

ABSTRACT: *In dealing with the topic of Professionalism and Forensics, much has been said about the various elements that go into the making of a forensic educator. This paper examines these elements by relating the choices that are involved in this educational activity. Opinions, probes, and questions are presented to challenge those involved in the education of a forensic professional to be aware of the choices that must be faced in determining the direction of a career and program in forensic education.*

PROFESSIONALISM AND FORENSICS A MATTER OF CHOICE

Larry Schnoor

Director of Forensics

St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN

Bryant K. Alexander

Doctoral Candidate

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL

When the subject of "Professionalism and Forensics" was first suggested, we were not exactly sure just what direction to take. After all, the terms could have so many different meanings, and to select just one, might suggest that it was the most important. In attempting to narrow our focus, we decided that by putting our collective experiences in forensics together, we would come up with over 50 years of experience in forensics, including time as competitors, coaches, and directors of forensic programs. And since we are on the edge of the millennium, it only seemed appropriate to examine this topic from several perspectives. Many papers at this conference have continued the inquiry into the questions and concerns that have been raised by many throughout the past several decades. To echo the words of the Keynote Address to the 1995 Pi Kappa Delta Professional Development Conference (Schnoor, 1995), as we approach the turn of the century, it is time that we take stock of just what we are about, what has been said about forensics, and what we need to

consider for the millennium ahead. In this examination, references to various studies, to various conversations from discussions at tournaments and via the internet, to personal opinions, will be used to put forth what we feel are the important issues to consider. We do not pretend to have the answers. We do not pretend to be prescriptive. But we do contend that the future of forensics will be shaped as to how these issues are handled, shaped, delivered, and executed.

This conference has on its agenda sessions concerned with the training of coaches and judges, standards of evaluation and judging, new directions for oral interpretation, public speaking, parliamentary and Lincoln-Douglas debate, tournament management, and a general session on the all encompassing topic of professionalism and forensics. One would hope that each of the sessions would address the factor of professionalism as it is related to all of the areas from participation, coaching, judging, tournaments and the results of a forensic education and what is carried away from the involvement in forensic activities. It is not our purpose to address all of the issues that may have already been put forth during the last day and a half. Rather, we will attempt to ask some questions, do some probing, and hopefully, center attention upon areas that seem to be of concern to the forensic community.

As we continue along this pathway of examination, it is clear that many of the issues before us are the same as were here in 1986. The same issues being recycled, with a few new changes, but the same base of concern. The training and education of coaches and judges has been an issue since the first debate coach was hired by a university back in 1905. Since that point in time, numerous studies and positions have been taken on the program that should be followed. In every case, mention is made that the forensic educator should be well informed of the developments in the field. One of the best references that could be helpful for a new forensic educator, as well as for one that has been in the field, would be to check the bibliography compiled by Steven Hunt (Hunt, 1996). Another excellent source would be to review what Douglas Ehninger called the "Six Earmarks of a Sound Forensics Program," back in 1952. (Ehninger, 1952). Perhaps one of the more interesting presentations along this line was from Grace Walsh in her article "Nine Steps in A Good Forensics Program" published in 1958 (Walsh, 1958).

As one examines these past references that are related to the education and training of a forensic professional, one begins to develop the sense of longevity that is necessary in our field. This sense of longevity is what helps to provide stability at the same time we are looking for changes and new developments in how we want to go into the future. This sense of longevity is what is needed, as we can learn from what has been proposed in the past, what has been tried, and what still needs to be considered. Without a sense of longevity, we tend to be like a ship without any rudder, floating on a sea of ideas but with no sense of direction as we do not know where we have been, so how can we know where we want to go. In determining where we want to go, we must realize that we shall have to make choices. It is the choices made by an educator that have impact upon the individual career for that person, as well as for the students in the program, and in the long run, the direction of forensics in the future. These choices need to be considered in the areas of the forensic season, the tournaments selected, the training, education and ethics of coaches and students, and finally, in the development of forensic events.

Let us first consider the discussion on the length of the forensic season. During the past several years, much has been put forth about how the season is much too long and should be shortened. This past spring, numerous opinions were put forth on the internet. Each opinion offered valid reasons, as far as the writer of the opinion was concerned. No real conclusion was developed, but the discussion did present all an opportunity to vent their frustrations. Only a few of the comments offered put forth the element of "choice" as it relates to this issue. In a professional sense, forensic education should enable both coaches and students to learn how to make a choice, based upon what is best for them, for their performance, for their program. After all, isn't that what is required in the professional world? The ability to make choices upon a full examination and consideration of evidence is valued highly in the business world which most of our graduates will enter. This discussion is also the subject of numerous papers which will be presented at this year's NCA convention in Chicago. There can be no question that for some the season is too long, and for others, it may be too short. We do not advocate any particular position, other than the decision is a professional one that should be left to those that are in the best position to make the decision, based upon their professional needs and considerations, both for them and for their students.

This factor of "choice" may also be related to the tournaments selected to attend, all the way from the regular season tournaments to the nationals at the end of a season. During the regular season, choices are made as to which state, regional or national level tournaments to attend. In some cases, this choice is based on how nationally competitive the objective is for a forensic program. In others, it is to support programs in order to make sure that programs continue in a particular geographical area. In still other cases, the choice of tournaments attended is based on the cost and the return received for that cost.

