

BEING A TEACHER

By Ian Brown

In 1978 I moved with my partner Jennifer from Montreal to the West Coast. We settled in White Rock. Within a couple of weeks, I got a job as a Program Supervisor for Surrey Parks and Recreation. The job encompassed various roles, from delivering supplies to different locations across Surrey, to being responsible for evaluating adult programs. Every month I had to attend meetings of the Community School Coordinators. I learned that the Director of Adult Education who had hired me was grooming me for a job as a Coordinator. I wasn't interested. Being an administrator seemed to me a thankless task of endless frustrations and few rewards. However, I got to know the guys in charge, including the Coordinator for White Rock. I mentioned to her that I was a teacher and that teaching is what I wanted to do – in particular literacy classes to adults. I had had my taste of High School teaching in Montreal and knew that I wanted to avoid the Public School system if possible. Candy, the Coordinator, told me that she would keep her eye open for the coming year.

The main memory I have of the Program Supervisor job was of how it was based on a free enterprise model. As part of my job, I got to see what each teacher was getting paid; when I saw that the teacher of the 'Tarot Cards' class was getting \$12 an hour while the very hard-working women in the daycare were only getting \$5 an hour, I asked for an explanation at a meeting. I was told simply that the Tarot Cards class was popular and that \$12 an hour is what the teacher demanded, while the daycare teacher-workers had not tried to negotiate. Hmm ...!

I did do some teaching in my spare time, namely private lessons in playing piano by ear, building on what I had learned in Montreal. The experience reinforced my realization that teaching was my vocation – it was what I valued and what I wanted to do. The process was fulfilling and the feedback rewarding. Of the five or six students that I taught, all were adults and all of them had a similar story about how they had been made to take piano lessons as a child, had found the strictness and emphasis on 'correctness' stifling, and had quit when they had a chance. The proposition that they could play by ear was enticing. As one woman put it, "all I want is to be able to play 'Happy Birthday to You' for my daughter at her party." Based on my experiences in Montreal, I knew I could deliver when I told new students that I could teach them how to play simple tunes with chords within a relatively short time; this promise included basic blues and rock and roll patterns. I loved the focus and intimacy that one- to-one teaching afforded. And after the abrasive atmosphere of special ed. teaching, the pleasure and gratitude of my piano students reinforced my confidence that I had a real aptitude for teaching which involved good communication skills and an ability to reduce apparent complexity - through explanation and demonstration - to simple and accessible information. These days (2021) there are some excellent materials and methods, but in those days (late 70's -80's) 'playing by ear' was regarded an esoteric blessing rather than something anybody could learn. However, I did come across one book a few years later with the marvelous title, 'How To Play Piano Despite Years and Years of Lessons'!

Professor Henchey at McGill used to say "if you are approached by a parent and asked to give your educational philosophy, you need to be able to give a concise and articulate response." Unfortunately, a lot of people think that all a teacher does is sit in a classroom and get students to study their textbooks. Here are two quotations on learning/education that reflect that mind set:

"Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach." (George Bernard Shaw)

"Lady, if you got to ask, you ain't got it," (Fats Waller – when asked to explain jazz)

I believed that if you really understood something, it was possible to deconstruct it, and you could explain it. It could be taught. It could have meaning. It could be learned. So George, listen up! There is no reason why a teacher cannot be a creative artist with great knowledge of form and content, highly developed communication skills, exceptional imagination and intuition, and great experience with perceptual analysis, modes of application, and overall knowledge of what works when and with whom, and for how long and why. Those who can, teach. Those who can't, write plays that are too intellectual or abstract for the average person and content that ages quicker than great leaps in knowledge and timeless wisdom. So there, GBS!!

In the Fall of 1979, Candy The Coordinator called me and said that there was a teacher of E.S.L. in White Rock whose class was overflowing and had appealed for a volunteer. I met with the teacher in question and on discovering that I was qualified, Joan (the ESL teacher) gave me her intermediate level students.

