

Academic debate is a powerful educational tool available in many high schools and colleges, and there is a movement to increase its availability (Wade, 1998; Crenshaw, 1998). In particular, the Urban Debate League movement was started to provide economically underprivileged high schools with enough funding and support to offer a debate program. However, core assumptions of the program remain theoretical and lack empirical data to demonstrate implied and supposed relationships. This study hopes to further our knowledge of success in debate by proposing the following research question: Do the economic situations of the schools that participate in academic debate affect their performance at tournaments?

Literature review

While there are no empirical studies that have explored what makes a successful debate team, there has been some discussion of various factors that might play a role. Lynn (1998) explains that funding is a key because it allows teams to go to more tournaments, develop better research abilities, and increase the pay for their coaches. Zorn (1998), on the other hand, says that the key to any debate team is finding good teachers and keeping them. Although the issue is widely discussed and intuitive, it is not at all settled and controversy surrounds these core assumptions. To understand this literature, we will first examine the urban debate leagues, then explore arguments about the impact of economics, and finally examine why some people think that money really is the key to a winning team.

Most of the literature about economics surrounds the creation of Urban Debate Leagues. Wade (1998) says that the urban debate league movement is a response to the uneven way that funds are being distributed to public high schools. The ability of the underfunded schools to have a debate program is limited because the school cannot afford such a program. Breger (1998) explains that the urban debate leagues hope to even out the playing field by giving urban children

the same benefits as the students attending high schools in the suburbs. While this is a worthwhile program because it gives these high school students the ability to compete in debate, it still might not be enough give them an equal footing. An example of this is explained by Lynn (1998), who notes that the Chicago Public Schools received \$75,000 for the city as a whole while each of the individual Glenbrook schools received \$60,000. This allows them to go to more tournaments, hire extra people to help coach, and provide other benefits that will be discussed later. While the school board in Chicago does give a considerable amount of money to the schools, they are still not on the same economically advantaged level with the suburban schools. Just getting debate started at these schools is the first step, but these programs are still limited in comparison to other high schools that have adequate funding to ensure a successful debate team. Most of the essays on funding are specific to the creation of debate-- they do not directly apply to the programs that are already participating in debate.

There is only one article that argued that economics were not central to the success of a debate program (Zorn, 1998). Zorn (1998) feels that the most important thing is the coach and keeping that coach should be top priority. This is because without someone to tell debaters what they should be doing it is hard for them to learn. While we agree that the coach does play a huge part in the creation of a winning team, there are some arguments that seem to demonstrate why economics are more important. For instance, the debaters from a school that do not have money are not able to attend as many tournaments which means that it takes longer for them to learn about debate. Also as Lynn (1998) points out, the richer programs are able to buy their debaters supplies and are also able to get access to better research tools like Lexis-Nexis. The final argument about why money is key and not the coach is that it takes money to get a good coach and to keep them (Lynn, 1998). Kozol (1991) says that poor schools cannot get teachers because

they pay so much less starting out and that the top of the pay scale is lower. Therefore, teachers who are good at what they do go to the richer schools--just like debate coaches. Another factor is that the condition of the neighborhoods where the disadvantaged schools are located is much worse, so teachers would not want to live near them anyway (Kozol, 1991). In short, new teachers (and potential debate coaches) choose economically privileged schools because the pay is higher and the neighborhoods are nicer.

As we have previously stated, the amount of money that a school receives affects things like the number of tournaments they attend and how they research. However, there are other benefits of being at a rich school. Kozol (1991) points out that the people who live in the nice part of town have more support from their parents. An example of this is that they fight the school board to get what they want and, since they have more influence, seem to usually get what they want. Kozol (1991) uses the New Trier High School as an example of this situation where the parents will get any significant thing they request. Not surprisingly it is one of the best schools in the state of Illinois. There are also the benefits of having access to computers and summer debate camps. Warner and Brusckie (2001) explain that these summer camps cost around \$2,000 to \$3,000 per student-- which means that most students from the lower funded schools cannot go unless they are able to get a scholarship to the camp. If a student does not go to a camp they start the debate season behind the other students—in both research, lectures about the debate topic, and rounds already debated. Neesen and Robertson (2001) point out that debaters do notice the difference between themselves and the other debaters. In their essay they point to the differences in dress as being directly linked to their economic situation.

Wade (1998) states that debate has always been seen as an activity for people of privilege and is linked to private or exclusive schools. If the economic situation of the school is key, we

would also expect that the private schools that have the most money would have the highest success rate. Therefore we offer the following hypotheses:

H1: Less economically well-off schools will show lower school win percentages than more economically well-off schools.

H2: Less economically well-off schools will show lower school average speaker points per round than more economically well-off schools.

