

Debating for Success: Academic Achievement, Self-Efficacy, Civic Empowerment and the Milwaukee Debate League

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DEBATING FOR SUCCESS: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, SELF-EFFICACY,
CIVIC EMPOWERMENT AND THE MILWAUKEE DEBATE LEAGUE

by

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ABSTRACT
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Over the course of the past three decades Urban Debate Leagues have been established on the premise that they improve schooling for underserved students. Founded in predominantly urban areas, these leagues have been positioned as a recent educational reform effort intended to empower students and foster educational and personal growth. This dissertation focuses specifically on the ways in which students involved in a Milwaukee Urban Debate League participating school have been affected by the experience with respect to academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. Through focusing on student voice, this research project examines the ways in which students manifest change in educational-related aptitude and effort both within and beyond the classroom as a result of participating in Urban Debate League sponsored activities. In addition to the effects on academic achievement, this study also addresses factors pertaining to how participating in urban debate influences student self-esteem and the extent to which they involve themselves in activities beyond the classroom at school and also outside the school within the local community. Findings indicate that urban debate participation has a positive effect on academics, although certain skill areas are affected more than others. The findings also indicate positive effects on self-efficacy related to self-esteem, but to a lesser extent enhancement of social interactions and personal expectations for going off to college. In the area of civic empowerment, the results are less conclusive that urban debate participation alters student involvement in and beyond their school community. Interviews and observations serve as the primary sources of data for the purposes of this study.

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Thomas O. Noonan, B.S., M.A.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

As with a great many things in life, the genesis of this research project began rather unexpectedly. In the spring of 2006 as I was charting my final path as a doctoral student, I was contacted by Melissa Wade, the Director of Debate at Emory University and co-Director of the National Debate Project. With a quick introductory email and follow-up phone call I was asked to become the local educational consultant for the newest Urban Debate League (UDL) in the nation right here in Milwaukee. Having obtained a 3-year \$1.2 million grant from the Einhorn Family Charitable Trust, the National Debate Project needed someone locally who could foster a relationship with Marquette University, as well as help them network with area schools. Despite only interacting with Wade as a high school coach many years ago, I was one of only two people in Milwaukee that she knew and felt she could contact for assistance with this undertaking. From our earliest conversations, she indicated her belief that a university partner was essential for developing a successful UDL, and in my then capacity as Director of Debate at Marquette University she stated I would be the ideal person to help with this undertaking.

Context of Urban Debate in Milwaukee

In simple terms, the intent of the new league was to develop roughly 25-30 debate programs in Milwaukee area schools (of all varieties – choice, charter, parochial, etc.) to be an avenue of ‘urban education reform’ that utilizes debate as a vehicle to

hook kids on learning. The essential idea espoused by advocates of urban debate is that students are empowered as thinkers and speakers in the classroom (Wade, 1999). Too often students are told to sit and be quiet. Debate affords students the opportunity to command the classroom environment. They are the speakers, they direct the conversation, and adults take a secondary role as judges who sit quietly, listen, and offer evaluation at the end. The UDL experience is intended to get young people in some of the most disadvantaged schools in urban areas active, and in turn see how those efforts impact educational achievement and self-efficacy. Beyond direct involvement in debate, which is by its own terms academic, students would be able to apply skills from the activity in their classes. Learning would be more naturalistic and enjoyable based on having the skills to make schoolwork manageable. Students who otherwise do not think they were good at school might gain confidence and see themselves as capable of going off to college. Milwaukee became the twentieth city nationwide to have an Urban Debate League, and there immediately appeared to me to be some really interesting research opportunities given the scope of this three-year project. Given the long-term nature of the project as well as the ability to integrate urban and suburban students into the program (the first of its kind for any UDL), this league offered some intriguing possibilities for in-depth research.

As I first began my involvement in the Milwaukee Debate League (MDL), my initial thoughts were to focus on producing an ethnographic piece that would attempt to capture the culture of urban debate throughout Milwaukee. Upon further reflection, it seemed to me that more specific questions with respect to the student experience

needed to be addressed. I couldn't help but thinking there were some broad questions important for setting the context for understanding a single urban debate league such as 1) how have these programs evolved over time?, 2) what has sustained these programs across several decades?, and 3) what are the possibilities for even more such leagues throughout the country? It struck me that there is presently an interesting story to be told about how students who actively participate in urban debate league programming connect their experience to the classroom and related academic endeavors. And in focusing on student experiences within a single team there is an opportunity to learn about the 'team culture' that is operative in a participating urban debate league school. Team culture may be described as the ways in which the students and the teacher-coach relate to one another and develop community as a given urban debate team within a league. There exists is an opportunity to better understand more about the individual student experience as well as the collective team culture for urban debate teams.

The development of these leagues has now spanned several decades and includes over twenty major urban areas (several leagues have even been founded following Milwaukee). I think that sharing the story behind the establishment of the Milwaukee experience may help address some broader issues that in turn will help to illuminate the more specific experiences had by individual students. Yet, before any comprehensive look at the Milwaukee league is approached, it is important for the reader to have some basic information about the activity of debate in general. As such, I will begin by briefly sharing some information about high school policy debate. I will

then provide some additional context about how urban debate has distinguished itself from traditional debate. Finally, in the last section of this introductory chapter I will provide information about the general organization of this paper.

Contextualizing Traditional High School Debate

The aim of this research is not to chronicle the storied history of competitive high school debate nor be an advocate for speech and debate teams; however, it is important for the reader to have some basic understanding of the activity. While I can personally attest to the benefits of the activity, the purpose is to seek a better understanding of the efforts of inner city schools that have banded together in hopes of reaching students and improving their levels of academic achievement. The focal point for telling some brief history will be on how urban debate leagues serve inner city schools and how the leagues have developed over time. Of course, such understanding of urban debate leagues requires some basic background on the activity of high school policy debate in general.

Policy debate has a rich history and has been supported for nearly a century by an official national organization, the National Forensic League. Those in education know well that the 'other NFL' promotes citizen advocacy and expression through interscholastic debate and a myriad of other speech and dramatic events. Since the founding of the NFL in 1925, over one million students across the 50 states have participated in the organization (NFL online, 2010). Students compete in events ranging from extemporaneous speaking to dramatic interpretation of literature to storytelling.

The hallmark event, however, of both the organization and of the annual national tournament is undoubtedly policy debate. It is the culminating event of the week-long tournament and signifies the high point of all national speech related competitions.

Traditional policy debate competition is comprised of two two-person teams, the affirmative team upholding the resolution and the negative team standing in opposition. The resolution, or topic itself under disputation, is selected through national and statewide balloting, and is the topic for the entire year. For example, the topic selected for the 2009-2010 school year was: *Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase social services for persons living in poverty in the United States.* Within the annual resolution is ample room for students to research and define sub-topic areas. Students meet in competition on weekends, sometimes both Fridays and Saturdays, and engage in a series of several rounds of debate depending on the structure of the tournament. Each round of competition is approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes in length with the four students taking turns in speaking. Each team has an equal amount of time and there is some additional preparation time built into the round to allow students some brief time to prepare before each speech; typically a total of between 5-10 minutes is allotted to each team and it can be taken in short increments.

The first portion of a debate round is a series of constructive speeches, four in all. In these 8-minute speeches, students construct their primary arguments both for and against the resolution. In between each constructive speech is a 3-minute cross-examination period where a member of the opposing teams gets to question the person who has just spoken. The questions typically are used to clarify the intent of the

argument and commit the speaker to a particular position so that counter arguments can be made in the ensuing speech. A good cross-examination is lively and considered the highlight of most debates from an audience perspective. This is the only time in the debate itself where there is direct interaction between the two teams, otherwise, it really is a series of individual speeches that is only connected through the ideas presented and refuted. The final portion of the debate, following alternating constructive and cross-examination speeches, is a series of rebuttal speeches that are 5 minutes each. In this phase of the debate, each speaker intends to solidify the best arguments that are put forth for his/her respective team and leave the judge with a more positive assessment of which side has a better advantage in supporting or negating the resolution.

As for judging the debate itself, students typically are speaking before a single teacher, coach or college debater who has willingly given up a Saturday to accept the role as the critic. In some cases, teams may even speak before a panel of three or even five judges. Judges are evaluating students on several different areas including: organization, argument development, communicative ability, and overall persuasiveness. There are some distinctions in judging styles known within the community as 'judging philosophies' wherein the judge is focusing on specific types of skills. For the purposes of this research, it is really not all that essential for the reader to know the intricacies of debate judging styles except to know that some judges focus more on communication skills and others tend to weigh analytical argument analysis more heavily. Given a myriad of judging styles that have evolved with the activity over

time, students are expected to come to know and adapt to judges round-by-round. There is a premium placed on adapting to the audience, more specifically the judge, and one of the hallmarks of the activity is the skill set that is developed related to adapting to one's audience (Fine, 1999).

Preparation for debate is largely done outside of the confines of the tournament event, although there is a growing philosophical divide among teachers and coaches about the extent to which time at tournaments should be allowed in between each debate round for preparing to debate the next team. In general terms, students tend to engage in extensive research and argument writing during out-of-tournament time in which they create cases and any number of pre-written arguments that relate to a single idea. Students amass several 'tubs' of evidence which cover any number of issues that can become part of the debate.

Among the captivating things about student participation is the dynamic of team development. In most schools, students participate in the activity in clubs and groups not associated with a particular class. Students along with their teachers spend time before and after school in preparation, learning the topic and practicing speeches. Team sizes can range from two to fifty or more students. The essential component is creating two-person teams that participate in tournament competition.

Distinguishing Urban Debate Leagues from Traditional Debate

Among the most important features that distinguish an Urban Debate League from the traditional debate circuit is the types of schools and students involved. For the

most part, traditional debate teams reside in suburban schools, and the vast majority of students participating in the activity are Caucasian. One only need look around at the average invitational tournament to see the predominance of non-minority students. A clear change in student participation through the advent of UDLs has meant the incorporation of many African-American and Hispanic students sharing in the activity.

Over the past several decades debate has experienced a precipitous decline in urban schools. Teacher turnover and budget cuts have rendered once preeminent teams defunct. At the heart of the UDL movement is to bring the activity back to schools in major urban areas. Another facet of urban school participation is reaching out to students of color. Given the historical trends of urban decline and 'white flight' to the suburbs, urban schools are serving a disproportional number of minority students (Watson, 1989). Combine racial and ethnic factors with low socio-economic conditions and students in the central city are without voice both within and beyond the classroom. Proponents of Urban Debate Leagues seek to bring the same educational speech and debate opportunities to underserved students in depressed urban areas. Leagues target schools that are chronically underperforming as a means of providing skill development to students, particularly in the areas of literacy and language arts. Additionally, students who are invited to participate are welcome to do so in hope that the connections to the activity will also promote an increase in self-efficacy. Whereas traditional debate competitions presently draw schools from predominantly suburban areas, UDLs put the activity squarely back to work where advocacy skills are needed most, the central city.

Another distinguishing feature among traditional debate programs and UDL schools is access to resources. As with all activities, funding does matter. Where this is evidenced most specifically in debate is through the evidence that students have access to in order to utilize in competition. Debaters rely heavily on research materials to substantiate their claims over the course of the debate. Access to high price databases, university libraries, and published debate evidence materials is afforded to those schools with means. Plus, a related issue is access to summer debate institutes that undertake research and provide starting materials to begin the season. Traditional teams, or the parents connected to these programs, can afford to send their children to pricey summer institutes hosted by a number of colleges and universities. These summer programs can range from one to seven weeks in length and cost from \$900 to \$4500. Amid some skill related work, the primary benefit for a student attending a summer debate institute is obtaining mounds of evidence, which is in turn used in competition throughout the season.

This is where the UDL operates very differently. Research materials are provided by the league to ensure that all have equal access. And in some cases, leagues operate their own summer programs to provide these resources. One of the substantive barriers for schools to participate in policy debate is that there are vast resource disparities among schools and districts. Some of the best financed schools in the nation are in the suburbs of Chicago, where budgets are in the tens of thousands of dollars. Private schools in Atlanta and Dallas also possess significant resources for competition. A clear

intent of the UDL movement is to level the debate 'playing field' so that all schools have equal opportunity for competitive success.

In many places, the materials produced for the local UDL are incorporated by the wider debate community. In Milwaukee, for example, during the second and third year of the league's existence the state coaches association worked to tailor the topic areas for beginning debates to those used by UDL students. Leagues elsewhere craft similar arrangements with local organizations. Students will also engage in original research. The essence of debate means providing evidence. Unlike a presidential debate where sources are rarely if ever provided, students in debate must read and have on hand in written form their researched materials. For every contention stated, debaters generally read evidence directly in support. Not only are these students focused on good public speaking skills they are working on reading skills as well. There is incentive to be a clear reader in order to be able to deliver more arguments and evidence within the allotted speech times. Students come to understand and appreciate the power that evidence gives them in the round. Often times, the debate turns on the quality and veracity of one team's evidence.

Another important aspect of a league is an emphasis on not just creating individual school teams, but building a community around the activity. Part of building a team for league involvement is the participation in UDL tournament events. It is important to bring the students together from within their city to form relationships for the future. In many cities, league schools take turns hosting these events in order to bring students together. This model comes from Atlanta where schools rotate in

providing the facilities for other league schools. In some of the other leagues a local university partner may serve as host.

Urban Debate League tournaments are one day events on Saturdays. Students will participate in four rounds of debate, each round lasting approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes. In a tournament setting, debaters will debate both sides of the topic; two rounds as the affirmative advocating for the adoption of the resolution and two rounds as negatives arguing against said adoption. Debaters from two schools will square off against each other with a judge watching and evaluating the debate.

During the competition, the judges are silent and allow the debate to unfold without intervening. Judges take detailed notes, called flowing in debate since they often make columns on the pages they write and align things as arguments move across the page. Only at the conclusion of the debate will judges speak. In many settings, judges provide what is called an 'oral critique' in addition to the written comments they place on their ballot. Judges will also make stylistic comments about public speaking ability on their ballot and award the speakers with points in order to rank the four participants.

Simply put, no two debates are alike. The combinations of analytical arguments that can be made along with the evidence that can be read allows for nearly unlimited possibilities. The fact that the adult judges remain quiet during the debate is important. Unlike the traditional classroom where students are more often silent, this is a setting in which the roles are reversed. While the judge is a decision maker, they are reactive to what the students have presented and the evaluation is based exclusively on what the

students have presented. Self-confidence is promoted in this manner as students assert themselves and take an active role. What is clear to anyone observing a debate is that students appear to be empowered when speaking. After working through uncertainties or nervousness, it is telling how quickly they find ease in the role of public speaker. These events appear to do a great deal to foster community among the member schools, and in spite of the competition these young people form bonds of friendship that cut across the divides in race, ethnicity and socio-economic status they likely experience outside the activity.

Overview of this Research Project

The Urban Debate League concept may be viewed, in part, as another innovative approach in a sea of efforts to reform urban schooling. Such innovation is not isolated to Milwaukee. From its inception in Atlanta in 1985, Urban Debate Leagues have been cultivated across the country from Baltimore to Chicago to San Francisco, with the newest leagues in Nashville and Miami. Proponents of UDLs assert that these entities are grass roots efforts for improving student achievement and participation in schooling (Wade, 1999). Further, supporters of the UDL movement contend that the focal point of education is recast as students become the primary speakers and teachers and other adults become the listeners, and more often than not they energetically assume responsibility for their own learning by conducting original research and crafting their own materials for debate (Wade, 1999; Lee, 1998).

While the Urban Debate League concept is several decades old, to date there has been no broad historical examination regarding the development of these programs, nor more importantly have there been any case studies that focus on the experiences of the students that participate in these programs. While anecdotal information about this type of programming is widespread, there is actually very little in the way of scholarly research that specifically focuses on urban debate in general. The anecdotal information that does exist generally consists of former urban debate league participants, now coaching at the collegiate level, reflecting on their experiences. Even of these there are few, and almost all stem from the perspective of African-American men and women. While other diverse groups are indeed represented in leagues across the country, very little of their voice is represented in any UDL related literature. In particular, attention paid to Hispanic students is scarce. Consequently, research that speaks to the development of these programs and the respective successes and limitations that Hispanic students experience as a result of their participation is worth exploring. The critical question to answer with this proposed research relates to how students may be affected by their participation in the activity.

The central question for this research project is as follows: What effect does participation in an urban debate league have on academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment for Hispanic secondary school students?

This is an important research question to ask. The focus of urban debate is to serve as a means of improving education, not just merely to create more clubs or after school

activities. It is intended to be an urban education reform program that serves students in underserved schools. Thus, I'd like to know more about how students assess the effects of their own participation. I am wondering if the students who chose to participate in urban debate believe that they benefit from the activity in some way, be it academically, with respect to self-esteem, or even through an increase in civic empowerment. Exploring this question through student interviews and classroom observations will assist us in more fully understanding the student experience in urban debate. I think proponents of educational reform would also be interested in knowing this as well. An in depth look at the students immersed within the Milwaukee Debate League may also serve to illuminate the importance of Hispanic student experiences.

Project Framework

So far, I have set forth the initial context for this research as it relates to the direct inquiry of student experiences of urban debate. Specifically, this study will focus on Hispanic high school students in the Milwaukee Debate League.

In order to provide the appropriate framework from which to examine student experiences, I thought it essential to begin by providing some background about debate in general and then offering some additional analysis of the ways in which urban debate leagues have distinguished themselves over the past few decades.

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of UDL development nationwide in order to provide the reader with some context leading up to the formation of the Milwaukee league. The next section chronicles the start-up of the Milwaukee Debate League and

information about the programming that has been made available to students. The approach used to set-up the Milwaukee league was different than other leagues so added attention will be given to this aspect, as well as a brief look at the support it received in partnership with Marquette University and the annual summer Marquette University Debate Institute. The final section of Chapter 2 delineates the objectives for UDLs and provides a look at the media coverage that has been given to these programs.

Chapter 3 provides a review of the pertinent literature that relates to this research. The first section is an overview of the topic of urban education reform writ large in an effort to narrow down the emphasis on innovative programming as it exists in large metropolitan areas. The second section presents scholarship on debate in general, whereas the third focuses on scholarship specific to urban debate. Following a comprehensive review of the necessary literature related to debate, attention is given to providing some context around the concept of self-efficacy. Proponents of urban debate proclaim the enhancement of self-efficacy and esteem as an effect of participation; this study will explore this angle as well. As such, an examination of the relevant literature sets the stage for this topic area to be covered. In the final section of this chapter, the pertinent literature with regard to academic achievement for Hispanic students is covered. There is a considerable need to address how urban debate impacts Hispanic students, so this section will establish a foundation from which to ascertain this area of the research.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for the project. The research question is presented, as is a conceptual framework for approaching the fieldwork. Sections are

also included on site and participant selection. Following that are sections that describe data collection and subsequent analysis. Data will be gathered through interviews and classroom observations of several students who have been participating in the Milwaukee Debate League. After the sections pertaining to data is a section that describes research positionality, specifically outlining the connection I have had to the activity and ways in which bias will be checked. The next section describes some of the anticipated limitations for conducting this research. Lastly is a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the interview and observation data. The chapter begins with a review of the methodology used for data analysis. Next follows a brief profile of each of the informants. Following these profiles is a description of the urban debate team at the research site, with specific attention given to the notion of the 'culture of debate.' This is followed by an analysis of the interview and observational data with regard to the three specific domains of academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. It is important to note that this chapter is intended to focus on the informant voices. As noted previously, most of the prior urban debate literature does not emphasize student voice. In an effort to allow these voices to stand out, there will be limited analysis provided in chapter five and more extensive analysis with respect to extant literature is provided in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, provides further analysis with respect to the existing literature profiled in Chapter 3. An examination of team culture at the beginning of the chapter provides the foundation for then reviewing the three domains of academic achievement, social interaction, and civic empowerment. Following

sections on each of those components of the research question, limitations of this study are presented along with some suggestions for further inquiry. The chapter closes with some concluding thoughts and suggestions for how this study might be utilized by those who advocate and support urban debate leagues.

Chapter 2 The Urban Debate League Movement

One potential strategy for approaching urban education reform, advocated by those who have been directly involved, may come from the establishment of an Urban Debate League in each major urban area. Initiated in the Atlanta Public Schools in 1985, and officially sponsored through grant funding starting in 1991, the Urban Debate League program was an initiative designed to foster educational improvement through developing co-curricular debate programs in middle and high schools. Unlike other types of after school programs, such as student clubs and athletics, policy debate offers a skill set that closely relates to other academic areas. In particular, emphasis is placed on skills connected to public speaking, reading, research and critical thinking.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of Urban Debate League development nationwide in order to lend context for understanding the formation of the Milwaukee league. Following this survey of league development nationally, the next section chronicles the start-up of the Milwaukee Debate League and information about the programming that has been made available to students. The MDL was established with different parameters than prior leagues, so added attention will be given to this area as well as to the support it received through partnership with Marquette University and the annual summer Marquette University Debate Institute. The final section of this chapter outlines the objectives for UDLs and provides a look at the media coverage that has been given to these programs.

Historical Background on Urban Debate Leagues

To date there appears to be no comprehensive history written about the development of Urban Debate Leagues over the past several decades. A way to better understand the Milwaukee league is to begin with a broader perspective about how it fits into the larger framework of Urban Debate Leagues nationally.

Following its foundational development in Atlanta, the Urban Debate League concept spread to New York, as the Open Society Institute, funded by George Soros, provided seed grants to fund programs in ten cities across the country. The 'Urban Debate Program' was officially founded in 1997 by funding from the Open Society Institute (OSI established in 1993 – a grant making foundation of the Soros foundations network). A program officer for the OSI outlined the creation of the Urban Debate League program by stating, "OSI funds urban debate leagues (UDLs) because debate provides urban youth with the skills they need to actively participate as citizens in an open society, so that their voices are heard and their opinions are considered in public discourse, both in their communities and beyond" (Breger, 2000). National in its scope, the Urban Debate League Program sought to extend grants to university debate programs which in turn would provide outreach to high schools in their immediate locale. Intensive summer debate institutes, tournament events, evidence materials, teacher mentoring, and year-end awards banquets were incorporated to engage students, teachers, and parents to be part of the local league.

As sponsors of the program, the OSI's stated goal was to "institutionalize competitive policy debate as an extracurricular and academic activity in urban school districts across the United States" (Soros Foundation online, 2003). Beyond the funding directed toward high school program start-ups, the Soros grant also emphasized 'noncompetitive debate initiatives' such as public debate and community based research projects as a means to promote direct democratic actions consistent with its organizational mission (Mitchell, 1998). The Open Society Institute may be best known for its outreach to former Soviet bloc nations in an effort to foster dialogue related to democracy and civic engagement. With that backdrop, the National Debate Project approached partnering with OSI in order to provide funding for UDLs here in the United States as a means of extending democratic dialogue at home. As part of the initial wave of funding, the OSI extended a three-year seed grant of \$300,000 for the creation of a league in St. Louis with the goal of making the program self-sufficient. In its first year, the funding for the St. Louis league afforded some 70 students and 20 teachers to participate in university sponsored summer debate programs (Mueller, 2000). As of 2002, there were 13 leagues up and running with Soros funding with an estimated 12,000 students involved nationwide, with close to 75% of them matriculating to college. As of that time, some 60 colleges and universities were actively recruiting UDL students (Morris, 2002). By 2003, it was estimated that some 242 schools across the country had active UDL programs (Bowler, 2003). And in 2003, a separate \$10,000 grant was given to the National Forensics League to help set up yet another UDL in Houston (Bryant, 2004).

The initial 'Urban Debate' network was re-organized as the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues in 2002 (NAUDL online, 2006). Working in conjunction with the National Debate Project (NDP), the founding partner group from Atlanta, as well as the Association Leaders of Urban Debate (ALoud), NAUDL supports programs with teacher training curriculum materials and financial assistance. Not only has the effort involved thousands of students, but scores of teachers have been an integral part of UDL development as well. By the year 2000, it is estimated that some 200 teachers had been incorporated into debate as a direct result of UDL programming (Ferrand, 2000). According to Ferrand (2000), "The UDL's function as incubator leagues, training new coaches and leveling the social, economic and experiential playing field" (p. 15). This infusion of educators into the activity provided many more opportunities for students. Schools where the needs were greatest were specifically targeted by proponents of urban debate, and teachers are essential to take on the roles of coach and judge, without which these programs would not be sustainable.

Moreover, classes in argumentation and debate were now being offered in nearly half of the schools that are presently active in the UDL network. This has resulted in the most strident efforts at speech education since prior 'speech across the curriculum' efforts. NAUDL reports that approximately \$11 million has been invested in UDL schools by area school districts. Such investment for debate is considered especially efficient at an estimated cost of \$750 per student vs. the traditional suburban school program cost which averages upwards of \$1500. Concludes NAUDL, "The UDL

movement represents the most explosive growth in high school debate in the history of the National Forensic League and its debate-related efforts” (NAUDL online, 2006).

Following the establishment of the initial leagues in Atlanta and New York, another 12 UDLs were launched between 1997 and 2003 including those in Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Newark, Providence, the San Francisco Bay Area, St. Louis, Seattle, Tuscaloosa, and Washington, D.C. The Chicago and Baltimore leagues have been noted for their strong connections to their local school districts, and Baltimore especially for its outreach in many areas including supporting a middle school league, public debates, and other community programs (Mitchell, 1998). As of 2006, the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues estimated that there were nearly 300 urban high schools and over 50 middle schools in the UDL network, some 23,000 plus students had already taken part in UDL programming nationwide (NAUDL online, 2006).

Urban Debate League programs throughout the country are currently in various states of success and disrepair, with particularly strong programs in Atlanta and Baltimore and weaker programs in Boston and the District of Columbia (based on participating schools and funding resources). The league established in Milwaukee, Wisconsin represented the twentieth such endeavor. Among the newest leagues are those along both coasts in both California and Florida. The Los Angeles Urban Debate League was launched in fall 2009 hoping to reach 300 students in 30 schools over 3 years (Villareal, 2009); also launched in fall 2009 was the Duval Urban Debate League in Jacksonville, FL (Galnor, 2009).

At present, it is estimated that approximately 40,000 students from over 500 urban high schools have participated in UDL related programming since the initial program began back in 1985. Of those students who have competed in UDL sanctioned events, NAUDL reports that approximately 87% have been minority students and 78% have been from low-income student populations (NAUDL online, 2006). Leagues are now active in 24 of the largest cities nationwide. Given the number of students that have taken part over the past several decades, it is important to know much more about the implications of this type of educationally-related programming.

Establishing the Milwaukee Debate League

The Milwaukee Debate League began with a gift, and a generous one estimated at \$1.2 million dollars. Wanting to recognize her husband's decade-long business success, Cheryl Einhorn sought to promote the activity that David described as giving him the foundation for his entrepreneurial achievement, and in the city where he attended high school. Einhorn contacted Carol Winkler at Georgia State University, who in turn consulted with her National Debate Project partner Melissa Wade at Emory University. Together, they reached out to me as the then Director of Debate at Marquette University. It was already April 2006, but the goal was to have a full-fledged league up and running by the fall of that very year. Wade and Winkler sent me a proposal that included a synopsis of scholarship on debate and the benefits provided by the activity. That synopsis included a nationwide study detailing reading score improvement, as well as another study that concluded that students who participated in

competitive debate during high school saw substantive increases in their cumulative GPA (Collier, 2003). Another study indicated that students involved in debate had experienced higher levels of self-esteem (Fine, 1999). I was immediately intrigued by the prospects and agreed to become involved.

Within a few short weeks Wade and Winkler were in Milwaukee and we were conducting school visits to see which ones would participate in the pilot year. The goal was to create a league of 30 schools by bringing 10 schools on board each year. We conducted 17 school visits in a matter of a few days. Choice and charter schools were included on the itinerary of school selection visits, as well as a suburban school, Nicolet High School, which was the alma mater of David Einhorn.

Startup of the Milwaukee Debate League even received some attention from local media. *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* ran an article profiling the gift and the emphasis on assisting students cultivate the types of skills Einhorn attributes to his business success. One teacher-coach new to the program indicated her hopefulness that students would be able to apply enhanced critical and communication skills in her world history and world literature classes. The coach remarked, "These are life skills that help make them successful individuals. I really like the active learning process that you have when you're involved in debate...I'm very excited to see what happens academically, come this fall, how this affects their overall grades" (Borsuk, 2006). With this type of enthusiasm we were confident about the prospects for success.

As the planning continued, it was clear that several aspects would be unique to the formation of the Milwaukee league. To begin, some schools with existing debate

programs would be included, and a suburban school would be incorporated as well. Generally, the focus for creating a new league was to go into an urban area where debate teams were no longer in existence. In Milwaukee, however, several prominent public schools with active debate programs were considered for league involvement. Those schools included Rufus King High School, Bradley Tech High School, and Juneau High School. The purpose for including these schools was to pave the way for a strong rapport between the new UDL programs and the existing debate community.

Unique to Milwaukee would be the way in which research assessment would be done systematically throughout the initial three years. As part of the grant agreement established by the Einhorn Charitable Trust Foundation and the National Debate Project, reading assessments were to be completed on an annual basis. The Gray Oral Reading Test (GORT), used for measuring reading level improvement, was employed at the beginning of each year. The expectation was that teachers would handle both base-line and post-year evaluations to track the progress of each student. Additionally, contact was made with the central office of the Milwaukee Public Schools to obtain other information that was to be analyzed on an annual basis. This information included GPA and standardized testing information, as well as attendance and disciplinary referrals. The reason for the collection of this MDL data was two-fold, 1) to meet the provisions of the grant by ensuring that the resources for the league were being used to attain certain benchmarks; and 2) Wade and Winkler were hopeful that the results garnered by the MDL would in turn serve as a way to secure additional resources for further national UDL expansion.

Yet another distinctive circumstance related to the establishment of the Milwaukee league was the need to quickly arrange for new teachers and students to attend a summer debate institute. Marquette University had been running a summer debate institute for over twenty years; however, the sudden demands for classroom space and staffing were such that another option was initially needed. Part of the design of the pilot year was to recruit 2 teachers and 10 students from each of the participating year-one schools. As it turned out, some of the schools new to the league had smaller enrollments than expected and as such several participated with 1 teacher and fewer than 10 students. Years two and three were to add an additional ten schools each, bringing the total to the projected 30 schools.

Following the first round of selection, 12 schools were incorporated into the program in the pilot year. As a result, in June 2006, 100 students and 20 teachers traveled from Milwaukee to Atlanta to attend the Emory National Debate Institute. Without question, part of the recruiting strategy was shaped around the idea that travel to Atlanta would incentivize participation, especially amongst the students. Yet, there wasn't any sight-seeing during the two weeks in Atlanta. Once on the campus at Emory, located well outside the downtown area, students and teachers engaged in a rigorous debate curriculum designed to teach students the mechanics of policy debate as well as to educate them about the topic for the year related to renewable energy. The evidence needed to get started was provided, and the staff seemed effective at connecting with the students. Feedback from the teachers on the mid and end-of-program evaluations was generally positive. It indicated that the college debaters that

the high school students had been working with during the two weeks had really made an impact, even in such a short time. Other than expressing disappointment that there wasn't time for exploring Atlanta, students expressed that they had a positive experience with the program, of which the culminating activity was a series of practice debates that let the students showcase what they had learned. And as a means of helping teachers understand the dynamics of learning that their students were experiencing, they too participated in several practice debates of their own.

To get the Milwaukee Debate League going following the summer institute program, a local administrator was needed. My role was that of educational consultant, so someone else was needed full-time to handle the day-to-day operations, set-up league events, and coordinate the assessment reporting that was to go from the teachers to the NDP staff in Atlanta. Dave Denomie, a former high school and college debater with extensive experience, became league administrator.

An expectation of the grant was to host a series of league tournaments, 8 tournaments in all with approximately one each month of the school year. Whereas other leagues had participating member schools host these events, we decided that Marquette University would host all of them. First and foremost, we wanted to centralize the location, and provide continuity for these tournaments. Additionally, we wanted to spare the teachers/coaches from yet another obligation on top of all the other duties running a debate team. Most importantly though, we wanted the students who were participating in these tournament events to feel at ease on campus and realize a sense of belonging. Among the foremost goals in establishing the league was

to provide marginalized students with access to a preeminent University and help them recognize that attending such a school was by no means beyond their reach.

Another important decision that we had to make at the outset was what to call the league. The formal designation – the Milwaukee Debate League (MDL) – was crafted specially without using the word ‘urban’. It appeared that most other leagues simply settled on the city name followed by urban debate league. Our situation was different though. While other leagues had all schools new to debate and all from within the direct urban area, we were incorporating some schools with existing programs, including a suburban school. As we discovered, some of the other leagues had opted to omit the word ‘urban’ from respective associations, yet we held that Milwaukee was to be unique from the start by incorporating several suburban schools into the league within the first three years. This had not been done before in any of the other cities.

Another clear distinction for the Milwaukee league was the immediate inclusion of schools with existing competitive debate teams. The purpose for initially including several schools with flourishing programs was to help bridge the gap to the statewide debate community. Ultimately, it was hoped that the UDL would be integrated into the community at large. Welcoming several prominent Milwaukee Public Schools known for fielding competitively successful debate teams was viewed as a key element for long-term relationship building. No other league had begun by including schools that had active debate teams. Outreach to the existing debate community of the metro Milwaukee area was seen as a distinctive strength to the league’s long-term success.

Among the stated goals at the outset was for the Milwaukee program to re-invigorate debate in the surrounding area, not just the central city.

Following the initial site visits it became clear that the funder wanted Nicolet High School, David Einhorn's alma mater, to be included in the league. As a suburban school, and one of highest performing schools in the state, it was notably distinct from other schools, save that of Rufus King which has a well-known and successful International Baccalaureate program. Since we already had a suburban school and some non-MPS schools, we thought about the prospects of adding additional suburban schools. Although charting new territory we were confident about the initial decision made branding the league. We also knew from the outset that growing to 30 schools might be difficult given the number of MPS schools with which we had to draw from. Additionally, the original grant proposal stated there was an expectation for the league to become financially viable through other funding sources in and around the community, so we were conscious from the onset about how league growth would impact sustainability.

