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Forensics Programs and Dynamic Democracy...

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of general education or, indeed, of any proper education, as fostering a student's ability to think accurately and to express himself clearly both in speech and writing. We kept recurring to this growth in inner powers as the main point of all education. Yet in practice we were so obsessed by the diversity of objective knowledge and by the conflicting claims of the many fields of knowledge that we ended by concerning ourselves chiefly, not with the growth of the student's inner powers of thought and speech but with ways of finding some common ground in objective knowledge. Hence we finally came to two ways of defining general education: as fostering inner powers, and as simplifying the confusions of outer facts. Rightly or wrongly we gave our chief effort to the latter."

" . . . These two ways of looking at education, though to some degree in conflict, must, of course, be finally reconciled. . . . We felt, as regards English composition, that a man will write best who is as concerned with content as with form. Hence we were inclined to think that English composition should be fostered not only in English courses but in courses in the sciences and social sciences. Whether this reasoning could apply in training in speech I don't know. It obviously could apply insofar as speech is felt to cover discussion on an argument. It could conceivably apply also insofar as you encourage your people to speak on subjects in which they have become interested through other courses. The belief that a person's powers of thought and expression will best be fostered by study of the MAIN FIELDS OF KNOWLEDGE IS THE CENTRAL BELIEF IF THIS REPORT."

I believe the Report was fair, realistic, and entirely in sympathy with the work being done in the field of speech and forensics. We have an important assignment before us; and if we accept as our working premise the central belief of the Harvard Report, namely, that a person's power of thought and expression will best be fostered by study of the main fields of knowledge, we can achieve much and we will get the continued support of those who seek to keep our educational program dynamic and up to date.

Quarterly Journal of Speech—April, 1947. "1946—Year of Decision." W. Norwood Brigance.

Report of the Harvard Committee—"General Education in a Free Society." 1945. Harvard University Press.

Letters—From members of the Harvard Committee: Robert Ulich, Benjamin F. Wright, George Wald, I. H. Richards, John H. Finley, Leigh Hoadley, Byron S. Hollinshead, Raphael Demos, W. K. Jordan.

Forensic Programs and Dynamic Democracy . . .

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Surveys conducted in 1947 indicated that the number of students participating in collegiate forensics had returned to prewar levels,[1] and reports on the 1947-1948 season marked a new high in both interest and activity. In the midst of this upsurge, we may inquire as to what forensics are doing for and to the student, and ultimately for society. As we find ourselves in a season of squad meetings, practice sessions, tournaments, and post-tournament lamentations, it may be well to inquire if our forensic programs are developing students who want to make democracy work as well as enjoy its blessings.

The broad potentialities and objectives of our work have been clearly and effectively stated.[2 3 4 5] This article makes no original contribution in that area. It seems more appropriate that we should concentrate our efforts on fully understanding these objectives and then translating them into action. If we feel any sense of responsibility for training people to meet the demands and challenges of our contemporary society, we must seek to develop those activities contributing to such an end. Since the relative importance of the specific demands and challenges will vary, we must consider certain of those characteristics necessary to truly effective citizenship at any level or time. Because our immediate concern is function rather than philosophy, for the present let us outline a list with which the forensic director may work.

In the first place, effective citizenship requires a high degree of intellectual activity, flexibility, and objectivity. If our citizen is possessed of such habits, we may feel more confident that he will succeed in recognizing, analyzing, and interpreting the import of local, national, and international problems. But such thinking must rise above the level of mere mental gymnastics, and as a second point it is equally vital that our citizens should feel a concern for the impact of these issues on his nation and on other nations, and on his generations and on future generations. He must recognize the dynamic nature of the social order, and seek to effect improvements. Thirdly, he must recognize the necessity of subordinating special and limited interests to the general welfare of the group and/or community. He must feel a responsibility and even a compul-

1. Fest, T.B., A Survey of College Forensics, **Quarterly Journal of Speech,** pp. 168-173, April, 1948.
2. Ewbank, H. L., Speech Contests as Educational Techniques, **Quarterly Journal of Speech,** pp. 187-196, 1936.
3. Baird, A. C. Debate and Discussion in Post-War Service to Democracy, **The Gavel,** 27: 20-21ff, No. 2, Jan. 1945.
4. Cortright, R. L. A Balanced Forensic Program, **The Gavel,** 27:22-23ff, No. 2, Jan. 1945.
5. Buehler, E. C. President's Page, **The Gavel,** 26:51-52, No. 4, May 1944.

sion to contribute fully and freely of his talents and energies to the welfare of the group and the solution of its problems. And finally, our citizen must be able to work with others. The ability to think, speak, and act effectively as a member of a group is prerequisite to democratic action. He must understand the role which communication plays in the social complex. He must develop skill in the techniques of speaking, and writing. And he must realize that social complexities and conflicting forces place increased emphasis on finding common ground and reaching satisfactory solutions.

