

# JOURNAL OF THE SPEECH AND THEATRE ASSOCIATION OF MISSOURI

Volume 40

Fall 2010

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# Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri

Volume XXXX, Fall 2010

Published by the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri - ISSN 1073-8460

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**Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri**  
**Fall 2011 – Volume 41**

The editor of the 2011 *Journal of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri* is presently accepting manuscripts. Scholarly articles, book and resource reviews, and teaching resources are all encouraged. Scholarship from a diversity of areas from the discipline encompassing communication, speech, and theatre will be considered. These areas include, but are not limited to: Speech, Debate, Theatre Instruction and Performance, Communication Theory, Interpersonal Communication, Intercultural Communication, Health Communication, Rhetoric, Persuasion, Organizational Communication, Political Communication, Family Communications, Listening, Communication Ethics, Mediation, Public Relations, Film, Mass Media Theory, Mediated Communication, and New Communication Technologies.

All submissions should be in Microsoft Word. References should follow the latest edition of the American Psychological Association style manual. Three paper copies and a diskette copy should be included with each submission. A detachable page with author affiliation should be included with the paper copies. All submissions should be received by February 21, 2011, to insure full consideration for publication.

Updated submission information for volume 41 will be available in October of 2010 at the website for the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri – [www.stamnet.org](http://www.stamnet.org)

Submissions can be sent to:

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## **Creating a Sense of “Us”: Fostering Collaboration Among Multiple Stakeholders**

*Gloria J. Galanes*

### **Abstract**

*As leaders of complex organizations, contemporary school superintendents must articulate a clear vision to their constituents and be skilled communicators who are able to manage collaborative leadership processes. This paper examines how effective superintendents, as exemplars of leaders of complex organizations, foster collaboration among multiple, competing, stakeholders. Data from individual interviews with five superintendents and focus group interviews with stakeholder groups for each superintendent revealed that successful superintendents established a foundation of trust by believing fully in the collaborative process, demonstrating mutual respect for all groups, and acting with honesty and integrity. Superintendents also engaged in activities that establish common ground, including building relationships, listening, providing common information and experiences, and utilizing procedures to build consensus. Successful superintendents worked to create a sense of “us” so that multiple stakeholder groups perceive that they have a stake in the fate of their district schools; this important lesson is relevant for leaders of all complex organizations. Limitations included the small size and homogeneity of the superintendents and their districts; future research should examine superintendend tendencies of large districts, compare male and female superintendents, and look at the effects of cultural expectations on superintendent behaviors.*

The job of the public school superintendent is a challenging one that has become increasingly complex in recent decades, partly due to rising expectations of the public (Goldman, 2007). Superintendents are called upon to do more, with fewer resources, under intense and constant public scrutiny. Challenges include ever-present financial pressures, the consequences of high stakes assessment, managing relationships with interfering board members, complying with state and federal mandates, curricular changes, demands from community and employee groups, and

the public's growing dissatisfaction regarding school performance (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001). Moreover, the nature of the superintendency has changed dramatically, evolving from being a teacher of teachers to being an applied social scientist (Kowalski, 2005). Like other leaders of large organizations, superintendents today must work with and understand the needs and desires of a variety of groups in society; they are forced to balance multiple, competing demands and responsibilities.

Contemporary superintendents, like other leaders of complex organizations, must be able to articulate a clear vision to their constituents and to be, among other things, consensus builders, managers, and politicians (Noonan & Perreault, 2002). This view of the superintendent's role is articulated in the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium* (ISLLC), which states, "Leaders ensure the success of all students by collaborating with families and stakeholders who represent diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources that improve teaching and learning" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 22). No wonder superintendents see their role as more stressful and complex in recent years (Orr, 2006).

This paper explores the nature of the skills and behaviors required successfully to lead a large, complex organization by studying how excellent public school superintendents work with multiple, competing stakeholders. Information about leaders' communication skills and strategies, obtained from interviews with successful superintendents and their stakeholders, is valuable to other leaders of complex organizations.

### *Complexity*

Superintendents play multiple roles (Cuban, 1985), with five general trends contributing to the increased complexity of their role: increased democratization, increased pressure from state agencies, raised standards and accountability, a less civil public atmosphere, and less respect for the role of the superintendent (Orr, 2006). They are expected to be educational leaders, but must also understand data, manage budgets, and be able to communicate measurable results, skills typically expected of corporate executives and military leaders (Ediger, 2008); large and small districts alike are affected (Hentschke, Nayfack, & Wohlstetter, 2009).

A significant challenge contributing to superintendent role complexity is the need to manage the demands of competing stakeholders (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2001), including such groups as parents, teachers, principals, students, boards of education, staff, and the community in general (Chand, 1991). Getting to know and understand those multiple stakeholders, particularly board members and key community leaders, is a top superintendent priority (Fore, 1999).

Stakeholder groups can sometimes expect instantaneous fixes and perfection of their educational leaders (Batagiannis, 2007) and may make seemingly “irrational demands” (Wertz, 2003, p. 9). Even so, with public participation mandated by law in certain instances (LaFee, 2009), managing and balancing competing demands requires considerable political and communication skill on the part of the superintendent (Cuban, 1985; Holloway, 2001).

### *Communication Skills*

Communication skills are at the core of a superintendent’s required competencies (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Sharp & Newman, 1991). Superintendents who successfully manage the increased complexity, including working well with multiple constituencies, necessarily exhibit excellent communication skills. Kowalski (2005) argues further that stakeholders not only expect excellent communication skills, they will mete out severe penalties for “inconsistent and incompetent communication” (p. 112). Effective communication entails maintaining good relationships with board members (Sharp & Newman, 1991; Holloway, 2001); ensuring that board members are kept informed (Fore, 1999); providing open, transparent communication (Fore, 1999; LaFee, 2005); mobilizing community resources to accomplish district goals (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008); collaborating with the community (Holloway, 2001); and helping build the community and working effectively within the political context of the district (Orr, 2006).

Superintendents who are effective communicators consistently exhibit a number of skills and behaviors. They have sophisticated organizational skills (Lindelov & Bentley, 1989), know how to use words and other symbols to help make meaning for their districts (Bryman, 2004) and to facilitate the development of a shared vision among their stakeholders (Holloway, 2001). They can reframe

discussions to focus toward positive outcomes (Wertz, 2003).

They are also effective listeners and consciously employ such techniques as listening tours and public meetings to solicit information, opinions and perspectives from stakeholders, particularly underrepresented constituencies (LaFee, 2009). By listening well, effective superintendents and other leaders encourage full airing of others' perspectives and come to understand those perspectives (Wertz, 2003; Galanes, 2003; Galanes & Dierks, 2009). Employing good listening and other effective communication skills is essential to creating a trusting environment and shared vision, all of which promote a culture of continuous improvement (suggesting a consistent focus on effectiveness) and a collaborative culture (Bjork & Bond, 2006). Collaboration, then, is at the heart of superintendent leadership.

### *Leadership as Collaborative Activity*

Although superintendents serve as the chief educational leaders of their districts, they are simultaneously expected both to lead and to collaborate in decision making with respect to their districts (Brunner, 1998). Effective superintendents seem to be able to do both: provide directive and nurturing leadership (Sampson, 2009). This mixed message suggests that superintendents are expected to adopt a contemporary approach to conceptualizing leadership as a communicative phenomenon, *a la* Hackman and Johnson (2009, p. 11):

“Leadership is human (symbolic) communication, which modifies the attitudes and behavior of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs.” It is the “shared goals” aspect of this definition that makes the superintendent’s job “inherently collaborative, interactive” (Watson & Scribner, 2007, p. 443). Superintendents are expected to share power by including groups like teachers and the public in decision making, which requires them to be skilled in team management, for which the development of build trust among participants is essential (Lindelov & Bentley, 1989).

Watson and Scribner (2007), in their review of leadership literature as it relates to educational leadership, conclude that effective

educational leaders engage in a process of “emergent reciprocal influence,” which they say “captures the essence of the nature and process of distributed leadership within collaborative contexts,” namely, leadership is a product of social interaction involving mutual influence among the interactants (p. 461). This view of leadership explicitly acknowledges the dynamic nature of leadership, the fact that it is inherently collaborative, and that it focuses on the behavior of leaders and those with whom they interact rather than on the position or the specific person of the leader. It assumes that, in the interaction between leaders and followers, a process of mutual influence occurs. This collaborative and dynamic leadership contrasts with an image many have of a leader as a strong, solitary individual charting a singular course. It suggests, instead, that effective school leaders perceive themselves as necessarily working with others. This view is supported by Brunner (1998), who found that those superintendents who conceived of power as power with others, as opposed to power over others were better able to engage in collaborative decision making.

Collaborative leadership requires skills of facilitation. Although many leaders have been schooled in leadership that is directive and hierarchical, contemporary leadership requires a different, less unilateral approach (Nissen, Merrigan, & Kraft, 2005). At the heart of collaborative leadership are the skills of relationship and constituency building. For example, Chrislip and Larson’s (1994) in-depth investigation into six examples of successful complex community collaborations, discovered that successful collaborations are facilitated when they occur in an atmosphere of trust, use an open process that stakeholders perceive as credible, and have the support of visible leaders and established authorities. Other studies, both in the United States and the United Kingdom, have acknowledge the importance of the social capital that effective community leaders bring to the collaborative process (Purdue, 2001; Hemphill, McGreal, Berry, & Watson, 2006). Hemphill et al. (2006), in particular, found that collaborative processes succeeded when leaders created inclusive environments that invited the participation of all members and attended both to task and relationship issues. Such leaders were also able to set their own egos aside for the sake of the collaboration’s success. Collaborative leaders find ways in which participants can agree by overcoming mistrust, creating a shared mind set, demonstrating commitment to the collaborative process (Chrislip & Larson, 1994).

The behaviors of effective superintendents parallel the behaviors of community leaders just described. Effective superintendents seek collaborative relationships with their many stakeholders because they believe that collaboration improves decision making (Wertz, 2003). They utilize dialogue and listening skills when they engage in a joint problem-solving process with others who hold varying perspectives. Young, Petersen, & Short (2002) note that a key to successful change efforts in schools depends on the stakeholders' willingness to seek and find common ground and mutually-agreed-on goals, central issues in collaboration. Brewster and Railsback (2003) state that "The quality of relationships within a school community makes a difference" to how well a school functions (p. 2). Effective superintendents promote high quality relationships among stakeholders and help them find common ground.

The previous sections have acknowledged superintendents need excellent communication skills to enable them to lead collaboratively. At present, there is a paucity of research regarding exactly how superintendents and other leaders enact collaborative leadership—what they do and how they do it (Hentschke et al., 2009). The goal of this research and the overarching research question guiding this study is: How do effective superintendents manage the process of fostering collaboration among multiple, sometimes competing, stakeholders?

## **Methods**

This study sought to understand how successful superintendents, as exemplars of complex organizations, foster collaboration and was part of a larger study of superintendents' communication behaviors. A purposive sample of successful superintendents and individuals who work with them was interviewed, individually and in focus groups. Such qualitative data can potentially reveal relevant factors that might be missed in surveys (Bryman, 2004). This study used a procedure similar to that of Hentschke et al. (2009), who combined two rounds of interviews, individual interviews with four superintendents and focus group interviews including the superintendent and two members of his or her team.

### *Sample of Superintendents*

This present study used data from individual interviews with five superintendents in the Midwest who were selected using both subjective and objective criteria. Initially, nominations were sought from state-level educators, education professors from two universities in the area, media personnel who consistently work with and report education news, representatives from educational administration professional organizations, area legislators and key community leaders. This closely resembles that used by Brunner (1998) to select her list of excellent superintendents. Once the master list of superintendents was compiled, three objective criteria were applied: whether the superintendent had been in the position for at least three years, whether the district had achieved the “Distinction in Performance” designation established by the state (as a measure of district performance) in the previous year, and whether a tax initiative had been passed in the district within the past two years (as a measure of community support). Superintendents from five districts in [specific location in] Missouri met these criteria. All were Caucasian men from their mid-forties to mid-sixties, had been in their positions for a minimum of six years, and served small to medium-sized districts ranging from 4077 to 5437 in pupil size (Missouri School Directory, 2010).

After IRB approval was granted, interviews lasting approximately one hour were conducted in the superintendents’ offices. The interview questions followed a semi-structured protocol that encouraged exploration and probing. All three researchers conducted three of the interviews; two researchers conducted the other two. The interviews were taped, with permission, and transcribed by the researchers shortly after the interviews.

### *Focus Group Participants*

Focus groups were conducted with individuals who worked closely with each superintendent and thus provided independent assessments of their superintendent’s behaviors and communicative style, a methodology supported by Hentschke et al. (2009) and Orr (2006). Three focus groups included five individuals; two included four. For each focus group, attempts were made to include a representative from each of the following five categories: the school board (all but one

focus group included a school board member, including two board presidents); the district administrative staff (three focus groups included the district's communication director; one included a principal); the business community (each focus group included a Chamber of Commerce staff person or prominent member of the business community); teachers (each focus group included at least one current or recently retired teacher); and parents (at least one parent of a current or former student was included in each focus group; in some cases, a parent also represented another category).

All three researchers were present for four of the focus group interviews; two were present for the fifth. The interview questions paralleled the superintendent questions, but also probed for areas where the superintendents could improve their performance. As with the individual interviews, the focus groups lasted approximately an hour, were taped with permission, and were transcribed by the researchers soon after the interviews.

### *Data Analysis*

The data were interpreted by looking for broad themes and meanings using a constant comparative method to identify common themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Taylor & Boglan, 1998). Each researcher independently read each transcript to identify behaviors related to the research questions and compiled a master list of relevant responses and memorable illustrative quotations. The researchers then conferred to discuss and integrate their individual findings, which are described in the next section.

## **Results**

Each of the superintendents interviewed enacted what could be termed a "personal" superintendency that was highly relational in nature, and each viewed the school to be in what one stakeholder called a "seamless" relationship with the community. The superintendents were active, visible members of their communities who created, if they did not already exist, vehicles through which the community as a whole, the city, the business community, parents, and the school community could collaborate to address community and school issues. As one stakeholder said of her superintendent, "I think he is excellent at creating a sense of

‘us.’ He is willing to show the way, but makes it very clear from the starting gate it is not one man who is going to accomplish any one vision.” The superintendents’ actions fell into two broad categories that actually occur simultaneously: establishing a foundation of trust and engaging in behaviors and strategies that allow people to get on the same page. The categories overlap to some extent.

### *Establishing a Foundation of Trust*

The superintendents worked consciously to establish a solid foundation of trust within which effective and genuine collaboration could occur. Three general factors facilitate this, including believing in the process of collaboration, demonstrating mutual respect, and acting with honesty and integrity.

### *Belief in the Process*

The superintendents used collaborative decision making for everything from redrawing district boundaries and establishing school fundraising policies to determining the school calendar and redesigning the curriculum. For decisions large and small, they invited public input, often from the community as a whole but at minimum from groups with particular expertise about key issues. One superintendent, observing the physical configuration of the room during his interview, noted, “I can see that door and you can’t; you can see this plant and I can’t. So, you know, that’s why you have leadership teams. Get the 360° perspective, not just through tunnel vision.” The superintendents genuinely believed in considering multiple perspectives:

We believe there’s wisdom in the collective. None of us is smart enough to make every single decision by ourselves. So we want to get as much input and get as much people- hands on that issue as we can, and then we can figure it out. . . . All of us in the room, somebody’s going to have a good idea.

Another said, “As [state representative] Maynard Wallace says, ‘It doesn’t matter how flat the pancake, there’s always going to be two sides.’” These superintendents wanted to hear both sides.

The superintendents acknowledged that, today, the public expects to participate in decisions affecting public schools, but they also

supported seeking widespread input for all important decisions. The superintendents are expected to be authorities on educational policy and law, but for many decisions, “We don’t know the answer,” so superintendents ask, “What do you guys feel?” One superintendent said, “I often said, ‘If we are only as good as my ideas, we aren’t very good.’” For many decisions, there is not a single right answer, and “some things are community preference.” In such cases, the superintendents generally sought widespread input.

The stakeholders confirmed what the superintendents said about collaboration. All stakeholders believed they were part of a team invested in making their schools as strong as they can be. One teacher said, “You can have the best quarterback on a team, they can still have a losing record . . . . It takes a team effort, including the management, which in this case would be the school board.” The stakeholders, as well as the superintendents, believed in the team approach, supported their superintendents’ collaborative styles, and had a hand in promoting collaborative decisions with respect to the schools.

While most of the superintendents sought input from the community at large, one placed less value in general community input into school decision making. However, this superintendent did describe a number of situations where he invited input from teachers and staff (including custodial staff) and sought public input regarding decisions directly affecting the public (such as redrawing of boundaries). He valued input from specific individuals or groups who would be affected by a decision or who had particular expertise in the decision to be made. Thus, even though his style was more top-down than the others, he provided ample opportunities for two-way communication between the school and its key stakeholders.

The superintendents not only believed that multiple perspectives produced better decisions, they also demonstrated a willingness to change their minds. One superintendent, based on security concerns regarding the district’s new football stadium, stopped the long-standing practice of patrons flooding onto the field after football games. This unpopular decision met with grudging compliance, but many patrons, particularly parents and the high school principal, continued to lobby to change the policy. That superintendent said, “I should’ve listened to the community . . . I didn’t listen to the patrons very well,” and eventually changed his mind. Another superintendent had resisted using social networking technology as an additional communication vehicle, until he

attended a technology conference at the instigation of his communication director and re-thought his position. In another example, the school board voted, for cost saving reasons, to join a health consortium affiliated with a different system than the district had previously used. Many teachers and other district personnel were extremely upset over this highly emotion-laden issue. A retired teacher emailed the superintendent, synthesizing for him the many negative comments she had received about this decision. Listening to that input, the superintendent and the board reconsidered the decision and renegotiated their arrangement with their original provider, who offered a lower cost option than the system to which the board had recommended switching. This teacher was heartened that the superintendent paid attention to the concerns and actually did something about them. These examples suggest that the superintendents were willing to be open to and persuaded by others' opinions and ideas, even when those ideas contradicted their own.

### *Demonstrating Mutual Respect*

The superintendents were described as treating everyone the same: custodial staff, parents, professional staff, and community leaders. Capturing the sentiments of all the superintendents, one said, "I believe everybody is due the same level of respect and I don't care if I'm talking to a custodian or if I'm talking to a board member." Superintendents were described as being genuine, real, and honestly caring about others. One stakeholder described her superintendent acting graciously to a set of parents who had come to address the board over a problem with their child. The superintendent greeted them at the door, made sure they knew they were welcome, got them coffee, and spoke with them after the decision, which had gone against them. Although the superintendent and the parents were on opposite sides of the issue, he treated them with respect and made sure that others did as well. One board member, noting that his superintendent and board do not always agree, said, "You can be in opposition [with him], but it's not an oppositional relationship." The superintendents were described as treating everyone with respect and courtesy.

The superintendents believed and acted as if everyone matters. They conceptualized all groups in the community as allies and potential supporters of the schools. This included not only parents but young professionals without children, retirees, retired school personnel, the

business community, city/county government, and visitors to the community as well. One superintendent, talking about retirees, said, “I’ve never seen them as stumbling blocks. They are allies.” They invite all groups in the community to school events, such as concerts, sports events, theater performances, and so forth. For the more rural districts, the school’s sports teams serve the same unifying function that other communities’ professional sports teams serve.

Effective superintendents go out of their way to diffuse, or at least not provoke, others’ anger. One offered a lion tamer analogy: The lion tamer will “never intentionally provoke the animal.” Another explained why he thinks it is critical to treat all people well:

Let’s be careful we don’t insult, let’s be very careful that we don’t make this a personal issue because it’s not a personal issue. They will forgive us—they may not agree, but they will forgive us—unless we do something that is inhumane or [engage in] bad treatment.

Several of the superintendents had inherited pre-existing conflicts in their districts and saw it as a top priority to repair relationships and ensure that others were treated with respect. In one district where the city, business community and school had publicly attacked one another in the press, the stakeholder group revealed that the superintendent was instrumental in helping these groups overcome their mistrust and begin working together as a team. In this district, representatives from city government were invited to attend and participate in the school’s annual planning process and, partly as a result, instituted their own strategic planning process modeled on the school’s. But the habits of public attack were not necessarily easily overcome. The school board president called a private meeting with two board members who had been publicly badmouthing city officials, and said to them, “Openly, in public meetings, you will not say anything negative about the city ... we’re partners in this and we need to find the positives in what we can work with, and if there’s negatives we leave them at home.” Although it took time, this district now has excellent relationships among the school, city government and business community, and the school superintendent is credited with providing the leadership that enabled these entities to overcome their historic mistrust. His strong belief in treating everyone with respect had permeated to the other people with whom he worked. Although this story is a particularly dramatic example

of a superintendent moving relationships from acrimonious to cooperative, the general example of superintendents providing community leadership characterized by respect for other groups and individuals was a common one.

### *Acting with Honesty and Integrity*

The superintendents paid careful attention to their own credibility: “Your credibility is important” and “credibility and the trust and the relationships are all built over time.” These men took the time intentionally to build their credibility with constituents and stakeholders. For example, they emphasized common experiences with their stakeholders: growing up on a farm, having worked as a teacher and principal, having driven a bus or worked in construction, and so forth. They worked to show that they “remember[ed] what it’s like.” They also were perceived as putting the kids and the district first: “[He] never approached anyone . . . where he has asked them for something for personal gain.”

All the superintendents were described by their stakeholders as being open, transparent in their communication, and truthful. They did not try to hide anything. Several sets of stakeholders gave us examples of bad news that the superintendents voluntarily shared with, first, the board and then the media and general public: an embezzling employee, a bus that hit a child, a gun that accidentally went off during a conservation officer’s demonstration, bad performance test scores or a looming financial crisis that would prompt program cuts. The superintendents worked proactively to get the information out and were perceived as being straight shooters, not spinners of information.

Consistency of message and action was also important to a superintendent’s establishing credibility as an honest person of integrity. As one stakeholder said, “Actions speak louder than words.” Numerous examples were shared to illustrate message and action consistency. One stakeholder chuckled about his superintendent calculating, during a gas crisis, how much money would be saved if all people driving district vehicles did not exceed 60 miles per hour. He asked that district drivers do that, and he himself was the first to comply with the request. Several superintendents explained that when they asked for money from the public, they were careful first to establish the need and explain the specific purposes for which the money would be used—a new library, an

addition to a junior high, new turf for the football field. They then did exactly what they said they were going to with the money. One superintendent added that “We usually try to do a little more than what we said we were going to do,” thereby underpromising and overdelivering.

As mentioned earlier, people need time to get to know someone before they can trust that person and believe that he or she acts with honesty and integrity. These superintendents demonstrated their commitment to their districts over the long haul and allowed their stakeholders to get to know them over time. One stakeholder, in a district where the superintendent had served in district administration for over 20 years, emphasized the importance of longevity and “lineage,” by which he meant that the superintendent and the district had developed a history together. To him, longevity and trust are linked: “I don’t think you can separate the two,” and “They [the public] want to know you’re invested.” This individual, lamenting his superintendent’s imminent retirement, said that it would be impossible for the new superintendent to start with this history in place.

In this particular school district, the school administration had never used eminent domain to claim property for school additions or improvements. Although the district’s vision was to create a school complex with a road to connect all buildings, eminent domain was not invoked to hasten fulfillment of that vision. The superintendent and other district officials went privately to the homeowners, expressed an interest in buying their property whenever the homeowner wanted to sell and, in at least one case, bought the property and allowed the homeowner to rent it for a nominal cost until he was ready to leave. This example was shared to emphasize the integrity and compassion that were hallmarks of the superintendent’s leadership.

The establishment of a foundation of trust is essential for collaboration. Trust enables the superintendent’s actions to be viewed through a positive filter and provides him or her some flexibility. Conversely, a superintendent who is not trusted will be thwarted: “Where the trust doesn’t exist, they question everything.” Trusted superintendents who are perceived as honest will be granted the leeway to try new things, forgiven when they make a mistake, and find that their ideas are granted open-minded hearings. However, once a foundation of trust is established, it must be nurtured and sustained; the development of trust is ongoing and continuing.

## **Strategies to Establish Common Ground**

A foundation of trust provides a solid basis for leading a district, but most superintendents must move their districts forward at the same time they work to establish trust. Having a foundation of trust is not sufficient for a district to succeed. All superintendents must work with multiple stakeholders with varying perspectives about what their districts should do, and must find effective ways of navigating these multiple perspectives to chart a single course of action for the district. The superintendents used a number of strategies designed to find or create common ground between stakeholders and the school.

Differences among stakeholder perspectives can tear a district apart and prevent it from accomplishing academic and other goals. Conflicts, particularly public ones, cause public support to plummet and can hamper district progress for years. One superintendent said, “Conflicts don’t pass bond issues. Conflicts don’t play out very well in the coffee shop. It just stirs the misinformation and usually what you brew is problems.” Superintendents face real, lasting consequences if they cannot overcome oppositions and find ways to get people moving together, in the same direction, on behalf of their districts. The superintendents interviewed worked hard to find or develop common ground and to create a sense of “us” within their communities. The strategies they used fell into four broad categories: building relationships, listening, providing information and experiences in common, and utilizing procedures designed to produce consensus. As with trust-building strategies, these also overlap.

### *Building Relationships*

The superintendents consciously and deliberately built relationships with a variety of stakeholders in their districts, from teachers and professional staff to parents, community leaders, business people, and government officials. In doing so, they emphasized their commonality with a variety of groups. They “spend a lot of time building relationships, learning and listening, and getting a feel for the administrative team, your staff, and your community.” They saw their foundation of trust as resting on the relationships they built: “The whole key to building trust is that you create a relationship with people.” Several used the analogy of the “three-legged stool” on which the health

of a community rests: the school, the city, and the business community. Therefore, they tried to strengthen those relationships in particular.

The superintendent's relationship with the board was an especially important one; all of them talked about steps they took to get to know their board members. One of them "job shadowed" members of his board by spending a day with each at his or her workplace, thereby getting to know each board member on a personal basis and understanding what daily pressures confront that board member. When people know one another in this way, they have a context in which to address important issues and a history of good will on which to draw: "Difficult conversations are then easier as a result of that ongoing inclusion." Personal relationships like these ultimately made the superintendent's job easier.

Involvement with the entire community is important as well. All superintendents were active, visible members of their communities. They belonged to the Chamber of Commerce and to a variety of service clubs, most were active in their churches, and all worked to be seen as supporters of their communities. They made a point of going to each part of their districts to get to know people from throughout their districts. That included doing such things as hanging out in a coffee shop in a remote corner of the district, attending meetings of organizations throughout the district, and being known as someone who could be counted on to support the community.

Moreover, the superintendents protected their relationships. For example, several had inherited thorny relationships with the business community or city government when they took their positions. They worked to overcome these tense relationships by resisting public fights with other community entities. Early in his tenure, one superintendent was met with an advertisement, placed by prominent business and government leaders in the local paper, opposing a particular decision of the school board. As tempted as he felt to publicly oppose this group, that superintendent said to a government official, "I'm not going to fight with you in public . . . We'll take a stand, but I'm just not going to act that way." This refusal to fight publicly helped cultivate trust and set the relationship on a more congenial and cooperative course.

## *Listening*

Listening was a key strategy employed by all the superintendents and confirmed by their stakeholders. One said that his approach to merging multiple points of view was “listening your way to a solution.” His stakeholders echoed this approach: “If you listen long enough, you get the answer.” While listening was the main problem-solving strategy used, by design, in this district, superintendents in the other districts were also reputed to be excellent listeners and readily accessible to those who wanted to talk. One stakeholder offered an example. He had encountered a problem with a district policy being upheld in a particular way by his daughter’s athletic coach. The superintendent, after ascertaining that the man had first talked to the coach and to the building principal, listened to his concern. The coach and the principal did not have the authority to modify the policy, but the superintendent and the board could—and did—reconsider the policy’s effect, ultimately changing it. However, this parent was quick to state that he would have been satisfied even had the policy not changed because he felt heard, acknowledged, and understood by the superintendent .

Other examples included the planned listening of one superintendent, who wanted to know from parents how the district could ease the children’s transition from one to two kindergarten buildings. Parents later thanked him for the district’s response to their feedback. In another example, the superintendent was praised for hearing the concerns of the business community, who were being bombarded by numerous parent groups with fundraising initiatives. In response to these concerns, this superintendent formed a task force bringing business representatives and parent groups together to hear and understand one another’s concerns. The outcome was creation of policy guidelines, supported by both business and parents, to regulate parent fundraising on behalf of the school.

The superintendents established a number of vehicles to facilitate listening to the community, with its various stakeholder groups. They met with any group that invited them (“We do meetings with everybody.”); established regular focus groups, which included the community, for discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the schools; had regular coffee gatherings with parents and others; established advisory committees of teachers, secretaries, staff members, custodians, parents, and other community groups; and encouraged people to email or

call the school with their concerns. As one stakeholder said, “There’s a lot of ways we can get to him.” Superintendents made it easy for people to be heard and convenient for them to attend by doing something as simple as providing child care. Stakeholders noted, also, that the superintendents had imparted their good listening skills to the staff; thus, when the superintendent could not be reached, the staff filled in effectively.

