

# CAN DO!

by **Ann Tornberg**

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While I was in high school, I began my interest in speech and debate at Beresford High School. At that time, we had an excellent oral interp and theatre program, but no debate. During the summer between my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I attended (at my own expense) a debate camp at Black Hills State University. There, in the summer of 1971, during an intensive two weeks, I first learned about debate. When I came back to Beresford that fall, I was ready to share with my classmates. A small group was formed and we were even given permission to work together on debate in a "luxurious" band practice room on alternating days when we didn't have PE. Thus, I actually started coaching and teaching while I was still in high school! Of course, a "real" teacher accompanied us to tournaments, but we were, in fact, entirely self-coached. What a rare, creative power we were given! The next summer, several of us went off to camp and a full-fledged, competitive team was traveling within the next year. How proud we were to become state champions in those years! My closest friends are still from that group of inspired young advocates.

This is my 23rd year teaching in Beresford, a small school that averages 250 students 9-12. Our NFL Chapter has currently 120 members and degrees. I direct the 1-Act play and our shows have received many "Superior Ratings" at the State Festival. I coach debate, oratory, extemporaneous speaking, oral interp, advise the student council, direct the homecoming variety show, and have directed a wide variety of dramatic productions during my tenure. Unlike most of the schools we compete against all year long with multiple coaches, I run these programs myself.

For a small school, we have a very active speech and debate program. Last year, we had over 70 students that competed in at least one interscholastic speech competition. That's 28% of the Student Body! We're very proud of our participation! In addition, last year, our NFL squad won the District Sweepstakes Award. How reward-

*Ann Tornberg is a role model for all small school coaches.*

James Copeland

ing it is for kids from this small school to place ahead of the Sioux Falls and Rapid City large school districts in our state. That victory especially reminds our students that speech activities are individualized and reward the size of the endeavor, not the size of the school.

This fall semester I found myself giving the same speech about my attitude towards coaching and teaching speech. The central thesis of the speech is based on what I call the "Beresford Can-Do Attitude." We try to make our students feel that they can accomplish the rather difficult tasks we teach. For example, 65 students are now writing an oration and most will deliver it from memory for competition. In policy debate, students are researching and writing a disadvantage argument in the correct structural form. These are tasks that would be daunting to many adults, and yet, with the right encouragement and guidance, even freshman are getting the job done. My educational philosophy can best be summarized in that "Can-Do" spirit. Any job, no matter how difficult, can be done with the right resources and attitude.

Students need to be challenged. They need to believe that they are intelligent individuals with the competency it takes to understand complicated issues. Give them a difficult task; give them time and instruction to figure it out; give them a goal to reach and reasonable deadlines; and finally, give them the chance to compete and prove that they have conquered the challenge. I believe these are the simple, but effective goals of quality instructors and coaches.

Too many teachers try to make students feel better by giving them high-interest, low-level projects with little challenge to their vocabulary or thinking skills. It's easy and the grade is a sure thing, but the kids really don't advance. I have seen more kids blossom when things were hard to understand and they had to struggle. This is

true for kids at all learning levels. The trick, of course, is to find where to start with each individual and keep pushing upward.

My own capsule philosophy of speech education would be the following statement; all students-the so-called normal, the handicapped, and the talented need to work to become adequately adjusted, responsible, and effective communicators and citizens. Even if you give them a very difficult task, as long as you provide them the means to do it and the encouragement they need, they **can** and will be successful.

*(Ann Tornberg's distinguished career has included the 1998 District NFL Sweepstakes, National finalists in American Legion Oratory and FFA Extemp, qualifying 16 students in 21 events at NFL Nationals and coaching 34 South Dakota State Champions. She has been honored as "Outstanding Young Teacher of Speech in 1980 and in 1992 Coach of the Year in South Dakota. In 1996 she was presented the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota's "Distinguished Service Award", its highest honor. She has served three times as Rushmore district chair. Both Ann's daughter's competed in NFL)*