

THREE ELEMENTS OF FORENSIC COMPETITION:
THE COACH, CONTENT, AND STUDENT

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Involvement in high school extracurricular activities is important for students of diversity; however, forensics (competitive speech & debate) is often viewed as an exclusive, all-White, suburban activity for those who come from wealth. Through three articles, utilizing a mixed methodological approach – the students involved, the content studied, and the coaches who prepare these students – are evaluated. Article 1 argues for the inclusion of forensic programs in high school to provide diverse students dialogue, originality, and diversity in literature. Article 2 is a performance ethnography created from a national survey of coaches. 10 composite characters illuminate the highs and lows of coaching a forensics program. Article 3 provides results of a national survey of former forensic high school competitors.

Article 1 utilizes *The Wizard of Oz* as a vehicle to address the benefits of forensics for students of diverse backgrounds among mandated test focused classrooms. The article introduces politician-wizards and teacher-witches frustrated with the bureaucracy of standardized testing. Using narrative examples, students epitomize the Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion, with no brain for school, no heart for learning, and fear of the classroom due to standardized testing pressures. The article provides technicolor solutions, which offer students ways to achieve success beyond the test.

Article 2, a performance ethnography, explores 10 composite coaches, attempting to earn a role in an educational play. A director questions these coaches, symbolizing the outside voices heard by coaches in the forensic community.

Discussions include: educational benefits, time, constraints, frustrations, and coping mechanisms.

Article 3 articulates survey results of 1,050 forensic alumni participants. The article addresses various student populations: Black, Hispanic, LGBTIQ, persons with a disability, and FIT (female, intersex, and transgender). Results are also analyzed by event preferences: debate, public speaking, and oral interpretation. All categories of participants yielded a strong positive response regarding the satisfaction of their experiences and their perceived influence of forensics on post-secondary lives. The only significantly different population was FIT in regards to post-secondary influence. Themes from participant responses are addressed for each diverse population.

DEDICATION

The articles within this dissertation are dedicated to all of my current and past students. It is the students who have acted, argued, and persuaded me over the years that have made me love my career as an educator. Without their hearts, minds, and courage, I would not have ever learned about the world around me. Listening, discussing, and planning with them have been some of the most beautiful moments of my life. I am grateful and honored to have worked with you all. Even if we didn't see eye-to-eye in the classroom or at tournaments, my lived adventures with each of you have shaped me into the person I am today.

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NOMENCLATURE

NSDA	National Speech & Debate Association
NFHS	National Federation of State High School Associations
NFL	National Forensic League
Forensics	Interscholastic high school speech and debate activities. As terminology differs between schools and states, “forensics” and “speech & debate” are both used interchangeably throughout the research.
Oral Interpretation	Performance of literature events, such as Prose (PR), Poetry (PO), Dramatic Interpretation (DI), Humorous Interpretation (HI), and Duo Interpretation (DUO) as defined by the NSDA.
Public Speaking	Speaking events such as Original Oratory (OO), extemporaneous speaking (EXT), and Impromptu (IMP) as defined by the NSDA.
Debate:	Argumentative events, such as Lincoln-Douglas Debate (LD), Public Forum Debate (PF), Policy Debate (PD or CX), and Congressional Debate (CD) as defined by the NSDA.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Joshua and Lamar began their freshmen year as competitors on the speech & debate team. Neither one did exceptionally well in school, for they did not see education as valuable to their future. They did not link school to their lives because they saw no connection between the standard curriculum and their own experiences. Joshua, who struggles with a reading disability, and Lamar, who comes from a home with two older brothers in jail, epitomize stereotypes of struggling, urban students of color.

While most outside of the world of forensics (competitive speech & debate) conjure images of two White, well-dressed young men debating one another on an issue of social and economic international concern, not all types of forensic competition looks the same. In fact, forensic competition consists of debate, public speaking, and oral interpretation events, which vary in style, format, and rules across the United States. For Joshua and Lamar, forensics was about performing a duo interpretation scene, where two competitors find a selection of literature, memorize the lines, and present the material in a 10-minute acted presentation.

However, Joshua (Hispanic) and Lamar (Black) struggled at first to find literature, which conveyed a message they wanted to share with others. They were confounded by the canon of literature, common in most schools, which did not speak to their lives. This was true until they found Russell Simmon's *Def Poetry Jam* and its

vibrant, honest poetry, which spoke to them and their perspectives on the world around them.

While they were unable to understand outdated literature they read for standardized tests, both young men were able to approach modern literature, which related to them in their own vernacular, and employs literary devices such as similes, metaphors, and rhyme. *Def Poetry Jam*, a 2003 Tony Award winning play, incorporates a multicultural cast of poets and their poems dealing with issues of pain, suffering, and urban survival. Stephen Colman, who begins the production with a poem pleading, “I wanna hear a poem/ where ideas/ kiss similes so deeply/ that/ metaphors get jealous...” (Simmons, 2005, p. 3), offered the importance of personal perspective within a poem.

Joshua and Lamar, who struggled in English I, found literature they could connect with on their level. These two young students successfully evaluated poetry in a 10-minute collection, which fused ideas such as Poetri’s “Everywhere I go I see ugly people/ with cute people,/ and I can’t help ask myself/ what does she see in that guy?” (Simmons, 2005, p. 65) to Stephen Colman’s “There’s a terrorist threat in the nation/ they give tax breaks to big banks/ but deny black people reparations” (Simmons, 2005, p. 97). Lamar, in particular, connected to lines such as: “I write America for the people just like me,/ too busy blamin’ instead of claiming/ that America is the best place to be./ This is my family/ Yea, my kin folk have problems and issues/ like every family does/ but I’m going to make my difference right/ here/ for us/ I write America” (Simmons, 2005, p. 103).

Both of these two 14 year-olds struggled to study the *Odyssey* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, for they were bored and restless with literature that did not represent their lived, cultural experiences. “This lack of representation in the [literary] canon renders it worthless and nonexistent to those against whom the canon doors have been kept shut” (Al-Shalabi, Salameh, Thebyan, and Umari, 2011, p. 54). Both of them had difficulty identifying with these historic texts; moreover, even literature about adolescent love, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, was difficult to understand with language so foreign to today’s diverse youth.

“National statistics show an alarming difference in literacy achievement between African American and Hispanic students and their White counterparts” (Jocson, 2006, p. 232), and this was evident in Joshua and Lamar’s struggles in English class. Yet, the words of Colman, Poetri, and others in *Def Poetry Jam* allowed these two young men to evaluate poetry, understand literary techniques, and interpret poetry in an oral performance, which transcends the standard canon of literature study in a classroom. They clearly made connections to the literature allowing them to incorporate their own experiences into a text. This was why forensics was so important to them.

As both their coach and an English teacher, I was well aware of how diverse students were often not participating in after-school programs, and “due to the diversity in urban communities and schools, it is important that students of all ethnic backgrounds be encouraged to get involved in extracurricular activities” (Espinoza, Lunenburg, & Slate, 2013, p. 281), such as forensics. I was especially fond of their literature selection, for, as Thomas (2015) eloquently explains, “school with less poetry is school with less

heart. School with no poetry is school with no heart. Both are tragic mistakes because if school needs anything, it is more heart” (p. 92). Finding a literary mechanism, through competitive forensics, gave heart to these two men.

For more than 18 years, I taught at four high schools showcasing a wide variety of cultural and/or social experiences. I have taught students who represent 50 different countries, speaking roughly 15 language variations; therefore, I understand the complexities of coaching a variety of students in forensic activities. I spent all my own educational years, except the first three years of elementary school, in Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District (Cy-Fair ISD), outside Houston, TX. However, until about 20 years ago, Cy-Fair had been a primarily suburban school district, thus, did not focus on diversity. As the student population changed with the gentrification of Houston, the face of the district has changed. What was once a majority White school district now resembles the changing demographic of the entire state of Texas. The increase in students of color, students from ESL/ELL families, and students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds has led to the change in numerous aspects of curriculum, attitudes, and involvement in activities, such as forensics. Embracing change and helping students from varied backgrounds was the focus of my forensic coaching career.

After teaching over 3,500 students in Communication Applications, Professional Communications, Debate, and/or English, I have learned cultural variations are what each person wants them to be in his/her life. There are those who wear their culture around their neck with pride, while others carry it like an albatross, strangling them daily.

As a forensic coach, I have traveled across the country, watching students perform literature on alternative “life experiences.” I embrace the belief that to survive we must learn from another’s perspective, we must embrace other cultures, and we must evolve through difficult discussions. As Jones (2006) explains: “we have to acknowledge the validity of another viewpoint, because it is living right there in front of us” (p. 344). As a coach, I have often felt speech & debate as an extracurricular activity is marginalized in the entirety of the educational system, similar to diverse students, like Joshua and Lamar, who simply feel left out.

Throughout the following articles, differing perspectives of forensics are addressed. Chapter II (High-stakes testing and forensics) argues forensic education as an alternative opportunity for students of diversity, like Joshua and Lamar, who traditionally struggle with standardized testing to find success in school. Chapter III (Educational play: The lives of forensic coaches) attempts to showcase the excitement, energy, and multiple frustrations of the educators who coach high school forensics. Chapter IV (Perception of influence survey) reviews the data of a national survey evaluating the perceived influences of forensic competition on the post-secondary lives of diverse student populations. All three articles focus on the pluralistic world that encompasses forensics. Finally, Chapter V brings these unique perspectives together into a singular focus for future research.

Through this research I hope to bring the academic benefits of forensics, the lives of forensic coaches, and the post-secondary perceptions of former students forward to continue a difficult discussion about the realities of competitive forensic

involvement. Like many other extracurricular activities, these coaches and students spend numerous hours outside of the classroom working with others of varied realities. This research is an attempt to shed light on issues not often discussed in previous research: 1) forensics as a safe space for diverse students outside the typical school day; 2) the personal lives of the high school coaches; and 3) the post-secondary lives of the students who competed in forensic competitions.

CHAPTER II

HIGH STAKES TESTING AND FORENSICS

Stephen Gregg's 1988 play, *This is a Test*, centers around a typical teenager, Alan, who stresses over a test in his school. Alan, like many other students, suffers from test anxiety; especially, when the test is given in Chinese, and Alan was absent the day they learned Chinese in class. Sound implausible? Sound ridiculous? For many in the business world, the idea of testing students in school over concepts covered in one day which are not a true representation of a student's ability is truly inane. However, in the current educational world of high-stakes testing, the inane becomes sensible, the implausible becomes reality, and the ridiculous becomes a way of life.

Noguera (2003) explains: "millions of dollars from private and public sources are spent in the name of reform and restructuring, and an entire industry of education experts has been created to go about the work of improving America's schools..." (p. 14). Therefore, this 'industry' of experts has led us to the 'Emerald City' of standardized state and national tests. As students attempt to navigate through the strange land of educational obstacles, how are students, especially those of diverse color, sexual identity, or varying socioeconomic backgrounds, able to find their way home in the school setting?

Holloway (1999) offers, "researchers strongly believe that involvement in extracurricular activities may support the at-risk student by maintaining, enhancing, and strengthening the student-school connection" (p. 87), by providing "all students—

including at-risk and gifted students—an academic safety net” (p. 88). “Participation in school-based extracurricular activities, like sports, the arts, and academic clubs, is a normative and important part of the school experience for many youth” (Fredricks, 2012, p. 295). While many students turn to athletics, other challenging academic options do exist. Forensics (interscholastic speech and debate) may offer a way for students who do not fit the mold of high-stakes testing mentalities; for “as urban communities and schools become increasingly diverse, extracurricular activities that involve students from different ethnic backgrounds become critically important” (Brown & Evans, 2002, p. 52). Therefore, in order for diverse students to find a place in the educational setting, and, like Dorothy Gale, their way along the yellow brick road, these students must be offered opportunities for dialogue, diverse literature, and originality of thought.

Why We Test?

Testing has always been a part of education; yet, over the last 40 years there has been an increase in standardized tests, leading to high-stakes games in education. “The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an increased usage of standardized tests... including over forty new state testing provisions in the 1980s” (Causey-Bush, 2005, p. 333).

However, the most influential element of standardized testing came under the Reagan administration in the White House report, *A Nation at Risk*, which claimed “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people” (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005, pp. 218-219).

This report led to the expectation that students would increase achievement while, at the same time, decrease the dropout rates for youth across the country. This expectation, led by political leaders came from a “coalition of business leaders, politicians, and elite universities with the money, expertise, and political power to force the nation’s schools to construct an accountability system designed to control the outcomes of education, and persuade the voting public to support it (Pease-Alvarez & Schechter, 2005, p. 191-192).

This movement towards accountability came to a head when, “In 2001, one of the first policy initiatives of President George W. Bush’s administration was the No Child Left Behind Act” (Vogler and Virtue, 2007, p. 55). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001(NCLB), with good intentions, has led to tests that Noguera calls “fundamentally flawed and morally irresponsible” (Noguera, 2003, p. ix). Noguera asserts that “without adequate funding and resources and without an understanding or appreciation of the complex issues” (Noguera, 2003, p. ix), the basic premise of NCLB: to standardize and equalize all students across the country, will be impossible.

Factors not seen by legislators, who are often outside the framework of the school system, must be addressed in these high-stakes tests and their direct impact on the communities the schools serve.

Therefore, in response to growing concerns over state tests and NCLB, “in December 2008, the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State Officers produced a document on national education standards that would guide the Obama administration during its transition into office... Two months later, the secretary

of education announced a federal education grant program known as ‘Race to the Top’” (Farmer, 2014, p. 17).

This new Obama policy would re-focus NCLB, even though the basic elements would remain intact. Farmer continues, in 2013, Common Core State Standards [CCSS] became the “framework for what students learn in math and English language arts, but it will also establish two federally funded and approved tests that will replace what states currently use to measure students’ academic success” (2014, p. 18). These standards now focused on the understanding:

to be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new (Common Core Standards Initiative, p. 4).

To Test or Not to Test?

Wexler (2014) explains, “As of January 27, 2013, 45 state, four territories, and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, which will replace current state standards. States that accepted federal money have committed their schools to the most prescriptive and formulized curriculum we have seen in this country” (p. 172). Wexler continues, this forces testing to drive curriculum. Although some argue that “assessments of educational strengths and weaknesses can be useful at the individual, classroom, school, or district levels to shape teaching and improve schooling... the lengthy turnaround time for scoring most standardized tests makes them nearly useless for helping a particular individual” (Neill, 2006, p. 28).

High-stakes tests, meant to help bring schools up to a national standard, may not “address the horrid conditions present in many failing schools, and it does not even begin to attempt to ameliorate the social inequities that affect schooling” (Noguera, 2003, p. 102). Farmer (2014) explains, “rather than pushing all states toward high standards, Common Core is encouraging a race to the mediocre middle. For example, while Mississippi’s standards appear to get stronger by adopting Common Core, the standards in Massachusetts get weaker” (p. 19). In some states, CCSS pushes standards to improve, while other states, which have more stringent requirements, are forced to lower standards to align with CCSS. Furthermore, many students are left out in this process, as “the needs of many children continue to be neglected and child poverty rates in the United States continue to be the highest among Western industrialized nations” (Noguera, 2003, p. 147).

Educational experts agree state standards, historically, are too long and detailed to ever be completely taught, and hope for better opportunities in CCSS. While supporters of CCSS argue, students “will become well prepared to participate in the global society of the future” (Neuman & Roskos, 2013, p. 11), others argue the legitimacy of this claim. “Many [tests] fail to distinguish what is important from what is unimportant, and much of what is important cannot be tested with a paper-and-pencil test of a few hours duration” (Neill, 2006, p. 28). In fact, “high-stakes testing may actually worsen the academic performance of students” (Savage, 2003, p. 201).

Furthermore, “Although teachers are being considered effective based on their students’ performance on standardized tests, evidence indicates that gains on state

standardized tests are not necessarily indicators of higher achievement” (Haynes, 2008, p. 2159). Often, teachers focus on the test; moreover, in some cases, students are not learning additional material or enrichment not on the test at all. “Although some teachers do not structure their curricula around content frameworks and test questions, research suggests that many teachers are narrowing their curricula to include only content listed in the curriculum framework and tested on the examination” (Vogler and Virtue, 2007, p. 55). Researchers argue some educational systems limit curriculum and scope of information to focus on the test, deemphasizing or eliminating enrichment programs, which may hinder the learning of information needed by students in a real-world setting. For example, Peters (2009) purports:

Supporters of programs, especially those outside of the core classes of basic Language Arts (i.e., reading and writing), Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, and Foreign Languages, find themselves forced to demonstrate how student participation in these non-core subjects will improve test scores or else risk reduction or elimination of support, including funding and teacher time (p. 37).

When programs, such as forensics, come under the scrutiny of a standardized testing focus, they are forced to demonstrate how they connect to the test itself. This argument is often frustrating for educators teach outside the world of testing.

High-stakes testing can lead to ill feelings regarding education as a whole; therefore, while politicians and the ‘industry’ of education strive for the Emerald City of Standardized Testing, educational institutions should focus on offering extracurricular activities, such as forensics, to diverse student populations within the United States to develop better leaders, community members, and families (Billman, 2008a, p. 97). To fully understand how testing impacts students, educators must find a home for these

disadvantaged student populations, who are often identified by their school demographics. Blazer (2011) argues, “the negative effects of high-stakes testing appear to be greater for low-performing, low-income, and minority students than they are for more advantaged students” (p. 4). Therefore, extracurricular activities, such as forensics, are one option for finding a comfort place in schools for disenfranchised students.

The Emerald City and the All-powerful Wizards

The purpose of NCLB and Race to the Top is to level the playing field to a utopia of quality for all students; however, supporters of these tests “claim that they are only interested in improving education by making schools and teachers accountable for students’ learning... [Whereas,] testing should improve education because it advances the idea that high standards and accountability... holding teachers and students accountable should motivate them to take education seriously and use their time wisely” (Savage, 2003, p. 202).

The great Emerald City was led by a Wizard; one who demanded citizens blindly follow, and not critically analyze issues. This lack of critical thinking in standardized testing is a fundamental flaw with the process. Au (2009) explains, “contrary to the explicitly stated policy goal of leaving no child behind, the research body suggests that educational policies constructed around high-stakes, standardized testing increase achievement gaps in education rather than close them, and thus contribute to increased educational inequality” (p. 65).

The politician-wizards who think testing will help low socioeconomic neighborhoods “have not been in classrooms or worked with teachers” (Savage, 2003, p.

203). For leaders and politicians to assume all teachers are “lazy and not putting forth the effort to do their best job” (Savage, 2003, p. 203), is an excuse to hide behind a curtain. Critics argue, politicians and leaders do not visit classrooms to see what is happening, they make assumptions and policies based on inaccurate data “...this is an unholy alignment intended to increase worker production and serve the privilege without disrupting the unequal relations that undergird our inequitable society” (Pease-Alvarez & Schechter, 2005, p. 192). Opponents to these tests paint politicians using a megaphone, smoke machine, and trickery to make us believe that they understand the educational needs of children. With the passing of tougher educational policies, such as CCSS, the answer for the wizards appears to be more and more testing. On one hand, “these new assessments are designed to tap how students can engage in authentic literacy practices, applying the skills they have learned to new situations...”; however, on the other hand, “inevitably, teachers and parents may ask if this means more testing for students. More likely, it will mean that there will be a suite of assessments designed for different purposes” (Neumman & Roskos, 2013, p. 11).

The Wicked Witch of the West

Moving down the yellow brick road, we come across the Wicked Witch of the West, the teacher. Standardized, high-stakes tests can make a witch out of the educator, for President Obama’s “Race to the Top funding has required testing of students to evaluate teachers” (Breiner, 2015, p. 103). Teachers argue they become less and less focused each year, as the tests drag them through the bureaucracy of accountability. One frustrated teacher said, “I’m not the teacher I used to be. I used to be great, and I couldn’t

wait to get to school every day because I loved being great at what I do. All of the most powerful teaching tools I used to use every day are no good to me now because they don't help children get ready for the test, and it makes me like a robot instead of a teacher" (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 392).

Most teachers are not witches; however, testing and frustrations with the system create "burned-out and ineffective teachers, who care more about protecting their jobs than helping students" (Noguera, 2003, p. 3). Schrauben (2015) offers, "too often, instructional planning is so tightly packed that teachers feel that there is no time or space for anything other than meeting curricular standards" (p. 21). Teachers know test scores are often the focus of administration, for "as principals identify effective teachers... based on their students' ability to meet the standards of high-stakes testing, the focus has been taken away from educating the whole child" (Haynes, 2008, p. 2157). Eventually, testing causes many teachers to "see their students not as people in need of their services, but as soon-to-be released test scores" (Vogler & Virtue, 2007, p. 56). Teachers feel that they have no choice but to provide instruction that is based on scripted curriculum designed in accordance with the NCLB legislation (Harding & Vega, 2014, p. 21). Teachers "can feel so small and vulnerable in the face of standardized tests that are validated, benchmarked, aligned, and seemingly delivered from the hand of some objective god" (Newkirk, 2015, p. 99), they lose focus or enjoyment in their occupation.

The Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion

In Oz, we must understand how extracurricular activities, such as forensics, enable students to find their way, for “many students struggle attempting to express their individual worth” (Seale, 2015, p. 13). If not for these creative outlets, negative effects often impede our most disenfranchised students. Teachers, who become overwhelmed with the process, begin to narrow down the curriculum to the specific skills on the tests, thus ignoring the brain so many young scarecrows want to fill. “Narrowing of the curriculum has also included the reduction, or outright dismissal, of subjects not tested in federal and state mandated assessments systems” (Vogler & Virtue, 2007, p. 55), thus failing to adequately offer students the essential and stimulating processes to “conduct science experiments, write papers, make oral presentations, prepare computer-based presentations... and apply their learning to new situations” (Neill, 2006, p. 28) which students have a true heart for in the classroom. Students become hollow shells who do not connect to the learning environment.

This is even more detrimental in urban schools serving students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds because in schools

... serving more affluent communities, the teachers and the parents make sure that most students gain the skills and knowledge which they need to succeed in high school, in college and in life. It is too often the case that poor kids get little more than test coaching and scripted instruction that does not adequately prepare them for further learning (Neill, 2006, p. 31).

Thomas (2015) said: “It seems we have come to a moment in US history when we no longer even pretend to care about that which is the result of the human heart: art” (p. 90).

Students, who no longer have excitement about school, become scared about their future.

The kids feel the stress. The kids know the teachers feel the stress. They worry. They say, 'I'm scared. I don't want to take this.' Some of them don't sleep because they are so worried, and they cry.... The pressure is on the kids... [One student] didn't come back to school the next day. It knocked all of the self-confidence we'd built up right out of her (Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000, p. 391).

In the end, we mold students without the right brain, missing a heart for learning, and are afraid of school. We create our own Scarecrow, Tin Man, and Cowardly Lion in each student due to a focus on teaching "good test-taking skills [that] will not be enough to get students through life" (Causey-Bush, 2005, p. 341).

The following stories of 3 students is a restorying, a process of reorganizing the individual's narrative into a framework, for better understanding and sense (Creswell, 2013, p. 74), to provide an insight into how these individual students survived in the high-stakes testing world by capitalizing on experiences with forensics. Using the following narratives to discuss the importance of forensics as an option for students who struggle under the regime of standardized testing, the theoretical become practical.

Furthermore, looking at specific individuals allows for a clearer understanding of both the struggle under testing frameworks as well as a stronger connection with how forensics can better disenfranchised students in the educational setting. This restorying allows for concrete examples in which forensic competition assists diverse students in practice, not only in a theoretical or statistical manner.

A Scarecrow

It was one of those long, tedious school days, when, as a teacher, I was tired of excuses. After repetitively asking why he wouldn't focus on speech when he is clearly talented, I grabbed Remi by the arm of his shirt and pulled him into a practice room so we could talk privately:

Me: What's wrong with you?

Remi: What do you mean?

Me: You are so talented, such ability, yet you don't seem to care. It's like you don't even want to try to be successful.

Remi: I'm too busy.

Me: Doing what?

Remi: Athletics

Me: What do you play?

Remi: Football and track.

Me: Are you the best on the team? (head shake no)

Can you be the best on the team? (head shake no)

Do you think you are going to make it a career? (head shake no)

Do you run the fastest in track? (head shake no)

Are you planning to get faster? (head shake no)

Then, why, when you can't be the best would you continue to focus on it?

You can be the best in forensics. If you focus, you will be a state champion.

This, I promise you. I know you are that good.

Remi: (looks up at me) Really?

Me: Yeah, you got this.

This conversation happened in May 2006, during Remi's freshman year. As a junior, Remi was a Poetry Interpretation State Champion. Remi decided to focus on forensics, instead of athletics, even though "sports is viewed as an attainable path to mobility" (Okamoto, Herda, and Hartzog, 2013, p. 166) for many students of diversity. I did not lie to Remi. He went on to earn numerous regional, state, and national accolades.