There was certainly a hopefulness that the schools themselves would continue to bear some of the costs, but the items provided by the grant, namely the tournament events and scholarship funding for summer debate institute, would come from funds raised locally in the future. Marquette University was also sharing initial three-year costs by hosting all of the events at no charge, as well as underwriting numerous other operational and benefit-related costs. One other factor that we considered was that the use of 'urban' has, at times, had a pejorative connotation. Given the fact that we would

be working toward league sustainability and the range of schools for membership would likely include schools not in the urban center of Milwaukee, we decided to go forward without using 'urban,' and the Milwaukee Debate League was founded.

The Milwaukee Debate League Underway

With the start of the 2006-2007 school year came considerable activity. A workshop was held as a refresher for those who had gone to Atlanta in June, and also as a way to reach out to additional students who may want to become involved. Additional planning took place to set up the 8 events that were to be held during the course of the year. Visits were also made to each school to provide additional training and assist in completing student reading assessments. The initial round had been completed at the Emory debate institute for those students who had attended, but the goal was to evaluate all students taking part in MDL events. Gathering data related to reading assessments, GPA's, standardized test scores, and disciplinary records would all contribute the long term prospects for the MDL.

Another part of the work needed to support the sustainability of the MDL came from including students and teachers into subsequent summer debate institutes. The Marquette University Debate Institute provided two-weeks of intense instruction over the summer for students and teachers to learn debate and become familiar with the topic area. For years MUDI had brought together students, teachers, coaches, and judges from around the country together to conduct in-depth analysis and research in the activity of policy debate. Over the course of two weeks, students engaged in

political, economic, and philosophical areas of research and discussion. From theory lectures to skill activities to full practice debates, the program emphasized the ability to critically analyze issues and more persuasively advocate for given outcomes. Just over eighty-five students attended MUDI 2007 during late July and early August. Approximately eight to ten states had been represented at MUDI in recent years; yet, most institute attendees through the years have come from Wisconsin.

The 2007-2008 high school debate resolution, the first topic used by the Milwaukee Debate League, dealt with international affairs, specifically how the United States federal government should substantially increase its public health assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa. Challenging material indeed; however the students immersed themselves in research and skill development, and at the conclusion of the program a series of practice debates. With the completion of the summer 2007 program MUDI marked its 28th year of serving the debate community. And to be sure that the institute had been a valuable educational experience for students and teachers involved, assessments of both the student and teacher programs were conducted. The findings indicate a very favorable experience as student feedback included statements such as, "Never have I retained so much information in 2 weeks," and "I love this experience... It's been life changing" (Noonan and Dale, 2007).

While confident in the efforts for our first year with incorporating the MDL students into the program, adjustments were planned for the second year including, 1) schedule changes with shorter days for commuters and some extra structured time built in for reading assessments, 2) consideration in offering some limited residential options

for those who show exceptional commitment to the league, and 3) enhancing instructional curriculum materials, specifically offering more detailed lesson plans to the staff by our literacy consultant and our leadership team. We also planned to provide another level of evaluation by having the lab leaders complete institute-ending write ups for each student that could then be shared with their respective teachers. Other than that, we were more than pleased with the process and the results of this year. MUDI would serve the MDL again during the summer of 2008 with 54 students from 14 league schools participating.

Strong support was provided to the program by Dr. John Pauly, the Provost of Marquette University, who was then serving as the Dean of the Diederich College of Communication. Always encouraging, Pauly's vision for the program was to make it a hallmark of the College and central to efforts to extend public discourse on campus and throughout the surrounding community.

Two years into the partnership and following the first tournament event in September 2008, those at the head of the National Debate Project expressed their dissatisfaction with a number of aspects of the MDL. Some of the concerns raised with the NDP by the grant funder included the lower than expected student attendance at monthly MDL debate tournament events and issues pertaining to problems in gathering student reading assessment data. In the fall of 2008, unable to assuage the funder and our NDP partners that in fact reasonable efforts had been made to fulfill the parameters of the initial grant, the arrangement came to a premature end. In a sincere desire for the program to continue to serve area teachers and students, Marquette University

respectfully withdrew from its partnership with the National Debate Project with regard to the Milwaukee Debate League. Over the past few years, it appears that the MDL has undergone a series of alterations and has significantly changed its operations; however, some of the member schools from the first few years of operation have continued active participation in MDL as well as other area debate competitions.

Urban Debate League Programs: Objectives & Advocacy

Among those at the center of the Urban Debate League movement has been Emory University Director of Debate, Melissa Wade. Her involvement in the endeavor goes back to 1985 through a partnership with Dr. Larry Moss and Ms. Betty Maddox, both teachers at that time in the Atlanta Public Schools. As Wade explained to Milwaukee area school officials as we made school selection visits in the spring of 2006, her intent was to provide a “full-service” speech and debate program to area schools. In essence, all forms of debate and forensic competition, including public speaking and dramatic performance categories, would be offered. Upon beginning to implement the program, however, it became readily apparent to Wade that she really wanted to focus on policy debate. After all, she realized that the wealthy suburban schools in the Atlanta area – some of the best in the nation in the activity – were focusing almost exclusively on policy debate. Wade’s perspective was that the skill set incorporated in debate, especially those skills related to research and critical thinking, were the most wide-reaching and beneficial to students in high school and beyond. With that realization and vision in mind, and in conjunction with the prompting of Dr. Moss and

others, her focus quickly changed. Believing that UDL programming is fundamentally an effort to improve education, Wade (1999) asserts:

It is clear that the educational system needs to reform if it is to prepare today's students for tomorrow's world. Debate competition is a rich source of opportunity for providing educational reform; for leveling the playing field of unequal opportunities; for lowering the institutional barriers of exclusion; for motivating interest in information. How does one redress the inequality inherent in public education? Competition in debate teaches the communication skills vital to educational reforms that are critical to the success of living in a global society. If one knows how to advocate on one's own behalf in a way that will be acknowledged by the listener, one does not have to resort to violence to get the attention of decision-makers. (p. 39)

Wade and her partners associated with the National Debate Project specifically, and advocates of urban debate leagues in general, contend that the intrinsic qualities of the activity make it ideal for instructional use in the classroom. According to Moss, the activity impacts more than just classroom learning, it also promotes self-confidence and in turn advocacy skills. Moss (2001) states:

Policy debate teaches students how to research policy issues and how to evaluate the strength and veracity of evidence and just as important, policy debate competition teaches self-confidence...All of these attributes that policy debate can engender in its adherents are essential to the success of any who would advocate on behalf of the residents of our toxic communities. (p. 23)

Moreover, the immediate connection from the classroom to the community is one in which the activity can help bridge. Moss (2001) further contends that:

For many new urban debaters, the opportunities created by their mastery of policy debate represent a ticket out of the toxic community. Already, we have witnessed communities of privilege expanding to allow room for the rapidly ascending stars of urban debate and we are justly proud of this accomplishment. (p. 23)

As a result of their participation in UDL activities and instruction, they assert that students find opportunities to reshape themselves and the local communities that surround them.

Work done by Warner and Brusckie (2004) notes that empirical data about debate is limited, but research by Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999) has demonstrated that debate is a potent mechanism to advance critical thinking skills. The need to process a series of arguments and employ research findings for most assertions emphasizes the skill set used for higher order thinking. In addition to Wade (1999), Winkler and Cheshier (2000) contend that argumentation and competition stimulates academic achievement. Development of critical thinking skills has been noted in a host of local newspaper and magazine articles as well (Estrella, 2002; Bahrampour, 2000; Hoover, 2003; Teicher, 2004; Glanton, 2005). Proclaims Mueller (2000) in one such article, “students are finding within themselves the motivation, self-esteem and skills needed to be successful,” and one student was quoted as stating “my grades have gotten better, and my study skills have gotten better” (p. 9). It may well be, for example, that the ability to motivate students through educationally-based competition and cultivate both critical thinking and communication skills is just what is needed to assist struggling urban students. While introduced here as a means of demonstrating the basis of advocacy for urban debate, further analysis of the extant literature will be forthcoming in Chapter 3.

Further, some students have reported a surge in self-confidence from their participation in the activity. Remarkd a student in the Detroit league, “It gives me

confidence to speak in front of people, not to be nervous, and voice my opinion” (Mrozowski, 2009, p. A3). Reflecting on the success in New York as UDL schools have taken on and achieved victory over noted debate schools Bronx Science and Stuyvesant, Wade remarked, “Once that happens, the self-esteem they get, you can’t buy that in a store because these kids are basically led to believe they cannot compete with those schools” (Bahrapour, 2000, p. B14). And compete they do weekend after weekend in many cases, and successfully so.

Proponents of UDLs say students experience a surge in empowerment.

According to Estrella (2002), one San Francisco area coach stated:

The higher objective is to try to transform these kids’ lives. This is about empowering urban youth and hopefully allowing them through debate to develop skills they’ll need in the classroom and for making choices later on...for me, it’s all about transferring debate into the classroom. (p. 8)

Stories reflecting overwhelmingly positive sentiments like these are reported from leagues throughout the country. While not nearly enough scholarly research has been conducted with regard to Urban Debate Leagues, these programs have nevertheless attracted a good deal of media attention over the past few years with respect to their educational implications. Overall, stories about UDLs and the students involved have appeared in a variety of major news outlets including the *New York Times*, *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Perhaps the most provocative example pertaining to urban debate aired on *60 Minutes* in a story by Leslie Stahl in June, 2003. Providing context on the basic structure and implementation of the UDL model through a particular Baltimore school, the story is, in *60 Minutes* fashion, rather gripping. It shows an extraordinary case in which a

police liaison officer works in the classroom as both a teacher and debate coach. It certainly captures the imagination about the possibility of the UDL approach.. The Walbrook team under direction of Officer Angelo Brooks gained national attention with an estimated 9.7 million viewers of the 60 Minutes segment (Bowler, 2003). From the story it seemed clear that debate had a marked impact on the student's academic achievement as well as their self-worth. Remarkd one Walbrook student in a related article after the CBS interview at the school, "The positive reinforcement, the respect, they unlock so much inside of you" (Steihm, 2003, p. B1). While it is evident that the UDL approach has attracted attention from an array of sources, this emphasizes the need for a thorough case study of student involvement in a league that can illuminate some of what has been transpiring nationwide.

University partnerships have also been a prominent part of UDL development. From the start, Wade and her partners asserted that strong connections to a local university were essential for league development. To begin, university debate students and coaches would serve as role models for students and be able to assist with local league sanctioned tournaments and other events. The university could offer urban debate league students the opportunity to be on a local college campus and in turn feel greater connection to the idea that they themselves have the capacity to excel academically and be able to attend college. Current connections between the following schools and UDLs are as follow, St. Louis with University of Missouri at St. Louis; Bay Area Urban Debate League with University of California at Berkeley; DC League with the University of the District of Columbia; Baltimore with Towson University; Chicago with

Northwestern; Detroit with Wayne State University. Some 60 colleges and universities have actively recruited UDL students (Morris, 2002).

Summary

After twenty five years, Urban Debate Leagues have found some traction through the establishment of 24 leagues nationwide. Sponsors and supporters of these endeavors believe strongly in the benefits that stem from participation in the activity. While the partnership with Marquette University ceased, many of the schools remain active competing in both league sponsored events and tournaments hosted by other non-MDL schools. Looking more closely at the Milwaukee program and student experiences represented at a school here may prove to be helpful in understanding aspects of the overall movement. More importantly, providing participants with substantive opportunities to share their own in-depth stories regarding their participation may shed more light on the general claims that have been made regarding improved academic achievement and self-esteem. Noteworthy also are the limits that the present literature offers us regarding student experience in debate. While much has been studied pertaining to the academic skill set that debate can offer, little research has been directed toward students actively involved in urban debate. Even the proponents of the UDL movement would likely admit that not nearly enough has been done to allow students to tell their own stories; and that is especially true for Hispanic students as even the limited sources presently available have tended to focus on

African-American students. The next chapter will review the relevant literature, which also helps to demonstrate the further need for my proposed research in this area.

Chapter 3

Reviewing the Literature: The Purposes and Practices of Debate as Urban Education Reform

As with any research, a review of the pertinent literature is necessary. This chapter provides the needed review. The first section offers an overview of the topic of urban education reform in an effort to narrow down some of the innovative programming that presently exists in large metropolitan areas. The second section reviews scholarship on debate in general, while the third section focuses on the limited scholarship specific to urban debate. Following a comprehensive review of the literature related to debate, attention is given to providing some context around the concept of self-efficacy, a prominent domain of this research. In the final section of this chapter, the relevant literature pertaining to Hispanic student achievement is assessed.

Context of Urban Education Reform

The concepts and efforts surrounding “urban education reform” are indeed vast. Any number of initiatives and expectations can be presumed from such a broad term. Commonly referred to as “urban school reform,” this subject captures ideas surrounding education in a manner which approaches changes in schooling that have occurred or should occur in metropolitan areas. As such, one could begin by imagining reform efforts that have been focused exclusively on urban areas themselves. Given the needs of schooling in large cities and suburban areas and how those needs are likely to be distinct in some ways from the needs of rural areas, a natural way to begin understanding the term may simply be in strict geographical and structural terms.

Scholarship by Fine (1994), Johnson, Finn, and Lewis (2005), as well as very recent work by Clarke, Hero, Fraga, and Erlichson (2006) probe issues related to major urban areas and a myriad of aspects related to change. From decentralization innovations in creating smaller schools to professional development programs for administration and faculty to community building, recent scholars have examined an array of possibilities surrounding urban school reform. Given the interest in urban reform, the historical analysis to unfold in my work will remain centered on schooling in major cities.

Some of the urban school literature, such as Stone (1998), covers programming in variety of larger locales such as New York, Chicago, and Baltimore all of which have an emphasis on increasing student achievement. In essence, the focus is on how very large urban districts approach reforms that will improve student learning and success, and what influences the potential for change. More recent works by Hess (2006) and Bryk, Bender-Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) focus exclusively on single urban areas, San Diego and Chicago respectively. In both cases reform ideas are approached through looking at issues with a mass urban setting. Hess puts together a series of essays specific to reforms launched in 1998 ranging from district and school level governance to in-school instructional programming meant to increase student achievement, while Bryk, Bender-Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton examine aspects of decentralization in Chicago elementary schools following a 1989 initiative.

Additionally, given large districts and concentrated populations, the idea of urban education brings with it connections for systemic improvement, as urban schools nationwide are increasingly struggling to maintain satisfactory levels of academic

achievement. Of course, the use of the word urban also invokes connections to other political, economic, and social ideas – both real and imagined. Subtle and sometimes not so subtle inferences to crime, poverty, and unemployment readily connect themselves to urban schooling. Recent essays incorporated into *Challenges of Urban Education: Sociological Perspectives for the Next Century* (McClafferty, Torres, and Mitchell, 2000), for example, explore the sociological considerations for the future of urban school reform initiatives. Issues of power and pedagogy are, and have long been, of vital concern as reformers approach any type of urban school modification.

Initial approaches to the topic of urban education have been through alterations in structural programming with the intent of enhancing student literacy skills. Programs such as “Success for All,” an adolescent reading skills program geared for middle school students, or “Accelerated Learning,” a program designed to impart specific reading and language skills, or “Project GRAD” (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), itself a program to support students in graduating high school moving onto college. Other similar programming that is specific to a particular city such as the “Double-ACE Model,” in New York, or the Philadelphia “Children Achieving Initiative,” reflects another manner in which specific urban educational reform efforts can be studied (Cibulka and Boyd, 2003). It is important to note that while Urban Debate Leagues are indeed akin to other structural programming reforms and could be studied in a similar manner, my intent is not to focus on the system itself; rather, I will deal more directly with student experiences on an individual level within a specific school of a UDL program.

With respect to debate as an aspect of urban education reform, the existing literature is limited to works focusing primarily on debate as instrumental to learning rhetoric and persuasion with lesser emphasis on more general academic achievement and self-efficacy. Notable items in the area of rhetoric and persuasion include works by Windes and Hastings (1965), Ziegelmueller (1975), and Keefe, Harte, and Norton (1982); each of whom asserts that debate provides an avenue for learning effective verbal communication skills. The conclusion in rhetoric-based research is generally that public speaking contributes to an improved ability to persuade. In connecting the activity of debate to critical thinking, Colbert (1995), Hill (1993), and Freely (1986) assert that debate is an activity that empowers the learner and unlocks untold academic potential. Even scholarship in the area of academic achievement connects more readily to traditional high school debate as it pertains to suburban schools as opposed to inner city schools.

General Scholarship on Debate

Although there is limited research in the area of high school debate, substantive work has been done indicating that debate in general can be used as a tool for educational improvement. While most of this scholarship is geared toward the college level, some does cross over to the secondary level. Bellon (2000), for example, makes a case for debate across the curriculum (DAC). Much like both writing across the curriculum (WAC) and communication across the curriculum (CAC), Bellon advocates that universal programming that extends across disciplinary lines should be utilized.

Bellon delineates the strongest arguments for DAC implementation, overviews research regarding the benefits of debate, and concludes by summarizing existing research on educational psychology and self-efficacy. Bellon contends that, "Debate is so fundamentally connected to democratic practice that, for much of our civilization's history, its benefits have been thought nearly self-evident" (Bellon, 2000, p. 165). Drawing extensively from other scholars, particularly research by Colbert (1993) and a meta-analysis by Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Louden (1999), Bellon concludes that debate lends itself to developing a number of vital academic skills, especially those related to critical thinking. With respect to the vital skills fostered by debate, Bellon (2000) asserts that, "a considerable tradition of scholarship exists verifying the benefits of engaging in forensics" (p. 161). Furthermore, he contends that "research conducted by educational psychologists has demonstrated that substantial cognitive gains have been made by students involved in participatory learning activities like debate" (Bellon, 2000, p. 161).

While Bellon's work provides a solid conceptual framework for understanding the viability of debate as a tool for improving necessary skills, there are several shortcomings to his work. First and foremost, his conceptual framework only relates to college students; no mention is made of the activity at the secondary school level where it is actually larger in scope. Since most participants in debate participate at the high school level and not the college, and the preponderance of college debaters have begun in high school, more attention needs to be given to implications of involvement at the secondary level. The fact that a study does not exist regarding debate across the

curriculum for secondary students in-and-of-itself leaves a gap. Additionally, all of the findings are in the theoretical realm; no substantive connections are made with respect to any actual students. Bellon only speaks in generalities about how students might improve if utilizing the DAC curriculum; however, no data are presented to warrant this claim. While making a good case for the need for “students to construct their own knowledge,” nowhere are students voices included. According to Bellon (2000):

When students are encouraged to think aloud – specifically, when they practice critical skills with their peers – they gain experience they may then apply to their own internal reasoning processes. Using oral language thus builds skills having more to do with critical thinking than smooth verbal presentation. (p. 164)

Thus, while making a strong case for substantive opportunities for students to make their voices listened to, nowhere in his work are voices actually heard. Finally, it is clear that Bellon has a good deal of college debate experience, but the activity is never explained in a way that leads the reader to fully understand the parameters of the activity itself. While DAC may be a worthwhile goal, Bellon leaves out the necessary analysis for educational policymakers who would want to know specifically about how a program functions and more importantly, what are its measurable results. Ultimately, Bellon’s belief that “improving learning requires both that we change how we teach and that we reconsider the assumptions we bring to our relationships with students,” is well worth noting, yet more constructive means of evaluating debate in the classroom are necessary in order to make good on that consideration (Bellon, 2000, p. 163).

In evaluating the connection between debate and critical thinking skills Colbert (1995), Hill (1993), and Freely (1986) assert that debate fosters increased academic achievement. Theory based research by Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999) has

also concluded that debate strengthens the skills needed for successful schooling. For their part, Warner and Brusckke (2001) also provide a scholarly approach for using debate to improve educational achievement. Warner and Brusckke, however, go even further in asserting that debate can be used as a “tool of empowerment” for urban America. Warner and Brusckke claim that, “academic debate has tremendous potential to empower urban students and assist them in their development into active agents of change” (Warner and Brusckke, 2001, p. 21). Beyond attempting to raise test scores or merely provide a necessary skill set for one’s own life, the authors contend that debate as an academic pursuit can in-and-of-itself revitalize urban areas. Their core assertion is “not simply to prove that debate can improve traditional student performance, but that debate is the sort of activity that leads to student empowerment in a way that traditional education fails to encourage...academic debate has tremendous value quite apart from its ability to improve achievement” (Warner and Brusckke, 2001, p. 10). They define the concept of “empowerment,” describe the activity itself, discuss debate as the “tool” and conclude with challenges for the future.

Asserting that debate is unique in its approach, they offer six key criteria to justify this claim. Those criteria include: 1) academic debate is student performance based, 2) academic debate is competitive, 3) academic debate is interscholastic, 4) academic debate is time-pressured, 5) academic debate is research intensive, and 6) academic debate is a dialectical process. With respect to using debate to assist the marginalized of society, Warner and Brusckke (2001) conclude:

Improving urban education may require more than traditional programs designed to raise test scores. Urban youth are not so much underachievers as

they are marginalized and excluded from society... Marginalized students certainly need basic academic skills, but the content of their education must focus always on enriching ways of including students; it must emphasize ways to give students not just the tools of the academy, but also the tools of empowerment. (p. 2-3)

In sum, Warner and Brusckke claim that debate can serve as a means to an end to rekindle faltering urban neighborhoods in addition to improving educational outcomes.

As with Bellon, Warner and Brusckke's work is entirely theoretical in nature, no high school students are incorporated in the piece and limited data are offered. While presenting some interesting ideas about using debate to give voice to students thereby empowering them to act for change within their community, very few actual student voices are presented through their work. Of those few voices utilized, they came from students at master's level education or beyond while student voices at the secondary level or even undergraduate level are entirely absent. While retrospective aspects are interesting and may have an appropriate place, other developmental and reflective factors are likely to have shaped the viewpoints of individuals looking back on their high school debate experience. Warner and Brusckke (2001) contend that "debate is based on student performance, and it is competitive, interscholastic, time pressured, research intensive, and dialectical" (p. 7). And yet, in spite of offering such a cogent description of what to look for with respect to student participation, no student voices from the high school level are included. As such, we are missing a more complete understanding of how students envision and then subsequently embrace or not embrace the types of opportunities afforded to them through debate. Additionally, Warner and Brusckke only deal with Urban Debate Leagues on a macro level, in essence making sweeping

judgments about programs citywide, without ever fully explaining how a program functions within an individual city or school. At no point do they present the events, real or imagined, that would occur in an actual school setting.

Moreover, even though Warner and Brusckke explain how university partners can be of valuable assistance to the development of a league, such as Emory in Atlanta, Northwestern in Chicago and Wayne State in Detroit, for example, no data are provided to illuminate why university connections are necessary, much less how they actually interact with and benefit UDL schools. Beyond a cursory review of providing summer programs and scholarships to potential college debate team recruits, little more is offered about how universities can provide UDL program sustainability. An examination of national league development could also serve to provide information on the ways in which and the extent to which colleges and universities interact with the local league. Feedback from league administrators and teachers would serve to illustrate the extent to which university partnerships have been necessary for sustaining the local league.

Along with the empowerment advocacy described with respect to Warner and Brusckke (2001), Mitchell (1998) has also argued that debate inherently serves to empower the student. Mitchell describes this as *argumentative agency* through which the individual has “the capacity to contextualize and employ the skills and strategies of argumentative discourse in fields of social action, especially wider spheres of public deliberation” (Mitchell, 1998, p. 45). Moreover, Mitchell contends that, “an essential part of the debate process involves citizens empowering themselves to invent, clarify, and amplify their viewpoints in public forums” (Mitchell, 1998, p. 50). As such, the

expertise that is developed through the activity allows the individual to participate more fully in public discourse and have confidence in doing so. Mitchell further states that, “Debate outreach efforts carry political significance because they counter unequal treatment in the educational system, a major root of inequality in our society” (Mitchell, 1998, p. 51). The motivational effect, however, is not limited to the student’s life connected only to school.

Sure, students may be applying debate skills in weekend debate tournament competition to schooling; yet, involvement in debate may also prove central to improving the student’s motivation for outside the classroom. Mitchell (1998) asserts:

Debate is an activity thick with motivation and laden with drama, meaning, and purpose. Because debate is at once inviting and challenging, it is an activity that has a unique appeal to students who have been alienated by the bland pedagogical fare served up in the frequently routinized and programmed classroom discussions of the present age. (p. 52)

Debate may serve to connect students not only to schooling but to their broader community and instill within them a sense of empowerment and civic mission. Mitchell (1998) concludes:

Those interested in seeing debate skills become tools for democratic empowerment have the ability to cultivate argumentative agency in their respective pedagogical and political milieu. This might involve supporting and encouraging efforts of students to engage in primary research, organize and perform public debates, undertake public advocacy projects, and/or share the energy of debate with traditionally underserved and excluded populations through outreach efforts. (p. 57)

Through this concept, an exploration of empowerment for students inside the classroom, within the school, and with respect to the broader community is in order. In sum, debate may have the propensity to provide students with much more than the

tools necessary to improve academic achievement in the classroom, it may even nurture a wider skill set enabling students to become further engaged in activism within their schools as well as the outside community as well.

In sum, while there is indeed limited research in the area of high school debate, some substantive work has been done which suggests that debate can be used as a tool for educational improvement. The skill set that debate helps foster with the individual student translates well to academic settings within and beyond the classroom.

Scholarship for Traditional High School Debate

While scores of books and articles cover debate theory and debate as a competitive communication activity, only a handful of books and articles examine high school debate, and fewer still relate to Urban Debate Leagues (UDLs). Nothing appears to exist that tells of the broader story of UDL development. Texts by Fine (2001) and Miller (2006) are among the only books written about high school debate at all. Gary Fine is the father of a former, and rather successful, debater from the North Shore area of Chicago. In his book *Gifted Tongues*, Fine describes the activity and the multiple types of interactions that go into it – student to student, student to coach, etc. He also attempts to provide context to the activity, as in what goes into team preparation and tournament participation. While most individuals would understand little of what transpires in a very competitive debate round due to the rapid-fire speech pattern and the flurry of evidence that is used to out-gun the other team, Fine asserts that there is a certain cultural understanding that presents itself about the activity. According to Fine,

the debate culture is an “adolescent social world” unto which students define a good deal about the norms and expectations of the activity itself. Students in debate, for example, deal with complex forms of analysis and argumentation, and in so doing define themselves by the summer debate camps they attend, the email list serves they belong to, and the competitive tournaments they attend. Overall, Fine (2001) concludes:

Despite its peculiarities and political ambiguities, high school debate is a valuable training ground for adolescents. Our educational system would be more successful in its goal of producing competent citizens if all, or many, students had the opportunity to participate in this activity. (p.18)

Through limited observations and interviews with approximately 30 participants of both teams (he indicated that there were 15 at each school), Fine assembled his work in order to provide his reader with an understanding of the format, norms, and culture of high school debate. Initially, he had only intended to focus on one school, but decided to work with a second debate squad given his positive association with them at several local tournament events.

In general, his methodology – which included observing team meetings each week, traveling with the team to several tournaments, and a series of interviews – appears sound, but is not without several shortcomings. The activity profiled by his work is not inclusive of urban schools or a more diverse student population. Clearly, since debate is typically seen as an activity geared toward the more gifted student, Fine’s work only serves to cement that notion. Fine (2001) contends:

The benefits of high school debate to individuals and to the community outweigh its troubles, and a further expansion of the activity to groups that are now excluded will serve us better than a contraction. High school debate is not a panacea for all of the ills that beset our educational system, but it is, I believe a tool by which a school system can do well by doing good. (p. 18)

Thus, further systematic study of high school programs and the culture that exists among students in a specific debate team would be worthwhile. There does not appear to any existing literature that formally defines or addresses 'team culture' in any substantive manner. Tangential connections are made through Fine (2001) and Miller (2006) as both speak to the happenings of specific teams, yet neither offers any detailed analysis of how the relationship among students and their teacher-coach develops.

Information that connects the activity to summer institutes also provides context for better understanding debate. Littlefield (2001) in his article "High School Student Perceptions of the Efficacy of Debate Participation" builds on only two prior studies, Thomas (1965) and Pruett (1972), which examine how debaters perceive the activity. Both earlier studies were done in conjunction with summer debate institutes from the University of Michigan and University of Georgia, respectively. Littlefield surveyed 193 students participating in the 2001 National Forensics League national tournament. The intent of the study was to explore the differences of how high school students view the activity as opposed to college students. Among the primary conclusions amongst students of both groups was that debate involvement tended to hurt academic performance through missed classes and heightened research burdens. Although Littlefield's study clearly supports the idea that students at both levels believe that debate, and the specific demands it places on them to conduct in-depth scholarly research, increases their critical thinking and analytical skills. There are, of course, some downsides of the activity that were also identified including stress, poor eating habits, loss of sleep, and a diminished social life. A clear limit to the study is the subject field.

In using only national qualifying students, which is not representative of the student population in the activity as a whole, the study severely limits the voices involved with regard to the activity. Only roughly 630 debaters are included out of the thousands that compete in debate throughout the year. Littlefield does acknowledge that other populations should be studied as well.

In sum, the research regarding high school debate has centered on more traditional programs in suburban schools. There is, however, a need to further explore the work that has been done that is germane to urban debate.

Scholarship Specific to Urban Debate Leagues

Whereas Fine (2001) offers work related to high school debate that is research-based, albeit limited by a focus on a traditional suburban school debate team, *Cross-X* by Miller (2006) may simply be classified as “investigative reporting.” Although his work does seek to uncover an interesting story of an Urban Debate League school in Kansas City, he appears driven to produce a riveting “tell all” story about the activity. In setting the scene for the team that he will profile, Miller (2006), in a rather melodramatic tone, writes:

Rinehart crossed her arms and glanced around her classroom, which, only two hours into the school year, looked as if a gale had blown through and tossed around all the desks and books and files. Room 109, the one-window headquarters of Central’s debate program, contains too much bustle to be as orderly as a typical school room. Even before the school year started, the summer’s free days dwindling, kids flitted in and out of Rinehart’s domain to seek advice on the cases they were building for the coming season or simply to escape the bleak streets of Kansas City’s East Side. (p. 4)

In preparation for writing his book, Miller details how he spent a year following four students and their coach from practices to tournaments and back again, immersing himself in the small team atmosphere of the school he labels “Central High.” In all, he writes a provocative tale of their journey through the year, including the highs and lows of preparation and competition, culminating in a city championship finish. What is most interesting about Miller’s work is that it focuses on urban school competitors, providing some insight into the difficulties they face engaging in an activity more typically geared toward more affluent schools. Yet, he works so hard to tell a sensational story in which the characters and events appear overly embellished. Even when attempting to describe part of the debate and depict one of the scholars that might be utilized within the scope of the activity itself, Miller over dramatizes. In somewhat lurid-like fashion Miller (2006) proclaims:

Berg remained seated during cross-x and his first speech. This was the trend on the down-with-formalities college circuit, and it was just beginning to seep into the high school level. He began his first speech with the basics, a customary topicality argument, before jumping into what he really wanted to talk about: Michael Foucault. He’d first become acquainted with Foucault’s work at a debate camp two summer earlier, and he’d since supplemented his public school curriculum with the philosopher’s writings. Foucault was an iconoclast on many levels, not least of which was his examination of sexual repression and his taste for gay meat markets (he died of AIDS in the early 1980s and is believed to have infected many anonymous lovers). Berg was fascinated by Foucault’s concept of bio-power, which he developed in probing examinations of the history of modernization...In these writings, Berg saw his own school. To him, Fargo North was a production line that churned out obedient, unquestioning young adults. Those who didn’t fit into the school’s narrow mold were, in essence, chucked into the discard pile with bad grades and suspensions. Berg fancied himself a rebel, and many of the kids being left behind were his friends. He hated seeing them become disempowered. (p. 85)

This near tabloid-like treatment of the subject may make for an interesting read, but it may not be considered scholarship in some circles. There is no review, for example, of any other research, nor is there any attempt to connect his work to other broader educational reform themes or issues. Miller tells a gripping story of four students and one teacher, yet never considers the possibilities of what debate may be like for students beyond such a narrow context. He doesn't seriously engage the culture of debate other than through alluring prose, including stories of binge drinking and notorious partying. As a result this does very little to deepen our understanding of debate in general, and the Urban Debate League experience in particular.

Scholarship on Urban Debate Leagues is limited at present, yet there is an unpublished assessment of the 2005-2006 Computer Assisted Debate (CAD) Project in Atlanta, which is one of the more compelling in terms of behavioral improvements that have occurred for students who have participated in the program. The CAD program, begun in June 2004, targets middle school aged students from two Atlanta Housing Authority communities. Students attend daytime summer programs geared at learning debate and speech advocacy, but more importantly engage in reading instruction, group work, and confidence building exercises. The study demonstrates that students involved in the CAD program have had a decrease in absences, fewer disciplinary referrals, and increased literacy scores. Information was gathered on students who participated in two middle school programs, and self-reports from the students were also included. According the report, absences for CAD students declined from an average of 15 to 4, disciplinary referrals for students school wide declined 11% from

2004-2005 to 2005-2006 whereas for CAD students referrals dropped 43%, and literacy scores were higher nearly across the board for all students grades 6-8. Student attendance and disciplinary records, grade point averages and the use of the Gray Oral Reading Test for literacy skills provided substantive data to support these findings. The results demonstrated that for the eighth grade students, those involved longest in the program, absences dropped from an average of 14.8 to 4 per student and cumulative GPA scores increased by an average of 1.4 points. Reading scores showed gains as well for eighth graders in both fluency and comprehension, with 16% at grade level with the post-testing for fluency and 33% at grade level for comprehension (CAD Assessment, 2005-2006).

Since many of the findings of the CAD report are based on student self-reporting, there is the potential that students provided only information they believed evaluators wished to hear. Students were asked to rate things such as their desire to go to college, their lessening of "communication apprehension," and their knowledge level of current events. While their data are interesting, especially as student perceptions all suggest improvement, questions about their trustworthiness are readily apparent. Another limitation is that all of the data are collected on a single group of middle school students. While representative of urban housing youth in Atlanta, there are a myriad of other factors that are either not accounted for or merely assumptive on the part of the research. No accounting for age, race, or ethnicity was made, leaving the reader without understanding of those characteristics. Additionally, nothing personal about any of the students or their family circumstances was revealed. All we can surmise

about them is that they possess a low socio-economic status. Much more information would be helpful, especially with regard to an explanation about what in particular about participating in the program has impacted their views toward schooling and beyond. In sum, there are methodological limitations in this research.

