

To Lucia [REDACTED]

Dear Lucia,

I hope the following article, which I have just written for Resources and which has not be published elsewhere is OK for whichever of next academic year's issues you decide.

This ought to earn Pilgrims about 3 double page spread ads in brilliant technicolour!!.

Mario

A Methodologist's Goldmine

By Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims

It's 1899 and you have been panning for gold in Alaska for three long, freezing years. Here and there over that time you have found grains of gold but your findings have barely paid for your meagre outgoings.

All of a sudden you see several gleaming nuggets of near pure gold in the sieve you are shaking in the stream. You have found a seam of the yellow metal and your fortune is made.

The thrill of coming on riches (methodological riches) that I experienced as I first turned the pages of **On Love and Psychological Exercises**, by A.R Orage, Samuel Weiser , 1998, was similar to a gold rush experience. The book landed on my desk six months ago and since then I have been trying out the exercises it proposes. A new vein of language class activities, a new feeling in the classroom, a marvellous sensation of something fresh, new and exhilaratingly different.

Who was Orage?

T.S. Eliot described him as " the finest literary critic" of the years between World War 1 and the Second World War. Born in 1873, Orage died in 1934. In the 1920's he studied with Ouspensky and with Gurdjieff, the synthesiser of Central Asian mysticism.

Orage's Psychological Exercises come directly out of his work with Gurdjieff and are designed to make our minds more agile by working with numbers, words, verses and images. If you want, they are strangely simple awareness exercises that achieve their effect by asking us to undertake

seemingly bizarre *formal* manipulation of numbers, letters, texts and images.

A sample of the Exercises

The Orage activities are intended to be done by an individual in the privacy of her own space. To make them classroom-useful, I have brought most of them into the social sphere.

1 Count-up Count down

Pair the students and ask person A to count up from zero to fifty by twos while person B counts down from one hundred to fifty by twos. It goes like this:

- A: Zero
- B: One hundred
- A: Two
- B: Ninety eight
- A: Four
- B: Ninety six

Variation: the students work up from Zero and down from ninety nine by threes.

The students work up from ten thousand and down from fifty thousand by one thousand and one

- A: Ten thousand
- B: Fifty thousand
- A: Eleven thousand and one
- B: forty eight thousand and ninety nine etc.....

Language note: working fast and fluently with numbers in a foreign language is very hard for many people. My Italian father lived for thirty years in UK and this was how he counted: One, two, tree, fouR, five, siix, sette, otto, nove, dieci, undici... e cosi via. Though a mathematician by love and profession, he never got beyond "eight" in the foreign language. Everything apart from number and swearing at his sons in Piedmontese dialect he did happily and fluently in English!

To get students fluent with numbers is important for many of them and it doesn't come easily. If you are teaching French then this exercise is very useful for the numbers between sixty and ninety nine (fourscore and

nineteen). If you are teaching a European language to people from the Confucian cultures then the high number work is important, as students from these languages think in base ten thousand, so in Japanese 22,000 is thought of as “two *man* (ten thousand) and two thousand”.

2 Cyclical number recitation

Pair the students and get them to recite in the following way until they get to 20:

Student A: one, two, three, four

Student B: four, three, two, one

Student A: two, three, four, five

Student B: five, four, three, two

Student A: three, four, five, six

.....etc

When you model the exercise with a volunteer student make sure you get it going with a rhythmical swing. If you don't, the activity lacks spring in its step.

Language note: this is brilliant for pronunciation practice. If you are teaching Italian students they may well imitate my Dad and come out with “tree” for “three”, “siix” for “six” and “hate” for “eight”.

Give them conscious practice of these sounds before doing the Orage exercise.

3. Learning new Words

Pair the students and give them the new words to be learned in this and the next unit of the coursebook. Give them a bi-lingual list of 20-30 words.

