

## A PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH OF INSTRUCTION: ATTITUDE CHANGE THEORIES IN OPERATING PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

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### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to compose an instructional resource on attitude change aspects in persuasive communication, which can be utilized as supplementary materials in a college level course in communication studies and English in Japan. The content of this resource will be useful for students both when they construct and send effective persuasive messages and when they evaluate arguments in receiving persuasive messages.

The content begins with an overview of the nature of attitude. Next, seven obstacles to changing attitudes and basic strategies related to the obstacles will be discussed: (1) selective perception, (2) selective recall, (3) selective exposure, (4) forewarning, (5) degree of commitment, (6) public commitment, (7) group pressure. Then assumptions and suggested strategies of seven major attitude change theories will be dealt with briefly: (1) the consistency theory approach, (2) the learning theory approach, (3) the social judgement-involvement approach, (4) functional theories approach, (5) principle of differentiation approach, (6) group dynamics theory approach, and (7) fear arousal approach.

The method of organizing the content in this study was to integrate the factors of attitude change theories in social psychology into the pedagogical form of a curriculum guide for communication studies. Generally, the primary purpose of attitude change theories in social psychology is not to improve the practical operation of persuasive communication, but rather to investigate psychological processes as they relate to social

phenomena. However, findings from research in the behavioral science can be utilized as guidelines for the modification of message receiver's attitude through persuasive communication.

The format of a curriculum guide applied in this study consists of five parts. The first part includes *instructional objectives* that gives a specific statement of what the student should be able to do as a result of the learning experience. The second part involves *content essentials*, which provides a survey of the essential information that the student should learn. The third part is the *learning activities*, which specify what the student will do in order to master the specific skills of the content. The fourth part involves *instructional assessment*, which suggests how student learning may be evaluated. The final part involves a list of the *references of instruction* that the teacher may consult for additional materials for the development of the instruction.

Most *instructional objectives* and *learning activities* in this instructional resource are constructed in behavioral terms at six cognitive levels of learning. The first level is *recall*, in which the student recognizes and recalls information learned. The second level involves *comprehension*, in which the student summarizes, explains, or paraphrases the information learned. The third level deals with *application*. In this level the student will be asked to use the new information in a different context or in a particular or concrete situation. The fourth level deals with *analysis*. Here the student must apply previously learned knowledge to analyze an instance of the phenomenon in question. The fifth level involves *synthesis*. Here the student must combine the elements learned. The last level is *evaluation*, in which the student must assign a value to standards that they will justify. These six cognitive levels are generally arranged in a hierarchical order, which builds from the less difficult to the more difficult.

The format of a curriculum guide applied in this study is taken from the one developed by Allen, Wilmington, and Sprague in their book *speech Communication in the Secondary school*.<sup>1</sup> This format is widely used in actual communication

education in many high schools as well as fundamental college courses in America.

The author defines the term, 'persuasion' used in this paper as "communication that attempts to influence the intended receiver's choice in beliefs, attitudes, intention, and behavior."

## **INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES**

- I . Instructional objectives for the nature of attitudes.
  - A. Without using notes, the student should be able to identify the nature of attitude.
  - B. Without the use of notes, the student should be able to define attitude in his/her own words.
- II . Instructional objectives for obstacles to changing attitudes.
  - A. Without using notes, the student should be able to identify seven obstacles to changing attitudes.
  - B. Given a work sheet, the student should be able to match correctly the seven obstacles to changing attitudes with descriptions of those obstacles and strategies of dealing with them.
  - C. Given some sentences, the student should be able to identify those that characterize obstacles to changing attitudes.
  - D. The student should be able to identify strategies for dealing with obstacles to changing attitudes in advertisements from any media.
  - E. The student should be able to plan advertisements that employ strategies for dealing with obstacles.
  - F. The student should be able to evaluate the strategies employed by peers to overcome obstacles.
- III . Instructional objectives for approaches by suggested attitude change theories.
  - A. Without the use of notes, the student should be able to identify seven appeals suggested by the attitude change theories that may be utilized in persuasive messages.

