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## Assessing Competitive Oral Interpretation Speakers: What We Expect Students to Learn

Kelsey Johnson  
*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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Assessing Competitive Oral Interpretation Speakers

What We Expect Students to Learn

By

Kelsey Johnson

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

In

Communication Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

December 2020

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Assessing Competitive Oral Interpretation Speakers: What We Expect Students to Learn  
Kelsey Johnson

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

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Dr. Daniel Cronn-Mills, Advisor

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Prof. James P. Dimock

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Dr. Kirsti Cole

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Assessing Competitive Oral Interpretation Speakers  
What We Expect Students to Learn

Kelsey Johnson  
Master of Fine Arts in Communication Studies  
Minnesota State University, Mankato  
Mankato, Minnesota  
December 2020

ABSTRACT

Forensic coaches believe and argue oral interpretation events are educational in nature and provide robust learning opportunities for the competitors who participate in oral interpretation. However, while many scholars claim oral interpretation events are educational, learning outcomes (LOs) do not exist to measure what is learned. Therefore, to measure if oral interpretation competitors are learning, I led focus groups consisting of North Dakota speech coaches to determine what we can expect competitors to learn by participating in the oral interpretation events sanctioned by the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA). Using thematic analysis of the focus groups, I illuminated six areas where competitors may learn through oral interpretation participation: reading, analysis, performance, voice, collaboration, and writing. Unfortunately, the primary purpose to identify oral interpretation learning outcomes did not emerge from the data. The forensic community at all levels of the activity have much work ahead to build the LOs which can demonstrate by contemporary standards the educational benefits of the interpretation events.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In 2009, while pursuing my undergraduate degree in English Education with the communication option from North Dakota State University (NDSU), I was assigned to write my literacy narrative for English 458 – Advanced Writing Workshop with Dr. Betsy Birmingham. Odd how certain details are singed into our memories. My 2009 literacy narrative outlined my journey to become a reader, writer, researcher, and speaker; a journey that transports me to 1999, the year I started my forensics career as an eighth-grade competitor. Forensics competition gave me purpose and motivation to be a better student and a lifelong learner. I didn't care about the literacy lessons in my high school English classes (and the irony I am a high school English teacher going on 10 years is not lost on me). I did not realize at the time, but looking back, I know forensics has numerous educational benefits, regardless which events a student competes. Now, 21 years later, I'm combining my love of forensics, performance and theatre arts, and educating high school students to better articulate and name the specific learning outcomes high school forensics coaches can expect of oral interpretation competitors.

As a coach in rural and urban areas in North Dakota during the past 12 years, I am no stranger to advocating for funding, additional coaching staff, or publicity for speech programs. I have witnessed several, mostly rural, programs in North Dakota die due to coaches retiring or changing school districts, coaches succumbing to burnout (Carmack & Holm, 2013), or cuts in funding and resources by school decision makers. Because speech is not a “spectator sport,” coaches and team members are burdened with



advocating for their programs in a way athletic coaches rarely, if ever, have to do. School administrators and board members do not always understand what we do in forensics.

Terri Egan, a colleague and mentor, recently reminded me of what long-time NDSU professor and Fargo Shanley forensics coach Dr. Robert Littlefield often said, “If you do it, you get it.” However, anecdotal stories or vague references about the educational benefits of forensics are unable to provide data supporting the educational outcomes expected of forensics competitors. Therefore, it is imperative forensics coaches, who are often teachers in their local school districts, create and articulate learning outcomes for middle and high school competitors. We can then assess competitors on the learning outcomes to better advocate for co-curricular speech activities. Until then, our activity will remain under the “myth” of competition as education (Burnett et al., 2003).

Therefore, I attempt to find what speech coaches expect oral interpretation competitors to learn.

Scholars have published event outcomes for oral interpretation (e.g. Kelly et al., 2014; Littlefield et al., 2001), but no one has been able to create an assessment rubric to measure learning outcomes. Further, the research I have been able to uncover focuses on collegiate-level forensics competition. A clear gap exists in research on the high school level. I contend: 1) high schools rarely, if ever, hire communication teachers since speaking and listening standards are housed under English Language Arts and 2) the same reason college educators struggle with justifying programs to their stakeholders (e.g. Grace, 2010; Kuyper, 2010; Sellnow, 1994).

Oral interpretation has struggled to be recognized as an important area of study at high school and college/universities. Current research emphasizes the importance of public address events, leaving little to say about oral interpretation or the performance of literature. In fact, oral interpretation events are going through an identity crisis with several scholars devoting research and time advocating for a shift to a performance studies paradigm instead (Lauth, 2010; Reid, 2012; Rossi & Goodnow, 2006; White, 2010). Related, some coaches, judges, and scholars question why oral interpretation or performance of literature events are even situated in forensics. Koeppel and Morman (1991) asserted oral interpretation competitors have strayed away from a clear argumentative purpose in favor of aesthetic entertainment; now, nearly 30 years later, I assert the competitors are still focused on aesthetic entertainment. Designing learning outcomes based on argumentation will help resituate oral interpretation into an argumentative forensics paradigm.

Public address bias is evident by the way an introduction to public speaking course is designed, with a focus on demonstrative, informative, and persuasive speaking assignments. Moreover, introductory communication classes spend time on broad concepts and theories in communication studies such as group communication, interpersonal communication, and intrapersonal communication. Clearly defined learning outcomes and assessment tools have already been created to justify an introductory public speaking course at the collegiate level. Forensics coaches can build upon the foundations of these assessment tools for oral interpretation events at the high school level, which will help defend and support competitive forensics teams as an extension of the classroom.

Teaching and learning standards have been around since the 1990s (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-a). In 2009, to create a national standard of proficiency, stakeholders across the country began creating the Common Core State Standards, which have been implemented by 42 states as of 2015 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-a). I attempted to find reliable data about how many states currently follow Common Core State Standards with little luck. The only data was found on highly questionable websites which I declined to use. One reason for a lack of current data is because of the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, when many states have taken back local control of standards and assessments aligned to the standards (Filippi & Hackmann, 2019). Interestingly, the states that took back local control usually made minor adjustments to the Common Core State Standards language. In the United States, pressure for students to succeed in English and math is apparent by the numerous standardized tests required throughout elementary and secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Consequently, the communication discipline needs to support and measure achievement in speaking and listening, two standard areas in the English Language Arts curriculum. However, a standardized, multiple-choice test cannot accurately and fairly measure a student's ability in speaking and listening since those are performance-based tasks (Powell et al., 2011). To combat the inability for a standardized test to measure speaking and listening skills, Jacobi (2010) encouraged states to hire communication teachers to teach and assess students' speaking and listening skills since communication scholars are the most knowledgeable. In essence, we need to move speaking and listening skills away from English Language Arts standards and demand

high school students take a public speaking course as part of their graduation requirements. Until a public speaking course is part of graduation requirements, participation in speech competition will bridge the gap.