### *Providing Information and Experiences in Common*

To have a sense of “us,” community members must perceive themselves as having interests in common. The superintendents worked to develop common interests by ensuring that their entire communities had the same information about the schools.

The superintendents first worked diligently to ensure that board members were on the same page about the district and its goals by providing the board complete and accurate information, good and bad, about the schools. They believed that if the board and the administrative team were in harmony, both groups would come to the same conclusions and would make informed decisions. All the superintendents educated their board members to ensure that they understood the context for their decisions. In a typical example, one superintendent described how, in preparation for a difficult budget meeting, the board held a prior work session where they learned, among other things, the specific dollar amounts attached to each program. This superintendent believed that with accurate information, people would come to see things in similar ways, ultimately making problem solving easier. Another, knowing that his district’s insurance costs had to be lowered, shared the facts with his board: “I was basically saying that something had to change and . . . I shared why I thought it was a good idea and I had to convince them.” Sharing the facts essentially did the job of convincing the board to make a change.

Similarly, the superintendents worked to educate the community to ensure that the community had accurate and up-to-date information about the schools. One superintendent, while touting the fact that his district performed well academically with relatively low per pupil expenses, nevertheless persistently shared comparison data about state and regional salaries, which revealed his district’s dreadfully low salary schedules. Because he never missed a chance to talk about these facts,

they became widely disseminated across his district, which built support for a tax increase targeted specifically at raising the salary schedule. In another rapidly growing district, the staff anticipated the need for a second high school. The superintendent consistently and frequently talked about the community's growth and the school's capacity issues. When the district eventually requested a tax increase for a second school, the community was not surprised and readily supported the request. As one stakeholder said, "Going to the different organizations and giving them facts. . . . [and] making a clear case for the need." Superintendents worked hard to make a clear case for their needs.

The superintendents purposefully educated their communities about their schools, "keeping it constantly in front of the public" in a variety of ways. For example, one superintendent produced a video telling the school's story and showed this video wherever he was invited to speak. Other districts had annual "state of the school" events—dinner, public meetings, and so forth—where the general public was provided updated information about the district. The superintendents believed that these types of activities accomplished two things: they helped build the school's case and also helped counter misinformation potentially damaging to building support for the schools.

One effective strategy, when a major initiative or change was contemplated, was to take key members of the community to observe the change first hand. One superintendent, wanting the community to expand its vision of what the district could be, took the board, parents and other community members to observe other schools in the region. Another wanted his district to adopt the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model, based on vertical integration of the curriculum, which would entail significant change in how the school operated. He arranged for groups of teachers, board members, and community leaders to travel to Chicago to observe the PLC model in action before he started the local work necessary for adoption and implementation. By providing a common experience, he created a common vision for people in his district: "I think it was more accepted because, if Mark said 'I went, it's great, you wouldn't believe what I saw' it was better than someone handing you a booklet or a study." This strategy maximized support, generated enthusiasm for the change, and defused potential opposition.

Finally, the superintendents timed their initiatives carefully, resisting going forward before people were adequately prepared for a major change: "You have to give them time to get there." They avoided

surprising people with unexpected requests, such as funds for a new school or major curricular changes. Instead, they provided the groundwork for people to understand and support their requests and their reasoning: “So you think you find common ground to start with and you build from there.” While they may have felt urgency to act, they waited patiently for their communities to catch up so the stakeholders could support the desired change.

### *Utilizing Procedures Designed to Produce Consensus*

Several strategies the superintendents used to produce consensus have already been presented to illustrate other points made in this paper. However, the superintendents also engaged other activities as well.

One important such activity was strategic or long-range planning, a regular feature for several of the districts. The strategic planning initiatives were inclusive. Because the superintendents genuinely believed that the schools belong to the entire community, they invited the entire community to participate in long range planning. Said one, “We have a very well organized comprehensive school improvement planning process . . . and one of the things that it requires is having involvement from our community.” Strategic planning was usually conducted by the superintendent and his staff. Sometimes oriented around a specific initiative, such as building a new school, the planning process usually occurred annually as a way for the district to touch base with the community, uncover community perceptions, and spot trends as they emerged. Occasionally, a strategic planning session began with a brief history of the district, which brought newer community members up to date: “I thought it was very educational for those people who were present. . . I haven’t been in the district for 25 years, so it was kind of like the past, present and future.” Strategic and long range planning helped create a sense of “us.”

All of the superintendents held regular discussions with various groups, particularly their staffs. Many of these sessions were designed for information sharing, not decision making, and helped promote common experiences, information, and shared perspectives among stakeholders.

Finally, the superintendents’ favorite method for establishing common bonds with stakeholders was to meet with people face to face,

individually and in groups, as often as possible: “If you don’t get face to face with people, it falls apart.”

## **Discussion**

Collaboration within a district merits a superintendent’s time and attention. Four conclusions were drawn from the analysis of these interviews. First, the superintendents were committed to the value of collaboration; thus, they invited input from a variety of groups and made it possible for individuals and groups to provide that input. This was not a matter of paying mere lip service to the management concept of moment—they truly believed that better decisions were made through collaboration and they worked to create vehicles by which others could participate in shaping district decisions. While they often had strong opinions and provided directive leadership when necessary, they made room for others to contribute ideas and opinions. The superintendents were inclusive, seeing all groups in the community as having—appropriately—a stake in the future of the schools. Rather than seeing multiple stakeholder groups as potential problems, they saw them as potential allies for their schools.

Second, the successful superintendents enacted a personal superintendent style that was highly relational and characterized by respect for others. They cherished and protected their personal credibility, believing that mutual trust and respect provided the foundation for effective collaboration and decision making. All the superintendents were committed to this philosophy and worked to implement it in their communities.

Third, the superintendents worked diligently to build relationships and create a sense of community, a sense of “us,” among the school, business sector, government sector, and community as a whole. They found ways to bring these groups together, often by initiating routine planning practices incorporating all the groups. They created processes, procedures, and initiatives whereby people could work together from a common set of facts and information, thereby making collaboration easier and routine. This process of sharing common information and experiences served as a focusing device to get people working together for a common purpose. The superintendents also allowed stakeholders the time they needed to process and absorb information before initiating a major change.

Finally, the interviews with these successful superintendents support the contention that effective communication is essential for success in leading a large and complex organization, such as a school system. The ability to demonstrate one's understanding of others and one's appreciation of others' perspectives is, fundamentally, a communicative activity, as is the ability to bring others together in common purpose. The contribution of effective two-way communication to a leader's success cannot be overemphasized.

### *Future Research*

Two important limitations to this present study, beyond the small size and gender/racial homogeneity of the sample, are the facts that the school districts studied are all small to medium-sized districts in a relaxed Midwestern culture where a personal superintendency is both expected and possible. These limitations suggest three main areas for future research: How does the behavior of superintendents in large districts compare to that of superintendents in smaller districts? Can a personal superintendency be enacted in a larger district and, if so, how does it differ? What is the effect of the culture on the expectations of a superintendent, and how do superintendents adjust their behaviors to fit the culture in which they work? and, finally, Are there differences in how male and female superintendents communicate and behave?

Despite the similarity of the superintendents and the size and homogeneity of the districts studied here, the lessons learned about communication—specifically creating a sense of “us”—broadly apply. Somehow, leaders of complex organization with multiple stakeholders must build trust and create common ground so that all the stakeholders perceive a personal stake in the fate of the organization and can agree on a particular direction for that organization. The communication strategies noted here can provide a starting point for leaders to do this.

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**A Rhetorical “God Gap”: Religious-Political  
Rhetoric of George W. Bush and John F. Kerry**

*Brian Kaylor*

**Abstract**

*During the 2004 campaign, commentators suggested that John Kerry needed to talk about religion more in order to defeat President George W. Bush. Some spoke of a “God gap” that gave Bush an edge because of support from religious individuals. Democrats changed their campaign strategies for 2006 and 2008 as a result of this so-called “God gap.” This study analyzes the religious messages in campaign addresses by Bush and Kerry and compares the messages of the two candidates in order to gain a deeper understanding of the campaign and the nature of religious-political campaign rhetoric. The argument is made that the real differences in the religious comments by the candidates are not quantitative but qualitative.*

As Barack Obama placed his hand on the Bible and took the presidential oath of office, it capped off a four-year redemption effort by the Democratic Party to demonstrate to voters that the Party and its candidates are religious. Four years earlier, numerous commentators and strategists argued that Senator John F. Kerry needed to talk about religion even more to defeat President George W. Bush, who frequently invoked God and quoted scriptures in his speeches. A 2004 Pew Research Center poll indicated that while 52% of respondents felt the GOP was religion-friendly, only 40% thought the Democratic Party was (Davidson 2004). Thus, Kerry and the Democratic Party sought to overcome this so-called “God gap.” In order to reach out to religious individuals, the Democratic Party held its first caucus for “people of faith” at its convention in Boston, and the week before the convention the party hired a Disciples of Christ minister as a senior adviser on outreach to religious voters. As a result, religious issues and language frequently surfaced in the 2004 election as both Bush and Kerry courted faith voters. Despite the attempts by Kerry and other Democrats, the “God gap” continued and may have made the difference in the election as Bush won nearly two-thirds of voters who attend church more than

once a week and Kerry won nearly two-thirds of those who never attend church (Foust 2004).

Although the 2004 effort by the Democratic Party was unsuccessful, they continued to engage religious voters and saw success over the next few years. Tim Kaine won the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election and Ted Strickland won the 2006 Ohio gubernatorial context, with both men finding political success in part because of their strong religious campaign messages. Then, as the 2008 presidential election approached, the Democratic candidates struggled to out God talk each other. During the 2008 Democratic primary race, Obama spoke at the fiftieth anniversary meeting of the United Church of Christ, Obama and Clinton spoke at meetings hosted by conservative evangelical leader Rick Warren, Edwards joined Obama and Clinton in talking about their personal faith during a Presidential Forum on Faith, Values, and Poverty sponsored by CNN and the liberal evangelical Christian organization Sojourners, and Obama and Clinton gathered for another night of religious Q&A at the Compassion Forum sponsored by CNN and the liberal group Faith in Public Life. Ultimately, Obama not only out God talked his Democratic opponents but also Republican John McCain. Obama's ability to comfortably and articulately talk about religion should not have been too surprising. After all, Obama had attempted to assist Kerry with this effort in 2004 by declaring during his keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention: "We worship an awesome God in the blue states" (Obama, 2004, ¶80).

After Kerry's loss, the Democratic Party responded in part by finding religion—especially after an exit poll identified "moral values" as the main issue that drove people's voting decision in the race between Kerry and Bush. However, did Kerry really avoid the topic of religion as many commentators have suggested? Did Kerry's religious messages fail to compare with the quantity of Bush's, or did he speak about religious issues substantially different than Bush? Are there clues in Kerry's religious-political rhetoric to explain why he failed where Obama succeeded just four years later? To answer these questions, this study topically examines the religious messages of Bush and Kerry in their campaign speeches during the 2004 general election. The argument is made that the real differences in the religious comments by the candidates are not quantitative but qualitative. Important implications from this study are discussed concerning both the nature of religious-political rhetoric in the 2004 election and in American politics in general.

## Red God versus Blue God

Although religion and politics are often considered taboo topics for polite dinner conversation, many commentators and politicians have noted the important role religion plays in modern political campaigns. Yet, scholars have given as much attention to issues of religion and politics, particularly to the rhetoric of candidates who failed to capture the White House or even their party's nomination. As Wald and Wilcox (2006) argued, "Apart from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science" (523). They added that when compared to political research in other areas, "[t]here has been less contagion in religion and politics" (529). Adding to the relative dearth of scholarly attention is that several of these studies only briefly covered religious themes or focused more on presidential rhetoric instead of campaign rhetoric. Thus, Darsey and Ritter (2008) argued that it is "clear the enormous amount of work there is to be done on religion in U.S. public discourse and the great need for that work" (571).

This study examines the religious messages of President Bush and Senator Kerry in their speeches during the 2004 general election, starting with March 2 ("Super Tuesday," the date Kerry essentially wrapped up the nomination) and ending with the close of the polls on November 2. The FDCH Political Transcripts database included 110 speeches for Kerry during this period and 369 domestic speeches for Bush. Bush's foreign speeches and joint appearances with foreign leaders were excluded due to the fact that Kerry had no speeches of this type, and since they were much less campaign oriented (since these speeches often had foreigners, and thus non-voters, as the primary audience). Additionally, this analysis included the three general election debates between the candidates. All religious references (i.e., God, Lord, Bible, Jew, Christian, Muslim, Islam, church, mosque, synagogue, religion, spiritual, amen, etc.) were then extracted from the speeches, along with references to religious leaders. The religious messages of these speeches were then analyzed, and the statements of the candidates were compared with each other. This textual analysis method resembles other recent communication studies (e.g., Benoit 1997; Compton 2006; Kantor, et al. 2001). Of Kerry's speeches, 72 (65%) included a religious reference, and 301 (82%) of Bush's did. Both candidates used religious language in all three general election debates. These religious references were then

analyzed on several topical levels to explore qualitative differences between the two candidates.

### *God Bless*

The most consistent religious references throughout the speeches for both candidates were the “God Bless” statements, usually at the end of a speech. Common phrases included “God bless America,” “God bless you,” “May God bless,” or simply “God bless.” Klope (2002) argued that the statement “God bless America” may best represent American civil religion and helps the speaker gain religious and patriotic legitimacy through its ideographic power. Kerry used a “God bless” statement in 51 speeches (46%), and in two of the debates. This type of statement was the only religious references in 15 of his speeches (21% of speeches with a religious reference). In fact, his last speech of the campaign did not have any religious references at all, and a “God bless” statement was the only religious reference in his six speeches before that one. Bush used one of these phrases in 281 speeches (76%), and in all three debates. This type of phrase was the only religious comment in 49 of his speeches (16% of speeches with a religious reference).

The candidates would sometimes deviate from the more traditional “God bless” statements, such as when Kerry declared “And may God bless our men and women in uniform, and keep them and America safe,” (Kerry 2004c) or when Bush stated, “May God bless Ronald Reagan,” (Bush 2004d) or “May God bless the state of Ohio” (Bush 2004e). On several occasions Bush told the story of an Iraqi man, who had been tortured by Saddam Hussein’s troops, writing “God bless America” in Arabic. However, the most unique deviation, and most explicitly religious use of this otherwise more ceremonial statement, came from Kerry:

We always end our speeches in campaigns like this by saying “God bless America.” But it seems to me that we should also say to God, “Thank you for blessing America in so many ways.” May America always have God’s blessing. (Kerry 2004i)

Throughout the campaign Bush more frequently used a “God bless” statement than Kerry, and Kerry had more speeches where this was his only type of religious reference. Other than Kerry’s October 24

comment, the “God bless” statements were used with little explanation or added spirituality.

### Freedom/Liberty

Perhaps one of the key tenets of American civil religion is the belief in freedom and liberty. Hart (1977) argued that words such as “freedom,” “democracy,” and “providence” are used ritualistically to establish power in civil religion. The most common religious reference other than the “God bless” statements was Bush’s declaration that freedom comes from God: “I believe all these things, not because freedom is America’s gift to the world, but because freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to every man and woman in this world” (Bush 2004j). This phrase, or similar versions of it, was used by Bush in 147 speeches (40%), and in the last of the three debates. On most occasions Bush used the word freedom, but on a couple times he used liberty. Bush later explained that he—and not a speechwriter—first coined this line: “As a matter of fact, I was the person who wrote the line, or said it. I didn’t write it, I just said it in a speech. And it became part of the jargon. And I believe it” (Albright 2006, 5). Thus, for Bush this line united both his religious and political beliefs to justify his actions in perhaps the most contentious issue of the 2004 presidential election. On a couple of occasions, Bush developed this concept even more fully as a key aspect of American civil religion. Just before making the statement in one speech, he quoted FDR to establish the concept of freedom and liberty as America’s creed:

On July the 4th, 1942, in the midst of the second world war, President Franklin Roosevelt gave encouragement to our troops abroad by reminding them of our nation’s founding creed. They were fighting, he said, because Americans believe in “the right to liberty under God.” (Bush 2004g)

And in the third presidential debate, Bush stated:

I believe that God wants everybody to be free. That’s what I believe. And that’s been part of my foreign policy. In Afghanistan, I believe that the freedom there is a gift from the Almighty. And I can’t tell you how encouraged I am to see freedom on the march.

Kerry, on the other hand, did not develop a similar freedom/liberty theme with religious references. While he did talk about freedom and liberty—though not as often as Bush—it was generally not in religious terms. One exception came in a speech where he talked about the importance of faith having deeds:

It's about the principles that have made America a land of opportunity and compassion—and a beacon to all the world. It's about that dream of “liberty and justice for all”—the vision that defines our destiny and our mission. We will never fully finish that journey—not on this earth. But let us move forward with a strong and active faith. (Kerry 2004i)

The other exception came in the final debate after Bush reiterated this freedom theme. Kerry responded, “I think that he just said that freedom is a gift from the Almighty. Everything is a gift from the Almighty.” This was the closest Kerry came to challenging Bush's on this issue in religious terms. Bush clearly developed a more spiritual message here than Kerry. Bush's frequency in using the freedom/liberty concept, which is closely aligned with American civil religion, likely added religious/patriotic power to his speeches.

### *Separation of Church/State*

Another key tenet of the American civil religion is the belief in the separation of church and state, although not necessarily complete separation (Hart 1977). Bush referred to this principle seven times (2%) and talked about the importance of the freedom of religion and worship (one half of the first amendment on religion) in 23 speeches (6%). Bush also talked about the freedom of worship in the last debate, but did not mention the separation of church and state in the debates. On the freedom of worship, Bush stated in a speech:

Let me just talk about religion and politics. First—first—first, it is essential that this country never abandon the principle that people can worship the way they want to. That you can worship, that you can choose to worship or not worship and be equally patriotic. That's important for people to know. The second principle is that if you choose to worship, you're equally American if you're a

Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu. That's an important part of our society. It's essential that we always honor that. That's called freedom of religion. It's an integral part of the American past, present and future. The state should never be the church, and the church should never be the state. (Bush 2004h)

While these messages fit the nondenominational aspect of civil religion, his statements about the separation of church and state are not entirely in line with traditional, or "official," civil religion. The references to separation of church and state were each used to justify his support of faith-based organizations. Bush argued on one hand that he respected the separation, and on the other that the government should give money to faith-based groups:

Look, I fully understand it's important to maintain the separation of church and state. We don't want the state to become the church, nor do we want the church to become the state. We're on common agreement there. But I do believe that groups should be allowed to access social service grants so long as they don't proselytize or exclude somebody simply because they don't share a certain faith. In other words, there are ways to accomplish the separation of church and state and at the same time accomplish the social objective of having America become a hopeful place and a loving place. (Bush 2004c)

Bush also argued that his faith-based program would not blur the line between church and state.

Kerry talked about the separation of church and state, but with less ambiguity. In three speeches (3%) he talked about this principle, and in two speeches (2%) he talked about the freedom to worship. Kerry also talked about the freedom to worship in the third debate, but did not mention the separation of church and state in the debates. About separation Kerry said, "And I as president will uphold the oath of office, the Constitution of the United States which the founding fathers smartly and brilliantly made clear separates affairs of church and state. And we must honor that in this country" (Kerry 2004d). Additionally, he attacked Bush for crossing that line with his faith-based funding and other policies: "There's nothing conservative about crossing that beautiful line drawn by the Founding Fathers that we've lived with for 229 years that separates church and state in the United States, but they do" (Kerry

2004b). Kerry argued that this historic principle must be upheld and he was the candidate that would do that. Kerry not only talked about this principle more frequently than Bush, but he also attacked Bush for violating it. Bush, on the other hand, defended himself against those charges but also at times questioned the level of the separation.

### *Faith-based Organizations*

One of Bush's main campaign issues in 2000 was his plan to provide government funding to faith-based programs, and in 2004 he talked about these programs and how much his initiative was helping. Bush talked about faith-based organizations or support in 56 speeches (15%), and several of his speeches were focused almost entirely on this subject. He also mentioned it in the third debate. Bush argued that support of faith-based programs was necessary because of the people that would be helped: "All of you know the power of faith to transform lives, you're answering the call to love and to serve your neighbor" (Bush 2004b). He also frequently stated that not aiding faith-based groups would be "government discrimination against people of faith" (Bush 2004a). Bush, speaking in the third person, even linked his faith-based support to his legacy: "Finally, I want people to look back and say that George W. Bush understood the power of faith-based programs to change America one heart at a time" (Bush 2004k). Additionally, Bush would often make a point to talk about how this funding was available to Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or any other religious groups. At the same time, some of statements are explicitly Christian. In one speech he told a story about his visit to a prison faith-based program when he was Governor of Texas:

And so I went to see it as the governor. And out comes the prison choir. And one of my favorite hymns is "Amazing Grace." Of course, I've got a lot of my mother in me, so I immediately jumped in line with the prisoners singing "Amazing Grace," you know, like 10 white suits and me. (Bush 2004e)

Virtually every example of a faith-base organization in his speeches was of a Christian one. At other times Bush seems quite close to becoming an advocate, or preacher, for religion instead of being the leader of the state: "Government is not good at changing hearts. The Almighty God is good

at changing hearts, which happens to be the cornerstone of effective faith-based programs” (Bush 2004i). The fact that each time Bush mentioned the idea of separation of church and state was while he was defending his faith-based initiative suggests that he recognized the controversy surrounding his funding. At the same time, his rhetoric about faith-based groups often seemed to violate the principle of separation.

Kerry also talked some about Bush’s faith-based funding, each time as an attack on Bush. In three speeches (3%) and in the second debate he referred to the faith-based initiative. Because of the importance of the separation of church and state, Kerry argued that Bush’s program is wrong:

I also believe in faith-based delivery of interventions and services in America, and I have supported those. But I draw a line that George Bush doesn’t draw, which is the line of separating the religious activity itself and proselytizing from the service of soup kitchen or a counseling or whatever. You have all kinds of efforts that do this wonderfully. The Jewish community centers, the Catholic charities, I mean you could run down long lists. I think we need to support those kinds of services, and we have for years. We don’t need to cross the line. To me, that is protecting the foundations in the way that you’re talking about. (Kerry 2004g)

While Kerry attacked Bush for governmental support of faith-base programs, Kerry did offer support for the organizations themselves. In the second debate he stated, “I’ve been for faith-based initiatives helping to intervene in the lives of young children for years.” Kerry also accused Bush of trying to take credit for the work that religious groups have been doing for years. In a speech to the National Baptist Convention, he talked about the work that the group has done, and then stated:

Some people want to take credit for the faith-based service that you’ve been doing for years. They want to turn it into a political issue. But we know that you’ve been working in partnership with government and community-based organizations for years to bring hope to communities across our country. (Kerry 2004h)

While both candidates appeared to believe that faith-based organizations were key to solving some societal problems, only Bush felt the government should support these programs. Kerry attacked Bush’s

governmental funding of these programs, but he only occasionally did so in religious terms.

### Social Programs

Social programs like social security and welfare, as well as the general topic of reducing poverty, were hardly mentioned with religious terms, and Medicaid/Medicare was not at all. Kerry's offered the only religious statement (1%) about social security, but it was quite explicitly religious. In his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention he stated:

We believe in the family value expressed in one of the oldest Commandments: "Honor thy father and thy mother." As president, I will not privatize Social Security. I will not cut benefits. And together, we will make sure that senior citizens never have to cut their pills in half because they can't afford lifesaving medicine. And that is the choice in this election. (Kerry 2004e)

Kerry also used a religious statement in one speech (1%) about welfare. Finally, he talked about those in poverty, such as the poor and the homeless, in a religious nature in three speeches (3%). However, these statements were explicitly religious and not just minor usage of religious language. In one speech he stated:

That's why we have to raise the minimum wage, ensure equal pay, and finish the job of welfare reform, so we can honor work and once again grow the middle class instead of growing the number of people in poverty. The Bible tells us that in others we encounter the face of God: "I was hungry and you fed me; thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you received me in your homes; naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me." This is the final judgment of who we are and what our life will mean. (Kerry 2004i)

He also attacked Bush on this topic with religious allusions: Four years ago, George Bush came to office calling himself a "compassionate conservative." Well, in the

story of the Good Samaritan we are told of two men who pass by or cross to the other side of the street when they come upon a robbed and beaten man. They felt compassion, but there were no deeds. Then the Good Samaritan gave both his heart and his help. It is clear: For four years, George W. Bush may have talked about compassion, but he's walked right by. He's seen people in need, but he's crossed over to the other side of the street. (Kerry 2004h)

Although Kerry did not talk about these issues in religious terms very frequently, when he did it was usually with an explicitly religious message. Kerry also mentioned poverty in the third debate as he listed different things he fights for because he believes that "faith without works is dead."

Bush used religious terms even less often to address social programs. He used religious references in only one speech (less than 1%) about welfare, and in seven speeches (2%) on poverty. He made no religious reference to any of these issues in the debates. Nearly all of these references were to faith-based programs, such as in a speech at a Baptist church where he commended those who were present:

I want to remind you that not only is there great spirituality here, but this is a church that trains people coming off welfare rolls to find work. ... This is a church which helps feed the hungry, and finds shelter for the homeless. A church that helps families to stay together. This is a church that is giving generously of time and money. Herb Lusk is a general in the army of compassion. (Bush 2004f)

When dealing with social programs like Social Security or welfare and poverty issues, Kerry invoked religious ideas more frequently than Bush, and Kerry did so in more explicitly religious terms. However, neither used religious references very often on these issues.

### Education

Kerry talked about education with religious terms in 11 speeches (10%) and in the last debate, with most of the references talking about how everyone, regardless of race, sex, religion, and other differences,

should be given the same educational opportunities. In a couple of these speeches, he made an even more explicitly religious point:

It was President Kennedy who took us to the moon, but it was President Kennedy who said, “Here on Earth, God’s work must truly be our own.” And we have to do a better job of following through on that. We have to make certain that our children have after-school programs. We have to make sure that schools that are overcrowded have a class size where teachers can actually take a kid individually, and if they need the help, give them the help, not feel like they're drowning on a daily basis. (Kerry 2004d)

And on a couple occasions, he stated, “John Edwards and I have a plan to invest in our future, provide the needed funding and put a good teacher in every classroom—so that all our children will have the chance to develop their God-given potential” (Kerry 2004h).

Bush also talked about education in religious terms, though nearly every reference was to a faith-based program. In, all he used religious ideas to discuss education and schools in 11 speeches (3%). Not only did Kerry talk about educational issues more often with religious terms, but he did so in more explicitly religious language.

### *Social Issues*

Social issues, such as abortion and homosexuality, have long been key issues with the religious right. In 2004, stem-cell research and same-sex marriage were the two most prominent social issues. However, neither candidate addressed any of these issues with many religious references. Bush only used religious terms during his discussion of abortion or the unborn in four speeches (1%), and only once (less than 1%) with regards to stem-cell research. And while he frequently talked about establishing a “culture of life,” only once was it explicitly religious. That reference came as he praised Pope John Paul II, who Bush had recently given the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Additionally, Bush did not talk about homosexuality or same-sex marriage with religious statements, but he did make it clear in 5 speeches (1%) with religious terms that he believes marriage is between one man and one woman. Bush also did not mention any of the social issues in religious terms during the debates. On abortion Bush used the same

statement in both speeches: “Preventing partial-birth abortion is an ethical conviction shared by many people of every faith and by people who have no religion at all” (Bush 2004l). He stated his opposition to stem-cell research by explaining:

I will work with Congress to pass a comprehensive and effective ban on human cloning. Human life is human life is a creation of God, not a commodity to be exploited by man. (Bush 2004b)

And on marriage, he declared:

The union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution, honored and encouraged in cultures and by every religious faith. ... It is for that reason I support a constitutional amendment to protect marriage as the union of a man and a woman. (Bush 2004b)

Kerry actually referred these social issues slightly more frequently with religious terminology than Bush did. In two speeches (2%) he talked about abortion with religious references, and once (1%) with stem cell research. In the second debate Kerry used religious terminology to talk about abortion, and in the third debate he did so about abortion, stem-cell research, and homosexuality. On abortion, Kerry declared, “I do not think the government of the United States should be entering into women’s lives and peoples’ bedrooms and making decisions for them that belong between them and between God” (Kerry 2004a). And on both that and stem-cell research he talked about his differences with the Catholic Church:

I know there are some Bishops who have suggested that as a public official I must cast votes or take public positions—on issues like a woman’s right to choose and stem cell research—that carry out the tenets of the Catholic Church. I love my Church; I respect the Bishops; but I respectfully disagree. (Kerry 2004i)

Kerry, when about homosexuality in the third debate, offered the only religious statement about homosexuality by either candidate in campaign addresses. He responded:

We’re all God’s children, Bob. ... And I’ve met wives who are supportive of their husbands or vice versa when they finally sort of broke out and allowed themselves to

live who they were, who they felt God had made them. I think we have to respect that.