- B. Given a work sheet, the student should be able to match correctly attitude change theories with descriptions of assumptions and strategies related to those theories.
- C. The students should be able to find at least three advertisements from newspapers, magazines, and other print media which reflect attitude change theories.
- D. The student should be able to analyze attitude change theories utilized in advertisements.
- E. In anticipation of the final five minute persuasive speech presentation to the class, the student should be able to plan an attitude change strategy utilizing any attitude change theories.
- F. The student should be able to evaluate the strategic plan of his/her peers and defend his/her judgements under the instructor's scrutiny.

## CONTENT ESSENTIALS

### I. *The nature of attitude.*

- A. *Definition of the Concept of Attitude:* Attitudes are the products of learning, which reflect person's beliefs, feelings, cultural values, experiences of various aspects in his/her life. As such, attitudes are predispositions of responses against people and objects. Attitudes, therefore, affect person's judgements, perceptions, learning efficiency, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Among many social psychologists, attitudes are defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object."<sup>3</sup>
- B. *Components of an Attitude:* An attitude has three components – the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioral. The cognitive component refers to perceptual responses and verbal statements of belief, while the affective component refers to emotional or feeling responses and verbal statements of affect. The behavioral component refers to

overt actions and verbal statements concerning behavior.<sup>4</sup>

C. *Distinctions Between Attitudes and Opinions*: It is significant for the persuaders to understand the differences between attitudes and opinions. Although attitudes and opinions are alike in some respects, they are not precisely the same. Opinions are verbalizable modifications of attitudes, which involve some aspects of expectations or predictions—not merely a preference. On the other hand, attitudes may not be entirely conscious. They constitute a certain predisposition, preference, or general orientation toward a given person or object.

II. *Obstacles to changing attitudes*: The persuader should become familiar with at least seven potential obstacles to changing attitudes and strategies associated with those obstacles. Obstacles include: (1) selective perception of the communication, (2) selective recall of the message, (3) selective exposure to the communication, (4) a forewarning of the persuasive intent of the message, (5) the degree of commitment of the audience to a position, (6) any public commitment to a position, and (7) group pressures for the audience not to change.<sup>6</sup>

A. *Selective Perception*: Perception is the process of creating meaningful pattern. Audiences selectively perceive, attend to stimuli because of their cultural differences, their interests, their prejudices, their training, their values, their personality differences, their assumptions, their physical limitations, etc. Thus, an audience may ignore (or distort) information through selective perception. In such a case, the persuader should try to relate important information to the audience's cultural backgrounds, interests, experiences, assumptions, etc. By so doing, the speaker may cause the audience to perceive of the message as the speaker desires and thus to respond to the information correctly.

- B. *Selective Recall*: Even if audiences understand information, they tend to remember only what they want to remember. Thus, the persuader will not be able to assume that audiences will recall correctly information to which they have been exposed. If the material is important to the development of the persuader's goals it should be emphasized and reinforced in the discourse.
- C. *Selective Exposure*: Audiences tend to expose themselves to messages either strongly in favor of their position or weakly opposed to it, and they tend to avoid arguments either weakly in favor of their position or strongly opposed to them. Consequently, the persuader should develop and present the strongest possible arguments, even when the audience already favors the position being advocated.
- D. *Forewarning*: Information hostile to the speaker's message, given in advance by someone other than the persuader may create an obstacle to attitude changes in the audience.<sup>7</sup> However, it may be advantageous for the persuader to tell the audience directly his/her intention to attempt persuasion on the basis of the available evidence.
- E. *Degree of Commitment*: The degree of commitment relates to the degree of ego-involvement of the audience to the issue.<sup>8</sup> Generally the more intense the attitude initially, the more difficult it is to affect change; the less intense the attitude initially, the easier it is to affect change.<sup>9</sup> In this case, the persuader should first weaken the audience's allegiance to the issue.
- F. *Public Commitment*: If audience members have publicly committed themselves to a proposal, they will be more reluctant to modify their attitudes. In such a case, the persuader should attempt to eliminate the effect of a public commitment that opposes the person's intent. One strategy in this case is to admit that many people have committed themselves to the opposing point of

view, but that conditions have changed since those commitments were made. Then the persuader should show his/her interpretation of the changed conditions.

