

**Empowering Achievement: Using Academic Debate to Provide Experience in**

**Western Academic Methods**

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Abstract: This manuscript focuses on the rationale for, and development of, a new program in China that is designed to support debate instruction using the Public Forum contest format that has been developed by the US National Forensic League (NFL). The history of the program, including the involvement of the NFL and the Harvard Debate Council, is provided. A strong emphasis is placed on the development of debate in China as a means for providing western educational opportunities for Chinese students. The program has been evaluated and those results and tentative conclusions are shared. Suggestions are made for improving the program and further evaluation as the program develops. Preliminary data does suggest that the program is valuable for students and the quantitative growth of the program is also an indicator of success.

Keywords: active learning, critical thinking, China, debate, Harvard Debate, National Forensic League, western education

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## Introduction

At a basic level, the pedagogy of empowerment concerns how instructional methods can work to impact individuals who are exposed to them in a way that increases the capacity and likelihood that those individuals will improve their own lives and potentially the lives of others. This paper focuses on efforts that have been taken to use debate as an instructional method to provide opportunities to empower students in China there through exposure to Western educational methods. The goal in providing this exposure is that those students will be more likely to succeed in Western (primarily US) universities and eventually grow into more self-confident, active learners who become more comfortable with taking initiative to develop solutions to problems that confront the world.

This paper begins with a brief review of the idea of empowerment and then explains how debate situates itself in a larger program of developing Western educational opportunities for students in China. A review of progress to date in developing debate in China is then provided so that the reader can gain a more thorough understanding of the significance of the developments. Self-report data is then examined to determine if the experiences of the Chinese students are likely to support the claims that situate debate as a valuable academic experience in the Western academic tradition. Finally, some conclusions that are drawn from my experience in China are offered.

## A Pedagogy of Empowerment

Pedagogy simply concerns how we approach learning and the learning methods that we choose to employ. Debate itself is a learning method and it is an approach to pedagogy that is centered on active participation in one's own learning.

Empowerment can be defined in a number of ways. Popular definitions include “increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities” (Wikipedia), “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions” (World Bank, 2013), and a “a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives” (Page & Czuba, 1999). Although these definitions vary, they all emphasize the role that empowerment plays in helping individuals and improve their own lives.

In this paper, the pedagogy of empowerment is defined as the student instructional methods that work to impact the individuals who are exposed to them to in a way that increases the capacity and likelihood that those individuals will improve their own lives and potentially the lives of other individuals around them. The results of the research that was undertaken and reviewed suggest that debate offers an excellent means of empowering many Chinese students.

## A Western-Style Education

William Bennet, the former US Secretary of Education, argued in 2012 that, “in China, our fiercest global economic competitor, the popularity of American colleges and universities

might be at an all-time high.” He noted that in the 2010-11 academic year, 56, 976 students Chinese undergraduate students enrolled in US universities. Other reports (Voice of America News, 2012) place the current number as high as 94,000.

Given the Chinese commitment to education and the desire of them to have their children learn in US universities (Bennett, 2012), the Chinese people will do anything possible to support their child’s admissions prospects at these universities. This includes not only a substantial financial support, but also the availability of programming necessary to provide exposure to Western educational practices and methods so that their kids will have experience with those methods. A report by Pocha (2006) was telling:

But it's also the promise of being prepped for life in a Westernized world and studying in an environment that emphasizes all-round development and not academics alone, as Chinese schools tend to do, that attracts locals. Getting admission to top Chinese schools is exceedingly competitive, and the schools' orientation is heavily academic. So parents with means looking to turn their children into global citizens look favorably at schools such as Harrow, which teach in English and take a wider approach to education

William Bennett more recently wrote of his experience with RISE China, a private educational company in China that helps students develop idiomatic English in order to help them get into American universities. It also helps them develop confidence, commitment, initiative, and active learning, which are “all qualities that are cherished by our higher institutions” (Bennett, 2012).

Access to Western educational opportunities that emphasize developing confidence, commitment, and initiative for Chinese citizens is not limited to enrollment in US universities.