If some contend that the foregoing are recognized goals of not only forensic training but a system of education for democracy, the writer will not take issue. We may truthfully say that they are contained in the broad commandments. Possessed of as high a degree of intellectual honesty as we desire for our students, let us recognize that too frequently we may neglect the commandments and worship the golden calf. Our challenge lies in being able so to direct programs and activities as to most effectively develop those habits and attitudes basic to better national and world citizenship. Let us consider a number of ways in which we may attack the problem.

I. First there is the possibility of contributing more effectively to social sensitivity and responsibility through the number and nature of issues discussed. The advantages of selecting national debate and discussion questions are obvious, and certainly our topics are and have been of immediate importance and respectable stature. But we need to discuss others of like significance. We tend to restrict the talents of our more able and experienced students if we neglect vital controversial issues by concentrating the entire squad on one or two questions. Breadth can and should be achieved without sacrificing depth. At the moment, European Recovery, Economic Planning, Labor Legislation, Valley Authorities, Socialized Medicine, Housing, Conservation, World Organization, and Atomic Energy Control are major problems demanding consideration.

An election year offers excellent opportunities to discuss significant issues before interested audiences. Professor Crocker put the matter very well when he wrote, "The issues in public questions are difficult to discover. . . . These issues (the campaign issues) should have been debated in every school and college in the land. But were they?"[6] But every year does not bring an election, and matters of state and local importance also deserve attention. They are the problems with which the citizen deals most frequently. Juvenile Delinquency, Sex Education, Zoning Regulations, Health Codes, Property Valuations, State Excise Taxes, and Highway Improvement fall in this group. It is possible that certain topics are taboo in particular localities, but it may be that we are too easily frightened by such claims. Intellectual leadership must be prepared to take certain calculated risks. In being willing to deal with immediate and controversial issues, the forensic director is not necessarily looking for a fight. It is simply a matter of recognizing and discussing the issues as they arise.

II. Emphasis on the nature of the rewards and the quality of student work may do much to develop those attitudes which we seek. We are well aware of the powerful effect of direct and tangible symbols, but do we help the student to realize that stimulating discussion, contributions to audience understanding, and honest advocacy of what is felt to be right and just are higher and more satisfying goals than ribbons, keys, or cups? Professor Buehler recognized this trend back in 1944 when he predicted, "Trophies, victory tokens, mementoes of triumph, and all symbols of drawing blood from the opponents will more and more sink into oblivion. The competitive sipirit will remain to be sure, and a score-board of some kind will be retained to indicate the relative scale of effectiveness. There will be new devices for recognizing merit. . . . "[7] Some critics contend that college student speaking is characterized by superficiality, and it may be that certain of our practices tend to justify their charge. Perhaps if we place greater emphasis on the communication of ideas to auditors, and the satisfactions of a job well done, we may stimulate more worthwhile expression. There are many groups in our society, including our own profession, whose members place service above great financial reward. May we not expect student speakers to respond in the same manner if we but make clear the nature of their responsibility?

III. Obviously the forensic program must provide a climate in which such a philosophy may grow and develop. Where the nature of the activities and the number of opportunities for participation are limited, students are restricted to a pattern of audienceless tournaments where certain styles of speaking may develop. Let us not forget that balance and breadth are important in our forensic activities. We need to use every avenue at our disposal. Radio discussions, speakers' bureau activities, intra-school speaking events, and campaigning for worthy campus and/or community causes afford excellent opportunities and stimulating audiences. We can and should do much more along these lines as a means of contributing to student development.

The basic educational possibilities of our present intercollegiate activities may be more fully exploited. Too frequently tournament time schedules ignore the value of constructive criticism. There is much to be said for fewer rounds of speaking that are carefully analyzed and evaluated by competent personnel. There is a questionable value in a tightly drawn schedule where students may only crystalize a pattern of error. But constructive analysis may go for naught if the student's mind is closed to suggestions. This is illustrated by the comment of one debate director whose teams had compiled a most imposing record of tournament victories. In referring to a judge who had voted against his team and criticized it for overly loud and rapid delivery, this director simply said, "We all make a mistake now and then."