Among the limited research of its kind thus far on UDLs is an unpublished quantitative study conducted by Collier (2004). Collier's work, presented at the Hawaii International Conference on Social Sciences, was designed to determine the effectiveness of UDL programming. Even Collier speculates as to the reason why virtually no research has been done in the area of Urban Debate Leagues. She concludes, "I suspect one reason there's been very little scholarship in this area is the absence of useful statistical data. Unlike high school sports, there are no official or unofficial estimates of how many students participate in debate" (Collier, 2004, p. 7). As for the intention of her work Collier (2004) states:

The purpose of this study was to quantitatively assess policy debate's impact on reading, self-esteem, and risk-taking behaviors...Results show academic debate improves performance at statistically significant levels on reading test scores, diminishes high-risk behaviors, and improves academic success and student attitudes toward higher education. (p. 2)

In answering the question "Why study urban debate?," Collier concludes that, "the simple answer is, because it appears to improve academic and personal outcomes for students in struggling urban schools" (Collier, 2004, p. 11). The study involves an evaluation of 421 students across five UDL cities, including Chicago, Kansas City, New York, St. Louis, and Seattle. There were 209 debaters in the research group, and 212 not in debate in the control group from 27 urban high schools. The study is centered on

three specific questions: 1) does debate increase reading comprehension as measured by standardized tests?, 2) does debate participation improve student self-esteem and positive decision-making (decrease high-risk behaviors)?, and 3) does debate increase GPA, and student interest in attending college? Collier is attempting to determine the extent to which UDLs benefit students academically. My research will extend on some of these questions by more thoroughly engaging students, asking them to share their experiences beyond just assessing standardized test scores and letter grades.

Before attempting to answer the research questions posed above, Collier reviews literature about debate as an out-of-school-time or co-curricular activity and lays a foundation for asserting that academic policy debate has already been deemed a valuable tool for supporting the academic growth of students in failing urban secondary schools. Her findings support numerous other researchers who report the positive effects of debate in general. Collier (2004) asserts:

This paper reports findings on the effects of academic debate on 209 inner-city public high school students during the 2002-2003 school year. There is no other quantitative research to compare with these results, however the data show that previously reported observations of debate's value to urban students (Bellon, 2000) (Breger, 1998) (Wade, 1999) (Warner & Brusckke, 2001) have validity. (p. 26)

Following a profile of the activity itself, as well as the five leagues under consideration, (all initiated with the Open Society Institute seed money), Collier examines: 1) the need to meet No Child Left Behind (2001) standards, 2) efforts to improve student self-esteem and decrease high risk behaviors, and 3) the extent to which there are increases in student GPA, and 4) student interest levels in attending college. Collier then describes her methodology for testing students which included use of the Scholastic

Reading Inventory (SRI), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (PSE), and other similar measures. Additionally, students were surveyed and the schools themselves provided GPA scores, attendance records, and disciplinary referral data. In all, Collier concludes that statistical significances occurred with respect to increased literacy rates, heightened self-esteem, as well as with regard to GPA and prospective college attendance. The results appear to be generally consistent from one city to the next.

Does this mean that this kind of quantitative assessment doesn't matter? Not exactly; I would argue that it means that programs, no matter how they are configured, from city to city may offer some benefits. A qualitative analysis, however, is needed to explore what specific aspects related to UDL participation may in fact relate to better achievement and improved levels of self-confidence. Finally, like Wade (1999), who clearly believes that the inherent competition in debate promotes achievement, Collier concludes, "At some level its intrinsically competitive nature motivates students with little pre-existing interest in research or education to research, read, and test ideas because they want to win" (Collier, 2004, p. 26). In other words, the competitive aspect that is implicit to the activity drives students who may not otherwise be disposed to educationally-related undertakings to engage. They find themselves wanting to research and read because debate provides them an opportunity to showcase their newfound knowledge.

The only other extensive research piece that attempts to measure the effectiveness of UDL programming is a more recent study by Mezuk (2009). Distinct

from Collier's unpublished study, Mezuk's research examined Chicago Debate League student participation that spanned from 1997 to 2006. The findings revealed that 70% of African-American male students who participated in UDL activities were more likely to graduate and three times less likely to drop out of college when compared to those who did not participate. Mezuk analyzed the African-American male population that was enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools between the 1997-1998 and 2006-2007 school year (N = 2,614) that participated in the CDL 458 (18%). He measured academic achievement data that consisted of eighth grade state math and reading test scores, cumulative GPA information for both eighth and twelfth grades, ACT college readiness scores, and 'ultimate high school outcome' which was described as graduation or dropout status (Mezuk, 2009).

The results indicated participants in CDL events were also more likely to score at or above the ACT benchmarks for English and reading. ACT reporting from 2006 indicates that African-American and Hispanic students are significantly far behind with respect to college readiness standards for reading, with only 21% and 33% demonstrating the needed entry level proficiency (ACT, 2006). Mezuk examined the connection to ACT readiness standards and found that "among African-American male CDL participants, intensity of debate participation was positively associated with the probability that the student scored at or above the benchmark on the English and Reading ACT in a dose-response manner" (Mezuk, 2009, p. 299). That is, as the number of debate rounds increased across a student's high school career, the "predicted probability" of scoring at or even above the benchmark level increased as well. Mezuk

found that those students who participated in 25 or more debate rounds, equal to that of 5 full debate tournaments, had a demonstratively higher probability of surpassing ACT benchmarks. In essence, more consistent involvement in UDL related events did have an impact.

Mezuk also concludes that “competitive policy debate preferentially attracts academically oriented students” and that “students with recurrent debate participation had a higher likelihood of positive academic outcomes relative to those with only peripheral participation” (Mezuk, 2009, p. 299). Yet, he added that even the students predisposed to participation in debate, due to an elevated level of academic achievement, were not high performing students since the average eighth grade test scores for CDL students were still below state standards.

The findings also indicate that the specialization of debate on reading and language arts skills indicates that there is a direct connection between debate and academic achievement in some areas. Mezuk (2009) claims:

The finding of only weak and statistically insignificant associations between debate and performance on the ACT Science and Mathematics sections suggests that the influence of debate on college readiness is restricted to those skills that are explicitly focused on in debate competitions, namely English composition, comprehending complex non-fiction texts, evaluating whether evidence is sufficient to support claims, assessing argumentation, and vocabulary. This result also indicates that selection factors likely do not in and of themselves explain the higher scholastic performance of debaters. If this were the case (that is, the only higher achieving students participated in and/or benefited from debate), it would be expected that debaters would perform better than non-debaters on all scholastic outcomes, not just those relevant to the activity. (p. 300-301)

By reinforcing literacy skills, students, and specifically African-American male students, appear to benefit substantially. As for policy implications, Mezuk recommends several

things which all appear to be directly supported by UDL student participation. Those recommendations include: 1) providing more opportunities for learning throughout the year, 2) supporting co-curricular activities that are explicitly tied to literacy instruction, 3) motivating students through school based learning that recognizes competitive achievement, and 4) providing innovative programs that are substantiated through empirical evidence.

While a substantive contribution to further understanding UDLs and the benefits afforded to students, the study has limitations. While he indicates that debate is a 'preferentially attractive' activity, meaning students who tend to believe they will enjoy success are predisposed to join, Mezuk admits that more research is needed in this area. What factors draw students to participate in the first place? What about student retention; why do students remain active in debate? These questions are not answered. Since the results indicate that sustained participation has an increasingly beneficial impact on academic performance; why might students cease participating? Further, what accounts for student success in the process of obtaining better GPAs and test scores? These questions are worthy of further exploration, and my project is intended to address them through a series of student case studies. There is much more to be learned about the experience that students have within the activity and how that shapes classroom participation, better study skills, homework completion, and other aspects of attitude and effort both inside and outside the classroom. The need for understanding is especially important relative to how participation in UDL programming impacts feelings of student self-esteem and empowerment.

Again, perhaps the most startling omission in the research conducted to this point regarding Urban Debate Leagues is the lack of student voice. Given the focus that proponents have about wanting students to have voice in their classrooms and school communities, it is nonetheless surprising that qualitative work has not yet been done. It appears that only a handful of short journal and newspaper articles have incorporated student voice. The limited commentary offered from students has more generally been related to improved vocabulary and reading skill development as well as achieving better grades in school (Mueller, 2000; Ghezzi, 2000); yet little more is offered by way of meaningful reflection on how specifically the activity may be helping to garner those improvements.

Lee (1998) offers a more detailed reflection; however, his personal comments come as a graduate student looking back and focus primarily on the importance of the activity as a means of advancing ideas of justice. Educated in the Atlanta Public schools, Lee assesses his experience as 'tragic' and states, "My savior, like many others, was the Atlanta Urban Debate League. It provided the opportunity to question the nefarious rites of passage (prison, drugs, and drinking) that seem to be uniquely debilitating to individuals in the poor urban communities" (Lee, 1998, p. 95). Interwoven into Lee's reflection is a call for activism. Recognizing that debate has tended to be dominated by the more affluent of society, Lee (1998) calls for change, stating:

As participants, coaches, and supporters of debate, we constantly speak of its transformative power and innate value. However, the lack of diversity in debate creates a bias in the samples we use to test the reliability of debate as a determiner of academic success and employability. As educators and activists we must transform the image of debate from an extracurricular endeavor for children of affluence to a pedagogical tool desperately needed to prevent an

ever-increasing number of academically underprivileged children from wasting away in misery and hopelessness. (p. 93)

While researchers have given attention to the notion that involvement in debate is akin to being empowered, Lee gives direct voice to the idea asserting that, "Urban Debate Leagues offer a pedagogical tool that simultaneously opens the mind to alternatives and empowers students to take control of their lives" (Lee, 1998, p. 95). In sum, Lee (1998) concludes:

Debate allows students to take control of their own educational destiny and at once make it a site of resistance. It allows those saddled with the baggage of poverty, racism, and sexism to construct their personal strategy for liberation. The Urban Debate League provides a space for us to learn what justice is because it forces us to learn from those disproportionately affected by injustice. (p. 96)

While students may not come to see UDL involvement in terms of solving injustice, Lee's voice reflecting back as a student is an important one; yet, it is looking back from an adult perspective. What is needed now is for student voice to be presented in the moment as current secondary level students.

Another facet of urban debate research, albeit very limited, relates the summer institutes and the benefits of concentrated programs beyond the school year spent working on the activity. In a paper presented at the National Communication Association annual meeting, Preston (2004) undertook a study looking at competitive success and retention based on summer institute attendance. The study included 169 students, of which 93 were year one and 37 were back for year two of summer institute participation. Charting student participation, Preston found that 'practical experience' with the activity determined more long-term participation, and students who attended

away camps and participated in more league tournaments were more likely to stay connected to the activity. Unfortunately, however, no students are spoken to as part of the study, and little was offered to explain what factors might have precluded subsequent attendance. Connectivity to debate long-term, for example, may very well have to do with the social connections one develops versus competitive aspects of the activity. Students spend a lot of time together through various league sponsored events, especially one-day workshops where such relationships are not cultivated to the same extent. More committed students are more likely to do the necessary work to attend an away camp, such as the advance application and financial aid forms.

Preston addresses implications for future research including issues such as: 1) the extent to which family structure plays a role in participation; 2) how the support of school attended contributes to involvement and success; and 3) the extent to which the teacher-coach experience level contributes to student success (Preston, 2004). These questions are intriguing and may be partially addressed in this research project to the extent that they connect to student efforts to be active in urban debate activities and also improve in schooling.

In light of the review above, I think it is clear that there are ample opportunities to further explore the implications of urban debate. Much more can be done with respect to getting students to speak out in meaningful ways about their experiences related to urban debate, and this research aims to accomplish just that. Using interview data, such as I am proposing to do, will more explicitly capture student stories. The prospect for reaching out to incorporate the voices of students presently participating in

an active UDL program will, at a minimum, offer some insights not already gleaned through the research that has been done to date.

Context for Understanding Self-efficacy

Beyond the literature that has been reviewed germane to debate and more specifically urban debate, it is important to also contextualize those related to the concept of self-efficacy. The scholarship reviewed here addresses underlying considerations that relate to both student interest and achievement. Educational researchers, and for that matter policymakers alike, are interested in the types of learning styles that foster learning and achievement, and thus have examined the roles that both self-efficacy and self-regulation play in the instructional process. Most resources on this subject draw from Bandura's pioneering definition of self-efficacy, which he described as "one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (Bandura, 1997 from Alderman, 2004, p. 67). Research by Alderman (2004), as well as Lodewyk and Winne (2005), has examined the importance of an individual's confidence level, and how that in turn impacts student achievement. Students clearly make self-regulatory determinations on a multitude of levels involving content and skill engagement; yet, the positive encouragement that teachers offer can do a lot to unlock the inherent desire to learn that resides in each student.

Empirical and indirect assessments of the relative success attained by other students also appear to be prominent factors related to student exertions. This seems

to be particularly true for students who have a lower sense of self-efficacy. Findings by Margolis and Macabe (2003) indicate self-efficacy can be developed, so long as students are appropriately challenged and not given tasks that lead them to become frustrated. Reading comprehension is particularly important and teachers may even consider using informal reading inventories prior to assigning work. In making use of such tools, teachers need to be mindful of the universal importance that self-efficacy plays on the entire learning process.

In general, educators can foster confidence in students in a variety of ways, and several of the scholars reviewed here offer suggestions for developing this personal facet and guiding students toward meaningful learning. White (1995) suggests that teachers promote self-regulation through social learning theory. Specifically, this can be achieved through the creation of enthusiastic learning environments. Self-reinforcement, as in self-centered evaluation and reflection, can be more effective than the more direct behavioral reinforcement mechanisms. Additionally, Brophy (2004) offers a multitude of strategies for engaging learners. Enthusiasm, intensity, the creation of interesting tasks, and individualized goal setting, which could be implemented as a function of differentiated learning, can all be part of what teachers do to more fully engender meaningful learning in their students. Modeling, as described by both White (1995) and Brophy (2004), as well as socialization can afford students with opportunities to relate to one another and create stronger connections to the instructional tasks at hand. Regarding learning tasks, it is imperative that instructors work to provide students with interesting and engaging activities, assignments, and

projects that students believe are worthwhile. Findings by VanSickle (1990) reveal that an overwhelming number of students feel that there is little if any connection between the subject of Social Studies and their day-to-day life. Appropriate reading levels, personally interesting content, and process focused instruction, are all important considerations as the things that we do each day as educators substantially impact student self-efficacy, in turn effecting the creation of meaningful learning.

Related findings on the importance of tasks and expected outcomes support the notion that teachers need to scrutinize and carefully construct lessons that are tailored to student interests. Rather than merely emphasizing content, Kitsantas, Reiser, and Doster (2004) concluded that process goals lead to far better results as students attempt to learn new skills. These scholars reported that student satisfaction and self-efficacy increased as they were provided an ability to construct goals for themselves, and support the assertion that students who engage in self-evaluation generally perform better than those who do not were again confirmed. Lodewyk and Winne (2005) concluded that well-structured tasks do not always equate to more learning. Their findings reveal that students given an ill-structured task and less instructional support, while scoring slightly less in overall performance, actually learned more and demonstrated higher long-term retention of the material than those given a related well-structured task.

Without question, teachers can indeed have an effect on the development of student self-efficacy and achievement expectations by diligently monitoring and encouraging self-regulation. Zimmerman has described self-regulation as learning

process through which students transform their mental capabilities into academic skills that they can then apply to specific tasks (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001). According to Zimmerman, critical to self-regulated learning is the learner's ability to take initiative, persevere, and adapt as needed. Equally critical is for instructors today to demonstrate a willingness to disengage from highly overused teacher-centered practices. It appears clear that the creation of meaningful learning may be much more of an individualized process, and schema development is not something that can just be directly transmitted from teacher to student. Accordingly, Zimmerman's claim about learning is that the ownership for learning resides with the student (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001). Drawing from Zimmerman, Dembro (2004) asserts that self-regulation is extremely important for individual cognitive development and the construction of meaningful learning. Dembro's concluding assertion is that educational actors need to shift away from standard-based reform initiatives toward learner-centered approaches that will be infinitely more productive.

Promoting self-efficacy is undoubtedly linked to motivation, which in turn is directly related to learning and achievement. Research conducted by Hootstein (1994) on motivation is particularly telling. Teachers interviewed by Hootstein indicated the use of simulations, review games, and independent projects as a way of connecting to student interest and motivation. Yet, at the same time they acknowledged a variety of factors that kept them from continually employing these types of strategies. For their part, students responded that simulations, games, and videos did indeed peak their interest. It is unclear, however, the extent to which teachers engage in these methods

and whether or not their execution is even effective. More study could be done in this area. The fact that debate can operate as a simulation and at times even function as an academic game may, for some students, result in greater motivation to learn. In turn that may lead to added academic success, and potentially to an increase in self-esteem.

Still other scholarship pertaining to self-efficacy suggests that achievement goals can make a difference in increasing student motivation. Changes on an individual level may in fact have an impact. Meece (1994) has determined that students who had engaged in instruction that was deemed more self-regulated were more motivated and felt more confident in their comprehension of the material. Meece indicated that persistence at a given task as well as problem-solving are both pertinent aspects to setting and achieving goals, as well as enhancing overall comprehension.

Mastery and performance through goal setting may be more effective than extrinsic motivational factors, certainly external behavioral mechanisms meant to control student behaviors and outcomes. In this way, learning shifts away from a teacher-centered approach to a manner in which students were more responsible. Do such aspects serve to improve ones' self-efficacy beliefs? This question may serve as the basis for some further examination through this research. There is an opportunity to learn more about the students of the MDL and the extent to which they may or may not feel an increase in self-esteem as a result of their participation. There is ample room to inquire into the parameters of self-efficacy related to classroom instruction and activities beyond the classroom as well.

Cultural Perspectives & Achievement for Hispanic Students

As this research is intended to explore the involvement of Hispanic students who participate in Milwaukee Debate League, this portion of the literature review explores cultural understandings associated with educational experience and academic achievement in order to establish needed context. To begin, it is important to look at key scholarship that directly focuses on the education of Hispanic youth. Of particular interest is work that deals with cultural understandings and the ways in which schooling can serve Hispanic students. It is widely held that Latino children encounter any number of cultural barriers as a part of the immigration and assimilation process. McLaughlin, Liljestrom, Lim, and Meyers (2002) analyze how Hispanic students who immigrate to the United States come to grips with challenges and frustrations related to acculturation, especially issues pertaining to language and change in culture. They argue the need to improve educational access for Hispanic student, and assert that there needs to be curricular and programmatic changes in order for Hispanic students to realize greater academic achievement and increased self-confidence; however, they offer few direct substantive ideas for actual curriculum or programs through which Hispanic education can be improved. Participation in urban debate could be looked to as one possible approach.

Moreover, the researchers focus on pre-existing attitudes held by teachers related to immigrant students. They contend that educators need to do more to monitor and clarify communication lines among students, parents, and teachers. Overcoming language barriers in the process is considered critical for student success.

While overcoming language barriers is certainly essential, other adjustments may be necessary in an effort to directly encourage student participation in learning. Those who advocate for UDL programming contend that it not only helps overcome linguistic barriers with the reading of evidence and ample amounts of public speaking, but it also stimulates student interest in current events and research which in turn feeds back into stronger and more confident classroom performance (Wade, 1999; Mitchell, 1998).

Cooper, Denner, and Lopez (1999) address the pertinent role that school plays in opening up future avenues in society, and also the ways in which families and school officials can assist young Hispanic students in attaining academic success. Given the fact that some 30% of Hispanic students end up as school dropouts, they are typically underrepresented in colleges and universities nationwide as well as in accelerated and college-prep classes that commonly assist students in gaining access to higher education (Cooper, Denner, and Lopez, 1999). The authors speak to the aspirations of Hispanic youth, as well as the manner in which parents and siblings can provide much needed support. Additionally, the authors contend that teachers are “gatekeepers” and more importantly “cultural brokers” that can assist students in acquiring the skills that they need for college and life beyond.

Other pertinent studies related to Hispanic student academic achievement have been done through more intensive qualitative methodology. Driven by interviews and participant observations conducted within the State of Texas, both Valenzuela (1999) and Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny (2004) concentrate on telling the stories of students and their experience of education. Focusing on central questions pertaining to Latino youth

and school achievement, both studies conclude that academic achievement among this population leaves much to be desired. Valenzuela asserts that schooling is a “subtractive process” through which students are largely stripped of social and cultural importance, and they become as she states, “progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3). Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny (2004) contend that while among the fastest growing groups of students in the nation, the “achievement gap” has declined only slightly over the past 30 years. Both lament the situation and conclude that little improvement has been made based on virtually no emphasis being given to culturally relevant curriculum and bilingual instruction. As with Valenzuela, they conclude that schools could be improved by, in their words, “drawing more explicitly on the cultural knowledge of home and community” (Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny, 2004, p. 23). According to Jesse, Davis, and Pokorny’s (2004) findings:

We found that successful schools for Latino students are coherent institutions – schools in which strong, energetic principals and caring, capable teachers have helped students to coordinate and align their efforts around a few clearly articulated values that provide a pervasive motivating focus and overarching purpose. This coherence should not be confused with cultural uniformity. Coherence grows out a strong sense of shared purpose that becomes part of a common organizational identity. If educators embrace the value of celebrating and building on the culture of the home with the same conviction with which they embrace the value of achievement in basic skills in English, they will be able to create coherent schools in which Latino students excel academically without losing or devaluing the rich elements of culture that they share with their parents and grandparents. (p. 39-40)

It would appear that fostering community that is inclusive of students, teachers, parents, and administrators is vital in order to systematically improve academic performance and provide for future students’ needs. While Valenzuela and Jesse lament a lack of community that presently exists in today’s schools, they fail to offer

specific curricular or programmatic alterations. Whereas the celebration of culture is laudable, with it there needs to be some systemic changes in day-to-day educational practice. Again, here is where proponents of urban debate assert that participation in the activity does in-and-of-itself promote culture, and then in turn community activism as an outward expression of that collective identity.

Teacher expertise and relationship-building through language and cultural understanding is essential. Hispanic students, especially recent immigrant populations, are in greater need of genuine care. Donato and de Onis (1994) offer a critical account of reform efforts involving Latino students, asserting that while “important structural changes have recently occurred, reform efforts have been aligned more closely with the concerns of capital rather than educational equality” (Donato and de Onis, 1994, p. 173). The authors further contend that Mexican-American students under perform in schooling due to language barriers and ability grouping that persists largely in later grades. Curriculum differentiation and tracking, they contend, accounts for high dropout rates and poor attendance numbers for post-secondary institutions. Overall, Donato and de Onis conclude that more strident assessments of the past are needed and segregated school practices must be overcome to effectuate productive reform. Ultimately, if Hispanic students are to succeed in high school and beyond, they contend that “policymakers need to provide Mexican-American language-minority students full access to the core curriculum and services that go beyond academic instruction” (Donato and de Onis, 1994, p. 180). The details of how to specifically accomplish this, however, go unaddressed. Tracking and differentiation may afford educators with some

limited opportunities to deal with educational inequity; yet, at a minimum more active student engagement in class is more likely to produce sustained academic improvement.

One final aspect of Hispanic educational achievement that has a connection to this research relates specifically to the extent to which students believe that they acquire leadership skills as a result of participation in debate. Since advocates of debate assert that the activity prepares students for present and future leadership roles, it is appropriate to provide some context to this issue as well. Part of the undertaking of schooling is to foster within students a sense of civic responsibility and empowerment. O'Brien and Kohlmeier (2003) contend that community involvement is a catalyst for developing lifelong leadership skills. The authors suggest that empowering young people today in school leadership positions has a long-term benefit; Mitchell (1998) has made that similar claim with respect to "argumentative agency" for debaters. In their study O'Brien and Kohlmeier examine leadership opportunities for fifth, eighth and eleventh grade students by identifying the types of leadership roles students can occupy, as well as asking them to identify a leader and then provide an explanation as for why chose that particular person. Of the students surveyed, two general categories emerged, including those identified as 'principled individuals' and others designated as 'problem solvers.' They conclude that providing students with civic efficacy is very likely to inspire them to serve in their community and be role models for others. Promoting leadership abilities in students is yet another important facet to assisting students in the accumulation of cultural capital and the promotion of long term educational success.

The ability for a Hispanic student, or any student for that matter, to serve as public speaker in the context of debate while being 'principled' and/or a 'problem solver' may promote leadership skills, even if in a limited capacity.

Beyond analyzing the extent to which urban debate experiences effect student academic achievement, this study also seeks to address the ways in which involvement can impact self-efficacy and civic empowerment as it relates specifically to Hispanic students. As a cultural group of students who not have been included in prior attempts at exploring the implications of UDL programming, there is a clear need to examine aspects pertaining to their participation.

Need for Further Research

Despite the work done to date with respect to Urban Debate Leagues, several reasons exist for doing additional research. First and foremost is simply the overall lack of scholarship in this area. Collier's (2004) unpublished study and Mezuk's (2009) research appear to be the only comprehensive attempts at studying Urban Debate Leagues. Both conclude by alluding to intriguing questions for further consideration regarding academic achievement. Warner and Brusckke (2001) present two challenges they deem worthy of further consideration; one is the need to find teachers that relate well to students, and the other is the need to integrate urban debaters with their suburban counterparts. Both of these areas could use further exploration, and a look at specific students, within the content of one urban debate league school, provides an opportunity to more clearly hear about authentic student experiences.

The most important reason for this study, of course, is the need for student voice. Noticeably absent in the research done to date are the voices of students. Absent also are the voices of those who teach and coach the activity of debate. While surveys have been used to get at some understanding of the student involvement, engaging in case-study driven research is vital to better assessing more authentic student experiences. Of course, real stories regarding students need not be of Miller's (2006) sensational variety, nor should they be limited to the context of traditional suburban debate practice and tournaments as presented by Fine (2001). This research not only brings to the fore student voices, but also pays particular attention to determining to what extent they are or are not impacted by their involvement in the UDL programming. This research will specifically explore the potential application of the skills learned and applied in debate to those that may then be employed in the classroom. Again, this is essential to more fully understand what students have found meaningful about their involvement in urban debate. I will also explore the connections students make with respect to both internal self-efficacy and outward school and community-related empowerment. While broad-based claims have been made which assert urban debate accomplishes these lofty goals, further inquiry is much needed in these areas.

Finally, while the focus on diversity with the context of UDLs has been to date largely centered on African-American students, I want to extend this to include how the activity may or may not impact Hispanic students as well. In particular, I think it is vital to investigate this to see how they have fared through league program participation and to see how they envisage that association with their team and the UDL community at

large. In short, an ethnographic study in this area, paying particular attention to secondary level Hispanic students of the MDL, serves to fill a gap in the existing knowledge base. Qualitative research in this area that involves immersion in a Milwaukee area school for the purpose of getting to know several debate students and their teacher-coach has the potential to provide us with a more comprehensive understanding of team culture. More importantly, however, it has the capacity to deepen our understanding of how students internalize the experience.

Summary

A review of the pertinent literature pertaining to this research has been the focal point for Chapter 3. Narrowing down the topic of urban education reform, presenting scholarship on debate in general, and then focusing on scholarship specific to urban debate are necessary to understanding the context of this research. Additionally, providing context for the concept of self-efficacy was needed given the incorporation of this as the one of the domains for inquiry. Literature with regard to academic achievement for Hispanic students was summarized in order to position this research toward students of the Milwaukee Debate League who represent this ethnic group. There is a considerable need to address how urban debate impacts Hispanic students, so a foundation from which to ascertain this area of the research question has been provided. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology for the project.

Chapter 4 Research Methodology: A Qualitative Approach to the Study of Urban Debate

This chapter outlines the methodology for this project. The research question is presented along with the conceptual framework for approaching the fieldwork. Sections are also included for site and participant selection. Sections that describe data collection and subsequent analysis follow. Data will be gathered through interviews and classroom observations of several students who have been participating in the Milwaukee Debate League, together with interviews with the teacher-coach of the team. Following the data-related sections is another section that describes research positionality, specifically outlining the connection I have had to the activity of debate and the ways in which potential bias will be mitigated. The next section describes some of the anticipated limitations for conducting the research. Lastly is a chapter summary.

Research Question & Approach

The critical question to be addressed in this research is how students may or may not be affected by their participation in an Urban Debate League.

The central question for this research project is as follows: What effect does participation in an urban debate league have on academic achievement, self-efficacy and civic empowerment for Hispanic secondary school students?

The focus of this research applies to three overarching themes: 1) an examination of the ways in which students may or may not manifest change with regard

to educational aptitude and effort within and beyond the classroom as a result of participating in urban debate related activities, 2) an examination of the factors pertaining to how participating in debate may impact student self-esteem, and 3) the extent to which students who are involved in the activity feel that they have grown in confidence, and as result feel empowered. This aspect of civic empowerment may have them more active in speaking out within their respective school and local communities. Simply put, this is an effort to know more about what is going on with respect to Hispanic students' interactions with UDL-related activities, and how this might impact their overall educational experience.

This research takes the form of an ethnographic study and relies on gathering data through informant interviews and observations. There was one teacher-coach and four student informants involved in this research. I worked within one school with selected students in order to really get a comprehensive feel for the way in which the debate program operates. More importantly, I wanted to determine how students participating in urban debate may be affected by their involvement in urban debate academically and with respect to self-efficacy and feelings of empowerment. Consequently, the preponderance of the fieldwork time was spent with the students themselves. I believe that concentrated time in one school within the MDL with a small group of informants provided clear focus for this study.

Conceptual Framework

Within the field of qualitative research there is an interpretive approach as defined in Denzin and Lincoln (2005) that focuses on placing the researcher within a 'naturalist' position with respect to what is being studied. According to Denzin and Lincoln, "this means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Researchers who engage in qualitative practices such as interviews and observations do so in an effort to gain a better awareness of how the subjects give purpose to the conduct they exhibit. This approach appears well suited for a qualitative study pertaining to the students engaged in the Milwaukee Debate League. Being immersed in the student learning environment through observations in the classroom as well as debate practices represents those natural settings through which the activity may have some direct bearing on attitude and behavior.

Additionally, qualitative research, which provides the researcher occasion to conduct a series of conversations and observations with the subjects, allows for the emergence of concepts during the course of the study (Stake, 1995). This study was designed as a series of visits to the research site over the course of several weeks. The intent was to allow for a deepening of the data and understanding as interviews and observations are layered upon one another. There is some implicit expectancy about qualitative research that greater understanding is typically fostered over time. Immersion into the culture of the debate team within the school and also in the

classrooms where the students spend so much of their time should, therefore, reveal the influences that are present.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the activity of debate is in a sense a culture unto itself, and for that matter each urban debate has a team culture within both the league and the high school itself. A focal point for this research was to better understand team culture, and time spent over the course of successive weeks afforded the opportunity to gain information and context. An ethnographic approach is one in which the researcher attempts to accurately describe and understand a culture. Approaching this as an ethnographic study represents an appreciation for the team culture of urban debate that exists for these students. Furthermore it recognizes that the goal for this study was not just a reporting of the experiences had by the informants, rather it represents a genuine effort to understand what they are engaged in. According to Spradley (1980):

The essential core of ethnography is this concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand. Some of these meanings are directly expressed in language; many are taken for granted and communicated on indirectly through word and action. (p. 5)

More than reporting, the foremost objective in engaging in the ethnographic approach is one of understanding.

Time spent immersed in the school and with the students provided the opportunity to draw forth meaning from the words, actions, and events that transpired. That time is known as fieldwork which, as described by Spradley, “involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different...Rather than studying people,

ethnography means learning from people” (Spradley, 1980, p. 3). Indeed, learning is the primary objective in order to more fully understand the urban debate student experience.

Within this ethnographic framework, I relied on a case study approach with teacher and student informants. I found that brief informant profiles and cross-case analysis better illuminated the findings. Another important consideration regarding the approach to this research has been defined by Stake (1995) as the *intrinsic case study*.

Stake (1995) contends:

Case study research is not sampling research. We do not study a case primarily to understand other cases. Our first obligation is to understand this one case. In intrinsic case study, the case is pre-selected...Sometimes a ‘typical’ case works well but often an unusual case helps illustrate matters we overlook in typical cases. (p. 4)

This concept is especially important to this research. While it would be interesting, and in many respects even desirable for those who advocate for the activity, to be able to extrapolate the urban debate experiences of the few students onto all participants in the MDL that would not be appropriate. The primary criterion, which Stake delineates, is that a case should be pre-selected in order to maximize what we can learn.

Additionally, due to the time and access limitations that are inherent with fieldwork we are better off to select cases that are “likely to lead us to understandings, to assertions, perhaps even to modifying our generalizations” (Stake, 1995, p. 4). In an effort to approach a deeper and more authentic understanding of the culture of urban debate within the school, this research project aimed to include a ‘holistic’ component with the

inclusion of informants in multiple roles. The informants included both students and the teacher-coach of the program.

With respect to the specific research paradigm employed, this project relied on a *constructivist paradigm* wherein the researcher recognizes that the knowledge is constructed by the individual (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Initially identified as *naturalistic inquiry* by Guba and Lincoln (1985), constructivism posits that there is no exact meaning to the known world other than what is attributed to it by the individual. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994):

Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the construction. (p. 110-111)

In essence, this paradigm establishes that there is no single reality; rather, there exists a complex set of realities in which the individual constructs knowledge and subsequent meaning. Through their examination of several paradigms, Guba and Lincoln explain that the aim of inquiry for constructivism is to achieve a level of profound understanding; however, even with that express goal in mind the researcher has a responsibility to continue to remain open to new interpretations as information is gained and new revelations present themselves.