While Kerry used religious language slightly more frequently than Bush when talking about social issues like abortion, stem-cell research, or same-sex marriage, neither did so very often. Additionally, neither candidate used religious terms when talking about the death penalty.

### Environment

Kerry used a religious reference in six speeches (6%) when talking about the environment, with each one including essentially the same statement:

And so one of the things John and I are going to do is recognize that as long as the United States of America only has 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, that's all God gave us. I think he sent us a message when he did that. And the message is, if we want to control our own security, and hold our destiny in our own hands, then I want America's energy to depend on our innovation and our ingenuity, not the Saudi royal family. (Kerry 2004f)

Kerry also mentioned the environment in religious terms in the last debate:

And I think that everything you do in public life has to be guided by your faith, affected by your faith, but without transferring it in any official way to other people. ... That's why I fight to clean up the environment and protect this earth.

Bush, on the other hand, did not talk about the environment with religious terms.

### **Conclusions**

Some important implications about the 2004 election and civil religion arise from this study. First, most of the coverage about the "God gap" talked about the need for Kerry and the Democrats to talk more about religion, thus suggesting that the campaign rhetoric was the main reason for the voting trend. While this study cannot demonstrate whether or not Kerry talked more about religion than other recent Democratic nominees or that it contributed to his loss, it does show that he failed to

use religious language as often as Bush in 2004 campaign speeches. Kerry even used the ceremonial “God bless” much less than Bush did. However, the difference does not appear to be as lopsided as the voting gap based on church attendance, nor as large as some commentators suggested. For instance, the *Boston Globe* argued that “Democratic leaders have often shied away from explicit talk of religion, in part because such language had become associated with conservative politics” (Paulson and Levenson 2004, ¶11). While Kerry did not use religious language as often as Bush, he did not shy away from it. Additionally, on many topics Kerry had the most explicit religious references. While Bush used “God bless” statements more frequently, they were always ceremonial in nature. Kerry, on the other hand, actually talked about the concept in explicitly religious terms. The *Boston Globe* also argued that Republicans use religious language much more often “in part because some Democrats view public expressions of faith as contradicting the separation of church and state” (Paulson and Levenson 2004, ¶11). Kerry, however, attempted to support the separation while also using religious language. Although the difference in frequency of religious references may have been the result of other differences between the candidates (e.g., cultural background, religious affiliation), it is clear that while Bush embraced the language of religion more frequently than Kerry, both candidates often invoked religious ideas in their campaign rhetoric.

More important than this quantitative difference is the qualitative topical difference between the two candidates. Bush frequently linked religious terms with some of his key issues, such as Iraq and faith-based funding. Kerry, on the other hand, rarely used religious language on those topics. However, Kerry did use religious terms much more often than Bush on Kerry’s main issues (e.g., environment, social programs, education). Even if the overall level of religious references had been similar between the two candidates, the topics they injected religion into would still make their rhetoric substantially different. The “God gap,” at least rhetorically speaking, appears to be more of a topical than quantitative difference. Bush saw his faith driving him to act on traditionally Republican issues while Kerry saw his faith influencing his actions on traditionally Democratic issues. This divide may be similar to Petrocik’s (1996) concept of issue ownership. As a result, whoever is able to define which topics “values voters” care about can define the other party out of the faith arena. If Republican issues are generally

accepted as the only issues of religious concern, then Democrats are placed at a inherent rhetorical disadvantage in communicating their faith. The power of this defining of the what counts as “moral values” was perhaps best seen in exit polling following the 2004 election when “moral values” was selected by more voter as the top factor in their presidential vote. This category meant issues like abortion, homosexuality, and stem cell research, all of which were Republican-owned issues. This finding led many commentators and pundits to highlight the religious divide and credit “values voters” for Bush’s reelection. Yet, as Wallis (2005) argued, when voters were asked in other polls about what issues were of the greatest moral concern to them, the Iraq war ranked first. However, in the 2004 exit polls, the Iraq war was a separate option and therefore not considered one of the “moral issues.” As this study has found with the partisan topical divide in policies that candidates highlight in religious terms, to credit on a few issues as “moral issues” that “values voters” care about could result in an inaccurate understanding of the role religion plays in election results and skew the results in favor of one party’s owned religious issues. Thus, when Democrats decided they needed to rhetorically find God in order to win more elections, they might have only recognized one part of the issue. For instance, Al From, then-chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council, argued during the 2004 primary season, “We went for years in the Democratic Party without recognizing God, and we pay a price for that” (Swarns & Cardwell, 2003, ¶9). The failure of Kerry was not that he did not talk about God as much as it was that the issues that resonated with his faith were not defined by many to be important religious issues. This suggests a much more difficult challenge facing Democratic candidates. Merely tossing in more references to God might not help them overcome the “God gap.” Rather, they must work to change the cultural definition of what topics are moral and religious priorities.

The man who delivered the keynote address in support of Kerry at the 2004 Democratic National Convention would just four years later succeed where Kerry failed by finding political salvation in the ballot box. During his own presidential run, Obama demonstrated that he was much more comfortable talking publicly about his faith than Kerry had been. Additionally, Obama ran against a Republican who was much less confessional in his campaign discourse than Bush had been in his. Perhaps such differences between the candidates affected the levels of

religious-political rhetoric and helped Obama, particularly in winning states like North Carolina, Virginia, and Indiana (and nearly taking Missouri). Or, perhaps differences in the dominant issues of the campaign—economy instead of national security—brought more media attention to Obama’s religious rhetoric since the key moral issues of the campaign were issues he owned. Either way, it seems premature for the Democratic Party to claim they have put aside the problem of the “God gap.” Until the larger definitional issues are addressed, the elections of Kaine, Strickland, and Obama might merely be exceptions. If Democrats hope to have a prayer in reaching voters driven by their religious values, then Democrats will have to reframe what issues are of religious importance. More research is needed to not only consider the 2008 campaign in light of this study of the 2004 campaign but to also explore the religious-political rhetoric in other elections. Clearly there was a rhetorical “God gap” in the 2004 election, with qualitative differences between the two candidates concerning the topics of their religious messages. America may be “one nation under God,” but rhetorically there appears to be two nations with two different ideas of what God would want America to do.

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**The Public Oratory Period of American Forensics**  
*Robert S. Littlefield, Ph.D. & Michael D. Bartanen, Ph.D.*

**Abstract**

*The relationship between public oratory and citizenship is well established in American life. During the period 1880-1945, American colleges, high schools, and local communities provided a unique venue for young speakers to polish their oratorical skills through forensics competition. However, following World War II, this relationship changed, undermining the position of forensics in academic and civic contexts. In an effort to inform contemporary thought about the value of forensics, this essay reveals the evolution of forensics during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as an educational movement, the relationship between forensics and civic life, and the effects of forensic participation on individuals, communities, and the national culture.*

Public oratory is so ingrained in American life as virtually taken for granted. From the colonial town meeting to contemporary disputes, the opportunity for a citizen to publicly argue the merits of a particular decision alternative has been recognized as one of the defining characteristics of citizenship. Beginning in pre-20<sup>th</sup> Century America, the facilitation of training and practice opportunities for citizen orators was understood as one of the primary civic responsibilities of colleges, high schools, and even local communities (Halloran, 1982). These institutions understood their role in teaching people to argue and effectively speak and perform in public; and generated significant public good will through their encouragement of sound rhetorical training gained through participation in classroom speeches, literary societies and informal debating clubs.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, educational institutions afforded the greatest opportunity for American students to polish their speaking skills by marrying public oratory<sup>1</sup> to competition in the form of

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of clarity, public oratory is defined operationally to include persuasive speaking, argumentation and debate, declamation, and other competitive public speaking activities involving the creation and presentation of an original speech by an amateur

debate and forensic speaking activities. This innovation was actually a reinvention, as the task of training citizens in public oratory existed both formally and informally in colonial colleges, maintaining a long-standing British university practice. College classes, in colonial times, used various oratorical and disputation practices in the formal curriculum (Bohman, 1954). The pedagogical value was well-understood. Students, in their original speeches, learned the skill of expressing their beliefs and opinions on current and academic issues, preparing them for the fields of law, politics, and the ministry (Halloran, 1982). Almost simultaneously, college literary societies emerged allowing students to speak and argue in a less strictly constrained context (Potter, 1944).<sup>2</sup>

There were other avenues, such as lecture circuits, lyceums, or the Chautauqua, where citizens could learn necessary public oratory skills. Unfortunately, these were insufficient in number and often inaccessible to a general public (Borchers & Wagner, 1954). After the Civil War, as schools and colleges began to compete in sports, the opportunity to motivate students through competition in debate and public speaking events, called *forensics*<sup>3</sup> became a convenient and

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speaker. Declamation and the performing arts include the oral presentation of printed material drawn from any genre of literature by an amateur speaker.

<sup>2</sup> See David Potter, *Debating in the Colonial Chartered Colleges*, (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1944): 67-76; also, Halloran suggests that the emphasis on the use of English also contributed to the popularity of the literary and debate societies: “From the beginning, English was the standard language of these groups, in contrast to the long-standing tradition that serious intellectual discourse was to be conducted in Latin. Some of the societies had explicit rules against speaking in Latin. The shift to English meant that learning could more readily be brought to bear on the problems of the world and practical affairs, the world defined by the English Language.” 250-251.

<sup>3</sup> Historically, the use of the term *forensic* or *forensics* to describe competitive speech and debate activities stems from Aristotle’s classification of speech types: deliberative, epideictic, and forensic. According to Aristotle, forensic or legal oratory provoked a judgment from a third party to determine the winning position. In other words, the presentation of arguments or disputations—for and against a particular position—resulted in a winner being declared by a third party judge or audience. Ancient Greek sophists used disputations to teach forensic oratory, a practice that continued in universities across Western Europe well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In the early American colonial period, colleges and universities viewed the mastery of argumentation through debates and disputations as a hallmark of receiving a sound education (Potter, 1944). When secondary schools and colleges began interscholastic and interstate debating, the format called for

desirable way to meet this training need. Forensics quickly became popular at both secondary and collegiate levels.

Colleges embraced on-campus speech and debate competitions, and scheduled contests with local college rivals. Even small towns and rural high schools adopted the opportunity. What began in the colonial colleges as an activity reserved for the intellectual and social elites, became a significant and meaningful area of study for the growing American nation. For the period from roughly 1880-1945, forensics was an almost ubiquitous, universally accepted, and socially appreciated educational opportunity. This time period saw the most sustained growth in participation by secondary and post-secondary students, the emergence of a largely coherent set of theories and practices, and significant innovations in practices that continue to define the activity today.

However, as the nature of forensic competition changed after World War II, the relationship between forensics and civic life was undermined. Competitive public debates and oratorical contests largely were discontinued, critic/judges replaced audiences, and the emergence of specialization in particular events or formats replaced what had been more universally accepted forms of competition. In this evolution, the dialogue about the value of forensics became politicized as multiple national organizations were founded, reflecting different perspectives on how forensics should be practiced.

To inform the current discussion about the value of forensics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, this essay sketches some of the characteristics of American forensics from 1880 to 1945. The first section characterizes forensics in the Public Oratory Period, describes the popularity of forensics with the public and the outlines the relationship between

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two teams to present their arguments for the benefit of a third party—judges or audience—to decide the winner of the debate. As debate grew in popularity, organizations emerged to recognize the achievements of debaters and to provide leadership in the organization of additional opportunities for competition. Based on a wide sample of documents drawn from Egbert Ray Nichols, “A Historical Sketch of Intercollegiate Debating: II,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 23, no. 4 (December 1936): 591-603, the use of the term *forensic* as it relates to competitive speech and debate activities came at about the same time as the emergence of the national forensic honor societies (Delta Sigma Rho, Tau Kappa Alpha, Pi Kappa Delta, and later Phi Rho Pi were described as national *forensic* honor societies). By association, the activities of these organizations became known as *forensic activities* or *forensics*.

forensic training and civic life. The second section examines the powerful influence of forensics on the individual, the community and the nation. The final section describes the changes in forensics caused by the perceived demands of the Cold War and suggests reasons why the nature of forensics changed as a result.

### **The Characteristics of Forensics during the Public Oratory Period**

From around 1880 to 1945, debate and speaking activities grew to be a staple of American high school and college education, as documented in school newspapers and yearbooks during this period (Littlefield, 1997). Characterizing this time frame as the Public Oratory Period arises from the almost universal agreement, among participants, scholars, and the public, that forensics training was valuable exclusively as a means of preparing people for the duties of civic life, as advocates in their professions, and in the important tasks of public participation and governance. Forensics was, during this period, first and foremost a *public good* whose value did not stem from achieving competitive goals such as winning championships and bringing glory to a school, university, or community. While those were, inevitably, side benefits, there was never any publicly expressed belief that competition was justifiable for its own sake. It was not until the on-set of the Cold War that competition became an end, and not solely a means. During the Public Oratory Period, other values, embodied in the common practices and norms, were paramount; and those other values caused the rapid growth of participation, theoretical development, and public enthusiasm for competitive speech and debate.<sup>4</sup>

Five characteristics of forensics during the Public Oratory Period explain its popularity: The novel and largely unique role that students played, as the active agents in the growth of forensics; the bestowed popularity and prominence given to participants of the period that often eclipsed the favor given to star athletes, musicians, or actors; the community embrace of forensics as a source of civic pride and

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<sup>4</sup> The characteristics of the public oratory period are drawn from the authors' syntheses of a wide sampling of over 1,000 primary and public documents from communities and University archives across the country. Multiple references in the documents from different parts of the country about each of the characteristics suggest a commonality reflective of a shared experience among those who participated in forensics.

responsibility; the audience-centered practices of forensics as a local, regional, and national activity; and the nurturing of significant experiential and practical innovations that adapted to student life during the period.

The first unique characteristic of the Public Oratory Period was the powerful role that students played in creating programs, organizing on-campus and off-campus events, and in promoting the activity to various constituencies. Students were the organizers who formed debating societies, engaged in practical activities to stimulate their critical thinking and develop their speaking skills, prepared for and sponsored inter-society competitions, served as student managers, and actually coached themselves (Stone, 1914). Competitive forensics was literally a bottom-up, student-initiated educational innovation. While faculty sponsors were sought out to provide legitimacy for forensics at their home institutions, the students actively worked to establish competitive programming and lobbied for getting academic credit for their efforts (Foster, 1904; Nichols, 1936a). Once faculty members were teaching argumentation and oratory for credit, students sought a change in the practical function of the faculty advisor. Team members realized that those students with faculty coaches tended to win more contests than those without faculty coaches (Cowperthwaite, 1946; Nichols, 1936a; Nichols, 1936b; Sillars, 1949). Even with a faculty advisor, the practical operation of forensics programs was typically student run. A student manager scheduled competitions with other schools; negotiated the specifics of the competition (including the wording of the resolution, time limits, judges, and the location of the all-too-necessary banquet after the event); made the necessary travel arrangements; engaged in pre-contest coaching; and handled the public relations.

The Public Oratory Period was also unique because debaters were afforded prominence and prestige within their schools and communities for their argumentation, oratorical, and competitive skills. Orators and debaters were very often popular figures and student leaders, causing the public to regard forensics as an elite activity and give it high status in schools and on college campuses. Anyone could join a literary or debating society; however, in the beginning, only the very best were chosen through local competitions to participate in inter-society or inter-school competitions (Levin & Goodfriend, 1914). The number of individuals actually traveling outside of their state for forensic competition was even smaller (Nichols, 1936b; Nichols, 1937).

The third distinct characteristic of the Public Oratory Period centered upon the close association of forensics with the local community. While there were opportunities for interstate competition, forensics drew its initial strength from the actual demonstration of argumentation and oratorical skills in local schools and community halls in cities, towns, and villages. The school campuses and surrounding communities served as the centers of activity and competition, and engaging in local contests and being selected to represent one's literary society or school against a neighboring school's best speakers served as its own reward, as Jacob (1928) described in his autobiographical sketch: "the sensation of defeating a neighboring city only half our size in a single debate was sufficient to make forensic interest the chief consideration in choosing my college and so I came to Ripon" (n.p.). Winning the top prize—a scholarship, gold watch, medallion, or cup—was an honor which made up for the fact there were usually few tangible awards for competitive success (Stone, 1914).

Fourth, the Public Oratory Period was distinct due to the audience-centered nature of the competition. The patrons of forensics (teachers, students, community supporters) required that substantial efforts be made to make forensics relevant to audiences. Forensics was considered an important entertainment outlet for communities starved for diversion. Initially, debaters and speakers were taught to use familiar historical and literary examples, in lieu of extensive reporting of facts or direct quotations, as those forms appealed more generally to local audiences. Speakers incorporated humor, sarcasm, and stylistic appeals as common strategies for creating audience interest (Foster, 1904). As debaters sought to keep the interest and attention of their audiences, formal prepared speeches gave way to more extemporaneous and adaptive ones. Similarly, as audiences became less willing to attend debates lasting over two hours in length, the number of speakers on a team was reduced from three to two and the speaking time for each speaker was shortened (Foster, 1904; *Harvard vs. Yale*, 1917). Since audiences often decided the winners of the early forensic contests, speakers adapted to what they believed the audience expected in order to gain their favor. Adaptation also was needed for community judges who were unfamiliar with conventions associated with particular forensic activities or contests (*Debating: History*, n.d.; Levin & Goodfriend, 1914).

The fifth characteristic of the Public Oratory Period was the willingness of those involved to experiment with organizational structures; and the ready adaptation of those structures to the vagaries of student academic and social life. Forensics was different from sports and other student activities. Taking place outside the confines of the regularly scheduled class, the activity necessarily adopted norms, practices, and structures which were consistent with the other elements of educational life.

The adaptation took numerous forms. The forensic season, for example, was clearly defined within the parameters of the traditional academic calendar; that is, prepare during the first semester, compete during the second (Nichols, 1936a; Stone, 1914). The preparation phase took considerable time due to the use of multiple debate topics of local or state interest, as well as the fact that the vast majority of students spent their summers working on farms or otherwise making money to subsidize their education (Cowperthwaite, 1946). For the speech contests, orators selected their topics, wrote and memorized speeches, and practiced during the first semester. Some national groups sponsored annual competitions in response to significant world events or national movements (e.g., National Intercollegiate Peace Association, Interstate Oratory Association), necessitating the adaptation of speeches to the particular rules set by the sponsoring group (Sillars, 1949).

During the second semester, competitions were scheduled on campuses, between neighboring schools, and in the form of debate and speaking tours. Student managers established reciprocal contracts for their teams to debate teams along a particular route or in a particular geographic area. For example, Ripon College debaters toured New England and debated Ivy League schools; the University of Redlands in California traveled to the Midwest and debated teams all along the way. The first trans-continental debate trip was made in 1916 when Columbia University traveled to Los Angeles, with a stop at William Jewell College at Liberty, Missouri (Nichols, 1937; Sillars, 1949). Typically, a school did not engage in more debates than football games and there were fewer oratorical contests.

During the Public Oratory Period, debaters and speakers ventured out into local communities to speak and perform at the meetings of various civic groups (e.g., Knights of Columbus, the YWCA, Lions Clubs, and the Sons of Norway) (Schrier, 1930). The value of these extension efforts were noted: "The college debater can do

more than any one group to establish their [the community's] public understanding of the college and its work, and it is upon such understanding that favorable public opinion depends" (Cortright, 1933, p. 9). High school students also extended themselves into the surrounding communities through speaker's bureaus. During World War II, many high schools "furnished high school students as speakers for civilian defense programs, bond sales drives, salvage drives, and other emergency efforts" (Secord & Thomas, 1946, p. 8).

In addition to creating schedules and public events, forensics produced national structures to nurture professional and social connections on both regional and national levels. The most significant of these organizational structures was the emergence of national forensic honorary societies to recognize student and faculty affiliation and achievement. Originally established as fraternities, the major national collegiate forensic organizations (Delta Sigma Rho, Tau Kappa Alpha, Pi Kappa Delta, and Phi Rho Pi) and the comparable high school association (National Forensic League) expanded to recognize the contributions of coaches and teachers.<sup>5</sup> Local forensic teams were invited to affiliate with the national fraternity that was most compatible with their practices or was preferred among their regional colleagues. Membership in these fraternities or honor societies was often determined by university status or perceived quality, and not open to many universities. Historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) were generally excluded although eventually they created opportunities to compete against fraternity members. Annual or biennial conventions and/or tournaments became a tradition. During this period, most forensic programs at accredited schools in the country were affiliated with at least one of the fraternities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Much later, these fraternities generally restructured themselves as honorary societies, as the cachet of fraternities were replaced by a greater concern for issues of racial and gender exclusion which emerged in the 1970's.

<sup>6</sup> There were originally numerous honorary societies, but eventually five college societies and a high school organization modeled after college honoraries remained. It is also worth noting that each of the honoraries had specific membership criteria and excluded, for many years, HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) institutions.

### *The Relationship of Forensics and Civic Life*

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the influx of immigrants to the United States and the demands of the industrial revolution led to significant changes in the American education system. Within a relatively short time, civic leaders began to realize that public education was necessary for all children, and not merely the wealthy or the growing middle class, to insure a skilled labor force and citizens able to effectively participate in civic affairs.<sup>7</sup>

The desire for equality prompted the following changes: The inclusion of speech training in the curriculum; the emergence of the basic outline for speech instruction; the creation of phonetics and speech correction programs; the introduction of dramatics and a new field of oral interpretation into the curriculum; the migration of public speaking and discussion from English departments to newly created departments of speech; and the acceptance of undergraduate and graduate majors in speech (Wallace, 1954). Forensic activities were viewed as a means to ensure the development of a healthy mind through the mental exercise of critical thinking and memorization (Gray, 1954). This emphasis on forensics as a means for training articulate citizens resulted in high visibility and popularity among the general public.

### *Public Perception and Popularity of Forensics*

The value of forensics was, to a great extent, perceived as valuable for both the person and the community. Hart (1897) observed the uniquely American interest in debate and public oratory: “Americans love a contest, even as listeners; and the good debater is likely to argue his way to success” (p. xiii). As a reflection of the popularity of forensics, the public debates and oratorical contests between schools from neighboring communities drew large audiences. Often, crowds attracted to these events rivaled sports activities (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954, p. 263).

Because these public competitions were official school events, audiences were highly partisan, with home crowds expecting to see their

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<sup>7</sup> States, beginning with Massachusetts, began to adopt compulsory school attendance laws.

competitors prevail as victorious. Ewbank (1951) described the response of the crowd to the winners of the first public debate he observed:

I don't remember much about the contest, but what happened afterward is indelibly fixed in memory. When the decision for the home team was announced, what we could have called pandemonium . . . broke loose. The debaters were lifted to the shoulders of shouting partisans and borne, uncomfortably but happily, off to who knows what orgies of celebration. (p. 3)

In addition to the displays of school spirit, student speakers and performers exposed the rest of the student body to new academic and cultural experiences. One such novelty took the form of sponsoring international debates between teams from Oxford University of England and the local forensic team. Following the lead of Bates College in 1921, the practice of hosting the British debaters rapidly spread and these exhibition debates were popular forms of entertainment and learning (*The Gavel*, 1921). For example, "over 2500 persons crowded into the University Armory to hear the contest [between the University of Minnesota and a team from Oxford] . . . It was undoubtedly the most interesting debate ever held at this school, and the English style of debating made a good impression on the audience" (Karlins, 1926, p. 26).

In rural areas, communities were very interested in public forensic events. A professor at the University of North Dakota explained: North Dakota is a state of small towns and when a debate concerning grain elevators, parcel post, working men's compensation, is held by two rival schools, the citizens are really interested . . . Last winter, in a certain town, the train bringing the opposing team was six hours late. It was a bitter cold night, but the audience waited until 12:30 p.m. [sic]. We then began the debate—nobody left—and followed it with a banquet. It was 5 a.m. when the last toast was finished. (Highsaw, 1916, pp. 374-375)

High school debaters joined college teams in providing their communities with exposure to forensics through public debates. Highsaw (1916) reported that between 1902 and 1912, "It is safe to say that if we

consider the entire 48 states and the various local interscholastic debating leagues, it is probable that 5,000,000 people have listened to these [high school] debates in the last decade, or 5% of the entire population” (p. 381). In the early years of the century, communities responded enthusiastically when local high school students were successful or needed support. In one instance, when a student won a national championship at the NFL National Tournament, “the school was so appreciative of [her] national victory that they declared a holiday, the chamber of commerce honored her at a special program, and the town had a parade” (The National Forensic League Contest, 1946, p. 164). The ability of forensics to stimulate intense feelings of partisanship and promote new experiences for students and communities remains as a significant cause of its popularity during this period.

### **The Influence of Forensics**

With an understanding of the unique characteristics of the Public Oratory Period of American forensics, an appreciation emerges for the effect of these experiences on individuals, the community, and the national culture. Public oratory and the performing arts affected the lives of individual participants in various ways: Expanding perceptions of the world around them; creating opportunities to associate with like-minded individuals; enhancing personality development; connecting them with dynamic teachers and coaches; and contributing to their career success.

#### *Effects of Forensics on Participants*

Students involved in forensic activities were exposed to topics in the humanities, as well as significant social, political, economic, and international issues of the day. Due to the nature of forensics, students needed to find and select appropriate selections from literature. Jones (1954) shared the influence of the humanities on his education: “My teachers always stressed the need for good material, and we were encouraged to read widely in both classical and modern literature. The study we made of some of the world’s great orations was especially stimulating” (p. 17). Participants also confronted significant issues of the day and used forensics as a way to express their thoughts and emotions. Secord and Thomas (1946) explained:

When a farm boy writes an oration about some phase of the Federal farm program which is within his grasp; when a negro [sic] student writes an oration entitled, 'On Being Black'; when any thoughtful high-school student writes an oration concerning juvenile delinquency; those are orations. They come from the heart and emotions are involved. (p. 7)

Forensics provided opportunities for students of like mind and interest to associate with others on the road to leadership in their schools, communities, and nation. The historical records from every state and region of the country are replete with the names of individuals who became statesmen, teachers, educational leaders, textbook authors, forensic directors, journalists and broadcasters, lawyers and justices, doctors, preachers, businesspeople, homemakers, and leading citizens, to name a few (Ewbank, 1951; Fernandez, 1959; Fest, 1956; Fifty Famous Alumni, 1963; Quimby, 1952). Often, their forensic experiences transcended several levels of education—from high school, to college, to graduate school—and provided for on-going leadership opportunities. In a survey of 255 Nebraska alumni who participated in forensics from 1895 to 1945, “over 78 percent of the [163] people who returned the questionnaires thought that debate enabled them to take a greater position of leadership on the campus and in civic life” (Olson, 1948, p. 66).

Involvement in forensics affected the personality development of its participants, and built self-confidence. Mayer (1948) cited examples drawn from his forensic experience of several ways forensics enhanced personality development, including: the development of self-control, the practice of sportsmanship, improved judgment, deference to cooperation, enhanced initiative, greater courage, improved tact, the practice of honesty, and demonstrated leadership. While these characteristics could be enhanced through forensics, Beard (1937) aptly described how forensics empowered participants through competition: “The feeling of inferiority is eliminated through participation in the contests, and we often find students who have learned faith in themselves through facing and dealing with the difficult situations often afforded by the competitive contest” (p. 4).

The uniqueness of this competitive experience also was characterized by Constans (1949): “There is a certain value in actual inter-collegiate participation that comes to the individual, a stimulus . . .

that he [sic] seldom, if ever, gets from practice debating in the classroom. Intercollegiate competition . . . provides the real test of his ability” (p. 153).

Students who engaged in forensics were taught and coached by energetic and inspiring teachers who, in many cases, became leaders in the emerging communication discipline. The historical texts are filled with the names of teachers and coaches who had a significant influence on their lives of their students (Fest, 1956; Fifty famous alumni, 1963; Hanks, 1948; Karlins, 1926; O.S.C. Marks, 1953; Quimby, 1952). Of particular significance were those individuals involved with the creation of national organizations—E. R. Nichols (University of Redlands), Brooks Quimby (Bates College), and E. C. Buehler (University of Kansas, to name a few—who provided opportunities for competition, a way to coordinate efforts, a means for inter-organizational communication, and the establishment of common forensic norms and practices. Occurring first in the forensics honorary societies, these networks ultimately resulted in the creation of the American Forensics Association in 1949.

The specific skills and training provided through coaching and competition became the basis for success in life’s work after the participants left college, as suggested in testimonials from former forensic participants citing the ability to think clearly and logically, select and use evidence, research, and think on one’s feet as benefits acquired through preparation for competition (Olson, 1948). Eisenstadt (1951) explained, “on the student’s abilities in getting his [sic] thoughts and their merit recognized will often depend his success in business, at home, in church, and in community life” (p. 8). This sentiment was supported by college presidents (Henderson, 1961). Fifty-four of the 56 respondents recommended debate as a valuable experience. One of the respondents, F. D. Murphy, Chancellor of the University of Kansas, explained: “The capacity to express oneself is of immeasurable value, no matter what field one takes up as a life work” (Henderson, p. 9).