Today, many school administrators are urging or requiring teachers to transition to standards-based grading and/or proficiency-based rubrics for grading and assessment. In order to transition to standards-based grading and creating rubrics, Powell et al., (2011) asserted educators must create “criterion-referenced assessments of learning” by “determin[ing] what we want the students to learn—what we want them to know, understand, and be able to do (schoolwide standards)” (p. 112). Standards-based grading is the ability to assess students on a proficiency level-based rubric: novice, partially proficient, proficient, or advanced. Brookhart (2013) asserted rubrics are a “set of criteria for students’ work that includes descriptions of levels of performance quality on the criteria” (p. 4). She emphasized the importance of performance evaluated with rubrics. Comparatively, speech coaches are constantly evaluating competitor performance to enhance their learning and, hopefully, be competitively successful. Educators today are well-versed in the use of rubrics, both holistic and formative, and arguably, judge ballots for speech competitions can be used as rubrics for student growth if high school educators and coaches can create assessment rubrics based on yet-to-be-determined learning outcomes. The learning outcomes will often fall into one of four various categories: “knowledge mastery, reasoning proficiency, skills, [and] ability to create products” (Chappuis et al., 2009, n.p.). Forensics has been lagging behind other content areas because we lack clear learning outcomes. If school administrators “speak the

language” of measurable outcomes, forensics coaches need to assess students/competitors using the determined outcomes so data-driven decisions can be made. After all, not all students can win, but all students can learn; therefore, forensics coaches must advocate and prove the learning using measurable outcomes rather than emphasizing winning and trophies. Ahart (1955) asserted, “If we realize how much there is to be gained from participation in speech events whether or not we get decisions, then we can all win even if someone else takes home the trophy” (p. 68). Furthermore, the creation of measurable learning outcomes will solidify speech competition is educational rather than just a competition to be won.

A second trend and “buzz word” in secondary education is College and Career Readiness. Teachers are tasked with ensuring graduates are prepared for a two-or-four-year post-secondary education *and* tasked with ensuring students are prepared for the workforce. Therefore, nationwide, educators (and arguably forensics coaches) have been exposed to what is often referred to as the “Four Cs” of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills to help teachers guide their practices. The “Four Cs” are critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (National Education Association, n.d.). Employers seek out people who can meet the “Four Cs”, and forensics pedagogy strives for all four of the fundamental 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. As of now, forensics scholarship implies these skills are learned by participants, but scholars have not demonstrated proven causation, just correlation. Recent studies by the National Endowment for the Arts showed students who participated in the arts either as a class or an after-school activity had better academic outcomes (Catterall et al., 2012). However, the same longitudinal study cautioned the “results do not support a cause-and-effect

relationship between arts involvement, on the one hand, and academic or civic achievements on the other” (Catterall et al., p. 11).

One of the benefits of forensic participation is smaller student-to-teacher ratios allowing for more tutor-like, personalized learning. Personalized learning considers the whole student instead of a one-sized-fits-all approach to teaching. The personalized student-centered approach is evident in speech tournaments since competitors choose their topics for public address events or their literature for oral interpretation/performance of literature events based on their own background and prior knowledge. Then, student competitors use audience feedback during the round, judge ballots, and coach input to revise and refine their speech(es) throughout the season. The feedback provided to students is a form of descriptive feedback, which helps student growth and learning (Sanford, 1995, as cited in Powell et al., 2011; Copeland et al., 2015). Moreover, including the student-competitor in the assessment process has shown increased student engagement and achievement (Powell et al., 2011). The student-centered approach forensics provides allows students to flex metacognition skills by answering three questions designed by Chappuis (2005):

1. Where am I going?
2. Where am I now?
3. How can I close the gap? (p. 39)

Afterall, students who can explain what they are learning will undoubtedly outperform their peers (Dean et al., 2012).

My research could potentially impact research within forensics, education, and performance studies. Competitive oral interpretation has a broad reach, and once forensics

coaches can articulate the ways oral interpretation competitors learn, we can create reliable assessment tools. Eventually, the research can help inform and train better judges for better ballot feedback focused on learning outcomes rather than aesthetic entertainment.

As a high school and undergraduate student, I knew forensics taught me valuable skills and lessons even if I was unable to articulate it. As an educator and communication scholar, I know it is imperative to define and assess learning outcomes for students, stakeholders, and administrators. Forensics educators can no longer just claim the educational merits of forensics competition, we must now prove and assess.

Chapter Two focuses on the literature review of speech as education versus speech as competition and the gap in competitive practices and standards. Chapter Three explains my method using focus groups and thematic analysis. In Chapter Four, I share the results and analysis of the focus groups. In the fifth and final chapter, I discuss the implications of the research and offer suggestions for further research based on my results.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

In response to recent trends in education, most notably the adoption of Common Core State Standards and standards-based grading and learning, national forensics organizations have begun identifying learning outcomes and objectives for speech and debate activities. At this time, the body of research available is limited to the collegiate level. I first explore literature about the duality of speech as education and speech as competition. Second, I examine previous research and literature focused on the gap in competitive practices and standards.

#### **Speech as Education versus Speech as Competition**

Competitive speech is an educational activity benefitting students by having a competitive component. Specifically, students report forensics benefited them through improved critical thinking, research and writing abilities, better public speaking skills, and more personal confidence (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Dickmeyer, 1994). Research going back decades (Ahart, 1955; Burnett et al., 2003; Ehninger, 1952) debated whether speech is educational or if competition is cloaked in education. Burnett et al. (2003) asserted “forensics is ... highly competitive” and lacks a clear educational model (p. 12). Burnett et al. (2003) claimed those involved in forensics rarely, if ever, focus on the student-competitor learning. Burnett et al.’s (2003) critique may have been a reality of the past based on the date of their publication. However, in more recent times, the National Forensic Association (NFA) and National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) have begun focusing on implementing and creating clear learning targets and



goals. In 2014 Kelly et al. published the *NFA Pedagogy Report* in response to the 2010 National Developmental Conference on Individual Events (NDC-IE). In late 2019, the NSDA created an ad-hoc committee of coaches nationwide to help create learning targets and goals for high school forensics students. Speech programs associated with high schools and colleges are co-curricular, extra-curricular, or housed under a School of Communication (or similar) umbrella. In fact, the NSDA began requiring speech programs to be associated with a middle or high school in order to gain membership starting in the 2016 school year (National Speech and Debate Association [NSDA], n.d.-b). Therefore, competitive speech can (and should be) educational in nature, whether high school or collegiate level.