- G. *Group Pressure*: An audience member may be reluctant to modify his/her attitude when such a change places him/her with conflict group to which he/she belongs. Generally, people tend to succumb to group pressures because they value membership in the group. In such a case, the persuader should show that new information has changed the situation and that some members of the group have begun to doubt the group's position and are coming to feel that the persuader's position is more consistent with a larger purpose of the group.<sup>10</sup>

### III. *Approaches by Attitude Change Theories.*

Modification of beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors can be approached by various attitude change theories in social psychology. Although the primary purpose of attitude change theories in social psychology is not to provide practical insights regarding the persuader-audience situation, those theories may provide guidelines for the construction of more effective persuasive messages. The persuader should become familiar with the basic principles of those theories and should apply them toward more effective persuasive communication. These major theories include: (1) consistency theories, (2) learning theory, (3) social judgement-involvement theory, (4) functional theories, (5) theory of differentiation, (6) group dynamic theory, and (7) theories of fear arousal.

- A. *The Consistency Theory Approach*: Consistency theories of attitude change include Heider's balance theory, Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, Osgood and Tannenbaum's congruity theory, and others. A common assumption of these theories is that the attitude change process is one of rationalization and that people will be motivated to be and to appear consistent regarding their attitudes and behaviors. Thus, attitude change may result from an

individual's awareness that his/her attitudes and behaviors are inconsistent or some attitudes are inconsistent with other attitudes.<sup>11</sup> These theories suggest that the persuader should appeal to the audience by indicating how inconsistencies between conflicting attitudes and/or behaviors may be removed.

- B. *The Learning Theory Approach*: Many psychologists subscribe to the learning theory of attitude change. A common assumption of learning theories is that attitude change may occur if the stimulation for making a new response is greater than the stimulations for maintaining the old response.<sup>12</sup> This assumption means that new information may bring about attitude change. This theory suggests that the persuader needs to provide learning situations to motivate and modify the audience's attitude or behavior.
- C. *The Social Judgement-Involvement Approach*: Sherif and his associates developed this theory. This theory emphasizes the process by which a person makes judgements about social objects (e. g., other people objects, events, issues, etc.) and is both affective and cognitive at the same time. Sherif stresses that a person's attitude cannot be measured by a single score, but can be more accurately measured by having a concept of latitude, that is a certain range of attitudinal positions. These attitude latitudes include (1) latitude of acceptance, that is the set of position on an issue (or toward a person or object) which a person finds acceptable, (2) latitude of rejection, that concerns the set of position which a person finds objectionable, and (3) latitude of noncommitment that refers to any other positions on the issue, which a person neither accepts nor rejects. Usually, the weaker the person's degree of ego-involvement with an attitude object, the broader his/her latitude of rejection.<sup>13</sup> This theory suggests that the persuader should first measure the latitudes of acceptance, rejection,



and noncommitment regarding a given issue between the persuader's goal of the message and the audience member's position, and then find an indicator of his/her ego-involvement factors, i. e., a personal commitment to his/her own stand on the issue. After that, the persuader should attempt to decrease ego-involvement factors in his/her own position, and to attempt to minimize the discrepancy of latitude between the persuader and the audience about the issue in order to increase effects of persuasibility of the message.

