

A Critical Awareness and Self-Learning Program for AP English

Developed as an In-Service Program
for the Birdville ISD (TX)
September 2006

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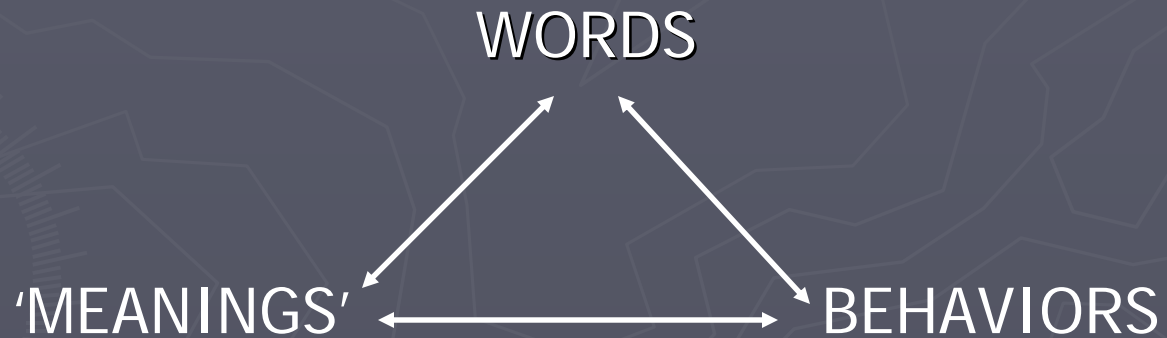
Program Objectives

1. Introduce basic principles of General Semantics
2. Relate principles to:
 - a) Critical thinking
 - b) Self-awareness
 - c) Self-learning
3. Provide guidance to enable students to *write* (and *think, speak, understand, etc.*) more effectively

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Overview

General Semantics (broadly defined): how we
Perceive, Construct, Evaluate, and Communicate
our *Life Experiences*



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Words

- ▶ Word/Brick Analogy
- ▶ Diverse Characteristics of Words

1. New words, terms added
iPod, hanging chad, google

2. Usages change over time
gay, sweet, dude, groovy

3. Specialized | General Use
decibel, neutron | strike, sit

4. Geographic variations
*truck/lorry, restroom/loo,
'first floor', 'football'*

5. 'Vocational' variations
dolly, fix, anchor, penalty

6. Social settings: *email, msg,
wedding invitation, ad, etc.*

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Words ...

- ▶ How many words are there?
 - According to OED ~ 1-2 Million, depending ...
- ▶ How many does any one person know?
 - Avg college student in 1955: ~ 67,000
- ▶ How many do we use?
 - Working vocabulary ~ 3,000-5,000
- ▶ How many do we *really* use?
 - 1,000 words comprise 90% daily vocabulary
 - 500 most-used words ~ 14,700 usages!

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Words ...

► What does a word 'mean'? *run*

score a run

hit a home run

run the ball

run up the score

ski run

bobsled run

dog run

fun run

run a race

run next door

run from the cops

run around with

run over

run free

run against him

run for office

run in stocking

run on a bank

run on Broadway

run-on sentence

run of stairs

run of hits

colors run

river runs

train runs

production run

run down

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Words and 'Meanings'

▶ Words don't *'mean'* without **context**

▶ Charles Sanders Peirce:

You don't get meaning, you respond with meaning.

▶ Percy W. Bridgman:

The true meaning of a term is to be found by observing what a man does with it, not what he says about it.

▶ Dictionary definitions vs. *'meanings'*

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Definitions vs. 'Meanings'

- ▶ **cancer:** *1) any of various malignant neoplasms characterized by the proliferation of anaplastic cells that tend to invade surrounding tissue and metastasize to new body sites. 2) the pathological condition characterized by such growths*
- ▶ 3 people in the doctor's office
 - "You've got cancer."

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Definitions vs. 'Meanings'

- ▶ **scleroderma**: *a pathological thickening and hardening of the skin caused by swelling and thickening of fibrous tissue; also called dermato-sclerosis; 2) a usually slowly progressive disease marked by the deposition of fibrous connective tissue in the skin and often in internal organs and structures, by hand and foot pain upon exposure to cold, and by tightening and thickening of the skin, also called dermatosclerosis*
- ▶ **Scleroderma** (to me) **'means'** that my mother is dead.