Approximately 60,000 Chinese students participate in US summer programs each year and hundreds of high schools and colleges have opened up campuses in China.

Debate has always been considered as an effective means to develop confidence, commitment, initiative, and to experience active learning. Lawhorn (2008, 19), explains that debaters must “be able to communicate well” and that they learn to become “comfortable performing in front of an audience – and having the confidence to do so.” Research by Colbert and Biggers (1985, 238) also documents “improved communication skills.” Many other studies have documented that debate provides extensive public-speaking practice and improves self-confidence (Matlon and Keele 1984; Pemberton- Butler 1999; Sowa-Jamrok 1994), two of the most important factors in reducing public-speaking anxiety and improving performance (Lucas 1998).

Debate training and practice also teaches other, less formal communication skills. Debaters are paired together in two-person teams and must rely on each other to compete successfully. The ability to communicate quickly and efficiently often determines if debaters win or lose. This “cooperative communication,” sometimes referred to as an “interactional skill” (Hill and Leeman 1997), between partners is significant skill that translates easily to the world outside of debate.

Success in debate also requires students to develop a strong sense of commitment. Since the most popular debate events feature students debating with a partner, students must be committed to the success of the partnership to succeed themselves. Students must also be committed to other members of their larger team or squad because they will eventually need to rely on their research support and argument support to succeed. And students must be committed to their own individual success, because success at the highest levels of debate competition

requires thousands of hours of research, strategizing, practice debates, practice speeches, and rebuttal re-works.

Students must take initiative to succeed in debate. Although coaches and teachers can assign students a minimum amount of research and a required number of practice debates, success in debate ultimately requires substantially more work than can reasonably be assigned by any teacher or coach. In order to succeed, students need to take initiative to research answers to arguments to they lost to in previous debates, to research new arguments so that they can catch opponents unprepared, acquire the necessary scouting information that they need to prepare for debates in advance, compete speaking drills, and, ultimately, pester coaches to provide more and more attention that they will need to succeed.

Active learning is a form of instruction that focuses on the role and responsibility of the student in the learning process rather than on the teacher as the professor of knowledge. Charles Bonwell and James Eison (1991) suggest that active learning is the most effective educational method and claim that learning is maximized when students work in pairs, discuss materials while roleplaying, debate, and take part in cooperative learning. L. Dee Fink (1999) explains that active learning occurs when learning activities “involve some kind of experience or some kind of dialogue” -- dialogue with self, dialogue with others, observing, and doing. Dialogue with self involves thinking reflexively about topics, and includes self-evaluation of the thinking, writing, and speaking. Dialogue with others involves “intense” discussion about the issue at hand. Observation includes listening to someone else doing something that is related to what they are learning about. Debaters are involved in observation when they are listening to the speeches of their opponents, listening to practice debates, and listening to judges explain their decisions. The

drive to win that accompanies tournament debating increases the intensity of the discussion, while the attention to detail and the need to think reflexively about the argument and ideas at hand required to do so are all increased in a competitive environment.

These Western educational practices and methods that emphasize student participation in order to build self-confidence, commitment, initiative can be contrasted with Chinese educational practices and methods which are commonly understood to focus on a more traditional “factory” model of education where students are the receptacles of knowledge espoused by the teacher and it is simply the job of the student to regurgitate that knowledge. With an average class size of 50 in even the best schools in China, contemporary Chinese educational practices rely on teaching methods centered around this factory model of education because it is otherwise difficult for a single teacher to instruct a large group of students in a different manner. Also, it is consistent with the type of instruction that students and parents in China expect to receive – they expect the teacher to provide knowledge to students that students then learn and regurgitate back to the teacher (Dello-Iacovo, 2008).

This knowledge is usually regurgitated on a test. Testing for content knowledge appears to be the premier educational method in China. “The *Gaokao* is China's national educational test, given to 10 million secondary students to determine their rank and placement at university. The top scorers become national celebrities. But critics say that the test's emphasis on memorization, fact recall and processing speed can determine college admissions too arbitrarily. "I did not feel well the day of the test," one recent graduate told us. "As a result I placed in the top 10%, not good enough to get into the C9. I felt like my life was over." (Silverstein & Singhi, 2012).

