

Assessment

Communication Studies, May 2016

Most common concepts identified in student reflection papers as most meaningful:

- Growth vs. Fixed Mindset
 - Sticky Principles
 - Active Listening
 - Process, Not Product
 - I vs You Language
 - Framing
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Examples of Student Writing on Most Influential Concepts:

Excerpts taken from different student papers.

Paper 1

Fostering a Growth rather than Fixed Mindset

Finally, one of the greatest things I have learned from my communication studies classes is how to foster a growth rather than a fixed mindset and why that is important. The power of a positive mindset has been something that I have believed in for a long time. I have read many books such as *The Secret* and *The Power of Positive Thinking* and I believe that our attitudes and mindsets have immense power over our daily lives and ultimately our destinies. My class, Language, Thought, and Action, taught by Professor Bradford Hall made me contemplate if I was really living up to my full potential using a growth mindset.

First, fixed mindsets are characterized by the attitude and perspective that “I was just born this way.” When challenges come, it’s scary because it threatens our ability and very

being. One with a fixed mindset can become paralyzed or stagnant in personal growth for cause of the fear of failing. If any kind of feedback is given to someone with a fixed mindset it can be very devastating.

Growth mindsets are characterized by the attitude “I can become anything I want become” or “I can develop any level of proficiency I want to.” This way of thought is very empowering. In a reading by Dr. Dweck, assigned by my professor, it says this type of mindset can “change a failure into a gift.” I have seen and experienced this in my own life. Professor Matt Sanders also makes the same point that even if we fail and we use those opportunities to learn, we really haven’t failed at all. (Sanders, 2012, pp. 7-21) I personally feel and know from my own experience that when I believe that by working hard enough I can do something, I can do it.

Fixed and growth mindsets really can change the way we perceive ourselves and others. I love this excerpt from the poem Invictus by William Ernest Henley:

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

We are the master of our fates and captains of our souls when we can effectively remember and implement the growth mindset in our lives. We can accept failure as a gift - the ability to improve.

Paper 2

Six Sticky Principles

The *six sticky principles* have changed my whole perspective and preparation for public speaking (Hall, B., Fall, 2015). Thanks to Brad Hall’s Language, Thought, and

Action class I now know how to give extremely effective and memorable speeches to audiences. Before this class I did not consider myself a very good public speaker. I took CMST 1020-001 Public Speaking at the beginning of my major but I still felt that my speeches had little impact and that audiences easily forgot what my speech was even about. After incorporating the *six sticky principles* to my speeches, I've noticed that my audiences have become more enthusiastic while listening to me and that my message even "stuck" with them.

The *six sticky principles* provide a guide for us to create meaningful and unforgettable speeches that "stick" with the audience. The *six sticky principles* include simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions, and stories (Hall, B., Fall, 2015). A great way to remember these six principles is to remember that the first letter of these principles spells out the acronym SUCCESS. Keeping a speech simple is very important. Nike has used "Simplicity" very effectively. Their slogan is three simple words - "Just do it." Because it is so simple, it is easy for people to remember. I've learned to stay focus on the core of my speech and not to include additional distractions – keeps things simple. "Unexpectedness" grabs our attention and curiosity. Sticking with the same old speech format bores people really quickly. By doing something out of the norm unexpectedly at the beginning or end of my speech, I was able to immediately capture my audiences' attention. "Concreteness" means using specific details that brings specific images to our minds. Writing my speeches now I carefully choose the best words to describe certain subjects so that the audience can visualize a clear image to what I am talking about. "Credibility" is crucial if our audience wants to believe what they are hearing. I now make sure that I verify each fact that I use in my speech with at least two

credible resources. “Emotions” play a huge part in why audiences remember speeches. Do you remember any speeches that didn’t give you any sort of feeling? Usually not! Incorporating emotions into our speeches helps people relate to what you are presenting and gives them a reason to care. Putting emotion in my speech has helped me stir my audience’s feelings and emphasize important points. This made my message more unforgettable because they remembered the way they felt during my presentation. Lastly, “Stories” make speeches extraordinary. By employing this principle, my audiences connect better with the message I wanted to share. When an audience can relate to your speech, they tend to pay closer attention and will remember it.

Each time I have to give a class presentation or give a talk in Church, I now immediately write down SUCCESS the side of my paper and fill in the *six sticky principles*. As I compose my presentation or speech, these principles have become a template for my talk. Once I have worked through all six principles I am much more confident in myself and I feel more secure in my public speaking skills. The *six sticky principles* are now my secret weapon for creating outstanding speeches and presentations.

Paper 3

ACTIVE LISTENING

“I went to the dentist today. I have three cavities! What’s the point of flossing if I’m going to get cavities anyway?!”

“Uh huh...”

“Then as I was driving back to my apartment I almost got in a car accident.”

“Oh...shoot.”

“...because a dinosaur wandered out into the middle of the intersection wearing my grandma’s wig. You’re not listening to a word I’m saying, are you?”

“Yeah, your grandpa lost his dentures. Look at this Instagram post!”

