



METAPHORS IN MIND

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SYMBOLIC MODELLING



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&
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and
Penny Tompkins



The Developing Company Press

Published by The Developing Company Press, 2000
www.cleanlanguage.co.uk

Distributed by Anglo American Book Company Ltd.
www.anglo-american.co.uk
and in the USA by Crown House Publishing Co., LLC
www.crownhousepublishing.com

Reprinted 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2011.

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A catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978095387510-8

LCCN: 2002491763

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Metaphors in Mind has been translated into Italian.
Mente e Metafore (ISBN 8-8815001-2-4) is available from:
Gruppo Editoriale Infomedia
www.infomedia.it

Metaphors in Mind has been translated into French.
Des métaphores dans la tête (ISBN 2-10-050099-6) is available from:
InterEditions-Dunod, Paris
www.intereditions.com

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Introduction

“James, I know you’ll ask a hundred questions about this workshop, and I don’t think I’ll be able to answer a single one. But I do know this guy David Grove is doing something special. I’ve just had one of the most profound experiences of my life. Why don’t you postpone your holiday and come and see him? Maybe together we can figure out what he’s doing.”

Unbeknown to Penny, this telephone conversation was to decide the direction of our lives for the next five years.

David J. Grove, M.S.

David Grove is a New Zealander whose unique psychotherapeutic approach, experience and style make him one of today’s most skilful and innovative therapists.

In the 1980s he developed clinical methods for resolving clients’ traumatic memories, especially those related to child abuse, rape and incest. He realised many clients naturally described their symptoms in metaphor, and found that when he enquired about these using their *exact* words, their perception of the trauma began to change. This led him to create Clean Language, a way of asking questions of clients’ metaphors which neither contaminate nor distort them.

Initially David Grove specialised in ‘healing the wounded child within’. These days his interests have widened to include nonverbal behaviour, perceptual space and inter-generational healing. He is constantly developing new ideas and creative methods which continue to fascinate and inspire us.

Our contribution

To “figure out” what David Grove was doing we used a process called modelling. This involved observing him work with clients (including ourselves) and spending hour after hour poring over recordings and transcripts. We looked for patterns in the relationship between what he was doing and the way clients responded that contributed to the changes they experienced. We combined these patterns into a generalised model which was tested and fine tuned—cycling through observation, pattern detection, model construction, testing and revising many times.

While our model is based on David Grove’s work and incorporates many of his ideas, he has a different way of describing his approach. Our model was derived more from our observation of him in action than from his explanation of what he does. It was also shaped by our desire for others to learn the process easily and for it to apply to a range of contexts in addition to psychotherapy.

As well as employing many of David Grove’s ideas, we have also drawn upon cognitive linguistics, self-organising systems theory and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). The result is a process called Symbolic Modelling.

Symbolic Modelling in a nutshell

Symbolic Modelling is a method for facilitating individuals to become familiar with the symbolic domain of their experience so that they discover new ways of perceiving themselves and their world. It uses Clean Language to facilitate them to attend to their metaphoric expressions so that *they* create a model of their symbolic mindbody perceptions. This model exists as a living, breathing, four-dimensional world within and around them.

When clients explore this world and its inherent logic, their metaphors and way of being are honoured. During the therapeutic process their metaphors begin to evolve. As this happens their everyday thinking, feeling and behaviour correspondingly change as well.

Some clients benefit just from having their metaphors developed with a few clean questions. For some the process leads to a reorganisation of their existing symbolic perceptions, while for others nothing short of a transformation of their entire landscape of metaphors will suffice. As a result clients report that they are more self-aware, more at peace with themselves, have a more defined sense of their place in the world and are more able to enrich the lives of others.

What you will learn from this book

What do you do as a therapist, teacher, doctor or manager when your client, student, patient or colleague says “It’s like I’m hitting my head against a brick wall” or “I’m so wound up I can’t see straight” or “Things keep getting on top of me”?

Do you ignore the metaphorical nature of their communication? Do you unwittingly introduce your own metaphors (“Why do you continue *punishing* yourself?” “I can tell you’re *stressed*.” “How does that *make* you feel?”)? Or do you take their metaphors as an accurate description of their way of being in the world and ask questions within the logic of the information—without introducing any metaphors of your own (“And is there anything else about that brick wall?” “And what kind of wound up is that?” “And whereabouts on top of you?”).

This book describes how to do the latter.

When using Symbolic Modelling you give your clients, students, patients or colleagues an opportunity to discover how their symbolic perceptions are organised, what needs to happen for these to change, and how they can develop as a result. In order to do this proficiently, you need to be able to:

- Attend to client-generated verbal and nonverbal metaphors
- Communicate via Clean Language
- Facilitate clients to self-model
- Be guided by the logic inherent in their symbolic expressions.

Our primary focus in this book is psychotherapy. And while we describe a complete process that can be used in its own right, many therapists and counsellors have found ways to combine Symbolic Modelling with their preferred approach. In addition, in Chapter 10 we describe how Symbolic Modelling is being used in education, health and business.

