LINCOLN-DOUGLAS MAKES UDL DEBUT

by
R. Eric Barnes

In September 2001 the nation's first Lincoln-Douglas Urban Debate League (UDL) will begin in Springfield (MA). The Springfield program, known as the Debate, Empowerment, and Leadership (DEAL) Program, is sponsored by the Weissman Center for Leadership at Mount Holyoke College. More than a year of preparation has been spent coordinating efforts between the college and Springfield Public Schools.

The Springfield league is unique among UDLs because it focuses on LD debate rather than Policy debate. It is worth explaining why. Both Policy and LD offer students a remarkable opportunity to gain a wide variety of essential academic and leadership skills. The reasons behind choosing LD fall into three categories: first, an understanding of the resources available in this area; second, a comparison of the skills taught by each form of debate; third, the comparative benefits of experimentation and replication.

Available Resources

Springfield is a small city with big city problems. There is widespread poverty, racial tension, and high dropout and truancy rates. The neighboring cities of Holyoke and Chicopee have similar problems. Yet, just north of this metropolitan area is a major center for higher education surrounding Amherst (MA). Improving the public schools can help these cities significantly, and the surrounding colleges can help. Establishing such partnerships is a basic principle of the UDL movement. The question was, how best can we use the resources of these colleges to develop a successful UDL in Springfield.

College students in this area are better prepared to coach LD. None of the area colleges has a Policy debate team, but three have Parliamentary (Parli) debate teams, which is similar to LD. Parli debaters easily become LD coaches, but it is difficult for them to coach Policy. Moreover, students as these liberal-arts colleges are generally familiar with the historical moral, political and legal theories most commonly used in LD. So, the greater availability of college mentors for an LD program within this area was a significant factor.

A second factor was the lack of mainstream high school debate programs of any sort in Western Massachusetts. There is very little debate of any sort in the surrounding area. It will be easier for area high schools that are *not* a part of the Springfield UDL to develop LD programs in response to a new LD UDL because it takes less formal training to start coaching LD. So, the likely greater availability of local mainstream competition was also a factor.

The latest factor was that the initiative for this UDL came from one person, who has extensive experience coaching LD debate. So, the resources for training teachers and college students to be LD coaches were much more available than the resources for Policy. This, together with the first two resource considerations, suggested that an LD league was a better option -- but this was not the final consideration.

Skill Development

Before considering the skills developed by LD and Policy, one must realize how remarkably similar these events are in the context of all available curricular and extracurricular activities. LD and Policy are two peas in a pod, only of slightly different color and texture. In large part, the skills being taught by both are the same. Both have the ability to change students lives through opening their minds to the world of dialogue and critical inquiry.

With that perspective firmly in mind, Policy and LD are not the identical. Their participants develop somewhat different sets of skills. The choice of which to use in a UDL should be informed by these differences. Consider the primary differences as outlined in the following chart.

Policy & LD Differences

P...Debate one topic per year *(depth)*
L...Debate four or five topics per year *(breadth)*

P...Learn carried research skills *(breadth)*
L...Learn history of intellectual thought *(depth)*

P...An empirical focus *(plans)*
L...A philosophical focus *(principles)*

P...A team event *(reliance on others)*
L...An individual event *(self-reliance)*

P...Fast speaking style *(more ideas covered)*
L...Persuasive style *(realistic speaking skills)*

The comparisons are more complex these brief remarks will adequately illuminate. To begin, students spending four years in Policy will gain an exceptionally detailed understanding of four significant issues, while students doing LD will be exposed to a less detailed understanding of sixteen to twenty significant issues. It seems like a simple choice between depth and breadth of understanding, neither being clearly superior. But this is misleading, because the Policy debater's research extends well beyond the apparent scope of the resolution, while the LD debater's research returns to the same issues on many occasions -- flipping the previous depth/ breadth distinction. This flip is captured by the research skills honed by each format. Excelling in Policy demands research from a wide variety of sources, while excelling in LD demands development of a deep understanding of the history of moral, political and legal theory. Even if we were to conclude that success in Policy required more research than success in LD, it is unclear whether this tells in favor of using LD or Policy in a UDL setting. Nothing that has been said so far about the differences between the two forms carries much weight in deciding which to use in a UDL.