How often do we find ourselves having a conversation like this? With grade-A distractions constantly at our fingertips, it is easy to find ourselves zoning out during interactions. Sadly, this usually happens during conversations with those who mean the most to us (think best friend, mom, significant other, etc.). We should work to reverse this pattern, as it can often lead to conflict and the breakdown of relationships. This reversal can be accomplished through practicing active listening.

First, it is important to understand the different types of listening. There is listening for enjoyment (kicking back to Adele’s new album, or listening to Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban on tape for the fourth time), analytic/informational listening (sitting up a little straighter in class when the professor announces, “This will be on the test”), and empathetic listening (staying on the phone and offering support while your best friend monologues about her break up for an hour).

Active listening requires you to use the right type of listening. After listening, you should paraphrase what you have heard: personalize statements in your own words, restate them, and check it out to confirm understanding between both parties. There are also ways to encourage further sharing as a listener. These include things like mirroring the other person, using minimal encouragers, asking clarifying questions, and using attentive silence. Minimizing noise distractions is pivotal to successful active listening—so put your dang phones away; Kim Kardashian isn’t going to change the world in the next five minutes.

Active listening is an important aspect of building relationships. It creates rapport between participants, and encourages self-disclosure. Because of its rarity, this skill is especially valued today (Jen Peeples. Communication conflict. Feb. 2014).

Paper 4

Process, Not Product

In the Small Group Communication class that I took we spent some time learning to focus on the process rather than the product. At first we did not entirely understand what this meant, but as we worked on our project we tried our best to not just focus on the end goal. As we worked on our project we were able to get to know each group member and build quality relationships and enjoy the process. Though we were able to complete the project and benefit those in need with our service, we were not focused on how much we could complete but how we could become a team and have a positive experience. The result of our project was more of an outcome of what we had done along the way rather than the process being an outcome of our end goal and we had a great experience because of that.

This idea has also come into play outside of the small group class and is something I have been working on for much of my life. At times I have difficulty living in the moment and appreciating what I am learning along the journey. I often focus on what lies ahead that needs to be accomplished or what I can look forward to next. However, during the last few months I have tried to implement the idea of focusing on the process. I have a goal to graduate with a GPA of 3.5, which can be attained if I do well this semester, but I am not just focused on my end goal- I am focused on the process.

Because of what I've learned I know that if I do my best to learn what I can in my classes and create quality work that the outcome will be positive. I can gain so much more than a grade at the end of the semester; I can obtain knowledge, gain character growth, and build positive relationships along the way.

Paper 5

“I” verse “You” Language

Paralleling conflict styles is “I” verse “you” language this is the second concept I chose to highlight. This concept was also covered in Interpersonal Communication. When conflict arises it is hard not to place blame, or to put the responsibility on someone else. This type of language is evident especially in conflict. When in disagreement we often get emotional and begin to put blame on other through the use of “you” language. We say things like ‘well you didn’t do the dishes,’ or ‘you never listen to me.’ Using this type of language places blame and can cause the recipient to put up walls and to shut down, not allowing a resolution to be reached. When we use “I” language such as in this example, ‘I feel hurt when I have asked you to do the dishes and you did not do them’ or ‘I feel like you don’t care about me when you don’t respond.’ Using this type of language is helpful as it shows personal vulnerability and gives the recipient a better understanding of your feelings and emotions.

I was recently married and the combination of two independent lives is no simple task. Everyone has advice on how to improve communication in your marriage. Having taken this class while engaged I asked my future husband at the time if we could try to implement this type of speech into our lives. Doing this has been a benefit to us specifically in helping us clear up miscommunication. There will be moments when

maybe he will be acting quite or somber and I start to think about all the things he might be thinking about, whether it be something I recently said or did, or something he is dealing with at work. Instead of making something out of nothing I will simply say ‘Hey I noticed you have been quite are you are stressed. I just want you to know how I am seeing it.’ Not those words exactly but along the lines. This opens up our pathway for communication and we are both able to express our thoughts and feelings without blame.

Paper 6

Framing

Dr. Jason Gilmore’s course Culture and Public Discourse was a course I had no assumptions about going into it. I was unfamiliar with Jason himself, and I had not spoken to anyone concerning the course material. The lessons I learned in Jason’s class proved, like all my Communication Studies courses, to be invaluable.

The principle that stood out to me the most was that of framing. Just as a picture is framed with a limited view, our communication is framed as well. We often do not give a full picture when recalling an event, telling a story, or pitching an idea. There are numerous reasons for this, and time restraints are often the most prevalent. However, there are times when withholding information that is otherwise critical is done purposefully. This is frequently done in media and marketing.

A reporter on television may only share parts of a story involving a politician to frame them in a certain light, whether good or bad. A newspaper article about the Utah State basketball team written by loyal fan may tell a different story compared to the article about the same game written by a fan from the opposing side. A marketing team

may create an ad that shows how wonderful their product can be, but hide the defect that will inevitably be discovered only after the sale is made.

Knowing that people are always framing their stories, narratives, advertisements, and other forms of discourse allows me to ask the right questions. It allows me to find out more about what is being communicated to me, and in turn, I am able to make better decisions for myself and my family.

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