



Newsletter of the Illinois Communication and Theatre Association

Spring 2016

Lost Battle, War Wages On

By Marvin Kleinau (Retired Southern Illinois University)

The field of speech/communication has lost one of the most important battles of its life. We are no longer considered essential to a high school education. This is not the first time this battle has been lost, and it will not be the last time. The world of educational leadership came to the conclusion a long time ago, in the late 40's, that speech was frivolous and they campaigned hard to eliminate speech classes all together. We looked like easy pickings because we were young and because some folks didn't understand the heavy concentration of contest activity. Luck was with us. We had a handful of university people willing to take on the killer goal of administrators, and we won. We did it by arguing that SPEECH WAS LEARNED. And further, the ability to communicate is a basic need of every single human being, and for some it is vital to their employment.

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Justifying Speech in our classrooms

Nick Sciallo (Illinois College)

Speech, communication, and debate classes are absolutely necessary for success in careers and college, and here's why:

Public speaking is one of the defining characteristics young people can have. It enables debate, participation in the public sphere, and civic engagement. Of course, it's also a necessity in many career fields regardless of one's intent to enroll in higher education. Good speakers are persuasive, funny, engaging, fun, and thought provoking. They push all around them to be better and say more.

These disciplines are not only areas of study themselves, but also augment all other curricular options. The historian who is able to debate the merits of primary sources is a better historian than one who cannot. The mechanic that can simplify complex car repairs to an uninformed customer is more likely to keep customers coming through the doors than one who is not. The college student who understands difference in

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Consider a Life Membership

By Anna Wright Executive Secretary

ICTA offers a life membership option. The \$500 payment can be made via a single payment or five \$100 payments. Once the \$500 membership fee is fully paid, the member no longer pays a membership fee and if they choose to attend the convention, do so at a reduced convention rate.

If you wish to begin a payment option for the 2015 year and attend the 2015 convention, you would pay \$260. That amount gets you current membership (\$60), convention attendance (\$100), and your first payment (\$100) accomplished. Once all five payments are completed, then you would only need to pay the \$100 convention fee or whatever convention fee is imposed at that time. Members who are considering long term commitment to the Association will find this option to be money saving.

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No one knows the exact formula for turning out accomplished communicators, but we do know the kinds of skills needed to make it in this world. You do know and you in cooperation with others can sit down and brainstorm the arguments needed to reverse the thinking of principals.

May I suggest as a first step that we turn our backs on what we want to play around with and establish some goals, based on research, that will produce an end result that is defensible in the eyes of administrators. We need to ask ourselves the question: what is it that every student needs in the way of "learned speech." Rather than bringing home a trophy for winning a debate tournament or a prose contest, why not find a way to bring the values of argumentation to every classroom. Sure some students may go further in their study and bring home some hardware, but that is never the purpose.

Composition is another critical element of strong communication. I recently received a package from Peoria Caterpillar that included a letter applying for a job. The letter was from one of our engineering graduates. It was shocking. It was terrible in every way. We must as an association dedicate ourselves to finding out just what student needs look like and then deliver a package to the principal that meets those needs. But don't think for a minute this will be an easy task. You need proof that Caterpillar holds communication skills high on its list of skills required. Some order to the task might include the collection of information as to where we stand right now. Then move on to generate a complete listing of skills associated with a variety of jobs, including just plain exchange of ideas. My guess is quite a few of us don't have any idea what students needs really are. Contest work doesn't have to be the sum total of high speech activity. It can serve as a wonderful stimulus but those students are a handful and not the reason for the effort. You must convince the principal life is dependent on communication skills, not only for employment, but to enhance our ability to work together to solve problems in home, community, nation and world. Use the contest to encourage and reward, but don't let it substitute that for the rest of the folks.

IHSA Speech: IE, Debate, Drama/GI Results

The IHSA Speech Individual Events, Debate, and Drama/Group Interpretation State Finals have concluded. Congratulations to Prospect High School on winning the team title in Individual Events. In Debate, congratulations to students of Glenbrook North's coach Michael Greenstein in Policy Debate, coach Fenwick's Mary Beth Logas in Lincoln-Douglas Debate, Carl Sandburg's coach Laine McGraw in Public Forum Debate, and Schaumburg High School's Darrell Robin in Congressional Debate. Reavis High School coaches Tom Witting and Erika Banik captured the State Drama title and Oak Lawn Community High School's T.J. Kahrman captured the title in Group Interpretation. Full results can be found through the IHSA website. Congratulations to all coaches and students that competed this year, and best of luck to those students and schools that will be representing Illinois at the NCFL National Tournament or the NSDA National Tournament over the summer.