Of course, just as Americans are not ignorant of the weaknesses of their own educational



system, the Chinese are also not ignorant of the weaknesses theirs. They understand that in order to be successful that Chinese students need to do more than simply regurgitate information. A Dean at a major Chinese university explained in an interview that, "Chinese students can swarm a problem...But when it comes to original thought and invention, we stumble. We are trying hard to make that up. We are trying to make technical education the grounding from which we solve problems" (Silverstein & Singhi, 2012).

The Chinese identify two negative consequences to the educational practices that are currently common in China. First, at the broadest level, they think China will not be able to compete with the US economically because the Chinese people will be relatively less likely to develop new, innovative businesses and products that will lead the world. Facebook was invented in the US. China has RenRen. Twitter was invented in the US. China has Weibo. At all levels, the Chinese are excellent at studying and replicating US products (and even directly launching them under different names as intellectual property theft is a huge program in China), but it is suspected that the Chinese lack the creativity and invention-oriented skill set that will be necessary to compete at the highest levels in the global economy.

Second, the Chinese fear that their students will struggle to succeed in Western, particularly US, universities that are the prize for Chinese students because the professors at these universities will expect students to be confident, committed, active learners who take initiative to come up with creative solutions to existing problems. They fear the 54,000-96,000 Chinese students who study in the US will be unprepared and will struggle academically when compared to US students.

It is this convergence of trends that has stimulated interest in debate at the commercial,

educational, and government levels in China. And in many ways it is a simple idea – Broaden the academic experience of students in China by providing opportunities for students to participate in a learning process that has both shown to increase self-confidence, initiative, and commitment and that is also part of the Western educational and philosophical traditions.

### The China Debate Program

In December 2011, I traveled to mainland China for the first time to work with Dipont Education Management (DEM) on the development of debate in China. We focused on outlining what would be needed to build debate in the country and how we could promote the Harvard Debate Council Summer Workshops (HDCSW) as an academic exchange program for Chinese students.

DEM is a large company in China that supports international exchange programs for students and also works to provide access to Western curriculum within China itself. The company is well-connected at the government and academic levels in China and has direct partnerships with twenty-two of the country's best schools. DEM even has academic learning centers physically present in the schools.

In only seven days in China, I made presentations about the value of debate and the HDCSW to DEM (Shanghai), the Wuxi No. 1 School (Wuxi), the Nanjing Foreign Language School (Nanjing), the Hangzhou Foreign Language School (Hangzhou), the Shenzhen Foreign Language School (Shenzhen), and the Shanghai World Foreign Languages School.

During that time, we developed a preliminary plan to promote debate in China and

began designing an academic debate program for students from China at the HDCSW. In January 2012, DEM Vice President Jeff Zhu traveled with me to the Montgomery Bell Academy debate tournament in Nashville, TN where Lakeland District Debate students who I coach were competing. The MBA tournament is one of the most prestigious in the United States, with only the top two person teams from approximately 55 schools from around the US participating. Jeff spent his time at the tournament learning all of the details about how debate tournaments operate and he also spent some time watching the most competitive students at the tournament debate one another. He was quite impressed by the level of competition and was even more enthusiastic about developing academic debate in China after he had seen the competition.

While in Nashville, Jeff also met US NFL Director Scott Wunn and began working on a plan to introduce the US NFL to China and to make Chinese students members. Jeff thought that it was important to build a US NFL component of the program because it would represent an opportunity for Chinese students to compare themselves academically to US students, and, ultimately, Chinese students who wish to attend US universities will need to compete against US students in the admissions process.

I continued to work with DEM throughout the spring of 2012 both to design an academic program for Chinese students at the HDCSW and to develop a competitive debate circuit in China. In June of 2012, DEM initiated a training session for more than 100 teachers to support the development of debate in China. To support that training session, I organized four days of debate training for the participants. I recruited Dr. Anand Rao (University of Mary Washington), Dr. Ryan Galloway (Samford University), and Adam Jacobi (National Forensic League) to deliver

presentations and to provide hands-on learning for the participants.

