

Minutes of the Board  
Meeting at CM  
Saturday, October 13, 2007

The meeting was called to order at 1:59 pm by the president, Chris Palmer.

Board Members present: Chris Palmer, Susan Marianelli, Joyce Albert, Lisa Honeyman, PJ Wexler, Wendy O'Neil, Maggie Berthiaume, Nancy Gahagan and Dan Sapir.

Chris began by asking people to limit comments to 2 minutes in order to keep the meeting moving along. He also reminded the group that this is a board meeting and that while all are welcome to make comments, only board members may vote.

First on the agenda: Motion proposed at the Annual League Meeting for ratification: "Replace Radio Broadcasting with Impromptu beginning with the 2008-2009 Season."

Chris gave the background for this proposal. Radio entries are dwindling and Impromptu is extremely popular at tournaments at which it is offered. We don't want to add an event without removing one. Wendy spoke about the positive skills encouraged by impromptu.

There was a question about whether we need to eliminate Radio if we add Impromptu.

- Does adding events really hurt tournaments (length of day? Require additional judges? etc.)
- Is it in the best interests of the league to eliminate an event if there are students interested in doing that event?

There was a bit of discussion about the costs of adding a new event without removing one.

- How many events is too many?
- Is it responsible to add events when there are costs to the adult volunteers that make tournaments happen.
- Requiring schools to offer more events puts a burden on them. Small schools can no longer host because of space issues and also because trophies are expensive. With so many events to offer they need a lot of space.

Question: Does adding another event really extend the day?

- It does add hassle and does require more judges for finals. In Massachusetts, when schools add a lot of extra events, it HAS extended the length of tournaments in the past.
- Yet, in other parts of the country tournaments offer fewer events, but the tournaments still run as long as ours do. The time tournaments take seems to be more about number of students attending than numbers of events offered.

Question: Are there other creative ways to address size of tournaments that don't involve eliminating events? Might we amend the rules somehow to allow for more events without overburdening the adult volunteers who run the tournaments and the host schools?

How many required events at MFL events are too many? Is there a definitive answer? It's constantly in flux.

If money is the issue (cost of trophies), maybe we should raise the entry fees instead of eliminating official events? Do we really have to eliminate events?

Reasons to keep Radio (whether or not Impromptu is added as an official MFL event):

- The MFL has had a few students who participated in Radio in the past who have gone on to become professional radio broadcasters. It is good professional training.
- Impromptu and Radio are similar because they don't involve much advanced preparation. But they are different because radio is only offered locally and has historically appealed to students who don't want to commit as much time to speech as other events demand.

Chris P. proposes that we split the motion into two motions – and the board agreed to do this:

Motion #1: “The MFL will eliminate Radio Broadcasting as an official event beginning with the 2008-2009 season.”

Motion #2: “A Resolution to commit the MFL to the intention of adding impromptu as a state event.”

We proceeded to discuss Motion #1:

As adults we have a responsibility to look at what is popular and what is not and swap them out as the times change. It's not that radio will be forbidden if tournaments want to offer it as an event. If numbers start going up, then we can adjust again in the future. As the culture changes we need to be flexible enough to change with the times.

We only had 2 entries at the novice tournament today. A few coaches noted that they did not register students for Radio at the novice tournament because they were unsure if it would be sustained in the MFL and didn't want to train kids for an event that would not be offered in the future.

We looked at registration numbers in radio last year.

- Last year there were 10-15 entries in radio at each tournament, on average.
- There were 15 students entered at States, from 7 or 8 schools.

Exceptions:

- At Needham there were 26 entries
- At Mardi Gras 38 students entered in radio.

There was concern that popularity of an event is not necessarily a good standard to be using when considering events. Should we eliminate all events that had low enrollment at States? In that case, should we be looking at eliminating DI and OO?

**Motion 1: “The MFL will eliminate Radio Broadcasting as an official event beginning with the 2008-2009 season.” FOR: 4; AGAINST: 3; ABSTAIN: 1. It passes narrowly.**

We shifted focus to the second motion: “A Resolution to commit the MFL to the intention of adding impromptu as a state event.”

Who would be in charge of writing topics for impromptu? Like group discussion and extemp, it is up to the tournament director. We can form a committee like extemp. Do we need specific guidelines.

Is impromptu a prep room event? Or is it all time that takes place in the round?

