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Individual Effects of Speech and Debate in High School

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Background

- Commonly, co-curricular forensics (Speech and Debate) is an activity offered to high schoolers that involves competitively participating in public speaking events.
 - Speech events include Memorize Public Address, Original Oratory, Impromptu Speaking, and Expository speaking.
 - Debate events include Lincoln-Douglas, Policy, and Public Forum.
- It is unclear where speech and debate got its beginnings. Implementation of it into U.S. high schools is often credited to Bruno E. Jacob in 1925 with his creation of the “National Speech and Debate Association.”



Thesis and Purpose

THESIS

- High school speech and debate offers beneficial effects to individuals that participate in the activity.

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this research is to measure the individual effect that speech and debate has on its participants after high school graduation.
- This study may help speech and debate programs recruit more participants. It may also help future researchers understand why speech and debate is beneficial to participants. Any negative experiences with speech and debate may help programs correct themselves.

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Literature Review

Historical Examples

- Hetlinger and Hildreth researched the personality traits of students in speech and debate in Kansas. Subjects were divided into whether they had placed first at a tournament previously. Each subject was administered a personality test with the results accumulating averages for each group. The study concluded that on average successful debaters were unsatisfied with criticism, partial to controlling situations, and had an aversion to caring for others (1961).
- Colbert sampled 332 high schoolers from a tournament in the West United States. Subjects were studied via two distinct questionnaires that measured argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Conclusion found that the activity led to argumentativeness and verbal aggression due to an observed correlation (1993).
- Stenger surveyed intercollegiate debaters in the Pi Kappa Delta national debate circuit. Assessed their level of participation, attendance and activity in academic conferences, future plans, and accreditation to debate for skill development. Only six eligible responses were received. Concluded that debate activity assists with academic and professional presentation skills depending on the debate event (1998).

Forensic Participation's Effect in a High School Setting

- The Milwaukee Debate League (MDL) researched how practicing speech and debate can have an influence on a high school student. Results showed that the MDL had a significant positive effect on student's reading level as well as a significant positive effect on the decrease of student suspense and disciplinary incidents. Further data shows a correlative relationship that MDL membership had on better attendance and higher GPA but neither results were statistically significant. (Winkler, 2010).

Considerations

- Hetlinger and Hildreth gathered that forensic participation correlates with certain unappealing traits. Colbert found similar results in participation making subjects verbally aggressive as well as argumentative. Inversely, Stenger observed forensics leading to assistance with academic and professional conference presentation skills and attendance
- Further research can be carried out within the communication studies discipline in order to fully conclude how forensics affects participants, especially in high school populations with no statistically significant research being brought forward on such a topic.



Method

Qualitative Idiographic Approach via Researcher
to Participant Interviews

Participants

IRB Informed Consent form signed.
Privacy maintained. Convenience
Sampled.

- **Participant 1 (P1):**
 - Male
 - Undergraduate Student
 - 3 Years in Speech and Debate
 - Impromptu Speaker
- **Participant 2 (P2):**
 - Male
 - Law Student
 - 2 Years in Speech and Debate
 - Lincoln/Douglas Debater
- **Participant 3 (P3):**
 - Female
 - Law Student
 - 4 Years in Speech and Debate
 - Policy Debater
- **Participant 4 (P4):**
 - Male
 - Social Studies Teacher
 - 4 Years in Speech and Debate
 - Public Forum Debater

Information Gathering

Participants were interviewed in 5 areas
(excluding demographics)

RELEVANT SKILLS

- What skills would you say you received or strengthened because of your time in speech and debate? How would you say this happened?
- How has speech and debate influenced your communication skills if at all?
- How has speech and debate influenced your persuasion skills if at all?
- How has speech and debate influenced your critical thinking skills if at all?
- Do you feel any better at information literacy as a result of speech and debate? If so, why?

