

## FACULTY HELP IN INTERCOLLEGIATE CONTESTS

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FRANK H. LANE  
University of Pittsburgh

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**H**OW much help should an instructor of public speaking give to a student preparing for an Intercollegiate contest?"

A professor of public speaking put this question to an Oxford man who is now the head of the department of English in a well-known institution.

"That depends upon custom," he replied.

I thought it might be well for us to ask ourselves the question, How much help should an instructor give to a student who is competing in an intercollegiate contest? Is there any standard by which to define the province of each and to regulate their co-operation? If we assume that the contest is between the students of one institution and those of another, we shall have a fair contest only when the instructors in different colleges offer approximately the same amount of help to the contestants under their charge; if they vary greatly in the amount offered, the contest is bound to be unfair.

Let us consider the relationship between the teacher and the student first in the oratorical contest and secondly in the debate.

There are several methods of revising a speech or oration. When I first began to teach, I learned that the instructor of public speaking in one of the large universities of the Middle West took into his library the oration winning first place in the local contest and revised it as he thought it ought to be revised, and then turned it over to the student to be delivered in the intercollegiate contest. This was my first intimation that such a practice existed, but since then I have heard of a number of similar instances. Not long ago the president of a denominational college told a member of his faculty that the instructor of public speaking was expected to write the college oration. This is a pretty definite answer to the question about the amount of help; but can we accept it as a general custom?

Recently a professor of history, just graduated by one of the leading universities in the East, was asked by a student who had won the local contest for a criticism of the speech which was to be revised for the intercollegiate contest. The professor replied, "Your speech lacks plan. I will write out four propositions for you to develop, and then you may close with this quotation from Shakespeare." Such a method seems to imply that the nature and purpose of our contests are not to give the student training and experience, but to win a victory and show the superiority of one college over another.

Let us consider another method. Suppose a loosely connected series of paragraphs has won the local contest. The instructor well knows that the speech is hopeless in its present form. He realizes also that the student has neither time nor ability to study model speeches and use the result of his study in an original way. Looking over the fifteen or sixteen paragraphs, the instructor finds in two of them the semblance of an idea, and suggests that the student amplify these two paragraphs as the body of his speech, and then close with a summary. Instead of the disjointed paragraphs, there is now a reasonably well-unified speech. But is this the result of the student's own work? Has not the instructor become the architect? Is he not the dominant force in the speech? When judges come to estimate the value of the production, will they not put emphasis on the idea, which was insignificant in the student original, and on the plan, which was altogether lacking in the first draft?

Now suppose we have a similar series of paragraphs under a different method of revision. In this case, the instructor considers, that if the student is to dominate the speech and to compete with another student, no change be made to interfere with the student's conception. The instructor, therefore, suggests changes merely in diction, sentence structure, and paragraph unity. To do more than this, the instructor thinks, would deprive the student of the leading part in the composition. In its final form the speech would lack sequence and unity, and the few suggestions about diction, sentence, and grammar would have but little value when the judges come to consider the oration. The ideal of this instructor is widely different from that of the instructors thus far mentioned.

Let us take one more method. There is a sequel to the story of the professor of history who offered the student four propositions and a closing quotation. After the student received the criticism, he consulted the instructor of public speaking. The instructor read the speech carefully and then said, "I do not see what you are trying to do. Tell me in a few words." The student was nonplussed. He was advised to go home and write out in a sentence the gist of each paragraph, and then consider the relationship of the sentences. The next day the instructor said, "Do your sentences seem to be related?" "No," said the student, "but the professor of history told me to use these four propositions and this quotation, and I believe that will be best." "But," said the instructor, "you surely are not going to use another man's plan. If you cannot work out a plan of your own, you cannot represent the college in the state contest. You are a Senior, but you have had no experience in planning a speech. I will give you some suggestions. Read these five speeches, and study them to discover the plan, and then come back and talk to me about them." When the student had done this, he saw that it was useless to try to do anything with the paragraphs of his first speech, and decided to take an entirely new theme. After he had worked out and developed his own plan, he said, "Professor, I don't care if I fail to get a place on the state contest. My experience in writing this speech will be worth more to me than a victory gained by the use of Professor Blank's plan."