In addition to the teachers, the training was attended by Zhou Jianhua, the Executive Vice President of the Society for Cultivating Innovators. He gave a presentation on the value of debate. The Innovation Method Society also supported the training. During May and June, DEM continued to work aggressively to recruit students for the summer debate program at Harvard. In July, 120 students from China's foreign language schools arrived in Cambridge for a special program at the HDCSW.

Harvard Debate hired a diverse set of instructors for the China program. Since all of the students in the program were beginners and it was only two weeks, it was not important to have instructors with advanced debate knowledge. What was needed were people who had some debate experience, were passionate about teaching debate, were patient with beginners who spoke English as a second language, and would be respectful of individuals from a different culture. The academic director of the programs was an individual who had significant high school debate teaching and directing experience and also had successfully coached native Chinese exchange students. Some of the staff members included one of the debaters the director coached who became a successful debater, a US college debate coach who is very personable, someone who had extensive experience teaching debate in Korea, two Harvard Debate Council members, and a number of other debate coaches who had experience coaching beginners. Although all of the instruction was conducted in English, four Mandarin speakers who could communicate in the language when absolutely necessary were hired. To create a student-staff ration of 1:8, 15 instructors for the 120 students were hired "lab" groups of 32 students with four instructors each were created. The instructors were arranged so that one would have primary responsibility for each

set of eight students and that one group of 32 would have a high school debate coach, a college debate coach, a first year instructor, and a Mandarin speaker. In the program, the students learned how to debate, the basics of public speaking & argumentation, and also about the topic that they would debate in the coming academic year – Resolved: China should increase its use of nuclear power.

After the summer program in the US finished, I continued to work with DEM to develop debate in China. In early August, 2012, I recruited four US debate coaches to go and work in China for a year, teaching debate in the English language schools. With the arrival of these experienced teachers to support the training, debate really took off in China. Although the program was originally conceived in a way that would enable the trained Chinese teachers to coach and teach the debaters, the schools themselves insisted that DEM provide coaches from the US to teach the classes. The schools didn't want to divert the teachers from their existing teaching assignments and they also didn't think that the teachers would be capable of doing an effective job teaching the students.

By late November, seventeen schools were operating debate classes and more than 1,000 students were enrolled in those courses. During the first week of November, 2012, 90 two person teams (180 students) competed in the first Public Forum debate tournament in China as part of the National Academic High School Debate Tournament Series. The Nanjing Foreign Language School defeated the Wuxi No. 1 School in the finals.

And DEM's relationship with the NFL continued. In the fall of 2012, seventeen schools in China registered to become members of the NFL and DEM committed to recruiting at least 1,000 Chinese students to join the US NFL this year and 4,000 per year within three years. In

February 2013, the HDC and the NFL completed a comprehensive curriculum and textbook that we that will be available in the fall to support instruction.

#### Format considerations

There are many considerations that should be taken into account when suggesting particular formats for debate events for particular groups and geographic areas. When considering events for China, three things were taken into account.

The first thing was the demand for events that are common in the West, especially in the United States. After all, the Chinese students want to compete against students in the US and attend US summer programs that support styles of debate that US students engage in. Given this, it was important to use an event format that is popular in the US.

Second, we needed to choose an event which both the US NFL and the HDC had experience with. Public Forum is one of the two most popular debate events in the US, it was created by the NFL, students can earn full NFL points for this event, and for the past three summers the HDC has run a summer workshop in Public Forum debate.

Third, there had to be reason to believe that the event could succeed in China. Since most of the participants, including the judges, were new, the event needed to be accessible. And, of course, we needed to be able to have enough judges to cover all of the debates that were anticipated.

Since Public Forum debate is common in the US, since it is accessible, since both the NFL and the HDC have experience with it, and since it has been easy in the US to recruit judges

for the event (and the debates are fledgling) we decided to pursue the development of Public Forum debate. In China, focusing on a single event also made it easy to prioritize resources. Some consideration has been given to adding other events in the future.