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communication styles and audiences is much better position to succeed in college than the student who is not. And, so on down the line no matter what one decided to do after high school.

Colleges need better critical thinkers, public speakers, and writers. Speech, communication, and debate classes emphasize those skills. Just think about the college application process. Taking the ACT or SAT demands critical thinking and reading. Students must be strong writers to complete impactful personal statements and scholarship application essays. They must speak with poise and passion at interviews with alumni, admissions counselors, and other college representatives. These are skills that cannot be learned in other classes.

Perhaps most importantly speech, communication, and debate classes inspire students to be civic-minded. Whether at the ballot box or on the street, the communication curriculum helps students to not only care about the world around them, but also express that care in ways others can understand. No matter what one's passions are (social justice, medical research, the rights of the elderly, or animal welfare), the skills students develop in these classes help them help themselves and others. We, as educators, should hope our students leave high school, not only after last block or period, but after graduation as people ready to make a difference and advocate for what they believe.

It would be wrong-headed to reduce or eliminate the role speech, communication, and debate classes have in Illinois's schools. As an experienced debater and debate coach, I know that the best students I've taught in college are those with strong speaking and debate skills acquired in high school. It's better to learn those skills early when college admission, scholarship acceptance, and first jobs are on the line, than wait until college where other students might very well be ahead. We should empower our secondary students to be the best they can be by never compromising the centrality of speech, communication, and debate classes in high school.

Did He Really Just Say That?: Civility and Polarizing Language in Current Discourses

By Richard Jones Jr. (EIU & Higher Education Representative)

Given the extraordinary tone that has characterized some of the political discourses during this presidential campaign, I thought it might be beneficial to bring a discussion of civility to our association's newsletter. Perhaps some of this content can help us inform or steer discussion in our classrooms.

Civility

Our strong emotions regarding our own beliefs, attitudes, and values can sometimes lead to incivility in our verbal communication. Incivility occurs when a person deviates from established social norms and can take many forms, including insults, bragging, bullying, gossiping, swearing, deception, and defensiveness, among others.ⁱ Some people lament that we live in a time when civility is diminishing, but since standards and expectations for what is considered civil communication have changed over time, this isn't the only time such claims have been made. As individualism and affluence have increased in many societies, so have the number of idiosyncratic identities that people feel they have the right to express. These increases could contribute to the impression that society is becoming less civil, when in fact it is just becoming different. We tend to assume other people are like us, and we may be disappointed or offended when we realize they are not. Cultural changes have probably contributed to making people less willing to engage in self-restraint, which again would be seen as uncivil by people who prefer a more restrained and self-controlled expression.

Some journalists, media commentators, and scholars have argued that the “flaming” that happens on comment sections of websites and blogs is a type of verbal incivility that presents a threat to our democracy.ⁱⁱ Other scholars of communication and democracy have not as readily labeled such communication “uncivil.”ⁱⁱⁱ It has long been argued that civility is important for the functioning and growth of a democracy.^{iv} But in the new digital age of democracy where technologies like Twitter and Facebook have started democratic revolutions, some argue that the Internet and other new media have opened spaces in which people can engage in cyberactivism and express marginal viewpoints that may otherwise not be heard.^v In any case, researchers have identified several aspects of language use online that are typically viewed as negative: name-calling, character assassination, and the use of obscene language.^{vi} So what contributes to such uncivil behavior—online and offline? The following are some common individual and situational influences that may lead to breaches of civility:^{vii}

- Individual differences. Some people differ in their interpretations of civility in various settings, and some people have personality traits that may lead to actions deemed uncivil on a more regular basis.
- Ignorance. In some cases, especially in novel situations involving uncertainty, people may not know what social norms and expectations are.
- Lack of skill. Even when we know how to behave, we may not be able to do it. Such frustrations may lead a person to revert to undesirable behavior such as engaging in personal attacks during a conflict because they don't know what else to do.
- Lapse of control. Self-control is not an unlimited resource. Even when people know how to behave and have the skill to respond to a situation appropriately, they may not do so. Even people who are careful to monitor their behavior have occasional slip ups.

- Negative intent. Some people, in an attempt to break with conformity, challenge societal norms, or for self-benefit (publicly embarrassing someone in order to look cool or edgy) are openly uncivil. Such behavior can also result from mental or psychological stresses or illnesses.