### *Creation of Forensic Community*

Public oratory not only affected the individual participants, but also promoted community within a campus or school team, created a social fabric of participants from different schools, and established a professional social structure that spanned the country. Participation in

forensics promoted the development of loyalty and social cohesiveness for teams, often providing *first experiences* for the participants, as Ewbank (1951) noted, “my first meal on a diner, my first night in a Pullman” (p. 3). Many students held among their fondest memories, the social relationships developed while on the school team. One participant reminisced: “I’d love to gather up the old gang of 1942-44 and go on another debate trip to Denver or the Missouri Valley Tournament. Gee, we had a good time” (Olson, 1948, p. 67). One reason for the development of strong team loyalty and affiliation resulted from the amount of time spent by the team while engaged in forensics. Buehler (1963) explained: “I saw much of the U.S.A. with my debaters. We traveled far and wide by train, bus, plane, and automobile . . . More important are the scores of deep and abiding friendships . . . which grew out of squad meetings and the many forensic experiences” (p. 60).

The loyalty of students for their coaches and teammates surfaced regularly as particular milestones were reached. For example, when Alan Nichols of Southern California celebrated his 25<sup>th</sup> year of service in debate, more than 200 gathered to pay tribute because “In retrospect the victories are not nearly so important as the fellowship that developed between men twenty years apart who could feel close together because of the single common experience of having worked with [Dr. Nichols]” (The U.S.C., 1947, p. 61).

In addition to building team unity, forensics also created a social fabric of participants who shared the common experience of competition. The socialization that occurred was purposeful. At tournaments, students and coaches were more than adversaries; they were friends. As such, social opportunities in the form of banquets and dances were built into the competition schedule (Special Feature: Southwestern College, 1945, p. 95).

A network of forensic information emerged from the numerous forensic publications that developed. College newspapers and literary magazines generated by debaters who were often journalists became the source of ideas and “knowledge about what was going on in the debate world” (Nichols, 1936b, p. 591). The national network of forensic programs expanded as publications, such as *The Debater’s Magazine* and *Speech Activities*, offered special features about a college or high school program making some distinct contribution to forensic activity or gaining a reputation of excellence. Often, schools reflecting very different institutional sizes and missions were showcased, including: Bates

College (Maine), Ottawa University (Kansas), Boston University (Massachusetts), Bradley University (Illinois), Linfield College (Oregon), Manchester College (New Hampshire), Montana State University, Rutgers (New Jersey), the University of Florida, the University of Michigan, University of Redlands (California), Southwestern Louisiana Institute, and Southwestern College (Kansas).

Also promoting the social network of forensic teachers, coaches, and participants were regular columns entitled, “News Notes and Personals,” published in *The Debater’s Magazine* and *Speech Activities*. This personalized publicity about individuals and team successes in Delta Sigma Rho, Tau Kappa Alpha, Pi Kappa Delta, Phi Rho Pi, and the National Forensic League came from correspondents whose job it was to report about individuals, their activities, and their organizations. The personal news (e.g., birth announcements, obituaries, promotions, new positions, alumni achievements) kept forensic colleagues and participants informed and connected. The inclusion of information about all of the honoraries in each of these early publications provided for a more interconnected community than existed during the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when the various forensic national groups became more self-focused in their publications.

Another aspect of community building involved the way the forensic educators helped to facilitate competition and created structures for governance. Initially, as forensic activities sprang up around the country, universities functioned as facilitators for competition (Highsaw, 1916). For example, the University of Texas organized and coordinated the University Interscholastic League forensic contests for Texas high schools (Hayes, 1952). Similarly, other Universities (e.g., North Dakota) formed high school declamation leagues and debating unions. At the collegiate level, triangular, quadrangular, and pentagonal leagues were common as coaches sought venues for student competition (Perrill, 1935). Forensic teams regularly scheduled debating tours, as Jacob (1928) described:

Desiring a little travel farther than our customary debates into Illinois and Iowa and especially anxious to witness a presidential inauguration, I persuaded our department to let me schedule a debating tour into New England. Those jaunts are now common among colleges and not unheard of at all among high schools, but in the day it was about the first venture of the kind. (n.p.)

As the interest in forensic activities grew, and the Great Depression and limited funds restricted the ability for schools to travel great distances, the tournament format emerged where, at a designated site, hundreds of students from dozens of schools could participate in public speaking, debate, and the performing arts (Hanks, 1948).

In addition to providing opportunities for their students to compete, directors of forensics also established the means by which they governed their respective groups. The national honoraries were composed of member schools sharing a similar vision of forensics, with each of these honoraries having a particular focus. For example, Delta Sigma Rho recruited the largest universities, providing recognition for students who already had participated in an interstate debate. Tau Kappa Alpha initially established one chapter in each state, also limiting recognition to students having proficiency in debate at the interstate level. In contrast, Pi Kappa Delta chartered any accredited school with a forensic program and allowed individual students who had not yet achieved distinction to progress through levels of advancement.<sup>8</sup> Modeling his collegiate experience, Bruno E. Jacob, initiated the National Forensic League. The relationship between college and high school forensics during the Public Oratory Period was evident due to the fact that most of the instructors at NFL schools were former members of one of the collegiate honoraries (*Suggestions from the Chapter*, 1927).

As the Century progressed, E. R. Nichols pressed for the creation of an umbrella organization expressly for forensic coaches from all levels and honoraries. His dream came to pass in 1949 with the creation of the American Forensic Association (Blyton, 1970). The AFA and the national forensic honoraries not only created a network of educators; but they sponsored tournaments, conventions, and conferences for their members to attend.

### *The Creation of a National Forensic Culture*

In his characterization of forensics as epistemic, Littlefield (2006) suggested: “The experience of forensics provides knowledge that is unique to the nature of the activities involved, and from forensic activities comes truth, or certainty, about the nature of the experiences

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<sup>8</sup> Modeled after the Masonic tradition, PKD recognized growth in its members as they progressed through distinct levels of achievement.

for the individuals involved” (p. 7). As applied to the present study, educators often cited the perceived benefits of the forensic experience as justification for the activity. Forensics provided tools essential for democracy, emphasized free speech and active citizenship, trained leaders, improved the speech of the general public, and evoked values supporting progress. These characteristics formed the fabric of the Public Oratory Period and had a significant effect on the way forensic participants and educators identified themselves and how they sought to be viewed by others in society.

Throughout the century, forensic educators characterized forensic training and practice as “an essential process of democracy.” In his justification, Nichols (1948) argued: “We must train young Americans in discussion and debate. Any other policy is short-sighted and blind . . . and the college that does not realize this is failing in its function as an educator and developer of future leaders” (p. 203). Nichols was not alone in this belief (Baird, 1945; Eisenstadt, 1951; Ewbank, 1951). Hanks (1948) summarized the beliefs of those who considered forensics as being essential to the continuation of the American democracy: “The whole future safety of our society . . . depends upon the unceasing stimulation of the program of public discussion and debate and the training of those who will be the leaders of that program” (p. 68).

Support for public oratory and the performing arts also was predicated on the belief that forensics promoted active citizenship and leadership (Auer, 1957; Ahrendts, 1954; Davis, 1915). In describing the ways forensics contributed to the development of active citizens and leaders, Highsaw (1916) explained:

Interscholastic debate influences political opinion by arousing discussion, informing the people on civic questions, setting people to reading, thinking and investigating, establishing convictions, . . . and bring[ing] forth leaders of public opinion who are not mere ‘brawlers’ and ‘molycoddles’ but clear-visioned, intelligent, well-trained spokesmen of honor and principle, of right and justice. (p. 380)

H. W. Nichols (1952) concurred: “Good Americans must speak out against those who would impose unsound political and social theories upon our people. So the art of forensic persuasion was never more important than today” (p. 25). To be involved in the training of future

citizens was viewed as “an obligation and our great opportunity” (Ewbank, p. 4).

The effect of forensics on the speech of the general public provided further reason for its strong support. In a nation of immigrants, the ability to communicate clearly in English was not an automatically acquired skill. In some states with large immigrant populations, classes in Oral English and Platform Skills represented early efforts by schools to improve the quality of speech among the public. Many were convinced that every student should be taught the skills afforded by forensics (Crocker, 1946). Congressman Karl Mundt (1935) believed that by setting a good example for others, those involved in forensics could “do their part in promoting the objectives of the [National Forensic] League to the end that America may become a nation of better speakers and more influential and competent citizens” (p. 3). Later, Mundt (1937) acknowledged the increased awareness of effective speaking resulting from exposure to those who had training in public oratory and the performing arts: “NFL-ers throughout the nation may well be proud of the part they have played in making America speech-conscious because to make American sufficiently speech-conscious is to make America speak correctly” (p. 3).

A final characteristic of the forensic experience was its inherent relationship with progress. Just as individuals could better themselves by assessing their abilities and taking steps to improve; in order for societal progress to occur, individuals needed to be able to discuss and determine the best course of action. Alternatives must be weighed and considered. The forensic educators of the Public Oratory Period believed that through the skills acquired in forensics, citizens would be able move the country forward (McBurney, 1948). U. S. Senator Hubert Humphrey (1956) brought the importance of having forensic training to the forefront: “At a time of mounting international rivalry and bitter controversy . . . our ability to talk and act with wisdom may spell the difference between genuine progress and hopeless failure” (p. 13). His conclusion, that “our individual voices . . . make up the real voice of America” (p. 14) underscored his belief that the ability to progress was dependent upon active citizens capable of weighing options and choosing the best alternatives in order to move forward.

The common epistemology of forensic educators and students framed the way they taught and participated in public oratory and the performing arts. The effect of forensics on the participants, campus

groups, and among professional colleagues was considerable. The way the forensic community worked together to create opportunities for students to compete and professional associations for the coaches to affiliate supports the belief that public oratory and the performing arts were considered as an integral part of the educational experience. However, by 1955, world events and changing educational priorities marked the end of the public oratory period of American forensics. Education in general, and forensics in particular, changed to meet new needs and the effect of these changes on forensics were pronounced and led to a decline in the significance previously afforded forensics as a crucial civic teaching tool.

### **The Shift to the Specialist Period in Forensics**

The strongly perceived linkage between forensics and citizenship training flourished until after World War II, when a growing emphasis on scientifically-based education coupled with the political changes caused by the Cold War dramatically altered the perceived role of forensics in the educational system (Evans, 2004; Fest & Schindler, 1957; Rudolph, 2002). The Cold War and rising interest in science influenced forensics, as well as virtually every other element of higher education. As the leaders of the United States sought to maintain America's position as a world power, both curricula and thought patterns moved strongly toward an increasing reliance on empirical evidence and logical forms of proof. The scientific achievements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century—both good and bad—contributed to this emphasis on science, often at the expense of other disciplines. For the first time, the Federal Government, through the National Defense Education Act, sought to influence public education by prioritizing research in the sciences: “Sputnik forced a national self-appraisal that questioned American education, scientific, technical, and industrial strength, and even the moral fiber of the nation” (NSF, 1994).

Schools more highly emphasized science curricula as Americans witnessed the push to get a man on the moon, win the Cold War, and find cures for diseases such as polio. The government's increased emphasis on scientific and technical training requiring specialization prompted the investment of large sums of money into the educational system (Fest & Schindler, 1957). This scientific perspective transformed public oratory

from the more eloquent and rhetorical to the more conversational and practical (Baskerville, 1979). Public oratory and the performing arts became what scholars called a *laboratory* for teaching speaking skills (McBath, 1984).

The activity of debate evolved to reflect this new emphasis on the scientific method. What was once a rhetorical and audience-based activity became more information processing and expert-centered. Debaters began to gather massive quantities of evidence to support their arguments rather than relying on established literary or historical examples; delivery was de-emphasized in the process of conveying more evidence within specific time limits; and forensic leaders began to emphasize the benefits of forensics for the individual (specialization) rather than for the greater community. This trend widened an existing and long-standing fracture between speaking aimed at audiences versus presentations given in front of the trained critic (Woodward, 1915), as the average audience member did not always view the quality of the oratory, debate, or performance in accordance with what were becoming unwritten stylistic norms and expectations for winning competitions (Becker, 1928; Padget, 1928; Rickey, 1956).

Critics of the changes railed against the loss of the traditional, rhetorical foundations of forensics (Stelzner, 1961). Fissures in the forensic community prompted some educators to promote a more humanistic perspective in the public oratory and performances of their students. Specifically, some advocated a style of public speaking and performing counter to the highly rigid styles that were dominant in debate.<sup>9</sup> But, these rhetorical approaches were not immune from some of the characteristics associated with the adoption of a more scientific model and eventually came to reflect some of the same traits that originally served as motivation for the split.

## Conclusion

When commenting on the changing perspectives in education brought on by the Cold War, Nevins (1962) wrote: “The lenses through

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<sup>9</sup> This motivation was the common explanation for the creation of the Southwest Cross-Examination Debate Association (later renamed the Cross-Examination Debate Association) as an alternative to the dominant National Debate Tournament style of debate. Other organizations, with similar motivations, appeared after 1970.

which we look at the past have to be refocused from generation to generation. What seemed wisdom to our fathers is often folly to us, and what is dramatic to our age may seem naïve or banal to the next” (p. 33).

This perspective has utility as we consider the history of forensics. The emergence of American forensics during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century demonstrates an evolution from local and regional activity to the emergence of national networks of competing organizations forming a unique cultural epistemology. The partisan support for forensics at the beginning of the Public Oratory Period and the changes that occurred after World War II reflect something of what Nevins described.

As historical accounts recorded in forensic texts document, the development of forensics followed a similar path in all regions of the country, suggesting the grassroots orientation of this remarkable American innovation. As forensics became more prevalent at the collegiate and high school levels, disagreements and struggles surfaced pertaining its value and practice. Those experiencing new approaches on the national circuit or through national associations met resistance from local or regional entities who sought to hold on to long-established traditions. Many of these disagreements continue today.<sup>10</sup>

In attempting to establish parameters for periods of public oratory, Halloran (1982) argued that “rhetoric in the sense of an art of public discourse flourished in American colleges of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and died out during the 19<sup>th</sup>” (p. 246) due to changes in the curriculum, faculty specialization, and a shift in the way colleges perceived their social function from benefiting the community to benefiting the individual student. While these factors well may have changed the way rhetoric was taught prior to the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, our analysis of the Public Oratory Period serves to counter the notion that public discourse was “quite dead” (p. 263).

Potter (1960) included in his “Postscript to the History of Debating in American Colleges” the suggestion that the history of

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<sup>10</sup> For example, how should oral performance activities be considered: As citizenship training; a game; a laboratory for argumentation or persuasion; or simply, just a fun way for students to spend a weekend? Should debate be no-holds-barred? Should there be a clearer relationship of theory to content when developing oratorical messages for public audiences? Should the judge of public oratory be an information processor or a critic? Should students be able to shape the activity or should educational standards be followed? Is there a rhetorical value of forensics?

American forensics during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century required its own essay (p. 263). While not a comprehensive examination, this essay provides a perspective on the value of forensics to inform the current debate within the discipline regarding the relationship of forensics to academic departments. We believe that as young people were encouraged to speak their minds, they found a competitive outlet enabling them to learn and develop valuable speaking skills that would serve them throughout their lives and provide access to a common democratic culture. Engaging in debates and public oratory built a sense of community and contributed to the unique cultural heritage of America. This legacy, grounded in the lives of those who experienced the Public Oratory Period, should inform those who continue the debate about the value of forensics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

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**Imus in the Doghouse:  
A Shock Jock's Use of Image Restoration Strategies**  
*John McGuire*

**Abstract**

*This research study examined image restoration strategies employed by radio shock jock Don Imus in his efforts to salvage his career following controversial comments about the Rutgers' women's basketball team in April 2007. Utilizing Benoit's image restoration theory, the research study found Imus employed a combination of strategies, most notably mortification and bolstering of one's own image in helping restore his image and resurrecting his career just months after the controversy. The study's findings support past research on celebrity image restoration while offering new insight regarding the on-air behavior of shock jocks and the occasions when they cross the line of good taste.*

The competitive nature of the radio industry has given birth to a generation of announcers who seek a large audience through outrageous banter and often-controversial behavior. The term *shock jock* has been applied to a cadre of notorious personalities, including Howard Stern, "Mancow" Muller, and the duo of Opie and Anthony. These individuals, based in the nation's biggest media markets, are also heard around the country through syndication or satellite radio. Although these announcers can generate millions of dollars in revenues for the companies that employ them, they can also create problems through the controversial content of their shows (Douglas, 1999). Some transgressions can be so serious that the announcer's image is damaged and efforts must be undertaken to restore listener support (and ensure that revenue keeps flowing in).

One of the more controversial cases of a shock jock crossing the line of good taste was that of Don Imus in April 2007. Imus's words about the Rutgers women's basketball team got him fired from his radio and television jobs within a matter of days. It was Imus's words of apology, done to save his career that paved his way to return to the airwaves in less than a year. This research utilizes Benoit's image restoration theory to critically evaluate strategies employed by Imus to

restore his public image and resume his broadcast career. This research has implications for the broadcast industry, as shock jocks remain among the most popular performers in all of radio. The research will also expand upon previous image restoration research and evaluating how Imus's celebrity may have impacted his efforts to restore his public image.

### **Fall (and Rise) of the I-Man**

Don Imus, whose radio career has spanned several decades, has spent most of them in the New York City market, the biggest radio market in the country ("Arbitron Radio," 2007). In spring 2007, the *Imus in the Morning* program on WFAN-AM reached an estimated daily audience of more than 500,000 listeners. The show was also being syndicated via the Westwood One radio network to stations around the country (Carter, 2007). In addition to radio, *Imus in the Morning* was simulcast on the MSNBC cable network, reaching another 360,000 people on an average weekday (Bauder, 2007). At what could easily be described as the height of Imus's popularity, it all seemingly imploded on the morning of April 4, 2007, when an acerbic remark created a national furor. During a segment in which Imus and program contributor Bernard McGuirk were discussing the Rutgers University women's basketball team (which had lost the previous night to the University of Tennessee in the Division One women's basketball championship final), Imus referred to some of the Lady Knights as "some rough girls" with tattoos. After McGuirk responded, "Some hardcore hos," Imus replied, "That's some nappy-headed hos there, I'm going to tell you that" (Bauder, 2007). Imus's remark, with its racist and sexist overtones, produced a firestorm of criticism. CBS, the parent company of WFAN, slapped Imus with a two-week suspension on April 10, 2007 (Farhi, 2007). National sponsors, however, had already started abandoning the Imus radio show as well as the MSNBC simulcast (Steinberg & McBride, 2007). On April 11, 2007, MSNBC announced it was terminating its simulcast of *Imus in the Morning*. The public outcry eventually forced CBS to fire Imus later that week (Farhi, 2007).

Even while all of these events were unfolding, Imus was engaged in efforts to save his career. Imus apologized on his own show April 9 and then used an appearance on another radio program hosted by African-American social activist Al Sharpton to repeat his apology.

Imus's exile from the airwaves lasted only eight months. In December 2007, Imus was hired by another New York radio station (Citadel's WABC-AM). The cable network RFD-TV also announced that it would simulcast Imus's new show across the country (Steinberg, 2007).

Imus's fall and rise back to broadcast prominence provides an interesting case study for image restoration theory. The remainder of this paper will offer (a) a brief literature review (including a typology of image restoration theory), (b) analysis of Imus's public apologies from April 9, 2007, and (c) an evaluation of Imus's attempt at image repair.

## Literature Review

### *The Era of Shock Jock Radio*

Ellmore (1996) has defined shock radio "as a late 1980s name for stations that broadcast raunchy, usually sexually indecent, material" (p. 535). Announcers working for such stations picked up the label of shock jocks. Keith (2007) has described shock jocks in harsher terms, decrying them as announcers "who found it great sport to denigrate women, gays, and minorities" (p. 535). Douglas (1999) identified traits of such shock jock programs that include (a) ensemble supporting casts, (b) celebrity impersonations, and (c) lots of cross talk and laughing to promote the idea of a party-like atmosphere.

The era of shock radio actually launched during the early 1980s. The first, and perhaps still most prominent, of these shock jocks was Howard Stern, whose program on WNBC-AM in New York in the early 1980s quickly vaulted to the top of the ratings. Although his show was a financial success through national syndication in the late 1980s, it also became a lightning rod for criticism in certain segments of the community. WNBC-AM became the target of protests because of Stern's frank sexual discussion and on-air stunts, including a segment called bestiality dial-a-date (Douglas, 1999).

Stern's success also came with a monetary cost for companies employing the controversial announcer. Starting in the 1980s, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) frequently fined stations airing Stern's programs for violating its codes prohibiting indecent broadcast content. One of the most serious FCC sanctions was a \$495,000 fine in 2004 against Clear Channel Radio and several its stations for a segment on the Stern show that commission

members judged indecent. The fine prompted Clear Channel (which had already taken Stern's show off the air in some markets due to controversial content) to drop Stern's program from all of its stations (Salant, 2004). Stern's battles with the FCC overshadowed the announcer's appeal as a radio entertainer. Hall (2007) suggested that despite Stern's diatribes, his ability to connect with and build a loyal audience was significant. Hall also described Stern's appeal with his mostly male demographic as stemming from his anti-authority stance, whether it was dealing with the FCC, politicians, or even his own radio bosses (2007).

Stern's frustrations with the FCC eventually forced the shock jock to flee traditional radio and take his radio program to Sirius satellite radio beginning in January 2006 (Carter & Ives, 2004). Other radio shock jocks (e.g., Opie and Anthony; Bubba the Love Sponge) migrated to satellite radio, although some performers started doing shows on both satellite and terrestrial radio stations. In early 2008, Bubba the Love Sponge returned to Tampa radio after a four-year absence. The announcer had been fired from his previous Tampa job after he and his station were hit with a six-figure FCC fine (Deggans, 2007). It should be noted that not all radio shock jocks are re-hired after being fired. Some notorious shock jocks like Doug "The Greaseman" Tracht have failed to resurrect their careers after losing their job over controversial remarks made on their programs (Fisher, 2007). All this suggests that popular radio shock jocks, despite potential complications for the broadcast companies in hiring them, are an accepted business risk. Johnson and Foote (1993/1994) suggested radio groups have braced themselves for such fines in exchange for having popular radio entertainers whose potential earning power (through local broadcasts and syndication) eclipsed any fines they might have to pay.

Don Imus isn't out of the norm when compared with other contemporaries in the shock jock radio field. One distinction is Imus's age--he is the oldest of this generation of shock jocks (67 as of the time of his firing by CBS in 2007) (Steinberg, 2007). Another distinction is the heavy emphasis on political discussion on his program. Regular guests on Imus's show ran the gamut; From U.S. Senators John McCain (R-Arizona) and Christopher Dodd (D-Connecticut) to NBC News Washington correspondent Tim Russert (Steinberg, 2007). Although some hard news was presented on the program, *Imus in the Morning* still had many of the elements Douglas (1999) identified in shows hosted by

shock jocks. Programming staples included fake news reports, impersonations of celebrities like Mike Tyson and Howard Stern, and bombastic commentary about the powerful and the famous. Prior to April 2007, some examples of comments heard on Imus's show included labeling former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell as "a weasel," and members of the New York Knicks basketball team as "chest-thumping pimps" (Bauder, 2007).

### *Academic Studies of Shock Jocks*

Although shock jocks have been a prominent part of commercial radio for nearly 30 years, there has been limited academic research examining these controversial performers. One exception is a study by Erlich and Contractor (1998) that examined the hiring of St. Louis radio shock jock J.C. Corcoran by KMOX-AM, a traditional news-talk radio station. Although the hiring had the purpose of attracting news listeners to the station (which already was the most-listened-to radio station in the St. Louis market), Corcoran's abrasive on-air style was in sharp contrast to what the authors described as the station's self-described community service format. In analyzing more than 30 of Corcoran's KMOX shows, the authors concluded Corcoran vacillated between making outrageous and confrontational remarks and toning down the nature of his delivery compared to his shock jock days. The researchers concluded that Corcoran's inability to adapt to a format that restricted his outrageousness proved unsuitable for the announcer and resulted in his eventual departure from the station (Erlich & Contractor, 1998). The study also points to the inherently controversial nature of such announcers that stations should expect to deal with.

### *Image Restoration Theory*

Although other theories and approaches have been developed in the study of this form of communication (e.g., Ware & Linkugel's theory of *apologia*), Benoit's image restoration theory posits such utterances as being goal-oriented with the intent of rehabilitating the communicator's image or reputation (Benoit, 1995). In utilizing this theory, the researcher attempts to (a) identify the goals of the communicator, (b) identify the methods of image restoration, and (c) evaluate the effectiveness of the communicator's tactics (Benoit, 1995).

Benoit has identified a typology of strategies, including (a) denial, (b) evading responsibility, (c) reducing offensiveness, (d) corrective action, and (e) mortification (1995). *Denial* is described as a communicator's rejection of the claims being made. *Evading responsibility* is the communicator offering alternative explanations as to why something has happened. Examples of this include (a) provocation, (b) defeasibility, (c) accident, or (d) good intentions. *Reducing offensiveness* suggests the communicator accepts some measure of responsibility, but offers reasons that would lessen the impact on their reputation. Examples of this strategy include (a) bolstering the image of the communicator in order to lessen the impact of the harmful action, (b) minimization of the incident (c) differentiation in order to contrast the specific act with even more serious transgressions, (d) transcendence, in which the specific act is placed in a separate light, (e) attacking the accuser, and (f) offering some form of compensation for the perceived harm caused by the communicator's actions. *Corrective action* can be described as the communicator promising steps that will correct the problem. *Mortification* is where the communicator expresses disappointment in his or her own actions or thoughts and seeks forgiveness (Benoit, 1995).

### *Application of Theory*

While image restoration theory has often focused on corporation (e.g., Benoit's 1995 study of Union Carbide's handling of the Bhopal tragedy) or politicians (e.g., Blaney & Benoit's 2001 book about the Clinton administration), athletes and celebrities are sometimes in need of rectifying problems they have created for themselves. One example of image restoration by an athlete was attempted by disgraced figure skater Tonya Harding after her involvement in a plot to severely injure one of her fellow competitors. Benoit and Hanzcor (1994) found that Harding, during an interview with CBS television, used multiple image restoration tactics such as denial, attacking one's accusers and bolstering her own image (e.g., discussing her rough childhood and problems with her ex-husband). The researchers evaluated Harding's efforts at image restoration as ultimately unsuccessful because (a) Harding offered little in the way substantive corrective actions for her past behaviors and (b) Harding painted an image of herself that conflicted with her low standing in public opinion (Benoit & Hanzcor, 1994).

Benoit and Anderson (1996) considered a case of image restoration that blended politics and entertainment by examining Vice-President Dan Quayle's criticism in 1992 of the CBS television show *Murphy Brown*. Vice-President Quayle had criticized the show and its producers for glorifying the idea that single women have no real issues when it comes to raising a child on their own. The researchers looked at the image restoration efforts used by the writers for the character of Murphy Brown as well as the entire show. Using the text of the episode called "You Say Potatoe, I Say Potato," the researchers found the writers employed (a) simple denial, (b) attacked the accuser, and (c) bolstering on behalf of their title character. The writers demonstrated simple denial with dialogue where Murphy disputed Quayle's real-life claim there was anything easy about giving birth and caring for an infant. The writers used the episode to attack the accuser (Quayle) and make fun of the vice-president's many public gaffes (e.g., Quayle's inability to spell the word "potato" while visiting with a group of school children). Bolstering was demonstrated by showing Murphy's character adapting to motherhood and loving her child, improving the character's image (Benoit & Anderson, 1996).

Benoit (1997) then examined the strategies employed by actor Hugh Grant after being arrested for engaging in lewd conduct with a female prostitute. Grant, who was starring in a movie coming out at about the same time, decided to use his scheduled talk show appearances promoting the film to repair his image. Benoit found Grant employed mortification as a primary strategy in these appearances. Grant employed other strategies as well, including (a) denial, (b) bolstering and (c) attacking his accusers (Benoit, 1997). In his analysis, Benoit suggested that entertainers like Grant have fans that are predisposed to accept explanations offered for an offending action. Mortification, therefore, could be an especially useful strategy for entertainers in situations like the one Grant found himself in. Benoit also suggested that by accepting responsibility for his actions, Grant may have won goodwill among those not be familiar with his work.

### *Summary*

This brief literature review has identified that shock jocks are encouraged and expected to be outrageous in the comments they make on the radio. As a result, these announcers have the capability to prompt

audience protests and FCC sanctions. It can also be suggested that with the apparent lack of academic research concerning the role of shock jocks, this study will help provide understanding of how these broadcast personalities react when they have gone beyond the limits of public acceptance. In relation to this particular study of Don Imus, it is suggested that image restoration theory is an appropriate analytical approach by which to examine the controversy Imus created in 2007 with his remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team. Thus, the researcher poses the following research questions:

- RQ1: What image restoration strategies did Don Imus employ after his critical remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team?
- RQ2: How effective was the image restoration strategies of Don Imus related to his professional career?