### Student Reviews and Skills

In order to assess the initial academic value of the program, thirty students at the Associated School of Remin University (the number one high school in China, RFDZ is a part of this school) were asked to fill out a survey about their participation in the program. The survey asked students to choose from a check list of reasons that they may have chosen to participate in the program and also asked some questions that were designed to get students to think about how debate may have benefited them.

The first question on the survey asked the students why they chose to participate in the course. This question was asked to determine if the students had joined debate in order to gain experience with Western pedagogical methods and to improve their chances for admission to, and success in, a US university. Although the survey provided these as options for “reasons to participate,” other options were also available. All of the students checked that they joined the program to “learn how to debate and argue.” Twenty-two also checked that they chose to participate in the course to “enhance college admissions prospects” and seventeen checked that those chose debate to “enhance college admissions prospects to a US university.”

A review of the surveys indicates that students perceive that participation in debate helped them develop many of the qualities and skills that William Bennet explains that the Chinese are

looking to develop. Thirteen of the surveyed students indicated that debate helped them improve their confidence. One debater noted that debate helped him become “more confident” when he “argue(d)” and another said it helped him be “confident speak (to) out loud.” Yet another said she would be “less nervous or tense when there is another opportunity to speak out.” One student specifically noted that debate makes him “more confident in exchanging ideas in English” and another noted that it helped her “overcome stage fright.”

Remember that active learning focuses on the responsibility of the learner in the learning process and engaging in cooperative learning, including dialogue with self, dialogue with others, observing, and doing. Dialogue with the self includes critical thinking – thinking reflexively about topics, including what a person ought to think about a topic, and includes self-evaluation of the thinking.

Four students noted that debate improved their critical thinking skills. One of them noted that debate encouraged her to “try to come up with answers to arguments on her own based on what she knew.” Another said that her participation encouraged her to “think about solutions to problems that will work.” Writing about his experience at the HDCSW, one student noted, “Within two weeks, we learned how to research, how to rebuttal, how to ask and answer questions and how to conclude. When I actually utilize them in studying, I see that I am getting absolutely more efficient.”

Dialogue with others involves “intense” discussion about the issue at hand. Two students said that debate helped them improve their ability to work with another person (their partner) and four noted that debate helped them with working in groups. One student noted, “(D)ebate is a kind of team work. You cannot do debate only by yourself, so you need to know how to categorize



with others and organizes others to solve problems”

Observation includes listening to someone else doing something that is related to what they are learning about. Debaters are involved in observation when they are listening to the speeches of their opponents and listening to practice debates. Three students noted that debate helped them to become better listeners. One student explained that debate helped him to “catch information in quick speed and respond.” Two students noted that debate improved their related note taking skills.

Three students noted that debate improved their overall sense of initiative and commitment. One student also noted how the overall learning experience motivated him: “I used to have no motivation to study, but now I do. I want to go to a wonderful university, and I want a learning life in an ancient building full of the atmosphere and knowledge. This is my goal. To achieve this, I have to work harder and not waste a minute. This might be the power of will, which I got from debate at (the) Harvard (Debate Council Summer Workshops.”

In addition to improvements in self-confidence, initiative, commitment, and active learning, students reported the development of a number of other academic skills. Six noted improvements in their English and some identified specific ways that improvement occurred. One student, for example, noted that debate participation improved his ability to use English as a “working language” and to “recognize different accents.”

Other students noted improvements in their research ability. One student noted that, “I learned how to find information in a particular category” and others reported gains in knowledge needed to do research from the use of search engines and Google Scholar. Many students commented on how debate helped them to organize information. One student explained that

debate helped him to “classify the information” and to “find the importance of each information when they (are) used in different situations.” Another student explained that debate helped her to “sort out” the information, and yet another noted that debate helped him “establish the links and causality between information.” One noted that debate helped him to “organize information.”

## Review

The data presented here is obviously limited. It is drawn from self-report studies from a limited number of students in one class who have participated in a debate program for a few months. Nonetheless, the data does reflect reason for optimism, as it is consistent with previously conducted research on the academic benefits of debate (some of which was also done with self-report studies). Overall, the limited data to date does suggest that participation in debate improves the skill and experience set that William Bennet says that Chinese educators and government officials are looking for. Additional data, including diagnostic studies, will need to be done to provide strong support for this claim.