Before focusing on forensics, Remi never shined in his academics. Remi was a 'B' student in on-level classes who didn't really care about school, yet "...adolescents who participate in extracurricular activities are exposed to a greater variety of developmentally facilitative experiences than are their non-participating peers. Such developmental opportunities may explain the numerous beneficial outcomes that are associated" (Bloomfield & Barber, 2001, p. 583) with such participation. However, not all extracurricular activities are right for every student. Remi needed an outlet for his verbal abilities. Forensics offered that opportunity.

While Remi's grades suffered initially in high school, as he spent more time on forensics, his academics improved. Huston (1985) explains: "the ability to think and discuss critical issues easily supplements classroom lecture-discussions. Because of their exposure to complex political, economic, and social issues, debate students can easily transfer that information to classes in political science, government, sociology, and economics" (p. 6-7); whereas oral interpretation students. Like Remi, can also transfer their skills into literature and arts courses.

After struggling throughout his sophomore year, Remi finally began to care about school. Remi was my scarecrow; he was goofy and full of life, literally falling all over the place, but, once he found a focus, he found himself in school. Interscholastic extracurricular activity gave him a home, one he never thought he would find. Remi's scores improved, his class rank shot up, and he was able to apply for colleges he was unable to qualify for prior to his engaging forensic activities.

Remi didn't come from a poor family; he didn't come from a broken family. Remi came from a two-parent, middle class family who supports and loves him, and while "activity involvement may reassure parents about their adolescent's whereabouts and time use" (Kao & Salerno, 2014, p. 63), Remi's parents wanted him involved in something that would keep him out of trouble. They wanted him to focus on an activity that would give him strength; "viewing debate as a forum for inculcating its participants with middle- and upper-middle class values... the activity can teach students how to work hard, respect others, and communicate effectively" (Asad & Bell, 2014, p. 16), which was his parents' hope.

Omelicheva (2007) explains, "The intensity of academic debate is one of its strengths but also potentially one of its weaknesses" (p. 164). Participation in forensics was Remi's primary focus once he committed to honing his skill; he spent countless hours rehearsing, reading, and developing characters. Furthermore, this focus allowed Remi to travel and experience life outside his school's attendance zones. Huston (1985) explains the significance: "exceptional experiences can include exposure to different values and cultural structures, visits to sites of historical significance, and the simple

camaraderie of travel companions” (p. 15). Individual students become more aware of the community, civic engagement, able to express him/herself more effectively, and understand complex concepts (Billman, 2008a, p, 98-99) needed in life after high school.

For Remi, his experience in forensics parlayed into a college scholarship; and despite his initial frustrations with academics, Remi went on to college and collegiate forensics where he became a national finalist in numerous events as well as a Duo Interpretation National Champion and Poetry Interpretation National Champion. Not bad for a kid who wanted to give up as a high school freshman because he didn't think he could do it.

The truth is: Remi was seen as one of the exceptions because he is Black. Educator and former forensic competitor, Tim Wise, (2008) explains, “the idea of throwing myself into an activity that allowed me to travel, to get away from my home at least two weekends a month, was more than a little appealing” (p. 68-69); however, “the activity was, and still is, extraordinarily white, not merely in terms of its demographics, but also in terms of its style, its form, and its content at the most competitive levels. Debate exudes whiteness and privileges white participants in a number of ways” (p. 69). Wise reports “funding, “interplay of race and socioeconomic status,” and ‘intellectual and rhetorical banter” (p. 70-72) as reasons students of color are often excluded from debate. Considering Wise’s analysis, it is even more important to include students of diversity in forensic participation. These students need a support mechanism beyond the normal classroom day.

Black, Hispanic, and other students of diversity feel left out in the current test-for-all mentality school system. Al-Shalabi et al. (2011) explain, “Americans of Latin, Asian, African, and indigenous decent have been excluded” (p. 52) from the educational canon. Often, due to time constraints and testing requirements, current educational focus is on White perspective. Diverse stories in social studies and English Language Arts are often overlooked or ignored all together. “For this reason, they [students of diversity] have been struggling for equality, recognition, identity and life” (Al-Shalabi et al, 2011, p. 52). This is why encouraging diverse youth to be involved in extracurricular activities is so important. Remi was a decent student, who made average grades, but he had a talent he initially wasn’t using because he didn’t see interscholastic competition as a means for success.

Remi is one example of thousands of students who don’t see themselves successful in extra-curricular activities because they’ve never been pushed, never been given the opportunity, or never knew these opportunities existed. "Many low-income teenagers know few people who have made it through college" (Class Matters, 2005 p. 93), and while “little research has examined why social class is related to extracurricular participation” (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010, p. 21), "a majority of nongraduates are young men, and some from towns where the factory work ethic, to get working as soon as possible, remains strong..." (p. 93).

This focus on work, rather than furthering education, is detrimental to students of diversity. In fact, “Black, Latinos, American Indians [Native Americans], and Southeast Asians (all of which groups have much higher poverty rates than whites) are woefully

underrepresented in the activity, relative to their numbers in the student population” (Wise, 2008, p. 70).

I was fortunate to know Remi’s middle school speech teacher, and I met Remi before he got lost in the halls of high school. For Remi, and other young men like him, schools must strive harder to push, encourage, and convince these students there is a home for them in extracurricular interscholastic activities, such as forensics. Mitchell (1998) observes many administrators find, “given the declining conditions of large urban school systems in the United States, funding for extracurricular activities in public high school is more often than not nonexistent. The cost of providing debate programs is often prohibitive for financially strained inner city high schools” (p. 55).

Yet, schools must encourage and build academic interscholastic programs, for as Omelicheva (2007) offers, “in addition to the enhancement of critical thinking, academic debate generates student interest in social problems” and “to succeed in debate, students must be able to negotiate their differences and commitments. They have to be willing to take on and delegate responsibilities and to participate in collective activities, such as brainstorming or preparation of speeches” (p. 163-164). As critical thinking is often a missing component of standardized testing, too many students are afraid of this challenging work, afraid of failure, and rush to work instead of furthering school; and, as a result, they slip through the cracks more times than educators want to admit.

A Tin Man

In this same freshman class, I was also fortunate enough to meet Leon. Leon, too, played sports, but wanted to do more. He began immediately attending tournaments

as a freshman. He enjoyed the camaraderie of the activity and wanted to be the best. Struggling with English, learning it only a few years before, Leon wanted to prove himself. He did just that. While “Latino first-generation immigrant students were less likely to be involved in both academic and sports school-based extracurricular activities” (Peguero, 2011, p. 25), Leon was determined to be a success. Leon refused to show his emotion, created a strong aura about himself, but was unable to reach to the heart of education. He performed well, but wasn’t invested.

As sophomores, Leon and Remi became Duo Interpretation partners. They were inseparable. While their lived experiences were vastly different, forensics created a family at school. This confirms the Kao and Salerno (2014) contention that, “adolescence is a period of development during which youth seek to form peer relationships and become more independent from their parents and families” (p.57), which is often done by meeting others from outside their own background. These two young men, along with the rest of the team, were a band of misfit toys who were deeply loved by each other.

Leon came from a poor family. I am still unsure of his parent’s citizenship status, but it doesn’t matter. “In general, the empirical evidence suggests that immigrant youth are doing well in school;” however, “children of Latin American immigrants seem to be one segment of the immigrant population who may be at heightened academic risk” (Crosnoe & Lopez Turley, 2011, p. 143) for various educational problems. Leon’s parents never spoke to me as their son’s coach. I traveled him around the country, often for several days at a time, and they never asked questions, never questioned anything,

and never participated. While I understood this to be a cultural perspective, “a lack of contact between immigrant families and schools might contribute to immigrant risks and undercut immigrant advantages, efforts to open dialogue between the two could be valuable” (Crosnoe & Lopez Turley, 2011, p. 145), yet Leon’s parents never wanted to speak with me.

I discovered Leon’s junior year, his parents spoke Spanish as their primary language, thus they were not going to embarrass their son by getting involved. I began to understand his Tin Man exterior. Leon’s father worked in landscaping and his mother worked in food services. They had very little money, but they wanted their son to be successful. Leon always had nice clothes, he always had supplies, and he was the first to pay any fees associated with travel to me in cash. His parents, I assume, went without so he could have what he needed. Okamoto et al. (2013) point out, “immigrant and second-generation youth are a growing population in the US, yet there is limited knowledge about their integration into the school setting beyond academic measures such as educational achievement, attainment, and dropout (p. 165). For Leon’s family, education was the mechanism for success. His parents saw this, and so did Leon.

As a high school senior, Leon was a national oral interpretation finalist, a performance which earned him a spot on a prominent state university program. Leon was extremely successful in collegiate competition, being in several national finals rounds, but those adventures faded as he began focusing on science and a time-intensive major. While Leon was always going to be successful because of his grades, his

participation in interscholastic competition allowed for him to bridge the gap from high school to college. He found his heart.

In the end, both these young men are examples of success stories; however, we must look at the students who are not shining in extracurricular programs, and ask ourselves: why not?

A Cowardly Lion

Alma was not the typical forensics student: she was insecure, didn't know how to express herself, and was afraid to find her voice. However, she found herself in forensics. "Involvement in extracurricular activities in the United States tends to differ for female and male high school students.... Females are more likely than males to be involved in school clubs and organizations" (Hoffman, 2006, p. 277); however, research indicates less involvement in other areas. For example, Crawley (1998) explains, female students are less likely involved in areas such as science, and "the current education system may be slow in addressing the disparities" (p. 38), but Holloway (2002) reminds us: "extracurricular participation exposes previously marginalized students to peers who have better attitudes toward school" p. 80).

For Alma, finding a group of friends to build her up, lessen her fears, and give her emotional strength was vitally important to her success in school. Alma was a heavy set, lower socioeconomic young woman who wanted to find herself, but was insecure about her appearance, her abilities, and her value as a person. It was through her experiences with poetry and finding literature outside of the standard high-stakes testing curriculum, where she found strength to openly discuss her life. During her freshman

year, Alma discovered spoken word poetry. She chose poems that dealt with her own negative body image and fitting in among her peers. In the published lines of others who looked like her, spoke like her, thought like her, she was able to finally have the courage to do, be, and say what she wanted. She found her strength, fell in love with another student for the first time, and was, finally, not constantly afraid of her own feelings.

Munchkinland Revisited

Dorothy Gale's mantra throughout L. Frank Baum's, *The Wizard of Oz*, has been 'there's no place like home'; however, for the diverse, often disenfranchised students, who are not fortunate enough to find themselves in extracurricular activities such as forensics, life is not the simple black and white world of Kansas. In reality, for most diverse, urban students, their community is the Technicolor world first introduced to the world in the village of Munchkinland. Through a chain reaction, which began with the political wizards affecting the teachers and the students, we see a school system create unmotivated, unprepared, and under performing students.

When the students and parents alike turn against a troubled educational system, the lack of resources can take its toll on the community. Poverty rates can increase. Crime may increase. Education decreases. Problems become more and more prevalent within the neighborhoods the schools try desperately to service, for "low levels of academic achievement, poverty, and violence are inextricably linked" (Obiakor & Beachum, 2005, p. 141).

This intertwining of multiple issues stems from the lack of education dropouts face after fleeing the schools. "The end result of culturally biased assessment is a gap in

achievement not only as measured by test scores, but also in the placement and eventual educational attainment of students” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 155-156). Students of color from these inner-city communities are not being given the educational tools wizards in political power have promised for decades. In some cases, these students have been almost systematically prohibited from success. “According to Haycock (2001), based on U. S. Census Bureau (1998) data, for every hundred kindergartners, fifty-one Asian-Americans, twenty-eight Whites, Sixteen African-Americans, and ten Latinos will earn bachelor’s degree” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 155-156). Noguera reminds us:

Although reforming public schools will not eliminate poverty... education continues to be the only legitimate source of opportunity available to the poor... it can also serve as a means for the poor and oppressed to imagine a more social order... for communities struggling to meet basic needs, improvements in education can be an effective means to obtain tangible benefits even without other more far-reaching social reforms (2003, p. 102).

Clearly, the need for urban, inner-city communities to be educated is evident, for students of any color need the tools provided by education to empower them for success. The students of Munchkinland suffer: 1) from interactions with witch-teachers, who, as Blazer (2011) explains, have a “diminished sense of professional worth and feelings of disempowerment and alienation” (p. 6), 2) curriculum scarier than a pail of water “when students are required to pass a test in order to graduate from high school” (Blazer, 2011, p. 9), and 3) when and a lack of support from the wizards in Oz leads to discouraging “students from exploring subjects that interest them” (Blazer, 2011, p. 10).

Technicolor Solutions

As a researcher, I hesitate to offer a philosophical viewpoint, since my own forensic background has taught me to view the world from varied perspectives. I often sit back, look at a problem, see what others have to say, and then act upon the best course of action. With this perspective in mind, I will argue postmodernist philosophy is most attuned with what is happening with high-stakes testing and its detriment to the education of diverse youth. As Noddings (2012) points out, "Postmodernism is more a mood than a movement" (p. 77); however, Gutek (2009) explains, "official knowledge in the curriculum often is 'privileged' and given hierarchical priority status. Privileged means that it is accorded a high status in the curriculum as better-- more accurate, more scientific, more objective-- than other academic subjects or educational experiences" (p. 148). This privilege is what hurts diverse youth in the pressure cooker world of mandated state and national testing. Furthermore, the "official curriculum [of mandated tests] constitutes passing on and engulfing students in a false consciousness that minimizes their lived experiences" (Gutek, 2009, p. 150).

Politicians lack understanding of what students need in the classroom to be successful because they fail to understand "that the search for one all-encompassing description of knowledge is hopeless" (Noddings, 2012, p. 78). Teachers lack energy after their struggles with the burden of testing demands, and force students "to put your own opinions and prior knowledge aside to determine a objective answer to any question" (Noddings, 2012, p. 78), contrary to postmodernist philosophy. Finally, students struggle with lack of understanding, lack of connection to materials taught, and

a lack of confidence to succeed because they see themselves as "Others, who use a different language and see from a different perspective" (Noddings, 2012, p. 80). It is because I agree with Jacques Derrida and other postmodernists: "we must give fuller accounts to "women, working people, ethnic and racial groups" (Gutek, 2009, p. 149), I present three distinct, yet overlapping Technicolor solutions which will bring a heart, a brain, and courage to our diverse students.

As an educator for nearly two decades, I embrace the philosophy of "the educator's role is to help people to learn to use their own voices" (Gutek, 2009, p. 155). From this positionality, I offer three solutions prevalent in forensic activity: 1) dialogue; 2) originality; and 3) diversity of literature, to assist diverse youth to find their way along the yellow brick road of education. These solutions are imperative to the field of forensic activity, for as Peters (2009) extends, "as long as the U.S. has a culture that values standardized test scores as a measurement of school, teacher, and student success, forensics educators will have to establish a definite link between competitive speech and higher test scores in order to survive" (p. 37). The following solutions not only give students the emotional framework to embrace education, but they also reinforce skills needed for success in the test-driven school system.

Dialogue

To begin a discussion on solutions, educators must open dialogue with students of diversity. Paulo Friere's (1970) text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, posits: "Human existence cannot be silent, nor can it be nourished by false words, but only by true words, with which men and women transform the world. To exist, humanly, is to name the

world, to transform the world” (p. 88). Friere analyzes the dialogic process imperative to “authentic education” to opening education to the Scarecrows, Tin Men, and Cowardly Lions of our school system. Friere (1970) offers: “Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education” (p. 92-93).

This is a truth in forensics, especially debate. When two students stand in front of a judge to argue the affirmative and negative of a debate resolution, the debaters engage in “dialogue [which] is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 88). For the students who present a debate case ‘by naming the world,” these debaters “transform it,” for “dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings” (p. 88). “Within the word we find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such interaction that if one is sacrificed-even in part-the other immediately suffers” (p. 87).

For debaters, who rely on an opposition to their presentation, there is both the spoken word of the individual and the reflection and response of the opposite side. Here, the power of words comes to life, as Friere explains, in action and reflection, followed by additional action and reflection. In truth, debate could be defined as the continuous action and reflection of word. “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking” (p. 92), and it is this critical thinking that motivates the student debater.

Unlike the standardized testing classroom, where educators are banking information into students, the process of debate is self-discovery, self-analysis, and internal preparation prior to beginning the dialogue with another. This reflection of what

another may say is often lacking in the classroom when the focus is solely on a test. Contrasting this banking mindset, debaters must anticipate what will happen in a debate in order to prepare for the argument, they must speak and act confidently with their own prepared arguments, and they must analyze and quickly reflect on what their opposition has said in the round. This critical thinking process is, as Friere points out, lost in the banking mentality of many educators. Forensic coaches/teachers cannot simply dump information into a competitor. Teaching students to think, act, reflect, and judge are key to success in forensics. This critical thinking process is where the dialogical experience comes to fruition.

Peters (2009) explains, an “important benefit attributed to participation in forensics is the increase in civic awareness and the empowerment of students to be productive members of a democracy” (p. 38). As a student begins to prepare arguments for a resolution, the student is acutely aware of opposition. There is never a right or wrong answer in these discussions, for a debater must learn to argue multiple sides of an issue. This multiplicity of arguments allows for a better educational framework on a particular subject, but also encourages the student to apply this process to other classes he/she takes in school. This is the antithesis of most multiple-choice formats of the testing mindset. When these skilled orators find themselves in a classroom with a banking educator, one who refuses to depart from the testing mentality, they disrupt, question, and often annoy their possibly oppressive educators who focus solely on rote materials.

These students, who have spent so much of their own time learning how to step outside of typical teacher-imparts-all-knowledge to others, struggle when impeded by an antidialogical educator who oppresses others as a mechanism to educate. Non-communicative teachers forget, “it is not our role to speak to the people [students] about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (Friere, 1970, p. 96). Palmer (2014) asserts, “commonly, though, teachers have students talk as an afterthought to some assignment, yet offer no lessons on the skills they assess” (p. 73).

The struggling teacher who turns Wicked Witch labels the student who speaks his/her mind on a subject as a troublemaker or a discipline problem; however, this is also where the student truly learns what it means to dialogue about important issues with others. “When students take part in speech and debate activities, they acquire skills that go far beyond writing essays and studying for tests, because every step of the way, they engage with information, other people, and important issues facing our world” (Wallace, 2013, p. 13).

While forensic students are taught to critically think about a subject from numerous perspectives, students outside forensic programs may not be pushed to think beyond the test’s oppressive pedagogy. This is a distinct advantage forensic students have over their peers who may not be regularly challenged to think beyond themselves or the information presented for a test. Wade and Zorwick (2009) explain, “debate offers an intentional and directed use of advocacy and controversy in order to improve learning in almost any academic setting. Moreover, debate transforms the classroom environment

into an intellectually challenging and engaging world where ideas are explored through discourse and argument” (p. 13).

In truth, students outside of forensic programs may not always be given the opportunity to engage in reality as often as those who participate in forensics, for “forensics uniquely benefits both gifted and at-risk populations, providing a rigorous and relevant education to everyone involved” (Billman, 2008b, p. 23). Moreover, “when people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it, they would have to reverse their starting point” (Friere, 1970, p. 104). While it is impossible to expect every student to understand the multiple aspects of all learned information, forensic programs offer an escape of the banking education systems entrenched in other curriculums due to testing restraints. Forensics offers students freedom from oppressive antialogical classes and the well meaning, but overwhelmed educators they endure while searching for their own realities.

Originality

Participation in forensic activities is not about being the best presenter, the loudest arguer, or the strongest defender of a claim. Participation in forensics is about being original. I have always begun my Debate I class with Original Oratory (OO), a 10-minute original speech designed to address a burning issue in society. I describe it as an Oprah Winfrey segment: sometimes you cry, sometimes you think, sometimes you do both. In OO, an audience is never quite sure what a speaker will address. It is this uncertainty that makes forensics a unique educational activity.

In events, such as Impromptu Speaking, where students are given a few moments to prepare before they give a speech based on their own prior knowledge, or in others, such as Program of Oral Interpretation (POI), where students use literature to create an argument, originality is key to the learning process. This freedom to explore topics, speeches, concepts outside the rigor of mandated tests, allows students, especially those who feel isolated from the school system, an opportunity to speak their own mind.

In traditional classrooms, with the burden of impending score results, students are forced to think in the way the test thinks. In other words, students must learn what the wizards expect them to say or think, not always what they actually think. For years now, I have had teachers from other parts of my school building complain to me that my forensic students were “argumentative” or “disrespectful,” or as some often label them, “rude.”

When I investigate further with my educational peers, it becomes clear; these students are doing nothing but expressing their original thoughts in the classroom. When my students would question, derive a new idea, or share their own thoughts, they were shut down or told they were wrong. Harding and Vega (2014) explain, “educators are confronted with these challenges daily, and are frustrated because they have neither the training nor the time to create caring and inclusive classrooms where students feel safe to express themselves and address these problems” (p. 21). Therefore, if original thoughts are continually expressed in class, the students are labeled as troublemakers. Since when did a student having an original thought mean he/she is a troublemaker? Fighting back against the tyranny of testing, these students want not only to dialogue, but analyze and

dive into their own thoughts. This original voice in the classroom can be a distractor or threat to a teacher who is solely focused on the upcoming test. This was obviously a problem for one student, Cooper.

Cooper was a remarkable student: energetic, hyper, opinionated, and clever are all words used to describe this young man. To be honest, Cooper was a loud presence in all of his classes; however, he excelled in grades. He mastered all of his course assignments and always had the right answers to the questions the teachers asked. In the forensic program, Cooper excelled in public speaking events, such as OO, extemporaneous speaking, and Congressional Debate (CD). Cooper's strength was his out-of-the-box thinking. While this was a blessing in forensic competition, and Cooper had numerous successes, he infuriated teachers who could not address his original thinking.

Especially frustrated with Cooper was his AP U.S. History teacher. A well-versed and experienced teacher, she was too focused on making sure students were prepared for the mandated state social studies test and AP tests which loomed at the end of the year. "The popularity of standardized testing has helped reinforce the belief that the primary role of the school and the teacher is cognitive development. Teaching course material is only one aspect of educational learning, however" (Way, 2011, p. 365). Unfortunately, Cooper's teacher did not know how to handle his commentary, his unique perspective, his outlandish ways of looking at facts, his clever ideas, or his desire to learn more.

While Cooper was a disruption to his teacher's pedagogy, he was looking for enrichment, which Carroll (2007) defines as "allowing a student to move beyond the regular curriculum to specialized study, often undertaking whatever he or she wishes" (p. 31). Cooper was different than the others in class who sat quietly, did, said, and wrote as they were told. Cooper would have no part in those 'shenanigans,' as he put it.

In mid-October of his junior year, Cooper's teacher gave up. After weeks of scolding him, telling him his unique ideas were just wrong, and yelling at him constantly, she threw in the towel. For roughly three weeks, an entire unit, his teacher let him teach the class. Cooper was thrilled to lead the class, to have an opportunity to use his original thought in the classroom. He accepted the challenge and led his class through an entire unit, preparing them for the district-written test. His teacher came to me exhausted, worn out from dealing with a student who had such different ideas. She asked me to help her corral him back into order. I asked her, "why?" I thought Cooper was correct in sharing his opinions. "Was being different such a bad thing? Why are his inventive ideas wrong?"

Cooper wasn't wrong, his teacher was. While I applaud her allowing him to teach the class as a mechanism to allow him to shine and express his individuality, I am unsure she affords this freedom to other students. What about those students, like Cooper, who have original and unique ideas, but are afraid to express them? Educators should allow for originality in the classroom, acknowledging that "learning can be liberating and completely transformative" (Williford, 2015, p. 24) for students if given the chance to actively create in the classroom. Embracing activities, such as forensics, is

a key way for students to express their own ideas. Performance and debate skills in forensics allow students to control their own ideas in a structured manner. These are the benefits of forensic activities.

With that in mind, what do our Wicked Witch teachers do to Cowardly Lions who sit in class and never express their own beliefs because they fear repercussions? Fecser (2015) offers for most teachers “The common sense notion is that problem behavior requires negative consequences, but punishment-based discipline triggers flight, fight, or freeze reactions, making matters worse” (p. 22). Carroll (2007) offers mentorship as a key mechanism for teachers to build relationships with his/her students. This mentoring allows for teachers to work with students, “encourage students to share ideas and opinions and cooperate for mutual self-improvement, thereby improving recognition, retention, critical thinking, and problem solving skills” (Carroll, 2007, p. 34). Unfortunately, with many teachers and administrators pushing for success on standardized national tests, our students are left to either 1) not speak their own mind or 2) infuriate already-frustrated teachers who struggle to prepare students for tests, which do not necessarily measure successful learning. Both teacher and student are left struggling in a system beyond their control. Still, forensic participation is an option for Cooper and other students who need an external outlet from the mundane testing classroom.