If we have not decided what impromptu is, how can we vote on this resolution?

Dan Sapir said he could prepare rules by the next MFL meeting.

Reminder – a resolution is an expression of intent. There is a board meeting in February and a league meeting between now and next fall, when this would go into affect.

**Motion 2: Resolution to commit the MFL to the intention of adding impromptu as a state event. There was no objection to this resolution; it passed unanimously.**

**Second on the agenda: Motion proposed at the Annual League Meeting for ratification: “Group Discussion will become a novice event only. It will no longer be offered at States, starting with the 2008-2009 season.”**

It was noted that there are really two parts to this motion, as there were with Radio.

First part: Group becomes a novice only event.

Second part: Group is not offered as an event at State Finals.

We began with a clarification of the rationale behind this proposal.

The original thinking was that, like novice reading, it is a feeder event for multiple other events: Congress, oratory, extemp, debate. It is a comfortable place to get started. Keeping it an educational ground where it is safe for new students to get started was the base of the motion. It was noted, that some students stay in group, however, and do not use it as a feeder event.

Discussion about this motion was passionate, with many members of the MFL expressing strong opinions about the pros and cons of group discussion. I’ve done my best to capture many of the statements made both in favor of the motion and against it. In the end, it was decided that:

The MFL board will form a committee, chaired by Greg Cunningham at Hull, to review and revise the rules of Group Discussion, and to attempt to replace the event with a more educationally sound and workable new event. The committee will report to the Board in a few months. The aim of the group is to try to preserve the good aspects of Group or a group-like event, while eliminating the negative philosophical and practical aspects of the event. The committee will meet at a few upcoming tournaments during off rounds. It is open to all interested coaches. Please notify Greg in person or by email (gregcjr@hotmail.com) by Sunday, October 21st, if you wish to participate.

## WHY GROUP SHOULD BE KEPT AS AN EVENT OPEN TO ALL LEVELS OF MFL STUDENTS

Some students who do group like going to speech tournaments, but they don't want to go to national level tournaments. They have a low/medium commitment to the activity and don't want to do any other events. They should be able to keep coming to tournaments. If we limit group to novices, older students won't stay involved.

It is a mistake to think of it as a feeder event for other events. Some really like it and want to do it for 4 years. Some students come to one or two tournaments in group discussion and then switch to other events. But others do not. They want to "debate," but not one-on-one.

Group Discussion is very much like impromptu, but in a group. If we value impromptu, how can we say that Group isn't valuable?

There is a large group of students who participate in this event. In fact, Group is our most popular event. Why do we want to disenfranchise these students?

If it is limited to novices, the level of discussion will be diminished because the older and more experienced kids will not be there to guide the newer competitors. The discussions will not be as good as they are with all levels of students present.

In the real world, discussions in the workplace and the board room are often competitive. Communication departments around the country study group communication and group dynamics, including the competitive aspects of discussions. This event teaches students real life skills as well as or better than many other events do.

Competition is part of life. Individuals are always competing for a promotion, a raise, someone's attention. In 26 years in the corporate world, the subtle things that happened before meetings about who was going to side with whom, really DO happen. However, we do need to make group discussion a better event. Students should have to step up a little more. We need to make it something stronger than it is.

It is important to note if you vote to put this as a novice event, you are slowly eliminating one of the most popular events offered in the state. Is this going to endanger certain schools who do focus on this event and are very successful in it? What does it do to their programs? Some schools use this event for students to grow and develop. Some move on to Congress or elsewhere, but some do not.

## WHY WE SHOULD LIMIT GROUP TO NOVICES

The varsity kids "walk all over" the novice kids in many rounds. Novices do not enjoy the safe environment we want to provide to ease them into more demanding events.

One coach spoke as a former group discussion competitor. It was a great way to start as a 9<sup>th</sup>

grader. The tension is less difficult to resolve on the novice level, as opposed to someone who is very competitive and trying to win. There's a difference between coming to participate and coming to win and it has a huge influence on the quality of the conversation.

### THE PROBLEMS WITH GROUP DISCUSSION AS IT NOW EXISTS

Group is an educationally dishonest event. All of the competition is under the table. "I'm going to cooperate with you more than you are going to cooperate with me, and we're going to fool the judge." In every other event students go head to head with other students and the judge makes a decision about who does a better job. In group it is not "clean" competition.