## Lessons Learned

Over slightly over the last year, I have learned many lessons about developing debate abroad, particularly in Asia, and more specifically, in China. In this final section, I will share some thoughts in order that the program (or at least parts of it) that has been developed in China could serve as a model to support the development of debate elsewhere.

A highly reputable educational institution. I'm not simply relaying bias when saying that I think that the name "Harvard" played an important role in promoting debate in China. That the curriculum was designed by coaches of the Harvard Debate Council, that the summer program was at Harvard, that Harvard had a strong debate program, and that Harvard debate coaches were heavily involved in the design and organization of the program were all important in getting support from the schools in adopting the program.

My experience in both China and Korea was that educational consumers are highly brand sensitive and that it was critical to have that brand support in developing the program. In education, those brands in Asia are Harvard, MIT, Yale, Princeton, and the other Ivy League schools. As William Bennett explained in 2012, "When I engaged Chinese parents about their children, they would often say, "My son (or daughter) is going to Princeton (or fill in the elite American university)." I would respond, "Great! What year is your son or daughter right now?" And they would say, "Three years old." And, as he continues to explain, beyond the brand respect, American Universities in China are held in high regard: "(T)o the Chinese people, American universities, for all their shortcomings and blemishes, are still beacons of freedom, individualism and self-improvement. To them, our universities are emblems of the highest achievement."

A highly reputable academic organization. I'm also not simply relaying bias when saying that I think that the involvement of the US National Forensic League played a critical role in promoting debate in China. A partnership with the US NFL is important in China because it not only provides credibility to the company so that they were not just another company trying to develop debate in China, but also because it provides two critical things for the students. First, it provided an enhanced framework for competition. The top qualifiers from their regional

tournaments will qualify to the US National Forensic League tournament – the largest academic competition in the world – in June of this year. Chinese students also have the opportunity to join the US NFL and participate in its honor society. This gives the Chinese students an immediate opportunity to enroll in a Western academic organization and it is one that they are highly interested in. Students have just begun joining the NFL and soon we will be able to assess efforts in that regard. Many students have started signing up, however, and the NFL has been provided with an office in Shanghai by the company, so it is expected that growth in Chinese memberships will be strong.

Involvement of the schools. In the US, debate is mostly organized around schools, with high schools, universities, and now middle schools fielding debate teams. This moves the recruiting of students to the school level where coaches and students who have regular contact with students can recruit them. Given DEM's strong relationship with the schools, this was a natural way to proceed. Anecdotal evidence suggests that it is a valuable approach. Obviously the growth of debate in China has been significant by any standard. In contrast, in Korea the growth of debate has been slower and there is almost no direct involvement with the schools.

A private, for profit actor. DEM is a private, for profit education management company. In the case of China, involvement from a private company delivered a number of benefits. One, the company brought a lot of capital to the table that it invested in the development of debate. This included my trips to China, training for 100 teachers, the hiring of a significant staff dedicated to the development of debate in China, the hiring and support of many US debate coaches who are now in China, and the promotion of the HDCSW program. Most non-profits would not have access to this kind of capital. Second, the company has a marketing department that has utilized its

capacity to invest time, money, and energy in to the promotion of debate. Third, a long-term profit goal incentivizes the company to “be in it” for the long-term – to promote and grow debate in China over the coming decades. Non-profit initiatives are often one-off programs. Fourth, the company brought many ideas to the table that are derived from its previous experience, including how to best mark the development of debate to a large number of students. Finally, in this instance , the company had a lot of business and government connections that it was able to effectively utilize to promote debate.

Of course, a non-profit actor could fulfill the role of the profit-seeking actor, but it would be essential for the non-profit to have a substantial amount of capital and to have the ability to support the growth and development of debate over the long-term. There are non-profits that can fill this role, there are just very few of them.

