

(Hanna, could Mary be asked to establish the link to the previous piece in HLT on Orage?)

Penetrating thoughts from the 1930's
or
The exercises, aphorisms and essays of the Gurdjieffian, A.R.Orage (1873-1934)
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[HLT carried a short piece on Orage's work in Year 5 Issue 3, May 03 in the OLD EXERCISE section. It mainly deals with the essay Orage wrote on economising energy]

A principle in the development of EFL methodology over the past 40 years has been to go beyond our small pond of language focus and to explore potential "feeder fields" such as drama,(Maley and Duff in the 1970's) instrumental music,(Cranmer and Laroy, in the 1990's), and Neuro-Linguistic-Programming,(Norman, Revell, Baker and Rinvoluceri over the past decade).

Though what am I now about to say might perturb followers of Gurdjieff, I see Orage's book, **On love and psychological exercises**, as a brilliant feeder field for us teachers of language. Some Gurdjieff followers will see in this as unwarranted reductionism, as taking what is great and over-arching and making it banal and trivial. They have their point of view and I have mine.

I want to divide what follows into three sections:

1. some exercises for our classes
2. a selection of Orage's aphorisms
3. a taste of Orage as an essayist

Classroom exercises

1. Sensory exercises

- A. The students work with a partner. Both look at the wall opposite them and divide it into four equal parts.. They silently note the objects and patterns in each quarter of the wall. Both close their eyes and collaboratively enumerate them in detail.
The students open their eyes and check.
- B. Before class prepare a very short scene with one class member. Eg two people enter the classroom, carrying a chessboard. They start a game and one person plays badly, taking pieces off the board randomly. Both exist, leaving the chessboard behind.
Ask the students to write down exactly what they saw in 3-4 paragraphs.
They compare their texts in 4's.

C. Prepare a variety of resonant objects, wood, metal, earthenware. The students blindfolded themselves.
Strike the objects and allow time for the students to tell their neighbours the sound they heard and what they think the object is. Blindfolds off. Ask them to put the sounds they heard into categories, working in pairs.
General sharing.

D. The students work individually and write down ten objects they have seen. They then write when and in what circumstances they recall first, or last, seeing them.
The students compare their lists.

Do the same with ten mother tongue and English words the student have recently learnt.

E. The students write short descriptions of three people they saw yesterday, appearance, dress, manner, mood....
They read to each other what they have written.

F. Tell students they may have experiences they can still hear in their mind's ear. They work on their own, writing down a short list of such experiences they can hear at will.
In pairs they describe these experiences.

G. The students write down ten animal sounds they have heard, eg an elephant trumpeting, dogs barking etc...In pairs they describe the circumstances in which they heard these sounds.

Do the same exercise with natural sounds, eg beat of rain, rustling of leaves

Do the exercise with musical sounds , the wail of violins, throbbing of drums,

or, mechanical sounds like riveting , thudding of hammers etc....

Emotional exercises

1. The students work in pairs. Give them the following phrases and ask them to discuss what emotions the phrase triggers in their minds.
Write the first phrase on the board and give them a timed two minutes reaction time.

HOME

NURSE

GREEN HILLS

HOKUSAI

WINE

GRANDMOTHER

2. The students list as many emotions as they can, including reverence, jealousy, joy, surprise, alarm, anxiety....etc.....
Each student strikes out from the list emotions s/he has never experienced.
Pair the students and ask them to describe the circumstances in which they experienced each emotion.
3. Dictate the words below and an after each word ask the students to add three associated words.

DELIGHT
SERENITY
DISLIKE
PRIDE
EXPECTANCY
HORROR
PITY
GRIEF
FEAR
ANNOYANCE
THE BLUES
EXCITEMENT
THE CREEPS

The students compare their associations.

