

Preface

This notebook or disc contains a series of lessons and exercises utilizing a number of basic General Semantic formulations. These lessons are designed to accommodate students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This format precludes in-depth teaching of General Semantics, but rather introduces students to formulations pertinent to them in age appropriate lessons. This system does not sacrifice as much important content as one might first assume.

In Alfred Korzybski's tome, *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski dedicated a great deal of space demonstrating how he arrived at these formulations and how they would benefit individuals utilizing them. We work on the premise that his conclusions are valid and we will only implement the mechanics of the formulations. Children seemingly have little problem accepting the simpler formulations and do not generally require significant proof.

The first step one should take, prior to using this curriculum, would begin to read the contents all the way through. This should provide an overview of what we plan to accomplish. Readers will find the material located in chapters by subject which will frequently contain material for different age groups. The placement of the chapters has no major significance. Some lessons will contain two or more formulations.

In Appendix C you will find twelve pages or sections, one for each grade. Each page will list the exercises and lessons for use during the year. It will also state the objectives of those lessons and exercises. In the upper grades, the staff can decide in which class to teach the lessons, i.e., English, History, etc.

The material in Chapter 19, Mathematics, has not been assigned to any grade or class. Math department heads in middle school and high school should review this material and assign it to appropriate classes.

The section on resources in this book contains a modest amount of information. The Institute of General Semantics' bookstore www.time-binding.org also has numerous publications

available. You may possibly find some of these publications in your library.

The Need

Typically, every autumn, throughout the United States, teachers face a classroom filled with strangers, each one a completely unique individual. They come equipped with baggage: familial and neighborhood myths, prejudices, predispositions, etc. As though this did not pose a daunting enough task for the teacher, each one of these students has the ability to change during the year.

Professor Richard Paul¹ well describes this ability to change.

“We are each born inclined toward egocentrism. We automatically generate fantasies and beliefs that give us pleasure and satisfy our desires. We do not need to be taught how to avoid unpleasant truth nor how to distort, falsify, twist or misrepresent situations to serve our egocentric interests. We do this quite naturally. Children display great precocity in these ‘skills’ with no training in their backgrounds.many of the important meanings we construct for ourselves produce powerful stereotypes, prejudices, delusions, illusions and narrow mindedness of various kinds.”

All the above characteristics get introduced to the student by someone else, or through the student’s own construction. The one thing in common with all these characteristics centers about the premise that the students require the use of language to impact them. Language itself is not primarily to blame, but rather the *misuse* of language that permits these mental viruses to thrive. Lacking an understanding of the potential pitfalls, students seem capable of finding them all.

Do you remember “sticks and stones may break my bones, but names can never hurt me”? False to fact! Words hurt! Words can affect our nervous systems and psyches. Yet we have traditionally devoted precious little attention to this area among ‘mainstream’ students. We assumed ‘mainstream’ students could evaluate what they see and hear in a rational and intelligent manner. Those students who truly have great difficulty with proper evaluation change from ‘normal’ to become known as

troublemakers, failures, and dropouts. And what happens to these less troubled students who do not quite reach these undesirable categories? Unfortunately, many of these slightly impaired students dwell among the ignored and fail to reach their potential. And according to some authorities, this latter group represents the majority.

We have a pressing need to alter the downward linguistic spiral in many children's lives.

¹Professor Richard Paul was Director of the Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique at Sonoma State University, when he presented his paper "Critical Thinking and General Semantics", in 1987, at the Institute of General Semantics Alfred Korzybski Memorial Lecture.

OUR APPROACH

One of the best "cures" for poison ivy occurs when we teach people how to identify it and avoid it. Once contracted, the remedial process becomes protracted, difficult, and painful.

We believe that one of the best "cures" for the confusion and alienation that attends misevaluation and misperception occurs when we teach students how to recognize the pitfalls of our language, and avoid them. Once the individual's nervous system and psyche have become corrupted, the remedial process becomes protracted, difficult and painful.

We observe that we live in at least two worlds. The world "out there," outside our skins, and the world as we perceive it, that is, the world view we create inside our skins. Because of our human limitations, our internal worldview will only approach similarity to the world out there. However, as the world inside and the world out there diverge, confusion and alienation accentuate. For the student, this can lead to poor grades and either literally or figuratively dropping out. At the extreme, we have a Columbine incident. Ultimately, our goal becomes to make the student's inner world as congruent as possible with the world out there.

Your students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and bring their own evaluations of their worlds with them. As a teacher, you

have been implored to train your students to “think creatively,” to “think outside the box,” etc. And somehow you are expected to accomplish this using a language beset with linguistic booby traps.

With Cognitive Evaluation and Communication we do not plan to create a new language, but a better understanding of the limitations of the one we use. To this end, we will cover the differences between inferential and factual information, the influence that environment has upon the students’ understanding, more effective ways for the students to evaluate what they see and hear, etc. We do suggest some language modifications to foster more effective communication.

We believe that teaching children to properly evaluate themselves, and the environment around them, will make them far more receptive to good teaching in general. For this reason we have compiled this K-12 program from previously successful lesson plans, respected publications, and original material. We trust that our efforts will become beneficial to you, your students, and your colleagues.

Cognitive Evaluation and Communication

This program incorporates many of the principles of General Semantics. You, as a teacher, have in all probability been introduced to some of these concepts during your formal education courses. Most often these courses would have included the term “communication.” As such, you will recognize some of what gets taught here.

