

A RATIONALE FOR EVENTS TO BE IN I.E. COMPETITION

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In their article, "Educational Triage," Keenan and Van Horn assert that triage is a "concept implying that decisions should be made in such a way that the number of survivors will be maximized." The article makes the point that in general education certain people, be they administrators, board members or others, have a direct influence on which programs will be offered and consequently which students will be helped in learning (educational survival). The inferred conclusion is that people in such positions should make decisions only after painstaking consideration.

Analogous one might apply the idea of "educational triage" to the area of forensics. It seems reasonable to conclude that various educators across the land view forensics as being locked in a struggle for continued recognition. It is incumbent upon us, as forensic educators, to discuss the many questions pertaining to existing goals and directions of forensic practice in an attempt to determine if changes are needed. By attending this National Developmental Conference on Individual Events, we recognize that problems exist which must be confronted and discussed.

The Second National Conference on Forensics has stated that: "Forensics is an educational activity primarily concerned with using a argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people."² Members of the conference went on to conclude that the "achievement of the potential values of forensics presupposes an educationally motivated conception of forensics."³ The aforementioned comments focus directly on what the writer perceives the underpinings of forensics to be. In short, forensics should provide a "field experience" where theories propounded in classrooms can be tried and perfected. Any discussion of rationale for inclusion of events for I.E. competition must consider the implications of the prior statements as paramount in the formulation of conclusions.

It has been said that forensics should be viewed as humanistic education. Forensic educators are to provide a wholesome and exciting learning environment where students are encouraged to develop positive attitudes toward ideas, themselves, others, and society at large.⁴ Any meaningful exchange regarding which I.E. events should be offered must consider these components. Robert O. Weiss capsulized the importance of these considerations when he said "Events are of more value when they approximate a simulation of what actually goes on in human communication, or when they contribute directly to the public discourse."⁵

With these introductory comments in mind, let's now turn to a brief analysis of each of the classifications of events (limited prep, prepared events and oral interp. events) in an attempt to determine if the criteria for inclusion are met. The Second National Conference on Forensics concluded that:

Public address contest events incorporate an argumentative perspective in the research, analysis, organization, and development of a speech, but are unique in that they also utilize a wide range of rhetorical strategies including audience analysis, language choice, and delivery skills. These specific rhetorical skills are essential because the events emphasize the persuasion of audiences.

Oral Interpretation of Literature events are distinctive because they focus on the human perspective from a poetic stance. The oral performance of literature requires that students understand literary analysis, history, the emotional and intellectual aspects of literature, and effective vocal and physical expression. Students must acquire knowledge of literary form and style while striving to interpret literature with the purpose of enriching the audience's understanding of the human communication.⁶

Hopefully, each of the "standard" events normally included in I.E. tournaments will foster these ideals.

LIMITED PREP EVENTS

Extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking are the two events usually thought of under this general heading. Most people will agree that extemp. speaking provides all the essential ingredients for a sound educational activity. Students participating in this event are required to remain current on regional, national and international events. The analysis and organizational patterns needed for speech preparation are worthy and, of course, the extemp form of delivery perpetuates that form still propounded as being most effective.

This is not to say that the extemporaneous speaking event is not without flaws. John Crawford, in his 1984 essay,⁷ makes charges that warrant consideration but those charges deal more with how the event is structured rather than whether or not it should be included in tournament format. Benson has

stated that the primary objectives of extemporaneous speaking are to demonstrate an ability to synthesize information and reason validly.⁸ If the make-up of the event ensures these goals, then the event merits inclusion.

Two recent articles, one by Kevin Dean and the other Christina Reynolds and Mitchell Fay have commented on the relative merits of impromptu speaking as a competitive event.⁹ Charges against this event often include such things as considering it a "blow-off" event; one that requires no advance preparation; or that the event seems counter-productive with respect to educational or societal goals. These charges may have some truth to them, but again, not so much in relation to what the event can accomplish if applied properly, but rather to improper use by coaches and students. If the event is to be included, and I feel it should be, then we must keep the goals and benefits of the event, as outlined by Dean and Reynolds and Fay in the forefront of our thought. If this is done, the event is sound.