Prior research on the concept of originality or originality of thought is limited in educational journals. While researchers can find analysis on creativity or action in the classroom, prior research on originality is almost nonexistent. Why is this? If we define

originality as the action of being creative and unique, then why aren't we utilizing this process in classrooms? Is this a semantic issue or something more in-depth; are we systematically removing original thought from our classrooms with mandated testing from state and national wizards? Do we as educators make more Tin Men, Scarecrows, and Cowardly Lions when we fail to allow students to be his/her own unique selves in the classroom? In the example of Cooper, we see a student wanting to have his voice heard, be different, but uncertain how this can come to fruition. Fortunately, out of sheer desperation, his teacher allowed him to have his own voice. Chan, Graham-Day, Ressa, Peters, and Konrad (2014) explain, “when teachers take time to empower students by teaching them how to take an active role in their education and providing them opportunities to do so, student engagement contributes to the goal of improving student achievement” (p. 105).

While Cooper struggles to find his own voice in the classroom, to be heard, is his teacher, who wants him to be successful, stymieing his originality by forcing him to conform to a testing structure? Extracurricular participation, such as forensics, provides an outlet for students frustrated by the limited interaction of ideas they are allowed in the testing classroom.

Diversity of Literature

The purpose of this section is two-pronged. While forensics allows for the diversity of literature to be explored by students, it is also vital to implement this exploration in all English Language Arts classrooms. Therefore, while the argument below explains how diversity of literature is inherent in forensic participation it is also

important to remember the need for this strategy in all literature-based classrooms. Furthermore, as this is a language arts application, the argument is the same for science, social studies, and math: educators must link the black and white tests of Dorothy's Kansas to the technicolor lives of our students. Thomas (2015) explains, "because of the double-impending doom augured by the Common Core: the rise of nonfiction (and the concurrent erasing of poetry and fiction) from the ELA curriculum and the mantra of the moment" (p. 90), the addition of diversified literature seen in forensic competition, is key to success of disenfranchised students.

The importance of making connections to a student's life is clear; however, how does a teacher incorporate these texts into an already-packed curriculum focused on testing? In order for educators to best utilize a student's innate inner voice, a teacher must be willing to address a "model of popular culture in which teachers and students become co-investigators, drawing on their different experiences and knowledge" (Low, 2006, p. 100). These connections to students in the class are not always found when reading writers such as Frost, Dickinson, Hawthorne, Twain, and Emerson; however, when using literature which connects to modern students and addresses concepts students can pull from prior knowledge, the new literature becomes an extension of the student's prior learning.

Today's students much more savvy than previous generations, and they are unwilling to learn from outdated, dead White men in English classrooms, especially students who already feel disenfranchised from the system. A focus must be made on incorporating diverse writers of color and bringing a blend of historical and

contemporary viewpoints to light in literature studies to complement and diminish the effects of standardized tests by giving the students an “opportunity to read about the experiences of others and make the necessary connection to them (Al-Shalabi et al., 2011, p. 51). As many educators have already moved away from the banking mindset, more teachers must push to incorporate diverse literature into the standardized testing classroom, which almost systematically “denies minority authors... the chance to be read at all” (Al-Shalabi et al., 2011, p. 51).

The addition of current spoken word movements, for example, is a perfect method of linking the words of historical writers, such as Walt Whitman’s “I Hear America Singing” to the current poetry of Def Poetry Jam’s “I, too, America.” Furthermore, comparing Leonard Cohen’s “Democracy” to the US Constitution is a forward-thinking method to address varying perspectives of America, to add a contemporary view, and to introduce a culturally balanced opinion on the topic. “In reality, the [literary] canon keeps Americans of Latin, Asian, and African origin out of its doors, which demonstrates the dire need for a representative canon that teaches students about American culture” (Al-Shalabi et al., 2011, p. 51). Students, addressing both older, established literature found in testing, as well as contemporary material are able to identify and understand the basics assessed on the high-stakes test without the pressure of the test itself because “adding more variety,” as Jogie (2005) argues, “might entice young learners to read more widely” (p. 306).

Moreover, contemporary language and literature clearly allows students to evaluate all standard literary techniques and skills essential to prepare them for

standardized testing, especially when teachers “help them [students] learn to make meaningful, critical connections between the text and their own cultural identities as diverse readers” (Blake, 1998, p. 243).

Although much modern literature is unswerving in its in-your-face phrasing and emotion (and often language), this fresh perspective on the literary elements of personification, tone, alliteration, allusion, metaphor, and rhyme scheme all come to life when students’ “serious writing, thinking, and conversations about their own lives enables their engagement in studies of others’ lives” (Hansen, 2014, p. 20). “More contemporary text options on prescribed reading lists will enable students from diverse backgrounds to engage in discussions of cultural identities” (Jogie, 2015, p. 306).

Simply infusing modern literature with the canon already expected of students, students of diversity are able to get a brain for school, a heart for the curriculum, and lose the fear of mandated tests. Seale (2015) explains, students “should understand how the written word, over time, charged with differing passions, convictions, and views, has shaped, related, and influenced the human experience” (p. 12), which the use of paired newer and older literature in the classroom can accomplish.

In essence, the addition of current literature that is culturally relevant to students’ own lives permits educators (who are tired of teaching to the test) an alternative to bring depth and meaning to students. Gayle-Evans (1993) reminds us: “The school was set up and still remains a system of White middle-class values. Because of this structure of the school system, many children from lower socioeconomic groups, as well as many minorities including African-American children, tend to feel alienated.” Therefore, to

combat the influence of these tests, curriculum specialists must actively search for newer texts, which parallel the established literature already within the canon of acceptable studies. Thomas (2015) asks us: “Will we soon wake one morning to find the carcasses of poems washed up on the beach by the tsunami of the Common Core” (p. 92), if we do not incorporate a plethora of literature genres and styles?

So, what does a teacher need to do? Engage. Interact. Investigate what students know, need to know, and want to know. Have students read and write. Students want to learn, but they are often turned off by the words of those who lived in another time, another place, another world than the one they know. Infusion of contemporary literature to stand beside the traditional canon allows students to link the two as one, resulting in a better education, for “true representation of social diversity requires authors from all backgrounds be embraced” (p Al-Shalabi et al, 2011, p. 51).

Literature, to successfully connect with students, must clearly link to the student’s life. “Learners participate in rich zones or contexts of development by sharing sociocultural and linguistic resources” (Jocson, 2006, p. 237); therefore, by studying new materials with students of diversity, teachers are able to link the world of canonized literature and their lived experiences. Students must be able to express themselves through their own experiences and see other writers, who express themselves with those same lived experiences, in order to comprehend the techniques and devices used in writing. The current canon “negatively impacts students’ views of themselves” (Al-Shalabi et al., 2011, p. 54), and this leads students to “become disillusioned and look forward only to the day they can drop out” (Hansen, 2014, p. 21).

Implications for Further Research

While forensic coaches “inherently know that the experiences gained in this activity prepare students for college and raises their test scores” (Riffer & Jacobi, 2013, p. 14), there is “to date, no specific research [which] has been done to study the connection between state mandated standardized test scores and participation in competitive speech” (Peters, 2009, p. 38).

Educational researchers acknowledge speaking and listening skills are vital to success on standardized tests, for “from the early elementary grades through high school, the Common Core State Standards ask students to organize and explain their ideas in oral presentations, use visual aids, and speak appropriately for various contexts and tasks” (Larmer & Mergendollar, 2012, p. 74). Jacobi (2013) argues, “Whether a student is seeking poems for interpretive performance, or searching for debate evidence, they rely upon information literacy. This broad term encompasses skills that are enumerated in the CCSS Reading Standards for Informational Text” (p. 24). Still, limited research is out there. Wallace (2013) argues, “while you won’t find kids in a forensic classroom filling in bubbles with No. 2 pencils, standards are clearly being met – and exceeded” (p. 13).

However, additional research must be conducted to showcase forensic activity in two ways 1) a direct support for mandated testing skills and 2) an alternative outlet for assisting diverse students who struggle with the stress of testing standards itself. This link is essential to both student successes within the activity and for the activity itself as a functioning element of the school system.

Conclusions

In order for diverse students to feel at home in the school setting, this article proposes participation in forensic activities as one solution to the underlying frustrations and concerns in a world growing more and more focused upon mandated tests. While our politician-wizards shout from behind curtains, unsure of what their demands will really mean to the classroom, some teachers become wicked witches who feel trapped and negative about the changing face of their curriculum. These changes, forced by national programs (NCLB and Race to the Top) in the form of standardized testing (e.g. Common Core State Standards) offer very little hope for the disenfranchised student who continues to falter in the average classroom. These struggles are apparent in students who do not have the heart, the brain, or the courage to face these daunting tests.

Through narrative examples, this researcher brings forth the argument for forensic activity as an alternative for students who do not fit within the confines of national and state standardized testing. Politicians and teachers have struggled with how to systematically evaluate a student's level of success; especially since many students do not fit the mold of multiple choice testing.

Three technicolor solutions were presented to showcase how forensics allows students to succeed: 1) dialogue, which enables students to actively engage with one another and discuss, rather than write or test over a subject they learn; 2) Originality, a term which embraces the merging of creativity with activity; and 3) Diversity of literature, where a student can connect with words and ideas in poetry, stories, or drama which directly relates to his/her life. These solutions are a starting point.

As mandated testing does not appear to be going away any time soon, alternative methodologies in reaching diverse students must be evaluated. While preliminary research does argue forensic activity correlates with standard, tested skills, more focus needs to be placed on protecting students who, like the Tin Man, Scarecrow, and the Cowardly Lion, continue to search for the missing part in their educational endeavors.

CHAPTER III

EDUCATIONAL PLAY: THE LIVES OF FORENSIC COACHES

When I tell parents at Open House how long a speech and debate tournament lasts, I typically get one of two distinct responses from them: “You are gone how long?” [in a confused tone] or “You are gone how long?” [in a jubilant tone]. They chuckle at the other’s responses. Either way, the answer back is the same, “we are gone from after school Friday until about midnight and then back up on Saturday morning from 6:00 AM until about 11:00 PM that night.” This is a typical, local tournament in Houston, Texas. “In truth, we are gone much longer and more nights when we travel nationally for major tournaments or across the state for regional meets, but usually we are gone about 24 hours or so of the weekend.” I continue, “last year, I traveled 23 weekends of the school year.” This is my life as a forensic (speech and debate) coach.

While educators as a whole are under immense pressures in a high-stakes game of educational Russian Roulette, with Common Core State Standards, mandated examinations and test scores, there are those teachers who continue to sacrifice their time, their families, and their personal lives for the time-consuming world of forensics. These long tournament hours, not to mention practice sessions after school during the week, are often overlooked by administration, parents, and outsiders who deem these coaches “crazy.” However, to best understand the craziness of dedicated educators who sacrifice much of their free time to the world of forensics, we must examine the lives of these men and women and question, why do they do what they do?

In order to best realize the lived experiences of these coaches, connection to these experiences must be made beyond data collection. As many of these coaches teach public speaking, oral interpretation, and general presentation techniques performance-style qualitative research methodology, such as performance ethnography, is warranted when delving into the realities of these educators. Anderson (2007) argues, “there is an undeniable logic in qualitative research turning to performance to convey the meaning of its data. The theatre is a powerful place for meaning making in its own right and many and varied issues can be dealt with in depth in theatrical spaces. There is also an ability for the theatre to make authentic and intimate connections that is beyond the capability of most written research” (p. 82).

Performance Ethnography

Abhyankar and Ganapathy (2013) explain, as educational challenges become “prominent, the methods and techniques to tackle these challenges are also becoming more sophisticated” (p. 113). One way to address the challenges in education is the use of performance ethnographic research. “As many Qualitative Inquiry readers already know, performed ethnography and research-informed theater are research methodologies that involve turning ethnographic data and texts into scripts and dramas that are either read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences” (Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury, and Snell, 2014, p. 674).

Warren (2006) explains, “Performance ethnography, as I have seen it written and lived, is about seeing the constructed nature of our lives and then interrupting that seemingly stable process” (p. 318). Snyder-Young (2010) argues performance literature

in interview form, already in the milieu of entertainment, pushes social conventions and brings forth current newsworthy stories. Pendergast (2014) explains, performance ethnography was “developed in a reaction against the text-centric discourses of the ethnography as practiced across the social sciences” (p. 88). Interview style performance, found in many performance ethnographies, “became popular in the 1990s with the mainstream success of interview-based theatre pieces like Anna Deavere Smith’s (1993, 1994) *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*, Moises Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project’s (2001) *The Laramie Project*, and Eve Ensler’s (2001) *The Vagina Monologues*” (Snyder-Young, 2010, p. 885).

Performance ethnographic research, instead of providing statistics and analysis of quantitative and mixed methodologies, focuses on in-depth investigation of specific examples within a culture or group. “Utilizing the powerful tool of theatre, performance ethnography brings cultural politics to the forefront and mandates that audiences interact with these political issues. The fusion of ethnography and performance realms creates the possibility for cultural awareness and functions as a tool for social change” (Esquibel & Mejia, 2008, p. 41).

Pollack (2006) offers, performance ethnography “involves going in to a social field at risk of going under” (p. 327), yet “the intention is to provide a space for critical reflection instead of neat-and-tidy explanations; multiple, divergent, and contradictory stories instead of linear truth claims; uncertainty instead of certitude, and so forth” (Cavanagh, 2013, p. 291).

Siegel (2005) provides a list of features characterized by ethnographic research in general: “prolonged engagement, purposeful sampling, persistent observation, multiple source data collection, and recursive interpretation” (p. 219). Furthermore, “research that utilizes ethnographic methods can highlight new knowledge through a particular focus on individual cases and situations” (Morgan & Henning, 2010, p. 1), emerging as “an instrument, a method for apprehending and elaborating the mysteries of ‘culture,’”(Lassiter and Campbell, 2010, p. 757).

Supporting this assertion, Morgan and Henning continue, “although the current trend in our field is to conduct research that is ‘evidence-based’ and that measures performance, the need for ethnographic work will always be there. Together, a collection of studies... can portray educational reality in a powerful and detailed way, showing how single cases are more than the sum of their parts” (2010, p. 3).

Ethnographic research focuses on individuals within a group/culture. This focus allows for analysis often not found in other quantitative methodologies which focus on specific data-driven results, for

affect is too often lost or sidelined in mainstream social scientific research: it is nominally referenced at best and regarded as an irritant, a variable to be controlled, at worst. Performance ethnography has become a pedagogically exciting methodological form because it can emotionally engage audiences in topics they would normally avoid (Cavanagh, 2013, p. 287).

While many researchers advocate for performance ethnographic research, there is criticism of the methodology. Anderson (2007) argues, “there is an assumption in some of the performance ethnography literature that the making of a performance is a simple task of presenting research findings in an animated way [however]... there is much craft

in creating engagement from research for a wide audience. These skills are beyond the capabilities of many researchers” (p. 89). Additionally, Foster (2012) argues performance ethnography “particularly appealed to me because of its fit with feminist epistemology and participatory research” (p. 41). As the research community is still working to place performance ethnography into the spectrum of qualitative research, more exploration of this research methodology must occur.

As an educator, the idea of any ethnographic research is intriguing. As a forensics coach, working within the culture of the activity, I am well aware of norms and procedures from this group in contrast to others. If performance ethnographic research is meant to embrace the individual and focus on specifics, then this research methodology aligns with these educators who embrace individuality and heart of their students. Performance ethnographic researchers focus on details, embrace observation, and narrow their research to specific examples representative of an entire body. By being detailed, the nuances, which make each character unique, are pushed into the spotlight; similarly, educators must focus on individual student nuances to effectively educate the whole child.

While the nuances of a single participant are important to research, composite characters are a mechanism in which some performance ethnographers utilize a single character to represent numerous research participants. Edmunds (2010) used fictional composite characters to demonstrate Native American experiences. “The use of fictitious composite characters does offer several advantages” for “a carefully composed composite character has the potential to immediately grab a reader” which

can provide “windows” into “the thoughts and actions of a character” which demonstrates the impact of the group analyzed (p. 43). In addition, Berbary (2011), created a screenplay “composed of quotes and passages taken directly from transcripts and field notes and rearranged into a script that conveys insight into each research question” (p. 187). Therefore, while performance ethnography focuses on nuances of a single character, composite characters unify multiple perspectives into a single voice.

Overall, there are mixed perspectives of performance and/or traditional ethnographic research. Stritikus and Wiese (2006) exert, “given the continued use of ethnographic methods in educational research, it is important to consider the role that they can play in important policy debates in education” (p. 1107). However, whether the research community embraces or scoffs at performance ethnographic research, the ever-growing changes within the educational system provide obstacles in which researchers must overcome. For example, Baker (2013) provides, researching “with young adults at a time of significant change provides many challenges for the ethnographic researcher” (p. 131). In this time of change, varied methodologies should be embraced, regardless of research interests. Performance ethnographic research, focusing on individuals or nuances within a culture, allows for variance from other qualitative research methods, for “these on-paper-only representations do not do the same thing and cannot claim to do the same thing as live performance” (Snyder-Young, 2010, p. 887).

This live performance probes into the microcosm of a research problem. "The traditional form of story is, first, an introduction of characters, and context, then the

revelation of problems that stir apprehension, increasingly complexifying, and ending in good or bad resolution of the problems. It is a chronology, as if going from 'Once upon a time' to 'and they lived happily ever after,' with an occasional flashback" (Stake, 2011, p. 174). While stories are often fairy tales, Warren (2006) explains, "I see in these pieces the richness of considering cultural practices as living moments, enfolded experiences, real people in real places" (p. 318). It is these real people, whom give so much of themselves for their students, in which this article is dedicated.

Methodology

In order to evaluate the experiences of forensic coaches, the researcher presents a performance ethnography play of their lives, based upon data collected in a national survey of coaches. Using the words collected within the survey responses, the researcher created a play. 10 composite actors were created from the data. These characters were based upon reoccurring themes on survey responses. These characters symbolize the major issues brought forth by the coaches in the national survey. While this play utilizes fictionalized characters, the lines are taken directly from narratives provided by survey responses. Cavanagh (2013) argues, "by juxtaposing monologues and creating dialogues between characters, I was able to work with intersubjectivity in social and political contexts. Dialogue enabled me to dramatize critically important differences between social actors" (p. 291). It is this dialogue between the constructed characters that illuminate the struggles of these forensics educators.

While there is no current plan for this text to be performed, this play could easily be produced for an audience. Much of what comes from these coaches will

sound like a stage monologue, for forensic coaches are skilled in teaching students how to take a piece of literature and make it come alive, not to mention the innate theatricality of their personalities.

Data Collection

Goldstein et al. (2014) explain, “while the methods of performed ethnography and research-informed theater are becoming increasingly popular in Western educational research, designing a performed ethnographic study is a complex task” (p. 675). In the fall of 2015, the initial plan was to have 30 forensic coaches complete an online survey; however, as word spread by forensic organizations, the number of participants who completed the survey finalized at 434. This large increase of participants was due to the need for research within the forensics community. While other extracurricular activities, such as band, choir, and orchestra, have extensive research to argue their validity in the entirety of the education system, to date, there is limited argumentation regarding forensics as a whole.

Two national organizations helped distribute the survey to a wide array of coaches across the country. Each coach was approached via email from the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), by newsletter provided by the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA), direct messages from the researcher, snowballing within the community, and/or social media. Coaches were asked to be candid. Names and/or affiliations remain confidential, only known by the researcher (to verify legitimacy of survey responses).

While face-to-face interviews are preferable, scheduling around the difficult hours of forensics coaches posed multiple problems. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to ensure a diverse pool of coaches (beyond respondents from national organizational requests to participate) to complete the online survey. Coaches specifically contacted by the researcher were selected for various factors: geographical differences, socioeconomic differences in their schools, size of programs, longevity as a forensics coach, and their involvement in state and/or NSDA competition to provide a full view of the national scope of forensic coaches.

Originally, due to public service and competition records in the NSDA, involvement in the organization was required simply as a mechanism to verify information provided in survey; however, as word of the survey spread throughout the forensic community, it became apparent limiting to NSDA coaches would hinder the amount of material gathered. Therefore, this limitation was removed; however, experience and data responses from each coach were verified as much as possible by NSDA records.

The coach survey consisted of an online Qualtrics survey with the following questions:

1. What is your name?
2. What is the name of your current school?
3. How many years have you coached (total)?
4. What are the benefits of speech and debate for students while in school?

5. What are the benefits of speech and debate for students after they graduate?
6. What has been your biggest concern/problem/frustration with coaching? Also describe one of your toughest moments as a coach.
7. What is your greatest joy as a coach? Also describe one of your proudest moments as a coach.
8. How does coaching affect your personal life?
9. Please describe your coaching community, how do other coaches interact/socialize?
10. Why do you coach? If you weren't coaching, what do you think you would be doing?

Data Analysis

Responses from questions 3-10 above created the play's text. Saldaña (1999) offers ethnographic performance text derives "significant selections from interview transcripts, field notes, and/or researcher journal entries or memoranda, are carefully arranged, scripted, and dramatized for an audience to enhance their understanding of the participants' lives through aural and visual enactment" (p. 60).

In this play, the words of the survey participants were used for the text. While many performance ethnographies "creatively and strategically edit their stories" (Saldaña, 1999, p. 63), the researcher only edited sentences for structure or grammar. No significant additions or subtractions were made from participant remarks in the

survey. Only “lengthy sentences or extraneous passages...whose absence will not affect the integrity of the voice or quality of the data” (Saldaña, 1999, p. 63) were removed. Deletions were avoided as much as possible to adhere to the authenticity of how each coach responded; however, if coaches discussed issues which compromised others with whom they worked, coach, student, or school names, were deleted.

After 434 coaches completed the survey, the researcher began reviewing the responses. Initially, the researcher read through the responses, memoing what was written by respondents. Next, as Saldaña (1999) suggests, the researcher used the participant’s own words as coding labels. Since “devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the meanings made explicit by the participants themselves” (Merriam, 2009, p. 183-184), the researcher revisited the memos multiple times before settling on which themes should be utilized in the responses. “To pick a topic and specific themes, the ethnographer must make choices. Figure 1 illustrates how fieldworkers regularly find that they have many more themes than they are able to include in a particular manuscript. The process of developing a story is essentially one of selecting some themes that resonate with personal or disciplinary concerns and that recur in a number of specific fieldnotes” (Emerson, Fretz, and Snell, 2011, p. 205). The following themes emerges from the seven questions asked of the participants.

Figure 1

Recurring Themes from Coach Participants

School Benefits	Outside Benefits	Concerns	Joy	Personal Life	Interaction	Why Coach?
“confidence” “communication” “social” “team” “research” “writing” “voice” “critical thinking” “relationships” “creativity” “listening” “analysis”	“confidence” “college” “job” “interview” “politic” “network” “career” “work” “skills”	“money” “funds” “time” “parent” “judge” “coach” “admin” “sports” “athletics” “work” “practice” “support” “class”	“success” “break through” “finals” “confidence” “voice” “improve” “growth” “skills” “future” “support” “impact”	“time” “family” “food” “health” “husband” “wife” “child” “kid” “money”	“socialize” “supportive” “Facebook” “clique/ish” “advice” “mentor” “dinner” “drink” “family”	“volunteer” “kids” “calling” “passion” “students” “making a difference” “former competitor” “love”

With this in mind, the researcher then created 10 composite characters that, as a whole, best represented the recurrent themes from all 434 individual coach responses. Stake (2011) argues "Many anthropologists urge researchers to study not what is extraordinary but what is common" (p. 38); therefore the ten composite respondents who eventually became characters in the play, best represented the commonality of all of the respondents determined through the researcher’s memoing of themes in all participant responses. If Jones’ (2006) assertion that “performance ethnography rests on the idea that bodies harbor knowledge about culture, and that performance allows for the exchange of that knowledge across bodies” is correct, then through the memoing and analysis of recurrent theme process, the 10 composite participants selected as representative of the entire participant pool best illustrated “the embodied knowledge” (p. 339) of the lives of forensic coaches.

The Play

Scene: [11 chairs sit equidistant from one another on an otherwise barren stage. A dim focus light hangs directly above each chair. About 10 rows back, in the middle of this theater is a desk lit by a crane desk lamp and covered in papers. At the table sits a formidable, faceless man, wearing non-descript black clothes. He takes a puff of his smokeless cigar and yells across the theater.]

Director: It's been a long day of auditioning. I have my leads: Science, Math, History, and Language Arts. I even have my supporting cast: Choir, Band, Foreign Language, and Athletics. Why am I being forced to audition of the role of speech and debate coach? [He pauses, takes a deep breath and continues]. Very well, bring me out the Auditionees. [10 candidates walk out onto the stage. Each one different than the next, each one unsure of what is to come]. Sit down and listen to me. [They all sit, with a single light shining down on each of their faces]. I don't understand why I am wasting my time with this role. No one cares about your program. No one needs a speech and debate coach, but I am required to fill this role, inconsequential as it may be. I have no idea what to do with this part, so I need you to tell me what to do. How am I supposed to make greatness out of this role? [Groans loudly, wipes his forehead, shoves papers around on this desk]. Very well. Let's begin. Each of you introduce yourself and tell me something about who you are as an educator.

Coach 1: My name is Aaron....

