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Speech Communication: a Case to Make Speech a Required Course for Secondary Graduation

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SPEECH COMMUNICATION:
A CASE TO MAKE SPEECH A REQUIRED COURSE FOR SECONDARY
GRADUATION

by

Emily K. Campbell

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

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ABSTRACT

Speech Communication Curriculum: A Case to Make Speech a Required Course for Secondary Graduation

The research project examines how courses in speech communication tend to affect students. The author specifically considers how courses in speech affect student test scores, understanding in other core courses, employability in the work force, preparation for college, and self worth. Prior studies, testimonials, and an informal study from the 2004 National Forensic League National Tournament are used to support the case. The intent of the presentation is to persuade school officials to start, strengthen, or save local forensics programs.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Currently, school district staff and faculty across the country are challenged with the endless task to improve the public school systems. New theories and strategies are introduced each year to address the current issues such as: (a) differentiated instruction, (b) building designs, (c) classroom management, (d) English as a Second Language integration, and (e) teacher motivation. The load of research can be overwhelming. Yet, the task to improve schools is still present, and new strategies continue to develop. In the effort to work through the maze of new research, it is necessary to remember the fundamental basics of what is truly needed in order to develop a successful school and, ultimately, a healthy society. Speech communication is an often overlooked curriculum that, with proper implementation and instruction, could be the solution that many school district administrators are seeking. Typically, the fundamental speech curriculum covers: (a) how to deliver various types of public presentations, (b) voice and diction, (c) performance of literature interpretation (d) argumentation and (e) research. Also, a strong speech curriculum supports extracurricular forensic competition. Problems in regard to Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores, student motivation, college admissions, and postgraduation preparation could be improved upon with the provision of an integrated speech communication curriculum.

Statement of the Problem

Many students graduate from high school without structured training in speech communication. In many states, such as Colorado, a speech course is not required for secondary graduation. Some Colorado schools do require speech, while others do not even offer it as an elective. Many educators acknowledge that participation in speech courses improves students' academic performance; however, there are additional reasons that support the presence of a speech curriculum. The outcome falls under two main headings: the benefit to the individual and the benefit to society. This author makes two assertions: (a) at schools where speech curriculum is provided, it is more likely that the Colorado state standards are addressed, thereby students are better prepared for CSAP testing. The CSAP test is a highly debated topic; whether one agrees with its purpose or not, the fact is that CSAP is in place, and schools and teachers are evaluated on their students' scores. The author believes that CSAP scores would improve with the addition of an integrated speech curriculum because students would have more access to the state standards; (b) students who participate in speech and debate are more likely to improve critical thinking skills and therefore will be more prepared for CSAP testing and analysis of real life issues and academic pursuits in and after high school; and (c) at schools where speech curriculum is provided, students are better trained in the State Standards of civics and are more likely to be better participants in the democratic society. Preparing students to have confidence in public speaking, and to participate in efficient, analytical dialogue will develop them into

stronger contributors to society. In order to fully address the Colorado state standards, improve performance on the CSAP, and prepare students for college, the workplace, and participation in the community, speech curriculum should be a requirement in Colorado secondary schools.

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project will be to develop a Powerpoint and a written speech to be given in a presentation. The presentation will attempt to persuade school board members and administrators to require speech as a mandatory requirement for graduation. Oral communication is the most basic form of communication known to humankind. Yet, many adults are either afraid to speak to groups or do not understand how to participate in a logical argument or discussion. It will be shown that the integration of speech communication into secondary curriculum will not only improve the critical thinking and CSAP scores of students, but also is likely to increase public participation in the democratic process and overall contributions made by students to the community.

Definition of Terms

The following list of words and phrases are terms that will be used throughout the proposal and in Chapter 3:

Communication: The field of communication is focused on how people use messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and

media. The effective and ethical practice of human communication is promoted in this field (National Association of Communication, 2005).

Critical Thinker: “one who is able and disposed to engage in principled reason assessment. Such a person habitually seeks evidence and reasons, and is predisposed so to seek-- and to base belief and action on the results of such seeking. She applies the skills and abilities of the reason assessment in all appropriate contexts, including those contexts in which her own beliefs and actions are challenged (Ibin, 1994, as quoted in Johnson, 1995, p. 3).

CSAP: Colorado Student Assessment Program (Colorado Department of Education, 2005).

National Forensic League: The National Forensic League is a leading honor society and educational resource for teachers, students, administrators, and parents in the field of speech and debate education. There are 2,700 member schools and 90,000 active student members (National Forensic League, 2006).

Urban Debate Leagues (UDL): “The leagues organize interscholastic debate as an academic competition, and promote debate as a component of the regular classroom curriculum, so that urban youth who have for so long been denied the powerful academic benefits of debate can be offered this valuable learning tool. UDLs thus aim to eliminate a particular form of educational and social inequality” (Urban Debate League, 2006).

Watson-Glaser Test for Critical Thinking: A multiple choice test, this assessment tool is geared toward high school and college students. It includes “sections on induction, assumption identification, judging whether a conclusion follows beyond a reasonable doubt, and argument evaluation” (Ennis, 1993, as quoted in Huffman, Carson, & Simons, 2000, p. 71).

Chapter Summary

Secondary school staff can better meet the goals of their districts and better prepare students for college, the workplace, and participation in democracy by employing a speech communication curriculum. Also, it is this researcher’s position that teachers not endorsed in speech need support in order to implement speech fundamentals into the interdisciplinary classroom. The purpose of this project will be to develop the rationale for speech education in secondary schools. In Chapter 2, this author will provide a review of literature for the implementation of the project. In Chapter 3, the details will be provided in regard to the target audience, goals it will achieve, and how the project will be presented.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this project will be to develop a presentation that can be used to persuade school board members and school administrators to require that all students take a speech class in order to graduate from high school. In relation to other academic subjects, few studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of speech communication curriculum in the attainment of student achievement, even though participation in speech accomplishes many of the Colorado State Standards. However, the specific studies that have been conducted indicate that participation in forensics, speech and debate, increases student academic achievement (Achieve, 2005; Brembeck 1949; Collier, 2004; Dietrich, 1949; Johnson, 1995; Kempe, 2003; Luong, 2000; Ruenzell, 2002). Two ways that achievement is obtained are through the development of the student's creative process in problem solving and the evaluation of as well as the development of critical thinking skills. These two features lead to more analytical and curious individuals. School district staff benefit from student achievement in many ways, but one key benefit is increased funding from improved Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) results. Societies, too, are affected by improved student academic achievement in terms of how students participate in the democratic community. Of course, individuals benefit from their own achievement in terms of: (a) confidence, (b) self-worth, and (c) enhanced intellectual capabilities. In this review of literature, the author will provide evidence to support these claims of student achievement

and demonstrate that, generally, students' critical thinking skills improve from participation in speech argumentation courses. Furthermore, in regard to the Colorado State Standards, many standards include learning how to be a critical thinker, learning the democratic process, and learning strong oral skills. While a link between democracy and speech might not seem readily apparent, research indicates that student participation in speech curriculum helps to achieve the skills necessary to be a strong participant in democracy (Beebe, Kharcheva, & Kharcheva, 1998; Gildea, 2005). These studies provide a rich background from which to begin analyzing the importance of speech curriculum in secondary schools.

Historical Background of Speech Communication

While speech communication theory can be traced to Greece, the discipline as a curriculum originated in the United States (Cohen, 1994, as cited in Beebe et al., 1998). Interestingly, the roots of democracy originated in Greece as well. Both speech communication and democracy are ideals that have been refined in the U.S. and are tools necessary to support each other.

The renaissance of U.S. speech curriculum began in the early 1900s (National Forensic League, 2006). In 1924, Carter, the head of the English Department at Albany, NY, Ray Cecil Carter, asked Pi Kappa Delta, "a national honorary forensic organization for intercollegiate debaters, competitive individual speakers, non-classroom audience speakers and instructors teaching courses in oral communication" (p.1), if a debate association existed (Pi Kappa Delta, 2006) The response that Mr. Carter received was, "As far as we know there is at present no organization for high school debaters. . . we would be willing to go to considerable effort to sponsor such an enterprise" (p. 2). Less than 1 year later, the

National Forensic League was formed. In colleges and universities, there was a rapid rise in speech curriculum offerings and summer forensic institutes. The first forensic summer camp was held at the University of Denver in 1935 (Gildea, 2005). The camp staff offered courses such as: (a) Techniques of Public Discussion, (b) Voice and Diction, (c) Techniques of Acting, (d) Radio Drama, and (e) Direction of Plays. Shortly after the initiation of the first speech camp, the importance of speech communication grew. In 1939, Senator Mundt, who was also the President of the National Forensic League, explained the importance of speech in order to fight oppression and uphold democracy during the Second World War. He said,

Speech is a dangerous art in the equipment of bad men, but it is a peacemaking, soul saving, many building art in the equipment of public spirited citizens in sanely governed countries. And it can even change the insanity of Communism, Nazi-ism, or Fascism into the orderly processes of self government once its advantages are widely enough and ably enough practiced by sufficient people. . . . Speech is a peacemaker when properly exercised. You as a student or a teacher of speech can become a peace-maker through the exercise of your special art and thus preserve the peace and democracy of America at this critical state in world's history. (p. 45)

In addition to the promotion of democracy, many scholars realized the impact of speech training on critical thinking skills. Brembeck (1949) reported that teachers of argument long have claimed that their course fosters critical thinking, yet there was little experimental evidence to support the statement. Since little research had been conducted on this theory, a series of researchers during the 1940s (Webank, 1947; Howell, 1942; Watson, Goodwin, & Glaser, 1939; all cited in Brembeck), including Brembeck, conducted studies to measure the effects of debate courses on the critical thinking abilities of secondary and university students. The purpose of the Brembeck study was to determine

the effect of argumentation classes during one college semester on college students' critical thinking performances.

To assess the effectiveness of the argumentation classes on critical thinking, Brembeck (1949) used a revised version of the Watson-Glaser Tests of Critical Thinking with 202 students from 11 universities of various sizes and types (Watson & Glaser, 1939, as cited in Brembeck). The students were tested before and after the argumentation classes. The tests were used to evaluate: (a) logical reasoning, (b) inference ability, (c) discrimination of arguments, and (d) proof in argumentation validation. "Together the four tests used in this experiment test those mental processes attributed to critical thinking" (p. 178).

Brembeck (1949) concluded that the total data collected from the four Watson-Glaser tests (Watson & Glaser, 1939, as cited in Brembeck) indicated an increase in critical thinking ability over the one semester argumentation courses. Students in both the experimental and control groups showed an increase in critical thinking with the biggest gain being able to identify proof of argument and the second largest gain in logic or drawing conclusions. Brembeck indicated that students with prior debate experience scored higher than students without debate experience on the pretest.

Overall, the Brembeck (1949) results are important because they suggest that enrollment in argumentation courses improves critical thinking. Brembeck concluded that students with prior debating experience scored higher on the pretests but did not show significant improvement on the posttests. He raised the question of whether superior

students benefitted from argumentation courses and suggested that, perhaps, enrollment in a basic level argumentation course did not improve overall critical thinking abilities for students with prior debating experience because they were not challenged. This argument was supported by Collier (2004), discussed later in the Review of Literature.