6. Crocker, Lionel Democracy Thrives on Debate. **The Gavel**, 27:54, No. 4, May 1945.
7. Buehler, E.C. **op. cit.** p. 52.

We might reasonably expect that love would be myoptic, but we can hardly justify its being totally blind. When the organization and conduct of activities place excessive emphasis on personal achievement as opposed to objective discussion, when schedules make it impossible to review both the form and content of the speech, and when minds are closed to honest criticism, there is little probability that our speaking will ever rise above the level of an interesting mental exercise involving the temporarily successful defense of an argument.

It is not the intention of this article to castigate tournament forensics without reservation. There is to be found in this type of activity much that is valuable. But we need to remember that the tournament is a means to an end and not an end in itself. We need to remember that tournaments generally are won by speaking to critic judges and many empty chairs. Our ultimate objective should be effective speaking before an audience. Let us provide more such opportunities in order that our students may experience the responsibility and the satisfaction that comes from intelligent discussion of a problem before interested people.

IV. There is yet another way in which we may lead students to identify themselves more closely with the problems of their society. That is by delegating definite responsibility for the administration of certain phases of the work. Granted that it may be easier for the director to attend to such matters himself, and that students will continue to be inept or fail in certain responsibilities, we recognize that the more closely one is identified with an activity the more important he feels it to be. A director does not sit apart, observing in a disinterested manner the feeble efforts of his students as they struggle to bring order to the program. He too must be in the thick of the fight. But for students to experience the difficulties, disappointments, and plain hard work that go into administering a successful forensic program can be a very healthy thing. They may learn through experience the roles played by determination and faith in seeking to arouse people to cooperative effort.

V. A definite part of any forensic program is the director and his policies. His position is unique. Few faculty members are in a position to exert as subtle but powerful influence on students' thinking. He is in close and constant contact with students under conditions where his attitudes, opinions, and public positions are readily observed and frequently emulated. Consciously or otherwise many students will associate the value and vigor of forensic training with the use to which the director puts it. The respect which he commonds on the campus, the constructive contributions he makes to the community, and the public positions which he takes on controversial issues are all weighed. Obviously our primary function as directors is not to crusade. It is to train young men and women in the arts of democracy. But at the same time it is good pedagogy to demonstrate that we can practice what we preach.

While making no pretense at being exhaustive, these suggestions are presented in the hope that they may stimulate further examination and evaluation of our programs. If by such means we are able to translate more effectively objectives into student-centered action, it will contribute in some measure to the attainment of greater objectivity, responsibility, and social consciousness on the part of our students. Our success will mean that we will have done something to make democracy work.

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Purdue University Forensic Conference . . .

Twelve colleges and universities from many parts of the United States participated in the National Invitational Forensic Conference at Purdue University, November 4 and 5.

They were the University of Alabama, Boston University, University of Chicago, De Pauw, University of Kansas, Michigan State College, Notre Dame, United States Naval Academy, Wayne University, Western Michigan College, University of Wisconsin, and Purdue. Representatives of the United States Military Academy, who had planned to fly to the event, were grounded by bad weather.

Each of the participating institutions was represented by two affirmative and two negative speakers, who engaged in four rounds of debate on the national intercollegiate question of "Federal Aid for Education."

Three of the twenty-four teams emerged from the four rounds of debate undefeated: the Kansas and De Pauw affirmatives and the Notre Dame negative. Although no school was declared tournament victor, the four Notre Dame speakers amassed the highest point total, with Kansas second, and Alabama third.

Three of the four rounds of debate were held in regular Purdue Speech, English, and Education classes. A critique and decision were given at the conclusion of each debate. The schedule was staggered, in order to permit debaters not engaged at a given hour to hear other teams in action.

Two seminar discussions were features of the conference. Professor E. C. Buehler, Kansas, President of Delta Sigma Rho, led a panel composed of Lt. Comdr. W. W. Evans, U. S. N., and William Birenbaum, Chicago, on "Interpretations of the National Question." "What can we do to Improve Debating?" was discussed by a panel composed of Dr. Winston L. Brembeck, Wisconsin; Prof. Austin J. Freeley, Boston; and Jack Murphy, Western Michigan. Both subjects provoked spirited discussion from debaters and coaches in attendance.

Dr. Alan H. Monroe, chairman of the Speech Department, Purdue University, was the banquet speaker.

The Conference was frankly experimental. Its objectives were, while de-emphasizing winning, to give the debaters a broader understanding of the question and concentrated practice with debate techniques in audience situations.