### **Image Restoration Strategies of Don Imus**

This study focuses on texts generated by Don Imus in two separate broadcast appearances on April 9, 2007—a day before his first suspension that eventually led to his firing by CBS. The first is a transcript of Imus's extended apology delivered on his *Imus in the Morning* radio program simulcast on MSNBC. Imus's statement was a follow-up to his first apology offered the week before on his program. The second transcript is that of an interview Imus did with social activist Al Sharpton on Sharpton's radio show heard in New York City.

In analyzing these texts, it appears Imus employed multiple image restoration strategies in trying to repair his public standing in the wake of his comments about the Rutgers women's basketball team. In particular, Imus made frequent use of mortification and reducing offensiveness; specifically, the use of bolstering one's personal image. Imus employed other strategies to a lesser extent, including (a) promising corrective actions, (b) minimization, (c) attacking one's accusers, and (d) transcendence. Minimization, attacking one's accusers and transcendence all represent forms of reducing offensiveness of one's actions.

#### *Mortification*

Imus extensively employed mortification regarding his remarks about the Rutgers women's basketball team. Despite an initial apology

offered April 5 (the day after the original remarks), the public furor about Imus's comments continued in print and electronic media as well as on the Internet. Imus made a more detailed apology on his April 9 radio program. At the beginning of a monologue that went several minutes, Imus said he understood the consequences of his words:

I have a responsibility this morning to provide some context and proportionality to who I am and what I do. And I don't want anybody to think that this—that I'm trying to weasel out of these remarks or that this is some kind of excuse, because there isn't any excuse for what I said. (Transcript, 2007b)

While the rest of Imus's on-air monologue that day included many other image restoration techniques (as discussed below), the radio host had reiterated that he personally was at fault. On the Al Sharpton radio program later that day, Imus used mortification in responding to Sharpton's question about why anyone should forgive Imus's comments:

I think it can be forgiven, but I don't think it can be overlooked. And I—when I originally apologized on Friday, I apologized. And I didn't say what everybody said, you know, if I offended somebody, I'm sorry because I knew I offended somebody. So I apologize. (Transcript, 2007a)

In this passage, Imus is again accepting responsibility for his comments, acknowledging the possibility of being fired because "I don't think it can be overlooked" (Transcript, 2007a). Imus also disputed Sharpton's claim that Imus would somehow walk away from the controversy without any loss of face: "How am I unscathed by this? Don't you think I'm humiliated? Don't you think I'm embarrassed?" (Transcript, 2007a). Imus, in disputing Sharpton's expectations, was once again attempting to demonstrate his personal mortification and his understanding of the potential impact his remarks would have on his career.

### *Bolstering One's Personal Image*

There were many examples of Imus's use of bolstering in his public statements. One way Imus tried to reduce the offensiveness of his remarks was describing his charitable work. Imus spent a great deal of time during his own radio program on April 9 discussing a ranch he and

his wife ran in New Mexico for seriously ill children. Imus made a specific point of talking about the ethnic backgrounds of the children welcomed at this ranch:

And half, nearly half of the kids who come there are from minority groups, Native American, Hispanic, Asian American...African American. Ten percent of the kids who come to our ranch are African American.

(Transcript, 2007b)

Imus's description of the children not only had the purpose of demonstrating the radio host's caring nature, but that he did not have any prejudice as to which children were being invited to his ranch. Imus went even further in describing his ranch's care for a child with sickle cell anemia:

My wife and I were stunned, this past summer, at the number of kids with sickle cell. I came on this radio program, when I got back, talking about sickle cell. I talked to politicians about it. I said, 'Well, how much money is being spent on sickle cell?' I don't know. I said, Well—and I ask doctors, doctors at the ranch and others, is there any research being done? (Transcript, 2007b)

In this case, Imus was attempting to show his concern not only for children, but that he had personal concern for a disease that strikes particularly at the African-American population. Imus also discussed his ranch and his concern for children with sickle cell anemia during his interview with Sharpton later that day.

Imus also employed bolstering in stating that he supported an African-American (Harold Ford Jr.) who was running for the 2006 Tennessee U.S. Senate seat as well as showcasing African-American entertainers on his radio program. Imus disclosed during his own radio show monologue that he had been the target of hate mail that called him a "n-lover" for these actions (Transcript, 2007b).

### *Secondary Strategies*

#### *Promising Corrective Actions*

Imus used his radio show and his appearance on Al Sharpton's program to talk about actions he planned to take to address the controversy he had created. One such action was to meet with the people

he had offended: “I have asked the Reverend DeForest Soaries to see if these young women will allow me to come apologize to them and their families and their coach, and he said he will work on that” (Transcript, 2007b). In this case, the corrective action would be a direct apology to members of the Rutgers’ basketball team. The fact that Imus made this disclosure on his program and his interview with Sharpton suggested Imus wanted this fact as part of the public conversation. When Reverend Sharpton questioned if an apology would be enough for the Rutgers players, Imus said he realized “some gesture of reconciliation” would also be expected from the talk show host (Transcript, 2007b).

Another example of corrective action that Imus talked about was the future of his radio program. On his own radio program the Monday after the controversy started, Imus remarked that he had not exercised the professional judgment expected from a broadcaster in his position and that he needed to change the nature of his show:

Here’s what I have learned: that you can’t make fun of everybody, because some people don’t deserve it. And because the climate on this program has been what it has been for 30 years doesn’t mean that it has to be that way for the next five years or whatever, because that has to change. (Transcript, 2007b)

Imus’s promise of corrective action could be seen as significant, particularly in light of the broadcaster’s use of outrageous humor that propelled his career to prominence.

### Minimization

While Imus was talking about changing his program, he also tried to explain how the nature of his radio show led to what was said about the Rutgers women’s basketball team in the first place. Imus’s rationale was that the satirical nature of his program and on-air banter meant prominent people were targets for humor:

It [the show] makes fun of me, and it makes fun of everybody on the planet. And sometimes it makes fun of me to a vicious standpoint. Does that mean I get to say something about the Rutgers women? Of course not. But that’s the context in which we operate here. (Transcript, 2007b)

Imus later described some of the racially based satire he had previously done on his show, including a made-up character based on white

supremacist David Duke (Transcript, 2007a). Imus expanded on his show's performance philosophy in his conversation with Reverend Sharpton: "Our agenda is to be funny. And sometimes we go too far and sometimes we go way too far. In this case, we want way too far" (Transcript, 2007a). In these utterances, Imus is making an argument that the nature of shock radio and the need to entertain an audience can lead to remarks that will push the limits of good taste. Imus told his own radio audience, "You know, I don't know why I said it. We are trying to be funny, but does that make it okay? Of course not" (Transcript, 2007b). Imus was reiterating the idea that comments were made on his show with entertainment as the first goal and the impact on others was only an afterthought.

### Attacking One's Accusers

Some of Imus's attacks were directed at newspaper accounts concerning the radio broadcaster's original comments. Even while bolstering his image by talking about his work with children afflicted with sickle cell anemia, Imus criticized African-American journalists for failing to talk about his efforts to raise awareness about a health problem that impacted the African-American community: "No black journalist called me. Nobody ever called me about any of that" (Transcript, 2007b). Imus was trying to show that while he was addressing a health problem in the African-American community, African-American commentators were attacking Imus about one remark he had made on his radio program.

Imus also attacked Reverend Sharpton while being interviewed by him. One example of this was when Sharpton challenged Imus's claim of not understanding the racial implications of what he was saying about the Rutgers team at the time he said those hurtful words:

Sharpton: ...what are you saying? You blanked out?

Imus: Well, no, I didn't...don't tell me I didn't understand what we were saying. I said, I wasn't thinking that. (Transcript, 2007a)

This is an example where Imus, although having admitted culpability, was still willing to argue with Reverend Sharpton about perceptions of Imus as a racist. Imus continued to press this point about intent: "Am I some rabid, racist, vicious person who's on a rampage screaming and got on the radio and turned on the microphone and said, 'Here's what I think these women are?' That's not what I did" (Transcript, 2007a). Imus

carried on this line of argument, noting that some people who wanted him fired even though they knew nothing about his show or what type of person he is: “I’ve heard people say...I’ve never listened to his show, but I want him fired. That’s an ill-informed decision” (Transcript, 2007a). These excerpts demonstrate that while Imus was willing to accept responsibility for his comments about the Rutgers basketball team, he would also defend his behavior in dealing with minorities over the course of his life.

### Transcendence

Imus also employed transcendence while being interviewed by Sharpton to turn some of the Reverend’s claims back on the host. In discussing his use of the phrase “nappy-headed hos,” Imus suggested that the same language had been employed for many years in the music of African-American rap and hip-hop artists:

Imus: ...let me ask you, in the black community when rappers and other people in the black community, athletes in the black community defame and demean black women?

Sharpton: I am one of them that is outraged....

Imus: And call them worse names that I ever did.

Sharpton: ...I am absolutely outraged by it. I attack it, I disagree with it. I’ve had friends of mine that used bad raps on radio that was fired. And I do not think that there ought to be two standards. I think you ought to join them. (Transcript, 2007a)

This excerpt demonstrates that as Imus was defending himself during his confrontational interview with Sharpton, he also got away from his primary strategies of mortification and bolstering that were frequently present in the monologue he delivered on his own radio program.

## **Discussion**

The goal of this research has been to identify image restoration strategies of radio shock jock Don Imus after his controversial remarks concerning the Rutgers women’s basketball team and how successful these strategies were in resurrecting Imus’s broadcast career. An analysis of two key texts identified the primary use of mortification (e.g., acknowledging there was no excuse for his comments) and reducing

offensiveness: Specifically, the use of bolstering one's personal image (e.g., discussing the Imus ranch that helps children with severe illnesses). Imus employed other image restoration strategies to a lesser extent, including promising corrective actions (e.g., meeting with members of the Lady Knights basketball team), minimization (e.g., that his satirical radio show always has the danger of going over the line of good taste), attacking his accusers (criticizing reporters not familiar with his show or his charitable work), and transcendence (e.g., contrasting his statement with lyrics found in rap and hip-hop music).

As the research study identified Imus's desire to maintain his broadcast career as the primary goal for engaging in image repair, one must judge Imus's strategies as being successful. A non-scientific Internet poll suggested strong public support for Imus remaining on the air in the days before his firing (but after his on-air apologies). The New York-based poll found three out of every four persons participating in the on-line survey wanted Imus to keep his job ("Snap Poll Results," 2007). Despite Imus's deplorable comments, it seemed his listener base had accepted his explanation and wanted the radio host to stay on the air.

This level of fan support for Imus can also be explained by the nature of the radio industry. As there are many unique radio format niches (e.g., shock radio), performers on the medium are afforded the advantage of trying to reach and entertain a narrowly defined target audience (Douglas, 1999). The situation is different for those in network television, for example, because their programs are going out to a broad, general audience. It is suggested that radio's programming structure, with its many niche formats, proved beneficial to Imus and his image repair efforts; the shock jock's target audience was already inclined to support Imus, no matter how controversial his remarks were about the players from Rutgers.

Imus's success also supports past research in this field of study. For example, Benoit (1995) found accepting blame was a key part of image restoration. Imus made repeated use of mortification as a strategy, whether speaking on his own show or during his interview on Reverend Sharpton's radio program. Imus's success can also be explained by Benoit's study of another entertainer (1997). Benoit suggested that actor Hugh Grant (and other entertainers and athletes like him) enjoyed a reservoir of goodwill to tap into with fans (Benoit, 1997). One can contrast Grant's case to that of Tonya Harding (who did express mortification) and her failure to successfully repair in her image.

Another of Imus's successful strategies was to appear on the radio show of one of his biggest critics, Al Sharpton. By engaging Sharpton, Imus sought to show that he wanted to repair the damage he caused for himself within the African-American community. Again, it can be argued that Imus was successful because Sharpton would later author a newspaper column in August 2007 that supported allowing the shock jock to return to the airwaves, provided he met certain conditions regarding his conduct on the show (Sharpton, 2007). Reverend Sharpton's message was counter to the position of other African-American groups, including the National Association of Black Journalists, who opposed Imus being re-hired in the New York market ("Black Journalists," 2007). Reverend Sharpton said he had concluded that Imus should be given the chance to show whether his apologies were sincere or just an attempt to get his broadcast job back (Sharpton, 2007). Although Reverend Sharpton was still voicing doubts about Imus's sincerity in his apologies, Imus was now receiving the benefit of the doubt from one of his harshest critics.

Imus's follow through on pledges of corrective actions that made back in April 2007 also supports the evaluation that his image repair efforts were successful. Imus did meet in private with members of the Rutgers basketball team shortly after his dismissal by CBS. After he was re-hired in December of 2007, Imus reiterated that "I will never say anything in my lifetime that will make any of these young women at Rutgers regret or feel foolish that they accepted my apology and forgave me" (Steinberg, 2007). Imus also followed through on a pledge to diversify his on-air supporting cast. When Imus returned to the airwaves on WABC-AM in December 2007, his show featured two African-Americans (comedians Karith Foster and Tony Powell). All of these steps were corrective actions taken in public view, allowing Imus to reassure fans and critics alike that he made the changes he talked about in his on-air apologies earlier that year (Steinberg).

### **Implications**

This study provides further evidence of the apparent advantage celebrities have regarding image restoration. Imus's public support, such as the Internet survey supporting him staying on the air, made it easier for other potential employers to bring the shock jock back to the airwaves. It is suggested, however, that such studies of celebrities and

image repair continue to identify whether certain strategies (e.g., mortification) help to advance or hinder image restoration efforts.

A cynical observer would suggest Don Imus, regardless of how he responded to the Rutgers' controversy, was destined to get another radio job because of his ability to attract an audience and earn money for his employer. History, however, has shown that has not always been the case for all shock jocks. As this research has demonstrated, Imus's words and actions in the days following his controversial remarks facilitated his return to a prominent place in the New York radio market and on cable television much earlier than perhaps anyone might have expected.

This research study also points to a need for greater examination of the shock jock culture and implications for the radio industry. As shock jocks remain a daily on-air presence in many of the nation's leading media markets, the lack of scholarship about this important niche of American broadcasting is particularly surprising, particularly in light of financial and regulatory implications. Although a shock jock's radio station and its advertisers will often pay a price for an announcer's actions, the research study's findings point to the ability of these performers to survive and thrive, even after times when they have created great controversy.

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## Overview

Scott Jensen

The speech and theatre education world said good-bye to a giant this spring when Dr. Bob R. Derryberry lost his battle with cancer. The soft-spoken scholar/educator lived the motto of the college forensic honor society, Pi Kappa Delta—“*The art of persuasion, beautiful and just.*” Few individuals exerted the influence on the fields of communication and forensic education than did Bob Derryberry.

The 72 year old Derryberry was Chair of the Department of Communication and Director of Forensics at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri. In his 46 years at Southwest Baptist Derryberry built a communication degree program that generated countless professionals who now practice the skills as lawyers, educators, authors, performers, and in countless other professions. Additionally, Derryberry shaped a forensic and debate program that is arguably the most successful in Pi Kappa Delta history, and remains one of the strongest comprehensive programs in the nation. Few programs match the number of individual and team championships earned by Derryberry’s students at both state and national tournaments.

Having earned graduate degrees at the University of Arkansas and University of Missouri, Derryberry became an ambassador of the education he received from such mentors as Loren Reid, ultimately, and with sincere humility, reaching the status of a communication and forensic education icon in his own right. Derryberry was awarded countless honors during his years as an educator, including both the Outstanding Teacher Award and Loren Reid Service Award from the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri. The Missouri Association of Forensic Activities annually presents the Bob R. Derryberry Individual Event Sweepstakes awards, and recently created a Bob. R. Derryberry grant to help underwrite travel to the Interstate Oratorical Contest, an annual national event open to the top two orators from each state. Derryberry’s professional accomplishments also include a number of national Pi Kappa Delta honors such as the E. R. Nichols Award for Outstanding Furtherance of the Forensic Discipline and the Golden Gavel Award. He is the namesake of Pi Kappa Delta’s Bob R. Derryberry Outstanding Young Forensic Educator Award, and was

named to the Pi Kappa Delta Hall of Fame in 2001, a rare honor for someone still in active forensic coaching and teaching.

While few individuals can match the accolades received personally, nor the competitive accomplishments earned by their students, Bob Derryberry's greatest legacies lie in his relationships with people. He was survived by his wife and best friend of 51 years, Joyce (Nettles) Derryberry. He was proud to maintain relationships with countless former students, friends, and colleagues from throughout his 50 years of formal teaching. As was written in the *Bolivar Herald-Free Press* on April 16 of this year, the day before a celebration of his life, "From his academic study of words to his lively interpersonal dialogues with colleagues and students, Bob Derryberry's life was a celebration of words. But perhaps the most important words to Bob were those spoken in kindness—his standard for speech at its best."

The texts on debate and speechwriting that he co-authored, his countless scholarly articles and papers, and his thousands of ballots and speech critiques are testimony to the enduring impact Bob Derryberry leaves on the world of communication and forensic education. Awards bearing his name will highlight his professional contributions for generations to come, but the example of his life will be the more important enduring reminder of what it means to be a practitioner of what one teaches. Bob Derryberry's gentleness, wisdom, and genuine kindness and love for his fellow human are examples to be held up to today's and future generations of teachers and scholars.

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## **Remembering Bob Derryberry**

*Josh Compton*

This morning I drove to a farm on the bank of the Connecticut River and paid \$4.79 for a four-pack of okra plants. Now it's a couple of hours later, and I'm settled on the stairs of our backyard deck, most of the dirt off of my hands and some out from under my fingernails, writing about okra—okra and bricks and pencil stubs and Bob Derryberry.

Bob Derryberry was crisp collar points and smooth cotton shirts, symmetrically knotted neckties and mahogany leather oxfords. He worked at a tidy desk—calendar, notepad, and pen at the ready. Near his feet, a briefcase housed his spare office key, a dictionary, and peppermints to share. His posture communicated readiness, his speech, care. My friend was careful. Careful and polished.

Bob was also okra and bricks and pencil stubs. Fingers that scooped fresh dirt to make way for the okra plants that he tended, the ones that grew in spite of the shade from his backyard oak and redbud trees. Feet that clambered over loose rubble of a fallen building—the former administration building on the college campus that we shared for a decade—as we scavenged for souvenir bricks before the trucks hauled them away. I'm remembering the case of pencils that Bob kept in his home office—pencils worn nearly to their ends, erasers marred with many mistakes, notches nicked into their wooden sides.

Bob held these contrasts together. It was seamless—the dusty leaves of an okra plant against the backdrop of a white starched dress shirt, the uncluttered surface of an office desk and the pitted surface of a turn-of-the-century salvaged brick. He could be one thing and its antonym, and it wasn't jarring. Bob was comfortable in a diner booth in Newell's truck stop outside of Newton, Kansas, and seated at the head table at a formal Pi Kappa Delta forensics banquet. He was competitive and kind, traditional and innovative, consistent and surprising.

I'm even more grateful that Bob saw complexities in others—that he noticed subtleties in personalities and interests and talents, and then nurtured and tended them. He saw the scared kid in his speech class and heard a future voice that would move audiences. He listened to early drafts and anticipated contest-winning orations. He picked up the pencil stub and respected its past words, its mistakes smudged on the eraser, and he anticipated what it would write next.

I suppose that this is what helped Bob to see more broadly, more boldly—he looked forward and backward. He noticed today’s sprout and saw tomorrow’s platter of okra slices, dusted with cornmeal and flour and fried in bacon grease. He held a brick in his hands and remembered the administration building that housed one of his first college campus offices. He met the aimless high school senior of 1992 and saw the speech professor of 1998.

A friend of mine, a master glassblower, tells me that glass is made of new materials, called batch, and pieces of old broken glass, called cullet. Without both—old and new, cullet and batch—glass is weak. I think that Bob thought of many things this way. He appreciated tradition but never wanted to be limited by it. He looked ahead with careful planning—mindful of the past, but not bound by it. He knew the need for balance, for batch and cullet.

Bob taught me to see things differently—a broader view of what’s happened and what will happen. It’s a gift that he’s given me, and one that I treasure, especially now that I’m left without my mentor. I’m looking back and remembering lessons, I’m looking ahead with confidence—sometimes the bold confidence of careful planning, sometimes whatever small confidence that I can muster. I’m holding a brick and watering okra, answering a student’s question and updating a calendar. I’m making mistakes and reaching for an eraser. It took me a dozen or so false starts to begin this reflection of my friend and mentor, Bob Derryberry. It wasn’t until last night that I realized what was missing: A pencil in my hand. An okra plant in my backyard. Dirt under my fingernails. There will be days when a crisp dress shirt and a neat necktie reflect some of my confidence, at least a veneer of polish. But more often than not, I hope to reflect through my words and actions the quieter confidence of broken pencils, the strength of glass, the brick that reminds us of what once was.

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**Generational Differences, Stress-Adaptation, and Program Stability:  
Identifying Exigencies and Strategies for Enculturating  
Millennials into Forensic Programs**

*Scott Jensen*

**Abstract**

*Much has been written regarding the uniqueness of the millennial generation as college students. In particular, millennials' learning styles, communication behaviors, and outlook on the world pose opportunities for educators to contemplate how they approach both the students and their curriculum. This paper explores what defines the uniqueness of the current college student generation and how that uniqueness has implications for teaching, with a focus on the forensic culture. Through an application of Kim's Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model, the paper examines challenges forensic cultures may pose for millennial students. Strategies are outlined that can facilitate millennials' enculturation into the forensic culture, achieving both adaptation and integration.*

I bring over 25 years of forensic coaching and education into this paper. That longevity has allowed for exposure to several generations of students on four different college campuses. Recent years have brought exposure to a new brand of student who appears, at least to myself and my colleagues, more egocentric, demanding, and less respectful of authority, tradition, and the strain of transition from previous forensic experiences and training. This new type of student offers motivation for re-examining our approach to teaching and forensic program management; we are now asking ourselves if we need to change to adapt, or whether we *should have to change* to adapt to today's college forensic student.

While we continue to ask ourselves these questions we acknowledge we are dealing with a different type of student than ten years ago, and this difference may well mandate a different approach to forensic program management. This paper examines the nature of the millennial generation, a model of cultural communication and adaptation, and strategies for easing challenges of integrating today's college student

into a program characterized by a sensitivity to the uniqueness of today's college student, as well as to effective forensic education and program management.

### **Nature of the Millennial Generation**

A number of scholars provide their own sense of the prototypical millennial student. Phillips and Torres (2008), in reporting results from focus groups of professionally employed millennials, conclude these students and young employees want to be employers to teach them, mentor them, understand the job is not their life, trust me, reward me, and not take them for granted. Howe and Strauss, in their 2007 text *Millennials Go to College*, define membership in the millennial generation as being born after 1980, in a high school class of 2000 or later, and a first-year college student in 2002 or later.

#### *Defining Traits*

The real uniqueness in this generation is found in their characteristics, or defining traits. Howe and Strauss, along with McCallister in a 2009 *American Music Teacher* article suggest nine traits of the millennial generation.

#### Sheltered

Millennial students are protected to the point of not learning to pick themselves up after falls, or work through their own challenges. A consequence of this protection, often from parents, is limited accountability from the student.

#### Confident

The millennial generation has a healthy sense of self-worth nurtured by frequent praise and accolades, along with awards that are arguably unearned. Acknowledging participation in events with certificates, or even de-emphasizing accomplishments of some by awarding all participants promotes a confidence that may not be commensurate with the prowess it suggests.

### Techno-Savvy

Millennial students have never known a world without the Internet. As such, these students have grown up with video games, computer-based classroom instruction, and skill sets regarding media and technology that often exceed the abilities of parents, teachers, and employers.

### Multi-Taskers

It is the norm for millennial students to communicate through multiple media, processing several concurrent messages. Typical layered communication might include doing homework with a cell phone close by for texting, an I-Pod playing “study music,” the computer for both writing the paper *and* instant messaging, and probably the television playing in the background.

### Oriented and Pressured

Millennial students are accomplished scholars who desire success and seek to be challenged. This generation is likely to attend college and willing to put forth the effort to not only be admitted, but admitted with scholarship recognition to the school of their choice. Consequently, these goals contribute to a certain degree of self-imposed pressure.

### Team-Oriented

Millennial students are comfortable working in group settings; throughout childhood this generation has been over scheduled with team sports, cultural activities, and school responsibilities. Consequently millennials are accustomed to permuting personal visions with those of a larger group. To a large extent this generation may even prefer group settings for social and task-oriented communication experiences.

### Special

Millennial students tend to believe they are vital to the future of their communities and the world. Parents communicate the importance of their children carrying through their family’s legacy. Society speaks to the importance of today’s youth becoming civically engaged and socio-politically aware. A highly visible youth involvement in the 2008 election process reinforces the accuracy of this trait.

### Conventional

The millennial generation appears to like rules and social standards as ways to make life easier. Parents and authority figures have credibility as agenda setters largely because of the adoration directed toward today's youth. The predictability and structure provided by these frameworks perpetuates a degree of comfort for students navigating their way through the college experience.

### Achieving

Millennial students are well educated and consequently capable of performing functions with excellence and confidence. The heightened educational experiences that now characterize high school and home environments (e.g., computers as standard classroom tools, smartboards, media labs, etc.) give today's first-year college students' greater confidence to set lofty goals with an expectation of achieving them.

### *Manifestations of Traits—Societal Perceptions*

While scholars agree on these defining characteristics of the millennial generation, the perceptions these traits help to shape toward today's college students are a mix of positive and negative. One *Economist* article from earlier this year labels the millennial generation as “spoiled, narcissistic layabouts who cannot spell and waste too much time on instant messaging and Facebook” (Managing the Facebookers, 2009, 10). This same article highlights a report from one consultancy that concludes 61% of chief executives experience trouble recruiting and integrating younger employees, largely because of a demand for “frequent feedback and an over-precise set of objectives on the path to promotion” (10).

From an educator's perspective characteristics of this generation have led to the new term *helicopter parent*, a reference to the parent who hand-holds while his/her child navigates the transition to college. From registering for classes to defending the first poor grade, today's parents create challenges for the college professionals charged with providing a meaningful collegiate experience that helps create independent, free-thinking citizens. Akande (2009) reinforces this dynamic when he observes this generation, more than any other, is likely to move back home after graduation.

I currently teach in a learning community that includes a seminar in which the students explore realities of the millennial generation. This group of students self-reported their generation as (1) being self-centered, (2) celebrating independence, (3) having a desire to change the world, (4) being technologically savvy, (5) being arrogant, and (6) seeking to be non-conformist. These self-reported traits mirror those aforementioned characteristics within scholarly literature. Our university's school paper recently published an editorial in response to a movement from a small group of campus students seeking a more collaborative relationship between students, faculty, and administration. The editorial comments that giving into demands of collaboration "would be doing you [students] a disservice. There's nothing wrong with a friendly relationship between faculty, staff, and students, but in the end they're your teachers, not your buddies" (Millennial generation needs to learn a few life lessons, A4).

### **Stress-Adaptation-Growth Model**

Kim provides a model illustrating the challenges of acculturating (learning) and deculturating (unlearning) cultures. He observes that when cross-cultural adaptation occurs a stranger's identity and "attributes are placed against the backdrop of the systemic forces of the host culture, the cross-cultural experiences of newcomers are unsettling indeed" (Kim, 1998, 296). This transitional process of learning and unlearning cultures creates stress on individuals navigating their way through the process. The temporary dissonance of other "disruptive experiences of a person" leads to the *stress* piece of the model (p. 296). Kim explains that our nature leads us to adapt to this stress, although such adaptation is not "a smooth, linear progression, but... a cyclic and continual 'draw-back-to-leap' pattern similar to the movement of a wheel" (p. 296). Each response to stress provides a new opportunity for repeating this cycle, and each adaptation process, when successful in the mind of the stranger, results in growth—or an alleviation of the stress.

The model "portrays cross-cultural adaptation as a collaborative effort, in which a stranger and the receiving environment are engaged in a joint venture" (p. 301). Kim suggests that most individuals understand this model reflects a necessary reality of life (and we would add a reality that is becoming more prominent as our world grows in its cultural diversity and the situations demanding cultural communication

competence). Successful stress-adaptation-growth calls for competent cultural communication skills that are honed through trial and error. The growth alluded to by Kim occurs over time and in response to successful acculturation and deculturation experiences.

### **Stress-Adaptation-Growth and the Forensic Context**

Forensic programs provide an excellent context for applying Kim's model...and for understanding the challenges faced by both forensic educators/directors and their millennial students. Even for experienced high school competitors college forensics provides challenges in cultural adaptation. College forensics, like any college experience, reflects an increase in student independence, less parental influence, and greater latitude in events available and performance choices that are acceptable. Clearly high school and collegiate forensic cultures, while similar in many ways, are also profoundly separate from one another as cultural contexts. The literature defining and discussing millennials also provides support for the millennial generation being its own culture. Coomes and DeBard (2004) add to this characterization, observing that "many members of the millennial generation see themselves as a counterpoint to the generation that immediately preceded it" (p. 9). Coomes and DeBard base their observation in the more service and team oriented tendencies of the millennial generation over what they term members of Generation X. These authors, while cautioning that over-stereotyping a generation can mitigate the uniqueness of the individual, conclude, "By exploring the factors that shape a generation's peer personality and discerning identifying characteristics of that personality, educators can develop more effective policies and practices" (p. 13).

