Discourse Communities

This overview for a discussion was provided to students in a 7-week 100% online course.

Types of Discourse Communities and What They Share

Usually, activities in hybrid classes allow time for in-class discussions about discourse communities. Such activities let students meet and discuss what types of discourse communities of which all are members. Students come to realize that they overlap with one another, or that they are members of similar or the same groups. In a hybrid course, students map these encompassing and shared communities that reside within and without our residence, and include, but not limited to:

- families, extended or nuclear;
- communal situations with many roommates, such as a college co-op;
- military service members—enlisted or officers;
- churches, temples, mosques, sitting group members;
- gym and yoga members;
- classmates, past and present;
- athletic team or band members;
- clubs; professional, Panhellenic, etc.

We talk (or text) and share information differently within and without our diverse discourse communities. And, when communicating, we put on different attitudes or "masks," depending to whom we speak or write/text/twitter/share information with those, at any given time or place.

Nicknames and Online Discourse Communities

We laugh with our families and may hail each other by nicknames the family has bestowed on us. My González Smeltertown nickname was Carolina La Gallina (Carolina the chicken, and rightly so). My Jackson cousin and grandparents hailed me by the southern CarolynRhea (pronounced Ray) and run my first and middle names together. One González cousin was nicknamed Pelon (bald, ironically because he was born with a full head of hear) and other Güero because he had green eyes in our sea of brown as boot irises. Yet, over time Pelon has come to fit his name because lost most of his hair, and Güero still has his green eyes.

We focus and become serious when speaking to authority figures, etc. We share stories within special groups and learn to trust or not to trust outsiders. Here, in this Daily Show with Trevor Noah segment with Roy Wood, Jr., he defines and frames what Black Twitter means as a digital discourse community. Wood, Jr. also shames and complicates the group why others cannot simply opt into self-enrolling as a member of Black Twitter and why:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcSh2F8e_8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CcSh2F8e_8)

We allow membership based solely on where we are born, in which family, by the color of our skin, and by the language(s) we learn and use.
Discourse community members share, tell inside jokes, and use language and words differently. We warp language into special terms, and share lore, aka family stories. Lore includes oral histories, communal memories, practices, and special recipes for holidays. Over time, the meanings of such thinks like special foods and recipes fade as older group members die. If stories aren't shared, they disappear with the last member. But we can later recall their meanings if we discover diaries, photographs, letters, and other textual, visual, or recorded evidence. Even a person's type of handwriting can identify their education level and where and when they learned how to write, such as with the Palmer Method.

Lost Significance

Such happened on my maternal side of the family. Decades ago, my mother's family lived in Smeltertown, a now politically erased and physically destroyed Mexican American community that was once located across Paisano from the now razed ASARCO plant. At the time I was about 4-7 years old, and still can recall the special foods my abuela and tia would have prepared for next week's Good Friday. In hindsight, the sparse noonday meal (served before noon) mimicked a Passover Seder meal. This memory of such weird food combinations later prompted my older cousins and I to wonder about their significance beyond a Good Friday Catholic fast. It has enticed me to research if perhaps abuela's family (Macias, who was of Mexican and Belgian descent,) and an immigrant with abuelo from Aguascalientes, Mexico, were in fact, "hidden Jews." Several years ago, the El Paso Times interviewed and discussed families here along the border who discovered their older Jewish heritage.

Conclusion

Overall, discourse communities share specific information that other groups do not have or do not discuss. Members are privy to information others cannot know or obtain unless invited to learn and be part of that discourse community. By noticing any given discourse community's special hallmarks, subtly interviewing our families, coworkers, classmates, and friends, we can understand more about ourselves and how we communicate and share with those around us.