Method

The study examined the four largest tournaments in California during the 2000-2001 debate season. The tournaments are University of California at Berkeley, California State University Fullerton, California State University Long Beach, and Redlands University. The results were obtained by taking the records and points that all teams that each school brought to the tournament in all divisions. Wins were divided by the number of rounds to obtain win percentages and speaker points were divided by the number of rounds to obtain the average speaker points per round. The unit of analysis was a school's performance at a tournament, averaged across all teams fielded by the school in all divisions. Obviously, this decision led to the double-counting of schools that attended more than one tournament.

The schools were then grouped into one of four economic categories. The first two categories grouped the public schools that are in California. California ranks their public schools with a numerical representation that they named Calworks number. This number is a representation of the number of students below the national poverty line. The Calworks number can be found at <http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/State.asp> under "School Profile." They also rank each school by telling the public what percent it falls in both their district and the state as a whole. A median split was used to divide the schools into the well off and the underprivileged.

There were 58 poor public high schools included in the sample and 61 wealthy public high schools.

The last two categories are for the schools that were not ranked by Calworks. These are the private schools and the ones that are not in California. They were grouped separately into a category for private schools in California ($n = 46$) and a category that included all schools that were not from California ($n = 83$). Any high school that attended the four tournaments were researched to find a Calworks number. The schools that did not have a Calworks number were then researched on the internet via their homepages to further categorize them as either private California high schools or schools from other states. The research design included a single independent variable with 4 categories and 2 continuous dependent variables, making the MANOVA the appropriate tool of analysis.

Results

Hypothesis one stated that less economically well-off schools would show lower win percentages than more economically well-off schools. After conducting a MANOVA, the hypothesis was confirmed to a significant degree. Public poor schools had an average win percentage of .43, public rich schools had a win percentage of .53, out of state had a percentage of .55, and private schools had a win percentage of .55. The most important finding for research purposes is that the public poor schools were the only group to have a losing win percentage. The magnitude of the difference between the public poor schools and every other group is about 10%. Post-hoc Sheffe tests demonstrated that poor public schools' win percentages differed significantly from every other group, and no other statistically significant differences existed.

Hypothesis two stated that less economically well-off schools would show lower school average speaker points per round than more economically well-off schools. Once again, the

MANOVA showed that this hypothesis was also confirmed ($F(243, 3) = 6.70, p < .001$). Public poor schools had an average mean of 49.39, public rich schools had 51.21, private schools had 51.74, and out of state schools had a mean of 52.92. Post hoc Sheffe tests revealed that poor public high schools were significantly different from out of state schools, and no other significant differences were present.

Discussion

While the subject of this study might seem obvious to those of us who have coached debate over the years, it is important to note that no other study has empirically investigated the relationship between economics and debate team success. This study is an important first step that will further the investigation of what impact economic factors have on the success of a debate program. Because it is a first step, the conclusions that can be reached from this study will not be ground breaking-- rather they have confirmed a belief many in the debate community already have.

This study looked at whether or not there is a correlation between the economic situation of a high school and the results that a debate team has at tournaments. This means that we are not able to determine what part of the funding, whether it is the school that gives students the benefit or the wealth of their parents, causes the advantages once the students reach tournaments. While we were not able to give a specific reason, we feel it is important to go through some explanations of the phenomena.

We agree with Zorn (1998) that the coaches are very important for the success of a team, but that it is the money that gets the coach to come to the school in the first place -- and it is what keeps them at the school. In addition, coaches have to have a good understanding of what makes a debater good and how to teach them these skills. Besides the basic coaching they also have to

understand the current trends in debate that might affect the team. At the tournament it is also important to have a coach who knows the people on the circuit so they can tell their debaters how to adapt to particular judges. This list is just a small percentage of the things that a coach must do to have a successful team. In short, the better coach a team has the better a team will do-- and the best coaches are usually compensated for their skills.

Another group of economic factors that probably play a role in the success of a team is the ability to travel. The ability to travel to many different debate tournaments outside the region the school resides in will help increase a team's record. It helps increase their record for two reasons. The first reason is that it allows them to go to more debate tournaments, which gives them more experience. Naturally, experience is a key factor to the success of any debate team since the more tournaments attended means more rounds debated. The second reason that travel is important is that it allows them to see different styles of debate that are not from their area, which is another way that increases their experience. Funding becomes important to travel for obvious reasons. If you have the money you can go to more tournaments. Local tournaments usually require either funding for bus drivers or the use of personal vehicles and rental cars. In addition, tournaments out of the area require plane tickets. Of course, only the richest schools are able to fly their students to tournaments. For economically underprivileged high schools, this is rarely an option. Finally, once at tournaments the students still need to eat—which requires food money. Some students from underprivileged homes simply cannot afford to go to tournaments where they need to purchase lunch. Furthermore, students from economically underprivileged neighborhoods usually have to supplement their (and sometimes their family's) income by having a job. This limits the number of tournaments that they can attend since working usually has top priority. In any case, the funding for travelling to tournaments will have

a direct effect on the long term success of a debate team.