Director: No names. No one cares about your name. Facts are not important for this role. We are not evaluating you on a test. I want real information: depth and meaning, not regurgitated facts I will forget moments after you leave. Why do you do this thing called coaching forensics? Motivation, that is where real performance comes from.

Coach 1: The benefits of speech and debate for students while in school are numerous. Students learn advanced research, argumentation, and public speaking skills, which easily transfer to all content areas. I find that students involved in speech and debate learn to formulate opinions based in research and can articulate them in a persuasive and polished manner. These students learn to balance their time and prioritize. Students also learn how to advocate for themselves and challenge ideas and individuals appropriately and respectfully. Most importantly, students in speech and debate learn to find their voice - students learn to think for themselves in a critical and analytical way and then express their ideas. Speech and debate gives incredible and intelligent students a platform from which to share ideas and arguments that challenge all of us to be better.

Director: Very well. Move along. Each of you, tell me what is important about coaching?

Coach 2: It gives them the ability to think critically, evaluate evidence, construct persuasive arguments using evidentiary support, and develop

presentation skills. It also teaches them how to research, evaluate source materials and authors, and satisfy the requirements of Common Core with respect to critical reading, writing and speaking. It gives them self-confidence and allows them to compete in an environment [pauses] both academic and competitive. It allows students with otherwise restrictive disabilities to compete and participate at the highest levels. Students with speech impediments overcome them, and become fearless-- overcoming things that reduce some adults to tears.

Director: Common Core! Ha! Really? How? This isn't English.

Coach 4: Most Common Core listening and speaking, as well as English Language Arts, are actually put into practice through the smorgasbord of events available to the speech and debate participants. The combination of debate and interpretive events cover key aspects of research, topic development, literary interpretation, and argumentation, but--most importantly--the students get to put their skills into practice through performances that often require on-the-spot poise and extemporaneous thinking and response. In addition, students are able to belong to a team, to learn how to win and lose gracefully, to develop social and behavioral skills necessary to be a responsible member of a traveling team. [Pauses for a moment]. While field and court sports offer similar opportunities, Speech & Debate's real benefit is the celebration of the mind, the

development of life skills critical to successful college preparedness and future career success.

Coach 5: [Thinks for a moment and begins to rattle off ideas]. Communication skills, organizational skills, research skills, learning to be a part of a team, expanding creativity, learning responsibility.

Director: [Chuckling at Coach 5]. You, quick response. I find that intriguing. [Points at Coach 6]. You?

Coach 6: High school is a difficult time for students, especially those that may be lacking in whatever is the social currency of the moment. Speech and debate naturally instills confidence in students. I think this is invaluable for students while they're in high school. Certainly, the benefits grow the more successful they are. There are several scholarship opportunities and people from the community and other colleges generally have a nice reverence for speech and debate that it "sounds good" when they are associated with it. I also think that students benefit from experiencing diverse perspectives. In high school, it's often that their views and ideas about the words are just parroted from their teachers or their parents. I think when they are confronted with differences and the possibility of alternate truths it becomes a good way for them to start to process the gray areas of life. Finally, some students are just alone. Every student needs a place to belong. For many students, regardless of success, speech and debate is that home. It fills a niche void that not many other

organizations fill. Because there's such an interschool component to speech and debate, that helps create the feeling of home.

Director: You. [Points at Coach 3]. We didn't hear from you.

Coach 3: Uhhh.

Director: Uhhh? Really?

Coach 3: Really. I don't want...

Director: What? You don't want to what? See, you can't even advocate for yourself.

Coach 7: [Interrupting the Director]. I am still not convinced that there is an adequate way to quantify the full scope of the benefits that are afforded to students involved in speech and debate. There are the obvious academic benefits that included persuasive writing, research skills, argument development, audience analysis, public speak and performance, critical thinking, problem solving, timed writing, and countless others. In addition to the academics, speech and debate fully develops young leaders through competition and socialization that is inherently part of what happens at speech and debate tournaments. Students learn about themselves and others through academic competition and research that offers them unique real world experiences that no other activity offers to its participants. Speech and debate offers a never-ending stream of diverse ideas, beliefs and opinions for review

and study in a way that allows students to really experience diversity in profound ways.

Director: Enough. Give me the single most important thing forensics gives students in school? Why is it important to these students? [Points at Coach 8].

Coach 8: Confidence.

Coach 9: Confidence.

Coach 1: Research.

Coach 4: Writing.

Coach 5: Critical thinking.

Coach 7: Analysis.

Coach 10: Forensics has many benefits for students while they are in school. First, it serves as a bridge across the curriculum. The education system necessarily divides the curriculum into pillars, but they rarely overlap. This activity inherently brings different disciplines together under a single umbrella. Second, it fosters critical thinking (and other higher-level cognitive skills). This aids students' abilities to succeed in other classes. Third, it often spurs interest in other courses. Many of my students become vocal leaders in other classes - even classes they say they never liked - after they begin to see the role of "our issues" in other classes. Fourth, it creates concerned citizens. Our activity is inherently communal. As students see the power of communal discussion, action,

etc., they look for other common points of interests and support other students in the school. It also gives them a social sphere. The list goes on...

Director: Stop! I said one idea. Not a million. How can anyone get a word in with you?

Coach 3: Really? [Stands and takes a step forward].

Director: Excuse me? [Coach 3 steps back]. Great! You give kids an activity in school to belong to and help them take a test. This isn't Science or Math where they use these skills all through their lives. You all.... Well, most of you all seem to be passionate, but I question why? None of you are leading roles. You all take these subpar roles in the academic world. Why not take leads in Science, or Math, or Language Arts, or star in important supporting roles such as a Basketball Coach or in Special Education? What do you do to contribute to the educational play? [Points at Coach 2]. What does forensics do for a student after they graduate? Math is essential in all aspects of life, how are you essential?

Coach 2: [Stands up and says with passion]. Any student that has engaged in competitive forensics is far more ready for life after high school. Not only does forensics cause students to think critically about issues, but it allows them to articulate their thoughts. Forensics teaches you how to lose, and to persevere to be the best. The rigor of tournaments on every level (local, national) puts students into a competitive environment and

requires students to be poised and thoughtful. Every component of a forensics tournament helps students prepare for life after graduation.

[Resumes her seat].

Coach 7: Students have more access to colleges. They know more about them, can research them, and colleges want them. Once there, they are incredible at learning because they have had to do so much for debate. They know how to research, how to document sources, and how to present their material in an understandable way. Once college is finished, students have the skills to work intensely and with others. Both of these are important in today's workforce. They know how to work on a team, how to research, and how to get the most out of time. Because they are also better at presenting, they use their skills to move up faster in most businesses too.

Coach 8: I feel very strongly that debate and forensics benefits students not only academically, but it contributes to their ability to be active, insightful members of society. [Adamantly]. They can use all of the skills that they learned in these activities to help them be successful regardless of the path they follow.

Coach 10: Students in speech and debate typically excel in college, because they know how to research and write, they aren't afraid of asking questions or challenging opinions, and they are self-confident when sharing their thoughts and ideas. These skills, of course, transfer to life. No matter

what jobs, activities, volunteer and community projects they experience, speech and debate students are well prepared. They are able to effectively advocate for themselves, their family, friends, and co-workers; they are excellent at articulating a wide variety of political, social, and artistic points of view. They become well-informed citizens and voters. [Pauses]. Perhaps most importantly, they open the world of ideas and multiple points of view to those with whom they interact throughout their lives.

Coach 3: [Speaks up]. Knowledge and experience to use throughout their lives in everything from describing health concerns to a doctor, reading to a child, researching and analyzing issues, to performing on stage or running for office.

Director: Well, finally, you speak. [Rolling eyes at Coach 3]. Sounds great, but this is generalities...

Coach 9: [Interrupting the Director]. We had a student attend Harvard a few years ago. In the first semester of her freshman year, she wrote a paper for a professor with which that professor wasn't duly impressed. On the next assignment, she approached the assignment as if it was a debate case. The professor approached her and congratulated her on learning a great deal from the writing class that is required of all Harvard freshmen to help them know how they are to write in college. This student then had the pleasure of informing that professor that she was not going to be

taking that class until the second semester. In short, she already had the skills to be successful without having to take the writing class.

Director: Oh, so young women can succeed in debate, too? [Looking at Coach 9]. I assumed we were only talking about boys when we discuss forensics?

Coach 9: [Taken aback]. I have seen women as former debaters use debate skills to succeed in a male dominated profession.

Director: Again, we use generalities to discuss this, right? This is about young men in the business world, not women, yes? I don't believe women are successful in speech & debate.

Coach 2: [Bolts up]. I have had many students -- my own daughter included -- who have told me they would not be where they are today if not for what they learned in high school speech class. Many of my daughter's colleagues in her PhD program who were brilliant did not know how to present themselves well. She is a tenured professor at a major top 10 University at the age of 34, which would not have been possible if not for her speaking skills.

Director: I see. Go ahead. [In a sarcastic tone]. Do any of you others have anything to say about the elite students you teach at affluent schools?

Coach 8: [Ubruptly stands up]. This is a great skill whether someone ends up working in a corporate office or behind the grill at a fast food restaurant.

Director: [Laughs]. Really? How so?

Coach 8: Forensics competition also allows students to travel. Some students might never leave their hometown if it weren't for trips to speech tournaments. This enables them to see other opportunities. Some tournaments are at colleges and universities and other places. Even within state borders, there are many different cultures. This exposure benefits them beyond after graduation because they have a wider field to choose from. I have personally had students who never really considered college an option until they began competing in speech. After visiting college campuses and towns different from their own, they saw possibilities they once thought out of their reach.

Director: I see. In simple terms, now, what is it students, as different as they may be [rolls eyes], learn from forensics that benefits them in life after they graduate?

Coach 4: It helps them become more successful students with their knowledge of research skills, organization and prioritization. It allows them to develop good relationships with others of a diverse background. It also helps them to write cohesive, persuasive and cogent papers. It helps them hone their skills in the political activism, community advocacy, and humanitarian responsibilities.

Director: Yes, yes, yes! [Exasperated]. I am not going to argue with debate coaches. Simple terms, single ideas here, be brief. What do they get?

Coach 1: Confidence

Coach 2: Leadership skills

Coach 3: Interview skills

Coach 5: Confidence

Coach 6: College preparedness

Coach 7: College readiness.

Coach 8: Confidence

Coach 9: Interview abilities

Coach 10: Networking.

Director: Hmm.... Not sure what to make of this? [Scratches a note on a piece of paper]. I've always assumed forensics was a bunch of affluent boys arguing about a world in which they don't know. Interesting.

Coach 6: Forensics allows them to develop good relationships with others of a diverse background.

Director: That is your platform now? [Looks directly at Coach 6]. Tell me why I should cast you in this role? Tell me your biggest concern. What is your worst experience in this activity? Make me feel this emotion and connection you speak of today. Convince me this inconsequential role really matters. I would rather cut this role from the script and save the money I would spend on another cast member, but I am willing to listen. Tell me why I should care?

- Coach 2: [Stands up]. There is a lack of concern for the challenges facing students of color, queer students, and women relative to their straight white male peers.
- Coach 10: [Stands up and moves across to Coach 2, as in agreement] My students, being from a Title 1 school are in no position to pay to fly across the country to meet the best of the best.
- Coach 7: The members of my team (especially the guys) are teased and called "gay" by other male students. In fact, I have some students not return because of the harassment they were given. I have turned it in to administration but nothing has been done. My students work hard to compete and feel that no one cares about how well that they do.
- Coach 6: [Stands up and joins the other two coaches]. As a gay male coach, I was constantly in fear of losing my job had they discovered my orientation. This was a detriment to my coaching, as I always had to be careful what I said about my personal life. Moreover, through encouraging students to find a piece or topic that was relevant to their own narrative, I was even accused of pushing "the gay agenda" by a former colleague. Not once did I ever force a student to perform a speech they didn't feel comfortable with, but I 100% supported and encouraged any selections that they believed were important to share...
- Coach 3: [Interrupting, speaking out louder than necessary]. Conservative views are often shunned by the extreme liberal coaches within our profession.

Coach 6: [Continuing]. The gay male speech coach from another private school was fired for coming out to the school. This forced me to be dishonest to the group of students that I have made a huge priority in my life, and they had done the same for me. We had spent so much time together, and I can honestly say that speech was the reason I stayed at the school.

Coach 3: [Shaking his head]. The choice of literature in the interpretation events has diminished tremendously.

Coach 6: [Trying to ignore Coach 3]. Speech allows for students to become amazing young adults, and I have personally seen it give so many students the ability to find their voices, to be able to find and articulate who they are, what they believe, and to share that with the world. The irony of me having to hide those things from my students, who were so open and honest with me, was very difficult.

Director: [Pausing for a moment]. All right, what else?

Coach 4: [As other coaches resume their seats]. I think my biggest frustration with coaching is that I am only one person. I feel that I can never help all of my students to their full potential. As the only coach for all speech and debate events at our school, I find it difficult sometimes to work with everyone. I worry that my students would do better if I worked with them more, took them to more or better tournaments, found them more literature to choose from, helped them craft better debate briefs, and so on.

Coach 7: Our students are in the AP and honors classes. The teachers always criticize the students for any mistake they make in class or on a test with, "maybe if you didn't spend so much time on speech" or "I bet you don't do that in speech." The kids don't even like their teachers to know they are on the team. In fact, in spite of all of our success, the school just passed additional course requirements for freshmen that will cut our numbers down to about 30% of what they have been for the past 19 years.

Director: So, your school has standards, what is wrong with that? Not every school can offer debate as a class. Consider yourself lucky. True?

Coach 5: The biggest frustration I've had with coaching is the lack of attention paid to what "our" kids do every weekend. The media almost always focuses on the problems in American schools. District administrators often pay more attention to athletic wins and losses. Principals and administrators rarely make the connections between what we do and what they view as important- test scores. Ironically, all of the folks who pay so little attention to speech and debate usually become our greatest cheerleaders when they actually get to see what it is our kids do on a regular basis. So I guess my biggest frustration is lack of exposure, lack of awareness for what we do.

Director: You don't do any more than any other teacher. What makes you different?

- Coach 5: Coaching demands a great deal from coaches; it is a year long commitment, and there are few willing to go there.
- Director: All teachers are over-worked. You are not special.
- Coach 5: I think it's ironic that schools preach the need for differentiated instruction, yet in a class that calls for true differentiation they do not understand why it isn't like an Algebra course. In a class period, I may have 4 levels of Lincoln Douglas Debaters, 4 Levels of Extempers, 4 Levels of Prose students, etc. They are all mixed. My grading was challenged by a parent for having different objectives, goals, and assignments, based on a students' event and the level of competition they were preparing for. I kept getting the response, 'It should be like a Geometry class. All students get the same assignments, and should be learning the same thing.' My administration was not supportive in this instance and I was forced to change my grading practices.
- Director: This so-called dedication seems more that I may have thought; however, you are always leaving school early for tournaments. You travel all of the time, and you claim this is fun, so you have it easy. Isn't that right? You hide behind the stars and supporting roles as a walk-on during the educational play. Real actors suffer. [Walks towards the stage]. Do any of you know what suffering is? Do any of you suffer for your craft? Are you real actors? I want raw emotion, what do you have in you?

- Coach 8: [All of the coaches look down for a moment, finally coach 8 sits up in her chair]. One of the toughest moments - I had a boy attend a tournament in the novice division. He won a third place medal. About a month later he had an accident and died. His parents asked to come over to my house. When they got there, they had his medal. They cried as they explained how much that night had meant to them when they thought back on how excited he was and how happy they all were. They told me they would always cherish the medal.
- Coach 1: One of my most difficult moments as a coach had to do with helping a student with a disability try to understand why she always placed last when she worked hard and did everything we asked of her. This is also what frustrated me the most. We all had an idea of what a winning speaker and speech looked like, and if someone didn't fit that mold, we didn't consider them winners.
- Coach 10: The toughest moment was when last year we were \$500 in the negative. I wanted students to get the opportunity so much that I relied on faith to get it paid. After months of worry, we had a donor who covered the cost. I realized that no matter what I want for the students, I could never put our team and myself in that position again.
- Coach 3: My biggest concern with coaching is that many students with great potential are not willing to invest the time necessary to being that potential into fruition.

- Coach 2: Time.
- Coach 9: [With a sigh]. Time. Time. Time. There never seems to be enough.
- Coach 4: Students nowadays are so extended.
- Coach 6: There are not enough hours in a day, days in a week.
- Coach 10: We our tons of money into sports, cheerleading, flags, but have to fight for every dime for speech & debate. Regardless of financial status, all students should be able to participate in speech and debate. We cannot allow speech and debate to become activities that only wealthy families and schools can afford. All students should be able to participate regardless of family financial status.
- Coach 1: It's not valued by many people and must compete, unevenly, with athletics.
- Coach 7: Athletic coaches will belittle speech and punish students for attending speech activities over sporting events.
- Coach 4: [Adding]. The boys' basketball team was in the state finals. Note, they had not won, they were just in the finals. The school brought buses for any kid to attend the game, and everyone got a free tee shirt. So they won, and the local fire department lead the team home into the school parking lot and two fire trucks rose their ladders and made a gateway for the boys to pass through. That's 5-8 kids on the team who probably played. Soooooooo, my debate team wins the State Championship. No

bus. No tee shirt. No recognition. That was tough. We made our own celebration.

Coach 1: [Shaking his head]. Money.

Coach 8: [Sarcastic] Show me the money!

Director: Enough. [Walks back to his desk]. I get it. Heartache. Sadness. Pain. [Sits and props his feet on the desk]. Everybody wants more money; this is non-unique. What about happiness? Do you know that emotion? If you are so dedicated, what good does it bring to you?

Coach 7: My greatest joy as a coach is seeing students start out as meek, unsocial, frightened speakers and then finish school as confident, accomplished, poised speakers and debaters. Watching students grow over four or five years is remarkably rewarding. Yes, having students win national championships or major circuit tournaments is inordinately gratifying, but it's the human growth for students I've spent many years working with is what I'll remember when I retire.

Coach 4: My great joy may be summed up in a representative student I have this semester. His name is Marcus. He's a freshman in high school. He didn't want to be in Speech & Debate. In fact, it was his seventh choice as he went in to see his counselor this past August. Although an athlete, he was shy and withdrawn. But, of all my students, he has improved the most in the first eight weeks of class. He speaks with authority and exudes more confidence. He is proud that he took the plunge and is

benefiting from having to swim. That's what makes me proud as a coach.

Coach 3: [Adds]. The greatest joy as a coach is to see kids "turn on" to the fun of thinking and arguing.

Coach 9: [Nodding her head in agreement]. I have friends who say how horrible millennials are and I don't see it. I see super hard working, innovative and brilliant kids. The future is safe in their hands.

Coach 2: Helping students to succeed in debate and then transfer the skills they have learned in debate into curricula and succeed in those classes.

Director: [Yawns]. Can't these students learn this in any class?

Coach 7: My proudest moment was seeing a young man, who is on the autism spectrum, take on the challenge of speech. He did informative speaking and extemp for four years. This student worked so, so hard in every area of his life. His knowledge of history and politics was exhaustive, but he had difficulty speaking clearly and had some awkward facial and hand tics that made it hard for him to score high in rounds. However, he came in for coaching every week. He practiced individual hand movements and memorized transitions. His knowledge and hard work earned him respect from the other students, and he developed several close friendships on the squad. By the end of his senior year, he was regularly scoring in the top half at most tournaments and even got a medal. He was

so proud of himself, and everybody celebrated with him. I'm so glad he got involved in this activity.

Director: [Interrupting]. He could have gotten help in any activity.

Coach 7: Not only did he grow in self confidence, but I truly believe that all the practice in public speaking will help him in the future. He has so much to offer, but for people with verbal disabilities, it is hard for employers and peers to see past those challenges. [Sneers at the Director, who pretends not to notice].

Coach 10: My proudest moments as a coach have always come from the success of the kid that wasn't supposed to succeed. I coached for years in a Title 1 school with students that came from homes where money was limited, resources were scarce, and hope was almost nonexistent. One of those students was destined to be just another number in the books. He had it all stacked against him. He was poor. His grades weren't grade. He was African American. His mom was raising him alone. His address changed multiple times a school year. He was by all accounts supposed to be just another one of those kids that littered up the stat books about minorities growing up in poverty. Forensics changed all that.

Director: Seriously? Minorities are successful in debate?

Coach 6: [Supporting Coach 10]. Debate is amazing in its ability to transform, connect and change the course of someone's life. It can pick you up by

the bootstrings and give you the tools needed to overcome obstacles that life throws in your way.

Director: I don't believe this.

Coach 10: [Continuing]. Through competitive speech and debate he found himself and his voice and his future. He defied all that we knew was supposed to be and he created a world that is. If he had never found speech and debate I guarantee that he would have fallen in line with the exact prescription that was being written for him by the American way.

Director: The American way?

Coach 10: [Forcefully]. He developed the skills to alter the path his life was to take. He was just one of many students that defied his circumstances and used his speech and debate experiences to be everything he could and everything he wanted to be in life.

Director: That's just one case, does anyone else have an example of this?

Coach 4: [Insistent]. A specific example would be a student who joined forensics during her sophomore year to get out of another class. She was petrified of public performance, but decided to give it a try due to the relationship we had developed in my English class. All through her first year of forensics there were tears and anxiety, and I even had to open the door to the competition rooms, practically shove her in, and shut the door behind her to get her to perform. However, by her senior year, she was providing leadership on the team by watching and "coaching" younger

students and even qualified for our state tournament. In addition, she recognized her own growth in confidence and skills and has already put all our tournament dates on her calendar so she can come back and judge this year! [Holding back tears]. THIS IS WHY WE DO THIS ACTIVITY!

Coach 1: I enjoy seeing young students go from shy, awkward young things to people with confidence and poise. They learn to think and feel more successful, even if they are not winning all of the trophies.

Director: Trophies! I wondered when someone was going to talk about the accolades. Isn't that what your activity is about? Winning awards?

Coach 8: Too often we qualify success by awards and prizes. Too seldom do we look at the individual success every student has when they sit down after giving a speech. They just did that! An award-based society can't touch what just happened; the student was successful because they got up and spoke. How many of their peers would refuse to go up and be judged? So, my greatest joy is helping students put themselves out there, because "out there" is one of the most terrifying and rewarding places a student can go.

Coach 6: [Turns to the side]. Firsts. [Begins to tear up]. One of my young men from my first year coaching has, through speech and debate, escaped the downfall for many young men of color. He was couch surfing when he came to the first debate meeting - sagging pants and attitude but a gleam

in his eye. He is now a BYU student and he tells everybody that it is because of speech and debate. His father is a drug dealer, in and out of prison, and his older brother is currently in prison for murder. He is the first person in his family to graduate from high school. He found his voice and broke the chains. When I saw him perform his original oratory for the state conference and saw local pastors step forward to support him in his speech journey, that was a moment of pride and happiness. He went from barely making it at school to a scholarship at BYU because he found his voice. How can I be prouder? [Coach 10 walks over and puts a hand on Coach 6's shoulder].

Coach 10: Coaching speech and debate is rewarding everyday. The fact that I get to spend everyday discussing current events, reading philosophy, and blocking interpretation is like a dream job.

Director: [Quickly snaps at Coach 10]. Oh, so you admit it's easy?

Coach 7: [Stands up]. Seeing students grow from insecure 9th graders to mature adults.

Coach 5: [Stands]. Growth.

Coach 1: [Stands]. Confidence.

Coach 9: [Stands]. There is more in life than just winning.

Coach 2: [Stands]. Recently, I experienced the devastating loss of my husband. It happened right at the end of the school year. [The other coaches take a deep breath and turn towards Coach 2]. Over the summer and at the start

of this school year, my students have given me an outpouring of support and love. It made me realize that I'm not just teaching these kids how to be good debaters, but how to be compassionate people. This is more important to me than them winning state titles.

Director: [Sits up, scribbles a few sentences, while the standing coaches all take their seat again]. I see. So, this is personal to you? [Coaches shake head in affirmation]. All of you?

Coach 1: Coaching is a joy, an identity, a calling. It steals thousands of hours from my children, my spouse, my aging parents, but they know that it is a vocation that has value, so I enjoy tremendous support. Unfortunately, the stipends I have received are typically 1/5 or less than a sports stipend, so there is some family resentment about the devaluing of academic coaches in this regard.

Director: Yes, that's been said before. [Annoyed]. Your family, huh? How does coaching affect your personal life?

Coach 6: What personal life?

Coach 4: Personal life? What's that? [Coach 6 and Coach 4 laugh at one another].

Coach 3: Coaching takes over my life, every minute of the day I am thinking about what I could do to help my students succeed and be the best they can be.

Coach 10: Coaching a speech team is almost like a second job.

Coach 9: Tremendous hardships include sleep deprivation, betrayals, spending my own money, devotion to bureaucratic details, putting myself in positions

of making difficult decisions, heartache. Two husbands have divorced me because my students' work in forensics truly is my first love.

Coach 10: [Agreeing]. It is tough work.

Coach 2: My husband calls himself the speech widow when speech season rolls around.

