



Talk Among Yourselfes

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It may not come as a surprise to you that I teach a course on gossip, rumor, and social change.

Communication with imposed formality, essential as it is, comes with its own limits. It does a job. Informal speech and conversations also do a job. It is different, not lesser, communication. What Bakhtin called the carnivalesque is rude and rule-breaking conversation; but it is also both honest and influential.

Orwell in *Politics and the English Language* argued that politicians had hijacked and repurposed the language. Perhaps our official academic language is a hijacked version of what we say in corridors, cafes and kitchens when talking to friends and colleagues about life and work on campus.

When we use only our official academic language to present ourselves, or it appears that way to the American public, we isolate, we silo. And we get used to silos and isolation and their practices. They represent us. Is it a surprise that the public sees us isolated in silos and that politicians explain us as out of touch with the communities around us?

Does the process teach academy leadership to always frown on informal writing as lesser writing? Do we shun the everyday as inadequate to our purposes and reputations? *The Sixth Avenue Journal* simply presents faculty and students using everyday language as one other view of life in and around the silos.

As a communication theorist, one of the most influential ways of looking at communities that I found in grad school was the idea of the “storytelling neighborhood, sometimes called storytelling networks” and their effect on community engagement, participation and belonging. A brief AI

summary says that “storytelling networks are the ‘living’ part of a community’s communication system. They aren’t just collections of stories; they are the active links between different ‘storytellers’ that allow a neighborhood to build a collective identity and solve problems.”

The storytelling network is integral to Communication Infrastructure Theory, developed back at the turn of this century, mostly at the University of Southern California under Sandra Ball-Rokeach, but also with one of my grad school professors, Yong-Chan Kim while he was here at The University of Alabama.

This journal inevitably grew out of my conviction that higher education needs to promote storytelling neighborhoods and networks as other representative voices.

If we are robbed of the STNs, problem solving, or for that matter problem recognition, relies more heavily on formal sources and inputs, individuals have fewer people to draw on to consider and understand. Dialogues roam less, we feel we begin to accommodate into smaller and smaller units (maybe using the word unit is a symptom) and perhaps call ourselves more focused for doing so. STN demonstrates that conversationally, unselfconsciously, talking to each other and talking about each other to each other, who we are and what we do in everyday exchanges, is influential, or can be if we keep it going.

We walk and talk our own halls, but also there are scholars, from faculties and student bodies, living in our cities and towns, and the more they contribute to everyday conversations, not only about those communities but also the academies within their boundaries, the better those communities might know us.

By the way, in this issue our optional theme was, “I wish that I knew what I know now (about higher education) when I was younger.” Not surprisingly, the idea of community is prominent in the responses. ●