Polarizing Language

Philosophers of language have long noted our tendency to verbally represent the world in very narrow ways when we feel threatened.^{viii} This misrepresents reality and closes off dialogue. Although in our everyday talk we describe things in nuanced and measured ways, quarrels and controversies often narrow our vision, which is reflected in our vocabulary. In order to maintain a civil discourse in which people interact ethically and competently, it has been suggested that we keep an open mind and an open vocabulary.

One feature of communicative incivility is polarizing language, which refers to language that presents people, ideas, or situations as polar opposites. Such language exaggerates differences and overgeneralizes. Things aren't simply black or white, right or wrong, or good or bad. Being able to only see two values and clearly accepting one and rejecting another doesn't indicate sophisticated or critical thinking. We don't have to accept every viewpoint as right and valid, and we can still hold strongly to our own beliefs and defend them without ignoring other possibilities or rejecting or alienating others. A citizen who says, "All cops are corrupt," is just as wrong as the cop who says, "All drug users are scum." In avoiding polarizing language we keep a more open mind, which may lead us to learn something new. A citizen may have a personal story about a negative encounter with a police officer that could enlighten us on his or her perspective, but the statement also falsely overgeneralizes that experience. Avoiding polarizing language can help us avoid polarized thinking, and the new information we learn may allow us to better understand and advocate for our position. Avoiding sweeping generalizations allows us to speak more clearly and hopefully avoid defensive reactions from others that result from such blanket statements.

Adapted from: Jones, R. G., Jr. (2013). *Communication in the real world: An introduction to communication studies*. Irvington, NY: Flat World Knowledge.

i Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in *Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships*, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 42.

ii Deborah Jordan Brooks and John G. Greer, "Beyond Negativity: The Effects of Incivility on the Electorate," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 1 (2007): 1–16.

iii Bart Cammaerts, "Radical Pluralism and Free Speech in Online Public Spaces: The Case of North Belgian Extreme Right Discourses," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 6 (2009): 555–75.

iv Mark Kingwell, *A Civil Tongue: Justice, Dialogue, and the Politics of Pluralism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

v Lincoln Dahlberg, "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic: From Consensus to Contestation," *New Media & Society* 9, no. 5 (2007): 827–47.

vi Sarah Sobieraj and Jeffrey Berry, "From Incivility to Outrage: Political Discourse in Blogs, Talk Radio, and Cable News," *Political Communication* 28 (2011): 19–41.

vii Rowland S. Miller, "Breaches of Propriety," in *Behaving Badly: Aversive Behaviors in Interpersonal Relationships*, ed. Robin M. Kowalski (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 35–42.

viii S. I. Hayakawa and Alan R. Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action*, 5th ed. (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1990), 112–24.

Our Flaw in Making the Case for Oral Communication

By Brian Rohman (University High School & Newsletter Editor)

As I am finishing up my second year of teaching, it could be easy for me to write about how wonderful teaching oral communication skills has proven through my experience. However, we are not the group that needs to be convinced of the importance of these skills. That is something that needs to be communicated to those that make the decisions about what will and will not be included in the curriculums of our high schools. As I have been considering what to include in my column, I have considered the words of one of my mentors (and a mentor to so many of us in this organization), Doug Jennings. I remember the town hall meeting at the 2011 convention where we were discussing whether or not we wanted to change the name of our organization. Doug was concerned that our organization was not consulted upon the adoption of new state standards, and that our voice was being lost in the discourse of state education policy. As Common Core has become the standards of the state, I have found myself realizing that Doug foreshadowed an important revelation. An organization founded upon the principles of teaching students to find and use their voice has found itself voiceless. We have declining membership, a lack of focus in terms of the goals of the organization, and a quiet voice when it comes to promoting our discipline across the state.

From this worrisome position, we have nothing but potential to offer. We have an opportunity to realize the mistakes of our past in order to move forward for our vital discipline. I agree with Marvin Kleinau. We may have lost a few battles, but we have certainly not lost the war. We control our own destiny. I am reminded of a quotation from Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." The members of this organization, whether they are a former, current, or future board member, new members, or seasoned members, are the committed citizens. The world we are looking to change is the landscape of education in the State of Illinois. We have made a difference in the past, and we can make a difference again in the future.