Coach 7: [Jumps up]. I once heard my wife tell a friend that once debate season starts that she becomes a debate widow. That hurt a lot. I love her very much and felt like I let her down with my career. [Sits back down, with his head in hands].

Coach 6: The running joke with my friends and family is, "I'll see you in 5 months!" Between teaching, coaching and tournaments I work 6 days a week, at 12-14 hour days. The majority of my friends and family are understanding about my coaching time commitments, but it does make it hard because I do miss a lot of activities and gatherings due to coaching and tournaments.

Director: What about you? [Points to Coach 5].

Coach 5: [Laughs]. I'm not a good person to talk to about that. I guess I could blame speech and debate for me not being able to marry Jessica Alba.

Director: Your lives are scheduled around forensics?

Coach 1: Let me put it this way, our regular speech season ends in April, all three of our children were born in January, you do the math. [Other coaches chuckle].

- Coach 6: You have to find a way to balance it all.
- Coach 4: I am exhausted, frazzled, financially stressed, and happy to be all those things because I am doing what I love.
- Coach 5: I think about quitting all the time when I have to give up a weekend and not be able to workout, enjoy the outdoors, or have to tell friends I can't do something because of Speech and Debate. It has a large impact on my personal life. I am an extrovert, and thus it sometimes depresses me when I can't socialize. I am unfortunately addicted to this activity and end up being way too selfless and give up more time than I should for students who want and need the help to better themselves.
- Coach 3: Not too many potential romantic partners will tolerate the kind of travel schedule we maintain.
- Coach 1: Further a lot of concession stands and judges lounges are not health sensitive places and weight gain is a problem for coaches. I also see a lot of smoking amongst younger coaches which might be a stress reliever on a temporary basis but certainly not healthy.
- Coach 3: [Interrupting]. Coaching is who I am. [Others look at him, he shakes his head and turns his back to the Director].
- Coach 1: [Continuing]. Coaching takes time away from my own children. It's hard sometimes not to resent that I am in a van full of rowdy teens when I could be making Saturday morning pancakes for my kids. I try to remember the opportunities that my own children get like softball, 4-H,

etc. are due to sacrifices from other coaches/volunteers with families of their own. I also know that who I am is the result of other adults sacrificing their time for me; I need to pay that forward.

Coach 2: Coaching takes up a lot of my free time but it is so rewarding that I don't mind. I greatly enjoy spending time with my fellow coaches, many of whom I would consider friends.

Director: You just give up your time?

Coach 10: [Stands up]. I wouldn't have it any other way. The friends that I have made in this activity are lifelong, and our professional and personal relationships are far more rewarding and sustaining than any I have made outside of my professional career. Seeing friends each weekend at tournaments is the highlight of my week, and I couldn't be as happy or successful without the opportunity to see my coaching friends every Friday and Saturday. They lead lives similar to mine, and their experiences and challenges are familiar to me. The depth of our conversations nearly always transcends talk of the weather, sports, or politics. We talk about important matters like teaching, learning, pedagogy, fundraising, developing student talent, and curriculum. In many ways, I live to work, but I wouldn't change a thing about that.

Director: [Pauses]. Well, then, all of you coaches get along? A fraternity of sorts?

Coach 1: I either love them or they drive me crazy. We have some whack-jobs in our area, but I know that they are everywhere.

Coach 2: I am lucky to work in a field and in an area where the coaches I compete against are some of my best friends. We interact in a positive manner both on the job, but also outside of the tournaments. We have “coachaoke” nights, where we all meet and hang out, we have dinner parties occasionally, and sometimes we just call and talk. It's amazing that we can have these relationships and still be some of the most competitive people that I know. We also try to solve problems for each other, and to offer support and help when times are tough and there may be a challenge faced by one coach in our community.

Director: Do you feel that same way? [Points to Coach 3].

Coach 3: Not me. I'm a lone wolf. [Coach 6 chuckles].

Director: Is there something funny?

Coach 6: [Referencing Coach 3]. Lots of whining and complaining... there are coaches that aren't so nice...

Director: [Interrupting]. Do you think you are better than a coach who doesn't socialize?

Coach 3: [Interjecting]. You put people in a competitive setting against the same people weekend after weekend and year after year and then have them govern themselves, you are only asking for animosity.

Coach 2: [Attempts to change the conversation]. Coaches ought to be concerned about one another and supporting one another.

Director: So, do you and your fellow coaches get along?

Coach 3: The other coaches do not like me because I question their integrity and will continue to do so.

Coach 6: There are always outliers. [Cuts eyes at Coach 3].

Coach 7: I think there are genuine interactions, but I think the competitive nature of the activity makes these friendships sometimes hard to navigate. I questioned, 'Are they being genuine' or 'Are they trying to politic'?

Director: Is it all politics?

Coach 8: I talk every morning to at least two coaches in my area. They are my dearest friends. These are the people that I spend every weekend with on the road. We listen to each other; take care of one another. We look out for each other's children as well. There is a competitive spirit here, but truly the focus is on the entire community and not one school or one student.

Coach 6: I choose to put myself around amazing coaches. What makes an amazing coach does not mean they win state every year, although a couple of them have, it means that they not only are great coaches to their team, they are great coaches and mentors to other coaches. I have four other team coaches I can think of right of the top of my head that I look forward to seeing at meets, that I will call or send an email to about a question I have about a script. There are, however, coaches that do not share, that are quite honestly rude to other coaches. I'm not sure if it is that they are so competitive that they distinguish that or if they are just

rude people. In my opinion though there are amazing and not so amazing people everywhere. You just have to decide who you choose to be around.

Director: So, not everyone agrees all the time with one another? How surprising! [Laughs]. Aren't you supposed to teach opposition? [Rolls his eyes]. Figures you all argue.

Coach 1: We have worked hard to break down antagonistic barriers between coaches in our state. Over the years, those of us who are long termers have become buddies and advocates of kids together as well as each others' programs. While we don't necessarily spend lots of time outside of school activities together due to geographic distances, social media connects us all daily.

Coach 9: We have a wonderful local community of coaches. We help each other with lesson plans, activities, sometimes high-stakes prepping, etc. We take our kids to tournaments with us. We have found ways to make tournaments fun by bringing food and activities to be played while we work the tab room. We keep up with each other and are truly friends--there for each other when someone loses a loved one, needs help moving, needs to go get a drink, etc.

Coach 2: Drinks.

Coach 10: Drinks. [Coach 9, 2, and 10 laugh at one another].

Director: You sound like you need help?

Coach 9: We kiss, we hug, we dance and sing and say silly things. We have very few inhibitions. And we love--- our craft, good literature, each others' talents. We socialize by talking about, analyzing and sharing material. And we talk about speech kids!

Coach 2: We teach that life isn't about the winning, it's about the desserts at the end of the tournament, and there are many ways to define 'desserts.'
[Coach 10 laughs].

Coach 10: I consider some of the coaches to be very close friends. I would trust them with my life.

Coach 8: We all compete at a very high level, but we also look out for and help each other's kids. For example, I have had a kid forget shoes and another team had a girl loan her some. I sewed a ripped hem for another team's girl at the state meet. We loan pieces to each other. We've consoled each other's kids after a bad round and celebrated when someone's team does well.

Director: I see.

Coach 5: There are some pretty great coaches in my district. It's almost like the Justice League, and the tab room is our headquarters.

Director: All right, Superman, what would you do if you weren't coaching with the rest of the Justice League?

Coach 5: I coach simply because coaches in high school and college coached me and I am paying those six people back. If not for their interest in me and

their direction, I shudder to think of what would have been my life. They played a great role in my childhood and young adulthood and I coach to honor their commitment to me. Without speech and debate, I would be dead, this much I know. It has kept me going through some really dark times.

Director: [Cynical]. How?

Coach 4: All students need a place to belong and debate and forensics can be that place for many of them. That is why I coach... and my life would have much less purpose without coaching.

Director: That's a bit of a dramatic reading, isn't it?

Coach 1: I coach because there is no other program or class that prepares students as well for "real life." When my students leave, they know how to convince the auto mechanic not to overcharge, they know how to get a better deal on those killer heels or awesome little black dress they've been eyeing, they know how to function in a panel interview, they know how to research anything, they know how to construct persuasive or informative essays, they know the importance of voting and they have an idea of how to select viable candidates.

Director: That's realistic. Saving lives, that's a bit much! [Looks at Coach 5]. Isn't it?

Coach 8: Debate kept me in school. I dropped out three separate times in high school, and I kept coming back because I fell in love with the fact that

people would listen to me speak my mind. I also didn't have a safe place to go on the weekend, or at all outside of school, and debate provided that. I transformed from a shy, quiet, soft spoken girl in the back of the class to someone with confidence to take on anything.

Coach 10: When I was 15 years old, I was part of a Latino street gang near Chicago. Although I was "different" than the kids I was hanging out with... I was going downhill. I was around that because I thought since I was Hispanic, they were the only group that would accept me... My teacher was the speech team coach. I did not know what that was, but he asked me to join. I was hesitant, but I knew that choice changed my life. The school I teach at now is predominantly Hispanic. I always share my story and hope that one day, these kids will do great things for our community because they have the confidence and the speaking skills. That is why I coach.

Director: I see. [Points at Coach 6]. Why do you coach forensics?

Coach 6: I coach because I competed. I owe a debt to competitive speech and debate that cannot be repaid. I was an abused child - shy, stuttering, and afraid - I was put in a public speaking class because there were no other electives available in seventh grade. I found my voice, I started competing in seventh grade. I learned how to dress, how to speak, how to portray confidence, even when I didn't feel it. The speech and debate classroom became my haven. Tournaments became my home. There I

was one to be reckoned with. I gained friendships with people who came from a very different background than myself.

Director: And you? [Points at Coach 3].

Coach 3: When I was in high school, I participated on my debate team. I was so hooked that I knew I had to become a coach someday. When I interviewed at my current school, I had only two questions for my interviewer: #1 Do you have a debate team? When they said they did not, my follow up was #2, do you want one? They said that they did, and now they'll never get rid of me!

Director: And, Coach 2, how about you?

Coach 2: Why do I coach?

Director: It's not a difficult question.

Coach 2: Because the thought of not coaching leaves me with a huge void. I love this activity; I love what it does for kids. I think it is so much fun. I love seeing how empowered kids can be when they see they can be successful. I have confidence in my ability as a coach. I have started or rebooted 3 programs: I feel like this in itself gives me the confidence I need but to also have those program be successful even after I leave means my passion is rubbing off. I get teary when I hear about how forensics has changed people. It makes me feel like I am leaving a solid, positive legacy.

Coach 7: Coaching forensics gives my teaching career a purpose.

Coach 9: [Adding to Coach 7]. I'm coaching because our students need this outlet. I don't know if I'm a good enough coach to get a student to nationals or even place in our district. I'm just hoping that by doing this I will give students an opportunity and outlet that wasn't available to them before. I tell all my students no matter what class, you learn a lot in high school that you may never use; however, public speaking is something every one will have the opportunity to use later in life. You can either embrace it or shy away from it. Those who embrace will have more opportunities than those who don't.

Director: [Stands up and stretches]. Fine. But, if you weren't a coach, what would you be doing? Quickly.

Coach 1: Lawyer.

Coach 2: English teacher.

Coach 3: An administrator.

Coach 4: Attorney.

Coach 5: I am a coach.

Director: Ugh! Continue.

Coach 6: Spending more time with my family.

Coach 7: I would be bored.

Coach 8: Theatre teacher.

Coach 9: I'd be a writer.

Coach 10: I love coaching speech. It's in my blood.

Director: Enough! Enough! Enough. [Takes a puff of his cigar]. So, you think forensics matters on this stage?

Coach 7: It is a transformative activity!

Coach 10: Education systems limit how students can think, what they can say, if they can be heard. Debate doesn't have those limits.

Coach 3: If I wasn't coaching, I'd be going to parks with my kids or walking my dog or streaming *Dr. Who* on Netflix.

Coach 8: It is part of who I am.

Coach 2: I love the energy, the community, the competition...

Director: [Interrupts Coach 2 and throws papers into the air in frustration]. Maybe this role is not as inconsequential as I thought. Enough. All of you exit the stage. I will make my casting decision tonight and post cast tomorrow. But for now, be off, I have one last role, even smaller than yours to fill. I need to find a school secretary. So, be off. Be gone. [Coaches stand and walk off stage. Director takes a deep puff off his cigar, scribbles comments on a piece of paper and yells]. Bring on the secretaries!

Discussion

The 10 composite Coach characters in the play represent the mixed, often contradictory perspectives, of 434 coaches, representing 43 different U.S. states. The information provided by the survey articulates the unique voices of coaches from across the country. The use of composite characters was embraced to provide a wide spectrum

of the participants. The intent is for the reader to “envision the spaces within which the characters exist and connect with the emotions, feelings and experiences that the characters represent” (Berbary, 2011, p. 195).

Specific characters were created to posit the varied voices of forensics coaches. For example, Coach 3 was a compilation of the antagonistic voices heard in each response. While addressing themes in each question of the survey, there was always an opposite or negative view from the majority of responses. Coach 3 was meant to demonstrate that perspective. In addition, Coach 6 was created to be the voice of social justice. There were numerous responses by coaches in each question that addressed the need to focus on equality among students, coaches, and society.

With the antagonistic perspective of Coach 3 and the social justice of Coach 6, the two coaches appear to be arguing within the play. While these characters portraying numerous coaches within the survey, the conflict of these coaches embodies the opposition between coaches at times. While the other 8 coaches tended to agree with one another, or, at the very least, not contradict each other, the outliers and social justice voices were embodied within two characters. With 5 male and 5 female coaches, the characters demonstrated the multifaceted, multicultural perspectives of coaches.

The Director epitomizes the various voices in the educational system which continue to push against these educators: (1) too much money on this activity, (2) too little time in schooling to really provide for this activity, (3) these activities are not a focus of testing, and (4) forensics is an elitist activity which only serves affluent males. These complicated issues face the survey participants from around the country, who

simply want to help students grow. While these outside voices continue to push against coaches, the dedication and energy of these educators is clear. Their time and energy to offer students educational practices that differ from testing regimes is important to the development of the students they serve.

Implications

With the current focus on standardized testing in the school system, the lead roles in any educational play are the four core classes: math, English, history, and science. These core classes, which are the foci of tests such as those mandated in the Common Core State Standards, take lead roles, while others, including foreign language, athletics, and fine arts are supporting roles. In activities, such as forensics, which are not offered as school day courses in most states or are awkwardly placed in electives, fine arts, or even technology classes in states that do offer a class, there is no real niche for these teachers who must fight to garner any time in the limelight of the educational play.

With a high response rate of 434 coaches, clearly these educators had much to say. Furthermore, coaches understand the lack of research in the field, often searching for it to justify their programs; therefore, coaches participated in this survey to help aid research over their beloved activity. This abundance of narratives also indicates forensic educators understand how valuable data is when attempting to push forth additional team growth at their own school or in neighboring areas around their school.

The scene above depicts the difficulties forensic coaches face while putting in long hours with little or no pay to reimburse their time and energy. The lack of funding

for programs, as seen in the play, as well as, the lack of administrative support or understanding is clear. Coach participants explained schools still hire teachers to coach forensics; yet, an appreciation of what forensics does for students is not embraced by those outside the activity. This lack of full understanding or appreciation prevents coaches from thriving in many cases. Coach participants expressed their frustrations with administration over funding, resources, time, and recognition; therefore, further exploration of extra-curricular activities, such as forensics, is warranted. While coaches must continue to advocate for their programs, an in-depth view of what benefits these programs offer students while in school and after graduation must occur. Coaches, administration, and students must come together to fully understand the time and energy commitments of the coaches who continue to provide the educational benefits of speech & debate articulated by the coaches throughout the play.

CHAPTER IV

PERCEPTION OF INFLUENCE SURVEY

Worth (2000) asserts, “Instruction in speech is one of the oldest forms of pedagogy practiced in the West” and while “competitive forensics has benefited the lives of countless people” the fact “that the subject should need justification should be surprising” (p. 4). However, Steep and Gardner (2001) explain, “a serious problem that has plagued the debate community is retention of women and minorities” (p. 70) and “creating an inclusive environment for women and minorities is a difficult task” (p. 77). With issues of belonging, discrimination, relocation, and financial considerations impacting diverse students, often more than their White counterparts, these students face issues that impede their ability to compete. With this in mind, why is it so important these diverse students participate?

Patterson, Hale, and Stessman (2007) explain, “the high dropout rate in urban high schools, particularly among poor and racial minority youth, continues to be a vexing problem confronting public education in the U.S.” (p. 1), while Gordon et al. (2000) contend, “Students of color are more likely to drop out or be pushed out of school and less likely to graduate than are white students” (p. 2).

Mezuk (2009) argues that while the national average high school graduation rate is 70%, Chicago Public Schools, as in the case of his study, is slightly less than 50%. The author, who chose Chicago for its blossoming debate programs, also offers that “ethnic minorities” are at a larger risk of dropping out and represent a growing trend of

urban school settings to maintain lower retention rates than rural or suburban counterparts.

Previous research argues, with the difficult outside pressures of life, students, especially those who feel disenfranchised within the system, suffer. Is it the responsibility of the educational system to offer extracurricular activities to all students, especially those who may suffer in the current system, to assist students in preparation for post-secondary life? Esposito and Happel (2015) argue, “those social groups that encounter structural barriers, such as institutional racism, gender inequality, and class oppression, will have more difficulty acquiring dominant forms of social capital which, of course, are more valued by the dominant cultural group” (p. 543). Therefore, it is important for successful schools to offer opportunities for students of diversity: race, gender, sexual identity, ability to earn social capital within the school setting.

Activities, such as forensic participation may be a key in maintaining success and development of these students due to the content and structure of the activity. Research focused on evaluating these activities and their success in working with students is vital to begin this process.

Literature Review

Limited current research is available to directly evaluate the relationship of forensic participation on student populations as a whole. In fact, rarely does forensics research address “what kinds of success forensic competitors experience after participation in forensics” (Worth, 2000, p.9). Littlefield (2001), arguing “the nature and benefits of interscholastic debate have come under scrutiny from administrators and

others who question whether the investment of time, effort, and resources is justified” (p. 83), conducted a survey of 193 participants who competed in Policy or Lincoln-Douglas (LD) debate at the 2001 National Forensic League (currently known as the National Speech & Debate Association or NSDA) Tournament. This survey directly asked “what benefits do high school students perceive from their participation in debate?” (p. 86). Littlefield offered several benefits: communication skills, social life, analytical and argumentative skills, teamwork, and college admissions (p. 86) as responses from the survey. However, Littlefield’s survey, while rich in data, limited input from various populations within the forensics community: (1) only 57 females participated, (2) only students in Policy or LD debate were invited to respond, and (3) responses only came from national qualifiers during the 2001 year which provides an incomplete view of perceived benefits.

Littlefield’s (2001) work is one of the few studies which focuses on perceptions of forensic competitors; however, numerous studies have illuminated how a student’s connection with the school is vital to success, especially those who feel disenfranchised from the current educational system. Keser, Akar, and Yildirim (2011) point out, “although research focusing on extra-curricular activities or non-formal learning is scarce” there is research that demonstrates this participation allows for “more impact on building active citizenship” (p. 812). Stearns and Glennie (2010) offer, “extracurricular activities are an integral part of high school from many students” (p. 296). “Yet given the funding challenges and pressures to increase test scores in today’s educational climate,” Stearns and Glennie, continue, “many schools are considering cutting the

number of activities they offer” (2010, p. 296). One activity often looked at for elimination, due to “budget and administrative cutbacks” (Kosloski, 1993, p. 3), is speech and debate.

However, it is important to remember the ability to connect to an activity, to escape the tediousness of standardized classrooms is vital to understanding the impact on these students, especially diverse learners, in their post-secondary educational lives. Littlefield (2001) contends, “future studies should explore the perceptions of debate from different segments of the debate community” (p. 96), while Daly, Buchanan, Dasch, Eichen, and Lenhart (2010) explain, “students who are involved in extracurricular activities demonstrate increased student engagement, academic achievement, and prosocial behavior” (p. 20) needed for a successful step into post-secondary life. “Unfortunately, many ethnic minority students do not participate in extracurricular activities and therefore do not receive the numerous benefits that those activities offer” (p. 20).

When focusing on diverse populations within forensic activities, there are varied research approaches. Shaw (1995) argues, “forensics can change lives” (p. 51), since it can “increase student self-esteem, promote leadership skills, increase communication skills, teach research methods, and provide an outlet for creative expression” that is lost in the testing mentality in which diverse students suffer. Her narrative research offers concrete ideas and personal examples of how forensic competition is vital to success of all students, especially those in need. While Stearns and Glennie (2010) do not directly address forensics, their study questions the correlation of extracurricular activities and

student participation in school as a whole. Their quantitative research concludes extracurricular activities “are a resource for students, an opportunity for them to learn both academic and non-academic skills” (p. 307) needed to develop in post-secondary educational settings.

Keser et al. (2011) concur with other research in their case study on children in Ankara, Turkey, offering six pillars of active citizenship education provided by participation: active citizenship perception, social accountability, intercultural awareness, awareness of democracy and human rights, thinking and research skills, and interaction and intrapersonal skills (p. 822).

There is one previous study that attempts to look at a specific population of diverse males in forensic activities. Mezuk (2009) posits two research questions: 1. “How are students who choose to participate in urban debate different from their peers who do not?” and 2. “What is the influence of debate participation on three scholastic outcomes: GPA, college readiness and high school outcome?” (p. 292).

Mezuk provides lengthy discussion comparing AA (African American) students in urban schools to non-Hispanic White students in other areas. Mezuk concludes there was a 59.1% graduation rate of all CPS (Chicago Public Schools) students in the study, with an over 70% graduation rate among AA debaters. In addition, there was an increase in average GPAs of study participants compared to those who did not participate.

Furthermore, debaters had a higher college readiness score than those who did not compete. Mezuk argues results were significantly higher for debate students versus

non-debate participants. Mezuk's article aligns with the purpose of this study, as both strive to identify success of diverse students in forensic activities.

Additionally, Kosloski (1993) used mailed surveys to question collegiate directors of forensic programs to assess "the extent to which physically challenged students are involved" and "identify issues concerning that involvement" (p.4). This research addressed varied persons with a disability and their interactions within a competitive collegiate forensic program. The surveys addressed financial and emotional costs. In fact, "the disparity between the willingness to coach a physically challenged competitor and the realities of doing so has the potential to greatly undermine the ability of many programs to welcome a physically challenged competitor" (p. 6).

Similar to Kosloski's mailed surveys, McGammon, Saldaña, Hines, and Omasta (2012) mailed surveys to 234 former speech and/or theater students to ascertain the "lifelong" impacts of both forensics and theatre participation. The authors assert: "several published studies exist that describe high schoolers' perceptions of their experiences as they're enrolled in secondary school, but virtually no systematic research exists that explores how adults from ages 18 to 70+ remember and reflect on those same events" (McCammon, et al., 2012, p. 7). While this study does address the post-secondary perceptions of forensic education, the overlapping of both speech & debate with theatre muddies the waters of analysis. While McCammon et al. provide provocative and compelling arguments regarding impact of extracurricular activities, the research does not address only speech & debate activities.

However, through previous research there is a growing consensus “forensics can empower students... it can be a motivator and a teaching tool” (Shaw, 1995, p. 54); however, an in-depth understanding on how these issues play out for diverse students after graduation is still unclear. Understanding the perceptions of participants in how forensics correlates with future success is important because these perceptions can lead to actual success. Researching this process may, in turn, assist future speech & debate students towards successful post-secondary life.

Previous Research Obstacles

The competitive nature of forensics creates a challenge in recruiting and preparing students, especially underrepresented students. “The organizational structure of forensics emphasizes competition, both from the top down, and the bottom up” (Burnett, Brand, and Meister, 2001, p. 108). Asad and Bell (2014) assert, “selecting winners and losers is perilous,” (p. 12), and while, “participation in forensics demonstrated the largest improvement in critical thinking scores” (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon, 1999, p. 27) in numerous articles, “several judges dismiss or even fear urban debaters because of ‘their speaking styles’ and ‘extreme aggression’” (Asad & Bell, 2014 p. 12) during a debate. These differing styles and foci are part of the research issues surrounding forensics nationally.

First, there is a lack of previous research analyzing high school forensics and gender. While numerous studies have addressed collegiate forensics, there is limited data on high school participation. Greenstreet and Frederick (2000) researched women

in intercollegiate speech & debate, concluding, “women are sexually propositioned, verbally abused, and subject to inappropriate random remarks concerning their bodies or appearance” and current practice “fails to include women as valued participants” (p. 31). Additionally Matz and Brusckhe (2006) researched gender inequity among intercollegiate debate, finding “female exclusion is markedly more pronounced at the higher levels of competition,” (p. 41) and “the problem of female under-representation will very likely persist until the community views this as a shared problem” (p. 44). Henson and Dorasil (2014) evaluated sex as a factor in the high school Tournament of Champions Policy Debate competition. The researchers found a “lack of evidence to support claims of systematic sex discrimination” (p. 431), yet note “it is troublesome that females judge only 13% of rounds” (p. 433). Therefore, while sexism has been evaluated on the collegiate level and with high school judges, research regarding high school competitors is missing, and the events outside of Policy debate have not been systematically evaluated.

