



## Big Questions Judge Training Judging with Cultural Competence

As a judge, it is important that you understand that schools are responsible for the education of all children. As an extension of the classroom, the speech and debate community should be a welcoming environment for all students. In order for all students to feel welcome, all judges need to be sure that they are providing an experience that is encouraging and supportive.

When judges create a negative experience for students, it is often unintended and a result of a lack of knowledge. As we work to create an environment conducive to respecting all student's backgrounds, experiences, and cultures, we want to ensure judges are made aware of this commitment and the role they play.

According to the National Education Association's Diversity Toolkit: Cultural Competence for Educators:

Cultural competence is the key to thriving in culturally diverse classrooms and schools - and it can be learned, practiced, and institutionalized to better serve diverse students, their families, and their communities. Cultural competence is the ability to successfully teach students who come from a culture or cultures other than our own. It entails developing certain personal and interpersonal awareness and sensitivities, understanding certain bodies of cultural knowledge, and mastering a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching and culturally responsive teaching.

The NEA continues, writing that "cultural competence doesn't occur as a result of a single day of training, or reading a book, or taking a course. Educators become culturally competent over time, but researchers suggest some places to start."

Judges should avoid jumping to uninformed conclusions or making assumptions when you see a student perform literature you are unfamiliar with, dress in a way that differs from your experience of what it means to be business-casual or formal, or say things in a manner that is unknown to you.

This is not easy and requires us to become aware of our lack of knowledge. The NEA furthers by going into areas that educators should be focused on developing in students. As judges, it is ideal to understand these areas so that you can begin to understand the skills students are working to possess, identify your weaknesses, and work to become more well-rounded.



- **Valuing Diversity.** Accepting and respecting differences—different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.
- **Being Culturally Self-Aware.** Culture—the sum total of an individual's experiences, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests—shapes educators' sense of who they are and where they fit in their family, school, community, and society.
- **Dynamics of Difference.** Knowing what can go wrong in cross-cultural communication and how to respond to these situations.
- **Knowledge of Students' Culture.** Educators must have some base knowledge of their students' culture so that student behaviors can be understood in their proper cultural context.
- **Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Adapting to Diversity.** Culturally competent educators, and the institutions they work in, can take a step further by institutionalizing cultural knowledge so they can adapt to diversity and better serve diverse populations.

## Strategies

As a judge, it can be daunting to think about the limitations you may have in these areas. Everyone has room for growth, and the beginning of the process is identifying your vulnerabilities and working to be more understanding.

Geneva Gaye, in her essential text, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice* published by Teachers College Press in 2000, defines culturally responsive teaching as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches to and through students' strengths.

This quote is an apt way to think about judging. All judges are essentially educators and need to be culturally responsive.