With specific regards to collegiate forensics and the millennial students a number of experiences mandate stress-adaptation. Forensic participation, especially in college, is at odds with several traits of the students joining these programs. Many college forensic programs ask their students to be self-starting and self-reliant, which often means working within self-designed rules. The range of what is appropriate performance and public address material in college contributes to the importance of students finding their voice, expanding that voice, and working within a more loosely defined (i.e., less rule governed) context. Millennials competing for the first time in forensics are subjected to

criticism about content, performance choices, and maybe even appearance that are all seen as personal choices. Not only are they no longer receiving praise for their efforts, in many cases students are being criticized for how they compete and communicate in a context in which many rules are unwritten and standards for evaluation are extremely subjective. Fewer parents are involved in collegiate forensics, creating a need for students to participate within a context that lacks a “safety net” to which they have been accustomed to having in many of their other ventures.

Millennial students seek to adapt to these challenges in a number of ways. Some maintain relationships with high school mentors and peers, relying on material and guidance that remain comfortable to them. My colleagues and I have noticed an increased number of students who are interested in forensics choosing to hold off on forensic involvement until their sophomore years; these students express a desire to “settle in” to their college experience and become comfortable with this new chapter in their life. Many of our new students, regardless of high school experience, seek out veteran students as models. This dynamic is interesting in that the veterans now assuming roles of peer mentors previously worked their way through the stress-adaptation-growth model as millennial students themselves. Consequently, many of these mentors evolve into roles of the helicopter parent. More and more we hear our veteran students characterizing first and second year team members as protégés. At the same time, we also exercise greater influence to prevent what is a growing trend of intrusive mentoring in which the experienced student finds the material, does most of the cutting, and hears many unofficial practices. For the millennial student this creates the rule-based, teamwork-based, sheltered environment in which they are comfortable.

### **Strategies for Adaptation and Integration**

We continue to employ strategies for successfully integrating the millennial student into the collegiate forensic culture. Because forensic participation so aptly combines essential elements of oral communication, it is a key contributor to our students’ long-term success. Morreale and Pearson (2008) provide a compelling case for communication education as central to the educational experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Promoting these connections between the need for

communication competence, the role forensics can play in promoting those competencies, and the ease with which one can transition into a forensic program is an effective way of bringing first-year students into the forensic culture. Our forensic context is broad-based (students are expected to participate in individual events and debate), open to all students willing to meet team standards, hosted on a small to mid-sized private liberal arts campus, and has a mix of experienced and inexperienced students who enjoy relative individual and team success throughout the year. With little scholarship support much of our recruitment is from students already on campus; consequently, the coming together of cultural differences is a centerpiece to our program. My colleagues and I employ several strategies for facilitating this adaptation.

At the beginning of each year we offer an all-expense paid retreat for new and returning team members. Our retreats include a Friday night on campus during which we review team standards, procedures for attending tournaments and preparing events, provide an opportunity for new and returning students to talk without professional staff present, and introduce Pi Kappa Delta. Saturday and Sunday are hosted at an area hotel and include sample performances, team-building activities, small-group work and interactive sessions, and Sunday performances by each team member—new and returning. The retreat offers acculturation experiences that incorporate hotel and team meal rituals, and event preparation that emphasize personal choice within a mentoring, group context that make the process more comfortable for the first-year student.

We also promote the importance of team standards and traditions. During the retreat and throughout the year we share stories that emphasize the nature of the program and its history. As part of this, we encourage modeling of veteran students who have heard the stories and have experience with the team's standards. This peer instruction and reinforcement of team legacies helps the adjustment for new students while ensuring a greater propensity for continuing rules and rituals upon which the program is based.

We also make an effort to establish expectations early on in the year that error on being higher than what we really seek from the students. We offer a first tournament experience that includes more national-caliber competition. We hold standards for travel approved practices higher than later in the year. In previous years we offered a

different introduction to competitive forensics with more regionally oriented tournaments, relaxed standards that would allow for students to attend tournaments despite not being as prepared as they should be. After recently changing our approach we have found fewer students traveling to early tournaments, but both greater success and a higher retention rate from our first year students. Creating stronger incentives to succeed also promotes an active learning mentality, something some research supports as being important to the millennial generation (Teaching the millennial generation, 2006).

Mentoring is a substantial part of the Webster University program. We have found first-year students feel more comfortable with guidance from peer mentors. By codifying mentoring relationships our program benefits from the experience our veteran students have with stress-adaptation-growth; first-year students learn directly from the experiences of peers who have successfully applied Kim's model to their own collegiate forensic experiences. The program also benefits from an increased sensitivity from our experienced students who have an invested interest in the future of the program and understand that successful acculturation and deculturation from younger students are determinants of a successful future. As recently as this current semester, one of our seniors has expressed frustration with the ego and independence of one of our first-year students. The new student has had difficulty breaking out of her comfort zone shaped by her high school experiences. Ironically, this senior embodied the very same characteristics in her first year of collegiate forensics.

Service learning and opportunities to extend the forensic experience outside traditional tournament contexts can both better integrate millennial students and extend the pedagogical benefits of the program for all its participants. Stone (2009) reports this generation embraces volunteerism, describing them as "the generation that learned in school to serve as well as to read and write" (on-line). Stone supports her argument with interviews of several CEOs of volunteer agencies and community leaders, all who note this generation has grown up in a time when several exigencies such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters created a need to work together on behalf of others. Making civic engagement an ethic within the forensic program can help to reinforce this attitude that defines the millennial generation, while also de-emphasizing the competition-only nature of forensic activities.

We also make efforts to create networking through both parents and program alumna. Our former students return to help with tournament hosting, provide suggestions for event material, listen to practices, and attend national and invitational tournaments as guest judges and active alumna. We also integrate family and friends through email exchanges and updates.

Such a strategy responds to an important trait of millennial students. Elam, Stratton, and Gibson (2007) write “they [millennial students] are often exceedingly close to their parents, who assume participatory roles in their children’s educational pursuits” (p. 22). These networks provide a sense of community and stability that strengthens the program, provides connection for students leaving the program, and creates a clear vision and integration of family and former program members for first-year students.

### **Conclusions**

Millennial students bring with them a unique background not altogether positive or negative. They are academically equipped for success but expectant of praise even in the face of moderate to limited success. They are anxious to work with groups and within service activities but are hesitant to bend rules and express their voice outside of their comfort zone. The forensic culture on college campuses intrinsically challenges many of these traits. The implication for these two cultures coming together is the need for wisdom and creativity in facilitating acculturation and deculturation in a way that eases stress, allows for adaptation, and ensures growth. Any given forensic program will succeed with adaptation strategies that are reflective of its own uniqueness. Sharing with my colleagues, our experiences encompass a number of strategies including those outlined herein, and has been met with at least moderate success, as measured by student satisfaction, retention, personal growth, and comfort with their own process of finding their voice and expressing it. Akande (2008) offers the ultimate call to action for those of us who are charged with mentoring millennial students. “Our greatest challenge now is to revel in their strengths, understand their weaknesses and harness their energy for a better, more productive tomorrow. Remember, it’s their world. We’re just living in it” (p. 20).

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## **Globalizing the Communication Studies and Theatre Curriculum** *Christopher J. Stephens & Jeanne Florini*

### **Abstract**

*Student learning is enhanced when discipline content is connected, integrated, and infused with a global perspective. To help students achieve deeper learning, educators seek to stir their intellectual curiosity and to teach them to cultivate habits for seeking wisdom. In the current world, globalization of the curriculum can be an effective vehicle for the achievement of learning outcomes by students. This article will offer a rationale for infusing communication studies and theatre curricula with global and cultural studies to help students become people of inquiry in their academic endeavors. Arguments will be presented to illustrate how communication theory and theatre studies can be used to effectively connect students to deeper and more meaningful learning. Examples and definitions of learning communities, high impact and interdisciplinary learning activities with a global emphasis are provided for the communication and theatre curricula. Additionally, how these approaches provide a basis for lifelong learning will be addressed.*

### **Rationale and Definitions**

The content and skill areas of the disciplines of Communication Studies and Theatre offer tremendous potential to be at the nexus of two parallel educational trends in colleges and universities: globalization of the curriculum and the move toward interdisciplinarity. According to the *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007) report, students focus on disciplines as a way to approach college because of the perceived link to economic marketability. However, this report also names knowledge and understanding of human cultures through the integrated study of various disciplines as core components of a generally educated person. Both Communication Studies and Theatre lend themselves to interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches and are ideal areas to infuse with global content. Knowledge of human culture can be explored in Communication Studies courses when studying topics such as: cultural context, Burke's (1972) theory of dramatism and the Fisher

(1984) narrative paradigm, all of which give insight on what it means to be human (Griffin, 2009). The development of performance skills within Communication Studies and Theatre courses provides opportunities for educators to connect course work to personal experience, and these activities become a powerful vehicle for the exploration of global studies and culture. Within the Communication Studies curriculum, an individual benefits from knowledge about how culture impacts communication. Kolb (1984) noted that this is translated into experiential learning opportunities and produces deeper and more meaningful learning.

In the Theatre curriculum, opportunities exist in content and skill areas. Recent Theatre Appreciation and Theatre History texts have expanded the global reach of content—most notably in the area of Asian theatre forms. Acting classes sometimes include performance style from the Eastern tradition, but the first author holds that this is the exception not the norm. The Western tradition in Theatre has always embraced its ancient roots in Greece and its modern roots in Europe and Russia. How deeply are students making connections to this material as a global experience? Our purpose is to suggest ways to create integrative learning experiences that enhance global understanding in Theatre courses and extra-curricular activities while facilitating profound intellectual and affective connections between the students and to the world at large. The nature of performance work requires the development of an *ensemble*. This notion is closely related to the burgeoning academic movement embracing the use of *Learning Communities*. A growing body of research suggests that students in learning communities achieve at higher levels and experience higher retention rates (Minkler, 2002). As theatre practitioners we have always known this to be true. The Learning Community movement gives us the opportunity to apply what we have learned in our discipline to the larger academic environment.

In *College Learning for the New Global Century* (2007), the national leadership council for the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) initiative, *Liberal Education and America's Promise*, “calls on American society to give priority to a set of educational outcomes that all students need from higher learning, outcomes that are closely calibrated with the challenges of a complex and volatile world” (p. 2). The report recommends that these *essential learning outcomes* be “developed across the entire educational experience and in the context of students’ major fields” (p. 2). As

described in the report (p. 3), the *Essential Learning Outcomes* are as follows:

- **Knowledge of Human Cultures and the Physical and Natural World**
- **Intellectual and Practical Skills**, including creative thinking, oral communication, teamwork and problem-solving
- **Personal and Social Responsibility**, including civic knowledge and engagement – local and global, intercultural knowledge and competence, and skills for lifelong learning.
- **Integrative Learning**

The approaches described intentionally address each of these outcomes. To help students become “intentional learners” in the pursuit of these outcomes, the council offers seven *principles of excellence*; the following three have particular importance to the globalization of the Communication Studies and Theatre curricula: Aim High and Make Excellence Inclusive; Teach the Arts of Inquiry and Innovation; Engage the Big Questions (including: cultural and humanistic literacy; global knowledge and competence; and enrichment programs that educate students to build sustainable communities, both at home and abroad). The activities and pedagogical approaches suggested below represent the principles of excellence in action, and model “effective educational practices”. These “high-impact activities” engage students more fully than traditional classroom-based instruction alone. In a 2008 AAC&U report, George D. Kuh described strong positive effects students experience as a result of participating in high-impact activities. Among the activities outlined, the following are well-suited for inclusion into the Communication Studies or Theatre curricula: Common Intellectual Experiences, Learning Communities, Collaborative Assignments and Projects, Diversity/Global Learning, Capstone Courses and Projects.

Gardner (2008) emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary and flexible ways of thinking. He outlines the five “minds” that educators should strive to help students achieve: the disciplined mind, the synthesizing mind, the creating mind, the respectful mind, and the ethical mind. Gardner (2008) suggests that one should start with cultivating the respectful mind, which allows an individual to seek understanding and be able to effectively work alongside and give support

to people from different backgrounds and ideologies. Synthesis happens once the mind is expert in one area (Gardner, 2008). Then, it can better make connections to other disciplines and think in an interdisciplinary manner. The creative mind looks beyond the present and solves problems that do not currently exist. Ideally, the premise of global and cultural infusion into Theatre and Communication Studies curricula is to help students achieve the minds described. Deliberate design of curriculum and delivery is essential to providing the foundation for the achievement of successful learning outcomes.

### **Learning Communities**

Academic and social engagement with peers and faculty results in a more successful and satisfied college graduate (Astin, 2001). In its second decade, the Learning Community movement has seen implementation in many forms across all types of higher education institutions. Minkler (2002) defined and discussed the merits of establishing learning communities within higher education infrastructures. In general, learning communities involve a deliberate structuring of the curriculum in which students and faculty are engaged and work together for longer periods of time. Learning communities may be established simply by connecting groups of students in linked courses or within collaborative learning experiences. Typically, general education courses are linked and developed to integrate content across disciplines. More complex iterations are seen in semester- or year-long sets of linked courses that are taught by interdisciplinary faculty teams. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. For the purposes of this article, “learning community” will refer to any interconnected group of students and/or instructors, collectively engaged in a thematic learning experience that they will complete as a cohort. Specifically, the global studies work described will give simple examples, with two courses linked for one unit within each course, and complex examples, with students engaged in semester-long projects involving multiple team-taught courses. According to Minkler (2002), the collaborative approach to teaching results in deeper learning with student contributions to the learning environment. Minkler’s (2002) students reported the experiences to be enjoyable, achieved higher grades, were less likely to drop out of school, perceived greater learning, reported higher

understanding of connections between disciplines, and reported a high degree of satisfaction with the college and of the college experience. The establishment of learning communities has since become commonplace in colleges and universities. The goals for learning communities as part of the principles of excellence are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom. As will be seen in the description of the Italian Studies Learning Community, this approach to education engages students and has a profound impact on their development.

### **Globalizing the Communication Studies and Theatre Curricula**

In the current economic climate, political initiatives have placed community colleges at the center of the action and attention at the state and national level. According to David Brooks in the *New York Times* (2009, July 17), “the Obama initiative...has the potential to spur a wave of innovation” (p. A23). As we hear more calls for educational reform, particularly those identifying the need to prepare students for success in an interconnected world, we as educators of Theatre and Communication Studies need to answer. Globally contextualized and interdisciplinary learning are replacing the acquisition of discrete bodies of knowledge. In this increasingly integrated world, ideas have no boundaries. According to Farnsworth (2007), “the world is changing rapidly around us, calling for us to change with it and ease some of the burden of its transformation. But we are either failing to hear the pleas, or are choosing to ignore them” (p. 1). How might we, as Theatre and Communication Studies educators, answer the call? What follows are suggestions for the implementation of Global studies content into our curricula, organized by discipline and subject matter.

### **Infusing the Theatre Curriculum with Global Studies**

“Impoverish culture and you will enrich ignorance” - translated from a hand-painted banner near the Teatro Regio in Parma, Italy in March, 2010. In 1932, a John Dewey lecture series addressed the importance of the arts in the education of a community: “As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization is secure” (p. 344). These two quotes from different cultural and historical contexts illustrate the universality of the arts as integral to the human experience. It is a

natural fit to infuse the theatre curriculum with global and cultural content. Theatre courses can also help to broaden students' experiences college-wide, by linking them to general education courses via interdisciplinary study of global issues. They offer an alternative opportunity to develop students' aesthetic appreciation and give a perspective of world culture through the eyes of the theatre artists.

### *Acting/Directing*

Within performance-oriented courses, the most readily available topics are the differing cultural styles of performance. In addition to the traditional emphasis on modern European- and American-derived approaches to acting, students can be exposed to Eastern technique. Moreover, when choosing material for scene work, the canon of world theatre can be explored. As students are asked to understand the preoccupations of characters they portray, they develop motivation to seek out additional cultural information to better interpret the text and adapt it to the stage. Brecht (1957/1963/1964) suggested that we know characters better by understanding their opposites and portraying their contradictions. In taking characters' perspectives students develop better cultural understanding. Encouraging students to select multi-cultural or global material for study and performance enhances that understanding.

### *Theatre Appreciation/Theatre History*

The same idea can be employed when selecting examples of dramatic literature for study in appreciation and/or history courses. Of course, the history of the art form already has global roots; one must study its origins in ancient Greece and its subsequent development in Europe. The first author uses pictures taken during travels (featuring students) to illustrate examples of historic theatre buildings. While many of our educational experiences were limited in the study of Eastern theatre history, we can certainly offer it to our students. Recent trends in popular entertainment (e.g., Disney's 1997 *The Lion King*) contain examples of the incorporation of theatrical practices from other parts of the world into the American theatre. This author has also exposed students to interpretations of well-known plays (e.g., Aristophanes' *The Frogs*, Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*) by Italian theatre companies. While offering an alternative take

on a familiar play, this activity broadens their intellectual and emotional landscape and further opens a window into understanding Italian culture. To engage students more deeply in their study of theatre history, we can ask them to reflect on their experiences, particularly those that involve travel. Two of this author's students gave a presentation on Italian contributions to theatre architecture from the Roman period, through the Renaissance, and into the Baroque, using only photos that they had taken on a recent trip to Italy.

### *Oral Interpretation of Literature*

As a hybrid course blending aspects of acting, literature and public speaking courses, Oral Interpretation allows freedom to explore global and cultural concepts. As with acting courses, students' selection of performance material can be guided toward world literature of all genres-poetry, prose and drama. Its existence as a general education course satisfying the Humanities requirement allows us to reach a cross-section of the student population. Even more exciting is that the latitude of delivery options facilitates engagement in joint units of instruction with other general education courses (see section on interdisciplinary projects).

### *Infusing the Communication Studies curriculum with Global Studies*

"Through others, we become ourselves." --L. S. Vygotsky  
(1931/1997, p. 105)

### *Persuasive Argument*

Planalp (2001) argued that emotional messages are a "cultural force," sent to individuals and society conveying how people and groups of people "should" behave and believe. Infusion of global ideas and themes related to persuasion illustrates the complex nature of the establishment of cultural beliefs and values. Communication was the cornerstone of the democratic process in ancient Greece, and Greek ideals have influenced the American political arena. Aristotle's (c. 335 B. C. E./1902) premise regarding persuasive technique was that it required logical proof, credibility, and emotional appeals. In contrast, the ancient Egyptians had a different premise for persuasive speech, one that

encouraged less talk and emphasized mutual respect (Sproule, 1997). In China, common people were not taught persuasive speech as it was deemed ineffective for achieving the cultural value of maintaining harmony (Sproule, 1997). This comparison/contrast of persuasive theory is an effective means of helping the students develop a global perspective of human interaction.

### *Perception, Self-Awareness, and Culture in Communication*

Self-awareness and recognition of cultural influences on the perception process are primary goals in communication theory education. Discussing non-American examples of culture (e.g., artworks with a non-American perspective) can help students better connect globally. After discussion, exploring the context of the work(s) generates discussion of contextual impact on students' perspectives. Examining images and stories from foreign newspapers bolsters student understanding of why life is different for those individuals because of their culture and the impact it has on communication.

### *Language and Nonverbal Messages*

Ekman (2003) indicated that there are some universal nonverbal displays, but he also found cultural differences in the nature and culturally accepted management of nonverbal displays (e.g., those associated with strong emotions). In addition, he found that language played a factor in nonverbal expressions of emotion. Planalp (2001) recognized that "emotion talk" influenced the perception of emotions in each culture. She suggested that the nature of language itself interferes with a clear understanding of meanings behind nonverbal expressions of emotion, as words cannot be translated to exact meaning. In a similar vein, investigation of the nature of foreign languages (e.g., the existence of formal and informal pronouns and gender in the Italian language) can be used to discuss cultural values and beliefs of the people who speak that language. The language of Shakespeare's plays illustrates how temporal, psycho-social, cultural, and physical context each influence the meanings behind language usage.

### *Interpersonal Communication*

Socialization of members in a community is achieved through the rituals, traditions and storytelling of families and the larger culture. Turner and West (2006) described one function of family communication as socializing the members into the community so they are productive and accepted. Families teach their own culture and values through communication. Exploring course concepts through global examples of rituals, traditions and storytelling and comparing them to student experiences, globalizes the Interpersonal Communication curriculum. There is opportunity for use of the students' cultural background and the infusion of various world views to develop a wider repertoire of interpersonal communication skills.

### **Interdisciplinary and Extra-Curricular Global Initiatives**

The potential impact of global infusion is magnified when implemented via Learning Community Theory. Two types of learning communities serve as examples to illustrate this point.

#### *Joint Units of Instruction*

An easy way to establish a short-term learning community is to link two courses for a joint unit of study. The authors linked the general education Oral Communication I with the Oral Interpretation of Literature course to collaboratively explore the global theme of Aristotle's (c. 335 B. C. E./1902) influence on communication theory and drama. Team-taught by the two faculty members, the objective was to illustrate the overlapping philosophies found in Aristotle's (c. 335 B. C. E./1902) writings and broaden the understanding of both groups of students while extending the scope of each course. This resulted in better composed and performed speeches in Oral Communication and performance works in Oral Interpretation. An additional benefit was subsequent increased enrollment in the Oral Interpretation of Literature. Final student evaluations in Oral Communication I revealed that this combined lesson was the most memorable lesson during the semester. Another example of linked courses involved nutrition and health communication. Montanari (2004) explained the connection between humans and food and maintained that food is not of nature because

humans choose, produce, and prepare foods according to human constructs (e.g., society) rather than nature's constructs (e.g., geography). Through global food tastings and the related communication activities, faculty and students developed a more articulate understanding of global cultures. Communication Studies students also practiced interviewing, seeking feedback and comments from participants which they synthesized and revealed to the Dietetic students.

### *Fully Integrated Learning Communities*

An ongoing global studies program at St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley-The Italian Studies Learning Community-models all of the aforementioned ideas and integrates course content and participation from Communication Studies and Theatre. This project was developed with the desire to create a guided, short-term study abroad opportunity for students that was imbedded within a curricular experience. Twenty-four to thirty participants collaboratively engaged in interdisciplinary study of a region of Italy. Focusing on the rich humanism of Italian Culture as revealed in its historical artifacts and its vibrant contemporary life, this learning community brought together students, faculty and community members in a collaboration involving class work, research, mentor relationships and study abroad. It challenged participants to share current knowledge and interests while cultivating new areas of inquiry and expertise. Connected to this experience is the involvement of The Global Classroom Club, which fosters appreciation among students for global education by sponsoring events on campus and facilitating student involvement in global literature, theatre and film study to deepen cultural understanding. It also increases student participation in the Learning Community's activities. All three constituencies in the Learning Community contributed to its success. Faculty and community members brought specialized interests and expertise and modeled life-long learning. In addition to studying the Italian language in preparation for cultural immersion, all participants explored a variety of disciplines related to the region being studied, facilitated by the faculty. In addition to the expected topics (e.g., art history, music, theatre), unexpected connections are made (e.g., to mathematics, science, business, psychology). Students identified areas of inquiry and conducted research in preparation for travel. The group traveled to Italy during spring break and visited sites, participated in

cultural activities, and immersed in contemporary Italian life. Upon return, students completed research, conducted a campus-wide symposium, and wrote research papers. Communication skills were reinforced in the development of the learning community, the practice of Italian, and the preparation for and presentation of the symposium. While in Italy, cultural differences in communication were observed. Theatre content was also built into the project. Students were given guided visits to theatre buildings of historic and contemporary importance and attended performances of theatre, music and opera. Students regularly chose theatre as an area of inquiry and reported their findings in written work and in the symposium. Those who are concurrently enrolled in Theatre courses were asked to bring learning back to the classroom and gave presentations to their classmates.

A second global immersion project was inspired by the response of students, many of whom had no prior experience, to the Theatre components of this program. The intent was to use the theatre production process as a vehicle for developing greater global understanding and cultural competency. A year-long collaborative developed by the first author included a Music colleague from St. Louis Community College and directors of a dance company from Busto Garolfo, Italy; Music, Theatre and Oral Interpretation students from St. Louis Community College; and Dance students from Busto Garolfo, Italy. Additionally, two researchers in Behavior Analysis from the University of North Texas (UNT) joined the collaborative to study and document the effects of this project on the American students. This project involved developing and rehearsing an original play (involving text, music and dance) over the course of an academic year and within two courses specifically designed for the experience. The topics chosen for research, exploration and plot development were Italian immigration into the U.S.A. and African-American migration within the U.S.A. at the turn of the 20th century. Following long-distance development and rehearsal, the groups were brought together in July, 2010 to work in Italy. After the completion of rehearsals in Italy, performances were staged in three Italian cities and three American cities. The play was performed in Italian and in English, respectively. As cultural immersion was a major goal, American students were housed by Italian students and then reciprocated the hospitality. The results of this project surpassed expectations. It should be noted that seven of the eleven American students had never performed before; four of whom joined the project as a direct result of their experience with the

aforementioned Spring learning community. While the project was intensive and difficult, the work was enjoyable and had a notable impact on the participants as well as on audience members. This month of work together produced remarkable anecdotal outcomes - the quantitative outcomes are to be compiled at the completion of the study - which include: greater student engagement on campus, heightened cultural sensitivity, an expanded appreciation of the Italian people, a recognition of how the American people and culture are perceived abroad, new knowledge of the history of immigration, a greater understanding of African-American history, more sensitivity to the plight of current immigrants, a wider repertoire of performance skills, an appreciation of European theatre aesthetics, and higher levels of fluency in the Italian language. Of note are some interesting effects: students have been witnessed carrying their Italian language texts with them outside of the school year and off campus, and several of the students have enrolled in a Children's Theatre course where they plan to develop and perform a multi-cultural, multi-lingual script for young audiences. Students have also indicated interest in exploring their own ancestral origins. A colleague reported that one of the African-American students enrolled in a course in African History, stating, "after seeing Stephens' connections to his Italian heritage, I need to learn about mine."

While it may not be possible to immerse students into a foreign culture through travel, there are manageable ways to integrate a global perspective into each course, for example:

- For each lesson, identify the global connection.
- Include a global example when describing material.
- Infuse language examples (e.g., What is an emotion called in another language?).
- Develop writing and speaking assignments with a global emphasis or component.
- Collaborate with foreign language, cultural studies, history, art and music appreciation, psychology, sociology, and science faculty to generate ideas for global connections and possible linked assignments, units of instruction, or team-taught classes.
- Identify reading materials with global perspectives to use for class discussion.
- Encourage students to participate in cultural events in their community.

### *Impact on Learning*

McKeachie (1994) discussed methods to motivate students within courses and as lifelong learners. Intentionally infusing global studies as a vehicle for teaching Theatre and Communication Studies courses allows for the use of these methods. Integrating global studies within these themes impacts learning in the following ways:

- Curiosity as motivation – The exposure to new ideas and cultures triggers conversations among the students about the material studied.
- Competence – Addition of global perspectives encourages students to study and discuss their own family and cultural practices as it relates to communication and theatre topics. This gives students a feeling of success at their level and allows for growth in later coursework.
- Atkinson's (1957) theory of achievement motivation - by providing a wide range of cultural and global activities, each student can adjust their challenge level.
- Helping students become strategic learners – When students are aware of their learning and its connections to their world, they are more likely to engage in future global and cultural activities provided by the college. As they examine and expand upon their academic goals, students are better able to articulate their needs.
- Using previous knowledge to help learn new things – Assignments and discussions related to culture through art, theatre, literature, music, and the media are tools for students to find a connection between old and new information. As the students progress in their course of study, they relate the cultural “stories” to the new information in other general education and career courses.

It should be noted that all of these strategies influence the motivation for learning. Students eventually recognize the persuasive nature of the affective domain, as it provides a personal connection in their learning achievements, and will hopefully continue to seek out or develop their own learning opportunities that reinforce the positive emotions associated with motivated learning. This is a powerful tool in the development of life-long learners.

### **Questions for Further Exploration**

1. What can we learn from and/or enhance via other cultural and global perspectives?
2. What can interdisciplinarity help us as colleagues to learn from each other about our disciplines and about teaching and learning?
3. How can interdisciplinary projects maximize contributions of our disciplines to general education?
4. How can learning communities make the impact on students more profound?