- D. *Functional theories approach*: These theories include Katz's functional approach theory and Kelman's process of opinion change theory. A common assumption of these theories is that attitudes serve certain functions in satisfying a person's needs or motivations. Katz classified the major functions that attitudes may serve according to their motivational bases of a person's individual needs. These functions are (1) need for understanding that refers to meaningful cognitive organization for consistency and clarity, (2) need for satisfaction that refers to maximizing external rewards and minimizing punishments, (3) need to defend one's ego which is concerned with protecting against internal conflicts and external dangers, and (4) need to express a person's values and thus to maintain self-identity and/or enhance favorable self-image, self-expression and self-determination. On the other hand, Kelman classified the major functions that attitudes serve according to the sources of influence external to the individual. Those include (1) compliance function refers to when a person is influenced by another person or group and not because he/she accepts the content of a message, but because he/she anticipates some approval or reward that is a social effect, (2) identification function refers to when a person is influenced because he/she wishes to establish or satisfy self-definition

with other people or group, and (3) internalization which occurs when a person is influenced because ideas and prescribed actions of the induced behavior is the reward factor. These theories suggest that the persuader should determine first what functions the audience's attitudes are serving, what new behaviors can serve these functions better, and what previous and consequent conditions can be controlled.<sup>14</sup>

- E. *Principle of Differentiation Approach*: Roger Brown developed this theory. An assumption of this theory is that a person will feel discomfort when he/she finds that his/her favorite stimulus object has some negative attributes. However, if he/she can differentiate the negative attribute of the stimulus object, X1, from other aspects of the same object, X2, X3, he/she can maintain his/her favorable attitude toward X2, and X3 while adopting a negative attitude toward X1.<sup>15</sup> For example, when a man finds that his girlfriend is a member of a less favorite group, he may rationalize by telling himself that she is different than other members of that group – more intelligent, more moderate than others, etc. This theory suggests that the persuader should differentiate desirable stimulus objects from less desirable ones. The persuader should help the audience to differentiate the desirable aspects of the object about which he/she is speaking from less desirable ones.
- F. *Group Dynamics Theory Approach*: This theory was developed by Kurt Lewin. An assumption of this theory is that attitude change will occur when a person perceives a discrepancy between his/her own attitude and the normal perception of the group to which he/she belongs.<sup>16</sup> This theory suggests that the persuader should emphasize the discrepancy between an audience's attitudes and the larger group norm in urging change in the direction of the group norm.

G. *Fear Arousal Approach*: Janis, Feshback, Dabbs, Leventhal, Niles, Hewgill, Fishbein, Ajzen, and others have conducted researches about the relationship between fear appeals and persuasibility. Although various researches indicated different results, a common finding in these researches is that fear arousal may be used to produce attitude change. However, no research indicates how much fear should a persuader safely induce in his/her audiences. Generally, fear appeals in persuasive messages often produce different effects on different dependent variables, such as beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions, and actual behavior. Fishbein and Ajzen suggest that fear arousal may be effective in raising behavioral intentions to perform a specific, immediate action (e. g., signing up for appointments at an Alcoholic Treatment Unit, rather than completely stop drinking).<sup>17</sup> In common, these researches suggest that in using fear arousal, a persuader need have no special concern about the amount of fear he/she arouses in the audiences, provided he/she offers a practical means for removing the cause of the fear.<sup>18</sup>

## LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- I. Activities related to the nature of attitudes.
  - A. The instructor will inform the students about the nature of attitudes, emphasizing the points developed in Part I of the CONTENT ESSENTIALS.
  - B. Following the lecture, the instructor will ask the students to identify the nature of attitudes. The answers may be given orally.
  - C. The instructor will give the students about ten minutes to construct their own definitions of an attitude. These definitions may be presented orally to the entire class.
  - D. The instructor will lead a class evaluation of the definitions.