Government support. As previously discussed, Zhou Jianhua, the Executive Vice President of the Society for Cultivating Innovators, gave a presentation at the teacher training on the value of debate for China. The Society for Cultivating Innovators is a government supported non-profit dedicated to academic advancement in China. The government of the city of Shanghai is providing financial support for the adoption of debate in some of the city’s schools. The mayor of Wuxi has committed to expanding the debate program in a number of schools in Wuxi. Government support provides a critical message to schools that debate is valuable and also delivers some of the financial support that is needed to make the program affordable, and parts of it free, to all students.

In many ways the support of the multiple actors created a perfect storm that has generated significant growth of debate in China. There, a private actor with substantial capital and

marketing capabilities invested heavily in the promotion of debate in China. Its association with HDC – NFL designed curriculum, the HDC summer camp, and HDC coaches provided significant branding for the program. The NFL delivered the opportunity for students to enroll in a Western honor society and to compete in the largest academic competition in the world right in the United States. Action by government actors gave blessing to all of the activities that were undertaken.

The rapid growth of debate in China proves that when students are provided the opportunity to debate and are encouraged to do so that they will debate. Cooperative efforts mean that more than 1, 500 students have joined debate in one year. The expectation is that 10,000 students per year will participate in the DEM organized program within three years.

## Moving Forward

As the program moves forward, there are a number of things to consider and work on. First, it is important to focus on moving students to more advanced levels of debate. Since the new debaters in China have almost no point of comparison, many of those who have done well think that they have mastered the art of debate and that no further training or advancement is necessary. DEM is currently working very hard to develop ideas and marketing plans that convince students to invest in debate for more than one year.

Second, work needs to be done to learn from the programming that has been offered to date. Teaching methods need to be assessed to determine which ones have been effective and which ones have not. We need to learn about successful and unsuccessful adaptations of the curriculum to specific needs, such as those students with limited English speaking abilities.

Third, a more specific program for students who are enrolled in the debate course but are not debating in the tournaments needs to be developed. It was contemplated early on that a number of students who took the class would not necessarily compete, a public speaking component of the course was developed for these students, but more work needs to be done on focusing curriculum and instruction on this particular group. To date, a substantial portion of the instruction has been directed at those preparing to debate.

Fourth, it is important to prepare the growing number of former US debate coaches who are moving to China to coach debate there to teach and live in China. Over the past six months, those who are presently coaching and teaching in China have assembled a wealth of knowledge based on their experience and we need to put in place a strong system to capture that knowledge not only to improve on the educational experience for those already there but also so that it can be shared with people who are planning to go over to China as new coaches. As part of this effort, a remote course on the program is being offered at Wake Forest University this spring. In the course, students will learn about the Dipont program, the National Forensic League, living and working in China, teaching and coaching debate, contemporary educational instructional methods, and teaching Chinese students in the English language schools.

## Conclusion

A pedagogy of empowerment consists of an approach to learning that empowers students to improve their own lives and potentially the lives of those around them. For many students, one road to empowerment consists of availing themselves of opportunities to study at leading Western

universities. In order to gain acceptance to those universities and to succeed in them, these students desire opportunities to participate in academic experiences that are deemed valuable by these universities and will also give them experience learning in the ways that US students are taught and have the opportunity to learn.

Competitive academic debate provides students with opportunities to develop confidence, to take initiative, and to make a commitment to a successful outcome. This is all accomplished while students are using the practice of argumentation and debate to develop critical thinking, public speaking, research, and idea organization skills in an environment that fosters active, cooperative, and experiential learning. These opportunities, skills, and experiences will serve students who wish to study in US universities well.

Developing debating opportunities for students that will survive into the long-term and that will serve large numbers of students is best accomplished by developing partnerships between a number of actors that are well positioned to develop these opportunities and to leverage support for students as they continue to improve as debaters. Different actors bring different opportunities and resources to the table, so it is best if these actors can work together.

As debating opportunities are developed for students, it is important to continually assess these efforts and to act on these assessments to further the opportunities. The longer the program develops and the more students participate, the more accurate the assessments will become and the more opportunities for continued improvement will exist. There is always more to be done the program moves forward with developing debating opportunities for students that will empower them to achieve their life goals.



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