These four different methods of revision or modifications of them are likely to be back of any oratorical contest as it now exists. The first method gives the instructor unlimited power to revise. According to the president of the denominational college, the instructor may write the oration; according to the professor of history he may offer four propositions and a quotation. This method leads to a student-faculty production, a Beaumont-and-Fletcher comedy or tragedy as you prefer, and it destroys the assumption that the contest is between students. It seems to be justified on the ground that the authorities expect the instructor to serve the institution in this way, and that victory is needed for the general welfare. The second method is a combination of the first and last. It gives the student the advantage of the instructor's

analysis for central things, and yet allows the student to do some work. But the influence of the instructor is dominant, and destroys the supposition that the contest is between students. The third method does not deprive the student of the leading part in the speech, but since it suggests only minor changes, it benefits the student but little either as a means of education or as a means of winning a victory. Of course it interferes but little with the idea that the contest is between students. The last method is truly educational because it shows the student how to develop his powers and allows him to dominate the speech. The result is an entirely student production in harmony with the assumption that the contest is between students.

The use of such widely different methods of revision is bound to result in an unfair contest. The fact that some instructors have helped much, some moderately, and others but little makes impossible a fair competition. Where is the fault? Does it not lie in our failure to define definitely the province of the instructor. Someone says the whole problem is one of simple honesty. Granted. But where is our standard of judgment? Each instructor rightly maintains that it is his privilege and duty to help as much as his opponents help. If one institution is frequently defeated, the instructor there concludes that his rivals are offering more help than he is giving, and he decides that he must give more help, if the college that he serves is to win its fair share of the contests. We find ourselves in a position analogous to that of the nations in respect to disarmament. All agree that disarmament is a fine ideal, but declare that it is impractical. Each nation, therefore, proceeds to pile up dreadnought after dreadnought. As the nations cannot fix a limit for armament, so the instructors cannot agree on the amount of help that an instructor may offer in an intercollegiate contest.

The same lack of standard is evident in the debating situation. A few years ago an instructor began work in an institution which had a successful debating record. His teams were unsuccessful, and he heard much praise of his predecessor. After a year of service, he was told by a member of the faculty that his predecessor had written the main speeches and the rebuttals for the debating teams. The same practice is referred to by Professor Lyman in an article

in the *Public Speaking Review*. "The debate," he says, "displays the work of the coaches, not of the debaters themselves." Professor Trueblood and Professor Woolbert are, I think, in substantial agreement about the work of the coach. One says that the briefs should be submitted to the instructor for "revision and help in the ordering of the material and general plan." The other says that the "work is an exercise in ultimate analysis and intensive study of material and method." But if the instructor makes the ultimate analysis, does he not dominate the debate? If he orders the material and the general plan, does he not perform the vital thing? Many would agree to such a procedure in the classroom, but in an intercollegiate contest they think it makes the instructor the dominant factor, and thus destroys the assumption that the debate is between students. Some teachers think the teams should be entirely free from faculty influence as they are in the English universities. Others say that it is not a coachless team that we want but a better-coached team, and they suggest that we call in the professor of sociology, or history, or economics, or perhaps all of them to help the instructor in public speaking. Others think that this would put too much emphasis on the faculty part of the debate, which is already too great in some institutions. Professor Robinson says that there is a consensus of opinion that a team ought not to be without a coach, and that there is an educative value in intense preparation under proper direction. But how are we to interpret "proper direction"? So far as I know, there is no consensus of opinion about the amount of help that a teacher should give a student. One instructor writes the speeches; one orders the material and plan; one gives merely general direction; and one believes in no help at all. But suppose we could get a consensus of opinion by a questionnaire as Professor Robinson secured the one about the desirability of a coach. Would such a standard be of much service? If it were practicable, it would be a great help in obtaining a fair contest. But if the province of the coach cannot be defined so as to equalize the amount of help offered by the different instructors, we should be just where we are now. The contest would be unfair and the assumption that the contest is between students would fall.

