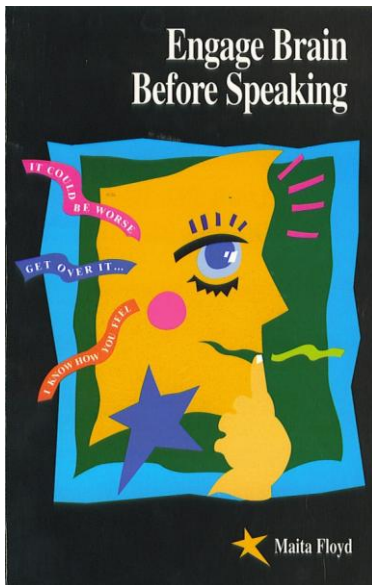


Role Play the Art of Listening Shelley A.W. Roy



The catalyst in every situation is the mental picture or reference perception of a desire at that moment. Paradoxically it is the individual's mentalities, pictures, expectations, which can form the biggest obstacles to success. As instructors we know that when there is a shift in thinking there is a shift in language. Therefore we structure our instruction around the changes in thinking and assess our success based on the changes in language.

As instructors we know that the process of shifting thinking from stimulus response to internal perception is neither quick nor easy. In teaching the rethinking and reframing of language that occurs when someone begins to understand Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) we know that "role play" is essential. When describing "Role Plays" instructors teach that there are three roles: 1) Client, 2) Counselor/Questioner and 3) Feedback Person. The first

focus in role-play is learning to be "the counselor/questioner". For most participants learning this role is the most difficult component in learning PCT.

Participants often ask, "What is the "right" question to ask?" As if there is one magical question which will create a shift in perception and thereby change behavior. Hanging onto this "reference" of a single right question often leads to frustration. The first step towards successful role-play is to let go of the idea of *one right question*. In addition instructors and learners are often more successful when they equate learning the skill of interviewing to learning a new language. In How to Think like Leonardo da Vinci, Michael Gelb gives us some insight into how to best learn a new language:

- Be willing to make lots of mistakes.
- Repeat words and phrases over and over.
- Start with an immersion course.
- Learn words and phrases related to areas of interest.
- Put posters and post-it notes all over the place.
- Open yourself to the feeling of the language.

All of these suggestions can be helpful in integrating the language of PCT into your vocabulary. Luckily many have been incorporated into the role-play setting.

Today I was reminded of the most important idea for learning the language of PCT, while reviewing Listening, The Forgotten Skill by Madelyn Burley-Allen, shifting our reference for what we are controlling for. We grew up thinking speaking, is a more important skill to learn than listening. Even babies know that they get more attention by crying, than by being quiet and listening. Think for a moment of the messages sent to young people, everyday about speaking and listening.

"Don't argue with me."

“You don’t know what you’re talking about!”
“Don’t interrupt your elders.”
“Be quiet!”
“You’re too young to understand.”
“Open you ears!”
“Don’t speak until you’re spoken to.”
“God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason!”

Ironically the channel most often used for learning is listening. We spend about 70% of our waking hours in some form of verbal communication. In general we engage in listening about 40% of the time we are communicating. Speaking makes up about 35% of communication reading about 16% and writing about 9%. Contrast this with the amount of time you were taught each of these communication skills in school. Most of us were never formally taught how to listen and what to listen for.

So where does all of this backwards thinking lead us? It leads us to focusing on the wrong skill. We equate an effective Counselor with an effective Questioner (speaking) and what is really true is that an effective Counselor is one who listens, really listening to the client with a different ear. Instead of focusing on the questions the counselor must focus on listening to the “client”. Listening with the PCT model in mind: What are the client’s perceptions? What does the client want big picture and in detail? What’s behind this want? Where is the error in their system? Listening for references, perception and error is the key to integrating PCT. We need to flip our communication thinking all together. The self-evaluation question the counselor needs to answer is - who should be doing most of the thinking and talking in a role-play, the client or the counselor?

A more accurate description of the roles we are trying to teach may be 1) Client, 2) LISTENER to the client and, 3) LISTENER to the counselor. Burley-Allen put it this way: “Your act of listening is the only help required. Active listening alleviates a problem by giving the person a chance to talk it through while experiencing emotional release, while, at the same time, providing limited and empathic input that conveys to the talker your concern and nonjudgmental attitude... Given the opportunity to solve their own problems, people tend to feel more confident in their abilities.” A request for help is usually not a request for our personal help; it is a request to listen.

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