Within the constructivism paradigm, ethics and values play a vital role with respect to the work done through the qualitative approach. Guba and Lincoln (1994) contend:

Even if it were possible, excluding values would not be countenanced. To do so would be inimical to the interests of the powerless and of 'at-risk' audiences,

whose original (emic) constructions deserve equal consideration with those of the other, more powerful audiences and of the inquirer (etic)... Ethics is intrinsic to this paradigm also because of the inclusion of participant values in the inquiry (starting with the respondents' existing constructions and working toward increased information and sophistication in their constructions as well as in the inquirer's construction). (p. 114-115)

The incorporation of values is important for this research. Thus, working with urban debate students and drawing out the direct association to ethnic identity for these Hispanic students, it was vital to give a fair-minded voice to their opinions and beliefs. While advocates for the UDL movement have postulated that the activity brings challenged schools and at-risk students certain benefits, there needs to be an impartial hearing, recording, and sharing of experiences for these informants.

Site and Teacher-Coach Selection

Site selection was determined by a number of factors, not the least of which was accessibility to the school. Milwaukee is unique in that this UDL is made up of more than just Milwaukee Public Schools. The program has a range of schools involved including choice, charter, religious, and suburban. As such, there were several possibilities. For the sake of protecting the identities of the informants, all names have been altered including that of the school itself.

I chose Perry Prep, a high school (grades 9-12) in the city of Milwaukee, based on the following criteria: 1) it's an original MDL school with sustained involvement in the league, 2) the school has continuity with the teacher-coach of the program over the past several years along with administrative support, 3) the school claims to offer a rigorous curriculum, and 4) the school has a substantial Hispanic student population.

Perry Prep entered the Milwaukee Debate League in the second year and has sustained its involvement through each successive year. The school was entirely new to debate at that time so its team culture of debate formed fully within the context of the urban debate initiative here in Milwaukee. It did not have a forensics/speech program either prior to the start of the MDL. The rationale for considering selecting a school that did not have an existing speech-related program is rooted in the desire to better understand how the league may or may not impact students in an environment with no prior connection to the activity.

Another reason for considering this school is that the teacher-coach of the program has remained the same. For the purposes of continuity and programmatic development, I thought that this would be advantageous. As I was interested in how the program has been evolving over the past three years, the presence of a single teacher as the debate coach may prove important to the telling of this story. Administrative support was another consideration for selection. The principal of the school readily embraced involvement in the league and has been very supportive over the years, even going so far as to work over the summer months to recruit students for summer institute participation.

Perry Prep appears to provide an academically challenging environment for its students. The school offers several advanced courses in the areas of math, science, and foreign language. Paraphrasing the school's mission statement, the school declares its purpose as one of educating students for college success through both a rigorous and values-based education.

Another reason which significantly influenced the selection of Perry Prep was the sincere interest in getting at understandings specific to Hispanic students. The school, with approximately 240 pupils overall, serves a predominantly Hispanic student population. This aspect was especially significant. As established in the previous Chapter, this is a student group that has to date garnered very little attention in other prior urban debate related studies. Knowing that Perry Prep's student body was mostly Hispanic was among the most important considerations for selecting the school.

Selecting this teacher-coach as a primary informant relates to several factors, yet rests primarily on the fact that she is the designated teacher-coach for the Perry Prep program. Moreover, the teacher-coach has been involved in the MDL since its inception which provides added context to her experience of urban debate. I have known the teacher-coach, Kate, for several years in a professional albeit limited capacity during my time as the MDL educational consultant. My previous interactions with Kate led me to the conclusion that she was an engaging person who is both candid and reflective. I had anticipated that the interview sessions would flow easily as a result of Kate's easygoing personality, and they in fact did.

Student Informant Selection

In total, there were five informants – one teacher-coach and four students. Students were selected in consultation with the teacher-coach. I sought insights and recommendations for student participation from the teacher-coach at the beginning of the fieldwork. An unexpected aspect to selection was that the debate team at Perry

Prep had experienced diminished participation. Whereas 10-12 students had been active earlier in the season, numbers had fallen off by April when I was beginning the fieldwork. The criteria for student selection was to include a number of factors: 1) students of Hispanic ethnicity, 2) some variation by grade level if possible, 3) length/depth of involvement in MDL-related activities with an emphasis on longer involvement, and, of course, 4) the willingness of the student to participate in the interviews and classroom observations.

In handling student selection for the case studies, I was seeking to enlist students of Hispanic ethnicity. As Hispanic students have had little to no voice in the present literature, this was the paramount aspect for selection. Secondly, I entered Perry Prep with the notion of considering some variation of grade level in order to gain some additional perspective. I was not going to try to specifically represent any type of cross-section of the student population, yet I thought involving students across the four grade levels would be a plus. This was purposeful in order to ascertain more about how urban debate is experienced via student grade level, with an emphasis at the higher grades. Third, I was considering that student informants having more than one year of experience with the MDL would have more experience to draw upon; thinking that more time participating in the activity may add some further insights into how involvement in urban debate may potentially manifest change in academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. As it turned out two seniors (Anna and Teresa) and one sophomore (Carlos) were selected from the available four remaining active debaters. I opted to select a third senior (Natalie) who had left the

team earlier in the year over another active sophomore member. My rationale was that the added experience she possessed would be more valuable for the study.

Based on the teacher-coach input, and student willingness to participate, every attempt was made to meet the intrinsic case study criteria as outlined by Stake (2005). As such, among my objectives was to include students who may not represent the typical student that is perceived to have achieved academic distinction as a result of their involvement in urban debate. I did not ask for standardized test scores, GPA data, or other grade-related information. Some preliminary introduction/overview to the students currently participating in debate by the teacher-coach was obtained before approaching them to ask that they be informants in the fieldwork. She helped identify understandings and experiences each had with the activity. Knowing something about their pattern of participation and level of competitive success in urban debate was helpful. Feedback from the teacher-coach who had most of them in class also assisted me in identifying students that had distinctive experiences with respect to the MDL. There was, however, the unanticipated limiting factor and that was the small nature of the team given the lateness in the school year. This situation will be more thoroughly addressed in Chapter 5.

As a result of this selection process of the school and teacher, the researcher-informant relationship with the students becomes vital given the limited number of interviews and the need for rapport to be well established in such a short period of time. I believe that rapport was well established with the five informants involved in this study. In sum, the focal point of the research remained on the student informants,

and care was taken to earn their trust so that I could feel comfortable in concluding that I could honestly and fairly represent what I contend were candid and insightful responses.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in the late spring of 2011 and included a series of interviews and observations that spanned five weeks. Permission and assent forms were obtained, and all research was done in conformity with Institutional Review Board guidelines.

The fieldwork consisted of a series of interviews and observations. Initially slated to span approximately six to eight weeks, the fieldwork time was consolidated into five weeks as a result of the school's academic calendar. As a result of the condensed timeframe, time was spent at the school every day for four full weeks, and several days of the fifth week. During the first three weeks of the fieldwork, two days per week included at least three classroom observations. These observations took place in the subject areas of English and Social Studies. Some adjustments in observation times were made to accommodate testing and quizzing, and a short leave for one of the classroom teachers. Four thirty-five to forty-five minute interviews were conducted with each student informant, and four hour-long interviews were conducted with the teacher-coacher of the debate team across the five weeks. The administration, faculty and staff were most gracious in allowing me access to their school.

Being present at the school every day over the course of several weeks provided me with a feel for the atmosphere of the institution as a whole. I developed, in short order, a regular presence at the school. I presume that my presence over the five weeks became less intrusive as time went by. Many students recognized me and even said hello in the hallways during the latter weeks of my time there.

Reflecting best practices with the field of qualitative research, data were collected through multiple data sources including interviews, observations, and the collection of relevant artifacts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Spradley, 1980). According to Spradley (1980):

When ethnographers study other cultures, they must deal with three fundamental aspects of human experience: what people do, what people know, and the things people make and use. When each of these are shared by members of some group, we speak of them as cultural behavior, cultural knowledge, and cultural artifacts. Whenever you do ethnographic fieldwork, you will want to distinguish among these three, although in most situations they are usually mixed together. (p. 5)

Data were triangulated as a result of observation field notes, transcribed interviews, and a few relevant debate artifacts. Some additional notes were taken during the interviews and observations via laptop computer. Additional reflective notes were added following each interview and observation session. The purpose for the added notes during the interviews, beyond the data gathered via digital recorder, was to record other aspects of the communicative experience. Non-verbal expressions are also important to the participant observation and interview process (Spradley, 1980). The comparative analysis in associating both transcribed notes and field notes contributes to the depth

and integrity of researcher-informant dialogue. A journal was kept as well for recording additional insights and queries.

Informant Interviews

A series of four 35 to 45-minute interviews were conducted with each of the student informants. Students were interviewed individually. All student interviews took place at the school in the classroom of the teacher-coach or some other appropriately designated area. Care was taken to ensure a safe and monitored environment for the students at all times. These sessions were recorded with a digital tape recorder and transcribed; additional written field notes during the interview sessions were taken as well.

A total of four 1-hour long interview sessions took place with the teacher-coach of the debate program. The process of member checking (Stake, 1995) is considered an important technique for validating the data that is gathered through interview transcriptions and observational notes. This method was partially used during the data collection process with the teacher-coach since it assisted in the triangulation process and further ensures accuracy and trustworthiness. The informant interviews took place at the school in the classroom of the teacher-coach or some other appropriately designated area. These interviews were taped and later transcribed. Transcriptions of each interview were to have been made and reviewed prior to each subsequent visit in an effort to gain in-depth information and understanding. In actuality, I was only able to listen to each informant interview before the next one and draft follow-up questions

from that process. Given the contracted time of the fieldwork I was unable to transcribe each informant interview before proceeding to the next one as I had initially hoped. I do maintain, however, that the auditory review was sufficient to raise pertinent follow-up questions for inquiry.

Informant Questions

As previously described, among the primary goals was to come to know the workings of the program within my subject school and to understand the culture of the debate team present there. Another fundamental aspect of the research was to comprehend how each student assessed the program and its effects on his/her own educational experience. Issues pertaining to academic achievement, internal self-efficacy and confidence and outward school and community-related empowerment were included among the initial questions. Follow-up questions extended upon these in order to provide a more complete perspective for each informant. In order to approach this emic perspective with the informants, a series of focus questions had been crafted for the debate students and teacher-coach alike to guide the interview process.

Initial questions for the student informants included:

- What made you decide to get involved in debate?
- How did you get started with the team here at school?
- Are you involved in any other activities?
- What is your class schedule?
- What other commitments do you have at school? Beyond school?
- Why do you think students get involved in debate?
- To what extent do students remain involved in debate? Why are you still involved? Will you participate next year? In college?

- Describe what the team is like? What are practices like? What do you work on?
- Do you work on research? Where do you get your evidence?
- How does debate fit into your school day?
- Do you work on debate outside of school?
- Does student involvement affect student performance in school? Your own?
- Has being involved changed your attitude toward schooling?
- How has being involved changed your performance in school in any way?
Specific to homework? Specific to in-class participation? Specific to writing?
Specific to note-taking? Does debate help you with anything else?
- What are the tournaments like? How do students from different schools interact?
- What do you like most about debate? What do you like least about debate?
- What is difficult about debate?
- What impact do you think it has on you? Friends? Family?
- Does debate have any effect on the school? Any effect beyond school?

Initial questions for the teacher-coach informant included:

- How would you describe the debate program here at the school?
- What prompted you to become involved as the teacher-coach?
- How would you characterize the larger debate league the school participates in?
- Is there support for the debate program from other colleagues, administrators, and parents? How does it compare to other programs?
- What do you think motivates students to become involved in debate?
- Why do you think your students remain involved in debate?
- To what extent do you think this program may be beneficial for the students?
- Is there any connection between the students' involvement in debate and performance in your class? Can you cite any specific example or examples?
- To what extent do you think this program may be beneficial for you as a teacher-coach?
- Is this type of program beneficial for the school community as a whole?
- What if any changes would you like to see made to the program? UDL programming or debate in general?
- Do you think student academic achievement has been impacted as a result of involvement? Any connection to the amount of participation?
- Do you think student self-efficacy and/or empowerment has occurred? In the classroom? In the school? In the community beyond?

In addition to these initial questions, other related questions emerged as the student and teacher-coach interviews unfolded. Classroom and team practice observations of the students also provided the basis for some further inquiry. Classroom observations

were helpful as several follow-up questions connected to skills were queried. The initial questions were adjusted and extended in an effort to gather additional detail and perspective. In the time spent listening to each interview session, follow-up questions were scripted.

Informant Observations

In addition to the interviews, a series of observations served as the other primary component of the fieldwork. Four observations of each student were conducted in each of their respective English and Social Studies related classes. Classes are approximately one hour in length. The purpose of these classroom observations was to observe students in the midst of the academic setting at school and then be able to have some dialogue about how participation in debate may impact how they engage in their classes. Humanities based classes were chosen in an effort to observe students in a learning environment where discussion might take place. The extent to which students participate in class was directly observable. Comments the students made within the classroom setting afforded further opportunity for explication during subsequent interviews. Four observation times of debate practices/meetings were to be conducted as well; however, the small nature of the team meant limited time and those observations were shorter than initially anticipated. The rationale for these observations relates back to the already stated intent to more fully understand the team culture of the program both with respect to how it functions internally and also within the larger MDL community. While narrow in scope, some insights were gathered as a

result of having observed practice time. Particularly helpful, however, was that many of the observation times provided insights for additional follow-up interview questions. Several questions in the later interviews had some connection to what had been directly observed in the classroom. In total, the fieldwork amounted to approximately fourteen hours of interview time and twenty hours of direct observation time across the five weeks.

In sum, data collection occurred through the use of interviews, observations, and the collection of a few relevant artifacts. These data were intended to explicate the research question, and through subsequent analysis address some of the gaps shown apparent through review of the literature in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

As for data analysis, the process will draw from Goetz and LeCompte (1981) in two ways regarding the information gathered from informants. They describe several “common conceptual techniques” including *theorizing* and several other related techniques classified as *general analytic procedures*. Consideration had already been given to these two types of data analysis techniques and how they will be used to approach understanding the coded data. Described by the researchers as a “formalized and structured method for playing with ideas,” *theorizing* allows the researcher to analyze ethnographic data through “mixing, matching, comparing, fitting together, linking,” etc. (Goetz and LeCompte, 1981, p. 180). The coding process I engaged in afforded the opportunity to utilize these types of analytical processes in order to draw

forth the pertinent material. These analytic approaches do not need to be initiated at the conclusion of the data gathering. With that in mind, I began to code some of the observational data during the fieldwork time. Reviewing the taped interviews in-between each interview session was a priority in an effort to try to make connections among the comments made by the informants. It was also important since I recognized early on that I would be unable to transcribe the interviews in the midst of the fieldwork. Response related to academic achievement and understandings of self-efficacy and outward school and community empowerment were further broken down into subset categories for subsequent examination.

Additionally, the data analysis drew from the *general analytic procedures* through the incorporation of “analytic induction.” Acknowledging the theory of Spradley (1980), which suggests that case studies are a means to understanding those individuals as compared to drawing more generalized conclusions, I entered into the fieldwork careful about how wide-ranging the conclusions offered could be. With data analysis underway, it became clear to me that brief introductions to the informants followed by cross-case analysis would be more beneficial. Some claims are forthcoming as a result of the data analysis, yet none that I would contend can or should be applied to all urban debate teams overall. The analytical process also centered on creating some categorization in line with what Goetz and LeCompte (1981) describe as “scanning the data for categories of phenomena and for relationships among such categories, developing working typologies and hypotheses upon an examination of initial cases, then modifying and refining them” (Goetz and LeCompte, 1981, p. 180). While

recognizing that the “relationships” with the informants was restricted to only four interview sessions, I would contend that some meaningful understandings were gained.

The data analysis process proceeded deliberately with the intent to ensure trustworthiness of the information gathered through both the observations and the interviews. Certainly, the practice of triangulation, as previously described in the data collection section, was deemed pertinent to safeguarding that the data accurately reflects the meanings and intentions of the selected informants. One additional facet for helping to ensure the trustworthiness of the data is through member checking. Through the technique of member checking, informants review transcripts or related observation notes to authenticate the information and to offer feedback (Stake, 1995). For the purposes of this research, the teacher-coach was asked some review questions about my observation notes in an effort to be sure they were as representative of the student informants as possible.

Incorporated as a means of ensuring a measure of precision within the qualitative research approach were procedural mechanisms for data gathering and analysis as offered by Huberman and Miles (1983). The approach specified by Huberman and Miles (1983) includes: 1) coding, 2) policing, 3) dictating field notes, 4) connoisseurship, 5) progressive focus and funneling, 6) interim site summaries, 7) memoing, and 8) outlining. Coding is the organizing of the data by theme. Policing is the effort of detecting bias and making sure to stay focused on the central questions and issues. Dictating field notes refers to just that as opposed to the process of using the transcription process. Connoisseurship represents the extent to which the

researcher understands the context of the site and is knowledgeable about the subject matter around which he/she is studying. Progressive focusing and funneling is the systematic narrowing of the data as the fieldwork progresses. Interim site summation refers to drafting short narrative write-ups about what is transpiring at the site along the way. Memoing is the practice of writing up formal notes and sharing information about emergent issues. Finally, outlining is the uniform process through which the information is then organized.

Whereas Huberman and Miles (1983) employed these tactics through a more comprehensive study that included multiple research sites, this general format nonetheless proved useful to the analytical practices I used for this one-site qualitative study. As for the modifications, the data collection via interviews was done through transcribed notes and not through dictation. Additionally, formal memos were not drafted for review with the student informants or the teacher-coach given the truncation of fieldwork time. There was review, however, through some repeat or extended questioning during successive interviews, but no formalized process of crafting memorandum. Lastly, with respect to adjustments to the above protocol, site summaries and outlines were only created through my own journaling. In order to reflect and discern as the research process unfolds, a research journal was kept throughout the fieldwork. Every effort was made to keep the interview and observation data as thorough and organized as possible.

Following a comprehensive review of all data, the sources were coded and preliminary themes rendered. A thorough analysis of the findings is presented in

Chapter 5. As such, the chapter provides insights about what was learned and understood from the informants with respect to the culture of the debate team at the school, as well as pertaining to the research question issues of academic achievement, self-efficacy and civic empowerment. As part of that analysis, I began by providing a brief profile of each informant. Next is an analysis that addresses each of the three domains of the research question: academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. In each of those sections, I have analyzed the elements that are similar in nature as well as those that are divergent as shared by the student informants and the teacher-coach. As promised I have included significant student voice throughout the Chapter.

Researcher Positionality

As for my place in this research, I must be candid with the reader here that I have been associated with high school debate in one form or another for the better part of my life, and believe it to be a very worthwhile activity for young people. In all, I have twenty-two years invested in the activity of debate as a former competitor, a long-time high school and college coach, the director of a summer debate institute, as a former member and leader in several state and national debate associations, and recently as the local educational consultant for the Milwaukee Debate League itself for its first two years. I approach this research from the vantage point of having been in-part responsible for the partnership that developed between Marquette University and the National Debate League. I witnessed firsthand the operations of the Milwaukee Debate

League since its inception through the dissolution of the grant arrangement two and a half years later. It is my involvement in urban debate, of course, that is in no small way a reason for pursuing this research project.

Given the personal connection to the activity and the founding of the MDL itself, I was entirely mindful of my personal biases as I approached this work. Yet, partiality is not a reason for me not to pursue it. There are some clear deficiencies in the research done to date relative to urban debate that requires attention. As for keeping my biases in check, I am confident that reviews by colleagues and friends both within and beyond the debate community - and most certainly my dissertation committee members – have kept my predispositions in perspective. Additionally, the processes identified in the data analysis section pertaining to triangulation and member checking provided formalized and on-going safeguards with respect to this issue.

Limitations

While every effort was made to minimize factors that might have detracted from this qualitative study, there remain several aspects that need some elaboration.

Clearly, site selection in-and-of-itself was limited. While there is tremendous diversity among the schools of the Milwaukee Debate League, selecting a school that would ensure access to a predominantly Hispanic student informants presented a clear limitation to selection. Limited choice aside, I was fortunate to be able to select a study site in which the students were Hispanic given the fact that Hispanic students have had little to no voice in the debate literature to date. It should also be noted here that since

the fieldwork only focused on a single ethnic student group, readers should not read the students in the study as speaking for students in other ethnic groups.

With respect to the interviews, there was a clear limit to the kind of rapport that could be established over the course of just a few weeks. There was also a clear limit to the amount of time students could be expected to give up for their involvement, as well as the limits of time for dissertation work. As an outsider to the school and someone who represented a quasi-authoritative role as an adult researcher, there was some chance that students might be less than forthcoming with aspects of their experience related to academics and the team. Some researchers have suggested that students may be inclined to embellish claims related to their involvement, or the reverse may be the case where little detail is offered so as to keep things positive (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This, however, wasn't my experience with my informants.

It was clear from the first round of my interviews that further questioning would be needed to draw out some additional in-depth responses from the four student informants. Whereas the teacher-coach interview sessions seemed to more readily bring out longer and more specific answers, the student interviews required a bit more work on my part as the questioner. Certainly having a series of interviews helped in establishing rapport and the responses from Anna, Natalie, and Teresa really became much more in-depth. Carlos presented more of a challenge from the interviewer perspective, yet through asking more questions and at times repeating the question or serving up a slight variance in wording for the initial question, over time he offered a more substantive response. Following each interview session I made notes regarding

areas to probe further in the following interview, and in the final interview I even asked each student and Kate if there were any areas of questioning that they might have been expecting that were not covered. Each of them articulated that there were not any areas that they expected to be discussed that hadn't already been covered related to urban debate.

Throughout the interview process, student responses were generally rather favorable toward participating in urban debate. I am convinced that there was certainly a genuine aspect to their responses; however, I also believe that the students may have refrained from being more critical or forthright about the downsides of the activity. They may have given more favorable responses supporting the notion that involvement for debate is highly beneficial and not necessarily offered more of the shortcomings that exist in participating due to thinking that's what I wanted to hear. The fact that concerns over time was served up as the only real drawback of urban debate league involvement, and that is so generic as a deficiency, left me wondering about just how forthright students were in sharing a balanced perspective. Granted there were some other queries raised about why the MDL events have shifted venues for tournament events, but even these appeared to be questions about the convenience of having events in a particular location and not stated weaknesses of league participation.

Moreover, it is possible that in considering that my work might be shared with others who may look at extending urban debate elsewhere, the student informants perhaps gave more favorable responses in hope that their positive feedback would serve as leverage for other students to have similar opportunities for involvement. Yet

another possibility was the reflection that the student informants thought their responses had toward the teacher-coach, and even the school overall. For example, when asking the debaters about what they might do differently in running an urban debate team of their own they had little to say by way of alterations. Viewed from another perspective, however, and considering the success they had garnered as a team, the support they had from other teachers and school administration, and the apparent respect they had for their teacher-coach, it may be that they have little substantive critique to offer about the UDL.

By contrast, I found the teacher-coach's answers to be much more balanced through her sharing of favorable and unfavorable impressions of the urban debate league and parameters for student involvement: her perspective, however, is that of a coach with a long history in the UDL, and not as a student debater. That balance came through especially with regard to the potential connections to academic achievement. In answering the inquiries I raised, the teacher-coach offered some critical and insightful analysis of the ways in which her students have experienced the activity over the past several years. At the forefront, it was not entirely conclusive in her mind that participation in the urban debate league directly resulted in substantive increases in the academic achievement and related skills for schooling. It was also evident she thought some aspects of league management were in need of attention as she described the need for an organized and comprehensive curriculum to be developed and provided to the teacher-coaches.

Some limitations in the observational time appeared along the way as well. The first observation day had to be shifted due to a substitute teacher. In the first class actually observed, the time was split between silent reading and the viewing of an Indian literature based film. In a class later that day for the same student (Carlos), the students spent time working on a study guide. As such, there was not much in the way of opportunity for class discussion. Among the primary reasons for observing classes was to see whether or not the students were involved in more vocalized aspects of learning. Another unanticipated situation developed as two student informants shared the same classes, for both English and Social Studies (Natalie and Teresa). Given low student participation numbers with the team it was not possible to avoid this situation. What effect this had on how the students handled themselves in class and through follow-up interview question is not known; however, the initial intent was to have as many observations as possible in many different classes.

As a consequence I would argue that a pattern of regular observations across more weeks or better yet a semester would likely add to the ability to generate more detailed conclusions about the effects that urban debate league participation may or may not have in class. Some interview questions explored issues that surfaced in classroom observations, but what remains unresolved was the extent to which the student informants altered their in-class behavior as a result of my presence. My sense, however, is that this was not an issue. It is fair to conclude that observations with greater frequency over a longer duration would minimize this 'outsider' factor as well as produce more data for analysis.

Of course, while there was an expectation that the novelty of the researcher presence would wear off after several visits. It is possible that teachers too may have reacted to an outside visitor presence by potentially drawing out the students there to be observed. My presumption was that the triangulation of what the student informants would share during the interviews compared with what the teacher-coach would share, as well as what the observations would reveal, to me adequately accounted for this potential limitation.

Summary

The purpose of this research project was to examine the extent to which Hispanic secondary level students interact with UDL-related activities and how this might impact their overall educational experience. Through the use of interviews and observational data, the intent was to better understand student experiences with regard to the culture of the debate team at their school, as well as the potential effects participating has on academic achievement, self-efficacy and civic empowerment. The procedures outlining data collection and analysis for this project were intended to appropriately direct the fieldwork and subsequent coding and analysis; guidelines for ensuring integrity and trustworthiness have also been included. Chapter 5 will detail student voice focused on the three areas in the research question. Chapter 6 provides additional analysis and connects the study findings to the extant literature.

Chapter Five Presenting the Data through Student Voice

This chapter provides an analysis of the interview and observation data. The data analysis process was drawn from Goetz and LeCompte (1981) through *theorizing* and engaging in *general analytic procedures*. As such, the coding process afforded the opportunity to engage in these types of analytical processes in order to draw forth the pertinent material. Answers related to academic achievement and understandings of self-efficacy and outward school and community empowerment were broken down into subset categories of further examination, and that break down provides an organizational structure for part of this chapter.

Whereas I had intended to provide case studies for explicating the data (Spradley, 1980), it appeared more appropriate, as the coding process unfolded, to instead break down each component part of the research question and provide analysis through student voice in each respective area. Member checking, the technique of having informants review transcripts or related observation notes to authenticate the information and to offer feedback (Stake, 1995) was unfortunately omitted due to the contraction of fieldwork time as a result of time and parameters that were needed to gain IRB approval.

Transcribed notes were made at the conclusion of the fieldwork, not along the way during the time spent at the research site, and provided the basis for coding the data. Observation notes along with a limited research journal were kept and used in an attempt to triangulate the findings. In lieu of a complete case-analysis approach, an

introduction is provided to each informant and then cross-case analysis is addressed each of the three facets of the research question: academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. Within each of those sections, I have analyzed the elements that are similar in nature as well as those that are divergent as shared by the student informants, as well as including the teacher-coach perspective. Finally, significant student voice through the use of direct quotes appears in this chapter. It is important to note here that virtually no editing has been done to the quotes that appear in this chapter. In one place a teammate name was removed for purposes of confidentiality, and in a few other places I have truncated the quote with the use of three periods to provide conciseness.

The fieldwork at Perry Prep, comprised of a series of interviews and observations, was conducted over the course of five weeks in the spring of 2011. Each informant was interviewed four times over the course of five weeks. Observations were conducted as well. Each student informant was observed four times; two English classes were observed as were two Social Studies related classes. Some students were observed twice in a given day, while others had one observation. It was necessary to work around the school calendar and a few requests of the teachers. For example, there was a field trip in one instance and in another there as an outdoor lesson that was conducted that the teacher thought was best avoided as an observational time.

Among the prescient reasons for conducting this research was to let student voices be heard. Of the little that has been written on Urban Debate Leagues, student voice has been nearly non-existent. Also, the data contained in this chapter focuses on

the teacher-coach voice as well. While that adult/educator level voice has been present in earlier literature regarding urban debate, analysis that connects to student reflections of the activity has not been previously included.

What follows is a systematic analysis of the 180 pages of transcribed interview material integrated with the observational data gathered. Taken together this material provides the basis for examining the perspectives that one teacher-coach and four students have relative to participation in an Urban Debate League.

The format of the chapter begins with a profile of each of the four student informants and the teacher-coach. Following the profiles is a description of the urban debate team at Perry Prep, with specific attention paid to the notion of the 'culture of debate.' Finally, this is followed by an analysis of the interview and observational data with regard to the three specific domains of academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment.

Lastly, it is important to note that this chapter is intended to focus on the informant voices. As noted previously, most of the prior urban debate literature does not emphasize student, and to some extent teacher-coach, voices. In order to allow these voices to stand out, there will be limited analysis offered up in chapter five and more extensive analysis with respect to extant literature provided in chapter six.

Informant Profiles

This section provides a brief introduction to each of the informants who are participating in this study. The introduction to each student informant contains the

same basic information including: 1) grade level, 2) class schedule, 3) identification of other involvements at school and outside of school, 4) the reason that they became involved in urban debate, and 5) something that explains what they like best about the activity. For the informants who are high school seniors, an indication of future plans is also included.

It is important to note that while one of the focal points for the research was to hear from Hispanic students, in gaining insights about the students from the teacher-coach, it became apparent that there were not four Hispanic students still actively involved in the team this late in the season. With that in mind, a choice needed to be made between an Asian male sophomore with two years of experience versus a Caucasian female senior who had three full years of experience and departed the team at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. I decided that it was important to the research to include a four year member of the team, even though she had departed the team earlier in the year. The added experience and possibilities for reflection are, in my estimation, more apt to added depth to the study.

Anna: a senior.

Anna, a Hispanic female, is a senior. She joined the team junior year and has two years of participation in the urban debate league. Anna has a rigorous class load and her six classes include senior English, Government, Physics, Sociology, AP Calculus, and a 'rhetoric and composition' class at a local university. In addition to debate, Anna has participated in a number of other activities at Perry Prep including Student Council all

four years, soccer for two years, volleyball for two years, and running club and the school newspaper for one year each. Recently, she has been serving as a tutor after school at the school's writing center. Outside of school Anna does yoga and is involved with a club soccer team.

Throughout the interviews, Anna was reflective and thoughtful. She seemed confident in her responses and in part attributed the confidence she possessed to her involvement in urban debate. While not shy, she told me that she has generally been reserved in classes at school and seemed to think that debate has helped her to better organize her thoughts and speak more slowly and clearly.

When asked about her motivation for becoming involved in the urban debate league Anna stated:

Well, um, I've been wanting to be a lawyer for a long time now and I was just kind of looking for extracurriculars that would help me like develop skills that would help me throughout high school and college and I thought that debate would be a good thing to join so I chose to participate in it."

In Anna's immediate family, she would be the second to attend college; her older brother attends a state school. She told me that a family vacation meant starting freshman year a few days late and she missed the initial information and opportunity to join. By sophomore year she had enough other involvements and didn't think she could add anything else to her already busy schedule. So when asked what changed her mind

Anna responded:

"I guess just knowing that it's going to help me in the long run, like, knowing that debate can help me, help me get to where I want to be so that was like my one motivational factor, like, this is going to help me in the future, stick with it, it's something you're, you're going to look back and say, "Oh, I'm glad I joined debate."

With that Anna has fully participated in the program for the past two years. In reflecting on what she has liked most about debate, Anna remarked:

What I like most about debate is that I get to do my own work, and if I'm not – I, I have to work with my partner, but it also depends a lot on me, like, individual, individually. So if I don't do something right, I can, I'm the one to blame and I can say, "There's no one else to blame. You did this. You could have done better." And the reason I can push myself to get to where I want to be is because I know if I don't, it's all going to fall on me and nothing's going to work the right way. Just that, um, I'm in charge, making, making whatever I want to happen, happen.

Anna will graduate in June. She will be attending a liberal arts college in Southeastern Wisconsin and intends to pursue a career in law.

Carlos: a sophomore.

Carlos, a Hispanic male, is a sophomore. He has been a member of the school debate team for two years. Carlos takes a standard slate of sophomore classes which includes English, Geography, Geometry, Chemistry, and Spanish 1. Beyond classes and involvement in the urban debate league program, he is involved in gaming club and like other adolescent males has a fondness for video games, his favorite being Super Smash Brothers.

Carlos is, even by his own admission, very quiet in nature and that is why he told me he joined debate, that and for 'college things.' Yet, he pointed out in my very first interview with him that he is growing out of his shyness. I asked him how so, and he stated that even doing this interview with me was a sign that he is growing in confidence. When I asked about his ideas behind 'college things' he stated that he must

have been told at some point debate was good for college. Upon probing this further for explanation, he flatly stated, "I forgot." Kate, the teacher-coach of the program advised me that it would take some effort to draw information from Carlos, and at that moment I immediately understood her council. Outside of school, Carlos is not involved in any activities. Carlos does, however, describe himself as an avid reader and Kate confirmed that he really has an affinity for reading.

Compared to the other informants, Carlos was much more reserved and a number of his responses were inaudible during the transcription process. He often answered with very short responses, merely confirmed my question, or often times stated 'I don't really know' or 'I do not remember.' Surprisingly, the fourth and final interview elicited some of the most brief and inaudible responses. I was surprised by this given the steady development of rapport across the first three conversations. One of the reasons I selected Carlos was because Kate told me that he was in fact exceedingly shy, and more than anything else he has credited debate as the reason he is more talkative. His starting point for the activity she stated was one in which he let an entire constructive speech, the first eight minute speech in a debate round, go by without stating one word. In just two years it appears that he has made significant strides through his involvement. Beyond desiring the representation of a Hispanic male in the student informant group, I wanted to really engage a student who might otherwise find it challenging to open up and talk his urban debate league experience. Carlos proved to be a bit of a challenge initially, but as the interviews proceeded he was a valuable informant. Although I found myself repeating or rephrasing some questions

in an effort to draw out more substantive information from him, his contributions as an informant proved worthwhile.

In asking Carlos to describe the experience of participating in the urban debate league, he stated, "Most of the time it's okay. It can be fun and then sometimes, it depends on what's happening that day." When I came at the question again, he said, "They have a tournament, like, once a month, and, like, throughout the year, we have, like, at least one tournament per month, which is great because, unlike some other sports, where you have a tournament only once every year." In all, Carlos was generally positive about his participation over these past two years, and he anticipates being a part of the debate team junior and senior year as well.