High school speech coaches are often educators, so naturally as speech coaches, they are skilled at assessing student learning. National speech and communication associations are creating clear-cut educational outcomes to support speech programs at the middle/high school level and the collegiate level coached by educators (Merrell et al., 2015) who understand student development and learning because they were required to take various teaching methods courses in order to be licensed educators. In fact, the NSDA encourages administrators looking to hire coaches to consider “English, Social Studies, World Languages, or other subject area teachers” and to “**think about the people you already have in your building**” (NSDA, n.d.-a, original emphasis). Goodnight and Mitchell (2008) argued for hiring forensics scholars as active coaches rather than hiring lesser skilled people to fulfill positions for “sportified” terms like

“coach” (p. 83). The problem is no agreed upon state or national standards for public speaking and oral interpretation to assess students.

Assessment of students first requires learning targets and outcomes. High school speech can model work done in English Language Arts, which already houses Speaking and Listening standards. A majority of states follow the Common Core State Standards (Achieve, 2013). For English educators, knowledge of English-Language Arts standards—including Reading Literature and Speaking and Listening—is vital. Some of the Common Core State Standards’ key ideas for Reading Literature Grade 9-10 that closely relate to oral interpretation speech competition are “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text” and “determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-b. paras. 2-3). High school English teachers are charged with teaching and assessing six specific Speaking and Listening standards, all of which closely connect with forensics competition:

1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on ... topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively;
2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source;

3. Evaluate a speakers' point-of-view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence;
4. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task;
5. Make strategic use of digital media in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest;
6. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated and appropriate. (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.-c, paras. 2, 7-11)

Standards knowledge is integral for student success in the classroom, and therefore fundamental for competitive speech if coaches are to accurately label speech competition as educational and to properly assess students both in preparation and, as judges, in competition.

Beyond standards knowledge, coaches must know how to teach students/competitors. Communication studies and forensics have strong pedagogies coaches can rely on for best practices. Students benefit from speech by having a competitive component. Coaches must have an intimate knowledge of communication pedagogy in order to get the best out of their student-competitors. Ehninger (1952) believed good forensics programs borrow from what is taught in the classroom,

defending the term co-curricular instead of extra-curricular. Simonds (2001) discussed the communication skills all educators need to be successful in a classroom environment. She lists “teacher immediacy, teacher clarity, power and compliance-gaining, interpersonal relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators, listening and feedback, [and] nonverbal communication” as foundational to teacher success (Simonds, 2001, p. 1). Littlefield et al. (2001) argued the squad room or practice area is an extension of the classroom, so educators and coaches need vital communication skills to effectively teach and train speech competitors. Furthermore, effective coaches guide competitors through the five stages of expertise identified by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1987): “novice, advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, and expertise” (p. 110). Levasseur et al.’s (2004) research resulted in various themes emerging for advanced public speakers. At its core, advanced speakers spoke extensively and received numerous points of criticism, were exposed to several speech genres, spent time on theory and the art of public speaking, used models to improve understanding, self-analyzed and self-critiqued, and analyzed various speech situations (Levasseur et al., 2004). Competitors in North Dakota present speeches a minimum of two times per event per tournament and get a judge’s ballot (criticism) for each round; they have the opportunity to compete in 14 different NDHSAA events split among limited preparation, public address/platform, and oral interpretation; they learn the art of public speaking and elocution through practice; they watch final rounds live or NSDA recordings to see model speeches; they might record their speeches to critique or reflect on; and they adjust the speeches based on audience,

time requirements, and purpose. Yet, even with Levasseur et al.'s (2004) findings, some scholars believe speech competition is just mimicry.

Speech competitions create a learning opportunity not afforded in a traditional classroom setting. First, competitions allow for experiential learning (Merrell et al., 2015). Experiential learning theorizes people learn from experiences (like a speech tournament) rather than through reading, writing, or hearing; in short, experiential learning is a “direct sense experience and in-context action as the primary source of learning” (Kolb, 2015, p. xviii). O’Keefe (1986) argued students learn passively in a classroom; whereas, experiential learning has authenticity which motivates students (Sellnow, 1994). In essence, students are applying the theory and the lessons they learn in a communication classroom to more real-world experiences (Sellnow, 1994). Second, speech competitors are steeped in real-life public speaking contexts by participating in speech tournaments (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Minch, 2006; Sellnow, 1994). Some argue speech tournaments are pseudo real-life contexts based on formulaic tournament procedures, judges who follow event norms, and audiences consisting of other competitors (Bonander & Marsh, 2015; Kelly et al., 2014). However, a traditional communication classroom is far less authentic than a speech competition. For instance, a majority of students are enrolled in a public speaking course to meet graduation requirements. Sellnow (1994) asserted, “Too often, intelligibility and poise suffice for attaining a passing grade. In the competitive forensic setting, however, intelligibility alone is not likely to get a speaker very far” (p. 5). Third, students who only participate in public speaking in a traditional classroom setting do not have the length of a season

(often, several months) to prepare, refine, restructure, and practice (Minch, 2006). Next, participation on a speech team is voluntary, so the speeches students work on throughout the season extend beyond a one-time assignment allowing for “consider[ation] from a variety of vantage points”; students pour extended time and energy into their speech(es) and prove to an audience why the speech(es) are important for others to hear (Sellnow, 1994, p. 6). Therefore, competition enhances what students are already doing in a classroom and allows them to dig deeper with topics and literature. Fourth, the traditional classroom audience stagnates because it routinely includes classmates instead of various members from around the nation varying in age, socio-economic backgrounds, culture, and a plethora of other factors (Copeland et al., 2015; Minch, 2006; Sellnow 1994). Jacobi (2010) claimed “forensic competition breeds motivation to succeed and improve, and the interscholastic tournament model creates an ongoing, multi-institutional assessment environment that is unlike any other content area” (p. 121).

Speech professionals at the collegiate level have been researching the educational benefits of forensics participation for decades. However, very little research has been conducted specifically for high school forensics participants—the very people that feed into collegiate programs. The NSDA was officially formed in 1925, and, yet, still no universally accepted performance outcomes are available for what coaches and judges can expect of students (Littlefield et al., 2001). Regardless, Littlefield et al. (2001) surveyed literature and found five oral interpretation learning outcomes:

students should understand the necessity for the elements of the genre to be present in their oral interpretation; students should understand the relationship

between the author's assumed intent and the interpretation the reader conveys; students should understand the concept of enhancing an oral interpretation through vocal expression; students should understand the concept of enhancing an oral interpretation through physical expression; and students should understand the convention of performing an oral interpretation within a specific context.

(para. 8)

Kelly et al. (2014) uncovered best practices for collegiate-level forensics. Specifically, regarding oral interpretation, the general learning objectives (GLO) and student learning outcomes (SLO) are:

1. Student oral interpretation performances shall be informed by traditional principles of Oral Interpretation and/or more recent approaches to performance articulated in the field of Performance Studies [GLO].
2. Students should be able to discern if a text demonstrates "literary worth" based on the literature's ability to recall a common emotional experience, reveal the presence of unique content and structure and leave room for individual imagination [SLO].
3. Through performance, students should be able to demonstrate they have analyzed the structural and aesthetic components of the selected text [SLO].
4. Students, following intensive study of the relationship between literature and the interpretation and performance thereof, will demonstrate and honor the literary voice inherent in the selection of literature. This shall be evident in cutting and physical performance choices [SLO].