Suppose you are learning Turkish and your base language is English, your partner takes a Turkish word from the list and you take the corresponding English one and you do a rhythmical dialogue like this:

Partner: dünya

You: world

Partner: dünya

You: world

Partner: (switching) world
You: dunya
Partner: world
You: dunya
Partner: dunya
You: world etc.....

Some people find that finger clicking or clapping keeps the necessary rhythm going .

Language note: this way of learning vocab is commonsensical, since it accepts that many students go to L2 via L1, and also appeals strongly to the musical intelligence.

4. Numbering words

Ask one of your students to draw a large boot on the board with an old lady + loads of children in the boot.

Teach them this nursery rhyme:

*There was an old lady who lived in a shoe
who had so many children she didn't know what to do.
She gave them some broth without any bread,
whipped them all soundly and sent them to bed.*

To help them learn it by heart ask them to chorally read it in these ways:

in a whisper
in a declamatory voice
as if they were six year-olds
sadly....
With a bouncy rhythm

Rub the poem off the board

Ask them to work in pairs, with their eyes shut.

Student A: Five- there
Student B: three- was
Student A: two- an
Student B: three- old

Student A: five- woman etc.....

Language note: The last stage of this exercise is very useful for improving the spelling strategies of those learners who find it hard to visualise words. To give the number of letters they have to somehow capture the word in their mind's eye.

5. Geometric Visualisation

Ask the students to shut their eyes and tell them you will be speaking to them from the back of the class, behind them. Give them the following visual suggestions in fairly a high, level voice, pausing so they have time get internal pictures:

A sheet of white paper, 12 inches by 12 inches is pinned on the wall before your mind's eye./

From white the paper turns to red/

and then to light blue/

the lower half remains blue but the upper half turns white again./

On the lower half a sailing ship appears from the right/

and passes slowly across the sheet./

A second later, three gulls enter the upper, white half from the left/

The gulls slowly fly across the sheet to the right/

They pause and hover over the ship/

and then dive down for food thrown by a girl standing on the deck/

She is wearing a bright green cloak... ..

Ask the students to continue on from this picture and to make their own endings.

Ask them to open their eyes and get into groups of 3-5. Ask each student to a) tell her lead-out from the picture

b) describe what actually happened to her internally during the "dictation". She may have visualised- she may have done other things.

Language note: Orage, in this exercise, offers us a listening comprehension where the focus is on the student's internal experience, not on proving to the teacher that he has semantically "understood" each and every word. The stress is put on the internal result of the listening, not on its technical, foreign language aspects.

6. Electric light switches

Give your class this homework:

“ between now and our next class, each time you switch a light on or off, please note your state of mind and what you are thinking about”. Come to class ready to report.”

In the next class 50% or more of the students may well have forgotten to do the homework.

Organise the class into an inner circle of people who have done the work and an outer circle of those who haven't.

Ask the inner circle people to report on what they remember from their light switchings and how the exercise generally affected their awareness.

Language note: my bet is that your students will never before have paid any conscious attention to their inner world when turning lights on and off. To talk about something **new** in the target language is vitally useful, since most second language work consists of tedious repetition of thoughts and feelings already rehearsed in mother tongue. This activity, and other “surprise” exercises, gradually change students' underlying feelings towards the target language : they begin to find it more acceptable, less unreal, more assimilable and more reliable.

Perhaps some of you are by now scratching your head and wondering why this article should appear in a serious teacher's magazine. What weird, off-the-wall rubbish.

“ I'd never use any of this stuff with my students- they'd think I'd gone barmy and anyway would ask ‘ what has this got to do with the test next Friday?’”

I sympathise with this viewpoint, in a way, as I am a person with very strong mental gestalten, and I do not like my thinking perturbed by strong, invasionary ideas.

However, in my own case, I have often come round to seeing the point of teaching ideas I initially violently opposed.

Conservative learners are like this.

Some of you may want to rush off and try one or other of the exercises

with your classes tomorrow.

Your enthusiasm will sometimes carry your students with you.

Have fun.

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