Natalie: a senior and former debate team member.

Natalie, a Hispanic female, is a senior. She was involved for three full years, freshman through junior year. While initially joining the team senior year, she withdrew shortly within the school year in order to pursue other interests. Her experience with the local urban debate league began when Perry Prep joined during year two. Like most other seniors, Natalie has six classes which include English, Psychology, Government, Chemistry, Algebra II and Drama. She also has a job outside of school and periodically does volunteer work at an area church.

Expressive and confident, the interview time passed easily with Natalie. She readily expounded upon answers to the questions presented. It was clear from our conversations that shyness was not an issue for her, and that her motivation for

involvement was something else. In addressing her motivation for joining debate it was a connection to a friend that got her started. That and an earlier interest in the activity prompted her to seek out the debate team at Perry Prep. There was also an acknowledgement of some of the skill areas emphasized in debate that got her attention. Natalie stated:

Well, it was our freshman year, and the main reason I actually went was because my friend went to debate camp during the summer before our freshman year, and she didn't want to be in it alone throughout the year so I was, like, "Oh, okay, I'll join. You know, it sounds pretty cool." And I was interested in debate from elementary school because I was, like, I remember once in, I was like what was it, in fifth grade, we had a debate about this topic about science that we should go and study other planets or not, and I thought it was fun to do that debating about it. So, like, "That sounds interesting," and so I went with, and I thought it was a really, uh, cool thing to be involved in to be able to, like, just, cause also I was, I wasn't very good at speaking in front of people because I couldn't read very well so I thought that maybe this could help a little bit 'cause that's what all the teachers were saying, "Oh, debate will help you with that." I was like, "Oh, okay." So I tried it, and it was really cool."

After three years Natalie decided to end her time in debate in order to maintain her grades for college and also to pursue other school related activities. When asked directly about the decision to move on from debate she commented:

Well, I was in debate for my freshman, sophomore, and junior year. I didn't continue this year mainly because of it being my senior year, I didn't want to have too much on my plate for it because I wanted to make sure that my grades were good enough for college and I was focusing on the applications and everything like that because junior year I was involved in a lot of activities, including debate, and it was all too much for me so I decided to, like, kind of let go of everything I was doing and just focus on my class work. Yeah, so I was involved in debate for three years...pretty much. I joined the Student Council this past year. That's the one thing that I'm in this year that I haven't been before. Um, and then I'm still in Peers with Impact which I've been in before as well. So, those are the two main things that I'm in right now that I'm focusing on.

Natalie told me that after she talked to Kate to let her know about ending her involvement in debate, and her principal even checked in with her to be sure that she was alright and really achieve the activity balance she was seeking. Asked if she missed it, Natalie stated:

Sometimes I do. Like, it's, it's funny, sometimes kids that are in debate they'll be talking to me about it and I'll be like, "Yeah, I used to love doing this" and whatever. And, um, sometimes when I'm after school and just working on homework, I'd be working in the room that debate kids are working on their debate research and, like, sometimes I have this urge to, like, join in with them, you know? So, yeah, I do miss it sometimes. It was a lot of fun. It was hard work, but it was a lot of fun, and I find myself sometimes in class still using my debate skills. Like I remember the other day in U.S. government we were trying to connect our average-day lives to, like, how what we do is connected to the government, and I was making all these connections and I was just like, "Oh, I learned this in debate."

When selecting informants Natalie was chosen over an active sophomore student largely because of her long-time connection to the activity; she had joined the team when it first entered the urban debate league. Plus, as the only non-active informant, I considered that her perspective might carry some added reflective component given her ability to look back on the activity.

Natalie will graduate from Perry Prep in June. She is heading to a state school in southeastern Wisconsin, although she has not yet decided what she will study. She has considered staying with the activity as a judge and hopes to return back to Perry Prep to share her experience and help recruit new team members.

Teresa: a senior.

Teresa, a Caucasian female, is a senior. She has spent four years in debate and is presently the only four year member to be currently participating. Teresa has six classes which include AP Calculus, English, Psychology, Government, Chemistry, and Art.

Aside from classwork and a daily regimen of debate practice and study, she serves as a tutor for the writing center and has been involved in the school newspaper. Teresa has recently been looking for a job, yet has not had any success with that to date. Last summer, she attended debate camp at Marquette University, receiving a full scholarship from the MU Debate Program.

The interviews with Teresa were on the shorter side among the three female informants, yet not for lack of information shared. Teresa was focused and direct in her responses. Admittedly reserved in some school and social settings, Teresa shared that participating in debate has been an outlet for public speaking. Kate, her teacher-coach shared that she was in fact introverted and initially lacked confidence for talking in front of other people. Over time, her confidence has soared in Kate's estimation. From the conversations we had, it seems that her confidence has increased and so has her competitive nature. And it was that competitive nature that Kate stated brought her to join debate:

Well, I think it's just that I, I'm an opinionated person by nature, and I always like to have my opinions on a subject known, and I just naturally get into arguments with that so I think that's kind of why. And also I'm competitive, meaning I'll do what it takes to, like, get my name out there and, like, I would kind of, it's strange because I wasn't really a vocal person when I first came to Perry Prep. I didn't really talk to anybody and now I talk to everybody. So, that kind of helped, too, and yeah.

As for what's kept her in it for all four years, Teresa stated, "Uh, socializing. I, I get to talk with the other students and I get to meet students from other schools and it's academic and learning is something that I love to do and, plus, it has to do with reading and I've been reading from a young age and, yeah."

Teresa will graduate in June and has plans to attend college locally to pursue a degree in marketing management. Of the three seniors interviewed Teresa seemed most committed in her pledge to continue to remain involved with debate and the Milwaukee Debate League. Despite not having a debate team at the college she will be attending come fall, she plans to continue involvement in urban debate as a judge in the local urban debate league.

Kate: the teacher-coach.

Kate, a Caucasian female, has run the debate program at Perry Prep for the past three years and has been with the program since the school entered the Milwaukee Debate League during the second year of operation. She participated in debate for four years in high school so has background with the activity. She has been at Perry Prep for the past ten years and was initially the 'second coach' since the MDL insisted on having two staff members from each school involved. The initial head coach moved on to take over another school activity and Kate stayed with it because it was important to the students. Since it is a smaller school, there are limits on the activities and the school does not have other related co-curricular groups such as forensics, mock trial, or academic decathlon. Reflecting on why she got involved in coaching debate Kate stated:

So after the first couple years, we started getting some different events and different, involved in different sports and activities, um, around in the district, and I brought up having a debate team, um, but it never took off. That idea never went anywhere. So I just kind of let that one go, and I was coaching some other things. I coached cheerleading for a couple years. Um, and then we found out somehow, I think our principal found out about the Urban Debate League, um, which was in its second year. We joined the second year.

Perry Prep has had an active team for the past four years, and the awards displayed in Kate's classroom are evidence to some of the success that the team has had in that time. As for why she has stayed with it Kate says, "You know, I think it's worthwhile, and they learn a lot. And, I don't know, there's something about it. And, and I don't want the kids just to lose that opportunity."

In part of our interviews I asked about support for the program through the school and in particular the administration. Kate stated it was adequate:

Um, so our administration has been supportive of that as well, that kids are allowed to participate in practice and tournaments even if they're not making the grades that you would have to make to play soccer or basketball or whatever. Although, interestingly enough, I think because this, this school has such a strong focus on academics, I know I had two freshmen this year who bottomed out pretty quickly with grades and, and were both involved in debate – excellent debaters – but both of them decided, "I can't do it and keep up with my work. So I need to let it go." Um, which I was sad to see them, you know, do that, but priorities and you're going to have to figure out what comes first.

The conversation about support also expanded to include the league organizers about whom Kate described as generally helpful, especially at the beginning of the school's involvement. The primary gap she noted was with respect to debate curriculum. Kate remarked:

There is a coaching stipend through the league, and generally good support when first brought into the league, although there is a definite need for more help with curriculum...Um, the one thing that I've always wanted more support on, uh, which it hasn't seemed to matter who are running the league – anytime I

ask for it, I never really get a whole lot of support – is I want more, I would love a curriculum. You know, here's what you do day one with your new kids. Here are the debate activities. Here are some games. Here are things you should be doing with your kids. And I never feel I get enough support with that. I feel like "Well, here's the three-hundred page manual and, you know, it's got an activity section in there and do that," you know. Um, but I know that there are coaches that have a lot more experience in the league, who don't need any of that. So, um, but I guess my overall impression, especially first coming in, is very welcoming, um, very supportive, able to answer any questions I was having. Um, I just always looked for a little more support on that coaching aspect because I'm never sure if I'm doing enough or doing the right thing.

Aside from the trials regarding not having enough and well-structured and comprehensive curriculum materials, Kate was clear from our first meeting that this year has brought the added challenge of sustaining student involvement throughout the school year. Team member participation had dropped significantly as the 2010- 2011 school year had worn on (this will be substantively analyzed more thoroughly in the next section).

The preliminary meeting with Kate helped me to identify four students that would participate in the study. Since the study took place later in the second semester, the team has grown smaller in participation. I openly discussed with Kate the desire to incorporate Hispanic students in the study, explaining that prior research on urban debate has not engaged this student population. I was interested in Kate's perspective about which students would likely be more talkative and forthcoming about their experiences with urban debate. The reverse also proved true for Carlos, the only male student involved in the study, with whom Kate indicated was actually not particularly talkative. I made the decision to pass over another Asian male sophomore student for Carlos, in spite of the reservations offered, in order to have a Hispanic male presence in

the study. She stated that debate had appeared to provide him with confidence, yet that I was likely not to get nearly as much initial information from him as the other three informants.

Urban Debate at Perry Prep: Team Culture and Involvement

The urban debate team at Perry Prep has been a part of the Milwaukee Debate League since the fall of 2007, and is part of approximately ten schools to sign on during the second year. Students actually began their involvement at the Marquette University summer debate institute earlier before the school year began and at its high point the team has had over a dozen members. Over the course of the last four years the program has established itself as a notable activity both within the school and the MDL by earning a number of competitive tournament team and individual speaker awards. From the interview and observation data gathered, the debate team appears to be among the most accomplished activities at Perry Prep. In speaking about what the team means to the school, Natalie, senior and former debater, stated:

Um, well it brings us a lot of trophies. Our, our debate team actually gets more trophies than, like, anything else we have in this school, which I think is cool. Um, we get more trophies than the sports teams so that's funny. But, uh, it just, it, uh, debate just, it brings a lot of, like, it brings a lot of help 'cause, you know, like with all the other activities – you know, you're doing sports and it can help you with your, uh, uh, being in shape, things like that – but debate really helps you with, like, academics, you know, like, really helping you reading, writing, you know, speaking, researching, you know all these things. It helps you with that. It helps you in the classroom more than what just sports, which maybe only, it helps you with like determination and things like that, but debate also has that as well. Like, debate has so many things that it can help you with that, like, other activities in our school will only have a few of those. So I think debate is just, it just brings a lot of help to our school for students who need it.

Success is evident whether one is looking at the trophies placed atop a cabinet in Kate's classroom or listening to students speak about the activity. As such, there is a certain attachment for the team that is evident from those who are really committed to the activity. They form the culture for this urban debate team.

The culture of the debate team at Perry Prep might be best described as an outward effort to provide all involved in the activity support and respect. From the initial experiences when first joining the team to participation on MDL tournament events, comments from the informant interviews expressed that there has been an emphasis on respecting others and divergent points of view. My observations of the practice sessions, albeit limited, also demonstrated the respect fostered among the debaters. Anna didn't know anyone before getting involved in the team and yet quickly got the message about respect. Anna stated:

We meet at practices, they're, like, they're showing me their different point of view of things, the way they see and it, like, helps to, like, educate myself, saying, "Oh, it doesn't have to be this way." There are other alternatives to whatever we are talking about, and, you know, I guess I don't, it's opened my mind and it helped a lot, too, in other situations, not just debate.

Echoing that sentiment that the group respects each other and works together well, Natalie contends, "the group works well together. They're always, like, trying to help each other out, um, help each other find research. If you don't understand a particular piece of evidence, trying to explain it to them, you know, so, um, yeah, we worked well together, I think." Teresa expresses a similar perspective and also underscores that the team really works when stating, "I would say we're all really hard working, and we

work really hard to understand what we're doing in debate and...I think that's it, really at the core of our success."

Another facet of the culture of the team at Perry Prep includes support through continual encouragement to succeed. In reflecting on what it is that makes the team successful, Anna commented:

I think we're motivated...I think a lot of motivation comes from our coaches. They keep pushing us and we just keep going with it and aside from the fact that we, that they enjoy, well they seem like they enjoy the time we spend together so I think that's true. And well, we, I think it's the competitiveness of the activity also, like everybody is always competing and like "next time I am coming home with a trophy" or this and that, and we just keep pushing ourselves and I think the competitiveness with other schools is also, like, a drive for them to stay on the team and just like "I'm going to try better next time" and so they just keep going with the activity.

Others shared similar thoughts about the support provided by the team and what participation on the urban debate league means to them. That support for Teresa meant, "it's allowed me to be more open with people. Like, I, I've been able to, socialize a lot more with people. And, it, it's allowed me to, like, be more informed about, about things going on in the world." For his part Carlos stated that he doesn't think there is any other activity like the debate team at the school, yet when asked for specifics why that is the case he says he really can't explain.

From Kate's point of view, the culture of the team has been shaped by student enthusiasm for the activity. Kate stated, "The dedicated students create the culture...it is their enthusiasm that really generates positive energy around which the team succeeds." This year, however, has seen some increased challenges in sustaining student participation throughout the entire season. Several senior members opted not

to continue in the activity, Natalie being one of them. In speaking about that enthusiasm as an implicit part of the culture of the team, Kate struck a more somber tone in expressing that losing committed members had affected her and the team as a whole. In addressing this Kate remarked:

So, I mean there's half of my team is gone and those were the more enthusiastic kids, the real leaders, um, helping the other students – the new ones – learn what they're supposed to, um, so kind of losing that leadership that we've had for the last three years, uh, I think was kind of devastating to our team. So they, I think, really created the culture. Uh, so losing that was, was pretty hard...I think that my enthusiasm feeds off of the kids' enthusiasm. So, um, in losing some of those core members and not having as many enthusiastic and involved members left on the team, I think that my enthusiasm has waned a little bit as well.

Of course, remaining involved in any team takes a great deal of commitment. Asked what has kept her in it for the past several years, Kate stated:

The kids. The kids who are involved in it are pretty passionate about it and really like it. So I do it for them, you know. And I think that's kind of one of the reasons my excitement for it has gone downhill this year is because I don't have the involvement and the commitment that we've had years past in our program. So my involvement and commitment has started to dwindle, uh, because we don't have it as much from the kids anymore, either. Um, so it's the kids, it's always the kids. Why else, why else do we go into teaching? It's the kids. Um, so yeah, I was definitely doing it for the kids to continue to stay involved, and every year my husband says, "Are you coaching again? Do you know how exhausted you are? Why are you coaching? You need to stop that. You need, you need time. You know that's taking up too much time." You know, 'cause then I don't start doing any of my own planning until after, you know, debate practice is over or whatever so I'm not getting home 'til six or seven at night 'cause then you still have to do teacher work. Um, so, yeah. It's doing it for the kids. They enjoy it. They get competitive about it. They get involved in it. Um, and I think it's a fantastic program, it's a fantastic, um, activity for the kids to be involved in.

And despite some periodic challenges it does appear to be a very worthwhile program for those involved at Perry Prep. What seems to make it so is the culture of support and respect that has been established over the past several years. That, and the enjoyment

for the activity that each informant communicated throughout my time at the school, and I observed for myself as well, might suggest why students become involved in the urban debate team in the first place.

Motives for being involved in urban debate.

The question of what motivated each of the student informants to become involved in the urban debate program was asked at the beginning of the first interview. The question was also asked again in a later interview, as was the question what they thought the motivation for others to become involved might be. In addressing this question, Anna speculates it's about interest in debating ideas. Anna remarked, "I don't know, a lot of the team is pretty passionate about the whole activity, and I think that's why they joined debate because they like to debate, they like to -- I don't know, they just enjoy it. It's a good time so I think, maybe, that's the reason why." For Teresa, the connection seemed to resonate with self-improvement. Teresa says, "Maybe self-betterment. Maybe they don't feel like, maybe they don't feel like they're strong enough in reading and they want to get better or they, they don't think their logic skills are that great and they want better, they want to improve that, too." And for Natalie, it appears to be a combination of interest and some of the noted skills she likes of public speaking and reading. Natalie contends:

Well I would say that other students get involved in debate because it, it sounds really interesting. When you hear about it, you're, like, "Oh, you can learn about all these new topics" and, um, also a lot of kids, I guess, would say that it could help them 'cause that's the main focus when teachers are bringing it up to you, like, "This could help you with either your speech in front of people or your reading or, like, it could help with so many things," and it can specify to so many

kids. You know, one kid may not be very good at, uh, speaking in front of people and debate can help that. Another person might have a hard time in just, um, reading, like, you know, this research and so that this can help them. So there are many things that debate can pinpoint for a certain child or a certain person and that can help with them so, um, it really varies for a lot of kids that for what they go in for.

From Kate's perspective, what motivates a prospective student to join the team is different for each student. Remarkated Kate:

I think for each kid it's a little bit different. Some of them want the competition. Some of them like the arguing part of it. Some of them like that "other people have to listen to me," you know, because it is organized like that. I've had some students turn away, um, because they find out that it is an organized argument, and they just want to yell. They would like, "Oh, I get to yell at other people. I get to argue." "No, no, no. It's organized. You take turns." "I don't want to take turns." You know, so for some kids. Um, but so, uh, so the competitiveness, um, the arguing, the fact that other people are listening, um motivates, motivates, motivates. Um, for some students, scholarships, knowing that there's an opportunity for scholarships out there, um, and that there are recruiters, which I am hoping will continue. I know that we've had pretty good luck in the past. Um, since the league started, we've had quite a few scholarship opportunities. Now with the change in direction that it's taking, I'm hoping those opportunities will still be available to the students.

Related to this motivation, Kate told me that a former student was offered a scholarship to a prestigious out-of-state university, but in the end decided so attend college locally. Yet, for some students the possibility of scholarship assistance to college is a significant factor. For others it is simply to overcome an element of shyness and gain confidence speaking in front of others. Kate stated:

And so we've had a couple of students even join up for this because they want to get over their shyness. They think it's going to help them to speak in front of people, to be able to do public speaking, um, which I think is an interesting – I don't know if I ever would have picked that to, if I have a fear of speaking, to purposely pick something about speaking in front of other people.

This was particularly true for Carlos, who himself stated that overcoming shyness might be a similar motivation for others who have sought out the Perry Prep team or the urban debate league experience through other schools.

As this question with respect to student motivation was discussed in several ways, I asked whether intrinsic or extrinsic motivation played the more significant part.

Kate didn't hesitate in responding:

Definitely intrinsic. I mean there's not a whole lot I think that would be an external motivator. The trophies, maybe a little bit, but I think that's, uh, icing on the cake, you know, if you win a trophy. It's nice to win a trophy. Um, but I think it definitely has to be an – there's a lot of internal motivation... but I don't think that's the main reason they're participating because so "Ooh, I can win a trophy. It's so I can be involved in this activity, and I can talk about these ideas that I know things about, um, and people are listening to me. Um, what I say is important."

The notion that intrinsic factors play a more significant part of urban debate league involvement really comes through the assessments of each of the informants, as well as the idea that it is somewhat distinct and likely multifaceted for each individual. Of course, Kate also added that some external factors like the trophies are appealing to some, not to mention the attraction of free food. Kate remarked:

I think at the beginning, the very, very beginning, we really played up the free food - "Lunch and breakfast are provided. Come for a free meal." - um, with the tournaments, anyway. And, I mean, as teachers, and I wasn't in charge as much, you know, the other, the other teacher was, but as teachers, we also went through, besides just making the announcements and talking to kids, but hand-picking some of those kids out and saying, "Hey, this activity is for you. I see these qualities in you, and I think you're going to be really good. Um, so come see what it's about. Come do a tournament. Check it out. See what you think." Um, and so I think after that, I mean, by picking a couple kids that we thought were going to be really good - and I don't know exactly what those qualities are, to describe those qualities. You just know when you see it. "That kid is going to be good." The kid who can, the kid who can come up with thirty different excuses for not having their homework done, but follow each one of them

through to the end, not just “My dog ate my homework,” but it’s creative and it’s, you know, or... The kid who has the reasoning behind the things they say, and those are the kids that I think are drawn to, um, an activity like this as well. And, I mean, once they start, I don’t think they can stop. You know, they just, they really, um, enjoy it.

Beyond the appeal of the free food, Kate and other teacher-coaches in the urban debate league can both encourage and size up potential students that may in fact benefit from the activity. The connection that many who promote the activity assert is reflected in Kate’s remark that the smart and savvy excuse making kid is exactly who should be attracted toward urban debate. Of course it isn’t enough to just identify those students, some outreach is needed to get them involved and debate practice and the hook to competitive tournaments has tended to be the primary ways of reaching out and encouraging student involvement.

Team practice and tournament preparation.

An initial topic area for the interviews with the student informants focused on what practices and tournaments were like, and how those aspects of involvement fit into the larger picture of team involvement. This section, an extension of understanding team culture, addresses the goings on at team practices and how the debaters prepare for the monthly MDL competitive tournament events.

Practice is three days per week, with an optional time on Friday, which through my observations was clearly waning this late in the school year. Students gather in one of two classrooms, that of Kate or the assistant coach. Practices typically run from 3-

4:30 PM and consist of research and reviewing evidence, speaking drills and sometimes practice debates.

Carlos offered one of many brief answers when asked what happens in practice. His response, "It depends on the student. It depends what they need help on. For me it's most likely because I need more help on speaking loud and clear and coming up with stuff on the spot." From what I learned through further interviews and my observations, there really was a good deal of flexibility to what practice time offered students. For Anna, the description of practice revolved around evidence preparation and understanding of arguments likely to be debated:

Well, we need to agree on a case to run, and, um, we prepare our, our first speech and our constructive speeches. And what, we kind of predict what the other team will say to that, and so then we pick out cards that will refute that, like that sort of thing. And, um, also, mm, we look at the cases that we're not going to run. We try to get other information just in case we don't know what to say and they bring up some crazy thing about it. So, we try it, for like our special possibilities that they could win that argument against us and try to attack those.

Evidence is a mainstay of the activity, and that same connection to evidence understanding was also made by Teresa, yet she also noted the importance of other skills such as reading and speaking. Teresa remarked:

We, we do practice reading. We do practice going over evidence and how we can fight the other side in...yeah. It, it's, um, but, but we do do exercises that help us improve our skills. And we play games and in, like, after a tournament, we'll go and look at our ballot and we have to go through them and figure out what we did wrong and what we can do to improve... Well, like, exercise-wise, we, we use pen drills. We read with a pen in our mouth... Like, it improves, uh, clarity and sometimes speed, but it's pretty much pronunciation and clarity.

In addition to the core skills of reading and speaking, Teresa also addressed the importance that research plays as part of practice preparation. Relatedly, she shares

that at times it is coach directed and at other times it begins with the students. Teresa stated, “Sometimes our coach tells us what to research, but a lot of times it’s just on my own. Like, like, I’ll think of something like, “Oh, what if we something, like, something this way?” and then I go find information about it and then I will develop an argument as to what we, what we could do with that.”

Asked about how she remembers practice being handled in prior years, Natalie recalled that much of practice was driven by the experience level of the students.

Natalie stated:

Um, well, usually it depends, like for the newer students, you would usually have it more as a class, you know, helping them out. Um, higher up students you would usually go off on your own and do individual things. Sometimes she’ll be like, “I want you to have this evidence done by this time. I’ll come back and check on you.” But for the most part, um, the higher up in level you are, the more you had to do on your own and get ready on your own.

Furthermore, that experience level also tended to dictate how practice was allocated in the days leading up to an urban debate league tournament event. Natalie recalled:

For the last few days before the tournament it would usually be split off into your pairs because you really want to make sure that you and your partner are on the same page and that you know what you’re doing because it really sucks when you go into a tournament and you and your partner are not doing the same thing, your trying to do different points, and it just doesn’t work, you know. So the last three days is usually would be, like, you and your partner just making sure that you guys are solid and you know what you’re doing.

As a result of gearing up for tournaments there was some increased emphasis on working with partners, and several students spoke to that point along with Natalie. With tournaments occurring once a month there was time in the week immediately after to process the last tournaments performance and then conduct research,

formulate some new arguments as needed, and then have that concentrated partner time leading up to the next tournament.

Despite what appeared to be somewhat of a routine as described by the debate students, Kate expressed some frustration with the lack of focus from week-to-week, as she and the other coach have tried varying formats and times in order to better captivate student interest. In describing these efforts Kate stated:

We tried even this year doing, um, two-hour practices two days a week – we did 3:30-5:30 two days a week – and we ended up going back to the three days a week – hour fifteen or whatever it is – because they didn’t, uh, they didn’t like it. Two hours was too long. It was too much time. Um, as far as them, I think from the students, some of them don’t always enjoy all the aspects of it. Some of them don’t enjoy the reading of it. Some of them don’t enjoy, um, doing a little bit of writing or sketching out some rebuttals ahead of time. You know, what are the arguments of this? Um, and then actually put it down on paper. Most of them love talking about argument. You know, when we just sit down and have candid conversations or, all right, let’s talk about this case, you know, “What did they say? Where’s it going? How’re we going to fight it? You know, what are the negative aspects? What’s the purpose with this?” That we have a lot of participation in, but it’s more of, some of the kids don’t like to read as much and some of the kids don’t like to, uh, do as much actual writing of their ideas. But talking is, they all love to talk. So, but I don’t suppose I know very many kids who don’t.

Yet for Kate, teacher-coach, the duration of involvement matters more than the format or routine of the practices; that and setting ‘the hook’ beyond practice by the student having a positive tournament experience. Kate remarked:

I think they need to be involved for at least a semester. As far as practices go, at the beginning of the year, I think it makes a lot more difference how many they come to than towards the end of the year. Um, ‘cause at the beginning of the year, especially if they’re new, we’re learning new cases, we’re learning how to debate, we’re learning how long the speeches are, what do you do in each speech, all these things. So when they miss practices at the beginning, it makes it pretty difficult for them just to pick up on what even are, what’s happening. Uh, but I think once you hook them in by going to a tournament, and things went pretty well at the tournament, um, or at least they didn’t running out of the

room screaming, um, then you usually, you've usually got 'em. Um, so if you can hook them in and they have a good experience on the tournament, you can usually keep them involved, um, at least for quite a while. Um, if they have a bad experience at the first tournament, it's hard.

So while practice is important to the activity and team development, perhaps it is a positive tournament experience that encourages students to remain involved. Of course, they cannot partake in an urban debate tournament until part of the team. While that follows being involved at practices for some duration, it raises the question of what goals students might set for themselves with respect the activity.

Part of the team practice experience that I observed did maintain some urgency despite the lateness of the season was the goal setting that the debaters engaged in. With a tournament remaining on their schedule, the active debaters that I spoke with did articulate some type of goal that they were each pursuing. Asked about having set a goal for debate Carlos responded, "I think so. I'm not sure. I do a lot of goal setting and, yeah. I'm not sure if I do goal setting for debate or if it was in some other class." The goal setting for Carlos was elusive within the context of debate vs. class whereas the other student informants expounded upon goal setting specific to urban debate. For both Anna and Teresa, the stated goals were performance driven and were readily connected to the competitive tournaments. Anna stated:

Well, I always want to bring back a trophy home and no less than third place, um, the speaker trophy, that is. And, um, those are given out based on arguments, points, and, um, speaking, things like that. And, um, I've gotten second place, and I always tell myself if you don't, you need to come in second place, if not better. I still haven't gotten that first place, but I still have hopes for this Saturday's tournament.

Teresa's goal was one met at the start of the year, "I think, well, my goal actually was to try and get first place speaker, and I got that during my, the first tournament this year so I, I started the year really strong and that, that was my goal, actually, starting the year." And, it was a goal repeated as she earned the top speaker award at the very final tournament in May.

As a former debater Natalie didn't have a current goal to share, so I asked her to share a memorable team experience. With noticeable excitement she responded:

Um, well I could say this one time during the tournament, like, everyone on our team got awards. We all got trophies or medals for something. So I thought that was really cool, 'cause, um, it never happened where our whole team all got something. And I thought that was really cool 'cause, like, it really showed that we really tried hard that tournament and we did well.

It was clear from her response, and many of the responses shared by the other student informants, that there was clearly the pride felt in having been part of the debate team. The positive recognition that the urban debate league provides appears to have impacted these students. There was certainly an air of confidence in the goals that the student informants shared, and the recognition given to them as a result of their efforts. That recognition is evident even at school as classmates and teachers show support for the debaters at Perry Prep.

Support/expectations from teachers and classmates.

The urban debate team at Perry Prep appears to be fairly visible to students and teachers of the school community. In the first visit to the school I noticed the hall décor and promotion for the team that was very prominent on the first floor of the building.

During the interviews some questions were posed related to the attention and support that the urban debate team at the school garners. In general terms the student informants felt that the team was well recognized and supported by the school community. One facet in that line of questioning involved how other teachers, not including Kate and her assistant debate coach, acknowledged and/or encouraged the students who participate in debate. When Anna was asked about this she replied:

I think so. Um, teachers always like, "You're on debate! You can do that." And I'm like, "What's the matter! I'm, I'm in debate." And sometimes, maybe, I might be having a bad day and have, like, I'm close-minded that day, like, shutting off, shutting everybody out and, I don't know, maybe that has to do with it, and like, "Uh, it doesn't matter that I'm in debate." You know, like, there are other things that I know I can't, I can't do that thing. Like, they ask me to do something, "It's easy for you in debate," and I'm like, "No, it's not, it takes more time." And, um, I think the reason – uh, no, I don't think the reason – but, yeah, kind of, the reason they expect more from us is because they think this activity should be preparing us for other things.

In sharing her perspective, Teresa focused more on addressing the idea that teacher expectations may also come with regard to debate participation, "Sometimes, like, if we come to a subject that we've approached in debate or just speaking in front of the class, they expect me to do better than others because I've had the experience." In answering that question, do teachers perhaps expect more from you since they know you are in debate, Carlos stated "I guess it would be reading, slightly reading. Then there's public speaking." Anna stated that she it was difficult to state exactly the level of impact that involvement in debate has in improving work at school, although it was her opinion that teachers perceived that debaters fared better in school. And as for Natalie, she shared that her opinion as that, yes, teachers did expect, at least with respect to participation during class time. She contends:

Um, well they definitely expect me to participate more, to make, like, participate more than most of the students. I know that a lot of times teachers would call on me, like, a lot, because they know that I will, um, do that so, yeah, I guess teachers expect me to, um, be more participating and to read and all that stuff, but, I mean, they don't really treat me as much differently as, like, other students in the classroom.

In terms of other teachers recognizing the team, Kate focused in on the noticed improvement that colleagues have mentioned to her with respect to students involved in the activity. Kate shares:

Yes, we've had some students in debate where their teachers have commented that "Wow. This student has really improved." Um, and usually it would be at speaking in class, either just speaking up – because they're not a student who would normally volunteer or raise their hand in class and maybe now they're starting to – um or, you know, giving speeches and, um, making arguments, things like that, in class. So yes, I've had comments like that.

Even in the brief and passing conversations I had with the principal and other non-informant teachers that consented to allowing observations of their English and Social Studies classes, mention was made of the fact that the students involved with the urban debate team at Perry Prep were by and large good students academically who have made positive contributions to their classes and to the school writ large. Those contributions, however, are not without challenges and the next section explores some of the challenges that debaters face with respect to the activity.

Challenges for an urban debate team.

Participating in an urban debate league team is not without its challenges. As such, informants were asked to share thoughts on the things that made participation

difficult or overly demanding as compared to other school related activities. For Teresa, the foremost challenge is simply crafting the balance of debate and school:

Like, I think it's being able to juggle debate and schoolwork. Just. like, you have to make time for your schoolwork, but you also have time to, for debate, like, if you want to be a good debater. And, like, with me taking an advanced math course, it kind of affected that just a little bit because I would have something else to do instead of practice or I would be at practice and then I wouldn't do so well on a test or... It kind of reciprocates.

For others it is balancing debate and other activities. Anna remarked:

Finding a balance for the activity because I wanted to quit the team, and I was like, "I can't do this. This is frustrating." And then I felt like I wasn't doing any good in the rounds, and I was like, "I don't want to be here. I don't feel good when I don't do good." And I was like, "It's stressing me." And I was like, "I just want to quit." And, um, I knew that, like, I'm not a quitter so I was like, "You can't quit." And, um, I pushed myself to overcome that and just look past all the wrong things I was doing and try to find a solution for it. And so I think just staying in the team was one of my biggest challenges.

That balancing challenge is exactly what confronted Natalie at the beginning of her senior year. Even though she really wanted to remain involved with debate, at the same time she wanted to explore other options, in her case student council. Mindful of the possibility of overload, Natalie described giving serious thought to the limits of her involvement. Recalled Natalie:

Well, it's hard to say because, I mean, with debate you... The only thing I could say would make it more, like the times more flexible or less practices, so then with less practices then, you know, it's hard to keep up with all that and to be able to go to debate, debate tournaments and do well. So it's really hard. Like, when you're in debate, it has to be a real commitment. That's the only thing about, with debate. You have to really be in it and you have to understand that it's going to take up a lot of your time and you have to be able to accept that. And I was able to accept that until this year because I did really want to try some other things.

Recognizing the commitment factor for urban debate league participation, Natalie opted out. She described not wanting to talk to Kate and even avoided her for a few weeks, but when she did end up in that conversation she found a supportive ear. Natalie told me that Kate, although a bit discouraged in that she was losing a senior leader with four years of experience, did understand.