5. Students should be able to differentiate between first-person, second-person and third-person point-of-view and apply this to the development of a narrator voice in a performance of literature through the use of appropriate vocal and physical expression [SLO]. (pp. 50-53)

None of these outcomes include the assessment portion, “the means by which decision makers understand the relative value a program provides” (Jacobi, 2010, p. 122). In today’s educational climate, educators are evaluated by what their students are able to do on standardized tests and the grades they earn in the classroom. For collegiate accreditation purposes, certain criteria must be met proving the importance of forensics programs to exist on campuses and to be funded (Pape, 2010). If coaches are to claim speech competition is educational and directly connects to the learning expected inside a classroom, educators must create assessable outcomes and then use them to assess our students (Jacobi, 2010). One way to assess students is to tie the learning outcomes to the ballots filled out by judges at each tournament (Pape, 2010). Student-competitors will also learn better and faster if they clearly know the learning goals coaches and judges can expect (Powell et al., 2011).

Today’s educator is well-versed in providing student-friendly language when writing learning outcomes. In North Dakota, teachers often refer to “I Can” statements so students can articulate what they can do. The “I Can” statements stem directly from the state standards language. Chappuis (2005) contended students must use formative assessment to see the biggest gains in their learning. She argued students with “a clear picture of learning targets” make the most gains as learners (Chappuis, 2005, n.p.). To create a clear picture, educators need to:



1. Provide a clear and understandable vision of the learning target.
2. Use examples of strong and weak work.
3. Offer regular descriptive feedback.
4. Teach students to self-assess and set goals.
5. Design lessons to focus on one aspect of quality at a time.
6. Teach students focused revision.
7. Engage students in self-reflection and let them document and share their learning. (Chappuis, 2005, n.p.)

Using these strategies encourages students (and competitors) to reflect on their learning in order to grow as learners and competitors. After all, Walker (2014) found forensics competitors could articulate numerous learning outcomes achieved through competition and involvement in forensics competition, especially when viewing forensics through an experiential learning lens. Some of the objectives Walker (2014) uncovered which could relate specifically to oral interpretation include: “oral communication, deliver[ing] a speech, ethical communication, critical thinking, listening skills, evaluat[ing] other speeches, audience analysis, variety of speeches, [and] communication tendencies in self” (p. 38).

### **Gap in Competitive Practices and Standards**

Forensics is wrought with challenges stemming from the gap of competitive practices and the standards or goals of the events. One of the challenges forensic scholars see is following norms. Norms, according to Rawls (1999), are the “socially acceptable behaviors that individuals engage in” (as cited in Swift, 2006, p. 46). Paine (2005) argued norms belong to the in-group and are implicit rather than explicit like rules. Competitors

emulate what they see winning competitors doing because, as Brennan (2011) found, competitors and coaches use winning to define success. The issue, though, is the loss of pedagogy and scholarship due to “copycat forensics” (Reid, 2015, p. 4). Competitors and coaches both find norms to be the biggest issue in oral interpretation; 48% of students and 67% of coaches complained about norms in oral interpretation (Swift, 2006). Reid (2012) contended that oral interpretation requires “isolated performance skills” (p. 26), allegedly those learned from the unwritten rules and norms of the activity discussed by Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997).

One way norms are established is through ballots because they “serve to inform students what behavior is successful in forensics culture and what is not” (Reid, 2015, p. 8). Through numerous studies, scholars have been able to distill common themes and comments on ballots (Bartanen, 1990; Dickmeyer, 1994; Mills, 1991). Morris (2005) distinguished between evaluator and critic claiming an evaluator uses norms rather than pedagogy and education. Reid (2015) proclaimed norms are “pedagogically irresponsible” (p. 9). If evaluator-type judges are rewarding norms based on trivial things like little black book work, a “pat on the back,” or “pacifiers” (Mills, 1991, p. 35), it is no wonder students are frustrated by lack of useful, educationally-based comments they can use to improve their speeches (Reid, 2015). The oral interpretation ballot used by NDHSAA sanctioned tournaments in North Dakota lists six criteria judges are asked to comment on: Introduction; Appropriateness of Vocal Responsiveness; Appropriateness of Characterization; Appropriateness of Selection; Communication of Mood, Emotion, Thought; General Effect/Areas to be Improved. The bottom of the ballot includes a spot for general

comments. Even when ballots provide criteria to comment on (like the NDHSAA oral interpretation ballot does), 50% of judges wrote whatever they wanted anyway (Reid, 2015).

If forensics coaches want to accurately claim individual events are educational, they need to align ballot comments and scores with communication pedagogy and learning outcomes. Over the past 30-40 years, oral interpretation coaches noted a paradigm shift to performance studies, but even philosophies and educational outcome language has not seen the same shift. The NFA started this work with Kelly et al.'s 2014 research "What We Are Trying to Teach." To do this, successful coaches need to know the speech event outcomes or purpose of the events. Coaches can learn this information by reading event descriptions and, in the case of North Dakota, the NDHSAA ballots. The 2019-2020 NDHSAA Speech Regulations defined the Philosophy of Prose/Interpretation Events as:

In North Dakota the voice is considered the chief instrument for a performer in oral interpretation. While the body reflects the emotional and intellectual content of the vocal communication, the performer should not super-impose gestures or movements as a primary means of interpreting an author's words. Instead, the oral interpreter functions as an intermediary between a writer and an audience. (North Dakota High School Activities Association, 2019, p. 7)

A problem arises, though, when looking at the NDHSAA philosophy of interpretation events. The NDHSAA arguably uses an oral interpretation paradigm with the focus on voice; however, trends are evolving towards performance studies paradigms (Kelly et al.,

2014). Much like the early sophists, oral interpretation focused on “decorum, a proper cultural exhibit of the educated mind skillfully reading fine literature for appreciative audiences” (Pelias, 2018, n.p.). Performance studies has emerged as a scholarly field of its own (Shields, 1994). Pelias and VanOosting (1987) agreed by saying “the field of oral interpretation is changing (has changed)” to performance studies (p. 219). Look at any final NSDA dramatic, humorous, duo, or POI round, and a person would be hard pressed to find a performance that does not consider the whole body: voice, body language, non-verbals, and muscle work to name a few. Performance studies programs emerged as a legitimate field of study in the 1980s and 90s (Schechner, 2006). Shields (1994) added performance studies was legitimized for the Speech Communication Association and the Association for Theatre in Higher Education as well. Little research about the paradigm shift and the impact on judge ballots has occurred since performance studies has emerged, though. Using the NDHSAA philosophy and ballot leaves little, if any, room for judging students using a performance studies paradigm. In the late-80s and early-90s, ballot comments already noted the interpreter’s use of body through characterization and delivery (Mills, 1991). Reid (2012) affirmed a move to embrace the body as a text to be evaluated starts to shift towards performance studies. More use of the body in high school competitions is seen on the national finals stage each summer, proving a paradigm shift to performance studies has already occurred since those performances are advancing in tournaments. Competitors are no longer confined to a small space or solely using their upper bodies for expression and movement (Kiger & Newman, 2013). While the traditionalists may want to hold on to the dated definition of oral interpretation, it just

simply is not happening in today's forensics circuits. Both performance studies and oral interpretation have their limitations and pedagogical issues; however, based on what is actually happening in rounds, the way our judges write ballots, and how modern coaches work with competitors, a shift to performance studies just makes sense.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **Overview**

