



## Effective Upper School Teaching & Leadership with Dr. Christopher Schlect

### Lesson 7: Cultivating Eloquence: Progymnasmata

#### Outline:

#### Eloquence for Secondary Students I: Progymnasmata

#### **Progymnasmata - Greek term for “preliminary eloquence exercises”**

- Schlect describes the importance of eloquence in upper school rhetoric: “Students need to be taught how to express themselves”

#### **Progymnasmata history**

- Commonly exercised in the early Mediterranean
- Became standard form by end of Classical Age
- Middle ages education continued their use
- Recent centuries shows their gradual discontinuation with classical rhetoric

#### **Eloquence exercises**

- Eloquence and writing excellence is not cultivated through reading rhetoric theory but through practicing exercises. They begin with preliminary and then declamation (most mature exercises)

#### **Key question: If teaching is about students, what are students actually doing?**

- Genius of Progymnasmata exercises is that they simplify the task of being eloquent by reducing composition variables.
- Mistake with most modern Progymnasmata forms: having a rigid scope and sequence of variables.

#### **Composition variables emerge when** a student has to write an essay (i.e subject: history of science). Students need to think about:

- Their thesis
- Which perspective to adopt
- Introduction
- Claims to identify and then organize
- Word choice

#### **Even teachers experience a diversity of variable choices**

- Imagine grading students’ paper. Imagine what you want to comment on, what mistakes you are looking for. It takes time and conscious effort.



- Ancient practices much more free and creative; only meant to be used for order and guidance on how to exercise rhetoric.
- Proper Progymnasmata exercises focus on one or two variables at a given time, allowing teacher and student to go over each eloquence aspect individually, before moving on to the next one.

### **First exercise: Myth/fable**

- Student rewrites fable according to teacher's chosen style.
- **Why a Myth/fable?** They contain human instruction/moral punch.
- Students are not asked to create their own myth, too many variables. They just need to rephrase the original narrative with only one aspect of focus.
- **Myth exercise example:**
  - Tree crickets enjoying themselves in the summer, while ants worked on storing up their food for winter.
- *"People should learn to paraphrase Aesop's fables. Do so simply, and begin by analyzing every verse and then rephrase in different languages. Finally, proceed to freer paraphrase and then embellish the original without losing poet's meaning."* Quintilian
- Students have to compact 87 word prompt into no more than 50 words. They need to preserve the main points so it forces them to prioritize parts of content.
- *"Myth sometimes to be expanded, sometimes to be used concisely"* Hermogenes
- Students have to expand the story. Under teacher's guidance, they can include dialogue, change view point, rearrange chronology of story. Schlect likes to divide class into two groups that does two different perspectives (ants or tree crickets), then read aloud and discuss which one delivers the moral better.

### **Second exercise: Copia**

- Erasmus introduces copia - exercises that provides a range of speech techniques. Students have to reword sample sentences or a text passage using interchangeable nouns, verbs, shifting sentence emphasis.
- Why is Schlect introducing this exercise to the upper school? The exercise is helpful even for adults (such as judicial attorneys)

### **Third exercise: Chreia**

- Purpose is amplification. Choose a memorable quote (i.e a maxim) and unpack it. Chreia provides scaffolding for commentary and expansion.

### **Fourth exercise: Maxim**

- Reverse of Chreia. General statement persuading toward something.
- Difference between Maxim and Chreia is that we know the speaker's identity in a Chreia exercise. Maxims are broader and we have more variables to work with.

**Fifth exercise: Refutation/criticism**

- Attacking a story, for its structure, tone, event chronology, logic, etc. Requires logical reasoning on the students' part

**Sixth exercise: Confirmation**

- Defending a story via constructive analysis. Also requires students to reason logically.

**Seventh exercise: The common place**

- Amplification or emphasis of an admission. Useful in all three of the types of discourse
  - Epideictic (praise or censure)
  - Judicial (rhetoric of the law court)
  - Deliberative (rhetoric of the legislative assembly)
- Called the common place because it applies to every party; everyone accepts its rules.
- **Question to ask: How do I actually grip my audience in regards to something that is already agreed on?**

**Eighth exercise: Encomium**

- Speeches of praise, highlighting a person's qualities.

**Ninth exercise: Vituperation**

- Speeches of blame

**Tenth exercise: Comparison**

- Takes Encomium and Vituperation and juxtaposes them to highlight one side or the other.

**Eleventh exercise: Characterization**

- Students role-play as characters, historical or literature. How would a certain character behave? It forces students to be sensitive of their characters and narratives' nuances.

**Twelfth exercise: Descriptive**

- Students foster vivid expression and detailed reporting. *“To produce representation in unrestrained form, use different figures of speech, and portray accurately things that are being described.” Hermogenes.*



**Thirteenth exercise: Thesis**

- Students have to create a general proposal.

**Fourteenth exercise: Law proposition**

- Students are trained to argue and stand for any stances/existing law.