Beyond the challenges of balancing debate with schoolwork or other school-related activities, this year brought the stepped up challenge of simply holding debaters as membership seemed to dwindle. According to Teresa, "We went from I think about maybe at least twenty-something kids to four or five. It's because it's so much pressure." The drop by late spring semester did seem to weigh on most debaters minds with the exception of Carlos who did not mention anything about challenges for the team. Teresa offered some further assessment for the decline in pointing out that the season is too long and some students may simply need to give more time to school saying, "I think it's because it's long plus, um, just commitments with schoolwork rather than, like, they don't want to be in it. Like, they'd love to be in it, but it's just commitments with school and maybe their grades aren't, aren't that great." Although not a part of the team for this year, when asked, Natalie speculates on the reasons for the smaller group stating:

I think it maybe it deals with in the beginning how you are bringing in the new students because I don't think a lot of students realize all the work that they will have to be doing so they join it thinking, "Oh it's not going to really be anything." And then they find out that it's a lot more work than they expected so then they quit.

Natalie also recalled from past experience the challenge of having consistency of partners and team participation and attributes this as another reason for the possible decline. Natalie commented:

I think the main challenges we've really had was, um, trying to get, to like have people partners 'cause we'd always have people like who wouldn't come for a round or a few would just not, you know, would, like, quit. And then we'd always be left with like one person without a partner, and, like, they want to debate, but we don't have anyone for them. And so it was kind of hard for us to, like, do that because we'd always end up switching then every tournament so everyone would at least be able to do one of the tournaments with a partner, you know, things like that. So yeah, I think that our greatest challenge was actually just being able to have us all have partners, especially in my freshman year.

Not having consistency in partnerships is something that is particularly challenging as teams have odd numbers or become very small and conflicts keep some debaters from attending the tournaments. Even with the small numbers, however, Perry Prep was able to enter two teams at the final tournament of the season in May.

Despite the smaller team as the year went on and the unusual dynamic this year of losing several experienced members from the start of the season, Anna's response to the question of decline also led her to identify some of the more memorable aspects of her involvement with the team. Anna remarked:

I think, um, actually I can think of two. Um, one would be sticking with the team because we have such little, such a small team, and a lot of the team members end up going away and they just don't want to do it. So, like, having our little team or four because these are the four people I know that were with me at the beginning and they're here now, and so, I mean, just sticking together and actually committing to the activity. That's one, and the other one is working together even when we have different partners switched up and we, we – there was one day when we all brought trophies home and Sarah and Don were like super happy and so we're like, "Yeah." It was, like, all like new partners and everything and we're still able to do things, good things, great things.

As for this year's particular challenge with declining numbers the loss of seniors was particularly difficult as Kate shared:

So, um, this year, uh, we're pretty low, um, because the key leaders that I had, um, are seniors this year – several of them – and decided that they didn't have time for debate. That was the one thing they were going to cut out because of, um, applications for college and writing essays and their senior project and all this other stuff going on that they decided to just really focus on more academics. Um, so I lost my key leaders, uh, which then, and they also were great during practices 'cause they would train some of the incomers, especially when you had incoming students who weren't always that good about showing up to practice regularly. So when we lost those key players, those key leaders, um, our - and that was six of my, that was six, six students. So that's half the team.

From our conversations it was evident that the decline of students had really taken its toll this season. When I initially asked Kate to describe what the team was like and to specifically speak the culture of the group, her immediate response was to identify the drop in this year's student participation. It has challenged her level of commitment and energy for the urban debate league. And in her opinion the decline in student involvement is directly related to the length of the tournament season. Whereas the outward debate community engages in tournament activity throughout the fall of the year, the Milwaukee Debate League runs its tournaments once a month from September to May. From Kate's perspective this yearlong approach has eroded the student base. She stated unequivocally that the season is simply too long for all involved.

While the decline in student participants weighed heavily on Kate, the students didn't seem to dwell on the issue. Even from my limited observations of debate practice students generally filtered in and received some individualized instruction from Kate or her assistant coach. The instruction was usually met with some level of questioning or

only passive acceptance. During the time I spent at Perry Prep there was limited structure to the practice time, and that seemed to have everything to do with the smaller team. Students regularly attended daily practice, but didn't appear to demonstrate urgency in preparing for the final tournament in May. In all, there are clearly challenges that any team will encounter in a given season or over time. Related to this are some of the drawbacks of the structure of the activity itself, and so I asked the student informants and the teacher-coach to share what they thought the shortcomings were of urban debate league participation outside parameters of the team.

Drawbacks of Urban Debate League participation.

While a good deal of the experience for the student informants and Kate has been positive, there have been some drawbacks to involvement in the urban debate league. The overarching concern articulated by all was the issue of time. Certainly, the concern over time constraints can apply to a myriad of things connected to education and co-curricular activities. Yet, the elements demanded of the Perry Prep debate team by MDL organizers through mandated practice hours and tournament attendance across the entire school year and lengthy days for competition garnered considerable attention during the interview process. Anna stated:

Well, you definitely need to put a lot of time into the activity. So I think the dedication and time that I need to put into this activity is a downside for me because sometimes my workload is heavier and I need the time for myself and get the, my work done. So the time - my time is very precious, and I sometimes, I use a lot of it in debate. Um, another downside, uh, I'm not sure, I don't think, I don't see there, I don't see debate as, like, having any other downsides just

because of the amount of time you put in and that could jeopardize your other activities or your school grades even, maybe. But, I like debate. I don't see any other negative things to it.

Natalie's assessment was very similar:

I would say the downsides of debate would probably be the amount of time, like, you put into it. It's just so much that sometimes it can be overwhelming for some kids, maybe. Or like, you, especially because all the tournaments are on Saturdays and, you know, you can't just, like, go out and have fun on a Saturday because you're at debate, you know. So I'd say it's just like the amount of hours that you have to put into it.

Although the concern over time widely expressed there wasn't unanimity in a call for a shorter tournament season. Carlos liked that it crossed the full school year so that there was time to work on ideas in between the monthly events. Anna too when asked about shortening the season responded that she would "still much prefer the whole school year....definitely."

Related to the concern raised over time was the length of the day. Natalie shared a thought that was reflected among all of the student responses when she said:

So that's how, like, a lot of times we'll get a bunch of kids at the beginning of the year and then, like, half of them are gone by the next month, and most of that's probably because of the whole having to go every, like, one Saturday of every month, you know, having to be there for a long time. And a lot of kids just don't want to do that, you know, they don't have to, they don't want to have to wake up at, like, 7:00 on a Saturday, you know. Especially if you're a freshman. You're just, like, "Oh, forget that."

Teresa shares a similar thought and additionally offers a critique of the rate of delivery in speaking for some of the upper level debates. Teresa remarked:

I think, like, it's kind of fun, only, like, getting up early for tournaments, that's kind of a downside, like you lose sleep. Um, but about debate itself, I don't think we should have speed because speed, it, it makes it hard for students to, like new students that want to get into debate, like they'll see a round and they're just speed reading through the whole thing and they're like, "Oh, I don't want to

do this anymore,” and they’ll, they’ll lose confidence. And, it’s, I think speed is destroying debate, to be honest. I mean, I even, I’ve been in it for four years, and I even have trouble understanding.

This issue of rate of delivery or ‘speed’ as debaters call it tends to provoke strong opinions for or against with proponents arguing that the more arguments in the debate round the better and opponents of the practice stating that it diminishes the communicative side of the activity. Teresa also stated that she thought Kate didn’t like the practice either; however, that issue was not directly addressed conversation with her.

The other prominent issue related to the drawbacks of the urban debate league experience was the volume of material that students are to learn. The downsides of the urban debate league remarked Carlos are, “time...and getting up early for competition and the volume of materials to learn.” As was customary for Carlos through our conversations, his remark was brief but striking. Natalie also stated that the real detriment of debate was that at times it was too much like school and “all of the research. It was just so much reading, so much studying, and things like that, highlighting, summarizing. There was just, like, so much of that after, like, doing that for three years, it’s like, “Oh, come on.”

In offering her own assessment of the shortcomings of the urban debate league Kate identified some of the same issues as her students related to time and the volume of material to learn as well as several other issues including student motivation and length of the overall season. Kate remarked:

It’s a lot, a lot of time. Um, and, well, that’s a big one. I mean, it, it is a lot of time, and it’s giving up a Saturday a month or, if you were to have them more

often, whatever, it's giving up Saturdays, which as a teacher is kind of a nice day to recuperate and refresh. Um, so that's one downside is, uh, the time factor. Um, I think another downside is that for some students it's very difficult, I think, to motivate them to want to read evidence. That is a struggle for me. How do I motivate them to want to read and summarize five hundred pages of evidence or one hundred pages of evidence? You know, we start small, whatever, so maybe that's a struggle that I just have, um, as a coach, as to how to motivate them. Um, but I would see that as maybe a small downfall is that there is a lot of new material for them to learn in a short amount of time and that material is usually not spread out over the season. You have to learn everything up front. Um, and then I feel like I end up scaring away a lot of kids at the beginning because they're like, "Whoa, this is too much work. I can't handle this." Um, so I think that's one of the downsides... [Another] downside I think is that the season is so long. It's all year so a very, very long season. Um, and it's, as far as I understand, the agreement was that you have practice four to six hours every week so for us that's three nights a week. Um, so that's quite a bit of time putting in with the kids and then quite a bit of time for the kids. You know, I know the downside for some of the kids is they can't always make practice or for some of them then they needed to quit because it's too much time, it's too much commitment, and they need to focus on their academics or choose to focus on their academics because it's too much. Um, so I think those are some of the downsides.

Perhaps it is that last one about the length of the season that heightened Kate's contentions regarding the shortcomings of the urban debate league since these interviews were being conducted in May. Yet, Kate also identified some organizational deficiencies as well, stating:

I think that at some times it may not always be as organized because there's been over the past few years, um, changes, lots of changes in the leadership of the league and, uh, who's in charge of what, and I think that sometimes it is not always as organized as it could be. Um, we've had different locations, um, which makes it a little tough, uh, especially if you don't know where the tournament's going to be a week in advance and, you know. So that makes it tough, I think, as well, for parents because they're not sure, "I don't know where my kid's going so I don't even know if I want him to go." So that makes it difficult...Um, so I think the organization has not always been what it could be. Um, I think one of the weaknesses just right now is that we've, um, because of the funding, gotten away from the college campus, which I thought was one of it's strengths, um, in having kids be present on a college campus. And just being there, I think, makes

it more real to a student that “Yes, this is something that I can do and that I can accomplish. And I could come here or I could come to a place like this.”

In general, Kate was generally positive in her remarks regarding the activity as a whole, yet it was clear across the interview series that we had that the lengthy debate season had taken its toll.

Academic Achievement: Attitude and Skill Competencies

Throughout the student informant and teacher-coach interviews a significant portion of conversation revolved around academic achievement. Questions were asked about how urban debate participation may or may not influence overall academic performance, attitudes toward schooling, and specific skill areas that are often attributed to attaining success. Observations also served to illuminate findings in these areas. This section analyzes the data with respect to these three facets of academic achievement.

Influences on academic achievement.

To begin, students were asked some very broad questions about the idea that being involved in an urban debate league, in this case the Milwaukee Debate League specifically, fosters overall improvement toward academic achievement. This area of questioning allowed for students to reflect on their own level of achievement and also to speculate about academic impacts on teammates and even others in the MDL.

Beginning with the self-assessment, Carlos acknowledges that some of the academic skill improvement has been ‘slight’ for him. Asked to elaborate on the

thought he said he really couldn't. For Teresa, her assessment was that the rigor of debate has helped her to not necessarily be a more successful student, but rather to be able to sustain and balance a heavier academic workload. Teresa stated:

It, it really depends. I mean, um, like, as a senior, I'm pretty bogged down with everything, but it seems like, um, I'm able to make time for debate everyday, even though I have a lot of things to do. Yeah. Like, like, I can, I can work with a, with a heavy work load so... And I mean, I have to get used to that. I'm going to be taking twelve credits next, next fall anyway.

In posing the question to Anna, she admitted something that she had not previously, that being she had seriously thought about quitting but gave debate a second chance and in so doing really found some real satisfaction and success. Anna shared:

I only think from my personal experience. I tried it out, and I was going to quit because I thought it was too much, but, um, like my coaches encouraged me to go back and give it a second try. And I did. And I enjoyed it very much. Like, I was one of them, I hated writing and doing extra work that doesn't need to be done, but, um, you learn a lot. And it helps you, it kind of gets you out of that lazy thing you have going on. Like, like if you're just lazy about schoolwork and you don't want to do it, it kind of gets you out of that habit of laziness. You just, you have to do your work, and you do it and you find the time, and it helps in other areas of, like, the subjects that we have here. And, um, it's a, um, pusher to, like, make you a great student because you have to maintain your grades in order to participate. So. And, um, I think just telling them what it felt like for me to be a debater, and, um, explaining how I felt in the beginning and how I felt afterwards, what I learned, and just basically my whole experience and hoping that, like, "Oh, if she did it, then I can too."

In moving beyond her own experience to consider the potential for her teammates and debaters at other MDL schools to realize academic achievement, Anna remarked:

I think definitely, really. The students talk about, I think one of the schools has debate as a class, too, and they talk about their debate classes at school and how they have to go and they say it makes things easier for them. We don't really go into details because we usually end up talking about something else, but I think so. It makes them, it helps them, not just on the debate activity, but it helps.

In talking with Natalie about that issue, she expressed that debate indeed helped her as an underclassman and even in so far as asking teachers for help outside of class. Natalie stated:

So, but yeah, and I know for me, uh, especially freshman and sophomore year, it really helped me with things like that because, um, also staying after school for debate, if I needed extra help, you know, I'm already there after school for debate, and I can just go and ask the teacher really quick. You know, "Could you help me with this?" So, I think debate does help with things like that.

So, from the student perspective urban debate league participation may have some related impact on academic achievement; however the opinions were varied on what those implications in fact are.

As it turns out the student informants were not the only ones to offer some variance of opinion. Kate too offered both affirmations and reservations in this area. To begin, Kate was asked to offer some overarching assessment of what characteristics exist for those who find success in the activity to which she replied:

Good speaking skills, just public speaking skills, being able to speak loudly and clearly. Um, good reading skills, um, being able to, I should say, not just reading, it's the comprehension that's the important part of it. I get kids who have been involved in this who have fantastic reading skills, um, but don't really comprehend what they read, and I think it's the comprehension that's important. Both of those things, the speaking skills and the comprehension skills, can also improve by being in this activity. I think they increase.

Asked about academic benefits, Kate offers these observations:

I think for the kids who are already, um, above-average in those areas, it's not going to have much of an impact 'cause they're already moving in that direction. And, uh, maybe our school is different from other schools 'cause I see different kinds of kids out there at other tournaments. Um, but, that we attract, that this program, this school, attracts a different caliber of student because we have a very long waiting list so we basically have our pick. So our kids tend to be basically pretty good students already. So the kids who already excel a little bit in those areas, I think that this activity attracts them because it's something that

they can use their skills in. We do have a few students who come in who are low in those areas, um, and for those students, I do see some very marked improvement. Um, for the students I think are on the, already on the upper levels of that, I don't think you're going to see as much improvement 'cause they don't have as much room to grow. Um, but I mean the speaking skills, just the ability to, I mean, read a piece of evidence without stumbling over your words, just seeing that, I can say, especially for kids who have been in it for three or four years, they get better and better every year, and that's just practice, that's just reading out loud. So that I do see getting better, and that I can see from everyone.

And as for whether or not more time in the activity may correlate to higher levels of achievement, Kate answered:

Yes, that I would. I think the more dedicated they are, um, those are usually the students that I see as being better academic students, but I can't tell you that really is the causation. I mean, you might see a correlation, but what's really the cause of that? Is it debate making them better in school or is that they are already good students so they're going to be dedicated not only to their studies but anything they choose to be involved in? I mean, I don't know which way you can, you can take that....Again that's going to differ kid, kid by kid, but I think they have to be involved in it more than a semester. Um, I've had kids who've been involved a semester, maybe gone to two-three tournaments, whatever, and I don't see any long-term benefits in that. I don't see that the kids have improved anywhere, um, really in any of those areas. Um, if they came in already as good speakers, I, you know, I think they still will leave the same way. If they came in already as a not, as a poor speaker, a poor reader, then I don't think they do quite, quite enough during that amount of time to really get anything out of it.

Our final avenue of conversation in this area dealt with infusing debate into the curriculum as a class and questioning whether or not that likely to have greater impact on the academic strides urban debate student might make. Kate has talked with other coaches about this and sensed development in other programs that are committed to this approach. She contends:

I was talking with one of the coaches from another school I know, and they're talking about next year actually making debate a semester-long required course for all of their students in order, before they graduate. Um, 'cause I was

wondering, his team has been coming on quite nicely, um, and, uh, I used to think that our teams were kind of on par with each other and his team has just excelled this year. They are fantastic. And, uh, I found out it's because he's teaching a debate class. Um, so if we could have a class, which I have approached and been turned down on – we don't have enough room in the schedule, um, to do so – um, I mean, that might make a difference. Um, but, I mean as far as I think the school's attitude about the program, it's just, it's just another extracurricular, and it's good for the kids.

From Kate's point of view, establishing a class for debate at Perry Prep is not likely given the dynamics of their current schedule. In sharing these thoughts she also told me that not moving toward creating a debate class has had an impact on the team's development, yet she concludes that the students have still benefited substantially from their participation.

In sum, the information shared by the student informants and teacher-coach indicate that there is a discernable effect that urban debate league participation has on overall academic achievement. If anything, there is simply a belief expressed that involvement has been beneficial. This element of conviction relates to another basic claim that has been advanced by supporters of urban debate, and it is that attitude alone improves as a result of participation. Before examining skill-related effects, attitudinal influences from the data merit analysis.

Attitude toward schooling.

Related to academic performance, yet distinct from specific skill development, is the attitude that a student has toward school. Proponents of urban debate leagues assert that not only do skills improve, but perhaps more importantly students who participate find themselves with much better attitudes with regard to schooling. The

debaters at Perry Prep appear to be fairly good students based on the interview and observational data gathered. While grades and GPA scores were not assessed, comments from Kate and the student informants themselves appear to support this conclusion. Questions were asked as part of the interview sequence about how urban debate participation impacts student attitudes toward school. When asked if debate has changed her attitude, Teresa stated:

Yeah. Well, I, I've always liked school, and I think it, it's just because it enriches what I learn during the school day. It just makes it even better coming to school. Plus, debate is something I do after school so I, so I have something to do rather than just go home, do homework, and do nothing. It gets me to actually do something.

When asked about what she thought about urban debate changing the attitudes of other Perry Prep students participating, Teresa commented:

Um, I don't know. I don't really know, I don't really see my, um, teammates outside of here because I don't really have any classes with them, and, but, I don't really think it's changed them so much. Like, they seem, like, a little more, um, laid-back than I am towards, uh, like, academics so I really don't think, I don't really think debates changed them, but it has changed me.

In asking Anna her thoughts on whether or not debate has affected her own attitude, she stated:

I think my attitude toward school hasn't changed. Um, I am a very complicated person and a lot of those times I am just like, "Oh, school. I don't want to come here." But I know that if I want to go somewhere and make something out of my life and to accomplish all the goals I want to, I have to go to school. And that's what keeps me here. That's the way I feel.

Carlos also indicated that he did not think there was any impact on and had no opinion on how it may or may not have any impact on others.

In addressing this topic with Natalie a follow-up question focused on her opinion of the perception that only already high-performing students become involved in debate. She responded:

No, no. Not at all 'cause, uh, I know that, I mean I've never been the perfect student, but, uh, I was in debate, and there's a lot of kids in debate who actually have had difficulties in school, you know, getting things done, and I think debate would be a good thing for those students because you really start to learn self-discipline and getting things done. So, if anything, I think debate should be draw, like, drawing in more students who need that extra help because, you know, it really helps them with certain problems that they might be having as well with, like, like, um, reading or writing and things like that.

Several questions regarding this idea were asked of Kate as well. Her assessment was that it really does vary from student-to-student. Kate contends:

I, I really think that's down to an individual kid basis. I mean, I've got a kid on my team who I think is failing almost all his classes 'cause he sees no point in doing any homework 'cause it's boring. Doesn't mean he's not intelligent. It just means he doesn't want to do any work. He also is the one who maybe shows up once a month for practice. You know, so I don't, you know, and then I've got other kids who are straight-A students who wouldn't dream of never handing in a homework assignment and who show up every day for practice.

For some students, of course, there may be a stronger connection to instilling a better attitude toward engaging in schooling but grades along may not be an effective motivating factor. Kate concluded:

I think overall, looking at that over time, there has definitely been an improvement for some of those students, um, to help their grades. Um, some not. For some of them school, itself, grades are just not important. So how I hooked them into debate, I'm not sure. Um, but the grades themselves for some of the students are just not a motivator.

As Kate states, the extent to which student motivation translates to higher grades and increased academic success is mixed. It is fair to conclude that a number of factors

contribute to having a better attitude about school and participation in urban debate alone doesn't necessary ensure improvement but certainly may help.

Skill competencies.

In addition to the assertion that student attitudes improve, advocates for urban debate leagues claim that participating in the activity improves academic achievement by enhancing the underlying skills necessary for school-related success. Student informants were asked about the relationship between debate and performance in school. The questions for the debaters were framed generally about achievement, and specifically based on the skills that they themselves identified. What follows is an analysis of what they had to say based on specific identifiable skills including: 1) public speaking, presentation and in-class participation skills, 2) reading skills, 3) writing and note-taking skills, 4) research and critical thinking skills, and 5) homework and organizational skills.

Public speaking/presentation/in-class participation skills.

Foremost among the skills incorporated into debate is public speaking and presentation skills. Reflecting on her experience Teresa stated:

So the speaking aspect, actually, has helped me in speaking in front of the classroom because we have to give practice speeches, um, to our class so I was more confident when I did that. And, um, and like for projects, when we have to give presentations about something, like a PowerPoint presentation, I've been able to speak to the class rather than just, you know, reading off of the PowerPoint.

Public speaking for the most part has been easy for Natalie, but not without some nervousness. Natalie remarked:

I think it would be just the being in front of the people and talking, like, you know, saying what I had to say in front of them. I was really comfortable just being in front of people. Um, I didn't, like, I, the reason really why I would get nervous during debate was because I was afraid I was going to, like, mess up this word or pronounce something wrong or stutter or something like that, but, um, just, like, the actual being up there in front of people was completely fine with me.

In responding to the question, does debate help with public speaking, Natalie said, "Yeah, definitely. Um, well, in debate I've learned to, um, organize my arguments more logically and, like, develop a way of presenting them in an order which benefits me and kind of makes the other side of the argument seem like, 'Oh, this is no good.'" Carlos admits that he struggles with public speaking, yet indicated that he was going to stay with debate to continue to work on public speaking, and especially as a way to prepare to his senior project. "I plan on sticking with it for three years, so, cause following next year, if I am correct, that's senior year, there is a big project that will probably need a lot more focus and debate helps me with my speaking." Students at Perry Prep has a summative project to complete for graduation and several of the students identified involvement in debate as a means for being better prepared for completing that assignment.

Natalie addressed that project and the presentation as well as a writing aspect as well in our conversations as well. Natalie stated:

And, I've used that a lot in English classes for my [senior] position paper, especially, because I had to, um, write it, an argument, about what I think. I wrote it on sex education and MPS in Wisconsin. I, I definitely used the, um, what I learned here in debate to write my paper, and not just those papers, but

papers outside of my English class, too and in other presentations too. So, it helps a lot. It really does.

And the presentation skill was of the utmost importance for Natalie, Teresa, and Anna, each of whom would be giving a senior presentation as a part of satisfying the school's graduation requirement. Natalie and Anna spoke about the preparation aspect and commented to some extent that debate experience would likely provide some advantages in this exercise.

Connected to public speaking is in-class participation. Anna and Teresa most directly addressed this skill through their replies to questions during the interview process. In connecting one of the class observations to Anna's Sociology class, she was asked whether she thought debate has had any effect on her participation in class day-to-day. Anna's response:

This is my last class [each day]. I'm just like, "I want to go home." But, um, I've always been very, um, involved in the classroom, I think. Like, I, I'll, like, raise my hand a lot. Otherwise if I don't pay attention, I'll just start daydreaming and I'll probably like, try, I'll try, um, to not fall asleep because I'll get sleepy and I'm just like, "Oh, stay focused." So I try to keep myself, um, participate, not just another body there.

For Teresa, she stated that she felt more comfortable participating in class as a result of her participation in urban debate because it has aided her in handling aspects of pressure. Teresa remarked:

I work well under pressure, I think. So, um, and, like, everyone always tells me, "Oh, you'll be fine. You're in debate," but sometimes it doesn't really, like, have, like I don't do real well sometimes just because it's in front of my classmates rather than people I don't know.

For her part, Natalie weighs in on this topic given her three years of experience and singled out English class where her participation may have increased. Natalie contends:

I would probably say it would have to be, like, English because of the whole fact that in my English classes we have a lot of presentations that we have to do and perform in front of a classroom, reading, and all those things, so I think it really helps with, like, English classes because there are periods where you have to speak in front of those people and to do those research for those research papers and to write, like, um, write them and, like, all those things.

Having observed Natalie's English where she was among the most vocal readers and speakers in the class, it is evident that whether attributed to urban debate or other factors, there was certainly a comfort and confidence to in-class participation.

In asking Kate about the possible connection that urban debate may have to student engagement in-class, she contends it does. Kate remarked:

For most of the kids, yes, I think there is. I know that I've seen a couple who I think have done fantastically in debate who still don't speak up in class – as far as I hear from other teachers. Um, but other kids, yes, I think it does help because they get more comfortable just speaking. Um, and then speaking in front of other people at tournaments, when you're speaking in front of strangers, I think that carries over a little bit, then, to the classroom. Where now they actually have ideas, they're able to form their ideas, figure out how to say their ideas, and now have a little more confidence in being able to raise their hand and share their idea with the class. Some kids though, obviously, come to debate already with those skills and are perfectly comfortable. Um, but for those kids who are weaker in that area, yes, I think it helps.

This connection to speaking and in-class participation has been one of hallmark assertions of the proponents of urban debate league participation and the perspectives offered by the students and teacher-coach appear to affirm that notion.

The fieldwork observations were structured to include two English classes per student informant as well as two Social Studies related classes. The reason for selecting these subject areas was rooted in the hope that there would be vocal, discussion oriented aspects to the class. The observational data offers some mixed conclusions. There were some class periods where the student informants did not speak or spoke but

once. Teresa for example went through an entire English class, while clearly attentive, not vocalizing any answer or adding to the reading discussion. In Social Studies, she spoke but once and that was to offer a short analysis of a current event, something that each student did in the class. Carlos also showed some pattern by not speaking at all in both English classes, although there was a lengthy movie clip shown in one class period, and offering a few short analytical points of a few words in his geography class. More vocal were Anna and Natalie in their respective classes; however, that also seemed to be a reflection of their personalities. Upon reflection, perhaps the most important aspect of the observation time was the ability to gain insight for further interview questioning. An example was in observing Natalie in a primary role as reader in English, a scenario where she was one of only two readers in the class. This offered up the awareness to further probe connections related to reading.

Reading skills.

In addition to the multiple facets of speaking related skills, reading is central to the activity of urban debate. Evidence is a mainstay of debate so reading is central to participating. As inquiry in this area began Carlos stated, "I can read really just fine." To the immediate follow-up question, "do you read pretty fast?" Carlos replied, "Well, uh one time I read, I read a 300-page book within, uh, 5 hours maybe?" As I asked the direct question, has debate helped with your reading ability, he stated, "Sometimes we read fast and [that] actually improved my reading skill when it comes to reading faster." As the conversation with reading unfolds with Natalie, she speaks about Carlos stating:

Well, I know this one kid, um, and he's, he's a, I believe he's a sophomore now. So he was a freshman, yeah, last year, and I was in debate with him, and I noticed that, like, he had a hard time with, like, um, he could read, but when he would state, like, he, like, read in his mind faster than he could, like, actually say it out loud, and like, he would like mumble and whatever and, and this year I heard him. He was reading a paragraph in chemistry out of the book, and he was doing so much better than the previous year, and I was, like, "Wow, that's, like, amazing." So, like, he never actually really talked to me about that, but it was something that I noticed myself that his reading, like, being able to read out loud got so much better, and I was actually really surprised by that.

In the final interview with Carlos I asked him what he liked most about debate to which he replied, "Well, one of the, like, I guess it'd be the fact that it kind of helps me get used to people. Like get over my shyness. Another would be that it helps my reading, reading. Yeah, it kind of helps my reading skill." Asked about how debate has affected her, Natalie stated, "It has, it has really helped me with my reading and just my speaking ability. Um, I think that's one of the main things it has helped me with, especially with my, when I have to read out loud - I mean I still have some trouble, but, I mean, that has helped me a lot."

Asked about the connection debate has to reading based on observation in English class where she read aloud some significant passages of the book the class, Anna responds, "I like reading and I think it's a good way to stay focused in class and not go, like, day-dreaming or, um, get sleepy or something so I like to participate and get involved and, like, be a part of the class, not just another body in the room. I feel pretty comfortable doing that." My observations of Anna in both English demonstrated her ease in reading aloud in front of others. Kate also weighs in this facet of academic skill development by stating:

So the biggest impact I think that I would see is usually on their reading skills, that it makes it easier for them to read, and I have had the kids tell me it's easier for them to give a speech when they have to give speeches in English class or Social Studies class, things like that. It's easier for them to get up and give a speech. Um, that they feel better about that, and it's more comfortable for them to do. Um, I don't know, I, and I'm drawing from a small pool of students as well, you know, so for me I think it's more based on, 'cause I can, I have kids on both ends of the spectrum and kids who've fallen in the middle, so for me what I see is more of an individual basis, a case-by-case basis, on what works for what kid.

Being attuned to the development in this area, Kate recognizes that the activity best contributes to improving this skill. This, of course, is consistent with the claims made by proponents of urban debate leagues and will be examined further in the next chapter.

Writing and note-taking skills.

Beyond speaking and reading, writing and note-taking skills are deemed essential for schooling. Students who participate in urban debate are asked to engage in note-taking during debate rounds, what debaters call flow, as well do some writing in preparation for and during practice. Each of the student informants and the teacher-coach identified some aspect of writing when asked about the skills that debate impacts. Anna stated:

I don't mind writing anymore. I hate writing structured writing, but, um – I don't hate it. I just don't enjoy it as much as just like writing regular open prose – but I, I've gotten more comfortable with it, and I feel like my writing skills have also improved so I can take that to every single class here because all of my classes are required to, um, make us write a research paper, including math and art and things like that.

Anna also stated that debate has improved her writing even consciously identifying styles in responding, “When I'm writing essays, like, persuasive or just argumentative –

pick one side – and, um, that’s helped me.” Teresa too noted a connection to writing improvement. Teresa contends:

Note-taking has, like, my speed in note-taking, you know, like, I’m usually the first one done a lot of times. Um, it’s helped my speed in note-taking and writing in general. Like, I’ve been able to expand on a lot of the things that I write. I mean I write as a hobby and it’s, it’s been able to, like, I’ve been able to think logically about how I could, like, how I could put a story together or just tell someone what I want to say.

She also stated that it helps her with organizing her thoughts, and that she serves as a peer writing tutor where she assists other students in editing papers and, “I just give them feedback as to what they could do better in their paper.” When Kate is asked for her perspective about writing, she remarked:

Yes. I think that helps. Um, I think that, um, it only improves, though, so much across the board. I don’t think it’s going to take a particularly poor writer and make them an excellent writer. I think it can take a poor writer and make them a mediocre writer, and a mediocre writer could become an excellent writer, and an excellent writer could get better...So I think that, yes, it helps their writing.

In all, Kate’s assessment is modest in that while improvement may in fact occur, the gains in writing skill will not be through leaps and bounds. Student writing, while perhaps improving through involvement in urban debate, will on do so in a limited manner.

In responding to questions specific to note-taking as an aspect of writing, Natalie stated:

I would say it would be kind of with my researching and taking notes because in debate, you know, when you have to, um, write down what everyone is saying, you, it’s like you have to be able to do it fast, you, you know, you use different symbols, things like that, so it really helped me with notes in class because I usually would have, like, a hard time because there’d be all this stuff, you know, like, “I don’t even know what to write down.

In observing her classes, Natalie demonstrated the tendency to take a lot of notes, writing down material printed on the teacher's presentation slides or from the white board or even through the discussion dialogue offered beyond written instructional prompts. Asked if he believed there was any improvement in his note-taking ability Carlos replied. "Slightly. I would guess so because when you try to take notes really fast you tend to I guess take them slightly faster?" And when this line of questioning was put to Anna, she reply was also generally affirming about improvement in this area.

Anna stated:

Um, I think so - notes, note taking. I always take notes. I didn't - before I just kind of didn't care - um, but ever since, ever since debate, I think I've taken, taken more notes than I ever have, um, in history and government, whatever class I had with Don [?], whatever class I have with Don. He's always given us PowerPoint presentations, and I sit around different people every time, and I always see that they just write tiny notes. And even though they're just like tiny notes and not on everything, I like to be very thorough and I try to get as much information as I can even if it seems insignificant because, I mean, like, it could be something I might be able to use in that class. So note taking, I do a lot of note taking.

In a follow-up question when asked if there was any connection to other writing, other than note taking in class, Natalie replied "Um, being able to summarize something, definitely, because you had to, kind of, read the research on the card that you had and be able to summarize it and put it in your own words. So I would say that also helped with that." Linked to writing, summarizing is also an important skill. Kate was also asked a specifically about note-taking, to which she replied:

Uh, yes, I would think there is a connection, um, only if the student is pretty good at flowing. Um, I think that would be a benefit. Um, I do have a couple kids who refuse to flow, um, but that's partially because the handwriting is completely illegible. So, I've had them attempt to flow, and they can't even read their own writing. So, but yes, I would think that's helpful although at the high

school level as well, I don't know how much it helps because I know that most high school teachers are pretty clear – “This is what I want you to write down.” You don't have a whole lot of high school teachers – at least that I see – that have say, “I'm going to give you a thirty-minute lecture. Write down what you think is important.” Um, I don't think you see a lot of that in high school, but I would think that would come out more in college.