Additionally, previous research focused on biological sex, not gender identity. As this article will address gender identity, offering male, female, transgender, and intersex options on the survey, there is a need to develop terminology for future research regarding this focus. As the focus of previous research has been male privilege in forensic competition, an attempt to evaluate this structure must be addressed. Rosette and Tost (2013) contend, “The experience of disadvantage is imperative because it draws attention to the difference between one’s own experience and the privileged experience of those in the dominant group” (p. 1421).

However, “this practice of marking the ‘problematic’ group reveals that the unmarked situation of dominant groups is assumed to be normal. Such a stance is only half-blind concerning group privilege, because although it focuses attention on ‘problematic’ groups and may acknowledge group inequality, it does not acknowledge the social position of the referent group as privileged” (Pratto & Stewart, 2012, p. 28-29). In an attempt to be both all encompassing and focusing on a population that does not garner privilege, this article will use the term “FIT” to address the entirety of the population which does not define itself as male. This will include female, transgender, and intersex identified respondents. This term, strives to include all participants not identified as male, and offer that these individuals are just as fit to compete and succeed as males, who have traditionally been privileged in both society and in forensics.

Second, an issue lacking support in research is that of LGBTIQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer/Questioning) students in extracurricular activities. Similar to Black and Hispanic students, “sexual minority youth are at risk for negative school-based experiences and poor academic outcomes. Yet, little is known about their experiences in positive school-based contexts” (Toomey & Russell, 2013, p. 304). In fact, research over extracurricular activities and queer youth is important “because it will likely provide opportunities to adapt existing programs to be more sensitive to youth’s needs, which could result in increased participation and enhanced developmental and health outcomes” (Toomey & Russell, 2013, p. 305). While this research is needed, the authors continue, “to date, no studies have examined sexual

minority youth participation in school clubs (e.g., French club, debate team), except for the literature on Gay-Straight Alliances” (p. 307).

Still, “although the benefits associated with participation in activities appear to be greater for youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, research has yet to investigate the mechanisms behind this assessment” (Bloomfield & Barber, 2001, p. 584), thus a hole in the literature surrounding forensics. There is a need for further research into the activity and its benefits for students of all backgrounds. Zorwick, Wade, and Heilmayr (2009), who have extensively written on urban debate leagues and its work to level the racial and economic playing field, argue “many annual debate topics involve arguments about race, justice, socioeconomic status, gender and sexuality. As such, debaters have the ability to research and learn a great deal about these topics” (p. 31); however, studies of forensic competition still warrant further research.

Third, an issue surrounding forensics is the disconnect between public speaking, oral interpretation, and debate. Current research focuses upon debate activity, a term some educators used to encompass all events, but, in truth, research focuses primarily on Policy or LD debate such as in Mezuk’s 2009 research. While the “focus has been mostly on effects of participation in debate...[there are] no empirical studies in which the effects of participation in original oratory, extemporaneous speaking, or interpretation of literature were examined” (Peters, 2009, p. 42). Peters (2009) also asserts, “the problem with such limited research on non-debate events is that supporters of comprehensive high school forensic programs must be able to justify their entire programs to critical administrators” (p. 42).

Justification

Hoover (2003) offers, “Long the dominion of affluent white males, debating is gaining popularity in inner cities, where it once languished” (p. A28). With schools primarily focused on high-stakes testing and pushing students through, what is a diverse, often disenfranchised student expected to do within the school system to find a way to belong? The answer may be extracurricular activities; “therefore, it is crucial to attract students who are at risk for school disconnectedness to school-based and community-based extracurricular activities” (Daly et al., 2010, p. 20) such as competitive speech and debate.

In fact, forensics allows students to use the skills they develop to promote change within their own community (Keser et al., 2011). It is this change that offers student success both in high school and in post-secondary life. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to build upon previous studies (Mezuk 2009; Littlefield 2001; McCammon et al. 2012; and Kosloski 1993) and explore the perceived relationship between forensic activity and diverse students in their post-secondary lives.

Theoretical Framework

During the research, data collection, and analysis processes, the author attempts to maintain a pragmatic research approach. The researcher hypothesizes the inclusion of Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, Queer Theory, and Disability Studies as mechanisms for discussion and further research on these diverse populations; therefore, the researcher focuses on Pragmatism, which is "not committed to any one system of philosophy and reality" (Creswell, 2013, p. 28), for this study. As "Pragmatists agree

that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 28), data attainment and analysis must be free of a specific philosophical interference prior to individual population discussions. "The dialectic stance assumes that all paradigms have something to offer, and that employing multiple paradigms contributes to a greater understanding of phenomena under study" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011, p. 291); therefore, a discussion of multiple paradigms is needed to fully understand issues surrounding forensics. This researcher, as a former forensics coach himself, understands and appreciates multiple paradigms and their influences on research.

Research Questions

The qualtrics.com survey focused on the correlation of perceived future impact of diverse students who compete in competitive speech & debate. Specifically, questions were:

1. What relationship do diverse students perceive between competitive speech & debate participation in high school and their post-secondary life?
2. How does the perceived relationship between competitive speech & debate participation in high school and their post-secondary life differ among diverse students in varied backgrounds?
3. What is the difference in the perception of diverse students who focus on oral interpretation, public speaking, or debate activities in regards to the activity's impact on post-secondary life?

Operational Definitions

As a former forensics coach, I am well aware of the language difficulties surrounding educational analysis of forensic activities. Each state within the United States has its own competitive league or organization. Furthermore, in Texas and Wisconsin, there are multiple leagues of competition. This diversification in structures leads to single events being referred by different names or titles. Acronyms within the activity can be daunting. Therefore, to clarify further, the researcher offers the following definitions to assist with analysis and discussion.

1. Post-Secondary Life: life for the participants beyond their secondary educational experiences.
2. Forensics: interscholastic high school speech and debate activities. As terminology differs between schools and states, “forensics” and “speech & debate” are both used interchangeably throughout the research. For clarification purposes, the term “speech & debate” was used for the survey, while research and analysis will often use the term “forensics.” While many states also use forensics to include theatre activities, for this research the term is limited to oral interpretation, public speaking, and debate activities.
3. Oral Interpretation: performance of literature events, such as Prose (PR), Poetry (PO), Dramatic Interpretation (DI), Humorous Interpretation (HI), and Duo Interpretation (DUO) as defined by the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA).

4. Public Speaking: speaking events such as Original Oratory (OO), extemporaneous speaking (EXT), and Impromptu (IMP) as defined by the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA).
5. Debate: argumentative events, such as Lincoln-Douglas Debate (LD), Public Forum Debate (PF), Policy Debate, and Congressional Debate (CD) as defined by the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA).

Methodology

For this research, the author uses a mixed methods approach. Due to the political nature of education, with varying voices wanting attention, funding, and time, mixed methodological approaches are suited best. Creswell and Clark (2011) posit: “audiences such as policy makers, practitioners, and others in applied areas need multiple forms of evidence to document and inform the research problems” (p. 21-22); therefore, the complexity of educational benefits for students of diversity demands a two-pronged research methodology. This two-pronged research includes a quantitative survey analysis mixed with narrative research of the respondents from open-ended questions on the survey.

Initially, the researcher planned to use purposive sampling to collect data on diverse student populations; however, as the lack of research on forensics became clearer, the researcher reached out to two national organizations. First, the researcher collaborated with the NSDA to determine additional survey questions important to the organization’s needs. Second, the researcher presented research plans to the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) to request access to their network

of state leaders to distribute the survey. Both NSDA and NFHS assisted with distributing the survey to a national pool of participants.

Next, coaches across the United States snowballed the survey, which allowed for additional geographical variation. Coaches from around the country were contacted by NFHS and NSDA to snowball the survey to their former competitors. The researcher used purposive sampling to contact specific students who represented the diversity of students focused upon in this article.

Social media (as a means to snowball participants), emails from NFHS and NSDA, the NSDA website (speechanddebate.org), and direct contact by coaches and researcher were all utilized to attract varied participants. This study utilized a qualtrics.com survey comprised of:

- 4 identification questions (to validate participant as a former competitor);
- 5 personal background questions to identify diversity of participant;
- 5 event specific questions to determine participant's experience in forensics;
- 9 questions over specific experiences and feelings regarding the impact of those experiences; and
- 4 narrative open-ended questions for participant reflections.

The survey attempted to ascertain whether or not there is a correlation between competing in forensics and post-secondary life for the participants, focusing on students of diverse backgrounds.

Participants

Former forensic students from across the United States were utilized.

Convenience sampling from social media encompassed a large variety of participants.

Similar to McGammon et al.'s (2012) research, it was anticipated that "the survey would most likely be forwarded to others through chain or referral sampling--that is, routed from one survey respondent to a friend, who then responds and forwards it to another friend, etc." (p. 17). However, purposive sampling by coaches who sent survey information to their alumni, as well as, purposive sampling by the researcher allowed for more diversity in response to surveys.

Initially, the National Speech & Debate Association (NSDA) was the definitional starting point, since all participants were originally expected to be NSDA members, with which public participation records on the organization's website or public records, could be verified. "Gaining access to organizations, sites, and individuals to study has its own challenges" (Creswell, 2013, p. 171); therefore, a diverse group of 120 participants was initially seen as optimal. However, as varied organizations and parties distributed the survey to an even wider pool than expected, more than 120 diverse participants were recorded. A total of 1,052 alums completed the survey. Membership in the NSDA also became a concern. Not all previous competitors were documented by NSDA for several reasons: students never had official paperwork completed by a sponsor, students' names have changed since they competed, names were spelled incorrectly in official documents (due to coach error) or students competed in other state or national organizations separate of the NSDA.

As participants for this survey represented various parties vying for success in career endeavors in their post-secondary educational lives after forensic competition in high school, all participants who could either be documented as NSDA members or substantiated their experiences in narrative responses were included.

Since the socioeconomic status of participants was not addressed in the survey, students of poverty are not addressed in this research article. It was determined the participant pool may not be able to provide the accurate economic background of their family when in school. Participants may not fully comprehend or know of financial struggles faced by their parents or guardians as they grew up; therefore, financial questions were not asked of the participants. While many respondents acknowledged financial and socioeconomic issues, the survey did not ask participants to reveal this information.

Data Collection

The relationship between high school forensic experiences and post-secondary life is an important question to analyze in order to demonstrate long-term benefits of extracurricular programs. Do former students, especially representatives of diverse populations, perceive they benefit from forensic experience while in high school, leading to an impact in post-secondary life? Research ascertained from this survey's dataset will be used to assist the NSDA and NFHS with furthering research on benefits of programs and to establish an understanding of what skills are needed for students to build long-term successes.

The qualtrics.com survey was distributed through social media, direct email, through the NSDA website, snowballing, and convenience and purposive sampling through direct request of various former forensic competitors and coaches. Participants were not immediately removed from use if they left answers blank; yet, participants were removed from analysis in this study if either (1) identifiable information was not completed for legitimacy or (2) survey narratives did not validate prior experiences. Respondent's name, high school, and state were asked of each participant to identify legitimacy of responses. In all but one response, this information was enough to verify legitimacy of the response.

Multi-optional questions were asked to determine experiences and perspective of each participant; however, narrative questions, "probes or follow-up questions can be as simple as seeking more information or clarity about what the person has just said" (Merriam, 2009, p. 101), were also utilized.

Ethical considerations include: protecting the identity of the participants and removing responses from questions which could identify the participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 174), when needed in presenting narrative data in its final form. However, the key "is to ask good questions; asking good questions takes practice. Pilot interviews are crucial for trying out your questions." (Merriam, 2009, p. 95). A pilot program of this survey was conducted using former competitors in 2013. Pilot results were not used in this research; however, processes and questions were adjusted to strengthen the quality of respondent information for this study.

Data Analysis

Working with mixed methodologies can be difficult. In truth, "research involves both analysis (the taking things apart) and synthesis (the putting things together). We gather data. We increase our experience. We look closely at the patches of collected data, the part of our experience; that is, we analyze and we put the parts together, often in different ways than before. We synthesize" (Stake, 2010, p. 133). To accomplish this synthesis, the researcher collected data from the respondents' surveys and began analysis by reading and memoing the open-ended, narrative responses at the end of each survey. After each survey response had been read and any extraneous surveys had been removed for not meeting criteria already discussed, data was calculated using the qualtrics.com system. This, in addition, to the narrative responses of the open-ended questions allowed for a robust dataset to be evaluated.

Results

As stated previously, the initial intent was to locate 30 students to represent each of the diverse voices: female, Black, Hispanic, LGBTIQ, and persons with a disability. However, as data collection evolved, a larger, more robust set of stories came into the dataset. These additional voices allowed for even more depth into the lives of these former competitors. Participants were not mutually exclusive within categories, for participants self-identified in numerous categories. Results of survey, utilizing parameters already discussed offer the following:

Table 1

General Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification		Event Preferences	
White	820	Male	463	Debate	499
Black	50	Female	575	Oral Interpretation	276
Hispanic	97	Transgender	11	Public Speaking	242
Asian	73	Intersex	2		
Native American	20	LGBTIQ	193		
Mixed Race	35	Persons w/a Disability	78		
Other	25	# of States	43		

Nominal questions regarding personal background, gender, identification in the LGBTIQ community, or as a person with a disability were asked to determine specific populations within the general population. In addition, alumni were asked to rate their event preferences to assist in understanding which events each former competitor participated. The general population results from these questions are presented in Table 1. 43 US states were represented in the 1,050 surveys.

Throughout the survey, a number of questions were asked to elicit information from alumni in order to garner a full perspective of each participant. When addressing the question on whether there is a perceived influence on life post-secondary education

from participation in forensics, there are two ratio questions to review from the survey: (1) What is your overall feeling about your experiences in speech & debate activities in high school? (2) How much do you think your experiences in speech & debate activities influenced your life post-high school? These two questions, which will be referred to as “satisfaction” and “influence,” will be used to determine significance between different populations.

Satisfaction is important to address in relationship to influence. As students achieve more satisfaction through competition, do they tend to feel more positive about the activity and carry those experiences into their post-secondary lives? This question is of importance, for previous research offers, “though female and minority population is increasing, there does not seem to be a proportional increase in their winnings” (Stepp & Gardner, 2011, p. 74). Therefore, satisfaction is important to triangulate post-secondary influence. If participants did not feel satisfaction with the activity and/or experiences, the influence of forensics post-high school should be lower.

While many researchers utilize a Likert scale or VAS measurement, the researcher decided to use a radial option, with a scale of 0 (no correlation to 10 high correlation). This was done for three reasons: 1) uniformity in style leads to less confusion of participants, 2) researchers argue, “On the Likert scales, a higher percentage of the respondents tended to mark the middle options and avoided the extreme ends of the scales” (Hasson & Arentz, 2005, p. 6), and 3) various authors contend there is no “uniform agreement” that VAS measurement is “more reliable and valid.” Therefore, since “it is clear that the studies reporting on the advantages and disadvantages using

VAS vs. Likert scales often report contradictory findings” (Hasson & Arentz, 2005, p. 7), this research uses the radial scale of 0-10. This allows for flexibility of the VAS measurement, but avoids the labeling of measures on a Likert scale.

In addition, four narrative questions at the end of the survey are used to add depth and allowed the researcher to provide triangulation for description of quantitative results. These prompts are: (1) Write a brief narrative about your experiences in speech & debate activities in high school. (2) Write a brief narrative about how your experiences in speech & debate activities impacted your academics, attendance, and behavior in high school. (3) Write a brief narrative on how you feel your experiences above influenced your life post-high school. (4) Write anything else you would like to say regarding your experiences in speech & debate activities in high school.

Through the use of narrative questions in each survey response, participants were able to provide rich stories to articulate the high levels of satisfaction and influence in their lived forensic experiences. After completion of the survey data collection, the researcher filtered self-identified participants and read those responses independently of other participants. While reading responses from participants, the researcher performed an open coding of the responses from each population. The researcher was able to determine themes within the data.

Before analysis of individual sub-populations within the respondents, it is important to note: data yielded an entire influence population mean of 8.57 and a standard deviation of 2.02; thus, there is a consensus among participants that speech & debate has a strong positive correlation between participation and post-secondary life.

Furthermore, with a population satisfaction mean of 9.13 and a standard deviation of 1.40, there is a strong level of satisfaction in experiences of all participants in the survey.

Black Participants

The nominal question, which term below best identifies your personal background, evaluates the racial/cultural backgrounds of the respondents. This information is important for identifying the background to place each participant in the appropriate pool of participants. It is important to note participants were able to identify themselves in multiple racial or cultural backgrounds when completing the survey, if they chose. This question yielded the following information regarding respondents who self-identified as Black:

Table 2

Black Population of Alum Participants

Identification		Event Preferences	
Male	24	Debate	16
FIT	26	Oral Interpretation	20
LGBTIQ	12	Public Speaking	13
# of States	17		

Black participants, represented in Table 2, had a satisfaction mean of 8.94 with a standard deviation of 1.49 and an influence mean of 8.24 with a standard deviation of

2.50. With strong positive correlations in both satisfaction and influence, there are no significant differences in either dataset when compared to the study population means.

Analyzing responses from all 50 Black participants, the researcher was able to determine numerous concepts within the data; however, after evaluating the concepts, the data yielded in three themes: voice, family, and skill.

Black respondents used terms such as “confidence,” “empowering,” “out of shell,” “stage fright,” “speak up,” “comfort zone,” “break out,” and “outlet” to describe the theme of voice in their survey responses. Alumni repeated the idea of voice throughout the responses. One respondent claimed, “forensics was empowering for me” while another argued, “Speech and Debate taught me to confidently advocate for my beliefs;” moreover, offers one alum, “being a black body in a primarily white space I often felt as though I didn't have a voice, as though as I didn't have a place in my community. Speech changed that for me. It not only gave me a voice, it taught me how to amplify it in order to speak my respective truths.” Another articulated what forensics does for students of color when he stated:

Speech and debate were extremely important activities to me in high school. I was very fortunate to be a part of a competitive and successful program at the state and even at the national level. Forensics gave me an opportunity to express myself outside of the classroom and the tools to do it well. As a black man from a segregated city, I felt disenfranchised in a lot of different ways when growing up. I wanted a way to experience something different. I was able to travel across the country because of forensics. I would have never gotten that opportunity without speech and debate. It also gave me a voice.

Black respondents resonated their positive satisfaction with their experiences and offered those experiences provided post-secondary abilities to express their own voice, for as one

respondent explained, “it gave me a way to break out of my small little world and expand.”

In addition to the theme of voice, Black respondents used terms such as “socialize,” “connections,” “home,” “relationship,” “teacher,” “coach,” “team,” “hangout,” “safe haven,” as well as “family and “speech & debate world” to address the theme of family in their survey responses. Throughout the responses from Black participants, alumni claimed, “the speech and debate team gave me a safe space most days of the week to relax” or “The speech room was my safe haven.” Surveys articulated that forensics provided Black alumni with a sense of family, for “it helped me find my footing, my family. I made friends and found a home on the speech team.” The sense of family and home, for many participants, directly impacted their trajectory post-secondary education. For example:

My experiences in Speech and Debate has shaped and molded me into the person I am today. I got started in middle school and it really kept me focused and able to get through the curriculum. When I got to high school, I wasn't doing speech and debate and I was skipping school, got involved with gang activities, and my life was set on a course to either being incarcerated or dead before my 18th birthday. In my sophomore year I got back into forensics and went to state and then nationals and my life changed. It changed completely. I started to care more about my life, something about competing and training every week that whipped me into shape and my coach staying on my ass. He was a parent to me. He got me into programs to recover credits I lost due to skipping, went through credit by examinations, stayed on my grades, and I managed to graduate on time with my class when it was said it couldn't be done. As an African American in a system, being able to travel to different states, see the world from a different point of view changed everything for me. And I've seen that there is something bigger than the hood.

This participant, among others, saw forensics as a family, thus giving them the strength to push forward in their post-secondary life. One participant recalled feelings prior to

experience with forensics: “I felt stuck in my hometown at times. I had no idea how to express my frustration with the lack of inclusion with the community around me.”

Contrasting, students with a sense of community were able to push forward in life.

Third, Black respondents used terms such as “life experiences,” “critical thinker,” “speaking skills,” “communication,” “test scores,” “leadership,” “research,” and “think quickly” to articulate the theme of skills in their survey responses. The skills taught through experiences in forensics allowed Black alumni to be successful after graduation. One alum explains, “Without speech and debate I wouldn't have been able to accomplish all the leadership roles I took on in undergrad. Being able to effectively communicate and being comfortable speaking in front of my peers put me heads and tails above fellow students. It was these leadership positions that allowed me to end up at a top 10 law school.” Furthermore, career opportunities are more plentiful, for “it has allowed me to be able to take greater risk and put myself in positions with great opportunities. I believe that it [communication] sets the tone for everything that you do and to have that ability has really set me apart from the rest at a much younger age.” Another alum explains, I was the “first in my family to walk across the stage with a diploma. Forensics has really grounded me. I still use principles from here in my life. It is a learned behavior, that makes you a better person.”

The 50 Black respondents offered voice, family, and skills as the influence provided to them as they embarked upon their post-secondary educational ventures. These three themes provided them the ability to navigate through and be successful after high school.

Hispanic Participants

Similar to Black participants, Hispanic alumni, represented in Table 3, were permitted to identify in numerous racial/cultural backgrounds, if they so chose. While there is a strong positive correlation in Hispanic satisfaction, with a mean of 9.10 and a standard deviation of 1.32, and Hispanic influence, with a mean of 8.24 and a standard deviation of 2.50, there is no significant difference for either question in comparison to general population.

Table 3

Hispanic Population of Alum Participants

Identification		Event Preferences	
Male	46	Debate	43
FIT	51	Oral Interpretation	26
LGBTIQ	27	Public Speaking	27
# of States	14		

Through an evaluation of the narrative responses, numerous concepts were collapsed to 3 recurrent themes: friends, success, and confidence. Numerous responses overlapped these 3 themes, such as: “In many ways the speech and debate program saved my life. I come from a poor socioeconomic background. Before S&D I struggled to find

where I fit in at school. This program gave me lifelong friends, an incredible support system, taught me career skills that I still employ, and changed my life for the better.”

First, Hispanic participants articulated how forensics gave them friends through use of phrases, including “friends,” “support system,” “life-long family,” and “socialize.” “It was where my friends were, my passions, and my fun” or “I felt connected to other kids that I never would have known if it weren’t from speech and debate” were examples of how friends were a significant theme for Hispanic alumni. Forensics helped these participants to “get involved,” “changed the way I approached interaction with individuals,” and “it surrounded me with well-minded individuals thriving for excellence.” Opening doors to new friends, one alum responded, “Being able to socialize and create new friendships throughout the area gave me a sense of pride and belonging having just arrived to the country from El Salvador a couple of months before.”

Second, Hispanic students articulated success as a theme in their forensic experiences. Through responses including, “work ethic,” “logic,” “skills,” “leader,” as well as “working hard,” “college,” and “critical thinking” the theme of success and its correlation with forensics is clear. One alum explains their post-high school success: “Speech and debate enabled me to articulate my thoughts clearly and logically, gave me a worldly perspective on current events, and brought me into a social circle that I treasure to this day.” While forensics, for many alumni, “shaped who I am,” the atmosphere also shaped alum: “joining speech and debate taught me the importance in not allowing laziness to overcome my study habits, and to care about my future which, in turn,

resulted in a new found commitment to reconfiguring my priorities so that my education would always come first.”

Third, Hispanic alumni elaborate greatly on the theme of confidence. Similar to other populations, the ability to have an “outlet,” “speak up,” “be myself,” “speaking confidently,” and overcome “shyness” are all terms utilized by participants to articulate the theme of confidence. One alum offers, “Speech and debate forced me out of my shell. I was one of those super shy kids and competing in speech and debate helped me overcome my issues. It gave me a place where I could engage in an intellectual activity and it was ok.” Likewise, another participant explains, “It made me see that speech was more than words in front of a crowd, that it could impact the way a person views an opinion, the way that someone remembers information, the way that people remember you. It gave me a way to break out of my small little world and expand.” This confidence allowed participants to freely express themselves to a variety of people in varied contexts: “It not only empowered me to present myself and my ideas in a professional manner, but gave me an outlet for creative expression and a strong support system of diverse individuals from a variety of backgrounds.” While most participants were “socially inclined” by their participation, others realized “freedom of speech is privilege” and the activity made them “fiery,” “ornery and cocky.”