In years past when many of us studied a foreign language, we started with classes in about ninth or tenth grade. Then we tried to learn it all in a short period of time. On the other hand, adding and subtracting,

fractions, percentages, etc. got taught to us little by little throughout our K-12 years. We learned our math by degrees. We believe that teaching the principles embodied in this course over the entire school experience will have a profound positive effect upon the students.

Perhaps we should define our terms.

COMMUNICATION

We spend our lives communicating, i.e., transmitting information, ideas, etc. We communicate with others, and we communicate with ourselves. And we accomplish this communication with an imperfect language. Keep in mind that of the 500 most used English words, there exist over 14,000 different dictionary definitions.

COGNITIVE

Much of what we say to others and to ourselves comes under the heading of "mindless." We say what we think people expect us to say. We often speak without thinking. Becoming cognitive, i.e., to think things through carefully, encourages us to evaluate situations, people, and the speech of other people and ourselves. We become slow to make broad general statements. Ultimately, our words can be trusted.

EVALUATION

We receive an overpowering amount of information through our five senses daily. We then must relate this information to our prior knowledge, and efficiently and rationally apply that prior knowledge to the situation or object at hand. This determines how we think, perceive, 'size-up the situation,' etc.

GENERAL SEMANTICS

Alfred Korzybski used this term first in 1933 in his book, *Science and Sanity*, to define a set of principles about understanding which he had devised. Some other

authors and researchers have refined these principles over the years, but the basic premise remains the same, i.e., the use and misuse of language affects us all. And we all can learn to utilize general semantics techniques to identify these problem areas and more effectively use our language.

Additional information about general semantics appears throughout this introduction section and the resource section of this manual. More information appears on the IGS web site, www.time-binding.org.

THE INSTITUTE OF GENERAL SEMANTICS

Founded in 1938 by Alfred Korzybski (author of *Science and Sanity*, *Manhood of Humanity*, etc.) this non-profit educational institution serves as a center for teaching, research and consultation in general semantics. In 2004, the Institute merged with the International Society for General Semantics, originally founded by S. I. Hayakawa. The Institute's mission continues today, bringing the discipline to new generations through seminars, publications, its website, an annual Journal, a quarterly newsletter, and a quarterly magazine, ETC. The Institute's Headquarters are located in Fort Worth, Texas.

Many national and international organizations relate to General Semantics. IGS has a good educational website, a bookstore, and educational programs all in one place, and for that reason we refer to it frequently.

Examples of some of the topics covered.

NAMING

Children can be introduced to naming concepts in kindergarten. "We call this..." rather than "This is..." This concept gets reinforced throughout

the course so that children will not be locked in on words as things. This should prove particularly important in ethnic relations.

NON-ALLNESS

This principle states that no one can know everything about anything. It will be repeated throughout the course.

DATING

Students will learn that the world about them, and they themselves, become dynamic and not static. George⁽²⁰⁰⁶⁾ is not George⁽¹⁹⁹⁷⁾. Therefore, we can alter our traditionally static language to indicate dynamism by incorporating the date or dating into our evaluations.

INDEXING

Students will also learn that in the world about them no two things occur perfectly alike. Thus teacher¹ is not teacher² is not teacher³.... Also, vegetable¹ is not vegetable². We generalize about teachers, vegetables, ethnic groups, nationalities, etc. at our peril.

REASONABLE AND QUANTITATIVE GOALS

Wanting to become “happy,” “rich,” “popular,” etc. sound good. However, without some more specific goal and quantitative measure, how will one know that one has achieved these goals? Too often our goals consist of ambiguous high order abstractions, or an “either/or” perspective. (Success or Failure with nothing in between)

FACT/INFERENCE

The difference between factual and inferential information will be stressed throughout the program. Most information we receive is inferential, with varying degrees of accuracy. We teach methods to increase the probability of accuracy.

DELAYED RESPONSE

Understanding the need to delay response, rather than react immediately. This principle, called symbol reaction, gets taught throughout the course.

ABSTRACTING

We never see, hear, smell, etc. it all. We then must abstract from what we do sense, then abstract from that. We teach about abstracting on many different levels. We should become conscious of abstraction: “What I call it is not what it is”. “What I see is not what it is”. Etc. Being conscious of abstracting lessens the tendency to think we know it all.

MAP MAKING

Every time we give an instruction or a description, we effectively make a map. For maps, to become useful, they must fit the territory, especially maps of ourselves. Many people create totally unrealistic maps of themselves, some to the extreme point of becoming institutionalized.

BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

We understand that behavior follows beliefs, precepts, etc. For behavioral changes to occur, the beliefs and precepts must change.

SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

We learn to understand scientific approach, i.e., gather data, evaluate, form a conclusion, gather more data, evaluate, etc. This becomes a great idea for history and science courses, citing real examples of both reaching sound conclusions, and acting foolishly

PERCEIVING AND EVALUATING

We stress that the process of perceiving and evaluating is affected by our point of reference.

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Learn that words can have many meanings. Ex.: The judge wrote, "I am qualified to answer this because I read the constitution." You have a 50% chance of interpreting "read" correctly. Of the 500 most used English words, there exist in excess of 14,000 dictionary definitions.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF PROJECTING

Learning to substitute "it seems to me" for "it is." The statement, "From the data it would appear to me that the world will behave thus and so," can promote a discussion. The statement, "From the data the world IS thus and so," can promote an argument. The second example projects our opinion onto the object, the world in this instance, as a verifiable fact.

ETC.

As you read this material, you will find 'etc.' used frequently. We do not encourage the use of 'etc.' in normal composition. We do use it here to remind the student that more information about the topic remains unsaid.