The third grouping of factors that might explain the results is what the parents can economically contribute to their children's success. The personal wealth of the parents means that they can help purchase the success that a team might enjoy. The most significant of these factors is if they have the ability to send the children to a summer debate camp. These camps are important because they not only give the student a head start on the topic by giving them evidence, they also give them a chance to be coached by someone who might have a higher understanding of debate than their coaches. At the very least it allows them to be coached by someone other than their normal coach, which might give them a different perspective of debate. As previously mentioned, the camps also include a tournament—which means the students who are fortunate enough to attend will already have had actual debate experience on the newest topic. Furthermore, summer camps also allow them to make friends that can help them at tournaments throughout the year. Besides these camps, the money also benefits these debaters by allowing them to have computers, allowing them to do research at home. This means that they get more time to do research than students without computers in their homes. The money also means that they have better clothes to wear to the tournament and this has been found to be extremely important in high school debate. Basically, students are expected to dress very professionally when they are at tournaments. When a debater is not dressed as well as their opponents, it will affect the way they debate (Neesen & Robertson, 2001). One final thing that the parent's monetary status will affect is the supplies the debate activity requires. When you debate you must buy things like pens, paper, debate tubs, copy paper, flow paper, and timers. While this might not seem to cost much money it adds up over the course of a year. All these things are necessary to be the best in debate. An example of this is that if you do not have two

timers then debate partners are not able to time each other which increases the chance that they might make a mistake and not have their partner know about it at the time. The amount that parents are able to help the debaters should effect how successful they are.

The final area that we feel might explain the findings of this study surround the research that people must do to be successful in debate. The better the school the more likely they are to have a better library. Kozol (1991) says that in one urban high school they did not even have a library and the books were piled in the corner of the lunchroom. When he went to the suburban high school he found that they had a better library, but that they also had a librarian to help the students. This means that debaters at these schools had access to more books and if they had a problem finding something they have someone to ask. Besides the better libraries the better-funded schools can afford to buy evidence that they need. These include handbooks that anyone can buy that have been researched by a college debater or even a coach. This evidence also helps them because it saves them time and is better than the evidence that they researched themselves. The economic benefit of research will help debaters win more round than teams who do not have access to this material.

Now that we have covered the ground of debate, it is important to discuss the differences in magnitude between win percentages and speaker points. As previously mentioned in the results section, students from economically disadvantaged high schools received lower speaker points and less wins than out of state schools. However, the magnitude of the difference in speaker points was much less than wins per round. This is an important finding because it indicates that speaking ability is not as greatly related to the economical standing of the high school. In other words, students from any category of high school have almost the same ability

to win a speaker award at debate tournaments. Money seems to play a greater role in determining the number of rounds won at a particular debate tournament.

The final concern with funding surrounds the urban debate leagues. These groups were set up through funding from various sources like the Open Society Institute and funds from the National Forensic League. The problem is that they were originally funded for three years with the hopes that they would become independent through donations or from funding through the school board. These other sources will not be able to fund them at the same level that they are at now which means that if economics is a key factor it might affect the success rates of the teams in the league. With our personal involvement we think that it is important to know the link between funding and the success rates of the teams.

Conclusion

This study proved that the economic standing of a high school is directly related to the success of that high school at debate tournaments. The investigation analyzed both rounds won and speaker points. In either case, students from economically underprivileged high schools were not as successful as students from richer high schools. Importantly, this study provides empirical support for Kozol's observations and confirms what many debate professionals have intuitively concluded. On the one hand, these findings point to the need for debate outreach at economically under-served schools, but on the other hand they point to the danger of relying exclusively on a 3-year funding strategy with the hopes that districts will fully fund programs.

Future research should try to focus on the role that economics plays in the success rate by breaking down the different variables that have been identified in this study. Some examples of the different variables that have been identified is the amount of travel a team does, the money parents can afford to spend on debate, and the acquisition and retention of coaches. This is

important to the debate community if it is really interested in increase the participation of other high schools. Further research could also look colleges to see if there is a difference between rich private schools and schools who have not been funded as much.

References

Breger, B. (1998). Building open Societies through debate. Contemporary Argumentation and Debate, 19, 66-68.

Crenshaw, C. Sharing the gift of debate: Notes from the Tuscaloosa debate league. Contemporary Argumentation and Debate, 19, 80-84.

Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities: Children in America's schools. HarperCollins, New York.

Lynn, L. (1998). Debating funding, funding debate: The Chicago debate commission's tale of two cities. Contemporary Argumentation and Debate, 19, 72-75.

Neesen, W.J. & Robertson, S.(2001) Tie tacks versus tie dyes: A Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the Western States Communication Association, Coer d'Alene, Idaho.

Wade, M.M. (1998). The case for urban debate leagues. Contemporary Argumentation and Debate, 19, 60-65.

Warner, E. & Brusckke, J. (2001). "Gone on debating:" Competitive academic debate as a tool of empowerment for urban America. A Paper Presented at the annual meeting of the Western States Communication Association, Coer d'Alene, Idaho.

Zorn, E. (1998). There's no debate: Glenbrook schools are powerhouses. Chicago Tribune, 5/5, sec. 2:1.