### **Conclusion**

Global and cultural studies connect seemingly disparate academic disciplines and create deeper meaning within the study of given disciplines. Alternative perspectives give more insight on how people live and believe, enhance prior learning and inform future educational endeavors. Students report greater levels of course satisfaction, higher levels of connection to each other and the world, and a greater desire to continue their educational endeavors. At a speech given on 8/16/2010 to open the academic year, Marcia Pfeiffer, PhD, President of St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley, shared data from *The State of St. Louis Workforce Report* (2010) in which an employer survey indicated that recent hires in St. Louis display various shortcomings in soft and hard skills, including poor work ethic, lack of critical thinking, and lack of communication and interpersonal skills, particularly in dealing with people different than themselves. She also presented three strategic planning directions for 2010-15, and articulated strategic choices that relate directly to the scope of this article. Strategic direction three, "Improving our responsiveness to evolving workforce needs," addresses the workforce report directly. The global, interdisciplinary learning communities described above build the skills needed by the local workforce. Strategic direction two is to "Enhance the quality and level of student learning outcomes." One goal to help achieve this direction is to increase the number of students participating in interdisciplinary courses and globally infused courses. The opportunities at St. Louis Community College to develop globally infused Communication Studies and Theatre courses that integrate with general education programming are plentiful. If we choose to answer the call, the

outlook for our potential contributions is great. Perhaps the most salient reason for including a global perspective in Theatre and Communication Studies is the altruistic and holistic desire to facilitate development of the whole student. A global emphasis more fully illuminates the human experience. Students experience a reduction of uncertainty, greater learning, personal growth and positive change. Studying and thoughtfully discussing Communication Studies and Theatre topics from multiple viewpoints expands the intellectual and emotional repertoire of tools students have at their disposal to analyze their own lives.

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**Reflections on Integrating the Arts and Gifted  
Education at the Middle School Level:  
Engaging Gifted Students from Diverse Backgrounds**  
*Carla Miller*

Working in the Fine Arts Department of a small diverse Middle School has led me to develop an interest in the impact of artistic endeavors on high-achieving students. My background in teaching is primarily at the high school and college level. Although I enjoyed teaching young adults very much, I am intrigued by the larger emotional and psychological issues involved with teaching at this level. The transition from elementary school to middle school holds such huge potential for impacting the child's academic as well as social development. My students work every day to balance the need to grow and as an individual with the need to fit in with their ever-fluxing peer group. For high-achieving students, whether identified as gifted or not, this process is even more tenuous.

Participation in the arts impacts the cognitive and social development of all students. Research supports the idea that the work in the arts increases skills such as problem solving, observation, and abstract thinking. (Rogers, 302) Skills in creativity, original idea development, and self-expression are also major areas of development. A school district in Clayton, Missouri has practiced a model of school-wide enrichment for all students, with fine arts being a big part of that project. Our gifted students, however, can also be appropriately challenged within our curriculum. Theatre in particular presents natural opportunities for extension experiences within the classroom. Because of the unique nature of theatre, students in need of individualized study in areas such as history can be easily accommodated through playwriting and discussions of social implications of theatre through different eras.

Several leaders in the field of gifted education support the theory that the arts are invaluable in the development of gifted students. In 1978, Renzulli defined giftedness as the interconnected relationship between three things: intelligence, task commitment, and creativity. (Pierto, 13) This skill can be applied in myriad areas of study, which may be why so many schools have adopted Renzulli's model, while others have struggled to define how artistic tendencies fit into the more

traditional picture of gifted education. Task commitment is an integral component to a student having capacity to push themselves to excel in an intangible field such as performance. While some art forms can be assessed in a concrete way, theatre rarely can. Musicians can be assessed on the accuracy with which notes are played, or a visual artist on how well an artistic style has been expressed. Actors must depend on a skilled teacher to define what excellence looks like, and what performance goals are appropriate.

Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences also recognizes the value of creativity in each of the intelligences. (Piierto, 13) This is supported by evidence that can be seen on a daily basis at my middle school. Students who work in one or more areas of the arts adapt to many areas of academic study in both a confident and effective manner. Self-concept is paramount to children at this age; a strong one can make the difference in how they approach a new area of study.

Part of the enrichment model includes the development of process and content goals. (Davis, 5) These goals can be expanded to address the needs of gifted students, and include many aspects of work in the arts. For instance, high-content applications, stimulating individual research, and work that develops a healthy self-concept all are important parts of an arts curriculum. This awareness is also called "aesthetic literacy." (Robinson, 193) The combination of history, theory and the study of human culture can result in a heightened level of understanding and appreciation of human nature and our world. Particularly at the middle school level, this study of human nature, along with the emotional and creative outlet it provides, is exceptionally valuable.

Specifically, theatre offers several areas of study that lend themselves well to stimulating work for gifted students, including writing, directing, choreography, and performance criticism. (Plucker, 736) Although these endeavors are worthwhile for artistically gifted students, they are beneficial for all students. While the value of the arts for students is widely accepted in the academic world, the challenge remains in tying artistic ability to gifted ability. This has been a problem throughout the development of gifted education. There have been a few attempts to develop a method of identifying giftedness in creative areas. The Talent Identification Instruments (TII) is one such effort, developed from Renzulli's model. (Plucker, 738) Now known as the Talent Assessment Process in Dance, Music, and Theater, this tool assesses

ability in creative areas, without correlation to academic ability. There are other tools for identifying gifted ability in the arts, although from my perspective, they are only an exercise sponsored by school districts that often lack the interest or funding to expand their work in gifted education into this area.

As strange as it may seem, this is not *really* a problem for me. I see my responsibility to each one of my kids on a daily basis as my primary motivation. Getting to know my students and assessing the appropriate level of challenge to apply to each child helps me in my effort to serve gifted students successfully. Since my district does not identify artistically gifted students, and has only begun to identify academic giftedness, having the information is not part of my process. I work hard to know my students early on, and push them to their fullest extent, wherever they may fall on the spectrum of ability. In drama classes, students tend to take cues and motivation from the work of their classmates. The more I can push one student, the more the rest will work to keep up and surpass that level of expertise.

Teaching in the performing arts lends itself well to the idea of creativity training being a necessary component in adolescent cognitive development in all areas. Research shows that students who engage in creative activities are more connected to school, and motivated to excel. (Dixon, 344) Working in the theatre includes multiple situations in which creative thinking is required. The production process, with many different designs, schedules, and restrictions coming together into a cohesive and polished product requires all involved students to think concurrently in abstract and concrete ways. Many aspects also require students to start first with the big idea, and break it down into details, steps, and connected processes. Torrance developed five indicators related to this topic that relate to the impact creative training can have on gifted students:

1. sense of well-being of the participants;
2. improvements in attitude toward school subjects, such as math;
3. decisions made by the students to follow creative pursuits;
4. an increase in type and length of creative writing;
5. improvement of self-concept. (Dixon, 345)

Much of my work with students takes place after school in my department's various extra-curricular activities. Although I strive to teach the same skills in my classes as I do after school, its extended time for attention, unique setting, and focus of its participants all contribute to extra-curricular learning being assessed separately. Dixon cites several sources that concur that gifted students who engage in extra-curricular activities enjoy multiple positive impacts. These include a higher likelihood of attending college, voting, and academic success in school. (Dixon, 528) Perhaps the major drawback to extra-curricular learning is the concern of over-booking gifted students that might result in time management problems. Over-extending these students notwithstanding, being involved after school is usually a positive experience for gifted students. Although there are several types of extra-curricular activities including competitions, clubs, and sports, my focus is on performing arts. My gifted students find they are socially accepted by others involved in the same activity, with many of them reporting more discomfort in other areas of their day due to the problems associated with being high-achieving. In the fine arts wing, however, everyone is "in it together," and encouraged to always practice the skill of ensemble. In a large way, all involved students share a common goal and schedule. Theatre is a product-oriented activity. No matter what, the show will open, on time, with an audience of 500 people in front of it. That motivation is valuable. On a more personal note, each student involved is required to actively contribute a unique piece of work towards the goal. No two have the same job. There is no such thing as passive involvement in theatre; passive activities tend to be unchallenging. Theatre is goal-directed and challenging on many levels. (Dixon 529) I am convinced this is one reason so many of the gifted students are involved in our program.

Research shows clearly, however, that our at-risk gifted, particularly African-American, kids are falling through the cracks. This is a huge area of focus in my own department, in which all culturally diverse students are considered to be at-risk, despite my district being very diverse. For instance, there is a concerted effort to identify and recruit African-American students into the gifted program. The gifted teacher facilitates meetings and group activities with any student identified as having above-average potential. From this group, testing

for gifted identification occurs. This opportunity does not exist for other minorities.

Minority students struggle with issues of self-concept and group identity especially at the middle school level. Although I do not believe that the “white establishment” of gifted kids discourages diverse kids from participating or feeling worthy at all, I do see evidence of negative peer pressure from within the group on a daily basis. Many African-American students who excel in school, or in the performing arts, can be teased or bullied for “acting white.” (Dixon, 114) Because this further complicates the inherent struggle with identity at the middle school level, these students really struggle. For instance, we find that many diverse students adapt behavioral and academic patterns depending on their class and what other students are with them. I have students in class every semester that behave beautifully for me, but are big trouble in other classes. A safe and welcoming environment in one class can be motivating, but it does not necessarily alleviate a lack of interest kids may feel in other classes. Clearly, the pressures put upon them from peers inhibit gifted kids, and the conflict it creates is powerful. (Horowitz, 114) I believe self-doubt plays an important role as well. African-American kids seem to come to us with a well-defined idea of what they are, or society says they should be, more so than other groups, with the possible exception of kids from Asian cultures. This stereotypical view many times comes from home, media, and peers. It is almost insurmountable in some cases for a teacher with the best intentions. Teachers in Missouri are not trained well or extensively enough, in my opinion, to adapt to the needs of minority students, especially gifted minorities. Further, a primarily white staff cannot view school and the world through the same filter of culture, identity, values, and traditions used by our diverse students. (Dixon, 117) Training must be put into place for teachers to be able to identify the visible and invisible characteristics of each group. Empathy for students from backgrounds different than ours is not enough.

It is apparent through studying the characteristics of different minority groups that African American students should be interested and successful in the performing arts. A large number of gifted students are involved in my school’s arts programs, creating a welcoming social group for newcomers with giftedness in common. Secondly, according to the Cross-Cultural Comparison Chart (Dixon, 119), African-American

students likely exhibit many natural tendencies valued in performance. These include being animated, expressive of emotion and thought, physical with aspects of storytelling, comfort with attention, and strong verbal style. Still, very few African-American students participate in theatre. The question of why has become a big issue in my school, in which most African American girls take orchestra and most African-American boys take band. Likely explanations include these areas being where their friends are, and it being acceptable socially for them to be part of these activities. Because “group affiliation” is so important to this group, the chances of equal disbursement throughout the arts are unlikely. (Dixon, 121) Of course, there are some kids from several minority groups in all of the arts. We have been challenged by our parents and administration to identify why more African American students aren’t involved. The same is true for Asian students, but concern has not been raised for them. This is especially troublesome with our gifted minorities, being that such a high number of gifted students are involved.

In an effort to discover the motivation behind African American high achievers and the choices they make, a survey was distributed during the 2008-2009 school year to a mixed group of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade boys and girls. The group was comprised of kids that had been identified as high achieving and were working with either a teacher of gifted students or an African American teacher who mentors many students. The combined group took the survey, revealing interesting results. One question that asked why few African American students participated in after school performance programs resulted in the top two answers by a large margin being lack of interest and that their friends were not involved.

This response is consistent with the idea that high-achieving African-American students will only become involved if they *all* decide to get involved as a group. Specific efforts to identify minority students will help diverse students see participation in theatre as interesting and acceptable because of the shared connection to the gifted program. Views on race and self-concept are developed by our environment; we can impact that perception by changing the paradigm from which we view our diverse students. (Dixon, 133) Arts programs share so many students that all the activities within the program, including theatre, can benefit by osmosis, as it were.

A separate identification for creative giftedness is unnecessary in my professional world, because I can use my curriculum and subject area to meet the needs of all kinds of gifted students. I firmly believe in Renzulli's model, and the necessity of creative thought for excellence to be achieved. I will continue to strive to develop my ability to make that happen. In addition, I believe that gifted kids should have the same level of individual attention and direction given to them as students at the other end of the spectrum. My personal goal is to be a teacher that seeks our strategies to help me meet that commitment.

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**Milk the Cows Before Enjoying Your Coffee:  
The Self Culture Artifact Assignment**

Randy K. Dillon

“Trying to understand one’s own culture is like trying to explain to a fish that it lives in water” (Martin and Nakayama, 2008, p. 28).

“Narratives, then, articulate what is of value to us and why, for it essentially defines (in the first instance) who we are and what we want” (Kirby, 1991, p. 59).

When students encounter lessons of culture and communication they often do not recognize the rich diversity that their own culture offers. In addition, the more students inquire about other cultures the more likely the questions get mirrored back to one’s own culture. Questions such as “Who am I?” and “What is my cultural story?” are asked when exploring one’s identity. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2005) characterize cultural identity as “the emotional significance that we attach to our sense of belonging or affiliation with the larger culture” (p. 93). Cultural identity is multifaceted. One can have an identity associated with gender, age, race, ethnicity, physical ability, religion, class, nationality, geographical region, as well as other aspects of society and culture. How each person sees him or herself as similar to and or different from others is an essential component for the formation of one’s cultural identity.

Cultural identity can be represented by something tangible such as an artifact. For example, a person who lettered in a sport in high school may keep their letter jacket for years beyond graduation. Another treasures those heirlooms from loved ones such as parents, grandparents, and other ancestors that may or may not have financial value, but are priceless when it comes to sentimental value. For example, I have my deceased grandfather’s coffee cup that he drank out of for years every morning at breakfast after he and my grandmother finished milking the cows on their dairy farm. Although I have never drunk out of this particular cup, I keep the coffee cup in a place where I can easily see it. The coffee cup reminds me of my grandfather who I always called Papa.

Furthermore, it represents to me the values of responsibility and the pleasure of enjoying the small but important things in life. In other words, one needs to be responsible and get the cows milked or the work done, and then one can sit down and enjoy a coffee break. (And one should also enjoy milking the cows without griping about it.) Artifacts such as a simple coffee cup serve as a connection between the past and the present. They are about people. Artifacts possess meaning. They contribute to a person's identity formation and links to one's culture. Artifacts can even help define and symbolize life-long-lessons and values for living.

We learn who we are, how we are similar and different from others through the stories we share with one another. Walter Fisher (1987) defines stories, of as he terms them narratives, as "symbolic actions- words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (p. 58). Fisher believes that narrative is a concept that can enhance understanding of human communication and action (1987, p. 20).

Stories are also essential for one's "*cultural identity search*" Lustig and Koester (2006, p. 5). Since learning who we are usually begins with socialization that occurs in the family, it is the family where one begins a search for cultural identity. Although the concept of family has multiple and contradictory meanings I prefer the definition of family provided by Noller and Fitzpatrick (1993) as "a group of intimates, who generate a sense of home and group identity, complete with strong ties of loyalty and emotion, and an experience of a history and a future" (p. 19). Family is maintained and perpetuated through certain specific practices. Family is more than "We are Family" as sung by the disco era act Sister Sledge. Communication scholars Langellier and Peterson believe that we must also "do family." To "do family" the [f]amily is organized and maintained daily and over generations through a variety of discursive practices by which we 'do family.'...One important strategy for doing family is storytelling—both stories to tell and secrets to keep" (Langellier & Peterson, 1993, pp. 55-56).

There are many beneficial pedagogical tools to help students explore culture and identity. One such tool is what I call the Self Culture Artifact Assignment. I believe that if a student has the opportunity to research, learn, and explain their own cultural identity that they in turn become more curious about learning about others and their culture. In

the remaining part of this paper I explain the how I carry out the Self Culture Artifact Assignment in my Intercultural Communication classes and offer some specific appraisals and observations that I keep learning along the way.

## **The Self Culture Artifact Assignment**

### *Objectives*

The Self Culture Artifact Assignment has the following four objectives. First, this assignment enables students to understand the role communication plays in the construction of identity. Second, it encourages students to learn about one's cultural stories, and listen to others' stories. Third, the assignment compels students to organize and present findings through a brief oral presentation. Fourth, it requires students to each summarize a response after listening to all classmates' presentations. The Self Culture Artifact Assignment as presented here is intended for community college and four year university courses in Intercultural Communication, Interpersonal Communication, and Family Communication. This assignment can also be implemented in a Semiotics (the study of signs and symbols) and Nonverbal Communication courses where artifacts can be used to symbolize concepts and meanings that don't require spoken language. At the high school level teachers can find this assignment useful especially in those classes where culture, diversity and identity are topics of discussion and learning.

### *Instructions to Students and Further Explanation of the Assignment*

The Self Culture Artifact Assignment asks each student to focus on an artifact that is part of one's identity—more specifically a part of one's identity that ties in with one's past, ancestry or heritage. This artifact can be very old or not so old. The student may know about the artifact or it may be an object that the student discovers in conducting this. The intention is not to find a priceless historical piece, rather it is to find something that I tell students that “tells a story about who you are, or where you or your family comes from, or has been.” Conversations with family members and others close to the student are encouraged.

Even those students who may not have a long family history, or are adopted, can participate. In such cases these students can be encouraged to explore their adopted parent's culture or can choose to look for artifacts that represent their personal cultural identity formation.

At the onset of the Self Culture Artifact Assignments students are provided with the following questions to help direct research for that special artifact: What is this artifact? Can the artifact be safely transported and presented in the context of class? How old is this artifact? Where did it originate? Who had it? How was it passed down? Who will get it next? Why was this the particular artifact you chose to bring in? What special meanings does it carry? What is its story or stories? What does this artifact say about your identity? Who else in your family or close associates have a connection with this artifact? What are these connections? How did you come to know about this artifact? How has the meaning of the artifact changed for you over the years, or even in the time period of conducting this assignment?

In order for students to prepare for the Self Culture Artifact Assignment I assign the project early in the semester. This gives students adequate time to track down artifacts. I have discovered that scheduling the presentations after a semester break (Fall Break or Spring Break) offers the best results. In addition, the time period after the break is at a point in the semester where students in a class have become more comfortable with one another. A couple of weeks before the presentations, I check with students in determining how well they are progressing toward completion of the assignment. The biggest challenges may be those students who live far away from home (i.e. international students) who do not have the opportunity to bring in a tangible object. Usually in these cases I will permit a photo that can easily be taken and downloaded. I also allow pre-approved substitutions like drawings and model representations.

The Self Culture Artifact Assignment counts toward participation points in the course. Brief in class oral presentations of two to four minutes are expected from each student. In order to accommodate all student presentations more than one period may be needed. Each student should contract for a specific date for his or her presentation. This helps alleviate situations where students would need to bring their cultural objects to class multiple times. Make copies of when students present to be handed out beforehand to all class members.

At the end of each day's student presentations, I spend some time with the class debriefing their accounts. Students are also encouraged to ask further questions. I also allow extra time at the end of class where students who have presented their artifacts that day can spend time to informally chat with fellow class members who may want to ask further questions, as well as get a closer look at the items brought in.

### *Post Assignment Discussion Questions*

Following the presentation of all students' Self Culture Artifacts, I ask students to write up an account of their experiences. Guiding questions are: What was the one thing about this project activity that affected you? (This could be something that you did as part of your own artifact presentation or by what you heard from another student's presentation.) What did you like (or not like) about this project? How could it be strengthened? A brief paper of approximately one to two pages double spaced in length is expected. I often incorporate this paper as the take home part of the final exam for the course. Students often report that the Self Culture Artifact Assignment was one of the most enjoyable, powerful, and memorable learning activities from the course. One student remarked about her experiences with the Self Culture Artifact Assignment, "It was so interesting that each of us had such different objects we found important, some clothes, images, or buildings. Even though we are all in the same class attending .....University, we all have different cultural backgrounds that on the surface go undetected. Each of our histories are so unique once you really analyze them."

### *Further Appraisal and Observations of the Assignment*

A successful assignment relies on the enthusiasm and participation of students. The first group of presentations, if done well, sets the pace for the presentations that follow. To help with this, I model what I expect for the presentation by bringing in my own Self Culture Artifact (i.e. Papa's coffee cup). In addition I spend time in class talking about what narratives/stories do and how they function culturally. Discussion begins with how culture is carried in story, how we story events, things, people, and our past. When we tell stories, we don't just

share or explain our culture, we produce it. Culture is always in the process of being created. The Self Culture Artifact Assignment allows students to see not just the diversity of cultures around them; it allows them to view how culture is being constantly constituted, by them in the presentation, for the audience. When I hold up my Papa's coffee cup and tell you about him and what he taught me, those are past events that are being reproduced in the telling. What students learn is how artifacts and events from long ago are part of how we actively construct our culture. My grandfather's coffee cup is remade in the telling of who I am. In turn as a result of this sharing we (the students and myself) are forever different.

A successful Self Culture Artifact Assignment goes beyond merely "Show and Tell." It is vital that in order to make this assignment resonate with my students that course concepts and learning experiences are emphasized. Furthermore, I tell students that they are the carriers of their story and with that come responsibilities of handing down these stories of cultural identity just like one would pass down an artifact to the next generation. The stories themselves may even outlive and transcend the cultural object that sparked the story. Referring back to the Langellier and Peterson concept of "doing family" this "involves not only ways of creating, defining, and sharing meanings and sensibilities but ways of maintaining and perpetuating those meanings and sensibilities as well..." (p. 64). Thus, it is dependent upon the individual student to be the keepers of the artifact **and** the story so that each has a chance to survive.

Stone (1988) remarks that "family stories are revealing in ways genealogies can never be" (p. 9). Students find valuable information about themselves and or others in the process of researching the Self Culture Artifact Assignment. Often, this assignment serves as a beginning to conduct further research into one's culture, family, or personal background. Students sometimes report they learn stories that had never been previously discussed. Such stories Kirby (1991) says can also reveal aspects of "truths' of our life that would otherwise remain obscure or simply unconstituted" (p. 53.). As one student shared afterwards about the assignment, "It requires us to think about our own heritage or culture and what is important to us. In some cases, it required us to call a parent or relative, travel home, or think about ourselves and family history."

Other students (along with their families) sometimes find the unexpected with the Self Culture Artifact Assignment venture. hooks (1989) writes that stories often become “a unique recounting of events not so much as they have happened but as we remember them” (p. 157). In some cases the subject of the story line takes on a twist that goes beyond remembering to out and right fabrication. This fabrication of story is related by one of my students and summarized here by permission of the student:

The part that affected me the most was something I discovered through this project. I stumbled upon a website for a haunted house that exploited our family name to say that my great...grandfather and his family disappeared in their field on night in the 1800s and created the “Field of Corpses” to make money every year on their property. My family was a little upset at this fact, but my mom and I took it with stride thinking at least they remember him!

A fabrication such as this described by the student offers a valuable lesson about culture, identity, and story. What we think we know about other cultures and persons, including those closest to us including family members, even our own self cultural identity may not be the full or even truthful story. “[O]ur understanding of other cultures and persons is primarily gained from, and in the form of, narratives and stories about and by those peoples” (Kirby, 1991, p. 3). People can use stories for a variety of reasons and purposes believing them to be true even when they are not, or in some cases, farcical.

The Self Culture Artifact Activity has proven to be one of the most exciting learning activities that I have experienced in my years of teaching Communication courses. For my students this assignment providing the opportunity to explore one’s cultural identity and story is enlightening and enjoyable. The possibilities for reflection and learning are tremendous. I encourage other teachers and students to give this assignment a try.

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## **Mindmapping and Beyond: Teaching Students to Select and Narrow Communication Research Topics**

*Tony Docan-Morgan & Sara Docan-Morgan*

*The objective of this activity is for students to select and narrow an original communication research topic.*

**Courses:** Research Methods in Communication, Capstone Projects in Communication Studies, and other courses that requiring students to select communication research topics.

**Objective:** The objective of this activity is for students to select and narrow an original communication research topic.

**Approximate Time Required:** One class period; 50-90 minutes depending on depth of coverage.

**Materials Needed:** Students should be provided with the attached “Mindmap Handout.”

**Rationale:** Undergraduate research “can provide transformative educational experiences and profoundly impact the teaching of communication” (Rodrick & Dickmeyer, 2002, p. 40). The benefits of undergraduate research for students are many: gaining interpersonal and technical skills (Landrum & Nelsen, 2002), fostering independent learning and analytical abilities (Ishiyama, 2002), and creating close personal connections with faculty members (Wayment & Dickson, 2008). There is no wonder, then, why undergraduate students in Communication Studies are often required to select specific topics for writing assignments, case studies, classroom presentations, and capstone projects. However, one of the first steps in the research process—selecting and narrowing a topic—may be one of the most difficult, especially for beginning researchers. The task of selecting a specific topic suitable for the particular assignment is often a difficult task for students. Some students simply do not know where to begin, whereas others select topics that are too broad, too narrow, or that fall outside the communication discipline. Some students even struggle to choose a

topic, because they know that they will have to be committed to it for an entire semester or more. The following activity was developed in response to students' difficulty choosing a communication research topic and is intended to give students the tools to find and select a topic of interest and significance, and one that they will be content to pursue for an extended period of time.

### *What to Do Before the Activity*

At least one class period before the current activity is administered, we recommend that instructors discuss a definition of *communication*, such as “communication is the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response” (Griffin, 2009, p. 4). Instructors should also offer an explanation of what *research* is, as well as its purposes (e.g., see Baxter & Babbie, 2004). These discussions should lay a clear foundation from which students can begin developing their own communication research topics. Instructors might also introduce any course assignments that require students to select research topics (e.g., literature review, research proposal, research study, case study).

### *What to Do During the Activity*

To begin the activity we suggest offering students the metaphor that coming up with a research topic is similar to being a curious traveler planning a trip. Both the researcher and traveler need tools to help guide their endeavor, open-mindedness to others and their experiences, and patience and flexibility when they encounter roadblocks or frustration. Instructors should inform students that they will first individually create a “mindmap” which will help them brainstorm potential research topics. Students should be given the attached instructional handout, or be asked to draw four large circles on a piece of paper. The circles should be labeled with the following titles: “Things that give me joy,” “Things that make me mad,” “Experiences that have shaped me,” and “Things that fascinate me.” Announce to students that they should complete each bubble freely and without hesitation. In the “Things that make me mad” bubble, for example, one might brainstorm “inequality, racism, inconsiderate people, rudeness, bad drivers, incompetent customer service interactions.” Ask students to not rule out any ideas and not be

concerned if their ideas are related to communication. We encourage instructors to come to class with and share their own personal mindmap so as to give students an example. After approximately 10 minutes, we recommend that the instructor solicit two to three volunteers to share their mindmaps with the class, preferably on an overhead projector.

After students have completed the mindmaps, the instructor has the option of having students reflect on and respond in writing to a series of open-ended brainstorming questions. The following questions tend to help students find a research topic of personal interest: What interests you about communication? What personal experiences involving communication have you had that pose interesting questions? Why do you want to become or why did you become a Communication Studies major? What topics or issues in the course textbooks or in previous courses do you find interesting? What career(s) might you enter once done at the university, and what topics, problems, questions, or issues might you face while in this career?

After students have completed the mindmap exercise and responded to the open-ended questions above, ask students to form groups of three and instruct them to spend approximately 10 minutes exploring each person's mindmap. Groups should answer the following questions: What ideas seem to have the most potential? What general directions might this mind map suggest for this person's communication research interests? Groups should pursue 2-3 topics in-depth and discuss the following questions: In what ways is this topic related to communication? In what ways does this topic relate to or involve the creation of messages? In what ways does this topic relate to or involve the interpretation of messages? How is this topic one that affects relationships? Who is affected by this topic, how are they affected, and how do they respond? Remind students to write down ideas offered by their peers. Instructors should occasionally inform each group of their time and/or when to change topics or group members, and visit with each group to offer ideas and check in on student progress.

To conclude the activity, we suggest that students complete and turn in an in-class written reflection that explores the following questions: In what ways, if any, was this activity valuable in beginning to think about research ideas? Based on your own assessment and your group members' feedback, what potential ideas do you have for your research topics? What questions, if any, do you have about choosing a topic, communication research topics, or related material?

## *Debriefing*

After students have completed the activity, the instructor should lead a discussion about students' experiences. Pertinent discussion questions include: What did you learn today about selecting and narrowing research topics? What strategies did you find helpful? What other brainstorming strategies might aid you or your classmates in finding research topics? Such a discussion may also segue into upcoming course material (e.g., developing research questions and hypotheses). Additionally, we recommend that instructors have students select one of their topics and begin exploring it in more depth during the next class period (e.g., during a library instruction day).

## *Typical Results*

The results of this activity are overwhelmingly positive. Students appear to be engaged and on task during the individual and group tasks. Perhaps more importantly, the majority of students who complete this activity leave class with at least one communication research topic that they use for the remainder of the semester on course projects. Additionally, after receiving Institutional Research Board approval, we surveyed students ( $n = 92$ ) in two sections of Research Methods in Communication Studies and two sections of Theories of Communication about their experiences with this activity. When asked, "What contributed most to your learning experience today?" students reported on the mindmapping (e.g., "Mapping my mind was great"), brainstorming questions (e.g., "thinking about my personal experiences to find a topic," "specific questions"), the group component of the activity (e.g., "feedback from my classmates," "bouncing ideas off of group members"), and seeing examples (e.g., "examples on the projector"). Students also reported on the value of being active in their learning (e.g., "changing tasks [and] not doing one thing for the whole time").