There are certain stylistic differences between Policy and LD. First among these is the demand in Policy for the affirmative team to propose a specific plan, not required in LD. Because of this, Policy is more concerned with empirical claims, while LD focuses on the philosophical aspects of an issue. But it is a gross misunderstanding to think either that theories of 'value' have no place in Policy or that empirical evidence has no place in LD. Both forms of debate concern normative (ie., valued based) questions and both are about the real (i.e., empirical) world, they just *focus* on difference aspects. An exclusive concern with either is a mistake, but neither focus is inherently better than the other.

Other stylistic differences also develop different skills. Policy teaches teamwork, while LD teaches independence. The style of speech and longer rounds in Policy allows students to get deeper into the issues simply by allowing more information

to be presented, while the style of speech and brevity of LD rounds teaches students to be simultaneously precise and concise, and also to speak in a manner that is persuasive and accessible to a broad audience. The claim that the Policy style is detrimental to good public speaking is surely incorrect -- although LD does better prepare students for normal public speaking. Other stylistic differences exist, but none demonstrates conclusively that one form of debate is superior in the context of a UDL.

It has been argued that the minority (particularly African-American) students that are served by UDLs already have a command of the type of public speaking skills that are developed through LD, and so are more in need of the skills taught by Policy. But many minorities lack this supposed command of public speaking, so the generalization is misleading at best. Moreover, even if it were true, this generalization cuts both ways. One could argue that a UDL should leverage students' existing skills to facilitate their entry into competitive debate. Again, this doesn't tell us which form of debate to use.

In sports, forensics, or elsewhere, team events teach reliance on others, while individual events teach reliance on oneself. If the students served by UDLs are in greater need of learning reliance on and trust of others than self-reliance, then Policy does do more to foster this. But the importance of teaching self-reliance should not be underestimated, and it is certainly a mistake to stereotype all UDL students as needing one more than the other. Ideally, opportunities to develop both would be available. Indeed, our ultimate goal is to make both Policy and LD available, not just in Springfield, but everywhere -- as discussed below.

This entire discussion recognizes that either form, if done poorly, will be less beneficial, and that the comparison should between both forms when done well. To use sterotypes, this means that Policy will not be taught merely as dueling evidence cut from handbooks, and that LD will not be taught merely as a dueling oratory of style with no substance. Given this, and the comparisons made above, the set of skills developed by one form of debate offers no advantage so significant as to make it the clear choice for a UDL. So, the decision on which form of debate to use in the Springfield UDL needed to be based on some other considerations.

Experimentation

Clearly, Policy UDLs have a positive and significant impact on the education and lives of urban youths in under-resourced schools. However, it would be foolish to assume that no significant improvements can be made upon the current model. Since the only way to discover improvements is to experiment, it is imperative that we try new methods and variations. It is in this spirit that the DEAL Program is beginning the Springfield UDL using LD.

Despite the remarkable similarity of LD and Policy, it is possible that one form is more effective in a UDL context. This may consist in teaching a more valuable set of skills or it could consist in some other advantage such as: ease of initiating a UDL, auxiliary benefits for teachers from learning to coach, ease of student recruitment and retention, ongoing costs and sustainability, and numerous other possible advantages. Let's examine some of these possible advantages, keeping in mind that they may not actually materialize. Indeed, the point is that although there is antecedent reason to expect some of the advantages, only by experimenting with an actual league can we determine if these exist.

First, it seems easier to initiate an LD league, because there is considerably less debate specific theory and jargon, which coaches need to become comfortable with to the point that they are themselves able to teach it. The DEAL Program began with two Saturday workshops for the new coaches, which is considerably less training than is required for a new Policy coach. College mentors also require less training to help with LD. This decreased need for people with specialized knowledge may increase the access to debate, and increased access is a cornerstone of the UDL movement. Moreover, an LD league requires only half as many students needed, since there are no worries about partners being unavailable, etc. LD leagues seem easier to start.

Second, it seems easier to sustain an LD league and integrate it into the wider community. LD avoids the extensive photocopying and other research costs incurred by Policy debate programs, and our summer workshop will be shorter than a typical Policy workshop (as LD workshops typically are). Furthermore, training parents and other members of the community to judge LD will be significantly easier, which will help to achieve the goal of parent and community involvement with the UDL. Finally, the relative ease of training coaches,

college mentors and new debaters also makes replacement of coaches and others easier. Running an LD UDL is not cheap or simple, but it avoids certain significant costs and difficulties.