The purpose of a group discussion (outside of the MFL) is thoughtful, cooperative, disciplined discussion working towards consensus. The fact that we are teaching our students that group discussion is **competitive** is not educationally sound.

Judges don't like this event. It is by far the event that judges most commonly say they do not want to judge. It garners the most complaints from judges.

The event is entirely predictable. Students start by telling the judge how great the topic is. They come up with games - "work these 10 words into the discussion". It is not a serious discussion. Not only do students prepare their introductions, they prepare their conclusions. So what do they learn from the discussion? They come in with a position and stick to it.

Research shows that the single most destructive thing to group dynamics is competition. Philosophically there is a really big problem with teaching students that you can "win" at an event like this. As soon as you have a win/loss paradigm with something that is supposed to be a collaboration, it becomes counter-productive.

This is the only event where a student can sit back and not do anything. In every other event, with the exception of congress, a student must, at the very least, stand up and say *something*. Even if they "puke on the judge", at least they had to stand up.

If we are using this as a tool to prepare students for future lives, what we offer is not how we conduct business meetings. If we are trying to prepare students for the "real world" we need to restructure the event. It can't remain how it is. Maybe the solution is not limiting it to novices. Maybe we need to rip the event apart and start over.

### GENERAL PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS

If competition is the problem with group, is it right for actors to be competing with one another? Is that any more educationally sound?

Is the intent of this proposal to eliminate the event eventually? There was a rules change regarding moderators a number of years ago. This event has been tweaked before. What about taking another look at the rules? Can we turn this into an event that everyone can agree is

educationally advantageous? Maybe the communication between those that think this is a great event and those who do not is the problem.

Educational viability should be the core of what we offer.

It is popular with kids. But just because it is popular, doesn't mean it is necessarily a good thing.

### WHERE WE EVENTUALLY WENT WITH ALL OF THIS

Can we come up with a new event (not called Group Discussion) that offers the benefits that those who like group say it offers, but that does not have the drawbacks?

Suggestion: Extemporaneous Parliamentary Debate is an event offered in the independent school leagues and in a slightly different form, at the college level. Students get their topics 20 minutes in advance and each student is paired with a student from another school. They have to work together to decide what they want to say. It is conducted in the form of a debate, with time limits. It is a lot of fun and includes many of the positive aspects of group discussion without many of the negatives that have been sited today. Is this the direction we should be heading in?

One coach who coached parli for the past three years, says, "Parli 'rocks.'" It is a great event. It does most of these good things we say we want.

One coach who did it in college wonders if our students are up to this event?

AT THIS POINT, IT WAS SUGGESTED (and agreed upon) THAT THE COMMITTEE BE FORMED TO STUDY THE OBJECTIVES AND VALUES FOR THIS EVENT – WHAT TO EMBRACE AND WHAT TO ELIMINATE AND HOW TO PROCEED FOR NEXT SEASON. (See page 3 – in blue – for specifics.)

**Motion #3: "A Committee will be formed to study Group Discussion, its rules and purpose."**

Moved by Nancy. Seconded by Wendy. Passed without objection.

Greg Cunningham will chair this committee. Anyone on the board or in a coaching position can e-mail Greg within seven days of posting that this will happen may be on the committee. (*Note: It was posted on the MFL website on Sunday, October 14.*)

Second part: Group Discussion should not be offered at States.

***We did not get far into this discussion because the exhibition round ended and we needed to get to the awards ceremony (to run it) and to take care of our students.***

Chris Sheldon suggested that allow bids earned in Novice Reading to count towards STATES bids in reading/interp events (PR, PO, PL, HI, DI) but count it as a half bid in any other interp

event. A student can get half-way to states in Novice Reading, but you need another bid in another event to determine which event s/he is qualified in at States.

The rationale is that a student who spends half a year in Novice Reading, honing his/her skills may be terrific, but has little opportunity to then earn 2 bids in a varsity level event. This way the students have a greater opportunity to qualify for and therefore participate in States.

Much agreement.

Next on the agenda was motion 3: "To eliminate Novice Extemp as a state finals event."

We had no time to discuss this motion before starting the awards ceremony. We will continue to discuss this proposal via e-mail.

Motion to adjourn by Wendy O'Neil.

Seconded by ? (Sorry, I missed this.)

The meeting was adjourned at 3:20 pm.