## II. Activities related to obstacles to changing attitudes.

- A. The instructor will give the students a skeletal outline of the obstacles to changing attitudes. Then, the students will fill in the outline as the instructor lectures. Lecture content will be taken from Part II of the CONTENT ESSENTIALS. A sample skeletal outline follows:

### *Obstacles to changing attitudes.*

1. Selective perception:
  2. Selective recall:
  3. Selective exposure:
  4. Forewarning:
  5. Degree of commitment:
  6. Public commitment:
  7. Group pressure:
- B. Following the lecture, the instructor will ask the students to identify seven obstacles to changing attitudes. The answers should parallel the initial presentation and may be given orally.
- C. Have the students match obstacles to changing attitudes with descriptions of those obstacles and strategies for countering them. A sample work sheet follows:
- Q: Match the appropriate obstacles and strategies with those descriptions.
- A. Selective exposure
  - B. Group pressure
  - C. Selective perception

- D. Public commitment
- E. Forewarning
- F. Degree of commitment
- G. Selective recall
  - 1. Audience members have committed themselves to a proposal in front of many people.
  - 2. Audience members tend to remember only what they want to remember.
  - 3. Hostile information is given in advance of the speaker's message by someone other than the persuader.
  - 4. Audiences avail themselves of messages either strongly in favor of their position or weakly opposed to it.
  - 5. Refers to the strength of an audience's previously made engagement with the proposition.
  - 6. When a change in position will bring a listener into conflict with his/her group's perception, he/she may be reluctant to modify attitudes.
  - 7. Audiences may differ in what they attend to because of cultural differences, interests, etc.
    - a. Show that new information has changed the situations so that some members of the group begin to doubt their position, and that your position is more consistent with a larger purpose of the group.
    - b. Try to relate important information to the audience's cultural identity, interests, etc.
    - c. Stress and reinforce the material in the discourse.
    - d. Eliminate the effect of a public audience

commitment that opposes the speaker's intent.

- e . Weaken the audience's allegiance to the issue.
- f . Tell the audience directly of your intention to attempt persuasion on the basis of the available evidence.
- g . Develop and present the strongest possible arguments even when the audiences already favor the position being advocated.

The answer should be A-4-g, B-6-a, C-7-b, D-1-d, E-3-f, F-5-e, and G-2-c.

D. Have the students identify by type the obstacles reflected in the statements that follow: (Caution: 'none' may be an appropriate answer.)

- 1 . \_\_\_\_\_ I don't know what will happen tomorrow.
- 2 . \_\_\_\_\_ He is going to try to get you to agree to his proposition.
- 3 . \_\_\_\_\_ I don't want to hear about that problem because I don't agree with the point he is making.
- 4 . \_\_\_\_\_ I will remember only what I want to.
- 5 . \_\_\_\_\_ I am going abroad next year.
- 6 . \_\_\_\_\_ Ladies and gentlemen, if I am elected chairperson I promise all of you to carry out this plan!
- 7 . \_\_\_\_\_ I am strongly committed to Terry's proposal, but not much concerned with Janet's proposal.
- 8 . \_\_\_\_\_ I am studying at Keiwa College.
- 9 . \_\_\_\_\_ If I oppose this issue, my colleagues in the association will blame me.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ That's not what he said! He agreed with me completely.

The answer should be 1-none, 2-forewarning, 3-selective exposure, 4-selective recall, 5-none, 6-public commitment,

7-degree of commitment, 8-none, 9-group pressure, and 10-selective perception.

E. As home work, have the students find at least two persuasive messages drawn from any media that reflects strategies for countering obstacles to changing their attitudes.

F. Working in small groups, have the members of each group share their findings resulting from their home work 'E' above and plan alternative strategies toward the obstacles.

G. The instructor will lead a class discussion to evaluate each group's alternative strategies.

III. Activities related to approaches suggested by attitude change theories.

A. The instructor will give the students a skeletal outline of approaches suggested by attitude change theories. Then have the students fill in the outline as the instructor lectures. The content for the lecture may be taken from Part III of the CONTENT ESSENTIALS. A sample outline follows:

1. The Consistency Theories Approach:
2. The Learning Theory Approach:
3. The Social Judgement-Involvement Theory Approach:
4. The Functional Theory Approach:
5. The Principle of Differentiation Approach:
6. The Group Dynamics Theory Approach:
7. The Fear Arousal Approach:

B. Following the lecture, the instructor will ask the students to identify seven approaches suggested by attitude change theories. The answers parallel the initial presentations and may be given orally.