One thing that complicates the situation is the fact that we are working under two ideals: one to win, and the other to educate. When the ideal of victory is uppermost, the instructor shows the student how to do a particular thing instead of revealing the principle and letting him work out its application. This tends to destroy the educational ideal. Professor O'Neill makes an interesting comment on the struggle between these two ideals: "The desire to win becomes so strong that it affects not only the team but the coach also. The coach is always a human being, and when he is constantly working with a team whose single thought is how to win this debate, it is almost impossible for him to adhere strictly to the true pedagogical purpose of the contest. But even if at the start the coach is sufficiently conscientious in his ideals as a teacher, he is hardly allowed to remain so. The student body, the local press, and the school board demand victory. The instructor sees that it is victory or his job, and he needs the job."

This conflict of ideals and lack of a definite standard to define the province of the instructor tend to make the contest unfair. I believe, however, that there are several ways of improving the situation.

First, we may make it a point of honor that students receive no aid whatever in the preparation of their speeches or debates for intercollegiate contests. If this were practicable, the contest would become a training-ground where the student could put into practice the lessons of the classroom. The ideal of winning would tend to draw forth all the powers of the speaker and would thus become truly educational. The contest would be between individual students.

Secondly, we may have it thoroughly understood that the instructor may give the student all the help possible. This would define definitely the work of the instructor. He would have no fear of helping too little or too much. He would have power limited only by his own and the student's resources. He could choose his gambit and play his living men to win the game. The contest would be a royal sport. But instead of assuming that the contest is between students, we should all know that it is between the

instructor and possibly the faculty of one institution represented by a student or a team and a similar force in another institution represented in the same way. If we fix the standard anywhere between the extremes of refusing help and giving as much as possible, we shall have such diversity of opinion about the proper amount that the contests are bound to be unfair.

In the third place, we may have a contest under entirely different conditions. We may assign a general field before the date of the contest, and let the student speak extemporaneously on some topic drawn by him from a list prepared by a committee. I understand that this method has been successfully used in the contests of the secondary schools. We tried it with the Freshmen last year, and had a lively contest. Such a plan results in a contest about as fair as any that can be arranged. The student is thrown entirely on his own resources. He may get as much general preparation as possible but he can receive no training for the particular speech. Furthermore, I see no reason why we may not have a discussion of some general subject. Each institution could have three speakers as in the formal debate. They could be graded individually, and the side receiving the highest average would be the winner of the discussion. They would draw their topics and be given adequate time for the preparation of the speeches as in the extemporaneous contest just mentioned. I am not at all sure that this kind of contest should supersede the kind that we have had for so many years, but it has a number of advantages. It assures a contest between students. The contestant will have no advantage because he has been given more direct help than his opponents, and he will have no disadvantage because he has not been given so much. He could get no special coaching, which is valuable largely in getting a decision, but he could get as much general preparation as possible, which is the only training that has educational value. On the other hand, the question of help by the instructor does not enter. He can have no direct part and need not accuse himself of offering too little or too much help. Moreover, he is not relieved from the responsibility of getting good results. His success will depend upon conscientious classroom work and not upon concentrated effort upon a single speech.

I do not wish to be misunderstood. I have no desire to attack the methods which I have mentioned or the ideals back of them. I have set forth some methods of revising a speech and some ideals about the province of the debating instructor that I might show that our contests are not fair and that they can be fair only when we have a definite standard that will regulate the influence of the instructor. I have mentioned three ways of improving the situation. They all give us a definite standard with reference to the relationship of the instructor and the student in the inter-collegiate contest. Two of them eliminate the instructor from any direct part in the contest and the other gives him full power. I see no way of establishing between these extremes a standard that will give us a fair competition.





