Parallel Inconsistencies

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by Judi Harris

Does the notion of Logo worksheets seem slightly incongruous to you? Does simple recursion escape you? Somewhat self-contradictory, perhaps, like a lasting fad or the only choice? If so, you have discovered oxymorons. These "contradictory expressions that make absolute sense" (Blumenfeld, 1986) can stimulate eager word study and serious humor in the Logo-infused classroom environment.

Consider, for example, the old news that was taped live, clean dirt, dry ice, and freezer burn. "Same difference," you say? "Almost exactly" I'd reply. Dr. Warren S. Blumfeld, Ph.D., recently described these fascinating phrases as "two concepts (usually two words) that do not go together, but are used together...the bringing together of contradictory expressions." (Blumfeld, 1986, p. 11) Students' work with oxymorons directs attention to synonyms, antonyms, new vocabulary; even geography.

Planned Serendipity
Logo can be used to temporarily cement oxymoronic phrases. Using the familiar PICK tool,

```
TO PICK :LIST
  OUTPUT ITEM 1 +
  RANDOM COUNT :LIST :LIST
END
```
lists of related nouns and adjectives that output randomly chosen words to concatenate into oxymorons. For example,

```
TO LARGE.ADJ
  OUTPUT PICK [TREMENDOUS GARGANTUAN
                GIGANTIC JUMBO HERCULEAN ENORMOUS
                IMMENSE GIANT COLOSSAL MIGHTY]
END
```

```
TO SMALL.NOUN
  OUTPUT PICK [SHRIMP FLEA LILIPUTIAN
                DWARF PIGMY MIDGET GNAT MICROBE
                RUNT MOUSE ATOM]
END
```
can be concatenated with:

```
PRINT SENTENCE
  LARGE.ADJ SMALL.NOUN
```
and that's how jumbo shrimp are born.

Constant variation can be achieved with the addition of an iterative command,

```
REPEAT 3 [PRINT SENTENCE
          LARGE.ADJ SMALL.NOUN]
```
to which the computer may respond:

```
GIANT MICROBE
TREMENDOUS PIGMY
COLOSSAL GNAT
```

As you can now see, "Mighty Mouse" also owes a great debt to oxymoronic combinations.

Ideaological Manifestations
Randomly planned oxymorons can be quite philosophical. Descriptors such as these:

```
TO DESCRIPTOR
  OUTPUT PICK [ALMOST MOSTLY
               TENTATIVELY [JUST ABOUT] [SORT OF]
               SOMEWHAT PARTIALLY TEMPORARILY]
END
```

when concatenated with certain thoughts:

```
TO THOUGHT
  OUTPUT PICK [PERFECT CERTAIN EXACT
               COMPLETE ANONYMOUS COMMITTED
               ORGANIZED PERMANENT EVERYBODY]
END
```
can yield some serious comedy, all too often spoken in earnest.

```
REPEAT 6 [PRINT
          SENTENCE DESCRIPTOR THOUGHT]
```

```
TEMPORARILY PERMANENT
JUST ABOUT COMPLETE
MOSTLY ANONYMOUS
TENTATIVELY COMMITTED
ALMOST CERTAIN
ALMOST PERFECT
```

Geographic Oxymorons
Believe it or not, I lived in Holland, Pennsylvania for seven years. I suppose that must be near Norway, South Carolina. Where can each of these country cities can be found on a United States map?
There are many seemingly misplaced cities that students can locate and record.

Philadelphia, Mississippi
Miami, Missouri
Atlanta, Texas
Atlanta, Indiana
Paris, Texas
Orlando, Oklahoma
Rome, Georgia
Rome, New York
East St. Louis, Illinois
Missouri City, Texas
Denver, Pennsylvania
St. Paul, North Carolina
Cincinnati, Iowa
Minneapolis, Kansas

Your pupils may enjoy adding to this unusual list.

Contrary to popular opinion, city-states were not confined to the Roman Empire. America has quite a few.

Wyoming, Ohio
Oregon, Missouri
Oregon, Wisconsin
Florida, New York
East Texas, Pennsylvania
Kentucky, Alabama
Indiana, Pennsylvania
Carolina, Rhode Island
New England, North Dakota

Initial Conclusion

Schools are already full of oxymorons. The Teacher Lounge is usually anything but. Has your administrator recently asked you for an original copy? And, just what is a student teacher? Why not continue a new tradition and suggest Logo-fueled oxymoron study to help brighten these winter months?

I would be remiss, though, if I did not caution you. "In this world of constant change, near misses, and routine emergencies, there is comfort in the subtly obvious art of the oxymoron. But be warned...the...oxymoron is addictive." (Blumenfeld, 1986, back cover)

Reference


Judi Harris taught students in Philadelphia-area elementary through graduate schools to use computer in teaching and learning for six years. She now does similar work at the University of Virginia, where she is completing her doctoral work in Instructional Technology.

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