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An Exercise In-Perspective

As humans, we currently use an inefficient, imprecise means of communication. Though 60 to 65 percent of all interpersonal communication occurs nonverbally, we nonetheless place a disproportionate amount of emphasis on verbal communication (Navarro, 2008, p. 4).

The issue with verbal communication is that it uses imprecise words to describe complex, abstract mental images and thoughts [hereinafter referred collectively to as “thoughts”]. The translation of thoughts into words produces an end product fraught with unexpressed subtleties which drains precision. In fact, it is not uncommon for a few individuals to be arguing amongst themselves vehemently trying to convince the rest of their opinions while blind to the fact that they are all of the same mind but with different presentations.

It is critical that individuals understand that, when perceiving information, that they should listen beyond words to focus on perspective. When mature adults encounter a situation where they completely understand the other side’s argument but refuse to accept it as fact, they would politely agree to disagree. The previous sentence presumes that the adults actually understand the *argument*, i.e., perspective, not just the words.

I believe it is vital that students appreciate the role perspective plays in everyday communication. Therefore, I developed an exercise that to fulfil that goal:

Ideally, the exercise should occur in groups of three to five students, but in the interest of efficiency, it can also take place in an ordinary classroom. The only two physical materials required are a writing utensil (preferably a pencil, which is symbolic) and a blank, white sheet of copy paper.

The teacher should pick a point in space for the students to focus their attention. An empty chair or desk would work well. The teacher should then tell the students that they are going to engage in an exercise in-perspective. The teacher should explain the following:

We are going to engage in an exercise that will demonstrate how important it is to look beyond someone’s words to focus on the idea being conveyed. So, how does this exercise work? It is very simple. We are going to create a mutual object that everyone can share, take home with them, or take home with them and share. So, we are going to begin on this side of the classroom and I want everyone to add some sort of “modality” or “submodality” to the object. You can not use gestures though! Sort of like charades. For example, Student A could contribute that the object is leaning over the chair while Student B could contribute that the object is rainbow colored while Student C could

contribute that the object is emitting a slight order while Student D could contribute that the object is twice the chair's size and so on. After we make it around the entire classroom, I am going to give you one minute to draw a picture of the object. After the time is up, we will compare our images in show and tell fashion.

Naturally, no two images will be the same. Since students' dominant senses vary, they would naturally prioritize and retain different sets of information that their respective brains find pertinent.

In addition to just being a lot of fun, the exercise would serve as a valuable schematic and/or heuristic tool. The teacher should take care to anchor the exercise in a manner that would make it trigger-able nostalgically when the students encounter a disagreement.

References

Navarro, J., & Karlins, M. (2008). *What every BODY is saying: An ex-FBI agent's guide to speed-reading people*. New York, NY: Collins Living.

For the record, I did not know about the story of the blind men and an elephant until a friend provided critical feedback. Story here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blind_men_and_an_elephant