Oral interpretation as a branch of forensics is often misunderstood by the general public, and many of my colleagues and team members ask how it fits within forensics competition. To defend the learning outcomes oral interpretation participants can gain through competition, I asked current and former North Dakota speech coaches what learning is gained by oral interpreters through participation and competition. The NDHSAA sanctions six oral interpretation events: Dramatic Interpretation, Poetry Interpretation, Serious Prose Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Serious Duo, and Humorous Duo. Believing subtle differences exist among the events, I asked focus group participants what differences exist and how they measure learning. The research goal was to determine what coaches across North Dakota expect competitors to learn in oral interpretation to create better evaluation tools.

#### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups are used for numerous reasons, including exploratory research (Given, 2008). A benefit of focus groups is for survey research, “especially projects that involve previously unexamined topics” (Given, 2008, p. 352). Very little research has been conducted at the high school level to determine learning outcomes in competitive forensics. Therefore, by having current and former high school speech coaches discuss the learning benefits of oral interpretation competition, this research hopes to reveal the academic advantages offered by high school oral interpretation competition. Coaches and

teachers collaborate throughout the year on various topics, including discussing best practices, designing lessons, creating assessments, and writing content standards. Using focus groups for my research reinforces a collaborative atmosphere. Focus groups encourage participants to speak freely in order to share and challenge ideas. Contradictions identified in the discussions allow a researcher to tease out new knowledge (Barbour, 2018) because contention and disagreement requires participants to defend responses.

When recruiting participants, a researcher needs to consider the group dynamics. For my research, I sought knowledge from North Dakota coaches because I was specifically focused on the NDHSAA sanctioned oral interpretation events. However, although North Dakota coaches appear to be a homogenous group, plenty of differences exist such as gender, age, geographic location, event knowledge, and experience. To ensure a lively group dynamic, I recruited participants from across North Dakota. The state is large, and in order to include participants who are physically distanced from me (Barbour, 2018), keep costs down (Liamputtong, 2011), and protect the safety of participants during COVID-19 quarantining, I used synchronous, virtual audio-video conferencing technologies, specifically Zoom. Virtual meetings in Zoom can be audio and video recorded, allowing the researcher to transcribe. By using Zoom, the researcher does not need to exert effort in determining the best room layout, participant seating charts, or lighting and acoustic considerations (Liamputtong, 2011). Employing a virtual focus group allowed me to get a broader range of participants for my study (Liamputtong, 2011).

Focus group interviews can use a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured process; I used a semi-structured interview process. My questions were created ahead of time to facilitate open-ended answers and feedback (Given, 2008). Focus group participants were provided the interview questions ahead of time, but, depending on the answers participants provide, I asked follow up questions or asked participants to probe deeper to explain their answers and ideas. Semi-structured formats allow for “a collaboration of investigator and informant” (Given, 2008, p. 811). As an investigator, I am also part of the study group because I am a current North Dakota speech coach.

### **Researcher as Participant**

As the researcher, I needed to be aware of my participation in the research as I am part of the focus group sample. Reflexivity comes into play when considering focus groups as a data collection method. I have been an educator-coach for 10 years, and I have been involved in competitive forensics in some fashion since 1999. Therefore, I am part of what Adler and Adler (1987) coined as having a “membership role” by being a “complete member researcher, who [is] already [a] member of the group...” (as cited in Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 55). Watt (2007) agreed by adding researchers must be aware of the influence they have on those being researched and how it may impact a study. Further, I am what Kanuha (2000) called an “insider researcher” (n.p.). While colleagues may identify with me and provide more honest feedback, conflict is bound to happen as I traversed the dualism of coach, teacher, and researcher (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I must bracket myself to avoid negative repercussions. Negative repercussion may include an assumed bias towards my research or an inability to separate myself from the research,



which usually happens for quantitative, “pool of numbers” research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 61).

### **Participants**

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University, Mankato (IRB #1560747). The participants for my study were current, former, or retired North Dakota speech coaches with knowledge of oral interpretation events; therefore, purposeful, criterion sampling was conducted. Using purposeful sampling, I was able to collect data from knowledgeable and experienced participants who were able to “communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner” (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2). To recruit participants for the focus groups, I obtained the publicly available names and email addresses of coaches across North Dakota using school websites and the NDHSAA website. I sent a recruitment email to 163 North Dakota coaches. Seventeen coaches responded to volunteer for the focus groups. Based on availability, I set up four different focus groups.

### **Implementation of Research**

Each focus group lasted for approximately 90 minutes. Because of the virtual environment and to reduce the likelihood participants would talk over each other with limited body language cues, I purposefully kept focus group size to 3-4 participants plus me as facilitator. Once coaches agreed to participate in the focus group, I emailed them the semi-structured interview questions to review beforehand. Each participant was asked to read, electronically sign, and return the consent form. At the start of each focus group, I welcomed participants, reminded them about the consent form and asked if anyone had

questions before beginning. I reminded everyone participation was voluntary; they could choose to answer some or all of the questions; they could choose to leave at any time. Before asking the first question, I told all participants the session would be recorded, shared with my advisor, and stored in a password-protected folder accessible only by my advisor and me.

I posed questions to participants and allowed them to talk freely as I took preliminary notes by hand. The list of pre-planned questions is included in the appendix. When necessary, I interrupted to ask participants to explain an answer or provide additional context. Otherwise, I allowed participants to build upon or contradict ideas in order to gather rich data and reap the benefits of focus groups.

### **Analysis**

Creswell (2014) noted qualitative researchers rely on inductive and deductive approaches to data analysis while “establish[ing] patterns or themes” (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 8). To determine what coaches expect competitors to learn through participation in oral interpretation, I used thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is qualitative in nature and requires a researcher to “identify, analyze, and report patterns” within the data (Scharp & Sanders, 2019, p. 117). Finding themes that answer the research question is more important than finding a certain quantity of answers (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). The data gathered from the four focus groups will undergo a “realist method” of thematic analysis in which I report the “experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). Because some foundational work on oral interpretation outcomes exists (Littlefield et al., 2001; Kelly et al., 2014),

analyzing the focus group data will require the identification of “underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations” on a “latent or interpretative level” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

First, I became familiar with the data from the focus groups. I reviewed my initial notes taken during the focus groups. Then, I watched and listened to the recorded virtual Zoom sessions and took additional notes and became more active in order to immerse myself in the data even further (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I focused on information that fit into the six different oral interpretation events sanctioned by the NDHSAA. Next, I generated initial codes for my data looking for commonalities and repeated terms or phrases that help answer my initial research question about assessment of competitors in oral interpretation. After everything was coded, I determined themes based on the codes. Some themes naturally fit into a broad category of oral interpretation while other themes were specific to the oral interpretation event (Serious Prose, Dramatic Interpretation, Poetry Interpretation, Humorous Interpretation, Serious Duo, Humorous Duo). Then, I reworked the themes into measurable learning outcomes that can be created into rubrics coaches can use to measure competitor learning in oral interpretation.