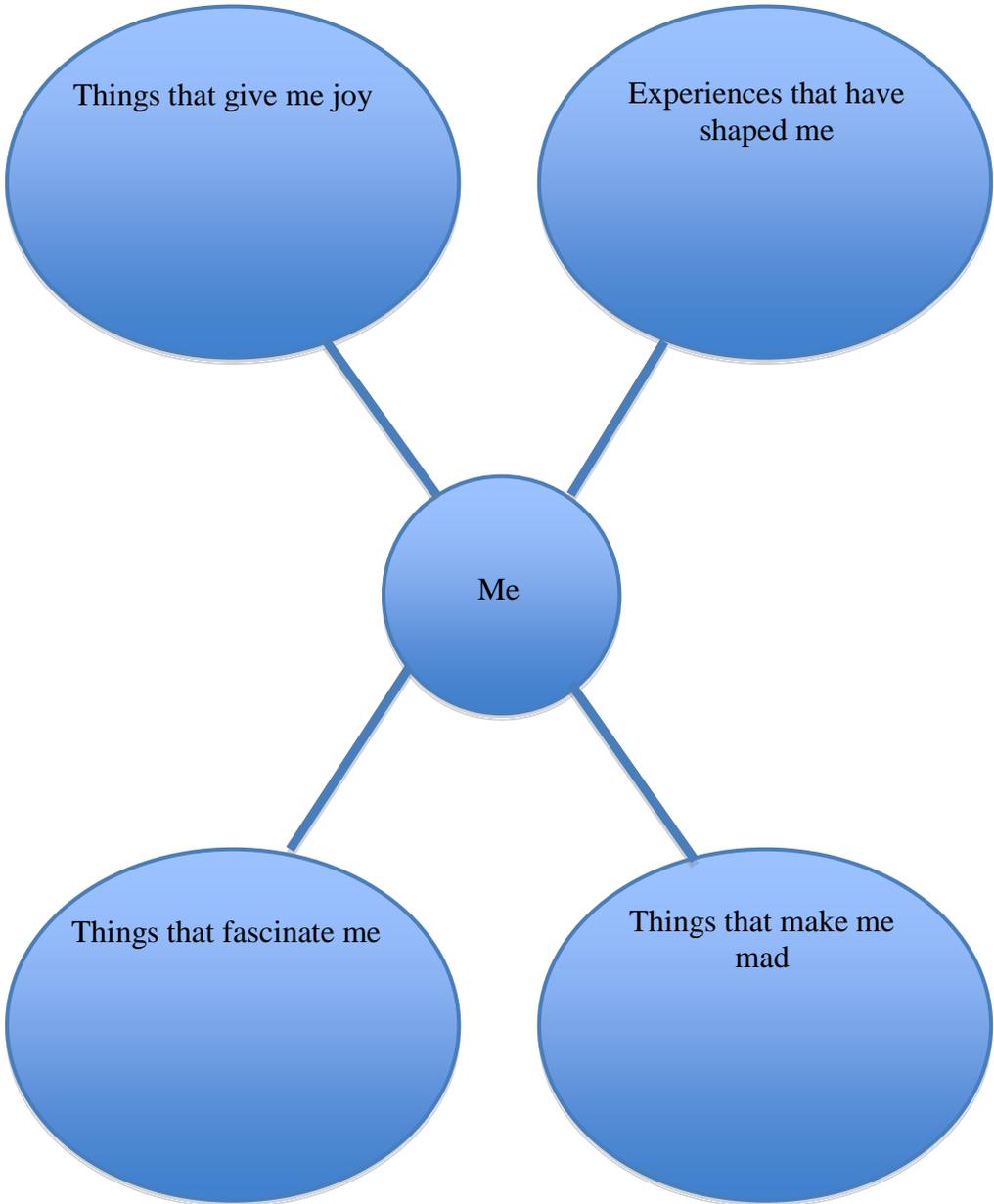
Additionally, it appears that some students continue to use the mindmapping tool in later semesters. We also surveyed students ( $n = 29$ ) enrolled in Senior Project in Communication Studies, a required capstone course for our department's Communication Studies majors, in which students complete an original research project. When asked "if the topic of selecting and narrowing research topics was covered in Theories of

Communication and/or Research Methods in Communication, what do you remember learning,” many students specifically mentioned mindmapping and discussing their ideas in small groups. Further, students reported actually using the mindmapping technique in Senior Project in Communication Studies and in other classes (e.g., “it helped me...in another English and history class”).

### *Appraisal*

Although not necessarily a limitation of the activity, some students report wanting additional individual consultation from the instructor regarding their topics. We recommend that instructors provide students with feedback about their topics during class when possible (e.g., answering student questions when they are in small groups), collect and respond to students’ written reflections handed in at the end of class, and invite students to meet individually outside of class time. One variation of the activity may allow for additional student-teacher feedback. In particular, students can be asked to complete the individual brainstorming before coming to class, so as to save time during class. Students can begin the classroom activity by working in small groups as stated above, and spend more time (e.g., 5-10) minutes talking with each group about their research ideas. Additionally, the instructor may wish to meet their students in a computer lab for the class period and have students search their topic in academic databases (e.g., EBSCO host). This exercise will allow students to learn more about their topic, narrow their topic, and find new key words related to their topic.

**Mind Map**



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*Sara Docan-Morgan (Ph.D., University of Washington) is an assistant professor of Communication Studies at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, where she teaches intercultural communication, interpersonal communication, and research methods. Her research, which has been published in the Journal of Family Communication and is forthcoming in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, focuses on adoptive family communication about race, difference, and identity.*

## The Fairytale Theatre Unit

Brian R. Engelmeyer

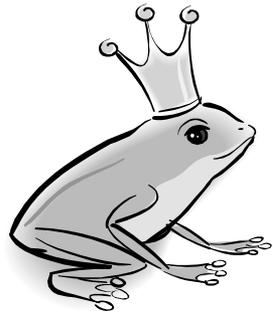
*The Fairytale Theatre unit is one of the culminating units in the semester-long 6th Grade Drama Course. This performance unit requires the student to use all of the theatre skills taught in this course to create an original and fractured Fairytale Theatre performance (from the page to the stage). The students work together in groups of 4-5 students to create this original work of theatre. The packet is designed to guide them on their journey one step at a time. This unit takes approximately 3-4 weeks to complete, less if you are on a block-schedule. I am always amazed at what the students create when they work together on this unit.*



In this unit you will be creating a Fairytale Theatre story with a small group that you will perform for the class. This project will be explained on this handout and in class today.

What are some elements of a Fairytale?

- 
- 
- 
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### **Required Fairytale Elements**

- 3 – 5 Minutes
- Element of magic
- Song and Dance
- Conflict
- B-M-E
- Character Voices
- No Violence or Death
- Memorized
- Every student must have a part in the fairytale
- Make sure every character speaks loudly and clearly
- Mask for your character – base provided during mask discussion day

### **Unit Due Dates**

Please make sure you work and plan your time wisely according to the due date below.

- ❖ Character List – 4/9/09(5 points)
- ❖ Typed Script-4/13/09 (15 points)
- ❖ Prop List – 4/17/09 (5 points)
- ❖ Peer-to-Peer Evaluation – 4/23/09 (25 points)
- ❖ Masks Due – 4/24/09 (75 points)
- ❖ Rehearsal Log – 4/27/09 (25 points)
- ❖ Fairytale Theatre packet – 4/27/09 (50 points)
- ❖ Fairytale Theatre Performances – 4/27/09 (200 points)

#### *Step 1 – Organizing and meeting your group*

After receiving your group member assignments, the first order of business will be to introduce yourself to each member of the group. Take this time to share something with your team.

My Group letter is: \_\_\_\_\_

My Group members are: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, & \_\_\_\_\_.

*Step 2 – Choose your positive moral*

As a team, discuss and decide on the positive moral that you will teach with your fairytale theatre production. You can use any of the morals below or you can choose/create one of your own. If you do not use one on the list below, you must get approval from the teacher before proceeding to the next step.

The positive moral that our fairytale theatre production will use is:

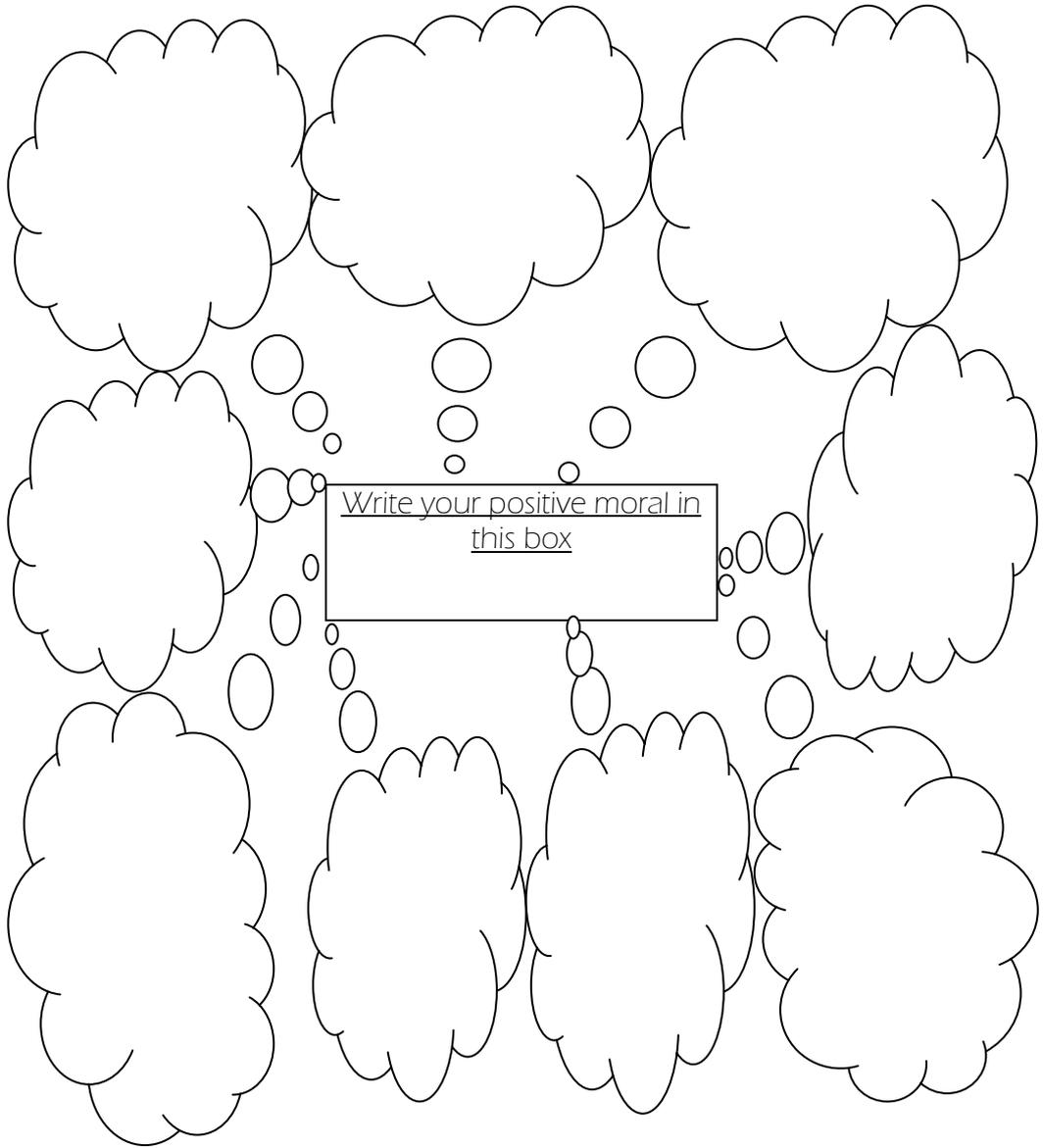
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- Be polite
- Be Kind to animals
- Respect your elders
- Look before you leap
- Be kind to your friends
- Don't cry over spilt milk
- A penny saved, is a penny earned
- Don't put all of your eggs into one basket
- Don't count your chickens until they are hatched
- Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you
- People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones

***\*\*Remember – at this point you shouldn't be focused on your story. Start with picking a positive moral first and then you can move on to the next step.***

*Step 3 – Story Brainstorming – fill the discussion sky with idea clouds*

As a team, brainstorm all the ideas that come into your head. At this point in the process, there are no wrong ideas. Accept every idea that your teammates come up with. You will be able to flush out the ideas that won't work later. Fill the sky below with all of the ideas that you come up with that will work with your positive moral.





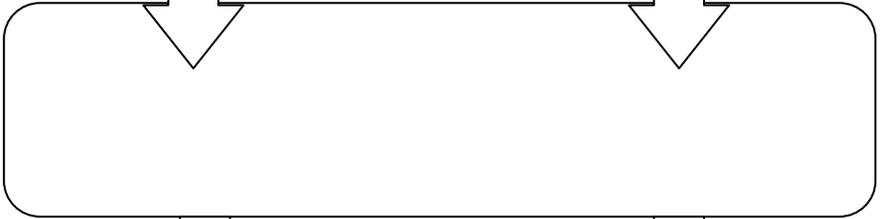
*Step 5 – Story Components*

As we have discussed in class many times, every story must have three essential components. B-M-E (Beginning, Middle, and End) Use this page to brainstorm your B-M-E. Write a brief description of each component and include the necessary items in each box.

Beginning (B)



Middle (M)



End (E)



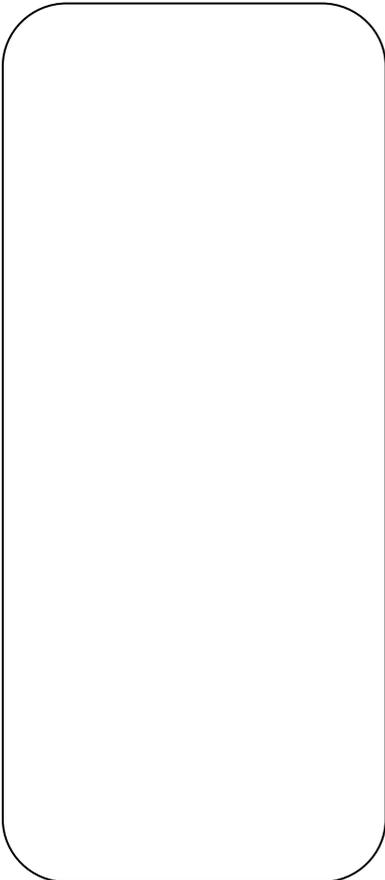
*Step 6 – Costume / Prop list*

As a team, create a prop and costume list for your production.

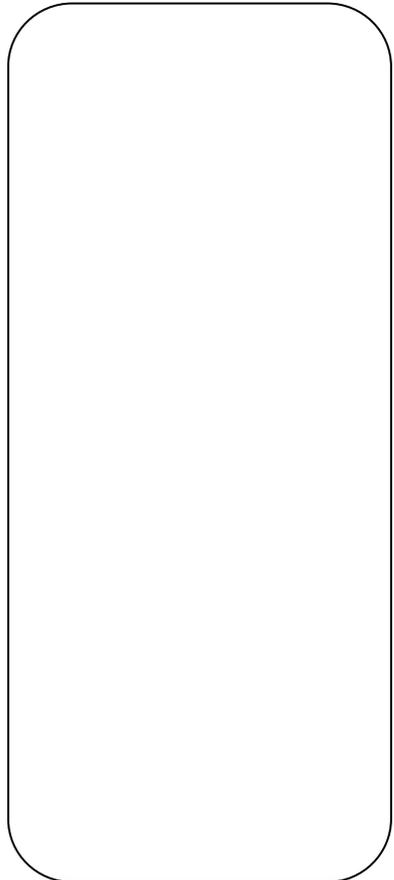
**Costumes** – Each character that you play will require one costume piece. A costume piece is one item, that when worn, represents your character. If you are playing multiple characters, this will allow you to easily change from character-to-character. Example – Cowboy character – Bandana

**Props** – Props are anything that the character uses on stage, but does not wear. Example – A wooden spoon that the character uses to stir the cake batter.

**Prop List**



**Costume List**



*Step 7 – Mask design and creation.*

In this part of the project you will be creating a half mask in the Commedia style. You will be given a plain mask to use as your foundation. Be creative and think outside of the box. There are no boundaries and it is only limited by your imagination. Your mask must fit your character and give the audience a look at what your character looks like. You will see many examples of masks and discuss their importance.

- ❖ Mask (be creative use the mask given to you as a foundation to build something amazing! You can do whatever you want with it!
- ❖ Be creative and have fun! This is a fun and neat way to experiment with a new form of acting. You have to be very expressive with your body because your face will be covered.



Photos of masks taken from [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com) & [www.ravenwoodmasks.com/theater-masks/commedia-masks.htm](http://www.ravenwoodmasks.com/theater-masks/commedia-masks.htm)

*Step 8 – Write/design your script.*

Now that you have laid the proper foundation for your production, it is time to create your script. Use all of the information that you have brainstormed as a team and create a script. This will be the most time consuming part of this process. Make sure you use your time wisely and keep the due dates in mind. You will need a typed script to turn in to Mr. E on or before the due date. The sooner your script is complete, the sooner you can start rehearsing. Please refer to the example scripts Mr. E has for you to view. These will help give you an idea of how to format your scripts.

As a team, decide who will be responsible for the following script creation tasks:

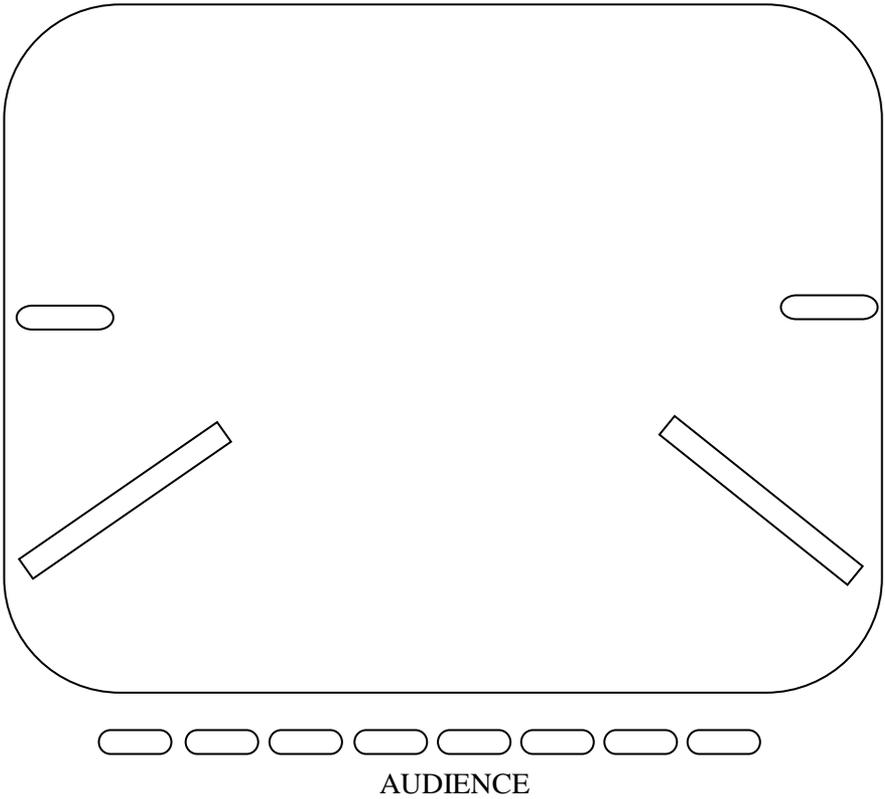
- A) **Scriptwriter** (responsible for writing the script out as the group creates the script. This person should be able to write neatly and take input from other group members.)
- B) **Script producer** (responsible for taking the written script home to type and create enough copies so that everyone in the group has a copy and also one for Mr. E.)
- C) **Editor** (responsible for editing the script for spelling and grammatical errors.)
- D) **Script organizer** (responsible for organizing the script and making sure it is done in a professional manner.)

*Step 9 – Rehearsal Process & Rehearsal Log*

Once your group has completed the script, you can then begin the rehearsal process. Use your class time wisely. Rehearse through your script and work on memorizing. You will be given a chance to conduct a peer-to-peer evaluation at later time in this project. Remember to work on your character and your character voice. You should not use your normal speaking voice in this performance. You should also change the way you move. Think about your character and how they sound, move, look, and interact with their world. Complete your rehearsal log (attached to this packet) as you move through this process. **You SHOULD NOT write the same thing as other members of your group. This is an individual reflection activity and allows you to set goals for yourself and also to keep you on track.**

*Step 10 – Ground Plan*

Use the stage diagram below to create your ground plan.  
Remember this is a birds-eye view of the stage.



**6<sup>TH</sup> GRADE DRAMA:  
FAIRYTALE THEATRE EVALUATION  
200 POINTS**

**Script (75)**

(55-75) Script was well prepared, neat, and included dialogue, stage directions, character separation.

(40-54) Script was well prepared, missing one or two of the above items, or late.

(0 – 39) Script was messy, late, missing 3 to 4 of the above items, or missing entirely.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total

**Vocal Expression (60) you must use a character voice(s) in this performance**

(45-60) Actor employed a character voice that contained a variety of inflection, pace and volume to express character.

(30-44) Actor employed some variety of inflection, with few problems in pace, volume or articulation.

(0 – 29) Actor used few variations in inflection, pace and volume, or had problems with articulation, volume and stumbling over words.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total

**Stagecraft (20)**

(15-19) Performance employed at least one prop and actors used costume choices.

(10-14) Performance was missing props or costume pieces.

(0 – 10) Performance was missing props and costumes

\_\_\_\_\_ Total

**Overall Effectiveness (45)**

(40-45) Performance was well paced, expressive, and communicated effectively with audience.

(30-39) Performance had few interruptions, few problems.

(0 – 29) Performance was poorly prepared.

\_\_\_\_\_ Total

\_\_\_\_\_ Overall Total

*Brian R. Engelmeyer is currently in his seventh year of teaching theatre at Wydown Middle School in the Clayton School District. He teaches sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the areas of Integrated Arts, Drama, and Musical Theatre. As a creator of the Wydown Theatre Company, he is involved with six productions per academic year. After receiving a degree in theatre from Lindenwood University in 1999, he went on to work for the Astors' Beechwood Theater Company in Newport, Rhode Island and toured with the Missoula Children's Theater based out of Missoula, Montana. He then returned to Lindenwood to obtain his teaching degree and Masters. Brian is an active member of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri (STAM) and has presented workshops at their annual state conference. He is also a recipient of the "Board of Governors New Teacher Award" for the 2006-2007 school year. To his teaching, Brian brings his love of working with middle school-aged students and a passion for the arts.*

## **Collaborative Twist to Children's Theatre** *Meridith Sauer*

We have all been there – loading and unloading self-supporting trees, paper-mache' rocks, and princess castles three times during a day of the annual Children's Theatre tour. The culminating performance of the theatre class supposes to inspire youngsters to dream of a life in theatre and provide the authentic audience for the high school theatre student. As I endured my first children's theatre tour, I encountered a surprise cigar from a fairy godmother, saw underwear on the outside of a costumed director, and canceled performances due to the physical fitness tests that were not yet completed. As I rode the rowdy bus back to the high school in deep embarrassment and deeper loathing of my students, I knew there must be a better way to fulfill Theater Performance Grade Level Expectancy (GLE) 1F (see endnotes). I spent the last few weeks of that school year determined to never to be in that position again.

What is theatre if not collaboration? We hold sacred the collaboration between performer and audience, work tirelessly for a familial collaboration among cast members, and aim for the seamless collaboration between director and all others. Why couldn't there be collaboration in children's theatre? My mind's gears shifted into overtime. I needed a way to address the inadequacies of the current children's theatre tour in a more controlled environment without spending more money. I needed a change.

That same week the Parents-As-Teachers program was holding their own Spring Fling for older preschoolers; I attended with my own daughters. There was an assortment of literacy, art, and make-believe activities scattered throughout their re-modeled building. Parent educators were guiding parents to help their preschoolers. The practical goals of the evening included involving families at a school district function, making contacts with older preschoolers, and disseminating school district information to the soon to be tested kindergartners. In that congested five room building, I saw my captive audience. I could offer the same activities in the high school commons while adding shows into the mix. An idea had taken form, and I was ready to act.

The first year of Children's Theatre Night with Imagination Stations I tried to pull off by myself in May of 2007. To the observer, it

was a success. To the director, it was a nightmare. Imagine running a preschool in the midst of staging five one-acts. It was time to assess my new design and make it better. I had addressed some major inadequacies I found with the tour design, but I needed a partner to make it run smoothly.

One guest at the first Children's Theatre Night with Imagination Stations was a P.A.T. (Parent's as Teachers) parent educator. She praised what we had done, but noted that much of it was a duplication of what families had done two weeks prior at the P.A.T. Spring Fling. She wondered aloud, "What would happen if we combined the two events?" Aha! I had a much needed partner. And I was off to work again. The following is our design of Children's Theatre Night with Imagination Stations; a collaboration.

**The Design:** Children's Theatre Night with Imagination Stations is a collaboration between the WHS Theatre Department and the Warrensburg R-VI Parents-as-Teachers Program. We supply the shows and they supply the audience. Our evening begins at 5:15pm. Families arrive at the high school commons/cafeteria, which has been turned into an older preschooler's play land. The parent educators set up all the Spring Fling activities in the commons: literacy activities, paper bag puppets and puppet theater, dress up and stage area, face painting, giant building blocks, and a safe baby area. Every 30 minutes a new children's theatre show begins. A "town crier" goes through the commons inviting the families into the adjoining lecture room to watch the show. Each student-written and student-directed show lasts about 15 minutes - perfect for 5 year-olds and beginning directors. Families come and go throughout the event. The evening wraps up at 8:00 pm. In that time span, my theater classes have performed five shows and the P.A.T. educators have met their program goals for family contacts. Together we have helped reach our district goal of involving families in school functions.

**Advantages:** While the children's theatre tour meets the Theater performance GLE 1F requirement, I found hosting the event in our theater made the performances much more authentic. The elementary schools in our district do not possess technical equipment, audience seating, or even a stage. By performing in our lecture room, students

were able to work on crews carrying out light and sound cues, set changes, and front of house responsibilities. During the weeks leading up to the performances, students are able to build and paint sets, costume the actors, and carry out a publicity plan. Of course, the directors get to cast their plays and bring their vision to fruition. Children's Theatre Night is the only "production" some theater students experience, and I value the authenticity of the event.

**Resources Needed:** The resources needed for the tour and the night performance are approximately the same. I saw an increase in the amount of money spent on the night performance in the areas of publicity, lumber and props. When doing the tour, the sets must be portable. Students were frustrated by the added difficulty of producing self-supporting, transportable scenery, and found the answer to be less set pieces and props. When we transitioned to the night performance, students wanted the look of a more "professional" set. They utilized stock pieces, but often built specialized units. I budget \$50 per show that must cover costumes, sets and new props. Usually, they don't spend the whole amount.

**The time:** There was not a change in the amount of class time scheduled for the tour and the night performance. In fact, we were more active during our class times due to the complicated sets. The directors are chosen at the beginning of second semester. At the end of January, they must turn in a first draft of a script. At the end of February, they turn in a final script and ground plan. They get their cast mid-March, depending on the timing of Spring break. Generally, they map out a 4 week rehearsal schedule. (We are on a 90 minute block) Since the students do not miss an entire day of school for the tour, the other teachers and administration have shown more support than in the past.

**Summary:** Reviewing our transition from chaos to a well-attended community event has shown that reaching out to an unlikely partner can lead to a fulfilling educational experience. Theatre is collaboration – we as theatre artists should be the leaders in creating partnerships to promote and support our art. Children's Theatre Night with Imagination Stations is one way to do this. It addresses and fulfills not only Performance GLE 1F, but also Script Writing GLE 1A and Technical Theater GLE 1C.

Students, parents, and now even I look forward to the one night the high school commons transforms into a play land and the students take the stage as directors, crew chiefs, and actors. That one night demonstrates the creativity, service and collaboration the theatre can bring to a community.

### References

- Theater Performance GLE 1A, Script Writing: Write a script incorporating character, dialogue, stage directions, plot, rising action, and resolution.
- Theater Performance GLE 1C, Design and Technical Theater: Organize and perform the responsibilities of the head of crews for production.
- Theater Performance GLE 1F, Performing: Stage a performance of a script.

*Meridith Harmon Sauer teaches speech and theatre in the Warrensburg R-VI school district. She is a graduate of the speech/theatre education program at the University of Central Missouri. Meridith enjoys teaching in her hometown with several of her own former teachers. She and her husband, Aaron, have two beautiful daughters, Delaney and Adrienne who have been bitten by the theatre bug as well. They recently completed their first production where all four Sauer's contributed – fulfilling Meridith's life-long dream.*