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Definitions vs. 'Meanings'

► "rejection"

- If a prospective date says "no"?
- If a customer buys elsewhere?
- If your application is denied?
- If your proposal is turned down?
- If you don't get the promotion?

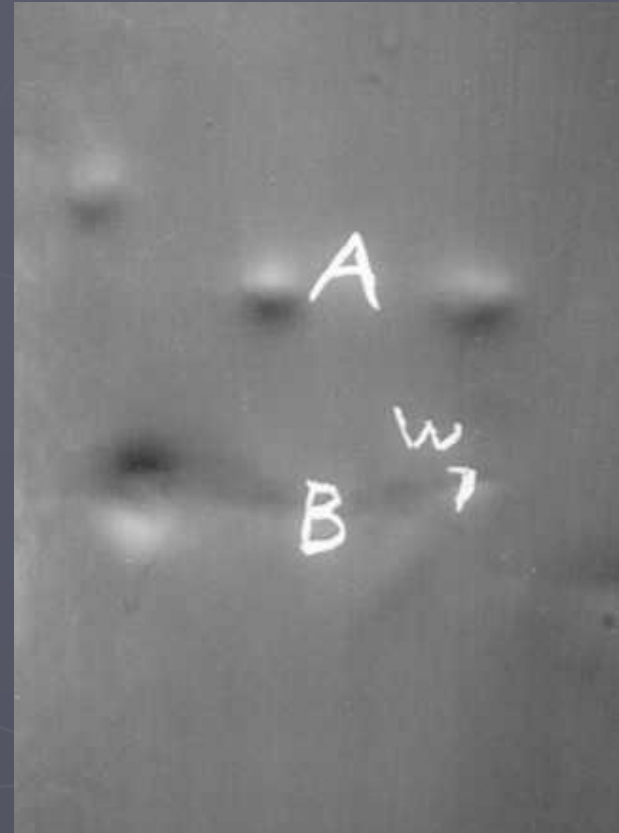
MEaning(s)

begin with ME

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Abstracting

3 'dimples'
or
3 'bumps'?



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Abstracting

now ...

3 'dimples'
or
3 'bumps'?



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Abstracting

- ▶ Where were the “dimples” and “bumps”?

You generated what you saw

You generated the ‘meaning’ of your experience

You experienced the process we call **abstracting**

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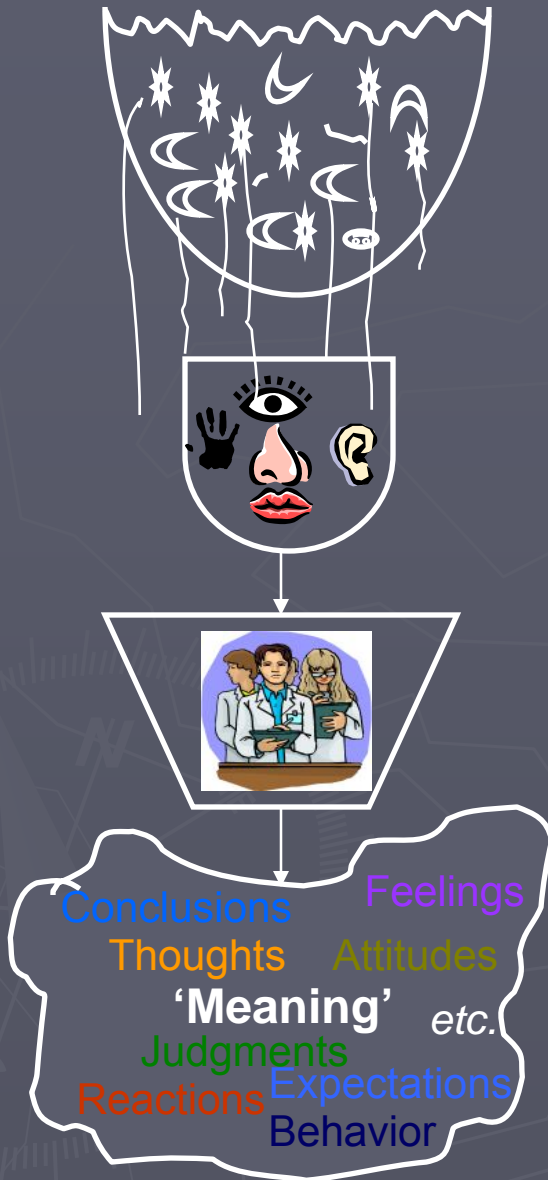
Abstracting

