

SYNECTICS—Making Metaphors by Betty Hartzog

GETTING ORIENTED: SYNECTICS is a derivative of the Greek word “syn” and refers to the joining of unrelated elements. The significance of this concept to creative thinking is the association of facts and ideas into new configurations of interpretation and understanding.

SYNECTICS is a structured approach to problem solving. It is not the intent here to provide the entire process, but to provide some of the operational mechanisms which have immediate application to promoting creative thinking and writing in the classroom.

Two basic processes (Prince, 1976) of SYNECTICS are –

- *Making the Strange Familiar* – combining something familiar with a new or unfamiliar problem to obtain a new perspective on it.
- *Making the Familiar Strange* – combining something strange to something familiar in order to gain a new perspective on it.

There are three operational mechanisms (Synectics, Inc., 1968), which deliberately *Make the Familiar Strange*:

1. *Direct Analogy* (simple comparison like a simile or metaphor)
2. *Personal Analogy* (being the thing – personification backwards)
3. *Symbolic Analogy* (compressed conflict oxymoron)

Directions: Have students fill in “Responsibility Synectics.” Then let each student share orally each part consecutively without any discussion. (Everyone will say his/her “a,” then “b,” then “c.”). This is “whole brain” thinking because students visualize in their right brain and make sense of it in their left brain. Because of the multiplicity of ideas and left-right, left-right sequence, the students reach the point of high “creativity” very quickly. Go through the process; then have the students produce a product.

Examples: Poem; story; paragraph on responsibility; list of personal responsibilities as a student, teacher, parent, employee and employer; paragraph on the ideal student, teacher, parent, etc.; plan for accepting the responsibilities they project for themselves in the next year or five years; etc.

SYNECTICS: A Brief Overview

Synectics was developed in the 1940s by W. W. Gordon for the purpose of generating new ideas faster in business. It was adapted for education in the late 1960s but has come to the forefront in the 1980s because brain research has become of prime importance in this country. “Syn” comes from the Greek word meaning *together*. Synectics is a group process whereby the group members arrive at the peak of creativity faster than they would individually because of the multiplicity of ideas; it is a three step metaphorical method that requires individuals to visualize (right brain) and make sense of their visualizations (left brain).

Since creativity involves “whole-brain” thinking, the synectics method, whereby we can foster bi-hemispheric brain activity for extended periods of time, definitely enhances creativity and requires participating group members to look at things from a difference perspective. There are three operational mechanisms, which deliberately bring about increased insight and a unique point of view. A model of these steps follows:

Synectics Model

1. **Direct Analogy** (simple metaphoric comparison)
Example: A car is like a totem pole because...
2. **Personal Analogy** (becoming the thing/problem/person)
Example: You are a hurricane blowing toward the coast. How do you feel?
3. **Symbolic Analogy** (compressed conflict: looking at positive and negative together)
Example: A clown is both sad and funny. How is this so?

Instructions:

The teacher or group leader allows time for the individuals to write out **direct analogies**; they then consecutively read out written statements without saying anything else. This causes everyone in the group to visualize, and then reason as each reader speaks, thus forcing whole brain thinking by everyone for the entire time the activity requires. They do the same with **personal analogies** and with **symbolic analogies**. After these exercises the students produce products and generate ideas of a more creative nature because of previous bi-hemispheric activity.

Warm-Ups for Metaphoric Activity

Direct Analogy: A simple comparison of two objects or concepts. It includes, though it is not necessarily identical in all respects to, the conditions of the real problem situation. The direct analogy transposes the original condition to another situation.

Exercises:

- A. A teacher is like a blender because
- B. A school room is like what nonliving object?
- C. How is a cloud like a bear?

Personal Analogy: individual identification with a person, plant, animal, or non-living thing for the purpose of comparison.

Exercises:

- A. Be a piece of celery. How do you feel?
- B. You are a hurricane blowing in from the ocean. What do you look like? What are you doing? How do you feel? How do you feel when you are seeded by an airplane? What do you dislike the most?
- C. You are nice, green, cool grass. That is the way you look. How do you feel? How do you feel when someone steps on you? What are three wishes you have?

Compressed Conflict: a description consisting of two words that seem to be opposite or contrary to each other yet can be used to describe an object, person, place, or situation.

Exercises:

- A. A clown is funny and sad. On the one hand, a clown is funny because
- B. On the other hand, a clown is sad because
- C. What phrase could describe a funny and a sad clown?
- D. What is angry and helpful at the same time?

RESPONSIBILITY SYNECTICS

PURPOSE: To look at **Responsibility** from a different angle.

Direct Analogy

Examples: A **student's job** is that of a **sponge** soaking up knowledge.
Geometry is like a puzzle; each theorem adds a piece.

- A. A teacher's duty is that of a _____ because _____.
(metaphor)
- B. School is like _____ because _____.
(simile)
- C. I feel like a _____ in class when I do all my assignments because _____.
(simile)
- D. I feel like a _____ in _____ class when I don't do my assignments because _____.
(simile)
- E. Parents are like _____ because _____.
(simile)
- F. Responsibilities are like _____ because _____.
(simile)

Personal Analogy

Remember to keep your own intellect and personality but imagine that your physical self has been changed to the following:

- You are the school principal. How do you feel?
- You are a mother who has just found out her child is using drugs. How do you feel?
- You are a nurse treating an AIDS patient. How do you feel?
- You are the president of a large tobacco company. How do you feel?
- You are a teacher with an unruly class. How do you feel?
- You are your best friend after you've let them down. How do you feel?