## CHAPTER 4

### Results and Analysis

Through analysis of the focus groups, I categorize the themes into six learning outcomes for oral interpretation competitors: reading, analysis, performance, voice, collaboration, and writing.

#### Reading

Focus group participants stated oral interpretation competitors are better, well-rounded readers who are exposed to more authors and literary genres and styles compared to other students and non-oral interpretation competitors. Because of exposure, participants noticed oral interpretation competitors used and recognized figurative language more often and had better knowledge and awareness of punctuation. Coaches who are also high school teachers noted students who compete in oral interpretation were much more fluent and expressive readers compared to peers in their classes. During the focus group sessions, I pressed participants to explain how they measured learning. Subjective measurements and instinct were often the only way coaches could measure since better assessment tools have yet to be devised.

#### Analysis

Coaches said analysis of literature and performance choices is one of the most vital academic outcomes for oral interpretation competitors. Evidence of critical thinking begins with the early stages of choosing literature for competition. Competitors must recognize genre to ensure they compete in the right category for NDHSAA sanctioned

tournaments. In this sense, focus group participants agreed with prior research by Littlefield et al. (2001) and Kelly et al. (2014).

Competitors recognize point-of-view and should be able to identify the pros and cons of choosing a point-of-view for performance. When coaches were asked to explain the difference between Dramatic Interpretation and Serious Prose Interpretation in North Dakota beyond source material regarding publication and copyright rules, a few noted point-of-view used to be a distinguishing difference although norms have shifted in competition, so point-of-view is no longer predictive. Three participants who have been coaching in North Dakota since the early to mid-1990s claimed Dramatic Interpretation used to have more than one character's point-of-view, but norms now reward competitors who choose first person point-of-view monologues for competition. The same participants also said Serious Prose was more narrative in nature, but those norms have shifted as well. As a coach and teacher myself, I argue coaches should explicitly teach competitors about the benefits and drawbacks of literature selection regarding point-of-view rather than relying on norms to dictate choices.

Every coach who participated in the focus groups agreed oral interpretation competitors have to understand plot structure and be able to identify a climax to the literature. Once competitors can find a climactic moment, they can work backwards to make choices about what parts of the literature to keep and cut to fit within NDHSAA time constraints. Competitors must analyze and critically examine why they kept or cut sections while maintaining author intent. Beyond analyzing plot structure, competitors analyzed character development in literature to make performance choices. Competitors

can track a character's development throughout the plot and make inferences about the character's thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

### **Performance**

For all NDHSAA sanctioned interpretation events, coaches agree competitors should learn various performance skills related to facial expressions, body language, and gestures. These performance skills are needed for any public speaking event, but oral interpretation competitors need these specific performance skills to embody the characters within their literature. Some coaches argued effective blocking considerations should be included in what competitors should learn by participating in oral interpretation; however, other judges debated about whether blocking should be an aspect of oral interpretation events in NDHSAA sanctioned events since the rulebook states the voice is the chief instrument. The coaches who were against blocking mentioned how blocking and choreography is more appropriate for theatre productions. Numerous coaches said North Dakota norms have shifted to include blocking, choreography, and pantomime. Norms do not equate to rules, and not all judges are aware of competitive norms. The questions related to the NDHSAA oral interpretation philosophy and the performance studies paradigm created the liveliest discussion for participants. Some coaches were adamant in saying the voice "cannot be divorced" from the face or body, so they suggested a new philosophy using a performance studies paradigm be adapted.

Coaches discussed the importance of performance skills to build and embody character(s) and show motivation. One coach mentioned how performance skills help bring the literature to life, otherwise the competitor is just reading from a script. Another

coach noticed his oral interpretation competitors were more adept and confident at using a wider range of motion and movement compared to the public address students he coaches.

Performance skills competitors used were the biggest ways coaches differentiated serious events from humorous events. One coach mentioned serious events require a competitor to show more character dimension and nuance. A few coaches noted humorous events require competitors to use their body and face to “add more humor” to the literature so humorous characters are allowed to be flat.

### **Voice**

As with any public speaking event, an oral interpretation competitor needs to understand how the voice is used effectively. Pitch, rate, tone, volume, and timing are measurable learning outcomes competitors can be assessed on. For oral interpretation competitors, manipulating their voice can help create distinct characters and nuance. Competitors who choose literature with multiple characters use their voice in a variety of ways to show their range. Over and over, coaches continually repeated “range” as a strong indicator of vocal mastery. Coaches noted the difference between the way an oral interpretation competitor and a public address competitor use their voices is with expressiveness and emoting. One coach stated novice oral interpretation competitors will rely on “loud and soft” to convey emotion, but more advanced competitors will rely on “nuance” and “range” an audience member can see. Another coach mentioned the advanced oral interpretation competitors will be “so believable; so real” as to cause a visceral response from the audience.

## **Collaboration**

When asked how a coach knows an oral interpretation competitor has learned intended outcomes, coaches were hesitant to answer. One coach quickly answered “the judge score” and then retraced to say “but not really [because judge scores are subjective].” All coaches struggled articulating *how* they measured learning; they just “sort of knew.” After thinking for a bit, a few coaches said they can measure learning once a competitor can help coach a novice competitor. Another coach added measuring learning can occur once a competitor can successfully analyze and critique other competitors they have in their rounds as opposed to just thinking it was good or bad. Coaching and critiquing others is a form of collaboration. Asking competitors to coach others demonstrates a level of mastery. Being able to articulate what competitors are or are not able to do demonstrates a different level of mastery.

A desirable skill most coaches sought from oral interpretation competitors is the ability to be coached and take criticism. Coaches agreed coaching and criticism can come from various points: judge feedback on ballots, one-on-one coaching sessions, peer-to-peer coaching sessions, and audience reactions. The competitor uses the feedback to refine, correct, and/or adjust their current performance to improve. Often, the competitor works in collaboration with a coach to make adjustments.

