

Control in the Classroom

An Adventure in Learning and Achievement

Review from
the web



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By Timothy A. Carey

In this fresh approach to education Carey explains the principles of Perceptual Control Theory (PCT) in a clear and very readable manner. The fact that all we ever do as human beings (indeed as living organisms) is control and that what we control is our perceptions is explained. The main focus is on the pupils but equally teachers are also controlling their own perceptions. We understand then that behaviour is simply the control of perception. The concept of PCAs (Perceiving - comparing - acting) is presented in a way that appears quite intuitive and developed in practical terms.

This is by no means a new approach and Carey and others clearly have many years experience in the delivery of teaching in this way. The book is packed with examples and analogies and Carey engages well with the reader. It is intrinsically pupil-centred and as such offers an alternative to a curriculum-focussed learning environment. It will not help those who wish to deliver a rigid program of learning in a very prescriptive way. It does, however, take an entirely fresh and alternative view on what pupils might be doing when they appear to be uncooperative or disruptive. Focussing on PCAs enables the pupil to learn 'their way', rather than assume that 'one size fits all'.

Coming to it as a perceptual control theorist and clinical practitioner I was slightly apprehensive, on flicking through the book prior to commencing, to see it provided a large number of forms. I was, however, reassured by an explanation right at the outset that the forms were not intended to be prescriptive or formulaic, but were rather presented as guide tools for those who wished to apply the concepts of PCT in the classroom and perhaps starting points for them to develop their own personal tools. From the 'Hunting for Controlled Variables' form through lesson plans and on to teachers self assessment, the book is packed with practical applications of the PCA approach.

We are constantly reminded of the PCAs as the author impresses the centrality of them to the teaching/learning relationship. Clearly where teachers come upon problems, (disturbances to their own PCAs?) it will be in the PCAs where the problems lie.

This book is truly remarkable. Do not be confused by the relaxed approach to its presentation as it punches well above its weight. Carey has an easy style which makes for a gripping read as well as a clear text in the application of PCT to the classroom. For those more used to a more traditional approach to teaching this technique may well come as very challenging. It may, however, also solve many of the until-now unsolved mysteries of the classroom.

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