After the Brembeck (1949) studies, the idea of democratic spirit in speech continued to forge ahead. In 1974, Kanellis (as cited in Gildea, 2005) wrote an article for *The Rostrum* about the philosophy of debate. He stated that debate teachers should be democratic instead of authoritarian in their approach to teaching debate. “Democracy implies tentative knowledge in a world of change. Authoritarianism implies absolute unchanging dogmas, methods, and answers to questions” (p. 6). Kanellis went on to note that, if debate coaches were unwilling to adopt this creed, then they should not oversee this important extracurricular activity.

Today, participants in the National Forensic League (2006) have many opportunities to question the policies and values of government and to continue to develop tools that promote democracy and develop critical thinking. For example, students use the aforementioned skills in an event called Student Congress which is modeled after the U.S. Congress (National Forensic League, 2006). First, students research different foreign and domestic issues. They choose an issue that is interesting to them and write either a resolution or a bill to provide a solution to address the problem. Then students meet in a chamber of either a House of Representatives or a Senate and spend usually a full Saturday, with the use of Parliamentary Procedure, to debate such issues as whether the United States should send

military aid to fight the genocide in Darfur and whether the government should regulate prescription drug companies to make medicines more affordable.

Another event that requires higher level thinking and knowledge of democracy is the Lincoln Douglas Debate (National Forensic League, 2006). In this event, students discourse on a more philosophical level. They argue about values in relation to a topic and use: (a) current and historical examples, (b) philosophy, (c) logic, and (d) persuasive speaking. Again, the topics are not limited to, but usually revolve around, life in a democracy and what should be done. In 2006, students debated topics that included eminent domain and judicial activism. In Policy Debate, two person teams develop evidence based cases on one topic per year and argue the best policy to resolve the issue. The ideas that stem from these debates have become so valuable that the winners of the National Tournament in 2005 were invited to speak on ocean policy to the U.S. Congress.

As of 2006, every state has members in the National Forensic League, and over 93,000 students and 3,500 teachers participate (National Forensic League, 2006). The League has a prestigious alumni list that includes: (a) President Lyndon Johnson, (b) Vice President Hubert Humphrey, (c) Senators Richard Lugar and William Frist, (d) media businessman Ted Turner, (e) Academy Award winners Patricia Neal and Don Ameche, (f) Emmy award winners Kelsey Grammar and Shelly Long, (g) television host Oprah Winfrey, (h) news anchor Jane Pauley, (i) CSPAN founder Brian Lamb, (j) Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer, (k) University President David Boren, and (l) Federal National Mortgage CEO Franklin Delano Raines.

Speech Communication Promotes Democracy

In the past 100 years, the use of speech communication curriculum has spread throughout the world (Beebe et al., 1998). It has been argued outside of the National Forensic League that the use of speech communication facilitates a democratic society (Berry, 1961, as cited in Beebe et al.). With the fall of the Iron Curtain and the emergence of democracy in Russia and the surrounding independent nations, Beebe et al. found that the purpose of speech curricula during Communist reign was limited to training an elite group of the party in persuasive speaking to promote Communist ideology. Therefore, the purpose of the Beebe et al. study was to identify the current status of forensic instruction in post cold war Russia and to provide suggestions to build communication studies curriculum in Russia. Beebe et. al. found that 47% of the instructors believed that the best way to introduce speech communication was to *require* one communication class through an existing department as part of the university curriculum.

Beebe et al. (1998) conducted their research because “with the raising of the iron curtain and a resurgent democratic political climate in former communist countries, there has been increased interest in economic, cultural, and educational exchanges between the West and Russia” (p. 261). They attempted to provide short and long range ideas to build a speech communication foundation for Russian higher education. Establishment of this foundation might bridge communication between Russia and the U.S. and assist Russia in the development of its democracy.

The findings and recommendations from the Beebe et al, (1998) study are important because they demonstrate the effects of the absence of speech communication curriculum in an emerging democratic nation. Also, the findings indicated that the participant professors considered that there was a direct correlation between an individual's ability to gain and maintain employment and participation in a speech communication course. The study was the first of its kind to be conducted in Russia, and it serves not only as an insight into the perceptions of Russian educators, but also as a possible guideline for the introduction of speech curriculum.

Graduation Gaps

Fine (2001), reported that, at most secondary schools and universities there is an emphasis on writing and thinking. Speech is perceived as a secondary field. Horner (2002, as cited in Kempe, 2003), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England stated, "teachers may focus on vocabulary but that is not all we need to know if we are trying to encourage children to be clear, expressive and fluent" (p. 69). While the U.S. is a leader in the provision of speech curriculum, data show that U.S. employers, professors, and students all express a need for more speech communication training including, oral communication, critical thinking development and research skills (Achieve, 2005).

In a study conducted by Achieve Inc. (2005), the researchers interviewed 1,487 public high school graduates from the classes of 2002, 2003, and 2004. The sample included about one-third African American, one-third Hispanic American and one-third of students who had taken at least one remedial course in high school. Of the students, 87% were currently in college while the remaining 626 either had dropped out of college or never

attended. A second interview was conducted with 400 employers who do the actual hiring, and a third interview was conducted with 300 college instructors who teach first year undergraduate courses. The purpose of the study was to evaluate, from recent high school graduates, employers, and professors, what skills students lacked in order to be successful in life after high school. Of all the skills reported by high school graduates, oral communication was reported as the greatest gap in what was expected of them post high school. Of the college students, 45% reported oral communication as a gap and 46% of the noncollege students report oral communication as a gap in their high school training in relation to job skills. In addition, 40% of the college students and 45% of the noncollege individuals reported a gap in their ability to conduct research.

In the employer interview conducted by Achieve (2005), 42% of the employers reported they were dissatisfied with their employees' ability to think analytically, and 34% of employers were dissatisfied with their employees' oral communication skills. The harshest critics of public high schools proved to be college professors: (a) 65% of the college instructors believed that students were not prepared for their first year of college, (b) 66% of the instructors were dissatisfied with the students' ability to think analytically, and (c) 59% were dissatisfied with their students' ability to conduct research. Ironically, 65% of the college students and 77% of the noncollege individuals wished that they had been challenged more in high school, and they wished they had taken more classes to better prepare them for life after high school. Furthermore, if the high school standards were higher, 82% of the college students and 80% of the noncollege students reported that they would have worked

harder. They reported that they should have higher requirements. The findings from this study, in particular, support the requirement of speech curriculum in high school.

Decreasing Gaps in Skills

Many believe that speech curriculum should be valued more in education (Dietrich 1940; Dietrich, 1940; Ruenzel, 2002; Kempe, 2003; Collier, 2004). Kempe argued that the use of speech through such means as drama increases one's ability to prosper in life, and she contended that extracurricular drama students tend to perform scholastically superior to those not involved in dramatics. Kempe used the term, *social capital*, to illustrate her point. Social capital is a term created by British educationalist, Hargreaves (2001, as cited in Kempe), that indicates the amount of social power one has in his or her environment. Social capital is defined as the trust between two individuals that affects the reciprocity and collaboration in the relationship. The use of social capital defines the type of environment one creates and nourishes. When people trust their peers, they are more likely to share knowledge, or *intellectual capital*, and this leads to the free exchange of ideas. Simply put, the more social capital one has, the more likely the individual will live in a productive environment. Robinson (2001, as cited in Kempe) argued that creativity has been devalued in education, yet creativity is necessary to obtain knowledge. "Creative insights often occur by making connections between ideas or experiences that were previously unconnected. Just as intelligence in a single mind is interactive, creativity is often interdisciplinary" (p. 67). Social capital leads to creatively inspired, self-fulfilled individuals who will be better equipped to work collaboratively and ultimately make a contribution to the development of the economy.

Drama is a creative outlet to explore methods to project a message (Kempe, 2003).

Through courses in speech and drama, students learn about how the body communicates. Students should study live discourse and identify the numerous modalities by which people create multiple messages. Kempe acknowledged that being an effective communicator is more than simply choosing the best words. Also, one must be aware of visual and oral signs that can communicate messages as well, sometimes unbeknown to the speaker. For example, a common speaking error is to use filler words such as “um” when a speaker tries to gather thoughts or formulate a conclusion. Often, the speaker is not aware of using the filler, as the audience, patiently or not, waits for the speaker to get to the point. The content of the speaker’s message and the discourse markers used can leave a conflicting message with the audience. In speech education, it is necessary for students to become aware of the grammatical features of spoken and physical language. In doing so, students can then make choices about what tools they wish to use to best communicate to a specific audience. Students learn how language can affect them; how it can be used against them; and how it can support them. The idea is not to manipulate others but rather to “decode the intentions of others” (p. 77). It is through this awareness of speaking and listening that students are empowered to gain social capital.

Bourdieu (1990, as cited in Kempe, 2003) argued that without proper training in speech, people are essentially disregarded because they do not know how to communicate in the fluency most influential to the particular environment. As a result, often, people are silenced. The ideas that do not enter the public discourse potentially hurt society and the economy. An example of this idea was illustrated in the study by Beebe et al. (1998). The

researchers explained that the role of communism and the stifling of free academic thought constrained the former Soviet individual's ability to speak freely and to take courses in speech communication. Also, educators were restricted to a communist dictated curriculum that was based on the ideals of Marxist and Stalinist philosophy. It was only with the fall of communism in the early 1990s that Russian educators were exposed to Western democratic ideals and the curriculum that supported these ideals. Today, in Russia, there is a boom of upper middle class citizens and an increase in its standard of living since the introduction of capitalism and the provision of freedom of speech. This study is an example of how speech communication curriculum prepares students for participation in democracy by preparing them for the work force and ultimately students are taught to think logically and critically about issues that face society. Students can learn to use their voice to activate change.

Argumentation Improves Critical Thinking

In addition to gaps in oral communication, the Achieve Inc. (2005) study showed that postsecondary graduates had notable gaps in critical thinking and research skills. Lessons taught in argumentation tend to positively affect critical thinking. The definition of critical thinking is varied. For the purpose of this paper, critical thinking was explained by McPeck (1981, as cited in Huffman, Carson, & Simonds, 2000) that "skepticism is crucial to critical thinking, and that truth is established through evaluating 'alternative hypothesis and possibilities' by learning how and when to question" (p. 62). A key point to McPeck's definition is that one must have knowledge and experience in a certain field in order to think critically about it. Students, who participate in argumentation, must educate themselves on the topic of the debate, typically through research, before they can truly think critically about

the topic. Student debate topics range from philosophical and value based to pragmatic and policy based. Some topics taken from the 2004/2005 National Forensic League season include,

Value Based Topics:

- a) Resolved: The pursuit of scientific knowledge ought to be constrained by concern for societal good.
- b) Resolved: To better protect civil liberties, community standards ought to take precedence over conflicting national standards.

Policy Based Topics:

- c) Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy substantially increasing its support of United Nations peacekeeping operations.
- d) Resolved: That, when a choice is required for public high schools in the United States, government funding should prioritize vocational education over college preparatory education.

Once knowledge is gained on a certain topic, then the student can begin to formulate questions, and thus, truly initiate the learning process. Huffman et al. (2000) used Bloom's (1984, as cited in Huffman et al.) *Cognitive Domain of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* to explain that higher level thinking begins with an understanding of the fundamentals through knowledge based questioning and then progresses in higher thinking steps to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Ennis (1987, as cited in Huffman et al.) linked the top three steps, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, to critical thinking. A well structured debate requires that students maintain higher level thinking as they continuously explore, compound, extrapolate, and judge the case.