## **Writing**

Coaches do not often think of assessing oral interpretation competitors using writing skills. However, some coaches mentioned the importance of a well-crafted introduction for all oral interpretation events. One coach said the introduction was less



important and argued the introduction portion on the NDHSAA ballot should be taken off since it is not as important as other aspects of the performance. Other coaches in the focus group disagreed because the introduction helps situate the audience and shows the competitor likely did some background research work to compose the introduction. A few coaches argued oral interpretation should be treated as arguments using literature rather than research (like in public address). Therefore, the introduction needs to be crafted to show the social relevancy or what many coaches refer to as the “So, what?” of the literature. One coach said the introduction needs to set the tone for the piece. The coach used an example he judged in the past to provide context: a competitor was doing a humorous interpretation, but the introduction was very serious in tone, so it failed to lead the audience into the piece and caused him to be confused as a judge. While the writing theme was not as prominent as other themes, it does merit consideration for a learning outcome for oral interpretation competitors.

## Chapter 5

### Implications and Discussion

This research sought to answer what measurable learning outcomes coaches can expect of oral interpretation competitors. Through focus groups, coaches identified several skills for oral interpretation competitors, but coaches lacked the ability to concretely explain *how* they measure the learning. The themes pulled from the focus group interviews fit into six categories: reading, analysis, performance, voice, collaboration, and writing. My analysis supports the theory oral interpretation events are educational in nature. Every one of the focus group participants agreed oral interpretation participation is valuable and offers robust learning opportunities; yet coaches lack a way to validate the learning. Currently coaches do not have any way to measure educational outcomes nor do coaches have any impetus to measure educational outcomes; after all, other co-curricular activities do not require coaches or advisors to measure educational outcomes and thus demonstrate the educational worthiness of the activity.

#### Implications

As a teacher, I am constantly asked to prove student learning and growth. Often, administrators want to see the learning and growth explained using data, rubric scores, or standardized test scores. So, when I set out on this research journey, I assumed the focus group participants, who are also teachers, would be able to explain how they measure competitor learning and growth in oral interpretation. The data from the focus groups, unfortunately, did not uncover the results I was after. Woosley and Venaas (2019) said, “Unexpected results are often not discussed, and when they are shared broadly, confusion

or frustration about the process is often glossed over;” however, “an ‘Oh Wow! Moment’ ... can also prompt new thinking and spur action” (n.p.). The results from this research did illuminate new paths for further research and discovery. I thought my focus group participants would devote considerable time defending competitor learning happening at speech tournaments since most of the literature I reviewed for this project homed in on the tournament as learning site. However, the data revealed distinct learning possibilities happening before and after tournaments. Even though the research went sideways with unexpected results, much can be learned still, and this research has the potential for expansion.

As a coach and teacher, I know anecdotally my oral interpretation competitors are learning by participating and competing. However, I anticipated focus group participants who are also coaches and teachers would have been able to articulate how they know their oral interpretation competitors are learning. Focus group participants claimed their oral interpretation competitors were more expressive and fluent readers inside the classroom compared to non-speech students. But certainly, oral interpretation events have more to offer than expressiveness and fluency. Interestingly, focus group participants were not able to provide more than anecdotal examples or stories. Until participating in the focus groups, its likely coaches had never been directly asked to defend the educational outcomes associated with oral interpretation beyond anecdotal evidence or discussing tournament success. I encourage the Communication, Speech, Theatre Association of North Dakota (CSTAND) and other state, regional, and national organizations create oral interpretation learning outcomes building upon and synthesizing

this research and the research done by Littlefield et al. (2001) and Kelly et al. (2014) to share a set of national standards, with adaptability for unique components at state and regional levels. Once determined, the learning outcomes would turn into rubrics for coaches to measure and quantify competitor learning in oral interpretation. Eventually, the learning outcomes would promote better oral interpretation judge training. When coaches can articulate what competitors are expected to learn using measurable outcomes and data-driven results, administrators and school decision makers are more likely to support and financially fund speech programs based on the educational value provided to competitors. In North Dakota, high school students can take an oral interpretation class if it is offered at their school, demonstrating North Dakota already recognizes students gain valid learning opportunities through oral interpretation. However, the class is currently housed under English Language Arts standards, which does not clearly state the learning outcomes for an Oral Interpretation course.

I was surprised by how much emphasis coaches put on reading skills gained by oral interpretation participation. I was surprised the focus group participants did not mention the benefit of storytelling in relation to oral interpretation events. Oral storytelling dates back thousands of years, and oral interpretation helps keep a form of the storytelling tradition. Nonetheless, I believe coaches can promote forensics to administrators and stakeholders by emphasizing reading and literacy as positive outcomes. First, reading and literacy are vital to student success no matter the content area. The National Council of Teachers of English's (NCTE) Commission on Reading (2018) contended "adolescent readers need sustained experiences with diverse texts"

including texts “self-selected and of high interest to the reader” because doing so improves fluency, vocabulary and text structures (n.p.). Coaches noted competition in oral interpretation improves reading fluency and vocabulary. Littlefield et al. (2001) claimed one of the outcomes of oral interpretation is knowledge of genres (drama versus prose versus poetry), which builds text structure knowledge. NCTE’s Commission on Reading (2018) added adolescent readers must be exposed to multicultural texts to see and view the world through different lenses. One coach emphasized the importance of a humanities-based education through oral interpretation competition. A second coach added oral interpretation speakers and audience members can experience “imagined rehearsals” by internalizing characters or seeing characters’ who have different life experiences played out.

The focus group participants struggled to provide clear distinctions among the various NDHSAA oral interpretation events. Specifically, little difference exists between Dramatic Interpretation and Serious Interpretation other than source material. With today’s publishing standards and the NDHSAA’s definition of dramatic texts versus prose texts, source material can often be difficult to distinguish. One implication of this research calls for the two events to combine. Since NDHSAA sanctions a humorous interpretation event allowing for any genre (drama, prose, or poetry), it would make sense to sanction a serious interpretation event allowing for any genre (drama, prose, or poetry). Unless clearly defined rules and learning outcomes are created to distinguish Dramatic Interpretation from Serious Interpretation, judges, coaches, and competitors will rely on event norms rather than established learning outcomes when making performance

decisions. The NSDA distinguishes the two events: Dramatic is completely memorized without the aid of a script and Prose must be performed with the aid of a script (usually a black binder). Prose performances for NSDA must also use legal prose literature as opposed to drama or poetry. Ultimately, though, using a binder versus not using a binder does not identify a legitimate learning outcome, especially when current norms reward competitors who are completely memorized anyway. Adjusting event rules based on LOs will guide coaching and judging decisions.

Currently, too much emphasis focuses on the public speaking outcomes and little emphasis or scholarship is focused on oral interpretation. In fact, I sought out rubrics (see Morreale & Backlund, 1996; Morreale et al., 2007) already used to assess speaking expectations in collegiate classrooms, and everything I found was focused on public address. Focus group participants noted oral interpretation competitors do learn and utilize vocal skills a coach would expect any public speaker to use, so using parts of the numerous public speaking rubrics already created would be useful. The rubrics could be expanded to include performance-based learning outcomes including blocking or movement, gestures, characterization, etc. The coaches who participated in the focus groups already embrace a performance studies paradigm to coaching NDHSAA sanctioned oral interpretation events. Rule changes and the oral interpretation philosophy in the NDHSAA rule book should adjust to the competitive norms happening in rounds in recent years; however, focus groups including a broader scope of North Dakota coaches should happen before revisions and adjustments are made.