ACADEMICS

- How as your time in speech and debate impacted your academics?
- Would you say speech and debate has made you a better student? Why or why not?
- Was there ever a time you felt that your grades or learning was suffering because you were participating in speech and debate? Why or why not?
- Was there ever a time you felt that your grades or learning was bolstered because you were participating in speech and debate? Why or why not?

Information Gathering

Participants were interviewed in 5 areas
(excluding demographics)

PROFESSIONAL

- How has your speech and debate experience influenced your professional goals and desires, if at all?
- Has your experience with speech and debate impacted your desirability as a candidate for positions or awards?
- Do you feel that you were able to receive better opportunities for jobs and awards due to your time in speech and debate? Why or why not?
- Was there ever a time you felt that you were better able to complete a work-related task because of your speech and debate skills?

INTERPERSONAL

- How has your speech and debate experience impacted your social skills, if at all?
- How has your speech and debate experience impacted your relationships with others?
- Would you say that your social group was different before you participated in speech and debate? Why or why not?

Information Gathering

Participants were interviewed in 5 areas
(excluding demographics)

PERSONALITY

- (Participants will be asked to complete the Myers-Briggs Personality Test)
- What is your personality type?
- How did you feel that your time in speech and debate influenced some of the answers of the personality test questions, if at all?
- Do you think your personality type would be the same without your speech and debate experience? Why or why not?
- Do you think you were attracted to speech and debate because of your personality type or do you think that people that receive speech and debate experience are more likely to find themselves aligned with this personality type afterwards? Explain?



Results

Focus on significant answers from participants and noted themes from the answers across interviews.

Relevant Skills

- **What skills would you say you received or strengthened because of your time in speech and debate? How would you say this happened?**
 - P1: “Having the ability to see both sides of a problem and seeing. You kind of have one point of view that's your own, but when you are in speech and debate you use both sides, and you get to kind of be in another person's shoes that you aren't normally standing in”
 - P4: “Critical thinking practice more so in research...Looking things up and having to be very picky about what I read and what I'm listening to and having to pay careful attention and having to pick out details that can be exploited easily.
 - Themes: Empathy, Public Speaking, Info Literacy, Confidence.
- **How has speech and debate influenced your communication skills if at all?**
 - P3: “know exactly yourself what you want to say and be precise, with how you communicate that point to another individual which was something that I really honed policy debate and it is very useful in my day-to-day life, you know communicating with family communicating and at work.”
 - P4: “Being a better listener to and that's, not just in arguing, but in conversations with people like talking to people, knowing what questions to ask and where to go next in any kind of conversation that comes from listening and picking up details.”
 - Themes: Improvement, Organization.

Academics

- How has your time in speech and debate impacted your academics?
 - P2: "In law school it is extremely important to have debate because just about everybody who in in law school have already had careers, they're usually older people, and they've had an experience to go through and do all that kind of stuff where they learn other ways to get the same skills you learn in speech and debate it's a good way to do it when you're young to get a lot of almost real world experience on things."
 - P3: "It was so so helpful I can't stress how helpful, it was to have a background in parsing apart argumentation and finding the strengths and weaknesses, especially in [my] major where I was graded on how well I could take apart political arguments and patch it in with different styles of arguments...put it back together in an academic type of writing."
 - Themes: Critical Thinking, Writing, Experience, Effective Speaking

- Would you say speech and debate has made you a better student? Why or why not?
 - P3: "I think this is a really two sided coin for me. On one hand, I think that it has made me a more involved student and I am more in tune with what I care about...on the other hand it has made me almost too efficient and thinking through an issue and kind of given me a superiority complex when it comes to me thinking and I kind of already know what we're talking about I don't need to do things like class reading."
 - P4: "Yes, I'm a lot better at focusing up when I need to listen, knowing when I need to listen and knowing what I need to read and where I need to read to extrapolate information."