Further, Ennis (1993, as cited in, Huffman et al., 2000) supported the claim that

argumentation develops critical thinking. Ennis identified ten independent critical thinking behaviors that could be identified in an argumentation course, including:

1. Judge the credibility of sources.
2. Identify conclusions, reasons, and assumptions.
3. Judge the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions and evidence.
4. Develop and defend a position on an issue.
5. Ask appropriate clarifying questions.
6. Plan experiments and judge experimental design.
7. Define terms in a way appropriate for the context.
8. Be open minded.
9. Try to be well informed.
10. Draw conclusions when warranted, but with caution. (p. 68)

In argumentation courses all modalities of communication are addressed as students are expected to read critically, write, speak and listen. Paul (1995, as cited in Huffman et al., 2000) referred to these communication modalities: “each of them is a large-scaled mode of thinking which is successful to the extent that it is informed, disciplined, and guided by critical thought and reflection (p. 110).”

Also, Paul (1995, as cited in Huffman et al., 2000) addressed the relation between higher level thinking and critical thinking. He believes that students must be able to find relevance in their learning and that the critical thinking skills they learn in school should be relevant to daily life. See (1996, as cited in Huffman et al.) stated that, “critical thinking is presented to students as the process of evaluating what they see and hear, then judging what those ideas mean to them” (p. 68). See claimed that students are more apt to learn and participate when they see why the subject matter is relevant to their lives. Through the use of research, case preparation, and debate, students apply critical thinking to analyze issues that affect their daily lives.

Now that the parameters of critical thinking, within an argumentation course, have been established, it is necessary to consider how to assess critical thinking. Huffman et al. (2000) selected 6 objectives from Paul's (1995, as cited in Huffman et al.) 21 objectives for the assessment of critical thinking. These objectives can be used for the assessment of an argumentation course.

1. It should assess students' skills and abilities in analyzing, synthesizing, applying, and evaluating information.
2. It should make clear the inter-connectedness of our knowledge and abilities, and why expertise in one area cannot be divorced either from findings in other areas or from a sensitivity to the need for interdisciplinary integration.
3. It should account for the integration of communication skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking, and it should assess all of them without compromising essential features of any of them.
4. It should test for thinking that is empowering and that, when incorporated into instruction, promotes the active involvement of students in their own learning process.
5. It should be of a kind that will assess valuable skills applied to genuine problems as seen by a large body of the populace, both inside and outside of the educational community.
6. It should contain items that, as much as possible, are examples of the real-life problems and issues that people will have to think out and act upon. (p. 70)

Huffman et al. (2000) developed an assignment to assess critical thinking in a speech communication course. The students were assessed by how their communication skills changed over the semester. The students were required to use critical thinking by the use of artifacts and a synthesis paper to justify their claims. The data were collected from 51 students who participated in one of three communication sections at a Midwestern university. The focus of the communication course was on public speaking, interpersonal communication, and small group communication.

Throughout the semester, students kept a portfolio of various forms of

communication such as a cartoon, an advertisement, or a conversation. With use of the critical thinking criteria outline by Paul (1995, as cited in Huffman et al., 2000), the students then evaluated the communication mode. For example, students addressed the credibility of the source or the bias of the author. At the end of the semester, each student wrote a synthesis paper to reflect on the communication areas they felt that they had most improved. The students identified a total of 21 communication categories. The results indicated that students felt they most improved their communication abilities in: (a) persuasion, (b) logic, (c) the communication process, (d) audience analysis, and (e) ethical communication. Huffman et al. believed that the artifact assignment improved critical thinking because students: (a) related skills learned in class with the outside world and (b) wrote about their lived experiences with the use of critical thinking application. “This evidence supports See (1996), Ennis (1987), and Lee’s (1997) feelings that the transfer of critical thinking skills to other academic areas and to real life experiences is an important way to teach critical thinking” (p. 91).

Speech Communication Improves Student Achievement

In a study conducted by Collier (2004), the findings indicated that extracurricular and cocurricular debate participation in “high-risk urban schools improves student performance at statistically significant levels on reading tests, diminishes high risk behaviors and increases students’ desire to attend college” (p. 6). While Collier’s study was conducted within urban, high risk secondary schools, in many ways, the findings can be applied to secondary students regardless of background. While there are notably greater types of challenges in regard to at risk behavior and drop out rates in urban high schools, most educators would argue that

every high school in the U.S. has these issues to some extent. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider Collier's results in a more generalized analysis of how debate affects high school students across the country.

Collier (2004) asserted that participation in debate: (a) improves reading scores, (b) improves self-esteem and positive decision making, and (c) improves academic success and attitude toward higher education. To support these claims, Collier conducted a study in five urban areas including: Chicago, Kansas City, New York City, St. Louis and Seattle. In each city, 50 nondebaters and 50 debaters from the same school participated in the study. A control group of honors and nonhonors students were included in the study. Students were preassessed in the Fall and postassessed in the Spring to measure changes in: (a) reading ability, (b) self-esteem, (c) risk taking, (d) GPA, and (e) school interest.

“A significant attempt was made to control for the self-selection factor (that debaters are already the bright, motivated students and thus will do better on the testing) by demographic data collected on the survey, and by measuring the difference of the difference.” (p. 22)

The final sample included 421 students: 212 not in debate, 209 in debate. The results strongly supported the use of debate (Collier, 2004). In the first analysis on reading, the highest reading scores in order from highest to lowest scores were: (a) Debaters (b) Honors students (c) Non Debaters and (d) Non Honors. After the postassessment in the Spring, the debaters' reading scores increased the most from the preassessment. The debate group reading scores increased 25% more than the nondebater control group and 18% more than honors students. “Academic debate demands reading to succeed. At some level its intrinsically competitive nature motivates students with little pre-existing interest in research or education to research, read and test ideas because they want to win” (p. 26).

Debaters must be daily readers on current events in order to maintain the best argument for and against the topic (Warner & Brusckhe, 2000, as cited in Collier). Without updated research, debaters' arguments will become flawed, and thus compromise their ability to win in competition.

In the second analysis on self-esteem, the debaters had the highest score among the test groups and maintained that score for the postassessment (Collier, 2004). It should be noted, however, that all test groups indicated an overall low score in self-esteem. Linden and Venables (1983, as cited in Collier, 2004) wrote, "That suggests debates influence trumps external control issues which correlate in African American and Latino/Hispanic youth with feelings of struggle and conflict plus general feelings that hard work doesn't create a positive result" (p. 27). Furthermore, Collier explained that self-esteem and student achievement are an overlapping and interconnected paradigm. "Children who perform well are less likely to use drugs, act out behaviorally, or become teen parents (Cohen & Rice, 1997; Kasen, Cohen and Brook, 1998; Weiss and Schwarz, 1996; Smith E., Atkins J., & Connell C., 2003)" (p. 27).

In the third analysis, the GPAs of debaters increased more than the GPAs of nondebaters (Collier, 2004). One startling result from the study showed that debater interest in school actually dropped. Collier speculated that, by Spring, debaters had gained so much knowledge and critical thinking capacity that typical classes were no longer challenging to them, and therefore, they should be offered more engaging studies. The debaters, however, were on par with their honors peers in college interest.

Collier's (2004) findings were important on many levels, but perhaps her greatest

contribution was that she provided quantitative evidence to support what most educators already know. Participation in debate requires research and critical analysis, which in turn, improves academic performance. Collier even proposed that academic debate should become part of an educational reform movement in the urban cities.

Today's middle and elementary school students are expected to become more sophisticated readers, learning advanced concepts and reasoning so they can understand and use texts well enough to prepare for high school and then adult work or college. Additional debate research could lead to engaging even younger and lower-performing students through competition and easing them into being better students and test takers as a result. To do that it is important to do more than debunk the myth of self selection and couple that work with assessment efforts dedicated to identify what curricular and OST (Open Society Institute) debate strategies produce the most positive results. By hitting those two target areas, debates best practices can be validated, refined and moved into other classrooms so all children can have access to this life-shaping activity. (p. 29)

Collier (2004) demonstrated the value of curricular and extracurricular forensic participation on students' academic achievement. Luong (2000) analyzed the positive effects of extracurricular speech and debate participation on college admissions. Luong (2000) cited a *Wall Street Journal* report in which a consistent trend was identified that,

Dedicated participation in drama and debate has significantly increased the success rate of college applicants at all schools which track such data. State and national award winners have a 22% to 30% higher acceptance rate at top tier colleges and being captain of the debate team improved an applicant's chances by more than 60% compared with the rest of the pool. Even without winning major awards, participation in speech and debate develops valuable skills that colleges are seeking out and that is reflected in the above average acceptance rate (4%). (p. 2)

Another current researcher studied the effects of extracurricular forensics; Hier (1997) suggested that participation in extracurricular forensics promotes students' time on task better than any other extracurricular program because it extends class time beyond the standard requirement. Participation in after school classes, summer camps, and weekend

tournaments facilitate learning, and thus, expand the frontier zone of time on task. Hier advocated that the use of extracurricular forensics is the ideal tool to further education.

While many students spend all year participating in forensic activity, including summer speech and debate camps, not all students and school districts can afford this option. The Urban Debate League (UDL; 2006) was founded in 1997 by the Open Society Institute, which has granted 9.3 million dollars in seed money. One of the primary missions of the UDL is to promote equal access and opportunity to participate in debate, the target student population being low income urban students. Also, the UDL members work to: (a) use debate as a mechanism for urban education improvement, (b) to institutionalize competitive academic debate programs, and (c) to support and professionalize urban high school teachers. Wade (2002, as stated in Ruenzel 2002) who created UDL said,

“We have all kinds of students participating in debate, but some of the best are kids I lovingly call “thugs.” These are kids who won't participate in a system that is oppressing them—they know they're being screwed. So they disrupt class, get kicked out, etcetera. But in debate, you enfranchise kids. Instead of being bad, they walk around saying: “Wow, I just beat Elite Academy. Look at me!” (p. 25)

In regard to college admissions, 40 U.S. colleges actively seek debaters from the UDL (Ruenzel, 2002). The students earn scholarships in return for competing on the college debate teams. Universities, in general, look for speech and debate competition on the high school resume because it tends to indicate solid academic achievement and grounding in logical analysis. A teacher from the UDL said that, before his debaters joined the team, they were at least C students, but after joining debate, many had improved their academic performance. Generally, they have grade point averages in the B range, and some are straight A students. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of extracurricular

forensics is that students become more interested in world affairs and develop an informed opinion about their place in it. “Debate has helped my kids find their voices. And now, in a society that has pretty much ignored them, they will have a greatly improved ability to make themselves heard” (p. 32).

Current Issues

Several possible issues should be considered when requiring speech communication curriculum for secondary graduation. Based on the author’s observations, one of the basic challenges of education is funding. Therefore, when proposing change that involves additional classroom space, staffing and textbooks, one must address how the program would be viable under the each district’s funding situation. One creative solution to funding would be to allocate some money from at risk and alternative education budgets to support a speech class. At risk and minority students show signs of improvement through debate curriculum and competition. Another creative option is to have an endorsed speech communication teacher on staff to work with teachers on ways to integrate speech communication activities in order to accomplish the required speech training. The speech teacher would not have a classroom per se, but rather would float to classrooms to teach speech instruction as it pertains to what the classroom teacher is trying to accomplish. For example, the speech teacher could develop a standard speech presentation lesson and rubric that all teachers could use whether in English or health class. Or, perhaps a science teacher would like to hold a debate on genetic cloning. The speech teacher could make a guest teaching appearance to instruct students on the proper format of debate and to reinforce how to gather scholarly research. Another use for an on-site speech teacher is to assist

students who wish to make a public presentation such, as the Valedictorian graduation speech or the student body President's address to the school. The options are numerous and equally important in bringing the necessity of articulation and clear thinking to the school environment.