PREPARED EVENTS

As outlined earlier, the more traditional public address events (Persuasion Informative Speaking, After Dinner Speaking and Rhetorical Analysis) are all grounded in the principles of research, analysis, organization and speech development along with the skills of delivery, language choice and audience analysis. To the extent that these educational aspects are met, the events demand inclusion in tournament structure. In considering these events, however, we need to pause and reflect on what Robert L. Scott pointed to when he said "rhetoric may be the art of persuasion, that is, it may be seen from one angle as a practical capacity to find means to ends on specific occasions; but rhetoric must also be seen more broadly as a human potentiality to understand the human condition."¹⁰ We must guard against becoming too narrow-minded in our approach. Few would argue that the scope of rhetoric has expanded in recent decades and any rationale for I.E. events should reflect a recognition and understanding of this broader definition.

Too often, for example, students of persuasion are still told to employ the problem-solution approach to their speeches. There is nothing inherently wrong with this approach so long as it best reflects the intent and/or goals of the speech. Modern persuasion theory includes more than this technique, however, and the various other forms need a platform from which they may be practiced. How an approach is or is not accepted becomes a judging problem and should not be dealt with here but the rationale for a more all-encompassing approach should be considered and recommended.

The same potential problems exist in the area of Rhetorical Analysis. Advances have been made in an attempt to broaden the scope of this event. The result has been a series of event descriptions which have, in some cases, been more confusing than beneficial. Don't misunderstand, we are trying. Any statement of rationale for this event must seriously consider the rapidly

changing nature of the event.

Humor has long been a tradition in the American society. The ability to focus on political, social and other problems have been the touchstone of such greats as Will Rogers, Mark Twain and Artemus Ward. It is assumed that After Dinner Speaking, as an event, is an attempt to perpetuate these traditions along with the various educational goals mentioned previously. It's questionable whether or not After Dinner Speaking, as practiced by many today, meets these standards. It could be argued that this point is one to be better covered in a discussion of coaching technique or judging standards but the point made is that any statement of rationale about After Dinner Speaking must take into account the proper use of humor and how it is to be employed to make a point in the speech. "Low-brow" humor is beneath the forensic community and should be discouraged.

Informative speaking as an event, will not be considered here. Basically, no major problems exist with this event provided the aforementioned criteria of good public speaking are employed.

ORAL INTERP. EVENTS

The critical question surrounding inclusion of interp. events in forensic tournaments is whether or not tournaments provide an adequate vehicle for the art of interpretation? Our oral interpretation colleagues will decry the tournament approach as being much too rigid. From a theoretical perspective this could well be the case. A valid charge against many of us in forensics is that we have not kept abreast of the latest oral interpretation theory. How many of us here can explain the difference between the self-discovery and literary discovery schools of interpretation thought? The point raises a very important issue which, in the writer's opinion, puts forensics in a bad light regarding oral interpretation theory. A recent article by Ronald Pelias identified not two but four different schools of interpretation.¹¹

Each of the theoretical concepts has its own basis in educational approach and results. If we accept the idea that educational goals are a key element of forensics and if we accept the idea that oral interpretation is an accepted and valued event in forensics (and I do), then it should follow that we are able to articulate, evaluate and practice the latest theoretical approaches. If we make every effort to do this we indeed advance our stated goals.

Oral interpretation events allow for the study of the human condition. These events are worthy of inclusion to the extent that they demand literary analysis, the study of history, an understanding of emotional and intellectual depths, the use of language itself, and vocal and physical expression. Beyond that, however, a statement of rationale must consider if the present practice of oral interpretation events in forensic tournaments is justifiable. Discussion is needed regarding format of the events and how or if new theoretical approaches can best be adapted to the tournament mode.

In summary, the following considerations must be included in an effective statement of rationale regarding I.E. events:

1. The traditional educational goals of forensics must be underscored.
2. The events should consider the many and diverse audiences to whom they may be addressed.
3. A reasonable degree of adaptability and versatility must be encouraged.
4. The events, as practiced, will remain compatible with the objectives and philosophies of the academic disciplines which house them.¹²

If these criteria can be met, the forensic community can and will remain a valuable tool in furthering the educational goals and demands of our vibrant society.

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- 4 James H. McBath, ed., Forensics in Communication. (Skokie, IL.: National Textbook Co., 1975), p. 14.
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- 6 Parson, p. 11.
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- 11 Ronald J. Pelias, "Schools of Interpretation Thought and Performance Criticism," The Southern Speech Communication Journal, Vol. 50, No.

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¹² Several of these same conclusions were drawn by The Second National Conference on Forensics. See Parson, p. 9.
