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Unlocking Perspectives with Proactive Rhetoric

Every conversation is rhetorical. Rhetoric serves as the backbone of all human interaction, whether a simple dialogue or a profound debate. The diction, expressions, gestures, and intentions are the other factors that make rhetoric strong. However, every individual molds the structure of rhetoric differently due to the influences of their characters, mindsets, and cultural backgrounds.

Every day, we are influencing or are influenced by others, both consciously and subconsciously. Whether someone retains any knowledge intentionally or not, trying to avoid learning or thinking a certain way is almost impossible. Influences range from authority figures like professors and parents to being socially impacted by our peers. Even when consuming any form of mass media like newspapers, television, social media, and the internet as a whole. Our engagement with the world, both physically and virtually, shapes the way we perceive the world. Unfortunately, not everyone uses this power of language we are gifted with wisely or for the right reasons. "Every communicative encounter has been viewed as primarily an attempt at persuasion or influence, or as a struggle over power." (Foss and Griffin 2). Foss and Griffin also state how many rhetorical theories reflect a patriarchal bias. Political speeches and propaganda use rhetoric as a manipulation tool, which would fall under this category that most people are either aware of or brainwashed by. This lacks a safe environment and focuses directly on status, affecting the power of language upon a lower class.

On the other hand, a subtle, manipulative version of rhetoric exists in the corporate world. Marketing techniques that play persuasive mind games for advertising purposes. Social

media influence is so powerful that people tend to believe anything they see online nowadays. Influences and companies tend to create an online illusion of a product despite its quality and practicality. However, at times, it can be positive and worth the money as well; it all depends on the intentions behind it. Platforms spread misinformation through emotional language, easily manipulating any mindless scroller online. I have been a victim of this and realized how immune the rest of society has become to it.

Aristotle's definition of rhetoric only limits it to mainly for the purpose of persuasion. He was old-fashioned with his ideology since "only scientific demonstration and the analysis of formal logic can arrive at absolute truth" (Aristotle 200). Rhetoric does not only have to be a tool for persuasion. It is how language is used to achieve any goal of informing, expressing, and encouraging. Persuasion seems to have a negative connotation; hence, rhetoric is instead a tool of encouragement. As Kenneth Burke would agree, rhetoric's aura should revolve more around encouraging each other to understand things from others' perspectives. Furthermore, it highlights how subjective and diverse rhetoric's nature can be.

An open mind is the key to achieving efficient rhetoric. A mindset should be flexible enough to adapt to certain conversations and people. There needs to be a mutual understanding on both sides. It is a more aware way of thinking and a controlled way of reacting. In simple terms, it can even be referred to as thinking before you speak, also known as Proactive Rhetoric. This mutual understanding is crucial, as it makes each party feel valued and respected, fostering a more positive and productive conversation. Emotions will always be on demand, no matter what the conversation is. Logic always seems to fall behind because emotions always get the best of us. Similarly to Aristotle's methods of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos.

Especially in heated situations, a balanced approach would result in Proactive Rhetoric. For example, it can be as simple as telling your roommate to do her dishes again but having them receive it as a personal attack. This is a type of rhetoric where there does not always have to be a winner or loser in a conversation. It is important not to let ego control the situation. However, without realizing it, one intentionally uses a particular language and techniques to influence the person they speak to to achieve a specific goal. In this case, you are appealing to the person in front of you and their emotions. They try to change their behavior to be cleaner by giving evidence to support that argument. This conversation could go two ways. One where it is a total screaming match if both people fail to break the aggressive approach. Another is where two people can have a mature conversation filled with understanding and respect. Rhetoric was used in a toned-down matter before the uproar of the argument and can be used after as well. Foss and Griffin's invitational rhetoric could support this where both parties' vulnerability and openness through their opinionated voices are respected. Furthermore, it underlines a collaborative dialogue while avoiding controlling and manipulating language.

The pinnacle of Proactive Rhetoric is reached with an understanding of all cultures and practices. Being able to put yourself in someone's shoes is a recognition of human dignity, as Kwame Anthony Appiah would agree. One can connect with them deeper if one can acknowledge where a perspective and language is coming from, whether that is how a person grew up or was educated. For example, April Baker-Bell's ideology revolves around linguistic diversity. "By linking the racial classifications Black and white to language, I am challenging you, the reader, to see how linguistic and racial hierarchies are interconnected" (Baker-Bell 2). Understanding this inclusivity could construct a safe environment that bolsters professional and personal relationships. Combination of these elements can also build one's character and

morality. This is not to say you must come from a diverse background, but being educated about the world is a plus. Learning about universal ideologies and language can expand knowledge, producing more brain power. However, it is essential to use that power wisely. Always stay humble and down to earth, even if new cultural information might sweep you off your feet. This would all reflect when having that one-to-one conversation.

The appropriate materials can teach all these techniques to achieve Proactive Rhetoric. Most importantly, since it is preaching a two-sided conversation and understanding. It would follow a Paulo Freire problem-posing education—not reinforcing information through authoritative language but encouraging a safe space for a collaborative learning environment. A framework built progressively, not by one teacher but by a mentor who will lead the way and mediate dynamic conversations. Both parties in this setting will learn and retain information from each other. If implemented correctly, it may prepare people of all ages to navigate the world better.

This motto my high school English teacher preached for our class has been engraved into my mind since I was 14. It is a quote from Richard Lederer's book, *The Miracle of Language*. "May we try not only to talk, but to say something; not only to hear, but to listen; not only to write, but to communicate. May our thoughts and aspirations become words that serve to build bridges from mind to mind and from heart to heart, creating a fellowship of those who would hold fast to that which is good." (Lederer 243). Lederer's words beautifully encapsulate the baseline of Proactive Rhetoric. Building those bridges is possible through meaningful communication. Specifically, those filled with active listening and mutual assimilation can connect deeper. Rhetorical language having the potential to unlock doors of inspiration is

undeniable, yet its transformative power can only be unleashed through the receptivity of an *open* heart and mind.

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