Another observation of the author is the justification to incorporate another program to a school that is trying to reduce its course offerings. However, a required speech course would actually help schools reduce elective course offerings; the elective options would be minimized as students would have one less elective available because of the mandatory speech class. Yet another issue to consider are the requirements a district mandates for graduation. How will adding another requirement affect a student's ability to graduate on the time line determined by the student and his counselor? During the early implementation of the speech requirement, some students may be challenged to find room in their schedule to accommodate the new requirement. Therefore, a phase-in plan may need to be implemented. Speech and debate courses normally fall under the English category and in Colorado, they are considered English classes that may be counted towards graduation.

Chapter Summary

Previous research (Achieve, 2005; Brembeck, 1998; Collier, 2004; Dietrich, 1940; Fine, 2001; Hier, 1997; Huffman, Carson & Simonds, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Kempe, 2003; Luong, 2000; Ruenzell, 2002) on the effectiveness of speech communication in academic settings provides a compelling position for requiring its study in high school. Research (Achieve, 2005; Brembeck, 1998; Collier, 2004; Dietrich, 1940; Fine, 2001; Hier, 1997;

Huffman, Carson & Simonds, 2000; Johnson, 1995; Kempe, 2003; Luong, 2000; Ruenzell, 2002) shows that courses in speech and argumentation overall improve academic achievement by increasing critical thinking, self esteem, reading ability, creativity and overall extending the students' time on task in the classroom (Achieve, 2005; Brembeck, 1949; Collier, 2004; Dietrich, 1940; Hier, 1997; Johnson, 1995; Kempe, 2003; Ruenzel, 2002). Research (Beebe, et al., 1998; Luong, 2000) also shows that participation in forensics better prepares students for life after high school by increasing their ability to get into a top tier university, and that courses in speech communication ultimately help to build the foundation for participation in a democracy. Emerging democracies around the world are adding speech to their academic organizations, thereby valuing its contribution to meeting educational and societal goals. The U.S. should consider its role in the movement of valuing speech communication.

The purpose of this research project is to design a presentation that forensic instructors can use to appeal to their school boards for a mandatory speech communication class for graduation. In Chapter 3, the author will discuss how the presentation will be developed and how and to whom the presentation should be given.

Chapter 3

METHOD

The purpose of this research project was to develop a presentation to persuade members of Summit School District to first offer a speech class at the high school and ultimately, to require speech as a mandatory course for graduation at Summit High School. To achieve this goal, the author utilized research conducted by scholars that validate the importance of speech curriculum in the secondary classroom.

Target Population

The research project was designed to appeal to the members of the Summit School Board in Colorado. However, the project is intended to be available to any educator who wishes to start or strengthen their speech program. Ultimately, the presentation could be given to the staff of the Colorado Department of Education and the State Board of Education. This author provides information for teachers, speech coaches, parents, and students who are interested in having speech curriculum available at their respective high schools. Select community members, especially those involved in politics, theater, and activism, members of the National Forensic League and school administrators in other states are other possible target audience members.

Procedures

The author gathered research from prior studies. With these data, the author drew

a correlation between speech curriculum and academic success. The author researched other studies that have demonstrated whether speech is a legitimate curriculum to be advocated in secondary schools. The author looked for how speech could affect critical thinking, test scores, and overall student growth.

Goals of the Applied Project

The immediate goal of the project was to earn a speech class to be offered at Summit High School. The ultimate goal was to make speech curriculum a mandatory component of high school graduation at Summit High School. By achieving these goals, the author believes that students will be better prepared for college, the workforce and community involvement. Armed with strong communication skills, students will be better prepared to deal with every day conflict and to use their voice to activate change in their communities.

Assessment

For the assessment of the project, this author sought feedback from experienced teachers and coaches in the field of communication. This author looked for educators who introduced speech communication curriculum into their schools and who have long lasting programs. This author also sought input from administrators on the logistics of implementing a new course.

Chapter Summary

To achieve the immediate goal of earning speech curriculum for Summit High School, this author conducted research of prior studies. The author researched data from

other studies concerning speech curriculum to find data to support the school board presentation. Additionally, the author conducted an informal study at the National Forensic League Nationals and gathered numerous testimonials from educators and students of forensics.

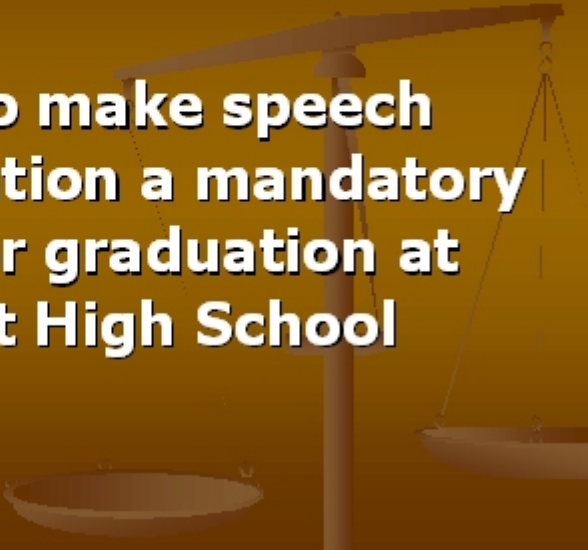
Chapter 4

Introduction

"It is awesome to say that your speech and debate team gets just as much attention as the football team. I come from a school that does not have very much school spirit, and when people get on their feet to applaud your efforts makes a real difference in liking school. I wanted to get going and show the school that Speech and Debate was just not an activity some kids did because they were not active, it was because we were good and the school knew that" (Brittany Corneillier, Summit High School Graduate, 2004). Speech and debate programs can bring not only school spirit to a high school, but also opportunities for students to increase their academic, creative and social outlets. The purpose of the following presentation is to persuade the Summit High School administration and school board to offer a speech course at the high school and ultimately, to make speech a required course for graduation.

Speech Communication:

A case to make speech communication a mandatory course for graduation at Summit High School



The Introduction to the Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standards States:

“The ability to communicate clearly – to read, write, speak, and listen – forms the core of human culture. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are essential tools for learning, for success in the workplace, for enriching and expanding our lives, and for responsible citizenship.”

Results

The introduction to the Colorado Model Content Reading and Writing Standards reads, “The ability to communicate clearly – to read, write, speak, and listen – forms the core of human culture. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills are essential tools for learning, for success in the workplace, for enriching and expanding our lives, and for responsible citizenship.” Speaking and listening skills are identified as critical elements of Colorado state standard instruction, yet many Colorado schools, including Summit High School, do not offer a speech communication class to the grades 9-12 student population. Speech communication, for the purpose of this presentation is defined as a course, or a series of courses, and participation in extracurricular forensic competition that teach argumentation, interpretation of literature through performance, the writing and performing

of original speech, and extemporaneous speaking, all of which require the use of strong research and writing skills in order to best communicate a message. The purpose of this presentation is to educate school board members, parents, and school administrators about the positive impact of speech education on student achievement. The goal is to have a speech class offered at Summit High School and ultimately to make speech a required course for graduation.

Historical Background

- Summit High School Speech & Debate team has increased in size 300% from 2001-2006.
- 2006 had 44 students- one of the largest SHS teams.



Since 2001, the Summit High School Speech and Debate Team has grown from a small group of 5 students to a squad of 44 participants and has become one of the largest teams at Summit High School. During this time, the team has consistently earned rankings as one of the top seven festival schools in Colorado and in 2004, 2005, and 2006 the team earned First at Festival State. This academic and extracurricular achievement has had a powerful effect on student interest and motivation in school.

Student Testimonial

- “In general, debate has been a great experience. It helped me write my English papers; it helped my college resume; it introduced me to philosophy, which is going to be my college major. It’s influenced just about every area in my life.”

(Alec Baker, Summit High School Graduate 2004).

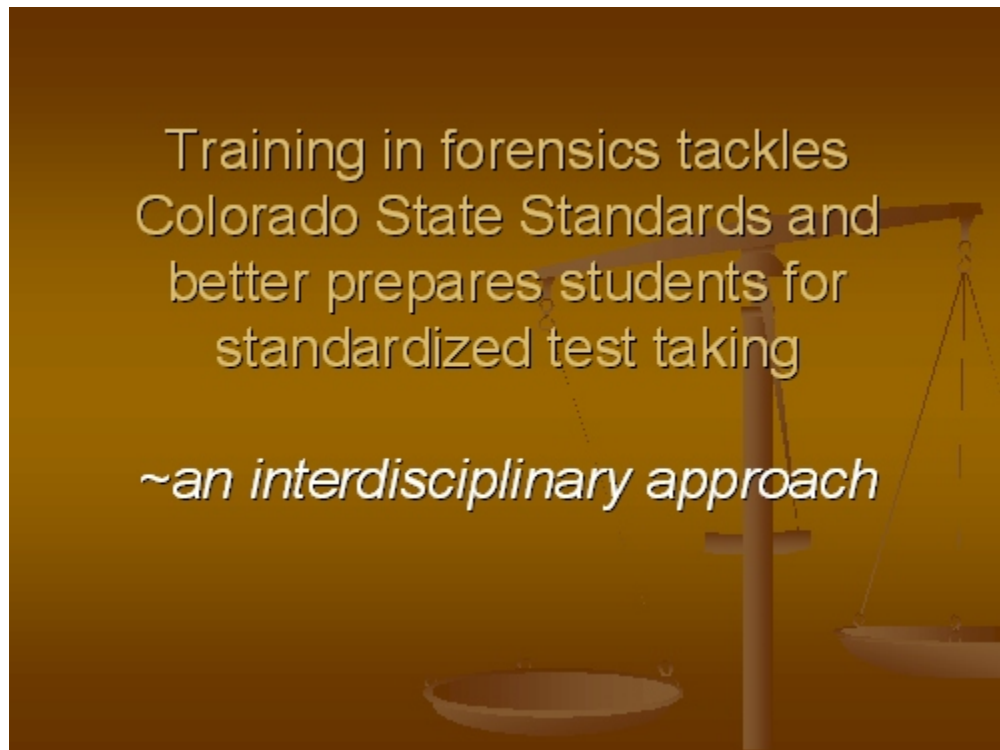
“In general, debate has been a great experience. It helped me write my English papers; it helped my college resume; it introduced me to philosophy, which is going to be my college major. It’s influenced just about every area in my life” (Alec Baker, Summit High School Graduate 2004). With this strong momentum, the time is prime for introducing a speech communications course at Summit High School.

Historical Efforts to Provide Speech Curriculum at SHS

- Colorado Mountain College has offered a speech course to juniors and seniors. Alienates underclassmen.
- Course is theoretical based and does serve as a "feeder" to the extra curricular program.

