

ENHANCING FORENSICS THROUGH CIVIC EDUCATION

by

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Policy debate, Lincoln Douglas debate, and extemporaneous speaking all have a unique opportunity to be further enhanced by the social studies curriculum in our schools. It has become apparent from a number of firsthand observations as well as discussion with other coaches that this enhancement is not occurring. Students in events seem to have a grip on which cards to read during the course of the round or which analogy to utilize in answering the question, but the real understanding of the evidence and analysis of the question at hand seems to be suffering.

Policy debate has a unique opportunity among the three events; the role of most every aspect of government can be incorporated into the policy debate round. This is not to say that there should be a debate centered on the working of government, but the round would be greatly enhanced if the students had a clear understanding of the operation of the national government. In one round I judged during the Russia topic, a student in the 1AC informed me that the U.S. policy of providing aid to Russia was **unconstitutional** on the grounds that it violated various aspects of the U.S. law code. Not a major mistake, but it was further compounded by the negative, which proceeded, in interpreting the aff citation, to inform me that it was the president who decided what was constitutional. Minor errors like this are just that, minor, they are however also indicative of the lack of understanding of the function, terminology, and roles that the various portions of government actually play.

The increase of prefab evidence in Lincoln Douglas does raise some question as to the actual understanding of the various philosophers by the students. When a quote is pulled out of a handbook and randomly put into a case with a prewritten tag phrase to go with it, there is little doubt that the full educational value of the activity is being lost. The philosophers that have helped to shape our civic world are often utilized in the debate round. Here is a very unique opportunity to help students understand the forces that drive the decisions

being made today. Another example of this comes from the juvenile crime topic of last year. One prefab handbook that one student acquired provided a definition of juvenile crime. Supposedly this definition came from the Juvenile Justice Act of 1973. It really seemed too good to be true, so I made the student find the actual bill and read it to find the actual citation, the definition was no where to be found.

Current events plays a strong role in all three events, yet none more so than foreign or domestic extemporaneous. Most teams stock their files with articles from *Time*, *Newsweek*, *The Economist* or other weekly current events magazines. While all of these weeklies are essential keep up on current events, having background in the analysis of the events is just as important. Students are supposed to provide some analysis in their answer to the question. Most do a good job of providing some analysis in their answer; providing them access to what the professionals in those fields are saying could further enhance this analysis. By having students keep up with the quarterly scholarly journals that are a part of the profession, be it in a foreign or domestic arena, the exposure to the analysis provides them with the background to understand what a realistic answer to the question really could be.

All three events provide real opportunities for us as educators to help the student expand his or her knowledge and understanding of the world around them. The rhetorical skills of the student are important. There is little doubt that most any profession requires individuals to communicate effectively. If one does not spend time dealing with the principal issues surrounding the topic and the background of that topic, then the art of rhetoric is lost.

All coaches spend time on topic analysis, and certainly students would not know which bits of prefabricated evidence to grab if topic analysis were not done. Going beyond the simple topic analysis and evaluating the role that government plays, philosophers have developed, and the way in which various events impact our day-to-

day life or the choices governments must take, is essential to developing a well-rounded competitor.

Rarely does one see an occasion to allow students a hands on opportunity to learn about government as with policy debate. Our topic analysis may very well cover what it means to change the foreign policy with Russia, but how often do we cover how foreign policy is developed? What actors influence foreign policy? Understanding these facets of foreign policy are key to really understanding the impact that the aff plan has on the existing system, thereby strengthening both the aff and neg positions. By investigating the role of the congress and the President, we are less likely to find the 'squirrel' cases or the generic DAs that, no matter what the situation, end in nuclear war and the end of the mankind. What we should find is that the arguments in the round should improve, because even if handbook evidence is utilized, the flaws that exist in the application of the evidence will be more apparent to the opposition.

The use of handbook evidence in L/D is understandable. How many coaches, let alone students have the time to sit down and critically read *Leviathan*, or *Two Treatise on Government* and *Political Liberalism*? The time factor should not be a deterrent to a real understanding of the philosophical basis being utilized in the round. Many reputable source books are in print that can provide an overview of what the philosophers are really saying with their ideas. Students and coaches should take the time to increase their knowledge so that when the philosophy is misapplied, they recognize the error. Not only will this improve the quality of the round, but it will

also greatly enhance the students' understanding of the political arena around them. Many of the questions being debated today are similar if not the same questions that philosophers have been raising for centuries.

Finally extemporaneous provides an opportunity for a real understanding of the impact of the current days events on our lives or the choices that government makes. In order to do this, students must be exposed to the professional opinions of those in the field. *Time* and *Newsweek* provide great accounts of how the Asian financial crisis is developing on a weekly basis, but what do those developments really mean? Students should be afforded the opportunity to access professional journals in the fields that they are preparing for. *Foreign Policy* often provides competing views on particular issues facing the foreign policy establishment. Here students are exposed to a more in depth understanding of how the world's events are affecting our government's decisions or us. This is where the attention grabber should be focused. Dazzling us with interesting analogies or anecdotes should not be the focus for the speech, nor should the speaker try to learn everything they can about a series of events in the 30-minute prep period before speaking. The focus ought to be analyzing the question and developing a well thought out, organized, coherent presentation as to what the answer is to that question.

Forensics is an exciting opportunity for students to develop skills that will last them a lifetime. The research skills, speaking skills, and analytical skills that can be developed are well documented in the communications journals. Insuring that these skills are properly applied can be accomplished by development the social science aspect of the event as well.

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