When analyzing focus group data, participants placed little focus upon the actual speech tournament. Instead, participants provided several learning outcomes leading up to a tournament, different learning outcomes occurring at a tournament, and different learning outcomes occurring after a tournament. Literature tends to focus too much on speech tournaments and their lack of educational outcomes (Burnett et al., 2003). Nevertheless, I contend the preparation and practice leading up to a tournament is where a lot of the educational value of oral interpretation events happens, and I agree with Burnett et al.'s (2003) statement, "The forensics community pays little or no explicit attention to the learning practices that the forensic educator incorporates" (p. 14). If coaches can create strong learning outcomes for oral interpretation and assess competitors on the outcomes throughout the season, forensics educators can shift away from the competitive focus of forensics. Coaches cannot simply rely on a judge's ballot to assess whether competitors are learning since judges are unable to assess a competitor's growth or progress throughout a season since a judge's job is to critique a performance in a particular round at a particular tournament.

Student-competitors can also be involved in their learning by answering questions Chappuis (2005) designed to improve metacognition skills. While those three questions (referenced in chapter 1) were created for any content area, I offer three oral interpretation questions competitors can answer pre-season, mid-season, and post-season:

1. What preparation and performance skills do I need to improve?
2. What preparation and performance skills am I already proficient in?
3. How can I improve the preparation and performance skills I do not have yet?

## **Future Research**

Focus group participants agreed oral interpretation participation is educationally beneficial. However, my research can be extended with future research. First, a study designed to compare and contrast oral interpretation competitors to non-oral interpretation competitors in high school classrooms could illuminate broader student benefits beyond competition. Future researchers should be cautious about claiming causation since numerous factors could explain possible outcomes. Second, artistic expression and performance are often criticized using subjective lenses. Therefore, further research studying best practices for adjudicating and coaching oral interpretation performances is needed. The research should focus on ways coaches and judges can fairly assess seemingly subjective learning targets oral interpretation is likely to produce. Third, research is needed to uncover best practices for oral interpretation coaches and teachers at a high school level. Doing so will help situate oral interpretation in academia because now most—if not all—research about best practices and teaching/coaching methods is focused on the collegiate level. Finally, once the broader high school forensics coaching community creates learning outcomes, the learning outcomes need to be transformed into rubrics. Because the focus groups did not specify specific learning outcomes, I offer suggestions for the six NDHSAA sanctioned oral interpretation events based on what emerged from my data. I am using Bloom’s Taxonomy language because it is both teacher and student friendly.

### ***Dramatic Interpretation***

1. Competitors are able to analyze author’s purpose



2. Competitors are able to perform multiple points of view from a single text
3. Competitors are able to apply appropriate performance skills appropriate for text

### ***Serious Prose Interpretation***

1. Competitors are able to analyze author's purpose
2. Competitors are able to use narrative technique
3. Competitors are able to perform using a range of emotions

### ***Humorous Interpretation***

1. Competitors are able to distinguish styles of humor and comedic writing
2. Competitors are able to perform using appropriate performance techniques
3. Competitors are able to perform using appropriate vocal expression

### ***Poetry Interpretation***

1. Competitors are able to analyze poetic language
2. Competitors are able to analyze author's purpose
3. Competitors are able to use vocal variety appropriate to text(s)

### ***Serious Duo***

1. Competitors are able to effectively collaborate with duo partner
2. Competitors are able to analyze plot structure
3. Competitors are able to perform using a range of emotions

### ***Humorous Duo***

1. Competitors are able to effectively collaborate with duo partner
2. Competitors are able to distinguish styles of humor and comedic writing

### 3. Competitors are able to perform using appropriate vocal expression

To ensure the rubrics are useful and accurately measuring what coaches expect of oral interpretation competitors, more research must be done to collect and analyze the data. High school oral interpretation coaches could use the rubrics to assess their oral interpretation competitors throughout the season to collect data on competitor learning and growth. Data from the rubrics can be normed and analyzed to determine if rubrics need adjustments. Two positive implications of a research study like described above would be to create robust and thorough judge training and provide school administrators and decision makers with quantitative data supporting student learning.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, a person would be hard pressed to find any oral interpretation coach or competitor who does not believe participation in oral interpretation is educational in nature. Until coaches have reliable assessment tools like rubrics with clearly defined learning outcomes and motivation to assess oral interpretation competitors, forensic educators and supporters will lack evidence of learning and will struggle justifying oral interpretation programs.

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## Appendix

### Focus Group Questions

1. What is your experience with competitive speech?
  - a. Follow up if needed: What is your experience coaching and/or judging the oral interpretation events?
  - b. Follow up if needed: What is your experience with oral interpretation in North Dakota? Nationally?
  - c. Follow up if needed: What skills do students gain by participating in oral interpretation events that differentiates those events from public address/platform speeches sanctioned by the NDHSAA?
  - d. Follow up if needed: What skills do students gain by participating in oral interpretation events that differentiates those events from limited preparation events sanctioned by the NDHSAA?
2. Overall, what academic learning outcomes do you expect competitors to learn by participating in the serious-style oral interpretation events, which would include Serious Prose and Serious Duo, and possibly Dramatic and Poetry?
  - a. Follow up if needed: What outcomes do you believe distinguish Serious Prose Interpretation from Dramatic Interpretation as evident in a student's performance?
3. Overall, what academic learning outcomes do you expect competitors to learn by participating in humorous-style oral interpretation events, which would include Humorous Interp and Humorous Duo, and possibly Dramatic and Poetry?

4. What outcomes do you believe distinguish Serious Dramatic Duo from Humorous Dramatic Duo as evident in a student's performance?
5. How do you know the student has achieved a specific measurable learning outcome?
6. If you are a current or former classroom teacher, in what ways (if any) does participation in oral interpretation events support learning occurring inside your classes?
7. If you are not a current or former classroom teacher, but you are a former oral interpretation competitor, in what ways (if any) did participating in oral interpretation events help support your classroom learning through graduation?
8. In what ways (if any) do the NDHSAA oral interpretation rules and philosophy of oral interpretation support pedagogy and educational benefits for competitors?
9. In what ways (if any) do the NDHSAA oral interpretation rules and philosophy of oral interpretation inhibit pedagogy and educational benefits for competitors?
10. In what ways does the NDHSAA oral interpretation ballot successfully or unsuccessfully assess learning objectives for competitors?
11. When promoting or advocating for your speech team, what (if any) educational benefits do you publicize for potential competitors, their parents/guardians, or for administration and stakeholders?