Summit Colorado Mountain College (CMC) has offered an elective speech course to the 11th and 12th grade students. While this is a good start, there are many problems with this approach. (a) CMC curriculum is not required to abide by Colorado State Standards, district standards, or to mesh with overall school curriculum. (b) The CMC course is only offered to juniors and seniors as a "supergrad" class, thereby dismissing freshman and sophomores who wish to take the course. (c) The CMC instructor is not necessarily part of the school staffing, and therefore is not involved in committee meetings, staff meetings and other direct involvement that keeps departments working towards a common goal. Finally, a CMC staff member is not always available after school to work with students on speech class projects, as well as to reinforce the extracurricular forensic program. The author's intent is not to disregard the scholarship efforts provided by the CMC, but rather to address how the Summit School District can improve upon the speech communication foundation

that has been established.



Colorado has established state standards for curriculum that each school is required to teach. Schools are held accountable to these standards and are assessed through the CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program) tests. The CSAP tests reading, science, writing, and math. Community perception of how well each school performs is often gauged by CSAP scores. Therefore, community donated funding and school credibility partially rely on the results of CSAP, and this is a major reason why school districts spend significant time and money to improve the scoring of students. When considering curriculum, educators must consider how the curriculum addresses the state content standards which will ultimately prepare them for the CSAP tests. Courses in speech communication, not only better prepare students for the reading and writing component of CSAP, but a properly designed speech course also meets many state standards outlined for civics, economics, and history. This content is covered on many college entrance exams such as the ACT and

SAT.

Reading Standards

- A data from a study in five major cities indicate that participation in formal, competitive debate led to a 25% higher reading improvement rate over students in regular English courses.

■ *"National Study Finds Debate Can Dramatically Increase Student Reading Skills." (2004). Youth Initiatives. Open Society Institute.*

The Open Society Institute (OSI) conducted a study in 2004, in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Seattle. The data indicate that participation in formal, competitive debate leads to a 25% higher reading improvement rate over students in regular English courses.

Speech Communication Curriculum Specifically Address 3 of the 6 Reading and Writing Standards

- Standard 2: Students write and *speak* for a variety of purposes and audiences.
- Standard 3: Students write and *speak* using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling.
- Standard 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, *speaking*, listening, and viewing.

Of the six Colorado Model Content Standards for Reading and Writing, three standards specifically call for training in oral communication. (a) Standard 2: Students write and *speak* for a variety of purposes and audiences (b) Standard 3: Students write and *speak* using conventional grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. (c) Standard 4: Students apply thinking skills to their reading, writing, *speaking*, listening, and viewing.

Other Reading Standards Addressed

- Standard 1: Students read and understand a variety of materials.
- Standard 5: Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference and technology sources.
- Standard 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

The other three standards, while focused on reading, are also met because participation in speech requires intense reading, research, critical thinking, and the understanding of history and literature in order to best prepare for a presentation, a debate or a discussion: (a) Standard 1: Students read and understand a variety of materials, (b) Standard 5: Students read to locate, select, and make use of relevant information from a variety of media, reference, and technology sources, and (c) Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Informal Survey at NFL Nationals

- 90% of students said participation in speech and debate improved their reading and writing abilities.
- 66% saw an improvement in their English scores.
- 91% of students said that their overall performance in school improved because of participation in speech and debate.

In an informal study conducted at the 2003 National Forensic League Tournament in Salt Lake City, the author sampled 119 competitors from 22 states and six foreign countries. Approximately 75% of them competed in both speech and debate. Approximately 90% of those students said that participation in speech and debate improved their reading and writing abilities. 66% said that participation in speech and debate increased their English class performance and approximately 91% of the students said that their overall performance in school improved because of participation in speech and debate. The competitive nature of debate heightens the student ego. The student desires to find good research and understand it, if for no other reason than so they can win. By sheer motivation to win, debate students tend to read higher level research outside of their required courses, thus increasing their reading time on task.

Forensics Provides for Authentic Assessment of all English Standards

- “Competitive speech is one of the very few realms in which it really matters for students to understand classical references, basic history, manipulation of an audience, and the uses of persuasive technique— they’ll get thumped by their competition if they don’t.”

■ Crawford, R. (2003). "In defense of competitive speech." *The Rostrum*.

Teacher, Rusty Crawford stated, “Competitive speech is one of the very few realms in which it really matters for students to understand classical references, basic history, manipulation of an audience, and the uses of persuasive technique— they’ll get thumped by their competitors if they don’t.”

Student Testimonial

“Debate has helped my writing by teaching me how to develop an argument. All writing is simply expressing a point, and debate has taught how to effectively communicate my ideas to my readers. As a result from debate, I did very well in my English classes, and I was more confident with my writing. Debate helped me in Journalism because I was able to use interviews and facts as evidence to back up my points.”



Jillian Rowley, SHS 2006

Speech communication training increases time on reading. The direct result typically is increased vocabulary skills and reading comprehension. In preparation for the SAT, speech courses improve student reading abilities that are tested on the SAT.

SAT Preparation

Forensics classes help students identify with vocabulary, reading, organization and critical thinking skills needed for the SAT.

- “The connection between the skills we (forensics classes) foster and strong performance on the verbal SAT is grounded in four fundamental areas: literacy, comprehension skills, vocabulary building, and writing skills development.”

■ *McGrady, R. (2004), "Forensics, Debate, and the SAT."*

Rusty McGrady, speech teacher, wrote for the Rostrum, “The connection between the skills we (forensic classes) foster and strong performance on the verbal SAT is grounded in four fundamental areas: literacy, comprehension skills, vocabulary building, and writing skills development.” Through courses in speech, students are better prepared for the reading assessment of CSAP, SAT and other standardized tests.

Civics Standards

Colorado Department of Education website states,

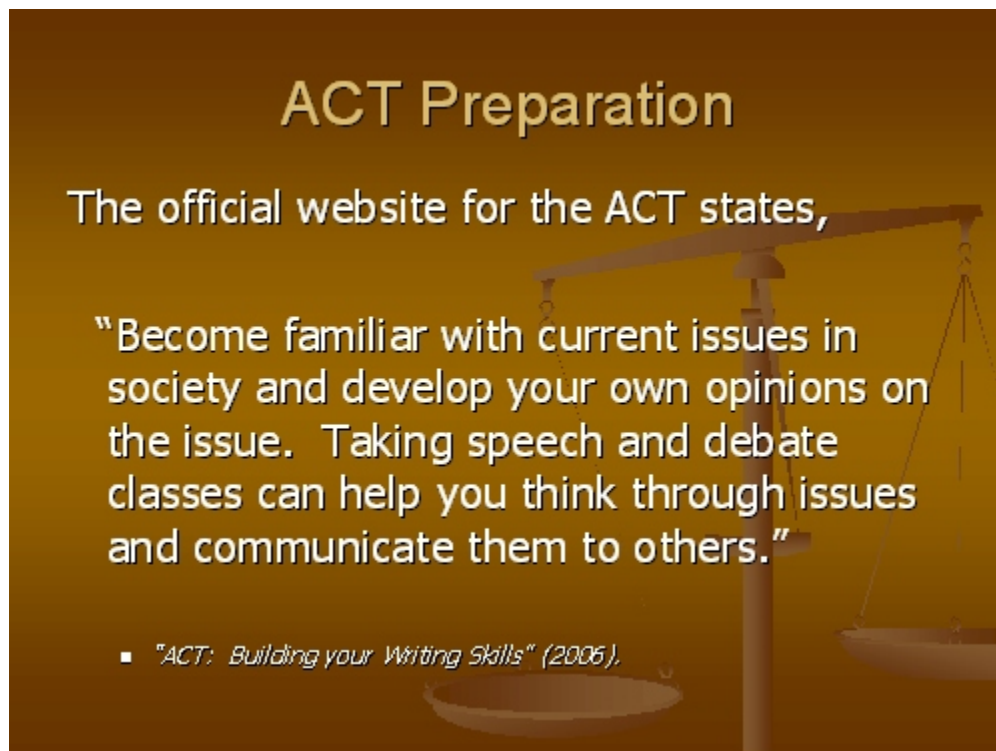
"Schools should help students develop an understanding of the (civics) content as well as the intellectual and participatory skills in both the formal and informal curriculum."



Student Congress. Downtown Denver Courthouse, 2004

Learning how to research, understanding bias, and learning skills in parliamentary procedure and civic process are also addressed through speech communication courses. The introduction to the Colorado Model Content Standards for Civics states, "Citizenship skills are required for competent participation in the political process. These include the capacity to influence policies and decisions by working with others, clearly articulating interests and making them known to key decision and policy makers, building coalitions, negotiating, compromising, seeking consensus, and managing conflict." Furthermore, the introduction states, "Schools should help students develop an understanding of the content as well as the intellectual and participatory skills in both the formal and informal curriculum." The understanding of civic participation is required by Colorado Model Content Standard 4. "Students understand how citizens exercise the roles, rights and responsibilities of participation in civic life at all levels - local, state and national." While social studies

departments cover the core civics curriculum, a speech course supports the teaching of civics by helping students develop the participatory skills needed to participate in democracy. Specifically, through speech education, students learn about the art of negotiation, the power of persuasion and the importance of a well thought argument.

A graphic with a dark brown background. At the top, the text "ACT Preparation" is written in a light yellow, sans-serif font. Below this, the text "The official website for the ACT states," is written in a white, sans-serif font. A quote in white, sans-serif font follows: "Become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issue. Taking speech and debate classes can help you think through issues and communicate them to others." At the bottom left, a small white square bullet point is followed by the text "ACT: Building your Writing Skills" (2006). In the background, a faint image of a wooden scale of justice is visible.

ACT Preparation

The official website for the ACT states,

"Become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issue. Taking speech and debate classes can help you think through issues and communicate them to others."

- *"ACT: Building your Writing Skills" (2006).*

Also, the combination of civics and speech better prepares students for the ACT.

The official ACT website states, "Become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issue. Taking speech and debate classes can help you think through issues and communicate them to others." An example of how speech communication teaches students about current events and how to analyze the issues is through training in extemporaneous speaking. Extemporaneous speaking, in general, is when the speaker is given a topic and has a short amount of time, usually 1-30 minutes, to prepare an analytical speech on the topic. In competitive speech, the speaker chooses between an international or domestic topic. For example, a speaker in international "extemp" might receive a topic such as, "In the Darfur region of Sudan, the international community is not

committing enough resources to halt the genocide.” In order to have information readily available, and since computers are not allowed in the preparation room, extemporaneous speakers prepare an extensive filing system of current event articles. The speaker is given a limited amount of time to prepare a 5-7 minute speech on the topic. The speaker is trained to analyze any given topic by discussing the historical background of the topic, the current situation and a prediction for the future. Speakers are also trained to discuss the major perspectives about the issue. The extemporaneous speech is a solid means of achieving the ACT recommendation to “become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issue.”

ACT Preparation

- The Minnesota Office of Higher Education found a correlation between ACT preparedness and “taking a course such as speech, in addition to English, in grades 9-12.”

- *“ACT Scores Reveal Much About College Readiness,” 2005.*

Additionally, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education found a correlation between ACT preparedness and “taking a course such as speech, in addition to English, in grades 9-12.”

Forensics Promotes Democracy

- Students need training in how to voice opinion, back up opinion and be accountable for opinion.
- Public discourse is essential to the spread of information and decision-making.



NFL Nationals in Philadelphia, 2005

Without voice, democracy cannot exist.

Social studies teachers are experts in history and political science but are not required to be trained in the communication skills that are critical for political change. Participation in government of the people requires voice. This voice is strengthened through speech communication.