Also cognizant that writing and note-taking skills are connected to schooling, some elements of urban debate relate to these skill areas. In order to be successful in the activity, urban debaters need to be able to take notes (flow) during the debate. The extent to which active participation in urban debate translates to better note-taking and general writing outside is tougher to full gauge, yet the students and teacher-coach concluded that there were prospects to build these skills through partaking in the activity.

Research and critical thinking skills.

Research skills are yet another area where debate students encounter school-related academic expectations. Even though a significant amount of evidence material is provided to urban debate league teams, students are still expected to conduct independent research, and this is particularly the case for more experienced debaters. When asked about whether he does research and if so if debate has helped him to become a better researcher, Carlos responds, “Sometimes. Recently not. Most of the classes require some research. Yeah, I guess I research some topics, so it helps when it comes to researching things.” Natalie's response chronicles her experience across three years and demonstrates the connection to school:

Yeah, well, when it comes to the research, um, that's something I would say that debate has helped with, like, learning how to do research and where you should go to find certain kinds of information and like, you know, things like that. 'Cause, like, I know when I first, um, started debate, like, they would just, like give us, you know, all the evidence, and we just had to read through it and whatever. But when you go on, you get into higher levels, and you have to actually start looking up on things and at first, I didn't know what I was doing, and I was, like, "Google!" or, like, just typing in random words, like, I didn't even know what I was doing. But, like, it does help with trying to figure out where you could go to find information or, like, what or, like, keywords you would type in for, like, a certain topic or something, you know, things like that. And then also as, um, far as research that things that, like, um, in debate that cross over into my normal everyday life.

From Kate's point of view, students do indeed benefit from the research through their participation in urban debate. She contends:

Well, I definitely think there would be a connection there...I mean, that's a lot of what they do in debate. And when we discuss cases, you have to discuss, "Okay. This piece of evidence says what? Now what does that mean or what does that connect to? What's going to happen next?" Um, so you kind of have to figure out that pattern and, and what's connected to what. So I would think that it would help critical thinking skills.

While the students didn't specifically mention critical thinking or analytical skills by name, it would seem that those skills are related to the continual work they do with research and evidence. A good deal of time in practice is spent analyzing issues and several debaters mentioned that the research they do gets them thinking about matters in new and different ways. This too connects to the claims made by urban debate league proponents and will be further assessed in the next chapter.

Homework and organizational skills.

While it would seem that that skills pertaining to organization should carry over to schooling, none of the student informants responded that debate seemed to have

any specific impact with respect this area, nor the related aspect of homework. There are certainly tangential connections to research and writing that may be gleaned; however, none of the debaters or the teacher-coach mentioned this academic area. And with respect to organization, only Carlos mentioned this skill area. He stated that he was not very organized with evidence or with school assignments. When I probed this with a follow question to get him to elaborate he stated, "I'm not very organized. Like, I know where stuff is, but I have trouble finding it...Then I try to look for it until I can find it or at least attempt until [inaudible] and I can't." More analysis regarding this area will be provided in chapter six.

Subject specific connections: English and Social Studies.

In probing the potential connections urban debate has with regard to schooling, students also made some direct associations beyond skills to course subject areas, notably English and Social Studies. Multiple skill areas are incorporated in the following analysis given my focus on these two curricular subjects. Observations in these class areas were helpful in triangulating the data and providing insights for asking other investigative questions. The initial questions about potential improvement in school asked openly about what class areas students thought were more impacted. For Carlos, debate seemed to help most with English class. In particular, he mentioned directly this class area and went on to say it's application to reading, research, and writing. Urban debate has helped Anna in English and government. Anna contends:

Well, there has been in our government class, I think, when they have discussion, like we, we talk about politics and sometimes, um, the things I learned in debate,

like about certain arguments that I've read because we have to research our, our arguments, so we look through the internet and are reading different things and I think, like, some of the little things, the research that I do and the things that I learn from I am able to put into that conversation, into those discussions that we have in class... And, um, let me see, I have math. I don't think I'd – maybe just the focus and, and the determination that I have to, like, finish like saying, "I'm going to write this rebuttal tonight." Sometimes it's just one of those days and you're like, "I don't want to do this," but, I mean, I have to get it done. So, I mean, in math sometimes I feel like that a lot of the time so it's, you learn how to be patient with yourself and push yourself. So I think it's something that I can use in every class. Just pushing yourself and trying to get through the best that you can.

When asked what skills specifically applied to history and English, Teresa responded:

Writing--one thing for English. Like, um, debate helps your writing skills and then, like, writing rebuttals, like, off the top of your head. And history, like, you learn a lot about history in debate as in, like, prior instances, um, like, cited in debate evidence, and you learn more. You get to it in class and you're like "Oh, I learned about that at debate." And you grasp it a lot easier than classmates.

Teresa has even told friends that debate can help with school, mentioning specifically English and History. Teresa remarked:

Like, I tell them that it will help, it will really help in, like, your school classes. You'll be able to take notes much faster, and, um, it helps a lot with, like, English and, like, history as in, well, those are like the two, the two things that are focused on in debate in terms of evidence and, like, logic skills. So...I, I tell them it will help them, but they, they don't seem to listen to me.

In putting this line of questioning to Natalie, she stated:

It happens, I think, more in, like, my Social Studies classes. Uh, I remember once was it, I think it was my first year in debate, we were talking about, um, Africa. There was a topic about Africa and about, uh, diseases and things like that. And I remember it got as something in somebody's head, it got brought up in one of my Social Studies classes and I was like, "Oh, hey. I know what you're talking about."

Connecting another classroom observation to a subsequent student informant

interview, this time to a follow-up question asked of Natalie, the question asked dealt

with whether or not the urban debate league topic areas assisted with any class subject performance. She extends her initial analysis in stating,

Like, sometimes it, I'll be – especially in history classes, you know and government classes – they'll bring up a topic, and I'll, like, "Oh, I heard something like that in debate, either last year or something." So it's kind of cool because you do actually learn things that are going on, and then when you hear about it later, you have this information about it. So...yeah.

Part of the subject matter based improvement the debaters shared in their responses also demonstrated an association to an awareness and understanding of current events. Students in debate are generally called upon to be able to analyze and apply current events news and ideas to the competitive discussions they engage in. Evidence materials beyond those provided by the Milwaukee Debate League also typically draw from current events news sources. Anna speaks to this issue using an example regarding the recent events in Asia, and a current events report she made in a Sociology class that I observed. Anna remarked:

There are, there was a time where, we had to really relate it to current events because of the situation that's going on now. There's, uh, we have a full-time presence in every country, so, um, and, uh, we do have, um, point troops and CT troops in Afghanistan. So, and one of the cases that affirmative team was on was Japan, and it was a day a couple of days after, the weekend after the hurricane or earthquake struck, and, um, well we had evidence about that thing, how there's no need for your plan for the troops to leave Japan because they're already gone so we shouldn't even be debating because there, ever since that happened, I think all of our people, all of our troops that were there were, like, expected to come back home or were already in the country. So, it does relate. You can usually find, we usually find arguments, like, from today, sometimes to pair them up with, with what we're debating.

The connectedness between current events and coursework is also articulated by Teresa, who furthermore shares that work in practice aids in this process as well. Tying this together Teresa concludes, "being able to research during debate or during practice

because, um, research is, like, fundamental to debate because you need to keep up on current events relating to the topic because they could possible come up in a round the next tournament.” I was able to observe Teresa deliver a brief current events report as well, in which she appeared very confident in offering analysis on the nuclear clean-up that was taking place in Japan.

Based on the data, both interview and observational, there is much to warrant earlier claims made that urban debate league participation has a positive effect on the necessary skills for school-related success. If anything, there is clearly a belief on the part of the debaters and teacher-coach at Perry Prep that MDL participation has made a difference.

Self-efficacy: Influences on Self-esteem, Social Interaction, and College Enrollment

In addition to attention given to issues related to academic achievement, the second major area for exploration posed by the research question involves the area of student self-efficacy. As examined previously, proponents of urban debate assert that students involved in the area experience a surge in self-confidence. Given this assertion, a portion of the questioning focused on how the urban debaters at Perry Prep felt about the connection between participating in the league and their own actualization of self-efficacy. The following section analyzes the interview and observation data with regard to the effect on student self-confidence, social interactions, and prospects for future college enrollment.

Self-esteem.

The first area explored pertaining to self-efficacy was student self-esteem. In responding to an initial interview question, "Why did you join the debate team?" Carlos addressed the idea of self-confidence in-part by stating, "I believe there was two reasons. First reason was because of the college things. The second reason was to get rid of my shyness and talk more." When I asked him to elaborate, he responds, "It might be because the college reasons, it could be for speech reasons if they want to practice for speeches, could be for mine reasons only at least similar reasons for mine, could have a reason for meeting since [inaudible]...and then memorization." For Carlos, who from all information gathered is painfully shy, urban debate has provided an outlet through which he has found the self-confidence to speak in front of other people.

Asked if debate has affected her confidence, Teresa stated, "I think, I think debate added to it just because once I started getting confident with debate, I was like, "Oh, I want to win all the time," and it, it just got better from there." And then asked if anyone has noticed a surge in confidence, she continues, "Yeah. Um, like, my mom will notice that, like, I'm more headstrong about certain things, like, getting work done or, if I, if set a goal for myself, I always try to do whatever I can to meet that goal." Pressing a bit further was a follow-up question asking her to consider when she felt the increase in self-confidence began, to which she responds, "I think it was when I got started. I really wasn't a talkative person so I was really nervous in front of everybody. Like, I really like talking in front of people at all or really talking to people so, uh, debate was, it was kind of scary for me at first. But, like, I was kind of like, "Why did I even get into this?" But,

but now I know why.” In posing the question, “has debate improved your confidence?”,

Anna commented:

Confidence. I think it does. Kind of like bragging rights like, “Oh yeah. I’m in debate, and I do so good I bring trophies home” kind of, like that. And actually just like getting awards and knowing that you, like, won a round, if not, if you didn’t even win all three of them, but just won one, I think, like, it’s a confidence [inaudible] like, “I was so good, and I know what I’m going to do next to make it even better.” And you feel good. I think confidence has increased.

Even in her response to the question, “What about the activity do you enjoy?,” Anna appears to make a connection to an increase in confidence by responding:

Well, I guess just being, like, proud of myself, saying like pushing myself further and saying, “I did this, and I am capable of doing this” which means that if I can do this, then I can do something else and I can do it better. It’s just bettering myself and improving and learning, I guess, and I like that because every new tournament gives us the opportunity to start fresh all over again, if not, if not all over again, just improve from where you left off and that’s good.

In addition to speaking about their feelings on a personal level, Teresa made some connections to how teammates have also appeared to gain confidence through participating in urban debate. Teresa reflects on her own growth and shares that she has seen Carlos grow in confidence stating, “He gets very nervous, too, and it was just like I was when I was, when I first started debate. And I think once we got him comfortable with, like, the evidence and procedures, I think, I think that was a big thing because, again, he’s my partner. He has to be able to speak, too.”

Natalie spoke about the confidence change that she has experienced and within the context of the urban debate league tournaments themselves in stating:

I like, just, I kind of like just proving to myself that I could do it ‘cause I never really felt like I was a very good debater. So, like, I like to be able to prove to myself that I can debate and that I can do well at it and that I can win rounds. I

like, I like that feeling of knowing that even though I didn't really think I was good, I still could do it, I could, like, accomplish something.

The growth in confidence that urban debate league students may experience was also described by Kate when asked about to describe her most memorable moments of success. Kate remarked:

Seeing some of these kids have that confidence and the ability to speak to other people and to have confidence in what they're saying. Um, and that's on all levels. I mean I have some kids who come in and don't talk barely, hardly at all, and now they do. Or some kids who already do a lot of talking, but maybe talking out of the side of their mouth and they don't really know what they're saying and now do know what they're saying and are [inaudible]. So, just seeing those kids get better at speaking and more confident in their ability to talk to other people, whether that be socially or academically or about politics or whatever it is, more confidence in their ability to speak.

When asked what exactly might account for the potential increase in self-confidence for urban debate students, Kate stated:

I think that's practice and tournaments, a combination of both, um, in that, uh, especially when we're just talking through some of these cases and what do they mean, what's happening, and where's this going, and why would this happen, and, well, a lot of the whys. And if kids are able to answer that or you talk through it and then we review it again the next time and kids are able to answer that. "Yes, that's exactly it." You know. So a lot of times I think they second-guess themselves because it's not something they feel they have a lot of information about, but the more we talk about it, the more they research it or the more they read about it, they find they actually do know information. And so just reaffirming the fact that "Yes that is correct. You know this. Talk about it." I think increases their confidence. Then, of course, taking that information to a tournament, being able to talk about it in a round, and then being reaffirmed again if they win that round or reaffirmed by judges' comments, um, or oral critiques, that, you know, "I liked your arguments on this." So, even if you didn't possibly win that round, at least you didn't lose on that argument. Um, so, just that constant affirmation that "You know what you're talking about." I think increases their confidence, and I just suppose speaking in front of other people would increase anybody's confidence, to continually have to speak in front of others.

As the conversation unfolded and Kate was asked what she likes most about the activity she initially paused to really consider the question, and then explained that it is those moments of breakthrough and confidence for the debaters that she resonates with the most. As Kate explained:

Oh...what do I like most? I guess...that's, that's a hard question. I don't think I've ever really thought about that. Um, but the moments, I think, that I'm involved in debate when I am the happiest, there are two of them. Number one is where we have been working with a case or a piece of evidence or whatever, and a kid who just hasn't gotten the idea that is behind this is all of a sudden able to summarize exactly everything that goes into that argument. "So this card says this and that means this next thing is going to happen and then this next thing is going to happen and this next thing is going to happen, and that's really bad. So we can't let this happen." Or whatever, whatever the argument is. When a kid who's been really struggling with that all of a sudden can say it all clearly and understands it, that's pretty amazing. And that makes me smile. "Congrats, you get it! Now don't forget it." And the other, the other moment that always makes me have a smile is when I see, um, some of our kids who may not be very confident win an award, um, so winning one of those individual speaker awards or winning one of those team trophies, and the kid's completely surprised. "Really, me? Who? What?"...You know, and so to see that surprise on their face. "My gosh, I really won, and wow, I must really be good. So, you know, maybe I'm actually good. Look at this!" Um, that one makes me smile. When, when a kid is surprised to get an award, um, that makes me smile.

It was evident in Kate's response that there was a clear sense of pride in the debaters that really make an effort to learn and achieve. The urban debate league team that she oversees appears to provide students with a myriad of opportunities to develop with respect to self-confidence, as well as social interactions, examined in the next section.

Social Interaction.

Part of the self-efficacy that urban debate students may experience relates to social interactions. The spectrum of activities that urban debate league participants

engage in, from practices to competitive tournaments to league-run or other summer collegiate debate institutes, affords students with opportunities for social connections with other students and educators. Some of the interview conversations revealed this aspect for personal maturity.

In asking what the debate tournaments have been like Teresa describes the day initially from the perspective of the schedule and competition. Yet, when asked about the interactions among students, she responded:

I think it's, like, your only really, like, competitive in the round. It's just they get out of the element of "I need to win all the time." Um, like outside of the round at, outside of the round they are just normal people. Um, we're, we're just normal teenagers, and, like, when the pressures off, again, we're just like normal people...usually really social. Like, even if we've never talked to this person before, if they usually come up and talk to you, we, we'll talk to them. Um, and they're really friendly. Like, again, with public speakers, we can really talk to anybody, and that's, that's what we do. If we've never seen them before, we'll talk to them. Sometimes about the topic, but a lot of times it's about school or what we do outside of school.

When asked what they talk about, Teresa says "we talk about what was on TV this week or like, um, something funny that happened on Facebook, something like that. Um, just normal teenager things." She also says that conversation usually isn't about the debate topic or the tournament itself. When asked about whether or not socializing occurs outside the tournaments, Teresa says not really, although she had contact with one person from another school but it didn't last very long.

Asking the question to Carlos, "how do the students from different schools interact with each other?" Carlos says, "Positively. Nothing bad happens." In putting forth a follow-up question to seek some greater understanding, Carlos simply remarked, "I'm not very good with social skills." This is a sentiment confirmed by Kate, and again

reveals some of the incredible shyness and introverted personality he seems to possess.

Anna was asked about student interaction as well, to which she replied:

Well, um, we're all pretty friendly with each other. We talk, we go fill a table and just have, I mean, small conversations. I mean, even after the rounds, we're all talking and laughing and just enjoying the time we have. And, um, no one seems to hold a grudge even though they may seem very aggressive during the round, like, everybody's like, "It's just debating" and afterwards everything's fine and we're all happy people.

A follow-up question asked in a later interview session with Anna dealt with whether or not some conversation regarding school occurred during social times at the MDL tournament, to which she comments:

School is always, it's always brought up somehow. Um, we're like, "Oh, what school are you guys from?" And then, you just start talking and somebody makes the comment and you're like, "Oh, yeah. We're doing that, too." And we learn a lot about how other schools run...we learned that, like, we have similar kind of, like, curriculum and education that we do, and I don't know. We always talk about what school we're at or, like, [which school] will have debate, like, as a class or something like that.

In talking with Natalie about the social aspects from her time attending MDL tournaments she had this to say:

When you actually start to talk to some of the other debaters and really start to become more friends with them, that's mainly when, like, discussion outside of debate really starts to happen because before, like, if you don't really know the person very well, discussions usually stay to the topic of debate, but once you start to get to know them, then you start becoming friends with them, you start talking about what, the kind of school they go to, you know, what it's like there, or things like that.

Social interaction from Kate's perspective also involves summer debate camp. In

responding to the questions do the urban debate league students interact socially with one another, Kate answered:

Yes. Um, a lot of the times, if they go to camp, they might make friends over camp that are from different schools so they'll see them at tournaments. Um,

we even had a romance going on for a while, um, between one of ours and a debater from another school. It didn't last – school romance. Um, and, uh, uh, and some of them just had friends that they happened to know from middle school who went to different high schools, um, and then also are involved in debate. So some of them already have friends that they know or friends that they have made over tournaments or whatever. So, yeah, there's some interaction.

Having been at the initial two summer institutes at Marquette University, Kate saw firsthand the effects that the activity could have on students in providing increased prospects for social interaction among high school students. At times, the MDL has brought together students from some twenty-plus schools, and the data suggest that the debaters from Perry Prep have benefited from those interactions.

College enrollment.

The final aspect of self-efficacy may be seen through the opinions that the students and teacher-coach shared related to prospects for future college enrollment as a result of having participated in urban debate. Anna, Teresa, and Natalie are all seniors who graduated and will be attending college come fall. Each was very sure about the path to higher education and stated as much during the interview sessions.

One of the areas initially probed was the notion of whether or not the students thought having urban debate league tournaments on a college campus had any effect on themselves or other league participants in with regard to future college attendance. Carlos was not exactly sure about the association but was definitive in stating he did not like the shift away from having MDL events on a college campus in stating, "Personally, I like the first time, first year because we had, we used to have, like Marquette, like we

had the debates at, like, Marquette.” Anna recalled that tournament events her first year shifted from Marquette University to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and she thought that was much better than going to another high school.

When asked about the connection to having the events on a college campus and the notion idea that advocates for urban debate league programming believe that it makes a difference for potential college attendance for students, Anna remarked:

I think it’s true. I always, like, when I’m wandering the halls or going back to the auditorium after a debate, I’m, I’m like, “Oh, soon I’m going to be here, like, at a place like this.” And I, it’s exciting because you’re in the actual classrooms, like, you see the actual papers left behind and there’s writing on the board, things like that, and you get a little, a little sense of what it’s going to be like. And, um, sometimes you even see the college students around inside the same building and same, um, hallways, and you see that they’re just having a good time, and good times, you want to be where the good time’s at. So...I’m like, “College. It’s a good time.” So, and, um, yeah, I think it’s, it’s, it’s pretty exciting.

The same question was asked of Teresa, who stated:

I would say that, that, it, it strengthens what you learn in school, and it will help you in college. Um, you’ll be able to take the knowledge that you get from col-, er, debate, and used it in college whether it be in papers or, like, again, a presentation. I know at the college that I’m going to, we have to give another speech like I do for my graduation here so, again, it just ties back into what, um, into what I learned in debate.

Even in considering the angle through which she’d use to try to recruit new debaters,

Teresa stated that implications for college are present:

Colleges love debaters. They take a look at what, everything you learn from debate, and they can use that and they can, like, - uh, how do I say this? – they, they take what you’ve learned in debate, it, like, that you tell them, and they can figure out, “Oh, are they a good candidate for our school?” And most of the time, debaters are what they’re looking for because they learn everything they need to know for college in debate.

In follow-up the question, "What's everything that colleges want for a student?," Teresa contends:

A good public speaker, for one thing. Um, analytic skills, like, um, the ability to be able to figure out problems on their own. Um, like, like, breaking, breaking down problems into smaller parts, and being able to analyze what the problem is from each part and then put it together. And, um...what else? Uh, good writing skills, writing rebuttals and, um, and writing arguments that, it develops your writing skills, and writing skills are used in, um, they're used in, like, writing papers and a lot of times your grade is, like, it's necessary to papers because that is what your grade is based upon.

Natalie's commented about the possible connection urban debate league participation has to likely college attendance in stating,

Well, there's a lot, there's a lot of things in debate that you would need for college like the researching, being able to research a topic. Um, again, being able to, like, speak in front of people, you know, not being completely shy, being able to read things, you know, understand more difficult words, things like that. There's a lot of things in debate that, like, I feel a college would appreciate because it's a lot of work, too, a lot of hard work, a lot of commitment.

And like Teresa, Natalie even intones the association for success in college to recruitment for the urban debate team at Perry Prep in remarking:

Um, you know, I think so far what we have, like what most of the kids like and want to hear because especially when you throw that college thing at them, that colleges do like people who have been in debate, they're all like, "Oh, really?" and it's like, "Yeah." You know, and then, uh, uh, we, we really try to stress that it is fun because a lot of people don't think that it would be fun, but it, like, our debate, like, uh, practice is always funny and hilarious because our coach is funny and hilarious.

It is evident from the answers of the senior student informants that the connectedness between urban debate and college is manifested in multiple ways. From preparedness for college to recruiting new team members the debaters at Perry Prep articulated several aspects in which they saw relationships to higher education. That said it is

important to recognize that Perry Prep appears to have a solid track record with respect to students going off to college. It is also clear that the association that the MDL previously had to a local university was something valued by the students and Kate. In all, student self-efficacy as delineated through increased self-esteem and social interactions as well as future college enrollment were aspects positively reflected in the fieldwork data.

Civic Empowerment: Involvement at School and Engagement in the Community

The third and final area of inquiry for this research study focuses on the construct of civic empowerment. It has been asserted that urban debate league participants are more likely to be outwardly active in their schools and outside communities as a result of participation. Some interview questions were asked in an effort to render conclusions about this claim. The section that follows examines civic and outward empowerment with respect to involvements both at school, beyond required classwork, and in the broader community outside the school. Subsequent analysis as compared with the existing literature follows in chapter six.

Involvement at school.

To begin, questions were asked of the informants in order to discover their thoughts on the extent to which urban debate may have affected them with respect to involvement right at Perry Prep. When Carlos was asked if participating in urban debate altered any other involvements at school he said no, it had not. Extending the question

and framing it related to other students he said he wasn't sure. Asked whether the urban debate team had any direct impact on Perry Prep, Carlos stated that the program is nice for school but probably wouldn't be missed that much if it did not exist. To Carlos, it makes a "slight difference." Posing a similar question to Anna regarding any impact the debate team might have on the school, she remarked:

I think everybody knows about debate because we, we bring home trophies and they put it in the announcements and they're like, "Yeah debate," but then I don't think any, like, in the beginning when they call for, like, an informational meeting to see who wants to join, we have a ton of kinds show up and at the end it's only like five people. So I think that what scares people away is the work, but that they know about the activity? Yes, they know about it, they know it exists here.

In response to the initial question that debaters are more likely to be active in their schools, school communities and maybe in the community outside of school, Anna stated,

I think that's definitely true. Um, I, I like to be involved. I was, I've been a part of many different activities since the beginning of the school year. Student Council's the one I've kept for all four years. Um, debate, I was in it for three years. Um, two years I only actually counted because one of the years I quit halfway through. And then, um, I've been in newspaper club – I was editor. Um, I'm a tutor at the writing center and two different sports. I was in yearbook one year. Um, I don't know. I like being involved like that. And, um, I, um, this summer I'm going to be working, um, signing up for AmeriCorps so that's something different, too.

Teresa offered a much different perspective in responding to the exact same question, stating:

I don't really think so. Like, uh, that's really all there is. Like, we're in debate, but we don't really do much else. I mean, I'm involved with, like, volunteering, but that's really it. Like, I, I volunteer as a writing tutor here at school, and I think it's because I wanted to help with the whole education thing. Like, 'cause, you get an education in itself from debate, and I wanted to make sure that the other people in the school are getting the education that I'm receiving.

From Teresa's point of view, her added involvements at school are a result of other motivational factors and not her participation in urban debate. Natalie also expressed a similar point of view in that debate did not necessarily encourage her to be more involved in other activities at Perry Prep. Yet, she made an interesting connection as to how debate has helped her to contribute to school issue debates as an active member of student council this year. Natalie shared:

Like, we had one was about vending machines, if we should have normal soda or diet soda...I think with the vending machine, we had a couple, it wasn't like a whole debate thing where we were like, "We should actually bring this up to the school," but there were like a few kids were like, "You know what. I like this idea. We should, like, try and get that in." I know that I actually, like, tried to talk to the student council about it because I felt that the diet soda was disgusting. I think we should have, like, normal soda, but, um, nothing really came out of it because there were certain, like, rules or whatever, I guess, that our school had to follow for nutrition in snacks and stuff so we were, like, "Okay."

While for Natalie, the connection was limited to how a practice debate issue intersected with what became a student council question, she thought maybe for others participating in the urban debate might lead them to become more involved in other things but she was not definitive in expressing this opinion.

The same basic question was posed to Kate, to which she replied that she thought more so than not. She contends:

There are, I mean, quite a few of our, of our debate students who have also been strong leaders in this school. Um, through Student Council. Um, current students have also been participants in a program called Peers with Impact...Peers with Impact is, uh, high school kids who present to middle schools and elementary schools about the dangers of drugs and alcohol. Um, so they commit to be drug and alcohol free, they sign a pledge, um, they go to some training, and then they play some Jeopardy games or whatever else and teach kids facts about drugs and alcohol and they're bad. Um, so we've had quite a few of our debate members who are involved in Peers with Impact and Student Council. Um - I'm trying to think, Quite a few of our members have been

involved in drama. Um, and, I've had a couple that are in yearbook, here and there. Um, back to the question. The question was whether or not debate, oh, impacts being involved in the community. And then I've had other debate kids who aren't involved in anything else. So, but I think I have more students who are involved in debate and other activities.

As such, from Kate's perspective there was more to suggest the connection than not.

Yet, one other factor we discussed was whether or not the student already had a disposition for involvement in school activities and was it that which led the student to be in debate and other activities vs. being in debate and that itself being the catalyst for other participation. To that question, Kate did not have any firm opinion.

Whereas there tended to be a good deal of unanimity on thoughts pertaining to the connections between urban debate some aspects of self-efficacy, there was much less so in terms of league participation as a catalyst for added school-related involvement.

Engagement in the community.

In exploring the idea of outward empowerment further, some questions were asked pertaining to involvement outside the school and in the surround community. When asked, Carlos and Teresa stated that they had no real opinion on this issue. Anna too was tentative responding, yet did acknowledge while perhaps not the case for herself, she thought that it was the case for a teammate. Commenting on another team member who appeared to become more politically active in the midst of the state budget debates, Anna remarked:

Well, uh, I'm not really sure, but I know – excuse me – um, [name removed], he - I think one gets involved just by being interested – and, um, he's a pretty big

activist. I guess I could call it that. He, um, he's, when the whole Scott Walker thing was going on, he went to Madison and he was, like, researching information. And so when the topic came up, he was, he had, uh, sources to back up whatever he was saying and he was very informed, I guess. And so, he was able to have an educated conversation with our teachers, too, about that. And, um, I think so, he may not be in a club or anything, but it shows his interest in, in involving himself with politics maybe or something else.

The same question was put to Natalie and she too did not have a definitive connection for herself or even her former teammates. She did, however, pursue a related angle in stating that the involvement as it relates to being exposed to college venues may serve to encourage urban debaters to actively engage in their out-of-school communities.

Natalie contends:

Yeah, um, well, look, being in debate, especially because we've been involved with Marquette, we've been involved with UW-Milwaukee, and now we're getting involved with other high schools, you really, when you're there, like, they like to promote some of the things that they're doing at their schools, and that, like, um, some students might be like, "Oh, that sounds like a cool idea. I might join with that." "Cause I know, like, at UW-Milwaukee, they would usually just like, sometimes, um, tell us about activities or things like that that they were going to do at their school that were, they're like, "You're more than welcome to come" - things like that. So I think it can, um, definitely help with having students be more involved in their community and things like that because you're connected to all these different places that you can go back there and be like, "Oh, I was in debate. I used to debate here, you know." And it's more easier to get involved with things like that. And then, also, um, uh, yeah, it's just like, you, you're just like entwined with all these places that it's hard not to get involved in different things than just debate by itself.

This same inquiry regarding community involvement was asked of Kate, who stated:

I don't see a whole lot of them involved in other things outside of school in their community, um, but I can't say for sure. I don't know always everything about everything that they do. They don't always tell me. Um, or I don't always ask. Um, I know that some of them have done volunteer experience, but they also require as part of their senior year project that they do a volunteer ex, experience. But some of them, I know, continue that. Like I know one student who's been volunteering now for almost two years at a no-kill cat shelter just because it's something she believes in and feels strongly about it. Um, so, you

know, sometimes they get hooked into that volunteering experience, and they do it for however long they need to, a couple weeks, and then decide that “I kind of like this” you know, and then continue doing it. As well as some of them are also doing it for the hours for that Wisconsin Covenant.

Given the final aspect of her answer, a follow-up question was posed to gain further analysis. In answering Kate explores the motivation for community involvement and questions whether is it really urban debate driven or rather is it based on pursuing a scholarship. Kate comments further, “so I don’t know if debate is really affecting the fact that they’re involved in the community or if that’s more of part of trying to get a scholarship or trying to fulfill a requirement or figuring out that it really is something that they just enjoy doing. Um, so I don’t know if there’s a strong connection there?”

In the end there appeared to be less consensus with the idea that urban debate league participation leads to outward civic empowerment though community involvement than with respect to more activity-related involvement at school. The student informants even seemed a bit surprised by this line of questioning, as did the teacher-coach. In sum, the theoretical claims in prior literature were not found to be the case here at Perry Prep, and more extensive analysis will be afforded this area in chapter six. For the time being it is fair to conclude that student involvement may not be enhanced by urban debate participation, but instead lessened due to the extraordinary time commitment needed for involvement. Additionally, there is little data to suggest urban debaters are more active in the local community beyond the standard involvements that any student would engage in related to service opportunities or college resume building.

Summary

The focus of this chapter was to provide an analysis of the interview and observational data with regard to the three specific domains of academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. Particular attention was given to team culture as a means for understanding involvement and potential influences as well. In all, it is reasonable to conclude that urban debate has influenced the debaters at Perry Prep in a variety of ways as examined through the lens of the research question. Again, since most of the prior urban debate literature has not emphasized student voices, a primary aim of this chapter was to let those voices be heard. In order to allow the informant voices to stand out, limited analysis was provided with the caveat that more extensive analysis, in particular to extant literature, will be forthcoming Chapter 6.

Chapter Six
Student Voice as Evidence for Understanding Academic Achievement,
Self-Efficacy, and Civic Empowerment

As previously stated, I thought it important to let the voices of the student informants stand for themselves, hence the format for Chapter 5 that did not include references to the extant literature. Since almost everything that has been written documenting urban debate leagues does not include students voicing their perspectives on the activity, my intent was to give them significant attention in Chapter 5.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the pertinent question to answer with this proposed research is how students may be affected by their participation in urban debate.

The central question for this research project is as follows: What effect does participation in an urban debate league have on academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment for Hispanic secondary school students?

Again, I assert that this is a worthwhile research question to have posed. The focus of urban debate has been to serve as a means of improving the education of students, not merely to create more clubs or after school activities, and to try to keep young people out of trouble. As asserted by its advocates, urban debate is intended to be an urban education reform program that serves students in underserved schools. This qualitative study has sought to uncover more about how students assess the effects of their own participation in relation to academics, self-efficacy, and engagement outside of the classroom. My efforts in exploring this question have included a series of informant interviews and classroom observations that provided some insights to assist in more

fully understanding the student experience in urban debate. I speculated in the introduction that proponents of educational reform might also be interested in knowing more about the experiences of urban debaters. To that end, an in-depth look at students immersed within the Milwaukee Urban Debate League at Perry Prep serves to illuminate the perspectives that students have with regard to this activity.

This chapter provides further analysis of the data presented in Chapter 5 and compares/contrasts it to the extant literature reviewed in Chapter 3. An examination of team culture provides the foundation for then reviewing of three domains of academic achievement, self-efficacy, and civic empowerment. Following sections on each of the three domains of the research question along with some considerations for further inquiry. The chapter closes with some concluding thoughts and suggestions for how this study might be utilized by those who advocate and support urban debate leagues writ large.

Context of Team Culture

In proposing this research, a principal consideration was to look at the team culture of the urban debate league team in Milwaukee. Team culture again refers to how the students and teacher-coaches relate to one another and develop community as a single urban debate program. It was evident from my time at Perry Prep that there was collegiality among those currently participating on the team. While participation had declined over the course of the year, something that appeared to weigh heavily on Kate as teacher-coach, the debaters that remained on the team roster clearly had a

close association to one another. When asked during the interviews to describe a significant team achievement, three of the student informants specifically mentioned a prominent award winning moment for one of their teammates. It was clear from several other responses that the students valued the friendships that they had made as well. More importantly, perhaps than even the friendships, was the appreciation for the respect generated from participating in the team. Each of the student informants stated time spent with the team was positive for providing an atmosphere for learning and mutual respect. They were able to share, learn, make mistakes and still know that the confines of the team provided for a safe environment. To some extent, this idea relates to claims made by Miller (2006) when he stated that the urban debaters he studied had a closeness for one another. Of course, the provocative side of Miller's tabloid style account of urban debate was nowhere to be seen at Perry Prep. Whereas Miller sought to get as personal as he could with his investigative tell-all approach, this research, while having aspects that were personal, was limited to areas pertinent to school and educationally-related community involvements.