Compressed Conflict

This is looking at something from both ends of the spectrum—positive and negative. It's like throwing an idea into the air and seeing it spin and tilt each way.

Example: A teacher is both *supportive* and *demanding*.

- A. What is both nurturing and destructive?
- B. A student is both _____ and _____.
- C. A parent's job is both _____ and _____.
- D. Brothers/sisters are _____ and _____.
- E. How is being an athlete both rewarding and disappointing?
- F. My responsibility to myself is both _____ and _____.
- G. A friend is _____ but _____.
- H. Oxymoron _____
Example: Responsibility = restricted freedom

Draw a symbolic picture or lines (modern art) that represent responsibility in general or your personal responsibility.

Write a poem, paragraph, newspaper article, fable, letter, or anecdote that depicts responsibility as you see it.

RAIN SYNECTICS

1. RAIN is like (FOOD) _____ because
_____.
2. RAIN is like (ANIMAL) _____ because
_____.
3. RAIN is like (MACHINE) _____ because
_____.
4. RAIN is like (MUSICAL INSTRUMENT) _____
because _____.

* * * * *

Read aloud three (3) times consecutively while group members close their eyes.

Let the rain kiss you.

Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops.

Let the rain sing you a lullaby.

The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk.

The rain makes running pools in the gutter.

The rain plays a little sleep-song on our roof at night.

And I love the rain.

Langston Hughes

* * * * *

You are a raindrop.

- What size and shape are you?
- How do you feel as you leave the cloud headed for earth?
- Where and how do you land? How do you feel after landing?
- Has your size and shape changed?
- How do you react to other raindrops?
- As a raindrop, do you mind becoming part of a puddle?
- How do raindrops die? Can they live twice?

As a raindrop, would you rather land...

on a WINDOW PANE	or	in a PASTURE
on a GIRL'S NOSE	or	in a MOUNTAIN MEADOW
on a SANDY BEACH	or	on a COW'S TAIL
on a GARBAGE HEAP	or	on a MURDERER'S GUN
on a NEON SIGN	or	in a PUDDLE

You are one raindrop in a storm that extends from Florida to Washington, D.C.
Do you feel POWERFUL or HELPLESS?

You are one raindrop in a hurricane headed for Tampa.
Do you feel FULL OF GLEE or FULL OF DESPAIR?

You are a drop on a rose in a city park.
Are you more like a CHANDELIER or a PIMPLE?

You are a drop on a dirty factory window.
Are you more like an ERASER or a PAINTBRUSH?

You are a drop next to a tear on a small boy's face.
Are you more like a CHAMELEON or a RIVER REACHING THE OCEAN?

You, a tiny raindrop, are floating lazily down towards earth, drifting one way, then another on a gentle breeze.

What one word sums up your feelings? _____

Why? _____

Before long, you are overtaken by a huge drop that barrels right into you. You are caught up in it and your speed rapidly increases.

How do you feel now? _____

What one word describes your feelings? _____

Why? _____

As part of that huge drop you've splattered out onto a giant banana leaf on a tropical island. Although you're by yourself again, you sense yourself getting smaller as one after another of your molecules evaporate.

How do you feel now? _____

What one word describes how you feel? _____

Why? _____

Put your first word together with either of the other two words to get a COMPRESSED CONFLICT, two words that show opposing feelings you've had as a raindrop.

Write a poem about rain.

SYNETICS: CHICKEN PROBLEM

Situation

An electronics engineer's job was terminated, but he was told that he would probably be rehired in twelve to eighteen months. In order to make it through the lean times, he sold his present home and rented a house outside the city limits with the intention of having a garden to supplement the food budget. Everything worked fine except that next door lived some very aggressive neighbors with chickens that roamed the neighborhood.

The engineer talked to the neighbors, but they did not comply with any of his requests to confine the chickens.

The engineer checked out fences, but they were all too expensive.

Here is the problem:

How can the engineer keep the chickens out of his garden or get his neighbors to keep them out without resorting to violence or installing fences himself?

(Remember - he and his family are very ethical, non-violent people.)

Brainstorming Sheet:

- List characteristics of chickens:

- List characteristics of inconsiderate people:

Direct Analogy

- A. A chicken in a garden is like –
- B. An inconsiderate neighbor is like –
- C. Keeping chickens out of a garden without violence is like –
- D. Your own –

Personal Analogy

- A. Be a chicken. What would keep you out of someone's garden besides a fence?
- B. Be an inconsiderate person with chickens. How do you feel about the situation? What would make you keep your chickens at home?
- C. Be one of the family members who has the garden. How do you feel? What can you do to improve the situation?

Concise Conflict

(Devise two conflicts pertaining to any aspect of the situation.)

Brainstorm now and come up with the best solution.