Democracy

- "You as a student or a teacher of speech can become a peace-maker through the exercise of your special art and thus preserve the peace and democracy of America at this critical state (World War II) in world's history."

■ *Senator Mundt and former President of the National Forensic League.*

An example of this is in 2004, the Summit Debate Team hosted a public forum at the Keystone Conference Center. The students debated the effectiveness of the United Nations and what role the United States should play in promoting democracy abroad. The 75 seat venue was full with community members and many people stood in the back. The audience listened to the debates and then asked the students questions to provoke further discussion and clarification. After the public forum, the students played the 2004 presidential debates that were occurring at that same time. From the prior discussion, the students and the community members in attendance were more informed about the issues in the presidential debate. The forum allowed for people to evaluate their own thoughts, perhaps to question the status quo, and ultimately, allowed for the youth and the adults to converse in an intelligent discussion on controversial matters. The students were able to use their voice to ignite political discourse— is that not the root of the civic process?

History Standards

Colorado Department of Education website states,

“The study of history is essential in developing citizens who understand contemporary issues with a depth and wisdom drawn from the experience of the past. Without history, a society shares no common memory of where it has been, of what its core values are, or of what decisions of the past account for present circumstances. Lacking a collective memory of important things, people lapse into political amnesia, unable to understand what newspapers are saying, to hear what is in – or left out of – a speech, or to talk to each other about public questions.”

Finally, speech communication emphasizes many of the Colorado Model Content Standards for History. The essence of argumentation is the clash of core values and claims. Speech communication students must utilize historical examples such as, court case decisions, causes and effects of major events, and the philosophy of past great thinkers to justify their arguments. Additionally, students study current events and compare them to historical trends for a logical analysis of the given debate topic. Richard Macdonald wrote for the Rostrum, “Events like foreign extemp, student congress, and policy debate inspire students to read hundreds of pages of The Economist, The Far Eastern Economic Review, or, God be praised, The Harvard International Review.” This thirst for current and historical knowledge is certainly an indicator of “relevancy” for the student learner. It is this thirst for relating current times to the past, that is critical to the stability of our future. The Colorado Department of Education writes,

“The study of history is essential in developing citizens who understand contemporary issues with a depth and wisdom drawn from the experience of the past. Without history, a society shares no common memory of where it has been, of what its core values are, or of what decisions of the past account for present circumstances. Lacking a collective memory of important things, people lapse into political amnesia, unable to understand what newspapers are saying, to hear what is in – or left out of – a speech, or to talk to each other about public questions. ”

History Becomes Relevant

- Student of debate often use historical examples as reasoning for their arguments.
- Students are trained to look for trends and parallel themes to current times.
- Students study why governments succeed or fail and what philosophies support their own thoughts.

Courses in history become more interesting to students of debate because they seek historical examples to justify their arguments. Students often use inductive reasoning (proving generalizations through examples) as a means of presenting a logical case. Therefore, students are not only actively engaged in the history classroom, but often, they conduct research of history for evidence outside the classroom.

Colorado Model Content Standards for History

- Standard 5: Students understand political institutions and theories that have developed and changed over time.
- Standard 6: Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history.

The two history standards most practiced by debaters are: (a) Standard 5: Students understand political institutions and theories that have developed and changed over time, and (b) Standard 6: Students know that religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history. Student debaters must understand the different forms of governments and reasons why they are and are not successful. Additionally, student debaters are typically trained in the teachings of the great political philosophers, including: John Locke, Rene Rousseau, Alexis de Tocqueville, Emmanuel Kant and the Greek philosophers, Aristotle, Plato and Socrates to name a few. It is not surprising to find students of debate sitting around talking about philosophy and governments for amusement.

Debate Fosters Critical Thinking

- Debaters must educate themselves on the varying debate topics. They must be skeptical of facts and question assumptions.
- The process of analyzing each debate topic lends to critical thinking.

Hopefully, it is clear thus far, that a course in speech communication can improve student learning in many subjects. But perhaps one of the greatest benefits from training in speech communication is the development of critical thinking. Critical thinking is a skill that should be used across the spectrum of academia.

Forensics Improves Critical Thinking

- "The most recent study concluded not only that participation in competitive debate enhances critical thinking skills, but that compared to academic pursuits of a similar time length, competitive forensics demonstrates the largest gain in critical thinking skills."

■ *Parcher, J. "The Value of Debate: Adapted from the report of the Philodemic Debate Society. Georgetown University.*

Georgetown Debate Professor J. Parcher stated, "The most recent study concluded not only that participation in competitive debate enhances critical thinking skills, but that compared to academic pursuits of a similar time length, competitive forensics demonstrates the largest gain in critical thinking skills." Critical thinking was defined and examined in a 2000 scholarly journal written by K. Huffman, C. Simonds and C. Carsons. "Skepticism is crucial to critical thinking, and that truth is established through evaluating 'alternative hypothesis and possibilities' by learning how and when to question." A key point to the definition is that one must have knowledge and experience in a certain field in order to think critically about it. Students, who participate in argumentation, must educate themselves on the topic of the debate, typically through research, before they can truly think critically about the topic. Student debate topics range from philosophical and value based to pragmatic and

policy based. Some topics taken from the 2004/2005 National Forensic League season include,

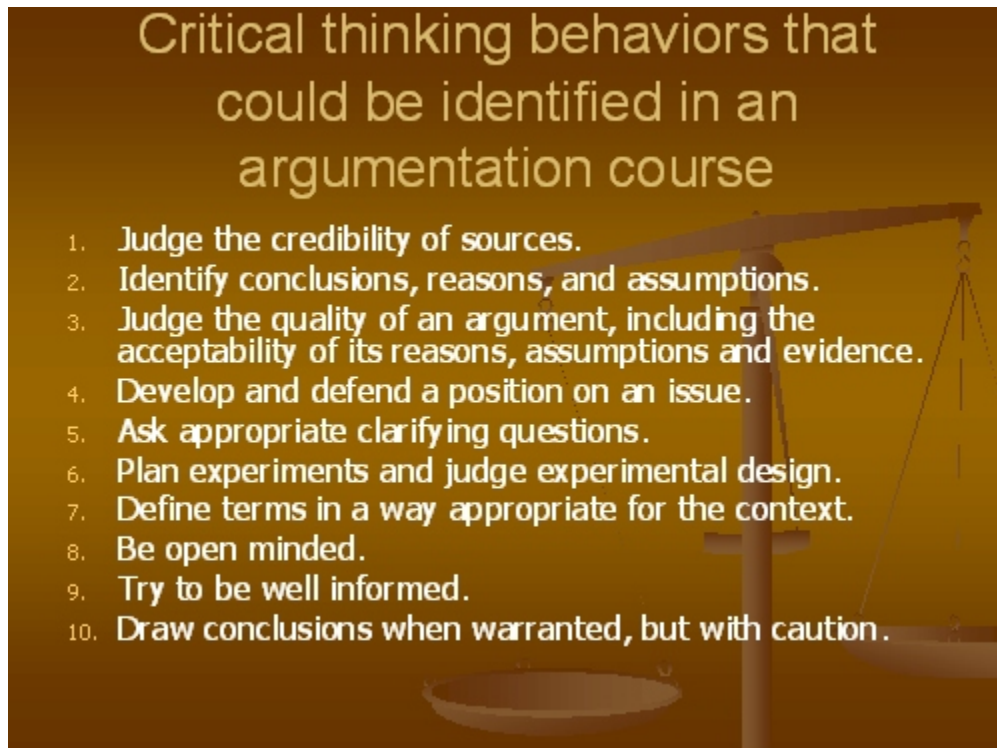
Value Based Topics:

- a) Resolved: The pursuit of scientific knowledge ought to be constrained by concern for societal good.
- b) Resolved: To better protect civil liberties, community standards ought to take precedence over conflicting national standards.

Policy Based Topics:

- c) Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy substantially increasing its support of United Nations peacekeeping operations.
- d) Resolved: That, when a choice is required for public high schools in the United States, government funding should prioritize vocational education over college preparatory education.

Once knowledge is gained on a certain topic, then the student can begin to formulate questions, and thus, truly initiate the learning process. The researchers used Bloom's *Cognitive Domain of the Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* to explain that higher level thinking begins with an understanding of the fundamentals through knowledge based questioning and then progresses in higher thinking steps to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. The top three steps, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, are linked to critical thinking. A well structured debate requires that students maintain higher level thinking as they continuously explore, compound, extrapolate, and judge the case.



The researchers went on to demonstrate how a course in argumentation can achieve critical thinking by identifying ten independent critical thinking behaviors that could be identified in an argumentation course, including:

1. Judge the credibility of sources.
2. Identify conclusions, reasons, and assumptions.
3. Judge the quality of an argument, including the acceptability of its reasons, assumptions and evidence.
4. Develop and defend a position on an issue.
5. Ask appropriate clarifying questions.
6. Plan experiments and judge experimental design.
7. Define terms in a way appropriate for the context.
8. Be open minded.
9. Try to be well informed.
10. Draw conclusions when warranted, but with caution.

In argumentation courses all modalities of communication are addressed as students are expected to critically read, write, speak and listen. The researchers referred to these communication modalities: “each of them is a large-scaled mode of thinking which is

successful to the extent that it is informed, disciplined, and guided by critical thought and reflection.”

Also, the researchers addressed the relation between higher level thinking and critical thinking. They believe that students must be able to find relevance in their learning and that the critical thinking skills they learn in school should be relevant to daily life. “Critical thinking is presented to students as the process of evaluating what they see and hear, then judging what those ideas mean to them.” Competitive speech and debate is one outlet where students can use the information they learned in school to succeed in competition. Through the use of research, case preparation, and debate, students apply critical thinking to analyze issues that affect their daily lives. Unfortunately, many students do not learn because they do not recognize why or how the information being taught relates to them. The beauty of courses in speech communication is that students explore issues, ideas, and even plots that are interesting to them. Sometimes, things that at one point had no relevancy become quite interesting when the information pertains to their argument or their original oratory. Typically, critical thinking can only occur when individuals are interested in what they are exploring. Therefore, a speech communication course, such as argumentation, can serve as a springboard for critical thinking of numerous subjects.

The Positive Impact of Forensics on Minorities and Alternative Learners



SHS Team Retreat at Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center

Alternative Learners

- “As a class, Forensics provides opportunities for students with alternative learning styles to succeed. It is a hands-on, active class that allows students to explore and organize complex ideas, even though those students may not be confident with their writing skills. As students build their confidence in their ideas, they become more willing to read and write about them.”

■ *Tammie Peters, Speech Teacher, Double Diamond National Forensic League Coach, Golden High School, Colorado, 2006.*

National Forensic League Double Diamond coach and teacher, Tammi Peters said, As a class, Forensics provides opportunities for students with alternative learning styles to succeed. It is a hands-on, active class that allows students to explore and organize complex ideas, even though those students may not be confident with their writing skills. As students build their confidence in their ideas, they become more willing to read and write about them.”

Student Testimonial

"My time on the team with my dyslexia and ADHD has helped me be able to concentrate (*sic*) on tasks that I have little patience with like doing research for an oratory. Being on the team has also helped me with organizing my thoughts and ideas into an ordered analysis or thesis. The team has also spawned friendships all across the country."



