Paraphrasing Activity: In-Class Triad Activity

Purpose:

The following two activities have been designed to give you practice paraphrasing. Depending upon the amount of time you have available, you may choose to complete both activities, just one, or portions of each. The activities are designed to promote the kind of talk for which paraphrasing is appropriate, meaningful, and helpful.

Paraphrasing is a verbal summary of the key ideas of your partner’s message that helps you check the accuracy of your understanding. It is not a word-for-word repetition of what the speaker has said, nor do you need to summarize the content of each phrase or minor detail (Beebe, Beebe & Redmond, Interpersonal Communication: Relating to Others). You can paraphrase content as well as emotion. You do not argue with the speaker; your goal is to make sure you “got” what the speaker was saying.

Procedure:

In-Class Activity

1. Three people are involved in this exercise. Each person will be rotating between three roles: Speaker, Listener, and Observer. The procedures and responsibilities are as follows:

   a. Speaker:
      Make a statement in response to one of the items on the paraphrase activity exercises (attached). Be sure to include both feelings and events where you can. Try to give your statements some emotional texture by including descriptions of your feelings.

   b. Listener:
      Use your own words to communicate what you understand the Speaker to be saying (paraphrase). Don’t just repeat what the speaker has said.

   c. Speaker:
      Verify, clarify, or modify the Listener’s paraphrased response.

   d. Observer:
      Provide input to both Speaker and Listener. What did they do effectively? What could be improved? Do not add in your beliefs, feelings, or opinions on the item discussed. Your responsibility is to provide feedback on the interaction.

2. Switch roles after each statement. This role speaking order means that, for every item discussed, each person will be Speaker, Listener, and Observer.

Example:

Speaker: (Original statement) “I don’t believe that love is the key to effective relationships. After all, what is love anyway? I think the key is negotiation and compromise.”

Listener: (Paraphrase of Content) “I agree. Some people get so hung up on the word ‘love’ that they forget about the day-to-day work that has to get done in a good relationship.”

Speaker: (Clarify, modify) “That’s not exactly what I mean. I think it’s important for people to care about each other, but how can we know what love is, apart from a willingness to negotiate and sometimes give in?”
Listener: (Paraphrase again to confirm understanding) “It sounds like you’re not saying that love is unimportant, but rather that evidence of love is how much people are willing to compromise to help each other satisfy their needs.”

Speaker: (Verify) “That’s it.”

Observer: (Input to the Listener) “The Listener started out with a ‘take-away’ rather than paraphrasing, putting in her own two-cents worth rather than trying to understand what the Speaker was saying. So, even though you agreed with the Speaker, you did take the focus away. But I liked the way you paraphrased the next statement. You really seemed to have gotten the Speaker’s message. (Input to the Speaker) “Also, the Speaker did a good job restating the message, without using the exact same words or making the Listener feel stupid for not understanding right away. However, I think using a concrete example might have aided in the Listener’s understanding.”

**Processing/Discussion Questions**

After spending time playing all three roles, you should have enough experience to answer the following questions:

We may do this in class, or you may have to write (type) up your answers to the following questions. If the latter, you need to thoughtfully answer all parts of each question, using examples, at least one paragraph in length.

*(If we are turning this in, please remember to put the Name of the Assignment at the top of your paper, as well as your name and the class meeting days/time in the upper right corner of your paper.)*

1. Which of the three roles did you find to be the most difficult for you? Speaker, Listener, or Observer? Why?

2. Which of the three roles were you most comfortable with? Speaker, Listener, or Observer? Why?

3. Do you prefer people to paraphrase your thoughts? Why or why not?

4. Describe one example (not from this exercise) where paraphrasing would have improved the communication process.

5. Do you feel this was an effective exercise? Why or why not? What would have made it more effective?
Paraphrasing Activity Exercises

You will do this once through (rotating roles) using one of the following from each Activity Exercise as prompts.

**Activity Exercise #1**
1. When you get right down to it, love is the basis of an effective relationship.
2. We are who other people tell us we are.
3. Whenever people speak, they have some purpose or goal they seek to achieve.
4. People should seek to discover their real selves and avoid changing behavior to fit different situations.
5. People should spend more time analyzing their interpersonal relationships.
6. Women are more sensitive and understanding than men.
7. People should have the right to be silent and unresponsive if they choose to.
8. Gay partners should be allowed to raise children.
9. States should be allowed to limit their population grown by placing a limit on out-of-state people who can become citizens of the state.
10. Persuasion is a necessary component of an effective relationship.
11. Honesty is vital in a relationship, even if it means inflicting pain.
12. When you come right down to it, men and women are just not the same.

**Activity Exercise #2**
1. I am in college because ....
2. At parties ....
3. Five years from now I see myself ....
4. I feel that the women’s movement ....
5. Some of my thoughts when I first meet someone are ....
6. One thing that I really feel strongly about is ....
7. In a group of people, I usually get involved when ....
8. I would really like to ....
9. When I find myself in a new group of people, I ....
10. Friendship ....