Structure of the book

We have arranged the book in five parts. Part I provides theoretical and background knowledge about metaphor, modelling and self-organising systems. Part II introduces the basic questions, philosophy and methodology of Clean Language. Part III contains a stage-by-stage description of the Five-Stage Therapeutic Process, with extensive client transcripts to illustrate and explain how the process unfolds. In Part IV we describe a number of applications of Symbolic Modelling outside the field of individual psychotherapy. Finally, Part V contains annotated transcripts of our work with three clients.

How to use this book

We have designed the book to be used iteratively. This means that you will benefit from revisiting each chapter with the accumulated knowledge gained from reading later chapters, and from having put into practice what you have learned. In this way the book is like a travel guide. It gives useful information about the places you are about to visit, what to look out for, and if you reread it after you return, it will mean so much more.

You do not have to begin this book at the beginning. Depending on your preferred learning style there are various entry points. You can start with Part I if you like general concepts and theory first. If you prefer to learn by doing, the information in Part II will enable you to start practising immediately. If you want to find out how you can apply the model in a variety of contexts, go to Part IV. And if you learn best by first seeing an example of the entire process, start with Part V.

And finally

Like learning to play the piano, no amount of theory or observation can substitute for the actual experience of your fingers moving over the keyboard. Our main purpose in writing this book is to encourage you to *use* Symbolic Modelling because only then will you discover how much your clients can benefit from this approach.

And it is not only your clients who will benefit. As a result of using Symbolic Modelling we have developed acute listening and observation skills, an improved ability to retain and recall information and an increased capacity to think systemically and at multiple levels.

Also, being facilitated to model *our* metaphors and patterns has been an indispensable part of learning to facilitate others to model theirs—not to mention the gift of our own personal development.

Yet perhaps the most unexpected benefit of regularly facilitating Symbolic Modelling has been learning to become comfortable with ‘not knowing’, to be in the moment with whatever is happening, and to trust the wisdom in the system.

Stage 1

Entering the Symbolic Domain

*In oneself lies the whole world,
and if you know how to look and learn,
then the door is there and the key is in your hand.
Nobody on earth can give you either that key or the door to open,
except yourself.*
Krishnamurti

The ability to process metaphorically and symbolically seems to be innate. It is not *if* someone can operate from a metaphoric perspective, but rather under what circumstances and in what manner are they consciously perceiving symbolically.

The Five-Stage Therapeutic Process was summarised in Chapter 2 (pages 39–44). This chapter examines Stage 1: how to start a Symbolic Modelling session by facilitating clients to begin self-modelling their metaphors. We describe how to initiate the process with the ‘standard opening’ question, or use an ‘entry’ question in response to one of six verbal and nonverbal ‘cues’. We then give several examples of which entry question to ask in response to each type of cue. In short, this chapter provides:

- The Purpose of Stage 1
- How to Start
- Entry Questions
- Entry Cues

The Purpose of Stage 1

In the beginning of the Symbolic Modelling process your task is to use Clean Language to support the client to become aware that their metaphoric expressions have a correspondence with their life experiences.

At some point during the client’s narrative, something they say or do will prompt you to select an entry question which invites them to

switch from everyday perception to, as Caroline Myss calls it, ‘symbolic sight’.¹ The question you select will depend on the logic of the information supplied by the client in relation to their outcome, their metaphors and their behaviour at that moment. With clients who are less aware of their use of metaphor, you may need to ask a number of entry questions for them to become familiar with the symbolic nature of their language and perception. These clients may cross the line from everyday narrative to consciously using metaphor many times before they settle into, stay with, and model their symbolic perceptions. On the other hand, for some clients, speaking metaphor is their mother tongue.

How do you recognise when a client has started to perceive symbolically, to engage with their metaphors and to self-model? There are a number of indicators, the most obvious being the client’s use of overtly metaphoric language. More subtle are the nonverbal indicators which vary from client to client: marking out the location of symbols in perceptual space, enacting events within the metaphor, and entering a contemplative state. In addition, when a client meta-comments with “this is weird” or “I don’t know where this is coming from but ...” or “it’s difficult to put into words,” they are usually indicating a transition to a consciously symbolic perception. Sometimes it is patently obvious when a client becomes aware of the symbolism inherent in their descriptions; at other times it takes acute observation to detect whether they have made the transition. For example, a client may dip into symbolism for just a few seconds, or they may be talking conceptually while seeming to express nonverbal metaphors with their body. It is vital that you calibrate the indicators to each client because, just as people exhibit differing degrees of emotion, so the range of behaviours which reflect their degree of awareness and involvement with their metaphors varies.

There are also indicators of when a client is not perceiving symbolically. These include repeatedly:

- Making eye-contact with you
- Asking you questions
- Meta-commenting or analysing
- Giving examples from everyday life
- Replaying events and dialogues, ‘He said ... and she said ...’

Keep in mind, however, that *any* repetitive behaviour may itself be symbolic of an unconscious pattern to the client’s perceptions.