John O'Connor, SHS 2008

Many make the assumption that only the top tier students participate in forensic competition. However, most teachers and coaches will testify that students range from prom queens to Marxist swearing outcasts, from awkward computer fanatics to spring musical leads. Additionally, the class rankings vary from the highest to the lowest tiers. For many students, participation in forensics is a safe environment in which to pursue intellectual and creative outlets. For some, forensics is the only class where they feel significant. The founder of the Urban Debate League said,

"We have all kinds of students participating in debate, but some of the best are kids I lovingly call "thugs." These are kids who won't participate in a system that is oppressing them—they know they're being screwed. So they disrupt class, get kicked out, etcetera. But in debate, you enfranchise kids. Instead of being bad, they walk around saying: "Wow, I just beat Elite Academy. Look at me!"

Speech communication courses and competition can sometimes reach untapped student demographics.

Student Testimonial

“Throughout high school, I lacked energy and motivation to direct me towards positive goals. Debate instilled within me a desire to understand philosophical and political constructs and discuss them in an open forum.”



Evan Ratzan (left) Nationals 2004

Colorado State Speech Champion and Lincoln Douglas two-time National NFL Qualifier, Evan Ratzan stated, “Throughout high school, I lacked energy and motivation to direct me towards positive goals. Debate instilled within me a desire to understand philosophical and political constructs and discuss them in an open forum.”

Participation in Debate

- Improves reading scores
- Improves self-esteem and positive decision making
- Improves academic success and motivation toward higher education

One of these untapped demographics is the high risk urban school setting.

Researcher, L. Collier conducted a survey in 2004 of high risk urban secondary schools throughout the U.S. From the findings, Collier asserted that participation in debate (a) improves reading scores, (b) improves self-esteem and positive decision making, and (c) improves academic success and attitude toward higher education. Collier's findings were important on many levels, but perhaps her greatest contribution was that she provided quantitative evidence to support what most educators already know. Participation in debate requires research and critical analysis, which in turn, improves academic performance.

Debate for School Reform

"Today's middle and elementary school students are expected to become more sophisticated readers, learning advanced concepts and reasoning so they can understand and use texts well enough to prepare for high school and then adult work or college. Additional debate research could lead to engaging even younger and lower-performing students through competition and easing them into being better students and test takers as a result. To do that it is important to do more than debunk the myth of self selection and couple that work with assessment efforts dedicated to identify what curricular and OST (Open Society Institute) debate strategies produce the most positive results. By hitting those two target areas, debates best practices can be validated, refined and moved into other classrooms so all children can have access to this life-shaping activity."

- *Collier Study (2004).*

Collier even proposed that academic debate should become part of an educational reform movement in the urban cities.

"Today's middle and elementary school students are expected to become more sophisticated readers, learning advanced concepts and reasoning so they can understand and use texts well enough to prepare for high school and then adult work or college. Additional debate research could lead to engaging even younger and lower-performing students through competition and easing them into being better students and test takers as a result. To do that it is important to do more than debunk the myth of self selection and couple that work with assessment efforts dedicated to identify what curricular and OST (Open Society Institute) debate strategies produce the most positive results. By hitting those two target areas, debates best practices can be validated, refined and moved into other classrooms so all children can have access to this life-shaping activity."

In regard to college admissions, 40 U.S. colleges actively seek debaters from the UDL. The students earn scholarships in return for competing on the college debate teams. Universities, in general, look for speech and debate competition on the high school resume because it tends to indicate solid academic achievement and grounding in logical analysis. A

teacher from the Urban Debate League said that, before his debaters joined the team, they were at least C students, but after joining debate, many had improved their academic performance. Generally, they have grade point averages in the B range, and some are straight A students. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of extracurricular forensics is that students become more interested in world affairs and develop an informed opinion about their place in it. “Debate has helped my kids find their voices. And now, in a society that has pretty much ignored them, they will have a greatly improved ability to make themselves heard.”

Post-Graduation

- Of all the skills reported by high school graduates, oral communication was reported as the greatest gap in what was expected of them post graduation.

■ *Achieve, Inc. (2005). Peter D. Hart & Associates. Washington, D.C.*

Training in high school speech communication strengthens skills, such as critical thinking, needed to be competitive in life after high school. Speech communication courses, help both college and non-college bound students, yet many post graduates feel that they are not given enough oral communication preparation for life after high school. In a 2005 study conducted by Achieve, Inc. of post graduates, oral communication was reported as the greatest gap in what was expected of them after high school. In the same study, data indicate that U.S. employers, professors, and students all express a need for more speech communication training including, oral communication, critical thinking development, and research skills. 42% of employers reported that they were dissatisfied with their employees' ability to think analytically and 34% of employers were dissatisfied with their employees' oral communication skills.

Students Want Challenge

- 65% of college students and 77% of non college bound individuals wish they had been challenged more in high school
- And they wish they had taken more classes to better prepare them for life after high school.
- These students also said that they should have higher graduation requirements.

■ *Achieve, Inc. (2005). Peter D. Hart & Associates. Washington, D.C.*

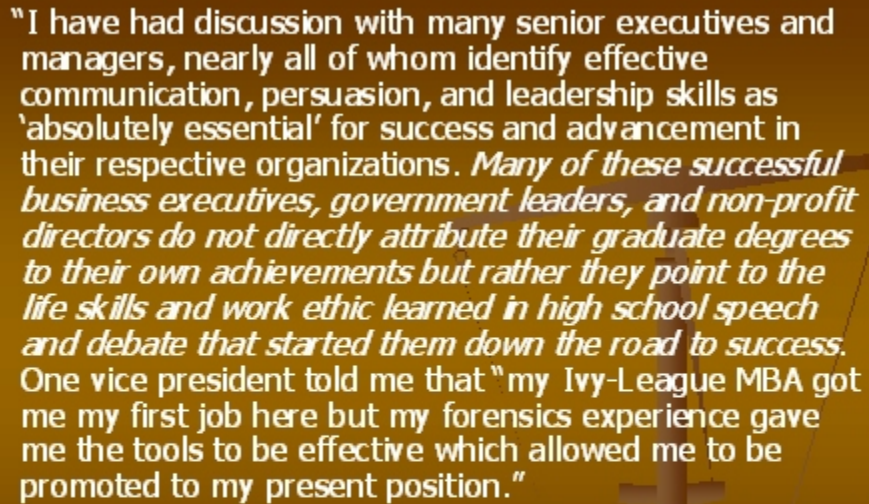
The statistics for college bound students are alarming. In the same study, 66% of college professors were dissatisfied with their students' ability to think analytically and 59% were dissatisfied with their students' ability to conduct research. Interestingly, 65% of the college students and 77% of the noncollege bound individuals wished that they had been challenged more in high school, and they wish they had taken more classes to better prepare them for life after high school. Furthermore, if the high school standards were higher, 82% of the college students and 80% of the noncollege individuals reported that they would have worked harder. They reported that they should have higher requirements for graduation. The Achieve study shows that oral communication is the biggest gap in preparation for life after high school and that the great majority of graduates wish that they had higher requirements. The findings from this study, in particular, support the requirement of speech curriculum in high school.

Employability

- A study of Midwest business hiring managers “listed debate first among twenty other activities and academic specializations that an applicant might present on a resume.”

- *McGrady, R. (2004). "Forensics, Debate, and the SAT."*

Even though speech communication is generally put on the back burner to reading and writing, strong communication skills, ironically, are one of the skills most sought after from college admissions and those hiring in the work force. A 2004 study by Rusty McGrady of Midwest business hiring managers “listed debate first among twenty other activities and academic specializations that an applicant might present on a resume.”



"I have had discussion with many senior executives and managers, nearly all of whom identify effective communication, persuasion, and leadership skills as 'absolutely essential' for success and advancement in their respective organizations. *Many of these successful business executives, government leaders, and non-profit directors do not directly attribute their graduate degrees to their own achievements but rather they point to the life skills and work ethic learned in high school speech and debate that started them down the road to success.* One vice president told me that "my Ivy-League MBA got me my first job here but my forensics experience gave me the tools to be effective which allowed me to be promoted to my present position."

■ Yale Professor Ming Luong (2000)

Yale Professor, Minh Luong wrote,

"Over the years, I have had discussion with many senior executives and managers, nearly all of whom identify effective communication, persuasion, and leadership skills as 'absolutely essential' for success and advancement in their respective organizations. *Many of these successful business executives, government leaders, and non-profit directors do not directly attribute their graduate degrees to their own achievements but rather they point to the life skills and work ethic learned in high school speech and debate that started them down the road to success.* One vice president told me that "my Ivy-League MBA got me my first job here but my forensics experience gave me the tools to be effective which allowed me to be promoted to my present position."

College Admissions

- The Colorado Commission on Higher Education recognizes debate as a legitimate English course for admissions into Colorado universities.
- Speech is given equal weight with literature and writing courses.

In consideration of offering speech and making it a required course for graduation, one must run through the logistics. Is speech even recognized by the state as a legitimate course? In the State of Colorado, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education recognizes speech as a legitimate English course for admissions into Colorado universities. Speech is given equal weight with courses in literature and writing. However, not only is speech considered legitimate, competitive forensics is the number one extracurricular activity sought by college admissions on the high school resume.

Increased College Acceptance

- "Dedicated participation in drama and debate has significantly increased the success rate of college applicants at all schools which track such data. State and national award winners have a 22% to 30% higher acceptance rate at top tier colleges and being captain of the debate team improved an applicant's chances by more than 60% compared with the rest of the pool. Even without winning major awards, participation in speech and debate develops valuable skills that colleges are seeking out and that is reflected in the above average acceptance rate."

■ *Yale Professor Ming Luong (2000)*

Further regarding college admissions, Yale Professor, Luong wrote,

"A Wall Street Journal report stated that participation in drama and debate has significantly increased the success rate of college applicants at all schools which track such data. State and national award winners have a 22% to 30% higher acceptance rate at top tier colleges and being captain of the debate team 'improved an applicant's chances by more than 60% compared with the rest of the pool,' according to the report. Even without winning major awards, participation in speech and debate develops valuable skills that colleges are seeking out and that is reflected in the above average acceptance rate (4%). Colleges and universities today are looking for articulate thinkers and communicators who will become active citizens and leaders of tomorrow."

Courses in Speech Communication

1. Address many state standards
2. Improve standardized test scores
3. Improve critical thinking
4. Increase acceptance rate into college
5. Make students more employable
6. Reach out to alternative learners and minorities

With all of the research and testimonials regarding the value of speech communication, many speech teachers in Colorado are losing their programs. Some schools such as Summit High School provide generous funding to the extra curricular forensic program but do not offer a speech course. Other Colorado schools such as Cherry Creek High School offer an average of five different speech communication courses, have a well funded extra curricular program, and consequently have one of the top programs in the country. And other schools are on the verge of losing their curricular program and have seen their extracurricular program downsized to just a few students. One may ask why a course is needed if an extra curricular program exists. The answer is quite simple. A course provides the fundamentals of speech. The extra curricular participation is focused on higher level work. Without a speech course, the extra curricular program is restricted. Coaches often have to spend their time teaching the basics instead of fine tuning well

polished work. Additionally, not all students participate in the competitive activity. A course allows for every student to at least get the essential oral communications tools. It is nothing less than shocking that speech teachers must fight to sustain courses that teach youth how to communicate in the most used form of communication. I urge you to consider all of the benefits of a speech communication course, including the effect on CSAP scores, meeting state standards, improving critical thinking, acceptance into college, better employability in the work force, and the outreach to minorities and alternative learners. Post graduates report that they wish they had more speech training. Professors and employers believe oral communication is the biggest gap for our recent graduates. For all of these reasons, a speech course must be offered and become a requirement for graduation.