C. Have the students match attitude change theories with descriptions of their assumptions and strategies. A sample work sheet follows:

Q: Match appropriate attitude change theories with

descriptions of their assumptions and strategies.

- 1 . The social judgement-involvement theory.
- 2 . Fear arousal approach.
- 3 . Group dynamics theory.
- 4 . The consistency theories.
- 5 . Principle of differentiation theory.
- 6 . Learning theory.
- 7 . Functional theories.
  - a . Attitude change may occur if the stimulations for forming a new or different attitude response are greater than the stimulations for maintaining the old ones.
  - b . Attitude change will occur when a person perceives the discrepancy between his own attitude and his group's normal perception.
  - c . The attitude change process is encouraged by the motivation of individuals to be and to appear consistent.
  - d . Appealing by fear may be effective on raising behavioral intentions to perform a specific, immediate action.
  - e . The amount of discrepancy between the position of the speaker and the listener will vary with different receivers.
  - f . People hold attitudes which fit their needs internally and/or externally.
  - g . A person will feel discomfort when he/she finds that his/her favorite stimulus object has some negative attributes.
    - ( 1 ). Arouse fear in an audience, then provide a practical means for removing the cause of the fear.
    - ( 2 ). Appeal to the discrepancy between an audience's attitudes and the group norm.
    - ( 3 ). Determine first what functions the audience's



attitudes are serving, what new behaviors can serve these functions better, and what previous and consequent conditions can be controlled.

- (4). Differentiate a desired stimulus object from less favored ones by identifying dissimilar attributes favoring the desired stimulus object.
- (5). Attempt to minimize discrepancy between self and the audience about the issue.
- (6). Indicate how inconsistencies between conflicting attitudes or behaviors may be removed.
- (7). Provide learning situations which modify the audience's attitude or behavior.

The answer should be 1-e-(5), 2-d-(1), 3-b-(2), 4-c-(6), 5-g-(4), 6-a-(7), and 7-f-(3).

- D. As home work, have the students clip or copy at least three advertisements from newspapers, magazines, and other print media which reflect an approach suggested by any attitude change.
- E. Working in small groups, have the members of each group share their collection of advertisements and analyze the approaches utilized.
- F. Have the students plan their strategies of attitude change utilizing any approaches in relation to their own persuasive goals in the assigned five minute persuasive speech which will be presented as a final course project.
- G. The instructor will lead a class discussion evaluating the student attitude change strategies prepared during the previous activity 'F'.

## INSTRUCTIONAL ASSESSMENT

- I . A number of the activities may be taken as measures of student learning.
  - A . The assigned individual reports may be evaluated, including:
    - 1 . the examples of two strategies for meeting obstacles to changing attitudes in persuasive messages drawn from the various media.
    - 2 . the examples of three advertisements from any print media which reflect attitude change theories.
    - 3 . Planning of attitude change strategies in the assigned five minute persuasive speech.
  - B . Student involvement in the small group activities may be evaluated, including:
    - 1 . the sharing of peer findings of strategies to counter obstacles, and the planning of alternative strategies toward obstacles.
    - 2 . the sharing of collections of advertisements, and the analysis of attitude change theories or approaches utilized.
- II . A unit test may be administered to assess student understanding of the unit content. Items for the test may be chosen from learning activities at the recall, comprehension, and application levels. For example, the student may be asked to:
  - A . Identify at least five obstacles to attitude change, and strategies to counter those obstacles.
  - B . Identify at least five attitude change theories, and discuss the assumptions and approaches related to those theories.

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