Academics

- Was there ever a time you felt that your grades or learning was suffering because you were participating in speech and debate? Why or why not?
 - P3: “I won't say it ever made my great suffer because I was, I was just a very good student in high school without having to really try. But it definitely did put a lot of things off in high school because of debate, especially my junior year because I was just so focused on wanting to win that I would just stay up for hours doing research, printing out articles organizing my binders rewriting my speeches, because I was, I was like obsessed with doing well in debate and it wasn't so much for the sake of argumentation more that was just for the sake of competition.”

- Was there ever a time you felt that your grades or learning was bolstered because you were participating in speech and debate? Why or why not?
 - P1: “After the fact. Like later on in high school and even in college, I had the skills that it helped with but not during.”
 - P2: “The same skills that you learn in debate are really applicable to anything you do in academics, especially in law school.”
 - P4: “Yeah I mean in speech and debate you cover a lot of topics and there's always bound to be overlap in what you're studying in school and what you're researching for speech and debate and it's just nice to be armed with that information already and knowing where to look.”

Professional

- How has your speech and debate experience influenced your professional goals and desires, if at all?
 - P3: “I think it impacted it in quite a large wave for quite a while I wanted to be a teacher. I ultimately obviously didn't come to that conclusion since I'm in law school now. I think, maybe not the largest part but definitely a part of that decision came from doing debate because I knew I just I liked argumentation so much.”
 - P4: “Specifically for my professional goals as a social studies teacher and my debate experience are pretty much inseparable. The skills you attain in speech and debate armed me very well for being a social studies teacher for leading dialogue and for helping students with research.”
 - Themes: Career Guidance

- Has your experience with speech and debate impacted your desirability as a candidate for positions or awards?
 - P3: “I am not sure that debate has directly affected either me getting my current position or getting the various promotions that I've had at work, but I can say that the skills that debate has given me has made me more marketable because I was directly told by my supervisor manager that the promotions that I have gotten are because I communicate well with other people and are quick to learn the new changes in policy and procedure at my job, which I, I think I can tie logically to my experiences in debate”
 - Themes: Interviewing Skills

Interpersonal

- How has your speech and debate experience impacted your social skills, if at all?
 - P1: “I think it's made my social skills, a lot better you know, being able to touch on topics that I wasn't able to touch on before and being more engaged into a conversation and being better active listening.”
 - P4: “sometimes you get up to the podium and you don't know what to say and you just have to talk and make it seem coherent and that is a skill that roughly translates to social life.”

- How has your speech and debate experience impacted your relationships with others?
 - P1: “I think it's been like been able to grow relationships, because beforehand, I was always kind of like ‘Oh, this is what I think about a topic and I don't want to accept your opinion’, but, when you go through debate you kind of see that their side and it helps me a lot and seeing the other side of what other people are thinking.”
 - P3: “Well, I think it's probably made me more annoying to a lot of people like in high school my parents would get very, very annoyed with me when I tried to convince them that they were wrong about stuff. with people who don't do debate it probably makes me seem a little more analytical than the normal person and a little weird.”

Interpersonal

- Would you say that your social group was different before you participated in speech and debate? Why or why not?
 - P2: “Yes, some of the best friends I have had, and the people have known the longest I’ve known from debate...because it’s a very closely intertwined sport. So it’s a really easy way to build relationships with people. On top of that, they are probably more quality because you’re with them for such a long amount of time and you actually get to see how well you work together, I did partner events so it was much more important to be in tune with that other person and have a good relationship with them to actually succeed.”
 - P4: “I’m still very close with those I did speech and debate with. I met this friend through speech and debate that I am living with now. even though we live in a different town than we were before one of my best friends from high school is from speech and debate I’ve made a lot of really, really close relationships from it.”

Personality

- All participants felt that their answers to this test were influenced in some part by their time in speech and debate.
- All participants thought that their personality type would be different if not for their time in speech and debate.