The time is prime to make speech communication
a requirement for high school graduation at

Summit High School.



National Qualifier Chloe King, Coach Emily Campbell and National Qualifier Jill Rowley

The time is prime to evaluate the means we use to achieve our goal of developing well educated, young citizens. The time is now to make speech communication a requirement for high school graduation at Summit High School.

Summary

The purpose of the presentation is to persuade the decision makers of the Summit School District to offer a speech course at Summit High School and ultimately, to make speech a required course for graduation. Scientific studies, informal studies, personal observation, and student testimonials all indicate that participation in forensics has an overall positive effect on student academic performance. Research also indicates that students of forensics are better prepared for life after graduation. And furthermore, participation in forensics can reach the often untapped demographic of students such as alternative learners and those who otherwise have little direction in life. For these reasons, it is the stance of this author that speech should be an offered course at Summit High School and ultimately, should be a required course for high school graduation.

Chapter 5

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate the importance of speech communication in secondary curriculum and to create a case to make speech an offered course and ultimately, a requirement for graduation at Summit High School. The author incorporated studies, statistics, and testimonials to justify the claims.

Contribution of the Project

The author created this project for two main purposes. One, the author aspired to persuade school officials in her district to offer speech as a course. The long term goal is to have speech one day become a required course for graduation at Summit High School. Second, the author wanted to create a resource for educators throughout the country who are seeking to start, strengthen, or save their forensics programs. The contribution of this project is to serve all peers in the speech field who wish to promote and improve forensics.

Resolution of the Original Problem

The immediate goal of this research project was to develop a case to make speech communication an offered course at Summit High School in Colorado. The long term goal of this project was to make speech a required course for graduation at Summit High. The author presented the case to the Summit School District and the high school administration. The course was approved, and in the Fall of 2007, a speech communication class and a Colorado Mountain College debate course will be offered at Summit High School. The immediate goal was therefore accomplished. The long term goal is still in progress. The

author hopes that the success of the courses, along with the success and the enthusiasm for the speech team, will encourage the district to make speech a requirement for graduation.

Limitations to the Project

The greatest limit to this project was simply locating scholarly data to support the author's claims. There are certainly data to support the project, but not in abundance. The author wonders why more research has not been conducted and hypothesizes that educators in the U.S. simply have not valued speech enough to conduct mass amounts of research. The author also feels that contemporary training in speech communication has steered towards the training of presentation skills and lost the other component of speech which focuses on discovery and writing. The Greeks and Romans viewed speech, or rhetoric, as essential to fighting tyranny. Their approach was more holistic than contemporary philosophy of speech. The Classic speech training included the philosophical component of "invention" which is the process of discovery, and "arrangement" the organization of a speech. The latter three components, included style, memory, and delivery which are the typical focuses of contemporary speech courses. This split of discovery from presentation skills in speech training could be one reason why contemporary educators do not value speech in academics as readily as Ancient Southern European scholars.

Recommendations for Future Research and Study

The avenues for exploration of speech communication in academics are countless. Some of the most evident areas for future study include how courses in speech

communication affect test scores. Many sources indicate a correlation between improved test scores and speech, but more quantitative research needs to be conducted to solidify this correlation. Another study in the same vein could be to identify the broad spectrum of state standards that could be accomplished through a course in speech. Speech is an interdisciplinary subject that easily incorporates the required core subjects such as math, especially logic, science, social studies, English and even the arts. Topics in debate, speech content, and current event analysis all require the student to have background knowledge or hence, seek knowledge in various subjects, in order to fully participate in speech communication. Therefore, another avenue of study could be to design an interdisciplinary speech course that seeks to teach many of the state standards across the spectrum and prepares students for standardized testing. Research in any of these avenues might serve other educators in the speech field who need a persuasive case to strengthen their forensic program.

A direct link between speech and academics is not the only option to consider for future research. The author also suggests more exploration in student psychology and participation in speech. Notions about increased student retention, student motivation, and self esteem have all been identified as possible links to participation in speech, but again little quantitative research has been conducted to support these notions. This type of research might be especially important to those who work with students deemed “at risk.” However, many students who are labeled “typical” also need outlets for their creativity and intelligence. A study about how participation in speech affects a student’s self worth in general could be quite valuable to any school district.

Project Summary

To avoid tyranny, the Ancient Greeks and Romans believed that training in speech communication was essential to democracy. Is it not interesting that the U.S., a country considered the strongest democracy in the world, does not emphasize training of public oration, discourse, and debate which are deemed the roots of democracy? Through the use of research and testimonials, the author hopes that speech will be given more consideration in the field of secondary academics. Data and expert opinion indicate a correlation between speech curriculum and increased test scores, preparation for college, the work place, and self worth. Speech communication can be an interdisciplinary subject that threads the knowledge gathered across the subject areas. A course in speech can present an outlet for students to synthesize the information they have learned and make it relevant to their lives. Educational reform is a buzz in the ears of educators across the nation as the U.S. slips down the scale of top countries of education. Perhaps, a return to the Classic focus on thinking and speaking should be considered part of the education reform in America. Perhaps, speech communication needs its own reform. In either case, the author hopes that forensics will be given more academic consideration and research to truly identify its value in society.

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Appendix
Handout

(This hand out was created by the Jefferson County Speech Coaches Association. The association granted the author permission to use the hand out).

Regarding Competitive Forensic Classes

(The Term “forensics” will refer to all competitive speech and debate and interpretation courses offered in Jefferson County Schools.)

How Does Competitive Forensics Supplement the English Curriculum?

- While many English classes offer a basic level of speech education, Forensics offers an advanced challenge, much like AP classes, for those students interested in communications. We have advanced literature and writing classes, and Forensics is the advanced speech class we offer. Furthermore, Forensics provides far more opportunities for students to benefit from speech lessons than the average English course. According to one study, “typical students might give as few as two or as many as ten oral presentations during an academic year,” while the “typical debater would conservatively give 128 speeches over the course of the year.”¹
- Forensics provides an opportunity for authentic assessment of all English standards. “Competitive speech is one of the very few realms in which it really matters for students to understand classical references, basic history, manipulation of an audience, and the uses of persuasive technique— they’ll get thumped by their competitors if they don’t.”²
- Participation in Forensics classes is highly valued by college admissions officers. A report in the Wall Street Journal pointed out that college give preference to students who have had consistent participation in Forensics over students who were involved in newspaper, student council, band, or athletics. Forensics participation can increase a student’s chance at being accepted by up to 60%.³

1 Jeffrey Parcher. “The Value of Debate: Adapted from the Report of the Philodemic Debate Society, Georgetown University,”

http://www.tmsdebate.org/main/forensics/snfl/debat_just2.htm

2 Rob Crawford. “In Defense of Competitive Speech.” *Rostrum*, November 2003.

<http://www.nflonline.org/uploads/Rostrum/speechcrawford1103.pdf>

3 Professor Minh A. Luong (Yale University). “Forensics and College Admissions.” *Rostrum*, November 2000.

<http://debate.uvm.edu/NFL/rostrumlib/Luong/AdmissionsNov/2700.pdf>

- There have been no studies yet about the impact of Forensics class participation and CSAP scores, and although there appear to be no specific data about ACT tests, the official ACT website advises students to “Become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issues. Think of arguments you would use to convince someone of your opinion. Taking speech and debate classes can help you think through issues and communicate them to others.”⁴ Additionally, the Minnesota Office of Higher Education found a correlation between ACT preparedness and “taking a course such as speech, in addition to English, in grades nine through 12.”⁵
- Specific studies have been done regarding SAT tests. One study in Maryland found that Forensics classes help students with vocabulary, reading, organization, and critical thinking skills needed for the SAT. “The connection between the skills we (Forensics classes) foster and strong performance on the verbal SAT is grounded in four fundamental areas: literacy, comprehension skills, vocabulary building, and writing skills development.”⁶
- As we look at school-to-work initiatives, Forensics contributes to the desirability of our graduates as employees. One study of Midwest business hiring manager “listed debate first among twenty other activities and academic specializations that an applicant might present on a resume.”⁷
- As emphasized in the Pre-AP training, we as a District, are looking for ways to increase student critical thinking. One class that develops such critical thinking skills is Forensics. “The most recent study concluded not only that participation in competitive debate enhances critical thinking skills, but that compared to academic pursuits of a similar time length, ‘competitive Forensics demonstrates the largest gain in critical thinking skills.’”⁸
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⁴ “ACT: Building Your Writing Skills.” ACT, Inc. 2006.
<http://www.actstudent.org/writing/prepare/build.html>

⁵ “ACT Scores Reveal Much About College Readiness.” Insight. Minnesota Office of Higher Education, August 2005.
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⁶ Rust McGrady. “Forensics, Debate, and the SAT.” Rostrum, November 2004.
<http://www.nflonline.org/Rostrum/Coach1104McCraday>

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Jeffrey Parcher. “The Value of Debate: Adapted from the Report of the Philodemic Debate Society, Georgetown University,”
http://www.tmsdebate.org/main/forensics/snfl/debat_just2.htm

- Forensics is one of the few classes that specifically meets the needs of ALP students who have Leadership giftedness. Since Forensics is an individualized course that uses students as peer-coaches, those students with ALPs in Leadership have a place to develop this giftedness. The former president of the Speech Communication Association of America commented, “It is in our various forensic activities that can most effectively communicate the values that form the base of speech communication. And it is these activities that can best help our students to develop their capacities for leadership.”⁹ Additionally, “modern data confirms this relationship between debate and leadership.”¹⁰
- As a class, Forensics also provides opportunities for students with alternate learning styles to succeed. It is a hands-on, active class that allows students to explore and organize complex ideas, even though those students may not be confident with their writing skills. As students build their confidence in their ideas, they become more willing to read and write about them.
- The Colorado Commission on Higher Education recognizes “debate” as a legitimate English course for admissions into Colorado universities. It is given equal weight with literature and writing classes.
- As a college preparatory class, while it does not get college credit, Forensics does allow students to test-out of freshman speech requirements in college. For instance, schools like Purdue give test-out opportunities for “Two semesters of high school speech. These must be academic classes, not speech team, debate club, etc. Only those academic classes with ‘speech,’ ‘forensics,’ or ‘public speaking’ in the titles are acceptable.”¹¹
- Specifically, Forensics increases reading abilities. A study in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, and Seattle found that formal, competitive debate participation lead to a 25% higher reading improvement rate over students in regular English courses only. This effect was true of average readers as well as good readers. The study credits the competitive nature of Forensics with improving reading scores.¹²

For these reasons, Competitive Forensics should enjoy the support of all those who decide resource allocation in Jefferson County Schools.

⁹ Jeffrey Parcher. “The Value of Debate: Adapted from the Report of the Philodemic Debate Society, Georgetown University,”
http://www.tmsdebate.org/main/forensics/snfl/debat_just2.htm

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Academic Advisors Resource Guide. Purdue University. December 15, 2005.
http://www.purdue.edu/advisors/academic_advising/admitted_dayon_commun.shtml

¹² “National Study Finds Debate Can Dramatically Increase Student Reading Skills.” *Youth Initiatives*. Open Society Institute, May 13, 2004.
http://www.soros.org/initiatives/outh/news/study_20040513