How to Start

We begin the first session by asking the client where they would like to sit and, when they are settled, where they would like us to sit. Then we take a short personal history and ask them to define an overall outcome — a contract for therapy. This builds rapport, allows us to assess the client's level of self-awareness and to note the metaphors they use during the conversation. Then we ask entry questions of their metaphorical, sensory or conceptual expressions so that they begin to self-model.²

When to initiate self-modelling

You can start modelling symbolically from the first contact with the client, be that by telephone, letter or face-to-face. From the client's perspective, the process starts when you ask a clean question which invites them to consider their verbal or nonverbal expressions symbolically. How they respond will indicate whether, or to what degree they accept the invitation. While there are no cast iron rules for when to begin, there are two key factors to consider: your degree of rapport with the client, and their level of self-awareness. Studies have shown that how the client and therapist relate is one of the most important aspects of a successful therapeutic encounter, regardless of the type of therapy.³ In this respect, Symbolic Modelling is no different to any other therapy, except that Clean Language is inherently rapport-building. By self-awareness we mean the client's ability to introspect, to self-reflect, to describe their own experience and to define a personal outcome. The greater the rapport between the two of you and the more the client is aware of their metaphors and patterns, the sooner the self-modelling process can begin.

The standard opening question

The standard opening question requests clients to specify their desired outcome for therapy and invites them to begin self-modelling.

And what would you like to have happen?

Although we did not make it explicit in Chapter 3, you have already seen an example of a response to this question:

T0: **And what would you like to have happen?**

C1: I'd like to have more energy because I feel very tired.

T1: **And** you'd like to have more energy because you feel very tired. **And when** you'd like to have more energy, **that's** more energy **like what?**

C2: It's like I'm behind a castle door.

After just two questions the client has defined an outcome, the problem and accepted the invitation to work in metaphor. Our second question orientates the client's attention to what she wants—"more energy"—and at the same time invites her to become aware of the nature of her outcome. Because she responds with an overt metaphor, a Stage 2 exploration of her symbolic perception can begin.

Whether you begin with the standard opening question or not, you start with a clean question. David Grove says:

The first question is important because ... it is going to set the tone and the direction of how the session will go. This quality of direction is very important because it will direct the client's attention—[and then] he will direct our attention—to a particular location in his experience and to a particular orientation in time.⁴

If your objective is for the client to define an outcome for the session, then the standard opening question can be further specified by adding "during this session," "while you are here," or "during our time together today." It can also be used when, as is common, the client provides a detailed description of their problem. Then you can ask "And what would you like to have happen *instead of* [client's description of their problem]?" Asking the standard opening question has a number of benefits:

- Most importantly, it directs the client's attention towards what they want or need so that they describe whatever they think, feel or intuit will bring about the desired change.
- Even if the client answers "I don't know," they will still have *considered* the question, and in the process of considering they will have nonverbal responses.
- Whatever the client answers will provide information related to their beliefs about the process of change.

"Tompkins and Lawley have written a book that provides people with a tool for profound analysis and insight. The use of metaphors as a means of evaluating how you order your world, your relationships, your occupation, and interpret the experiences of your life is invaluable. This book should be read by everyone who has an interest in expanding their awareness of why they say the things they do, and discovering how the 'contents' of their lives are sources of empowerment."

CAROLINE MYSS, PH.D.

Bestselling author of *Anatomy of the Spirit* and *Sacred Contracts*

"Metaphors in Mind

presents a broad integration of deep perspectives about helping people learn how to facilitate their own creativity in solving their own problems in their own way. Well done!"

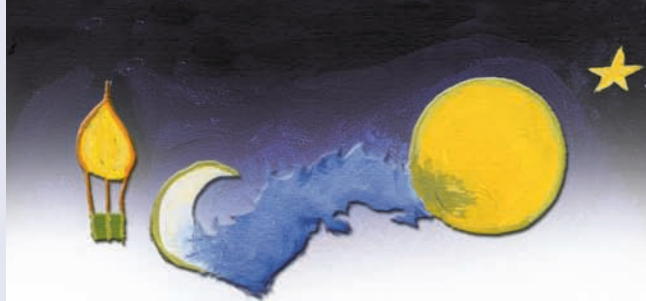
ERNEST ROSSI, PH.D.

Author of *Dreams, Consciousness & Spirit* and *The Psychobiology of Mind-Body Healing*

"Be prepared for this book to launch you on a personal journey of change and development. The parade of thought provoking concepts, stories and challenges contained within will provide a reliable travelling companion to accompany you along the way."

DAVID GROVE, M.S.

Author of *Resolving Traumatic Memories*



TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SYMBOLIC MODELLING

What do you do as a therapist, teacher, doctor or manager when your client, student, patient or colleague says "It's like I'm hitting my head against a brick wall," "I've got a knot in my stomach" or "I'm looking for the right path to take"?

Metaphors in Mind describes how to give individuals the opportunity to discover how their symbolic perceptions are organised, what needs to happen for these to change, and how they can transform as a result.

Based on David Grove's pioneering therapeutic approach and use of Clean Language, Symbolic Modelling is an emergent, systemic and iterative way of facilitating the psychotherapeutic process.

This comprehensive book covers the theory of metaphor, self-organising systems and symbolic modelling; the practice of Clean Language; the five-stage therapeutic process; and includes three client transcripts.

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JUDY STRAFFORD