Related to team culture was clearly the notion of student participation. Several of the interview questions sought to gain insight into the reasons why students become involved with and then remained in the activity. Questions for Kate addressed this as well. Mezuk (2009) has concluded that "competitive policy debate preferentially attracts academically oriented students" and that "students with recurrent debate participation had higher likelihood of positive academic outcomes relative to those with only peripheral participation" (Mezuk, 2009, p. 299). The data gathered at Perry Prep

appears in general to support his claim. Students involved with the team seemed to be well-positioned academically before beginning their participation with the urban debate team. Even Carlos who struggled more with schooling through what he shared with me and what Kate confirmed seemed quite capable of academic success. His real limitation for school centered on his shyness. For her part Kate stated that she wanted the students who were the excuse makers at school to get involved. Urban debate does provide an outlet for students who otherwise may not have opportunities to have voice in subjects surrounding education. It is clear from my observations of the classes at Perry Prep that they were quite engaging and students spoke frequently during class.

As specified before, student participation declined steadily throughout the school year due to a variety of factors not the least of which was the lengthy season. Notable here, however, was that all of the currently participating student informants, Anna, Carlos, and Teresa, had participated in almost all urban debate league tournament events during the season. Prior work by Preston (2004), who looked at charting student participation, found that 'practical experience' with the activity tended to provoke more long-term participation. Moreover, he claimed that students who attended away camps and participated in more league tournaments were more likely to stay connected to the activity. That was true for Teresa and Natalie, each of whom had attended a summer debate institute session at Marquette University, and then had been involved in urban debate for multiple years. In briefly addressing one of Preston's (2004) proposed future research questions regarding whether or not the specific school attended and support received from within the school contributed to involvement

and/or potential success, the responses of the student informants and teacher-coach indicated that it does matter. Each articulated in some way that the support of the school, through both the administration and faculty did matter. Moreover, students said that they felt that their teachers recognized their participation in urban debate. That said, the students also shared that they felt some added responsibility and expectation to perform better in class as a result of being part of the team. Kate also shared similar thoughts that teachers were indeed supportive and likely had increased expectations with respect to academic achievement for the students involved in debate.

While the student informants articulated some real passion for their involvement in the activity of urban debate, none of the interview responses were at the same level of personal connection as those reported by Lee (1998). That said, the school environment at Perry Prep appeared to be one of substantial support. And while undoubtedly there are students who probably struggle academically and in other ways, the marginalization that was articulated by Lee was not evident in the student informants involved in this research. In all, student debaters seemed to be held in somewhat high regard at the school given the success of the program. Additionally, the comments made by the teacher-coach conveyed the idea that students involved in the team were already positioned well for academic success. My impression that the staying power for the debaters that remained engaged through the late-spring into the month of May, when most of the fieldwork took place, demonstrated a strong commitment to the activity and to schooling in general. While nonetheless meaningful

to the students, I do not think that this study was positioned to address the notion that debate provides the type of salvation experience that resonates in Lee's work.

Academic Achievement: Inferences on Attitude and Skill Development

A number of assertions have been made with regard to attitude toward schooling and overall academic achievement for students who participate in urban debate league programming. Proponents of UDLs have asserted for several decades that these entities are grass roots efforts for improving student achievement and participation in schooling (Wade, 1999). It seems clear from the student informants that the activity has some overall effects on academic achievement. If anything, the students at Perry Prep who have participated feel that it has positively impacted their attitude toward school and influenced them to work harder to attain success. From the qualitative data assessed in this study it is apparent that effects on student achievement appear to be more personal in nature; in short, the effects may not be as widespread for all students as claimed in prior, largely quantitative studies. The previously referenced theory based research by Barfield (1989) and Allen et al. (1995) concluded that debate strengthens the skills needed for successful schooling. To some extent, my data supports this claim; yet, student responses were not universal in supporting the idea that participating in urban debate was necessarily the difference maker for their success at school. Kate, for example, expressed a cautiously optimistic opinion about how much of an effect urban debate league participation had on student achievement. She stated that it may help students who are already achieving at some level to do better, yet did

not think that the activity alone could take a student from a basic starting point and make them a high achiever.

Much of the existing literature regarding debate and urban debate league participation does focus on skill areas deemed essential to education. Beyond the broad calls for 'debate across the curriculum' (Bellon, 2000), the focus of research narrows to evaluate specific skill sets. The following section addresses these valued skill set areas and provides analysis of the extant literature as compared to the data reported out in chapter five.

The skill areas typically associated with debate include public speaking and presentation skills, critical thinking and analytical skills, researching skills, and reading skills with respect to fluency and comprehension. To a lesser extent there are connections made to writing and note-taking, organizational skills, and homework completion.

Public speaking/presentation/in-class participation skills.

At the forefront of claims made about the benefits of urban debate league participation is the improvement gained in the skill of public speaking. Rhetoric and persuasion studies (Windes and Hastings, 1965; Ziegelmueller 1975; and Keefe, Harte, and Norton, 1982) have firmly concluded that debate provides an avenue for learning effective verbal communication skills. Each of the four student informants stated that participating in urban debate had definitely improved their public speaking skills. Participating in tournaments they noted especially had an effect in that they were

speaking in front of students and teachers from other schools. Moreover, each shared that they had experienced confidence through this improvement in public speaking. On both a skill and confidence level they also felt that their abilities to handle presentations at school were also much improved. Kate too was convinced that participation can make a significant difference in public speaking. Her story of just how far Carlos had come in being able to present at the tournaments during his two years in the activity is a testament to that notion.

Related to public speaking, supporters of the urban debate league movement also contend that the educational process is refocused as students become the primary speakers. As a result of this activity teachers and other adults become the listeners, and often times students enthusiastically assume the primary responsibility for their own learning by conducting original research in anticipation for the presentations they will make at tournaments (Wade, 1999; Lee, 1998). Again each of the four student informants indicated that they enjoyed the aspect of controlling the speaking time during a debate round, yet none of them overtly made a connection to how the speaking control of that time leads to a fundamental shift in the current educational paradigm where teachers tend to hold sway over classroom dialogue. Kate's point of view in particular reiterated the usefulness in attempting to have students take more responsibility for their own learning. Public speaking was deemed an essential aspect for that potential growth. There are limits to this, of course, and her opinion that some of the best coaches are not teachers due to the time constraints of the profession might

diminish the effects gained if teachers are not the judges/audiences at urban debate league tournaments.

One other facet of public speaking relates to in-class participation in subject areas that more readily connect to debate. While research findings by VanSickle (1990) revealed that an overwhelming number of students portend that there is little if any connection between the subject of Social Studies and their day-to-day life, the student informants felt very differently. Anna, Natalie, and Teresa specifically stated that urban debate involvement had made them much more aware of current events and as a result more attuned to what they were learning in their Social Studies classes. Carlos, less direct in this area even stated that he knew more about the world because of debate and some of those things did relate to his classes on occasion. As noted in Chapter 5, the students had a good deal to say about the connectedness to particular subject areas, namely English and Social Studies. Overall, the data do point to the belief among the student informants and teacher-coach that urban debate participation has an effect on the skill of public speaking.

Reading skills.

In addition to public speaking, proponents of urban debate have asserted that participation dramatically improves reading ability with regard to fluency and comprehension. Several studies (Mueller, 2000; Ghezzi, 2000) have concluded that debate students have generally seen improvements in vocabulary and reading skill development as well as achieving better grades in school. Missing in earlier analysis, of

course, is specifically what students have to say about how the activity might contribute to better reading skills. As with public speaking, my data are striking in terms of student perceptions about improved reading ability. All four of them commented that urban debate makes a difference for reading. The volume of evidence requires a lot of practice, and from team meeting time to tournaments, reading aloud is done with tremendous frequency. Mezuk's (2009) findings also indicated that the specialization of debate on reading and language arts skills demonstrates that there is likely a direct connection between debate and academic achievement in some areas, especially those that rely heavily on reading.

As previously reviewed, Collier (2004) attempts to determine the extent to which urban debate benefits students academically, and is specifically directed toward how increases in reading comprehension may in turn translate to higher test scores and grades. While each of the debaters at Perry Prep stated that they believed that they were better readers as a result of urban debate, standardized test scores and grades were not shared nor reviewed. Their explanations, however, focusing on drills in practice and repetition of reading in order to prepare for the tournament events does suggest that reading improvements are evident. From her perspective as teacher-coach, Kate feels that comprehension is significantly improved based on the reading practice, but also in part stemming from the discussions and application of the reading in practice and at the UDL tournaments.

Research and critical thinking skills.

Beyond public speaking and reading, advocates for urban debate claim that students experience improvements in both research and critical thinking skills as a result of their involvement in the activity. In connecting debate to critical thinking, several prior studies have asserted that it is an activity that empowers the learner and unlocks academic potential (Freely, 1986; Hill, 1993; Colbert, 1995). And in arguing for debate across the curriculum Bellon (2000) concludes that debate lends itself to developing a number of vital academic skills, especially those related to research and critical thinking. Although the scholarship germane in the area of achievement and critical thinking skill development connects more closely to traditional high school debate as it pertains to suburban schools (Fine, 1999; Littlefield, 2001; Colbert, 1993), its application seems apparent from the review of the literature in Chapter 3 and has been expressed through those who promote UDL involvement and expansion (Wade, 1999).

In addressing these skill areas, the student informants spoke mainly about research as it related to urban debate tournament preparation and not as much as it connected back to school. Carlos was indifferent to the connection of research stating it helps some of the time. Natalie was more specific and talked about the skill gained, especially with respect to online research and how she is better able to identify valuable information. Each of the student informants, however, spoke about research as it pertained directly to UDL tournament competition. Perhaps one of the limits in this area is that the preponderance of materials for an urban debate team is provided by the league. Not all, of course, but it was clear from the student responses that a good deal

of material was provided and only some online research that was generally current events related was done as a follow-up.

Questions were asked directly about critical thinking to Kate as teacher-coach. Critical thinking was deemed by Kate as a skill implicitly developed through making connections between ideas and arguments. Her experience was that this was done as much if not more in practices than in the competitive debate rounds given the ability for students to stop and ask questions and receive more interactive feedback versus only being given a few minutes of comments at the end of each debate. Certainly the speaking, reading, research and discussion aspects of urban debate do appear to relate to improved critical thinking skills. The data, albeit thinner in this area from the student informant, does support this conclusion.

Writing and note-taking skills.

Upon review of my data and examining the existing literature, it becomes evident that there is a gap in this area. Whereas much has been written about debate skills related to speaking, reading, researching, and critical thinking, there doesn't seem to be any prior focus in determining the effect debate participation may have upon writing. The only connection here appears to be a tangential one as 'debate across the curriculum' (Bellon, 2000), which was developed to model 'writing across the curriculum.' When asked directly about the skill of writing, however, the student informants stated that urban debate did provide some benefit. Anna and Teresa spoke directly to this area in explaining that urban debate has helped them in putting ideas

together. Anna, for example, stated this specifically for persuasive or argumentative essays. Carlos, Natalie, and Teresa also stated that urban debate had an effect on writing specific to note-taking. Those responses, however, were based on answering questions distinct from the questions asked about writing. Kate's response in this area mirrored her overall assessment of how participating in urban debate may connect to academic achievement. Specifically, she felt that modest improvements were possible, yet a poor writer would not necessarily become an excellent writer. No doubt some further research could be done in this area to better assess the connection of urban debate to writing.

Homework and organizational skills.

As with writing and note-taking skills, there does not seem to be a connection in the existing literature with respect to urban debate. The closest connection here relates to organizational ideas, but that is angled more toward organizing ideas pertaining to logical presentations and more persuasive writing. Even when interviewing students this area garnered little response. Only one of the four student informants, Carlos, mentioned that urban debate seemed to help with general organizational ability. Moreover, none of the informants specified that it helped with homework completion either. Actually, only as they profiled what they perceived as the downsides of the activity time to balance school work with urban debate and other activities did homework appear to get any attention. As such, urban debate doesn't appear to aid in homework completion. Rather it was a factor that from time-to-time made homework

management more complicated; expectations for attending practice multiple times per week was mentioned as something that cut into homework time.

Overall, then, the data supports that participation in urban debate does effect academic achievement from both the student and teacher-coach perspective. There are certainly some things that temper this conclusion somewhat and that analysis will be outlined in the for further study section of this chapter. Nonetheless, the student informants at Perry Prep did articulate that they believed their involvement in the urban debate league helped them to do better at school. In each of the substantive skill areas of public speaking, reading, writing, researching and critical thinking the debaters contended that there were aspects of the activity that were directly connected to the classroom.

Self-efficacy: Inferences on Personal Growth

The second component of the question guiding this research deals with self-efficacy. This will be analyzed through the categories of self-esteem, social interactions, and confidence for going off to college. As the coding was being done, these categories emerged as the student data. The teacher-coach also spoke about self-efficacy with respect to several aspects. This section reviews each of these areas and offers inferences from the data collected in this study. These are then contrasted with the findings of prior research.

Self-esteem.

Research in education has examined the importance of an individual's confidence level, and how that in turn impacts student achievement (Alderman, 2004; Lodewyk and Winne, 2005). It has been argued that students make self-regulatory determinations on a multitude of levels involving content and skill engagement within the context of schooling. Several prior studies have indicated that students involved in debate experience higher levels of self-esteem (Mitchell, 1998; Fine, 1999). Additionally, one study claims that participation improves not only student self-esteem but also positive decision-making in a manner that decreases high-risk behaviors (Collier, 2004). In speaking with student informants at Perry Prep, each acknowledged that debate really gave them added self-confidence. For most of them it meant simply added confidence to be able to articulate their own point of view and speak in front of other people. Yet it also resonated with a few of them more generally with respect to believing that they could achieve at a higher level in school and potentially in their futures. The interview questions asked did not get into anything that might answer whether or not urban debate kept them from any high-risk behaviors; however, from what Kate described the student informants were certainly in good standing at school.

Another aspect of self-efficacy included in this study deals with self-direction in learning and how that may or may not connect with improvements in achievement. Research has determined that students who had engaged in instruction that was deemed more self-regulated were more motivated and felt more confident in their overall comprehension of material (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2001; Meece, 1994). As

asserted previously, critical to self-regulated learning is the learner's ability to take initiative, persevere, and adapt to educational circumstances as needed. In the case of the student informants, there was clearly some aspect of self-direction with regard to urban debate. Observations showed that students worked on debate through means that were largely self-directed. It was also clear from what the teacher-coach explained that at times the students wanted more self-directed activities for practice and tournament preparation; however, the problem being that the spacing of the tournaments on a monthly basis detracted from the urgency that she wanted the students to manifest. Moreover, the lateness of the season likely accounted for more individualized work versus large group sessions in practice. While self-directed work, reinforced typically through the urban debate league tournaments, accounted for better comprehension of debate materials, the application back to the classroom appeared limited to only a few subject areas, namely English and Social Studies. It was in these curricular areas that the student informants felt that urban debate had the most direct impact, and interview data support that confidence had grown in dealing with these subjects. That said it is somewhat inconclusive whether or not the self-direction that is a part of debate accounts for overall increases in academic achievement.

In terms of why this particular activity may result in an increase of self-esteem, there may be a connection to the game-like construct of the activity. Students have responded in prior general educational research that simulations and games peak their interest (Hootstein, 1994). The fact that debate at times functions as a form of academic game may, for many students, result in greater motivation to apply what they

learn to the classroom. That may in turn lead to academic success and potentially an increase in self-esteem as students experience success. For the student informants at Perry Prep, each indicated that they felt as though debate had helped them achieve at a higher level academically. It is fair to state that this increase in school performance is like intertwined with feelings of self-confidence. Additionally, when asked to identify a highlight of participating in urban debate the fact that each identified some competitive award for themselves or of another member and spoke about the feeling of accomplishment it generated does seem to bolster the idea that the activity raises confidence. Further, since the activity relies on the core skills needed for successful schooling and the students themselves identified those skills, the connection to increased self-esteem translating into better school related success appears a viable conclusion.

A final facet of self-esteem explored during the interviewing process was that of goal setting. Some further direct questioning for this area even emerged in the follow-up to initial questions about participating in the team. Beyond looking at academic achievement through skill or content mastery, prior research has concluded that process goals lead to far better results as students attempt to learn new skills. Scholars have reported that student satisfaction and self-efficacy increased as they were provided an ability to construct goals for themselves, and earlier findings that students who engage in self-evaluation generally perform better than those who do not have been confirmed (Kitsantas, Reiser, and Doster, 2004). The students in this study had each considered goals with regard to the urban debate team, yet that did not seem to

transfer back to their classroom experience. It is likely that the self-efficacy gained as a result of constructing goals is something that must be related directly to a class. It may be too much to expect that goal setting in a co-curricular activity such as urban debate corresponds to something similar for schooling.

In all, the claims that urban debate league participation improves student self-efficacy have merit. There are, of course, limitations to conclusions about how an increase in self-esteem is exactly manifested on a macro level for all participating students. The student and teacher-coach informants at Perry Prep were clear though that involvement did result in higher levels of self-confidence.

Social interaction.

In addition to self-esteem, thoughts and feelings pertaining to the social aspects surrounding urban debate unfolded as part of analyzing self-efficacy. Proponents of urban debate have asserted that the social connections among students from different schools, and in particular interactions from students among urban and suburban schools, really goes a long way to increasing student self-efficacy (Wade, 1999; Miller 2006). Even research focused on more traditional debate have also acknowledged a social aspect that has been important to those students involved in the activity, whether it be through the competitive tournaments or summer institutes attended (Fine, 1999; Littlefield, 2001). And on a more abstract level the notion of modeling in education as well as socialization, it has been argued, can afford students with opportunities to relate

to one another and create stronger connections to the instructional tasks they encounter (White, 1995; Brophy, 2004).

From Carlos stating that ‘nothing bad happens’ to Anna and Teresa sharing that debaters from the various Milwaukee Debate League schools do enjoy some camaraderie at the tournaments and at the summer debate institute, it would seem that the social time spent among urban debate league students is a net positive. Yet, even when asked in a few different sessions about the social interactions at the MDL events, the answers remained generic. None of the student informants spoke in any detail about any particular social experience at an event. When asked about friendships formed outside of any league events only Teresa indicated that had happened, and even then it only lasted a short time. To be sure there is a social element to the activity, yet it does seem distinct from the traditional debate circuit of suburban schools where there are social relationships formed that carry to time outside the activity. Whereas some advocates also state that bridging the gap through competition among urban and suburban schools is vital, the student informants spoke very little of having any interest in plugging into the debate circuit outside the local urban debate league. From Kate’s point of view the social aspects of the urban debate league were limited. The long tournament days and monthly spacing of the tournaments was, in her opinion, the reason for social interaction to be fairly narrow to tournament days. And finally, there didn’t appear to be any connection to the idea of modeling through this socialization. While it is likely that the urban debaters at Perry Prep take notice of the other top performing schools in the league and may perhaps emulate them, nothing was stated by

any of the students or the teacher-coach to indicate that the social interaction they had at the tournaments led to any replication.

It is fair to conclude that there is a degree of sociability to be found at urban debate league events, yet based on the data provided by MDL students those opportunities were somewhat limited. Certainly, linkage from the positive outcomes of such interaction to self-efficacy would be limited as well.

Confidence in going off to college.

The third and final aspect of self-efficacy raised by this research pertains to the assertion that has been made by UDL advocates that students who partake are then more likely to advance to post-secondary education (Collier, 2001). It is important to consider that Perry Prep appears to do well as a school promoting college attendance. Observations there demonstrated several aspects of this including a specific bulletin board dedicated to announcing where seniors were heading off to college. While three of the student informants were seniors and each of them had plans to attend college, it would be a leap to say that it was their urban debate league participation that was the difference maker in terms of the factors that had put them on a path to higher education. Admittedly, not enough became known about their family and personal backgrounds to be able to state any definitive conclusions in this area.

Two conclusions can be drawn, however, from the data gathered about connections to college. The first is an awareness of the skill set development needed for college. Carlos, even as a sophomore, articulated that he understood that urban debate

league participation would offer something that would assist him later for college. Although not as specific in articulating those skills as the three seniors, he recognized there was something to be gained from involvement and he expressed part of his reason for joining debate to begin with was related to college. For Anna, Natalie, and Teresa who were anticipating beginning college in just a few months, there was awareness that the skills learned and strengthened through partaking in urban debate would prove beneficial. Natalie was most direct in stating that this angle should be used when recruiting new students.

The second ancillary connection is the association that each student informant had toward MDL events when they were held at a local university. Each commented to some extent that the monthly competitive tournament events were better when hosted by first Marquette University and then UW-Milwaukee. The more experienced of the debaters commented that being on the campus made them feel that they belonged. A greater comfort and belief regarding attending college in the future was also tangible for several of the four student informants. Proponents of the activity have asserted that a university partnership is vital so that urban debate league students can attend events on a college campus. The comments of the student informants support this notion. For her part, Kate also thought the structure of holding urban debate league events on the college campus was better for students as well as more efficient.

So while not fully corroborating earlier claims in this area that participation in urban debate in-and-of-itself propels students onward to college, what does come through is that students can at least discern for themselves that the skills connected

with urban debate will tend to have application in post-secondary education. The students and teacher-coach concluded that events on a college campus made a difference as well.

Civic Empowerment: Mixed Outcomes for Engagement

The third and final portion of the research question relates to the construct of civic empowerment. Advocates for urban debate have suggested that participating in the activity in turn encourages the student to be more outwardly involved in their school and outside community. This section reviews the existing literature and offers connections to the findings from my research.

Involvement at school.

The first way in which it has been argued that students may manifest civic or outward empowerment is through more engagement at school outside of their assigned classes. It has been argued that debate inherently serves to empower the student through *argumentative agency*, in which the individual has greater ability to use skills gained through debate (Mitchell, 1998). For the debaters at Perry Prep, this involvement appears to be mixed. Carlos stated that being involved in urban debate had no effect on being involved in other things at school. Teresa also stated that it had not had an effect on her nor did she think that it had altered the involvement of others. From Teresa's perspective, debaters are typically just involved in debate and due to the time constraints usually not in many other activities. Anna, by contrast, stated that she

thought it made a difference, at least it had for her. Although in Anna's case, she appears to have been over-involved based on all the activities she shared during the interview process. As for Natalie, early into her senior year she made the decision to forgo another year in debate. Having participated in the urban debate league for three years, she opted to join student government instead. While she acknowledged that some of the skills she learned and refined in urban debate were beneficial, there was no reason to conclude that her involvement in the activity propelled her into student government. The motivation for joining student government seemed to stem from a desire to do something different in her final year at Perry Prep as compared to the desire to take skills learned in debate and apply them in an activist manner in another school activity.

Kate's perspective regarding how debaters plugged in at school beyond required coursework as compared to non-debaters was somewhat varied. Her experience suggested that debaters were more involved in school-related clubs and activities, yet that, in her estimation, may have stemmed from personality and not necessarily urban debate participation. She was also of the mindset that the time needed to make a commitment to urban debate, explicitly to meet MDL participation requirements for practice hours and tournament attendance, may have kept students from getting involved in other things at school. And for her personally, coaching debate meant that Kate was unable to invest time in other areas of the school as she would have liked.

Based on the data collected and analyzed from this study at Perry Prep, conclusions in the area of added involvement at school are certainly mixed. Further

inquiry into whether or not urban debate involvement leads to greater school-related involvement at school is worthy of further study.

Engagement in the community.

The second and final aspect of civic empowerment pertains to involvement outside of school in the wider community. Prior research has concluded that the undertaking of schooling can instill in students a sense of civic responsibility and empowerment (O'Brien and Kohlmeier, 2003). It has also been asserted that those interested in fostering debate skills specifically in students are in effect encouraging democratic empowerment (Mitchell, 1998). Some advocates for debate have even gone further in contending that debate can be used as a "tool of empowerment" for urban America. Beyond attempting to raise test scores or merely providing the necessary skill set for life, some proponents of debate have even claimed that the activity can lead to a revitalization of depressed urban areas (Warner and Brusckke, 2001). Given the responses of the student informants and the observations made in Social Studies related classes it was evident, at least for the three senior female students, that civic responsibility was important.

Observing Natalie and Teresa in American Government class on a day when they discussed frameworks of government and specifically aspects of a democracy seems to support this level of understanding; yet, admittedly that may just stem from effective teaching and learning in that and other classes. Although when it came to asking the debaters to identify community involvement that they personally have engaged in there

was little shared. Some identified community service work, yet none spoke personally about any involvement that would be considered activist or political in nature. And when asked about others on the team, only one example emerged from Teresa who spoke about another debate team member who had recently participated in a political rally at the state capitol. In further discussing this area, none of the student informants identified any civic organization in the area either. Although, interestingly enough, Natalie spoke to how involvement at local college campuses through the urban debate league was community involvement in-so-far as she believes that colleges value connections students make while still in high school. When asked about out-of-school activities, Kate stated that some debaters were involved with local community service projects, yet mainly attributed that to college scholarship opportunities. In terms of empowerment, it was not her experience that students in debate, past or present, had sought out such opportunities in the community at large.

In examining the effects that urban debate league participation may have on aspects of civic empowerment the results are indeed mixed. With respect to involvement at school, outside of assigned classes, students do not appear to be more involved as a result of urban debate participation. Again, this may be because debate team participation is time consuming enough; yet, it may also be the case because participation in debate alone really does not serve as a catalyst in this way. As for community involvement, the data there showed very mixed results as well. Aside from community service and the lone political rally example, it does not appear that partaking

in urban debate led to activism in the local community. That is not to say that may not occur elsewhere, but it was not generally the case for the urban debaters at Perry Prep.

Considerations for Further Inquiry

As with any research, this project provides a foundation for additional research. While one of the original goals of the study was to gain insight on urban debate specifically from Hispanic students, there was little data which surfaced in the interviews or observations that related to this area of inquiry. While the population of the Perry Prep was predominantly Hispanic there did not appear to be anything overt in the urban debate team culture or the students involved that reflected their ethnicity. In retrospect, none of the interview responses reflected any explication of the urban debate league experience from a uniquely Hispanic perspective. Relatedly, students did not speak about their Hispanic heritage or upbringing as part of the interview process, nor did I notice any Spanish being spoken in any of the classes at the school.

Perhaps not asking specific questions about Hispanic heritage, upbringing, or ethnic perspectives with respect to the activity left this gap for the informants to address. Only one student informant, Anna, mentioned anything in-depth about family in sharing that her brother is the first of her family to attend college. The student informants, as a whole, indicated support for participation in urban debate from their families, yet didn't speak specifically to what that entailed. None of the three Hispanic student informants mentioned anything about how they felt with respect to their ethnic identity, nor did the teacher-coach offer any observations in this area. In reflecting back

on the fieldwork, I took it for granted that this subject would organically be discussed. While candid conversation about ethnicity had occurred with the teacher-coach during the selection of students, this issue did not surface again during the fieldwork. I suggest that this would be an area for future exploration, especially in schools with greater diversity.

From my time spent at Perry Prep, it appears to be a successful school in terms of overall student performance and graduation rates; at least nothing came through with respect to the interview or observation data to conclude otherwise. Prior research has addressed the pertinent role that school plays in assisting Hispanic students in attaining academic success. It has been claimed, for example, that some 30% of Hispanic students end up as school dropouts, and that they are typically underrepresented in colleges and universities nationwide. As such, focusing on questions pertaining to Hispanic youth and school achievement are still much needed (Cooper, Denner, and Lopez, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). While there was clearly a focus on having students tell their stories with respect to urban debate league participation and the connections to schooling, self-efficacy, and outward empowerment through this research, it is not possible to offer conclusions about the extent to which Hispanic students are uniquely served by the activity as opposed to other ethnic groups.

An area for further inquiry would be to engage ethnic identity more directly. Whereas this research was to have a focal point for issues pertaining to Hispanic students, this is an area that was not sufficiently explored through the informant interviews. Asking students directly to speak to the perceptions they have about their

experience given their ethnic identity and also probing what they think of the experiences of students of other ethnic backgrounds would provide added insights. Furthermore, the area of outward empowerment can definitely be explored further with respect to Hispanic identity. Getting to know the students more personally in a variety of situations would allow for perhaps some enriching conversations about the community beyond the school (Valenzuela, 1999). Knowing more about family background, where students live and local community issues they face may enhance insights gained about outward involvement.

More can also be done in terms specific to student voice. Given the limitations of the overly dramatic style of Miller (2006) and the clinical approach of Fine (1999) there is ample opportunity to conduct further research to address the urban debate league experience for students. As noted, student voice has been missing from prior work, and this attempt can certainly be built upon. Following a team throughout an entire school season or school year would likely afford a deeper understanding of the experiences of urban debate league students. Moreover, the approach of getting to know the students personally, spending time in all of their classes, observing afterschool debate practices, and attending urban debate league tournament events would provide for added assessment of the questions posed in this study.

Given the importance of focusing on student voice, this research project purposefully stayed away from any assessment such as grades, GPA measurement, reading evaluation scores and other quantitative aspects related to urban debate league students. Future longitudinal study that incorporates these data may also be helpful to

further contextualize and understand student experiences. In this study, appropriately, the context for understanding academic achievement was based solely on the descriptions provided by the students and snapshots of class observation.

Another key focus for future study would be to incorporate multiple schools of an urban debate league into a qualitative study. At the inception of this study I had envisioned writing more broadly about the functioning of the Milwaukee Debate League. Thanks to my committee chair, my scope was appropriately reined in and directed toward a single school with a manageable number of informants. Part of the original design that went by the wayside was to engage in interviews and observations in three schools and with many more informants. I had even contemplated a survey tool for other debaters who would not serve as interview informants. While not appropriate for this project, use of a wider survey tool to gain insights from a larger group of urban debaters may also yield some interesting data. Collier (2004) examined academic achievement and other factors across several Urban Debate Leagues, yet did so in a way without including student voice. This strategy might be expanded to conduct in-depth interviews and observations in multiple schools in several different leagues. There have been anecdotal conclusions, for sure, regarding what UDL participation means in different places; thus, to get a broader sampling of student voices articulating their experience with the activity would add a tremendous amount to our understanding of what participation really means.

Concluding Thoughts

Having chronicled a rationale for why this qualitative study was important, sharing some of the history of urban debate, explicating the pertinent literature, detailing methodology and offering results, my final task is to impart some noteworthy concluding thoughts. In this final section I will highlight some of the key findings and conclusions drawn from this research, offering some perspective on how this research might be utilized going forward.

To begin, I think it is evident that the student informants in this study had a positive experience in urban debate and did distinctly benefit academically from their participation. The views that each student shared about how they themselves applied skills from debate to their classes, without question, corroborates this finding. To some greater or lesser extent these skill areas were advanced as a result of UDL activities. Additionally, it is reasonable to conclude that aspects of self-efficacy were enhanced as well. While decidedly more so for self-esteem and social interaction, the debaters communicated clear growth in these areas as a direct result of their MDL involvement. Furthermore, the mixed judgments related to involvement outside the classroom at school and engagement in the local community is in-and-of-itself telling. There are clearly limits for urban debate participation, at least that may have been definitively been the case for the students at this school. And in all of the above areas of study, the insights of the teacher-coach support the perspectives shared by the four student informants. In sum, I believe this study affirms some prior assertions and raises further questions about others. By no means is this study an end. Rather, as with any study it

offers a beginning for more and further refined inquiry. It is my sincere hope that others pick up where I have ended.

As for sharing some thoughts about how this research should be utilized going forward, it is important to provide a framework of ideas and cautions that ought to be considered as consequential to this study. When it comes to developing new urban debate leagues, it is evident that continued emphasis should be given to the skill areas that students believe are connected to school, and that have been spotlighted, in great part, by earlier research. Skills centered on public speaking, oral presentation and in-class participation continue to be essential. Equally vital, however, are those skills associated with research and critical thinking. A hallmark of Urban Debate League involvement for students is that they are expected to read a great deal. This expectation in particular really does serve to assist students perform better in school. In addition, this study suggests that writing and note-taking, while not previously given much attention, should receive added emphasis. Elements of practice could incorporate more writing just as much as the competitive debate rounds can better hone note-taking skills. Thus, crafting note-taking methods that would apply to classroom use would be of added benefit for students. An additional area that appears that have been overlooked, general organizational skills, could be given further attention as well. Finally, while no doubt successful debaters need to have organized thoughts and arguments, the evidence clearly suggests that more direct instruction in this skill area, which clearly helps students make connections back toward their schooling, would also be worthwhile.

There are, of course, some cautions to express to those that would seek to apply this study to broader assertions that have been made by advocates for UDLs. For sure, this study is certainly unique in that its centerpiece offers an emphasis on the voices of the specific students involved. That said, it is clearly limited to one school in Milwaukee, and there should be care and discretion used in any attempt to extrapolate these findings into something larger. In arguing for possible expansion of Urban Debate Leagues elsewhere in the country, and admittedly there may be some worthy reasons for ongoing promotion of this structure, care should be given to properly contextualize the conclusions made in this study. The four student informants and teacher-coach at this single school were speaking for themselves and not with any understanding that they were representing Urban Debate Leagues on a macro level. There is no expectation, of course, that this work may ever be drawn upon for future use. Moving from cases to generalizations about what is or should be is always a dangerous undertaking. Nevertheless, there is much to learn from this case that can inform the thinking of others involved with urban debate.

In conclusion, it is important to return to the essential element of this educational research project, that being a focus on the students. In some small way I am hopeful that this research serves student learning. I had intended to give students voice. I hope their voices continue to be heard in all that encompasses schooling. In the introduction I had mentioned that educational policymakers may be interested in the findings this study provides. More importantly than any narrow answers this project may offer there should be, for instructional leaders, a continual questioning of what will

best serve student instruction in the years ahead. There appears to be a real place for Urban Debate Leagues among other well-crafted efforts to reach out to students and improve twenty-first century education.

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