I am reminded, yet again, of the words of Doug Jennings from our past convention. During his acceptance speech for the Harrod Award, he reminded all of us to take inventory of our discipline and be the ones that fight for change through our classrooms and through research. It is time that we band together and make that effort. We must share what we are doing in our classrooms, adapt to unique situations, and help everyone better the state of communication education in this state.

We cannot stop fighting the war simply because a battle is lost. We often will look to another school, including our own, cutting their required Oral Communication course as another loss. We need to reshape our focus to be that of an opportunity. In those schools, communication skills still need to be taught. I am not advocating that we provide the appearance that communication skills can be taught by anyone. I am advocating that we provide the training to the teachers that lack the skill set. It is easy to dig in our heels and watch change happen elsewhere while we control what we can. The difficult choice we are faced with is to ask what can we do in the best interest of all students across our fine state? That choice will come with sacrificing time, energy, and resources. That choice will force us to reevaluate our discipline. That choice will force us to reevaluate ourselves. The difficult choices come with many hurdles and a desire to quit before the job is finished. I think it is time that we make the difficult choice so that the small group of committed citizens can make the change that we all agree is needed in education.

Illinois Communication and Theatre Association Workshop



Bringing the Oral Communication Classroom Into the 21st Century

Date: April 29, 2016

Time: 9:00a.m.–3:00 p.m.

Location: Illinois State University, Schroeder Hall, 100 North University St. Normal, IL 61761 ,Rooms 103 and 104

Cost: Free for ICTA Members and \$25 for Non-Members

To Register: Contact Kenny Knox at (309) 778-2201 or email: kknox@spoonrivervalley.us

Morning Session (9:00 a.m. -11:30 a.m.)

Incorporating Literature into the Oral Communication Classroom

Presented by Brian Rohman, University High School, Amanda Ritchie, ISU Student Teacher, and Isidro Murillo, ISU Student Teacher

Afternoon Session (1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.)

Debate Across the Curriculum

Presented by Nick Scullo, Assistant Professor of Communication and Rhetorical Studies, Illinois College

* Lunch on Your Own (11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)

* Continuing Education Credit Available

2016 Convention Theme: “Let’s Get Critical”

By Kacy Abelin (*President-Elect*)

ILLINOIS COMMUNICATION AND THEATRE ASSOCIATION 2016 ANNUAL CONVENTION THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22 - SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2016 at the Hyatt, Lisle, IL 60532.

On behalf of the Illinois Communication and Theatre Association, I would like to invite you to present a workshop, panel discussion, poster or GIFTS session at our upcoming convention. ICTA is the professional organization in Illinois for communication, theatre, debate, forensics and media for secondary and higher education.

This year we embrace the theme “Let’s Get Critical!” as a call to examine how we use, encourage and participate in critical thinking in our classrooms, on our teams, and in our lives. In addition to our usual high- quality sessions from (and for) specific groups within our organization, we are also seeking sessions in which we will learn from each other: secondary and higher education, communication and English language arts, faculty and administration, and much more!

Perhaps you want to lead a discussion on assessing critical thinking skills or demonstrating what critical thought looks like☺ Our GIFTS (Great Ideas for Teaching Speech) sessions are a great way to show off what you are already doing in the classroom or learn different approaches and perspectives on specific topics. Present your original research in a poster session or on a panel. Take this opportunity to critique current practices in your field, organization, and/or education.

Given the many challenges the education field, our specific fields, and our teams face, critiquing current trends and evaluating potential solutions will better enable us all to impact the lives of students and positively influence our worlds. Get Creative, Get Critical!

Questions for a specific interest group can be directed to the persons below:

Higher Education: Rich Jones (rgjones@eiu.edu)

Secondary Education: Kenny Knox

(kknox@spoon-river.k12.il.us)

Secondary Individual Events: TJ Kahrman

(tkahrman@olchs.org)

Higher Education Forensics: Judy Santacanterina

(jsantaca@niu.edu)

Debate: Carol Harms (charmsway@yahoo.com)

Theatre: Patrick Santoro (psantoro@govst.edu)

GIFTS: Jan Heiteen (jari88@aol.com)

Illinois Communication and Theatre Association

Campus Box 4480
Normal, IL 61790-4480

Phone:
309-438-2872

E-mail:
President
Adam Jenkins(ajenkins@bths201.org)
Executive Secretary
Anna Wright (amwright@ilstu.edu)
President-Elect (2016 Convention Planner)
Kacy Abelin (Kacy.Abeln@kishwaukeecollege.edu)
Newsletter Editor
Brian Rohman (brianrohman@gmail.com)