Forensics offered Hispanic students the ability to make diverse friends, succeed in multiple facets of their lives, and provided them with confidence in different aspects of life. As one Hispanic alum explains:

I am presently a professor at an Ivy League university. Colleagues often marvel at my ease, confidence, and adaptability in a public-speaking situation. Recently,

I realized that most of the things that come ‘naturally’ to me (and which my colleagues have to learn) are those skills rehearsed and cultivated by my years competing in speech. Frankly, I draw upon my speech experiences every day. Nothing else from my high school curricular or extracurricular experience is nearly as foundational to the work I do today.

Persons with a Disability Participants

Participant results, represented in Table 4, indicate there is no significant difference in satisfaction or influence for persons with a disability from the population.

Table 4

Persons with a Disability Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification/Event Preferences	
White	58	Male	35
Black	4	FIT	43
Hispanic	8	LGBTIQ	28
Asian	1	# of States	26
Native American	6	Debate	41
Mixed Race	4	Oral Interpretation	21
Other	2	Public Speaking	14

With a satisfaction mean of 8.97 and a standard deviation of 1.55 and an influence mean of 8.56 and a standard deviation of 1.93, there is a strong positive correlation for both satisfaction and influence for persons with a disability.

A statistical review of the responses from the persons with a disability population shows strong positive correlations with satisfaction and influence, yet an evaluation of concepts to determine themes were more dispersed. One participant referred to their time in forensics as a “roller coaster” where “sometimes my grades suffered,” but also stated forensics “teaches respect.” The contradictory nature of responses was also apparent as one former competitor explained “Debate drove me into a debilitating depression. I attempted suicide multiple times during my senior year,” yet another alum explained how forensics saved them from depression: “a latent depression and anxiety.... drove me to attempt suicide. Forensics became the driving force behind my recovery... In short, Forensics saved my life.” As each participant’s experience is different in forensics, it is important to acknowledge the broad scope of the activity in different schools, areas, states, and time.

The largest number of varied responses from persons with a disability came from the narrative question regarding academics, attendance, and behavior; however, with a review of all narrative responses, 4 themes emerged: success, confidence, family, and advocacy.

In responses, persons with a disability articulated a number of ideas correlating with success: “skills,” “refined speaker,” “lead effectively,” “pursue law,” as well as specific careers, including “law,” “audiologist,” and “writer.” One alum explained, “As a result of high school speech and debate I was able to get into a strong university and found my current career path of foreign analysis for the US government.” Another admits, “I think the primary reason I was accepted into Yale was my success in high

school debate.” Another alum explains how their experiences in forensics allows successful interactions throughout their current career:

My profession today is in human resources and my role requires me to be a very effective communicator, verbally as well as in writing. My role and responsibilities require me to communicate and engage with other employees and at different levels in our organization, from a junior staff member, all the way up to a Senior Vice President... [forensics] has helped me to become very successful in my communications interactions, both personally as well as professionally.

Second, the theme of confidence emerged through language such as “introvert,” “my own skin,” “speak up,” “empowered,” as well as “social anxiety” and “extrovert.” Alumni offered statements such as “participating in speech and debate has definitely helped me to become a very engaged and extroverted communicator with others” or “forensics gave me the confidence to be flexible and bold in any situation.” One alum explains the negative aspect of this confidence: “unfortunately, my experience in LD debate also promoted the parts of my identity that were elitist, ruthless, and arrogant.” However, most responses from alumni agree with one participant who stated, “speech and debate gave me the much needed confidence at such an uncomfortable time in my life. I learned to be comfortable within my own skin in the most uncomfortable situations.”

Third, respondents with a disability expressed family as a theme of their time with forensics. Phrases such as “community,” “family,” “friends,” “relationships,” and “forensics family” demonstrated family as a reoccurring theme in responses from persons with a disability. Forensics “gave me a family” stated one alum; while another agrees stating, “my team was the epitome of a family team. No matter what happened we were always there for each other.” Numerous alumni explained specific examples

when their teammates, coach/teacher and forensic friends were there for them during high school. “After I lost a friend in a car accident, debate tournaments were the only time I felt like my old self, and I don’t know how else I would have gotten through that period in my life if I hadn’t been debating.” As this pool of participants responded, the concept of family and camaraderie was evident in responses.

The final theme to emerge from persons with a disability participants was advocacy. One alum explained, speech & debate “spurred me to try and get involved in politics in order to truly create change” as another alum furthered the argument stating, “I specialize in political PR and advocacy and I’m always shocked how much politics, from a communication’s perspective, is like policy debate.” Whereas some respondents were pushing for changes within forensics, “I remain concerned about the ethics in competition,” other alums were focused on social justice beyond the activity. “I developed a passion for social justice. Now I’m studying Middle Eastern and African American studies to make a difference in the communities in which I belong.” Several surveys addressed how “debate taught me to be angry at injustice and gave me some of the tools I needed to act to right those wrongs.”

LGBTIQ Participants

The nominal question, do you identify as part of the LGBTIQ community, evaluates the perspectives of LGBTIQ respondents, represented in Table 5. This information is used to discuss the responses from diverse students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Questioning/Queer. This question yielded the following data from respondents:

Table 5

LGBTIQ Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification/Event Preferences	
White	146	Male	88
Black	12	FIT	105
Hispanic	27	Persons w/a Disability	38
Asian	8	# of States	36
Native American	6	Debate	77
Mixed Race	13	Oral Interpretation	56
Other	5	Public Speaking	51

In regards to self-identified LGBTIQ participants, there was a strong positive correlation between post-secondary life and forensic competition with a mean of 8.47 and a standard deviation of 2.07; furthermore, there was also a strong positive level of satisfaction with a mean of 9.03 and a standard deviation of 1.57. There is no significant difference between LGBTIQ and the general population of the participants in either satisfaction or influence.

A review of statistics shows a strong positive correlation for both satisfaction and influence; however, individual LGBTIQ respondents had a numerous perspectives to express throughout their narrative responses. Still, many of the respondents intertwined

the 4 themes prevalent in responses: confidence, skills, family, and identity. For example:

The speech and debate world is a smaller community than we all think. It's a family in which we love each other and hate each other at the same time. I came out in my sophomore year, and I don't think I would have gotten through it without the love and support of my coaches and teammates. I was taught to never hold anything back and to just go for it. To say what is on my mind and don't care what other people think of me. As long as I am happy in who I am, that will be the only thing that matters. I've tried to relay that message to so many people, and I hope they've listened, because it's the best advice I have ever been given.

Throughout the LGBTIQ narrative responses, terms such as “outlet,” “interaction,” “speak out,” “personable,” “articulate,” “voice,” “esteem,” and “introvert” collapsed to create a theme of confidence. Respondents in this population felt forensic activity gave them the confidence to be successful. One alum explains, forensics “gave me a platform for social advocacy when I was told I was too young for grown-up discussions” while another alum offers, “speech and debate helped me develop into a confident, proud individual.” Another alum elaborates on the confidence needed to challenge her in both debate and her life post-high school:

I regularly tell other people that if everyone were required to take part in speech and debate, the world would be a better place. It's not just the opportunity to cultivate empathy, critical thinking skills, and confidence... I've had the guts to run cases that shouldn't have ever been run and knew about climate change debates before anyone knew what a climate model was. I knew China was a thing and moved there before anyone else caught on. I've learned the consequences of dropping turns and the importance of definitions -- life lessons, it should be noted, that have resonance. I still won a bunch of stuff, like national and state stuff, which totally brought me pleasure at the time. But the payoff in intellectual and personal satisfaction? Can I do it? Can I really be that cliché? Priceless.

Second, self-identified LGBTIQ respondents addressed the theme of skills with various terminology, including: “research,” “critical thinking,” “focus,” “logic,”

“presentation,” “career,” “success,” “college,” as well as “work ethic,” “argumentation,” and “job.” As one alum argued, “I find that speech & debate has given me some unrealistic expectations of my own behavior and capabilities. Success in the world of speech & debate does not necessarily equate to success in the world beyond high school. Awards do not translate into scholarship or academic opportunities.” Moreover, a vast majority of alumni responded to the skill sets created, developed, or reinforced through forensics. Responses illustrating this influence include: forensics “became a staple of my life that taught me invaluable professional and personal skills,” “I learned research and critical thinking skills,” I “learned a lot about winning, losing, and working hard, it “taught me rhetoric, writing, research” and “I learned that I can achieve anything if I put my mind to it and that has made me successful.” One alum explains the focus needed in speech over time: “speech is a skill that took years to improve. However, unlike many others, it is one that individuals can continue to hone and build upon throughout their lives.”

Next, LGBTIQ participants identified family as a theme, using language such as: “socialize,” “fellowship,” “second-family,” “relationships,” “social life,” “teamwork,” “belonging,” “camaraderie” and “home.” “Joining debate has given me the gift and privilege of not only working alongside my colleagues, but making friendships and memories of a lifetime” offered one alum. “I laughed, I cried, and I celebrated,” “speech and debate tournaments were a home away from home for me,” and “the speech and debate team was like a second family to me” are examples of how familial many students felt about their teams. Another alum explains, “it gave me a community and provided

stability in the turbulent atmosphere that is high school and being a teenager;” however, these friendships go far beyond the high school years: “I am now 67 years old and several of my closest friends are people I first met in HS [high school] forensics.” Multiple respondents offered similar remarks, such as “being a member of the team made me feel like I had a home within school, a family of peers who were like-minded.”

Finally, concepts, including “changed my life,” “defines me,” “made me who I am,” “transformative,” “person I am today,” “truly shaped my life,” and “growing up,” contributed to how self-identified LGBTIQ participants clearly articulated identity as a theme in their responses. One alum explained how important this is for an LGBTIQ student in their formative years, “it is hard to be a gay boy in the state of Kansas, and when I was in speech class, I didn’t feel like I had to hide. I could be me, and that made me happy.” Another respondent offered, “I learned a lot about myself and the world around me while participating in speech and debate.”

While many participants wrote about their own identity formation in forensics, one respondent explained how forensics helped another, younger competitor:

I had a [poetry] program talking about the movement for marriage equality, and while judges would constantly bring me down with critiques on ballots and rank me down in the room, the comments from fellow competitors outside of the round, and sometimes even in the round, made me realize I was doing this for the right reason. I had a boy one time come up to me after the round in which I performed, and he thanked me, talking about he was always bullied for his sexual orientation, and I helped him see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Still, another former competitor offers:

Within my team and the forensic community at large, I was able to socialize in an environment relatively devoid of homophobia compared to the rest of society. I saw first hand how intellectualism and education destroys much of the ignorance that leads to hate in our community. Debate was a platform of which any and all

stereotyped personalities could be successful, as long as they were smarter or their skills better honed. I saw the respect for many gay members of many different teams grow in the eyes of their colleagues, based on the same love for the activity, and not on their differences outside. It was in speech and debate that I learned how to accept myself in my own homosexuality, instead of hiding it, like the rest of society was at the same time teaching me.

In regards to the impact forensics had on one alum, they stated, “it launched me.”

Overall, confidence, skills, family, and identity were themes to emerge from the narrative data. As these respondents grew in high school through their experiences in forensics, they were able to speak confidently, utilize important career skills, understand the importance of family, and appreciate their own identity as they progressed through their post-high school lives.

FIT Participants

The nominal question, which term best identifies your gender, evaluates the gender identity of the respondents. For the respondents, four options were provided: (1) Male, (2) Female, (3) Transgender, and (4) Intersex. With only 11 transgender and 2 intersex participants, the pool was too small to effectively evaluate. Therefore, to ensure these 13 participants are addressed, data will be presented as male and FIT. In Table 6, FIT combines female, transgender, and intersex participants. With prior research focusing on male students in debate, FIT is intended to show all voices different than traditional males. This question yielded the following information regarding the respondents:

Table 6

FIT Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification/Event Preferences	
White	463	FIT	588
Black	26	LGBTIQ	105
Hispanic	51	Persons w/a Disability	43
Asian	39	# of States	40
Native American	10	Debate	233
Mixed Race	21	Oral Interpretation	186
Other	11	Public Speaking	151

With a FIT mean of 9.08 and a standard deviation of 1.45, there is not a significant difference between total population and FIT satisfaction. However, with a mean of 8.38, a standard deviation of 2.19, and a resulting p value of .02382, there is a significant difference between total population and FIT respondents perceived relationship between competitive speech & debate participation in high school and post-secondary life.

Through evaluation of the narrative responses from FIT participants, the largest population within the general participant pool, offered four themes similar to other populations: confidence, friendship, skills, and success. Like other populations

evaluated, many of these themes overlapped within participant responses, for one respondent explains,

Although I did not see much competitive success in high school, my whole life was changed by the way I learned to think in speech and debate and the way I learned to express myself. It gave me so much confidence to work hard, try, mess up, and try again. It gave me friends and relationships that are stronger than any other group I've been a part of. It made me aware of global issues and taught me how to think and organize my own thoughts. My coach was like a second mom to me and my team was my family.

First, FIT employed terms including: “outlet,” “out of my shell,” “voice,” as well as “stand up for myself,” “empowered me,” and “courage” to express the theme of confidence. Alumni commented “I believe I found my voice and learned more about myself,” I “gained the confidence to go on to earn my master’s degree,” and forensics “brought me out of my shell” to explain the confidence their participation in forensics afforded them. One alum offered: “I learned how to speak and present myself as a mature woman who could speak and be heard.” Another explains the connection to post-high school influence: “Today my career regularly presents speaking opportunities (I was once tapped to testify before the US Senate), and I know that I have my experiences in high school forensics to thank for the poise and confidence I’m consistently able to project.” Writing their response from a work-related trip, “I am currently writing this from Chicago where I will present my scientific research to thousands of people and I’m not really worried about it. That is the impact forensics has had on my life.... We forget that this isn’t the norm for many high schoolers, and that most people have never dawned a full suit at 6 AM on a Saturday to talk to hundreds of strangers who are judging you.”

Still another alum exclaims, forensics “literally changed my life. I went from no voice to a fire ball who radiated light, love, and energy!”

Second, FIT conveyed the theme of friendship through terms such as:

“community,” “lifelong friends,” “family,” “social network,” “safe space,” and “camaraderie” to articulate the “social and emotional benefits...in forensics [that] cannot be understated.” A respondent elaborates,

the main influence that speech has had on my life post-high school is... I made incredible friendships through high school speech that have continued throughout the years, and the friendships are still being made. To this day, when I meet someone who was heavily involved in speech and debate in high school, I immediately feel a connection with them and can have a long discussion with them about the topic. I have made countless friends this way and can honestly say that a good amount of my best friends in college participated in the high school activity as well.

Other respondents agree, explaining, forensics “made me feel like I was a part of something bigger than me,” “provided me a network,” “I found my home and my best friends through this activity,” and one respondent, defined their team as “our own little family of weirdos.” “Debate,” explains a respondent, “was family, with all of its dysfunctions.”

Next, respondents articulated the theme of “skills” through language including: “discipline,” “research,” “writing skills,” “work ethic,” and also, “advocacy skills,” “gave me an edge,” and “life skills.” Forensics “gave me excellent research skills, honed my writing skills, improved my ability to speak in front of groups, sharpened my ability to think quickly, and honed my ability to find what’s wrong in the logic/argument being presented – which I have found so very important as a people manager and also as a Compliance Analyst for a pharmaceutical company” argues one respondent. Agreeing

with the post-secondary skills provided by forensics, another respondent offers “self-discipline, empirical research, argumentation, speech-writing, public speaking, team management, perseverance” as skills which provided “a genuinely impressive resume.” One participant offers forensics as a mechanism for understanding defeat, stating, “I learned that setbacks don’t define me as a person, and that they don’t even reflect my skill level...but to take control of my response and funnel it towards positive work and increased dedication.” Humorously, one respondent, who identifies herself as a public defense attorney explains, “I use what I learned from speech every single day.... ever try to convince a five-year-old that eating chicken masala for dinner is better than ordering pizza? I have! SPEECH!!”

Finally, FIT respondents provided the theme of success through specific examples of their own abilities and careers and that relationship with high school forensics. “The reason I was hired into my current job was because I am able to speak more eloquently than many of my peers. Plain and simple” states one participant, while another offers, “I moved to Los Angeles to work in the entertainment industry, and now, hold a high level entertainment job. I’m the only person in my family that ever had that kind of drive- and I think I owe much of this energy to the competitive experiences of debate and forensics.” Other respondents address careers in “law,” “politics,” “education,” and “medicine.” However, one response explains the level of success forensics offers students through an interaction with an old friend:

A couple of years ago my old debate partner and I happened to meet up for the afternoon and she mentioned something I had not thought often: where would we be if we hadn’t had that debate class? I don’t know the answer to that, but she’s a highly successful appellate attorney, and I’m the managing director of policy for

a national education organization, and I'm relatively certain neither of us would be where we are today.

While emerging themes through the narrative responses support that there is not a significant difference between FIT and general population regarding satisfaction, there still remains a significant difference between FIT and general population's perceived influence of forensics on life post-secondary education. Narrative responses provide a mixed perspective of this perceived influence.

Repetitively, responses such as "I completely devoted all my heart and soul to debate," explained the positive satisfaction correlation, yet there were FIT respondents who criticized forensics as merely competition against one another. For example, "my only regret is that high school debate reinforced many sexist and homophobia societal influences... it wasn't until college debate that I learned that masculine traits are not inherent to success." Another FIT alum offers: "I remember it being sexist just because of the fact that I was told not to dress like a girl for tournaments but try to dress as much like a man as possible, having condoms thrown at me to make me uncomfortable, or having my ass slapped to make me feel uncomfortable again." Reiterating this concern, "as a girl, my worth is often reduced to my appearance and this negatively affects my self-esteem." Additionally, another alum explains, her perspective of sexism in forensics:

...Debate absolutely taught me what misogyny looked like in a quasi-professional environment. I did all that work, and I was just as smart as (if not smarter than) male debaters, and I still had to put so much more work into it. I had to do it all in heels. I had to deal with goddamn pantyhose ripping on me, at least every tournament. I had to obsess over being pretty enough to get respect without crossing some invisible line that meant I was TOO sexy and I'd no longer be taken seriously. That meant - you need nail polish and lipstick, but only in certain

shades of pink, and you better know the difference, and you need a suit that flatters your figure but isn't too slutty, and, and, and! It never ends. I got comments about my appearance on ballots sometimes, while my male opponents got comments on their arguments. And then there was the manner of speaking - that goddamn line between 'she's not assertive enough' and 'wow, she's a bitch!' is so, so thin, but I can walk it like a champ now. I learned to coach the word 'like' out of my vocabulary, and suppress my rage when my male opponents used it every other goddamn word and never got called on it. I learned to navigate sexual harassment from my male colleagues, which, by God if that isn't a skill I've needed in professional environments! Anyway, I wish it weren't true, and I spend a lot of energy fighting it, but knowing how to maneuver around all that misogynistic bullshit is pretty necessary in college, in jobs and in life. I'm great in interviews now.

Other alumni commented, too, about "sexism," "bro-code," being "abrasive for a woman," "rather haughty or arrogant," and others "spreading vicious rumors" as negatives in the forensics community. Pointedly, as these alumni provided criticism of their commentary, the focus, for the most part, was on sexist interaction with males during competition itself. Yet, others addressed issues of "self-esteem," "assault," and "suicide" as issues surrounding their forensic endeavors. Even while alumni expressed frustrations and deep concerns, responses would often echo one alumni's comment: "it was both the greatest and worst experience of my life."

Oral Interpretation

Participants were asked to identify which type of forensic activities they most preferred. Options included: Debate, Oral Interpretation, and Public Speaking. Since competitive forensics consists of 15+ events ranging in skill sets, it was important to evaluate the types of events in which study participants competed to garner a complete look at the satisfaction and post-secondary influence when aggregated by event

preference. This question yielded the following information regarding the respondents who preferred Oral Interpretation:

Table 7

Oral Interpretation Preferred Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification	
White	209	Male	90
Black	20	FIT	186
Hispanic	25	LGBTIQ	56
Asian	18	Persons w/a Disability	21
Native American	2	# of States	39
Mixed Race	12		
Other	6		

In regards to participants, represented in Table 7, who identified an Oral Interpretation preference, there is no significant difference in either satisfaction or influence from the general population. With a satisfaction mean of 9.22 and a standard deviation of 1.45 and an influence mean of 8.58 and a standard deviation of 2.00, there is a strong positive correlation for both factors.

A large percentage of the alumni intersect with participants previously evaluated for themes fall under one or more of the populations already addressed: Black, Hispanic,

persons with a disability, LGBTIQ self-identified, and FIT; therefore, themes were not evaluated again for Oral Interpretation respondents. However, alumni were able to provide details in how their experiences impacted their lives beyond their high school careers. An alum explains:

I am now in graduate school, pursuing a MFA in fiction writing at a one of the oldest creative writing programs in the country, and I can confidently say that I still draw on a sense of narrative and storytelling that I developed while cutting scripts and watching pieces for interpretation events. Finally, I believe that the close relationship I had with my peers and coaches fostered in me the confidence in abilities as a speaker, thinker, and artist that has sustained me throughout my professional life thus far.

Furthermore, alums offer their own explanations of forensic influence: “Forensics gave me insight into the creative process. Learning the pieces and performing an interpretation allowed me to be more apathetic as well.” Explaining how his skills in Oral Interpretation provided him confidence, “I am currently in an improv team at Miami University, and without oral interpretation, I probably would not have made it. It gave me the confidence to stand up in front of people I have never met, and be ridiculous. And, it has helped me express myself much more eloquently. It gives me an upper hand in meeting people because I am able to express my thoughts in an efficient and thought provoking manner.”

In contrast to being “ridiculous”, alternative ideas regarding how oral interpretation is vital to success post-high school, an alum explains, “the social and intellectual developments I made during my time in speech and debate gave me invaluable life skills. The social acceptance and boldness that I learned from interacting with other students at tournaments and in speech and debate class developed

interpersonal skills that have proved invaluable in my current environment.” Finally, an alum explains how her entire family has been influenced by experience in forensics:

I think performers have an extra edge as well. After high school, sorority rush was the first placed I realized exactly how much speech influenced by behavior and my presentation of myself. Any oral presentations required in college were given easily, without nerves or trepidation. Even interviews for grad school and medical school were influenced by what I learned about presenting myself well in speech tournaments. Performers tend to be eccentric, outspoken individuals. Exposure early on to people who thought and acted differently from me taught me to value diversity in thought and character. In the end, this Drama Girl married a Debate Boy. Our kids will be in high school soon, and we are already pushing them for speech & debate! I just can't say enough about how valuable this experience was to me.

Public Speaking

Similar to Oral Interpretation participants, all alum respondents were asked to rate their preference in types of events, which yielded the following information:

Table 8

Public Speaking Preferred Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification	
White	190	Male	91
Black	13	FIT	151
Hispanic	27	LGBTIQ	51
Asian	15	Persons w/a Disability	14
Native American	4	# of States	33
Mixed Race	8		
Other	2		

There is no significant difference in either satisfaction or influence in regards to respondents, represented in Table 8, who self-identify as preferring Public Speaking events in relation to the general population. There is a positive correlation with a satisfaction mean of 9.03 and a standard deviation of 1.48 and an influence mean of 8.48 and a standard deviation of 2.05.

As the participants who identify as preferring Public Speaking events over others have largely been addressed in previous populations, themes were not evaluated in narrative responses; however, participants did offer insight into the influence Public Speaking had on their lives beyond high school.

An alum explains: “I felt that my main events (extemp and impromptu) were instrumental in helping me to effectively analyze situations and communicate my thoughts. The entire premise of extemp. (30 minutes to prepare a speech) is mirrored in the SAT writing section... Being able to think quickly certainly helped me in interviews. And being able to effectively argue my position helped in collegiate teamwork settings,” while another respondent directly linked impromptu to success stating, “I work in Sales and Political Organizing. The research skills I developed competing in Extemporaneous speaking and the confidence I developed competing in Impromptu speaking have helped me become an excellent Sales Professional and Community Organizer.” Furthering the link between Public Speaking and post-high school life, an alum responds,

My experiences with speech and debate had a profound impact on my post-high school skills and confidence. I knew myself to have an aptitude for public speaking and writing because of my success with original oratory in high school and, therefore, I made an effort to find ways to use those skills in my career. I'm currently a law student and my speech and debate experience has been invaluable to me in developing my persuasive writing and oral advocacy skills. I credit much

of my success in law school to this early exposure to public speaking and debate and to the tips and tricks I learned through my experiences.

Debate

As discussed before in Oral Interpretation and Public Speaking, alum respondents were asked to identify their event preference. Participants who elected Debate as their preferred event category are represented in Table 9.

Table 9

Debate Preferred Population of Alum Participants

Personal Background		Identification	
White	190	Male	91
Black	13	FIT	151
Hispanic	27	LGBTIQ	51
Asian	15	Persons w/a Disability	14
Native American	4	# of States	33
Mixed Race	8		
Other	2		

With a satisfaction mean equal to the general population mean of 9.13 with a standard deviation of 1.35, there was no difference for the Debate preferred population and the total population. In regards to influence, there is no significant difference with a mean of 8.61 with a standard deviation of 2.05. Both satisfaction and influence had a

strong positive correlation. Students who chose Debate yielded the following information.