1. Something Happens

2. Sensory, Nervous System

3. 'Cognitive Report'

4. 'Meaning' or 'Significance'



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Abstracting

1. Something Happens

We cannot sense all that happens

2. Sensory, Nervous System

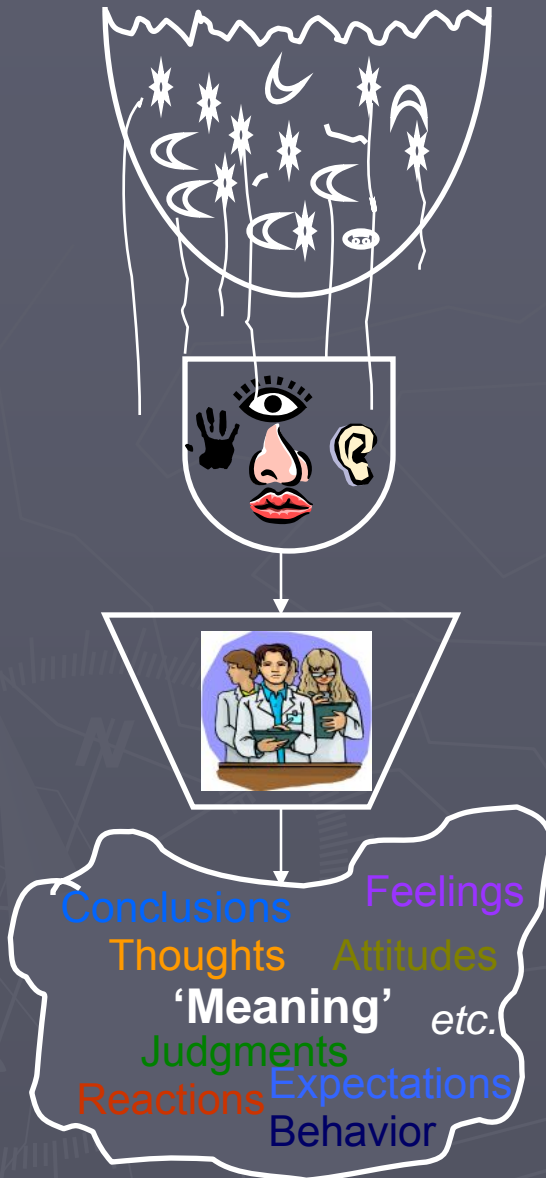
What we sense is NOT what happened

3. 'Cognitive Report'

What we describe is NOT what we sense

4. 'Meaning' or 'Significance'

What it means is NOT what we describe



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Applications to Thinking, Writing, etc.

1. Differentiate 'facts' from inferences, beliefs, etc.
 - a) after an observation or happening
 - b) doesn't go beyond what is observed
 - c) as close to certainty as possible
2. Recognize shades of gray, not "black|white"
3. Look for multiple 'causes,' not just "the" cause
4. "To-me-ness" – uniqueness of experiences
5. Avoid inappropriate *absolutistic* terms:
all, none, best ever, totally, absolutely, no doubt

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Applications to Thinking, Writing, etc.

6. Avoid the "to be" crutch: *the movie was good; she is a failure.* Use active, operational terms.
7. Be careful how you *objectify* processes and high-order abstractions: *the weather, the economy, politics, the media, truth, technology, justice, ...*
8. Take responsibility for your own actions; don't say "you" when you should say "I."
9. Take responsibility for your reactions; "I felt hurt," not "she hurt my feelings."
10. Look for differences among generalities to avoid stereotypes: *let's get a woman's perspective?*

Potential Benefits for Students

- ▶ Tentativeness
- ▶ Uncertainty
- ▶ → Inquisitiveness
- ▶ More description, less opinion
- ▶ More unique observation, less spouting of stock phrases, aphorism, and conventional wisdoms
- ▶ More discrimination of differences, more *trees* and less *forest*
- ▶ More humility, less know-it-all
- ▶ More accurate '*maps*' and more self-confident '*map-makers*'