

To Andrew S■■■■  
Clarity

May 2nd 2002-05-02

Dear Andrew,

Good talking to you this morning. I will give other game formats some thought and how to fit useful language into them.

In the meantime here's a small contribution to your website, if you feel it fits.

Mario

### **From Teacher to Teacher**

How exercises proliferate.

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK.

We learn exercises on initial training courses, we learn exercises from magazines, from websites, from Resource books but, perhaps most of all, we learn exercises from other teachers. This last way is a bit the way we learn jokes- they pop up in conversation and suddenly one realises how good what has been said is and decides to commit it to memory. In the process of committing an EFL exercise to memory a teacher will often change it by leaving out or adding bits. Often the new exercise is quite a bit better than the original one. As a given activity description passes from mind to mind lots of deletion, distortion and addition takes place. What creativity there is in these acts of inaccurate transmission!

Let me illustrate the way an activity can proliferate as it passes from teacher to teacher:

In 1989 Paul Davis and I published an exercise we called *the messenger and the scribe* in **Dictation**, CUP. Today it is mostly called *running dictation*.

You stick up some copies of a text in the corridor outside your classroom and ask the students to work in pairs. Student A goes out into the corridor, reads the first bit of the text and comes back to dictate it to Student B. This process is repeated until Person B has the whole text down on the page in front of her.

In the mid 90's I meet a teacher who had transformed the running dictation activity into something much more dynamic. Here is her version:

Put copies of the text up some way along the corridor.

Organise the students into teams of three. Student A goes down the corridor and reads the first bit of the text, which she brings back as far as the classroom door, and no further, and says it from memory to B, who runs across the classroom to dictate it to C. The middle person in the chain, Person B, is not allowed outside into the corridor.

The beauty of this transformation is that you have two students in every trio stretching their memories **and** taking useful physical exercise. Only C is a bit passive.

Recently, in conversation with a Pilgrims colleague, Rachel, I found that she had developed *running dictation* in two new ways:

1. Organise your class into teams of five or six. They are all seated. Student A then runs and brings back the first bit, which she dictates to the others. Student B then runs to the text and brings back the second bit.....

The beauty of this version is that all the students have the chance to go up and have a quick look at the whole text, and the group tend to help the weaker students to get the words down correctly. Very good with a multilevel classes. Very good with a large class, because there is less room for physical chaos than in the versions reported earlier.

2. Cut your text up into sentences and put up the sentences in disorder round the classroom walls.  
The students work in pairs and the "runner" has to decide whether to work out the order for himself or to dictate the sentences in random order, leaving the ordering task to the person writing.

I wonder if you share with me the sheer delight at seeing how the initial activity has sprouted into several new ones?

Maybe you know, use, or have been stimulated to think of new variations. If so, please send them to the Clarity website for publication in the same corner as this article.

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