Number sequencing exercises

1. Pair the students. Ask them to count down from 100 to 0, St A saying 99, Student B saying 98, Student A saying 97 etc..... alternating.
2. Pair the students. Working only with indivisible numbers, St A counts up from 1 and St B counts down from 49 like this:

St A : 1

St B: 49
St A: 3
St B: 47
St A: 5

3. Pair the students. They chorus the numbers from 1 to 100, and both raise their right hand when the number they are saying is divisible by 3 and their left when the number is divisible by 4. (on 12 they raise both hands!)
4. Pair the students and ask them to work thus:

St A: 2 4 6 8 10
St B: 10 8 6 4 2
St A: 4 6 8 10 12
St B: 12 10 8 6 4
St A: 6 8 10 12 14

In other words, St A counts upwards by twos, keeping 5 numbers in play, while St B counts the same numbers downwards

Tell them to stop when they reach 24.

(in his book Orage suggests 50 different number sequence exercises)

Word Sequence Exercises

1. Pair the students. The students add numbers to the letters of the alphabet, thus:

St A: 1 A
St B: 26 Z
St A: 2 B
St B: 25 Y
St A: 3 C
St B: 24 X

Etc...

2. Dictate the following words. The students write them down backwards. You dictate PIG and the students write: GIP

COW
HEN
SHEEP

BEETLE
GIRAFFE
ELEPHANT
ANT-EATER
RHINOCEROS
PTERODACTYL

3. Pair the students. Ask them to recite a verse they both know
St A goes first :

To 2 be 2 or 2 not 3 to 2 be 2
That 4 is 2 the 3 question 8.....

After each word the reciting student states the number of letters in the word.

Then it is St B 's turn to do the same.

A harder variation is to say the number of letters before saying the word.

Some Orage aphorisms

The observation of others is coloured by our inability to observe ourselves impartially. We can never be impartial about anything until we can be impartial about our own organism.

Egoism: measuring others by our likes and dislikes – not by their needs but by our preferences.

Pride: ignorant presumption that the qualities and status of the organism are due to merit.

Honest doubt is suspended judgement

Humour: a form of intuition

Intuition with certainty is judgement

Sentimentality: a slight emotion exaggerated by muddled thinking. "Do noble deeds and regret them all day long"

Life should be a voluntary overcoming of difficulties, those met with and those voluntarily created, otherwise it is just a dice-game.

There is a complete protection available to you – silence.

[These aphorisms are marvellous advanced level discussion starters]

Orage as an essayist.

A list of the topics Orage investigates in these 4-6 page pieces is in itself revealing:

How to learn to think
The control of temper
How not to be bored
How to read men
How not to give oneself away
How to live more
Are we awake?
How to become a man of the world
Economising our energy
Can intuition be acquired?
On dying daily
Doing as one likes
Who are the best people?
Life as gymnastics
How to learn to observe

I feel that all of the above explorations have bearings on our work as language teachers and teacher trainers. To give you a taste of the quality of mind and word of Orage's prose I would like to quote verbatim a chunk of his essay *How to learn to observe*. It is not for nothing that George Bernard Shaw once said that Orage was the most brilliant literary editor England had had in a 100 years.

“.....What increases our vital inertia is the habit, remaining over from childhood and seldom outgrown even by the oldest adults, of immediately classifying all objects (and people) as things we like and things we do not like. It is clear that there is no science in this, at least in the objective sense. Such a classification may serve as a symptom of our own state of being, but it does not even begin to classify and organise our knowledge of the world. Real observation only begins when likes and dislikes cease to be regarded as criteria of values; and all real science is beyond the childish criteria of “ I like” and “ I don't like “.

Even scientific observation, however is very defective in its methods. Distrusting, for good reason, the intermixture of *fancy* with observation, science has made the profound error of dispensing with *imagination*; with the result that trained scientific observers are, as a rule, the last people in the world to see things as they are and to see them whole. Aspects of things, the continuity and development of single

qualities, they see with considerable precision. They can weigh and measure and analyse and reckon time and space movements. But the things that they thus observe not only die in their hands, as it were, but they are seen as piecemeal and seldom as wholes, and still more rarely as phases of a process without beginning and with out end.....

My feeling is that the ideas in this essay is central to the work of all teacher trainers who undertake the hazardous adventure of observing another person's classes, to all DOSes and mentors. I very much hope that above excerpt makes you want to instantly "amazon" **Orage's On love and psychological exercises**, Sam Weisner, 1998.

Enjoy learning Orage by watching students doing his exercises, by pondering his aphorisms and reading his brief, pithy essays.

Bibliography

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