While themes of voice, confidence, skills, and team have resonated throughout all of the populations previously discussed, a thematic review of students who identified as preferring Debate events did not occur. However, through a review of responses, these themes were once again illuminated as part of the perceived influence forensics had on their post-secondary lives.

An example of themes repeating in Debate preferred students include: “Debate influenced my college choice, and inspired me to go to college in the first place. The skills I gained -- argumentative, research, speaking -- made the majority of my college courses easy. They set me far ahead of my peers. Not only would I have not gone to college if it wasn't for policy debate, but debate is what allowed me to thrive.”

Additionally, one former debater agrees, “my interest in international affairs and foreign policy sparked during policy debate,” while another offers, “congressional debate has definitely had a significant impact on my life post-high school.”

Specific scenarios offered by respondents illustrate the careers of the participant pool. For example:

I'm a Journalism and Political Science major and I have got to say that there is not a day that goes by that I do not use what I've learned in my field. In political science the strategy and understanding rational actors were both concepts I first learned in debate. When I later found myself in Journalism my experience in policy debate really came into play. Writing a news story is essentially writing a debate case, but with more filler and your collecting the information for cards by doing interviews. I specialize in political PR and advocacy and I'm always shocked how much politics, from a communications perspective, is like policy debate. In short my experience doing debate has greatly influenced my life and I use the skills I learned every day.

Another participant elaborates, “speech and debate gave me confidence that made the transition to college easier. I had the confidence to speak up in class and the discipline to read academic material while gleaning important information. The activity also gave me the skill set necessary to eventually become a communications director for U.S. congressmen and national nonprofits.” Furthermore, “Policy debate taught me how to think, write, and speak. I learned how to argue with passion and dispassion, taking up a side and dropping it at the flip of a coin. Policy taught me that it's not the perceived strength of one's argument, but the degree to which another finds it persuasive that carries the day” explains one participant. Continuing with the focus on how forensics correlates with career success, a former competitor posits, “as an engineer, working at a Fortune 500 company, I feel confident in my ability to synthesize qualitative data and speak publicly because of Public Forum - not my college degree.”

Furthering the perceived influence forensics has on post-secondary lives, an attorney argues in their survey response:

I handle arbitration hearings, administrative hearings, and other quasi-judicial proceedings. Unlike court proceedings, where there is a lot of discovery and you pretty much know what the other side is going to say/present, the hearings I do require me to think on my feet and respond quickly... This is ENTIRELY due to my speech and debate background. Speech and debate taught me how to take an effective "flow" of what the other side is saying while also drafting and structuring my own questions and arguments. It also taught me how to evaluate my audience to determine appropriate delivery rates and inflections and to gauge the effectiveness of various lines of argumentation. They don't teach these skills in law school.

Discussion

Hoover (2003) explains, “Students put in long hours of reading and digest countless details. They compile mounds of research, analyze arguments, and deliver

blistering rebuttals. The experience usually expands students' vocabularies and sharpens their speaking skills" (p. A29); however, this article asks the question: do former diverse forensic participants perceive learned forensics skills as beneficial in their life post-secondary education? The answer is yes and no, while diverse population alumni are satisfied with these lived experiences all, but FIT respondents see a strong positive correlation with their high school forensics and their post-secondary lives.

Rich (2012) explains, "The United States is increasingly a multicultural society, with white students accounting for just over half of all students in public schools, down from four-fifths in 1970. Yet whites are still largely concentrated in schools with other whites, leaving the largest minority groups – black and Latinos students – isolated in the classrooms...[furthermore] Blacks and Latinos are twice as likely as white or Asian students to attend schools with a substantial majority of poor children" (A6). By understanding the diversity of secondary students who competed in forensic activities and their opinions on how those experiences influenced their post-secondary lives, narrative responses from those students is vital in demonstrating a full view of those lived experiences.

Prior research has asked a variety of questions regarding diversity and extracurricular activities. To begin, Brown and Evans (2002) ask: "do students of non-European American ethnic groups who participate in extracurricular activities receive similar increases in a school connection? And, if so, are students from different ethnic backgrounds as equally likely to participate in extracurricular activities?" (p. 42).

Through the analysis of this research, yes, Black and Hispanic students do perceive they

make those connections. With a strong positive correlation with perceived influence and narrative themes of voice, family/friends, success, and confidence demonstrate a school connection to life after high school.

Furthermore, Branson et al.'s (2013) research offers, "the rate of dropout is higher for Black and Hispanic youth" (p. 4); whereas, Brown and Rodriguez (2009) assert, "school dropout among low-income youth of color has been considerably normalized" (p. 240). Through evaluation of the 50 Black and 97 Hispanic respondents who completed this research, there are narrative indicators that forensics reduces dropout rates for these disenfranchised students.

Additionally, Noguera (2012) captures the struggle for diverse students stating:

Our schools need help meeting the needs of those they serve, especially those most vulnerable and most likely to fail in American society — black and Latino males. We must address this issue with urgency and treat it as an American problem, rather than as a problem that only those who directly experience it should be concerned about. The continued failure of so many young men not only increases the likelihood that they'll end up in prison, permanently unemployed, or dead at an early age, but that our society will accept such conditions as normal. As that begins to occur, all of us are endangered (p. 13).

As former Black and Hispanic students articulated in narrative and quantitative responses in this survey, they are being served through forensic activities. Continuing the concern for these populations, Gordon, Piana, and Kelecher (2000) explain, "students of color have less access to advanced classes or programs for gifted students" (p. 2); however, within the forensic community, alumni believe coaches and teams are working "to design positive learning environments that meet the needs of the children they serve" (Noguera, 2012, p.12) through voice, confidence, family/friends, and success.

Pence and Dymond (2015) explain, “participation in extracurricular activities enables students with and without disabilities to pursue individual interests and have fun with friends; however, it also has the potential to increase student learning” (p. 281). With a positive correlation in both satisfaction and influence, in conjuncture with themes of success, confidence, family, and advocacy, many persons with a disability found an interest and an increased student learning environment within forensics. These results support Carter, Swedeen, Moss, and Pesko (2010), “extracurricular clubs, groups, and other activities can provide rich opportunities for students with and without disabilities to practice social skills, explore career and other interests, apply what they are learning in the classroom, meet new classmates, foster personal development, and strengthen everyday life skills” (p. 281).

Persons with a disability articulated the social aspects of forensics and its benefits to them in high school and beyond. Since open-ended results demonstrated some participants struggled in forensics more than other populations, “where discrepancies are identified, educators and administrators should consider whether informational, attitudinal, skill, programmatic, or other barriers to participation might exist in a school” (p. 277) prohibiting the positive post-secondary influences others have voiced regarding their participation.

As Goodrich and Luke (2014) contend, “we are currently at a crossroads in P–12 education related to LGBTQQIA students” (p. 363). Bidell (2014) explains, “LGBT students who are bullied more often due to their sexual orientation or gender identity also have lower grade point averages, are at high risk for dropping out of school, and are

more likely to forgo post-secondary education compared to their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 369); however, the 193 participants who self-identified as LGBTIQ in this survey articulated a sense of belonging and comfort with themes of confidence, skills, family, and identity regarding their forensics experiences. The issues facing LGBTIQ youth are, only in the last few years, beginning to come to light, as researchers begin to ask questions, such as Toomey and Russell’s (2013) inquiry, “is participation in extracurricular activities associated with better health and well-being for sexual minority youth?” (p. 316). The alumni in this survey felt at “home” and in a “safe zone” when addressing their forensic team. These students, unlike previous research reports, found a place to help them succeed.

“Sexist jokes,” “a double standard,” and questions including, “is your skirt long enough? Should you lose the nose ring? How’s your hair? Your shoes?” (Robertson, 2015) are comments often made to Kansas debaters, Ellen Baker and Monica Medeiros. In truth, the FIT respondents in this survey echo the frustrations of Baker and Medeiros. As there was a strong positive correlation with satisfaction, there was a significant difference in influence for FIT participants. The question remains: why? Do the sexist comments, insults, slurs, and sexism still existing in forensics preventing these former competitors from seeing the influence? As satisfaction is high, the answer still remains unknown.

Rogers et al. (2003) offer, “there has been a literal explosion of research in the area of women and minority participation in intercollegiate competitive debate” (p. 2); however, this explosion of research does not transcend into the high school competitive

level. Research into marginalized groups is still needed. Rogers et al. continue, “while many respondents reported sexist or racist attitudes and behaviors that were hurtful, their experiences were not sufficiently negative to motivate them to leave the activity” (p. 23). Responses from this survey echo Rogers et al.’s assertion; however, the claim that “ISM” is a myth (p. 23) in forensics, as the author’s claim as a reason for lower female and minority involvement, is naïve. Researchers must continue to evaluate the sexism and racism within communities that hinder diverse participation.

As students differentiated themselves by event preference, the results from this research maintain there is no significant difference in preferred event categories. Whether students competed primarily in Debate, Public Speaking, or Oral Interpretation events, there was a strong positive correlation in satisfaction and influence on post-secondary life. This research is new to the landscape, as no prior research regarding event preference could be found. Additional research must be conducted to triangulate these findings and further the direct link between events and the experiences they had post high school.

As survey respondents articulated throughout the population, voice, family, confidence, and skills are part of the reasons why participants were satisfied with their experiences and perceived these experiences as an influence in their post-secondary lives. Moreover, continuing to research these interactions and concerns from various populations within forensics is imperative.

Limitations

Accumulating responses from forensic students who have already graduated is a difficult task. With the social media broadcasting by NSDA and NHFS on Facebook, emails, and direct contacts, a large pool of participants was reached for this research. However, as coaches were the initial step in reaching these alumni, several concerns were raised: (1) are coaches only reaching students they perceived as having a positive interaction in forensics, (2) do coaches reach out to diverse students effectively, and (3) are coaching biases prevalent in distribution of survey information?

Coach bias was an issue in distributing the survey. The researcher contacted NSDA district chairs from across the country, asking them to not only send survey information to their own former competitors, but also send requests to the coaches in their district. This was problematic in two districts. First, an NSDA district chair objected to the question regarding sexual orientation on the survey. This coach contacted the researcher addressing his concern that the survey should focus on socioeconomic factors, not sexual identity. Initially, this concern prohibited distribution of the survey in that area of his state; however, other coaches within the area circumvented this chair on their own. Second, another NSDA district chair complained regarding the options of transgender and intersex for gender. This bias prevented data collection from an entire state; however, through other contacts survey distribution occurred. As these are only two examples, it is unknown how many other NSDA district chairs own biases prevented distribution of the alumni survey. NSDA leaders and staff assisted in transmitting survey

information as best they could to local leaders, but the local leadership may have not acted upon survey distribution requests.

Second, coach and alumni schedules are overbooked. Coaches who teach a full schedule each day may not have had the opportunity to contact their alumni or others to participate. Scheduling time to complete the 20-30 minute survey may have also been a mitigating factor in participation turnout. Numerous coaches contacted the researcher after the data collection deadline to enquire about responding, but were not allowed to complete survey once the online survey had officially closed.

Third, as the primary mechanism for recruiting participants was through district chairs and coaches themselves, students who dropped out of forensic programs or only had tangential involvement were likely not contacted. This might indicate why there was such a high satisfaction rating; however, the influence of this factor cannot be determined.

Additionally, the varying parties associated with forensics offer roadblocks to successful data collection. With multiple national and state organizations, some participants may not have been alerted to the survey, or alumni may not have felt they were permitted to participate. Several alumni contacted the researcher directly asking if they met qualifications to respond. All of those requests were granted, as to not limit participant pools.

Finally, socioeconomic factors were not easily attained in the survey. It is difficult, at best, to ask a former competitor to accurately identify their parents/guardian's economic status when they were in high school with total accuracy;

therefore, socioeconomic questions were not included in the survey. Respondents addressed these issues throughout, but the survey did not ask socioeconomic questions of participants.

Future Research

Through the eyes of 1,050 former forensic participants, a great number of opportunities for future research were illuminated. First, coach bias prevented LGBTIQ as well as gender identity to be addressed fully; moreover, opposition from others may have limited the responses from these communities. Second, complicating this concern, one NSDA district chair, who refused to participate, represented a state with multiple schools with a majority of Black students; therefore, additional research should occur to correct this lack of data. Third, more research should occur on how different state, regional, and national organizations, as well as their leadership, aid or disenfranchise student populations.

Further research on how coaches interact with students of diversity should be conducted. Based on narrative responses within the collected data of this survey, further questions surrounding (1) how coaches reach out to disenfranchised students, (2) how these students are retained in the programs, and (3) how students of diversity succeed in the activity become important to ask in relations to diverse student populations' success in post-secondary life.

Additionally, while much of the previous data on diversity in forensics has focused upon the urban cities, more data is needed on the dichotomy of urban versus rural students, especially in regards to diverse student backgrounds. As Jordan,

Kostandini, and Mykerezi (2012) argue, “for years the literature has looked at various issues from a perspective of determining how rural and urban areas are different” (p. 19), yet little research has been done on these factors in relations to forensics.

Intersectionality is an issue facing mixed methods research regarding identity. Collins (2015) argues “definitions of what counts as intersectionality are far from clear” (p. 1), yet offers a guiding assumption of intersectionality as “race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nation, ethnicity, and similar categories of analysis [which] are best understood in relational terms rather than in isolation from one another” (p. 14). More research should be considered in regards to the diverse populations within forensic competition. Moreover, Bright, Malinsky, and Thompson (2016) admit “difficulties have arisen with attempts to study intersectional hypotheses by quantitative means” (p. 61), instead opting for more qualitative research approaches. Considering this critique, evaluation focusing on the narrative aspects of participants should be furthered to examine the pluralistic perspectives of these participants and their lived experiences.

Finally, as researchers have clearly focused on debate (Henson & Dorasil, 2014; Martz & Brushke, 2006; Littlefield, 2001; Zorwick et al., 2009; Stepp & Gardner, 2001; Rogers et al., 2003; and Mezuk, 2009), a stronger focus on the varied events and types of competition must continue. Oral Interpretation and Public Speaking events offer different skills, experiences, and opportunities for high school students. This research articulates a strong positive correlation with satisfaction and post secondary life influence, yet little research has been done prior to collaborate this evidence. More research on these speaking and acting event must be pursued to (1) assist schools

struggling with funding issues, (2) allow schools to offer a multitude of events opportunities, instead of a single debate event (Policy or LD debate) as seen in many programs across the United States, and (3) broaden the discussion of what effects forensic participation has on a student's life after he/she/they graduate.

Conclusions

Recurrent themes from all populations evaluated focused upon the humanistic qualities of forensics: friends, family, and home; however, more correlation of forensics and its positionality in the academic realm must be evaluated. Recurrent themes of skills and success provide argumentation demanding further review by school administrative personnel, state and local curriculum boards, and educational researchers.

Still, there are many questions left unanswered. How does this sense of home provide safety nets for disenfranchised students? How do coaches, who participants in this study repetitively complimented, articulate their skills in the classroom? Does forensics as an extracurricular activity versus academic class make a difference in the learning process? How can teams that struggle for funding in a school system reach out to others for assistance?

The need for further research is daunting. As stated before, little national focus on high school forensics has occurred for a variety of reasons. Moreover, other academic and extracurricular programs within a school vie for the same funds forensic programs do. These are complicated factors that often prohibit programs from thriving. With such positive correlations and response from this study's participants, more research is warranted.

In summary, this survey attempted to ascertain how students of diversity perceived post-secondary success in relationship to their forensic experiences. Second, narrative responses from the participants illuminated several themes throughout the participant pool that accounted for the perceived influences. Third, discussion of event preference and its relevance to perceived influence was addressed. Finally, research obstacles and needs were discussed. Forensics can be an empowering, confidence boosting, and network oriented activity as articulated through the participants of this survey; however, more data is needed to fully actualize the attributes of forensics which make it so powerful in the lives of its competitors.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

The previous articles attempt to articulate three varied perspectives of forensic participation: the coach, the content, and the student. These different views allow for a wide-ranging and dynamic view of the activity. With 434 coaches and 1,050 former students completing the two online surveys, this dataset is one of the largest collected regarding high school forensics.

Additionally, previous literature was limited. These limitations are due to a variety of factors: differing state and national organizations, continual change in curriculum, structural differences of programs from one area to another, time constraints of coaches, and limited financial resources to continue research.

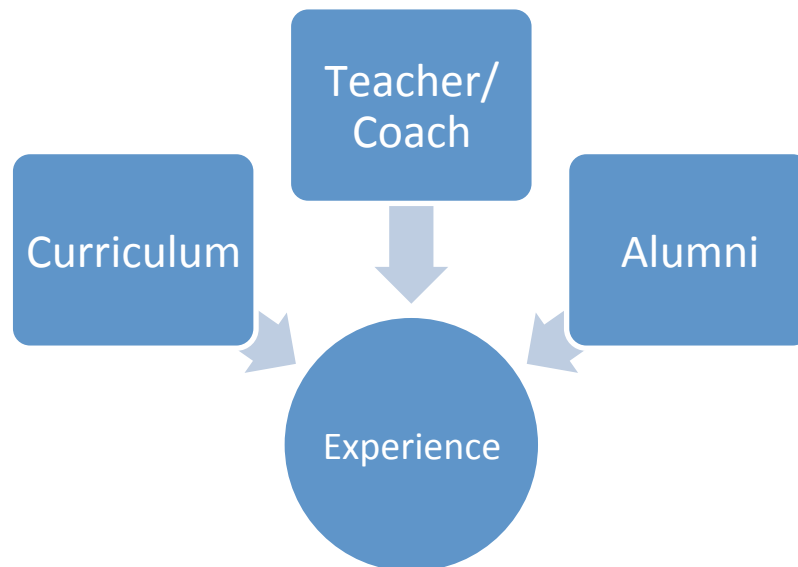
Article 1 articulates the frustrations of teachers who are consistently being forced to teach to a set list of standards for a specific end-of-year exam. While these educators are under the gun to prepare students for tests, in which the educators are often evaluated upon, little time is available for focus on activities outside the testing scope. Article 2 discusses the time limitations of the overworked, overextended, and overloaded coaches who love their job, but often struggle under the financial and time limitations. Article 3 examines the focus of students: learning skills to help them in life post-secondary education. While many of these students go on to coach forensics and/or assist local teams, there is little time for them to give back beyond assisting a single team. All of the

previous three articles address the time limitations of coaches and students in regards to being unable to provide needed research on the field.

Additionally, the preceding articles align with the three event categories within the forensic community. Both Figures 2 and 3 illustrate how each article aligns within the forensic activity. In Figure 2, the three elements of forensics: the teacher/coach, the alumni, and the curriculum all contribute to the experience.

Figure 2

Article Approaches to Forensic Experience

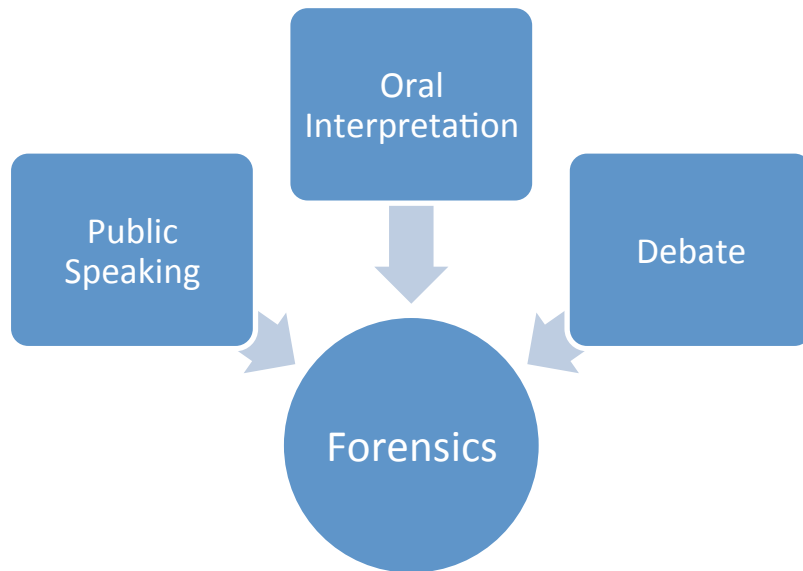


Furthermore, in Figure 3, the event categories of oral interpretation, debate, and public speaking align with the corresponding experiences in Figure 2. Article 1 aligns

curriculum with the public speaking events; utilizing a vehicle (*The Wizard of Oz*) to explain a topic as seen in most speeches. Using a play as literature, Article 2 aligns oral interpretation events with the performance ethnography of teachers. Finally, Article 3 aligns the national alumni survey with debate, utilizing statistics and collected data to make an argument.

Figure 3

Event Category Alignment with Forensics



Through this work, the preceding articles begin to shed light on multiple aspects warranting research. Article 1 provides additional argumentation that speech and debate supports standardized testing, such as Common Core State Standards (Jacobi, 2013;

Peters, 2009; Wallace, 2013; Wexler, 2014). The Scarecrows, Tin Men, and Lions of the student population need additional support systems to aid them in the educational arena. Adding to previous research, this article argues for these support systems for all students, especially those disenfranchised in the system. Article 2 addresses the frustrations of coaches and what motivates them to continue pushing for students and their programs. Through performance ethnography, the themes and concepts of 434 coaches become clear in the words of the play. Article 3 provides a robust dataset illuminating the perceived influences of forensic competition on former competitors. All three articles show the need for additional research.

It is important to understand the interactions of all three aspects of forensics: the coach, the content, and the student. All three pieces of a forensic program are important for this extracurricular activity to thrive. This triangular approach to understanding the activity is significant, for educators can not fully understand the activity only reviewing research on one aspect, to the exclusion of others. For example, an administrator unfamiliar with forensics cannot appreciate the hours and frustrations of a coach, without knowing the difficulty of the content and how they reach students of diverse backgrounds. Likewise, only evaluating what former students articulate about forensics may not give an observer from outside the forensic world full information on why forensics teaches the skills discussed by the survey participants. Finally, the discussion of speech & debate in relation to state and national testing standards is not clear to those outside of the forensics community until evaluation of the coach and lifelong impacts of

forensics are addressed. In truth, all three pieces of the forensic puzzle rely on each other for those outside the activity to comprehend the weight of these activities on students.

Furthermore, these articles are important to the field because the limited scope of educational focus on only core classes results in negative consequences. First, Article 1 examines the fear, lack of emotional connection, and ill preparedness of diverse students in current school models. It is important to provide safe spaces and opportunities within the educational system. This research examines speech & debate as one of those opportunities, which can assist struggling students of color and socioeconomic status. Second, Article 2 assesses the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of overworked educators who continue to lead underfunded and underappreciated programs. Third, Article 3 begins the much-needed review of the perceived impressions of students who grew up with a forensics program at their school.

Based on the findings, I suggest there is a disconnect between forensic programs and the schools they serve. Article 2 and 3 clearly demonstrate the lack of support and understanding of those outside of the program. While other extracurricular activities: theatre, choir, band, and orchestra often showcase their talents in a public venue for others at the school to witness, forensic competitions regularly happen at other schools, in front of audiences of participants from other schools, with judges who already understand the forensic world. As both surveys demonstrated, additional research must focus on how forensic programs build school enthusiasm and buy-in to assist in funding and recruitment of programs. Furthermore, misconceptions of what forensics is, prohibits growth. Coaches and alumni articulated, while many simply call forensic

programs 'debate', there is a nomenclature barrier between those familiar with the terminology and others outside the activity. Future research should question: how do coaches and students successfully explain what exactly forensics is to a perspective student or administrator deciding on funding issues? Additional work needs to be done in this advocacy arena. All three articles articulate various reasons why growth or understanding is not happening, but clearly, the need for self-promotion and effective explanation is needed.

Second, moving forward, future research should focus on the diverse youth served by speech & debate participation. As demographics in the United States continue to diversify, forensics must continue to focus on how argumentation, public speaking, and oral interpretation all allow for diverse youth to find, as Article 3 repetitively demonstrated, a voice in the educational system. This voice, along with motivation and connections with coaches, as addressed in Article 1 and 3, continue to be a strong purpose of forensic participation. Article 1 also provides specific examples of students who utilize their forensic experiences to find success in their high school experiences. However, articulating these needs through published research and data is imperative for the future livelihood and growth of forensic programs.

When I first met Joshua and Lamar in their freshman year of high school, I knew getting them to appreciate their education and work toward success was going to be a difficult road. By the time they reached me in 9th grade, they were both already disillusioned with life, school, and prospects for a successful future. Joshua and Lamar are not alone. A great number of diverse youth enter high school with no plans for their

future, feeling disconnected from the educational system, and frustrated with no idea how to belong. Forensics gave Joshua and Lamar, as well as many others in my years of coaching, the opportunity to compete. Forensics gave them their voice. Forensics gave them a way to be successful.

Extracurricular activities, such as speech & debate, must be pursued in 1) research; 2) content development in relation to core mandated testing concepts and skills taught in speech & debate programs; and 3) mechanisms to promote growth in schools so all students, especially those from diverse backgrounds, are allowed the opportunity to find themselves in the educational milieu.

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