The last point is the benefit to the current LD community. Mainstream Policy debaters have already begun to benefit from an exposure to different perspectives that are being brought to the debate community by UDL debaters. There are a lot of LD debaters and coaches who would similarly benefit from an increased diversity in the population of LD debaters. Indeed, the types of issues debated in LD may benefit to an even greater degree from additional perspectives of different sub-cultures. This is a goal that is certainly worth pursuing.

Big Picture

Policy and LD build very similar sets of skills but they do emphasize different subsets of these skills. We should reflect on their similarities in order to keep perspective, even though I have been focusing on their differences to critically compare their use in a UDL context. Policy is better at teaching some skills and LD is better at teaching others, but neither is clearly superior in this respect. The available resources in and around Springfield made LD a bit better for us. But these circumstances are not especially peculiar, and many other locations considering starting a UDL may have similar circumstances. The more significant reason for starting an LD UDL was to try to make a good thing even better. The considerations presented above may not have convinced you that an LD UDL offers advantages beyond those offered by another Policy UDL, but that was not the point. The point is that we need to experiment to discover if these advantages really do exist. One should at least be willing to admit that we do not now have all the answers.

The Future

The UDL movement should continue to expand to more urban centers across the country, and this should provide a model for reintroducing debate as a significant element in secondary education in all school systems. Moreover, this future should include a diversity of debate styles and formats from which schools and students may choose. Different people have different needs and different tastes. We need to find a way to cater to these without losing the value of the activity. Adding LD to the of-

ferings in UDLs is a step toward doing that, which is not to say that now is the right time for all UDLs to start doing two events. In time, the Springfield UDL should compete in both LD and Policy -- and if we are successful in Springfield, then other UDLs should in time offer LD debate. Indeed, in the more distant future it may be wise to begin more Parliamentary debate at the high school level. This would also better prepare students for international debate competitions, which would further open their eyes and our own. Introducing Parli would ***not*** be good for high school debate right now, but once again the only way to discover if there are significant advantages to using a form of debate to teach and empower young people is to experiment. Moreover, if we want to expand the number of people in each school who participate in debate, moving to multiple events may be appropriate. There are only so many Policy teams (or LD debaters) from one school that a coach can bring to a tournament without overwhelming the tournament. Offering multiple events will allow teams to grow with greater ease when they decide that they are ready to grow.

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Lincoln-douglas makes udl debut. by R. Eric Barnes. In September 2001 the nation's first Lincoln-Douglas Urban Debate League (UDL) will begin in Springfield (MA). The Springfield program, known as the Debate, Empowerment, and Leadership (DEAL) Pro-gram, is sponsored by the Weissman Cen-ter for Leadership at Mount Holyoke Col-lege. More than a year of preparation has been spent coordinating efforts between the college and Springfield Public Schools.Â college mentors and new debaters also makes replacement of coaches and others easier. Running an LD UDL is not cheap or simple, but it avoids certain significant costs and difficulties. The last point is the benefit to the current LD community. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were a series of seven public debates in 1958 between Republican challenger Abraham Lincoln and incumbent Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The main topic was slavery and the battle over its extension into new U.S. territories.Â He launched a Senate run in early 1855, but stepped aside to make way for another candidate. WATCH: Abraham Lincoln's 'House Divided Speech'. By 1858, Lincoln was the most prominent leader in the new Republican Party in Illinois, and the clear choice to run against Douglas. He kicked off his campaign in earnest with a speech in Springfield that June, in which he famously declared that "A house divided against itself cannot stand..this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.â€ 7 debates in 1858, Abraham Lincoln vs. Stephen Douglas for Senate seat in Illinois. A series of debates around 1858 between Congressman Stephen Douglas and Abraham Lincoln. There were a total of 7 debates between August and October. Douglas was unbiased by slavery and had no interest really in it (basically like a free-soiler) but he used the debate to try to "expose" Lincoln as an abolitionist. Lincoln responded by saying he was not one and even went as far as to say congress did not have the... Lincoln-Douglas debate is one person debating against another person and is primarily focused on competing values. Every two months, a resolution is selected from a list and used at tournaments held during that time period. Resolutions often take the form in which two values are pitted against each other. â€¢ lincoln-douglas debate centers on a proposition of value, Which concerns itself with what ought to be instead of what. Is.Â â€¢ lincoln douglas debate is held between two individuals. From opposing schools. Unlike CX policy debate, IT is not a partner event.Â â€¢ if voting issues are scattered throughout the speech makes IT difficult for the judge to. Identify them on a flow sheet. They should be identified clearly, distinctly and separately