Myers Briggs Types:

P1: Mediator (INFP-A)

P2: Debater (ENTP-A)

P3: Mediator (INFP-T)

P4: Debater (ENTP-T)



"MEDIATOR"

INFP (-A/-T)

Poetic, kind and altruistic people, always eager to help a good cause.



Debater

ENTP-A / ENTP-T

Smart and curious thinkers who cannot resist an intellectual challenge.

Personality

- Do you think you were attracted to speech and debate because of your personality type or do you think that people that receive speech and debate experience are more likely to find themselves aligned with this personality type afterwards? Explain?
 - P1: “I think people that do speech and debate will see themselves as a different personality type afterwards, because it's definitely a change in experience of what and how you do things.”
 - P2: “I was able to jump right into debate, which is something that not a lot of people want to do, and then I was pretty good at it right away. So I think it was probably more so that my personality was really fit for debate in the first place.”
 - P3: “I my personality type definitely did attract me to debates, and I think the personality trait that did attract me was not necessarily speaking in front of people or arguing, but more the information based and curiosity towards argumentation. That's why I wanted to join, and I think that created an avenue for me to change my personality. I think anyone can do debate, but I think there's definitely a subset of people who are attracted.
 - P4: “I would say you're more likely to have your personality affected by being in debate than you are to have the decision to join speech and debate by a pre-existing personality type. A lot of different personalities can be included easily in the speech and debate community and from there, they get those personalities kind of influenced by. having to talk more having listened more having to fill space with words and having to be more critical about how they see the world”

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Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

RELEVANT SKILLS

- Complete agreement on growth of skills. Participants felt that they grew in way that were personally useful to themselves and were able to successfully apply those skills when needed.

ACADEMICS

- Seemingly unanimous agreement on the academic benefit of speech and debate. P3 highlighted an issue of competitive obsession yet also spoke highly of the effect it had on their academics in college. Similarly, P1 noted that they did not feel measurable benefit until college.

Discussion

PROFESSIONAL

- Complete agreement that speech and debate aided the professional life of all participants. Some accredited the skills that they gained from speech and debate to growth in their respective fields. Also, a theme of being guided to a profession by time in speech and debate. P4 shows the stereotype of the debater to lawyer broken.

INTERPERSONAL

- For the most part, participants attributed positive social skills to their time in speech and debate. P3 noted more negative attributes in their interview.
- Certain participants noted that key relationships were formed due to their time in speech and debate.

Discussion

PERSONALITY

- Study confined to the personality types of “Mediator” and “Debater.”
 - Causation is suggested by participants in the fact that they felt their answers were influenced by time in speech and debate and that they wouldn’t align with this personality type had they not took part in the activity.
- Participants were split on how much speech and debate changes ones personality type. General consensus was that it changed to a certain point but participants like P2 argued that they joined the activity because of their personality type.

LIMITATIONS

- The study has room to be repeated to avoid the restrictions of convenience sampling. Suggested to repeat with greater distribution of speech participants. Only one took part in this study. Possible route could be to compare the two.
- More definitive stances could be taken with a quantitative nomothetic approach complete with control groups and statistics on various indicators in the areas of academics, professionalism, and interpersonal relationships. Best if done overtime utilizing current participants in high school.

Conclusion

- With an on-balance framework, it seems to be the case that there are positive effects for individuals that participate in high school debate.
 - Unanimous agreement from interviewed participants that speech and debate grew skills important to them and even giving them new skills at times.
 - Unanimous agreement from interviewed participants that their professional lives were positively impacted because of the time that they spent in speech and debate.
 - Academics did have a negative effect observed from one participant but there still seemed to be agreement that speech and debate will positively influence academics. Recommend to avoid obsession with competition.
 - Interpersonal lives also noted a negative effect when argumentation was too focused on. Otherwise, participants practiced empathy and made some of their closest and most quality relationships from the craft.
 - Speech and debate seemed to positively influence the personality of the participants based on the growth that they received during their experience in the activity.

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