In the case of which end of season nationals to attend, choice must also be made. Many programs are affiliated with a national fraternal organization such as PKD, DSR-TKA, or Phi Rho Pi. It may be their professional choice that the fraternal national tournament is the best for their program. Others may select to attend one of the other nationals, such as NPDA, NDT, CEDA, AFA-NIET, NFA or even Interstate. That too is their choice. The point here is that each program, each director of a program, needs to make this choice based on what is best for the overall program at the respective school and what is best for the students in that program. There are numerous other programs throughout the nation that make the choice not to attend any national tournament of any kind. Granted, the choices may be based on a variety of factors, but we must not forget that they are "professional" choices and should be respected as such by all of us. These translate into the professional choices that need to be made outside the academic practice of forensics as well. Our students should be involved in these choices, understanding the reasons and economics for each choice, so they too will gain the skills of decision making in a practical sense, which they can carry with them upon graduation.

Whatever is put forth about the training required for a forensic educator, it must be remembered that the same should be required for any educator.. What has this to do with the element of "choice?" Each of us must make choices everyday. For instance, the "choice" of whether to remain in the field of forensics or not. We are well aware of those studies that have indicated that many choose not to remain in the field for one reason or another (Bartanen, 1996; Gill, 1990; Jensen, 1993). In some cases, those that choose to leave may do so because they are not really that interested in being a forensic educator, in others it may be due to tenure reasons, still others may choose to leave because of family reasons or whatever.

The point to be made is that it is a factor of "choice" that is involved. Why the choice was made and what was considered in making that choice may never be clear to anyone except the person making the choice.

Also involved in the training of the forensic educator is the element of ethics. It is certainly clear to all of us in attendance at this conference, that we believe there is an "ethical" standard that is related to being a forensics professional. Yet, think of the number of times the question of "ethics" comes up in discussions at tournaments, at conventions, and at conferences such as this. During our tenure as forensic professionals, we have heard numerous rumors related to this coach or that coach, this student or that student, all of which center around questions of "ethics." For instance, what about the "choice" a forensic educator makes by allowing a student to continue to compete when the student's grade point average is at question? Are we doing that student a service? What about the "choice" a forensic educator makes by writing original material to use in interpretative events for students to use, not because the student cannot find material, but because the coach knows that the student will be able to win with this material? Or the coach that writes the orations or rhetorical criticisms or after dinner speeches. All of these are based on the matter of "choice." Our students are aware of the choices we make. What messages are we sending to them with these practices?

When we consider the development of new directions for any of our activities, be they oral interpretation, public speaking, or debate, we need to be clear in our minds as to why we are advocating these developments, these choices. It has been interesting to listen to the discussion over the years on experimental events designed to present some new directions. In that discussion we have heard numerous reasons why the event would be advantageous for the education of students. We have also heard numerous reasons why events should not be adopted or tried--and here is the interesting twist. The reasons that were advanced dealt with what it would do to possibly give some area of the country a better chance of winning, rather than being based on any educational objections. Even when it has been suggested that an experimental event would be worthwhile, the only way it could be included in a tournament schedule, would be if some present event were dropped. The objection to dropping an event has been mostly based on what it would do to the competition from the standpoint of winning, rather than from an educational perspective. What does this

say about the "choices" we make as professional forensic educators? Do we always model the behavior and ethics to which we give lip service, or do our behavior and actions send a mixed message? These are questions only each of us can answer as we examine ourselves, our behaviors, our actions, our ethics.

What can we use to help us in this quest, in this time of choices that must be made? Harold L. Lawson presented four questions in 1994 (Lawson, 1994). In his Keynote Address to the 1995 Pi Kappa Delta Development Conference, Schnoor put forth twelve questions one may utilize in making sure the forensics program is based on an educationally sound philosophy of forensics (Schnoor, 1995). In both cases, the authors' views clearly put forth the element of choices needed to be made in this examination and determination. We suppose that some could avoid these choices because, inwardly, they may not like the answers or conclusions that would be forthcoming. Others may not make these choices because of external pressure. And that in itself is a choice--a choice to allow such pressures to direct the program and activity.

As we face the year 2000, we must remember that each of us are challenged to develop criteria by which to make choices and to develop criteria by which to analyze problems and situations that will allow our students to enter the careers of their choice with a sound professional background, not only of forensics, but also of the general nature of ethics by which to operate. The claim has been put forth on numerous occasions, that forensics programs should exist because forensic participation prepares students for the academic and professional world. We need to make sure that our programs do more than just train our students to take our place in the academic world, to follow in our footsteps. We need to make sure that the qualities, procedures, policies, and practices we choose in our programs are those that our students can carry with them into the professional world. In this matter of determination, we may discover that our behaviors, our choices, our ethics, have been counterintuitive to the professionalism that we claim this activity fosters. It may be a painful examination, but it is one that must be completed for each of us that claims to be a "professional forensic educator."

References

Bartanen, M.D. (1994). Teaching and directing forensics. Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick Publishers.

Ehninger, D. (1952). Six earmarks of a sound forensics program. Speech Teacher, 1, 237-241.

Gill, M. (1990). Why forensics coaches quit: A replication and extension. National Forensic Journal, 8, 179-188.

Hunt, S. B. (1996). A select partially annotated bibliography for directing forensics: Teaching, coaching and judging debate and individual events. The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, 81, 141.

Jensen, S. L. (1996, November). Unifying research and teaching pedagogy for the transition from forensics competition to education. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Speech Communication Association, San Diego, CA.

Lawson, H. L. (1994). Four steps toward a philosophy of forensics. Speech and Theater Association of Missouri Journal, 51-60.

Schnoor, L. & Karns, V. (Eds.). (1989). Perspectives on Individual Events: Proceedings of the First Developmental Conference on Individual Events. Mankato, MN: Mankato St. University Press.

Schnoor, L. (1995). What direction are we traveling? Keynote Address to the 1995 Pi Kappa Delta Professional Development Conference, March 22, 1995. The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta, 80, 2-7.

Walsh, G. (1958). Nine steps in a good forensics program. Central States Speech Journal, 35-37.