At the same time, I had applied for a job teaching A.B.E. (Adult Basic Education) at Capilano College. I was interviewed and got the job. I knew that ABE was the program that dealt with adult literacy. However I soon found out that the Capilano students were anything but Paulo Freire's poor, illiterate farm workers. Instead, the class was mainly comprised of High School dropouts from middle class homes who had reluctantly accepted that in order to get a half- decent job, they needed to get a High School Diploma. My job was to motivate and guide these apathetic teenagers towards achieving that goal. It was tedious work and I had to motivate myself to make the long trip from White Rock to North Vancouver three times a week.

The ESL job in White Rock was more interesting. My students were older adults, mainly Dutch and German immigrants with a few Asians and Hispanics. I had experience teaching conversational English due to the Japanese diplomat in London and the Hydro Quebec guys. The White Rock class all had basic English skills so I did not find it too challenging to present suitable materials. My main memory of that class was the tension between the Dutch and Germans, all of whom would have experienced World War II. I know I used methods that the other teacher found strange, like getting my students to read and discuss a short story by D.H. Lawrence and organizing a 'Life Raft Debate' (a spin off from 'Teaching Social Studies Through Drama). However, Joan could see that the students liked and respected me and were satisfied with what they were learning. Meanwhile, we discovered we had a lot in common and quickly went from being colleagues to friends and lovers. By the spring of 1980, Joan knew she was pregnant and a few months later, the students in both classes knew too. They all approved of our relationship and were happy we were going to become partners and parents.



Joan and I with some of her students

Meanwhile, a world event was to set the course of my teaching career for years to come. Following the end of the Vietnam War, thousands of South Vietnamese took to the high seas in makeshift boats in order to escape the communist regime. By April 1980, the Canadian Government committed to accept 60,000 refugees. This decision had immediate reverberation in the world of ESL. Community Colleges scrambled to set up classes. I was affected directly at Capilano College when I was asked to switch from ABE instruction to teaching Beginner level ESL to newly arrived Vietnamese refugees.

At the same time, Douglas College in Surrey had a similar rapid expansion of their ESL program. Joan and I were approached and asked to co-teach a class in the Fall. We agreed on condition that we could both take leave of absence in November when our baby was due.

1980 was a year of many changes. I quit my job at Capilano College and Joan and I moved in together. In the Spring, we said goodbye to our White Rock classes. In the summer, we both taught ESL to visiting Japanese schoolchildren in Vancouver.



And in September and October, we taught a class of Vietnamese refugees at Douglas College. These students had gone through some very traumatic experiences. They were incredibly grateful to have escaped, to still be alive and to have an opportunity to start a new life. Often ESL teachers are the first significant contact refugees have had with their new culture. Joan and I found that our role was more than just language teaching. There was a need for the classroom to be a safe place with a warm, accepting, respectful atmosphere.

The students showed that they really liked both of us. We reciprocated by inviting them to our house in White Rock. It was a farewell visit at the end of October. Our baby was due in a matter of weeks and as arranged, we were handing the class over to two other teachers.



Farewell party for our students
in White Rock

However, as things turned out, it wasn't the last visit. In late November, after our daughter had been born, we received several calls from students who were distressed by what was happening with our replacements. We invited them to visit. We were concerned to learn that the new teachers had a 'tough love' attitude and were sending students out to shopping malls for 'contact' assignments. We listened as they told us of the stress of being made to approach people at random and ask for directions or for the price of different items in a store. Joan and I were well acquainted with the contact approach and had used it with the intermediate students in White Rock. But they were immigrants who had been in the country for years and were not coming straight from experiences involving rape, killing and terrifying experiences in small boats. What the

Vietnamese students needed was a classroom that was a safe container in which they could attain adequate language skills and get more grounded in their new unfamiliar culture *before* having to deal with the external world.

The students were really upset and begged Joan and I to return as their teachers. We said we couldn't do that but that we would call the replacement teachers and relay our concerns. Their response was to 'double down' and say that we had been too nurturing and that Canada was a country of free enterprise and that the sooner students learned to fend for themselves, the better. Oh Lord, how misguided! But there was nothing else we could do and so had to let it go.

Joan was disillusioned with the administration of ESL programs in general and decided that she would return to teaching Orff music to young children, something with which she had prior experience.

So it was that in the Spring of 1980, that I signed up as a contract Instructor at Kwantlen (the name 'Douglas College' had recently been changed to Kwantlen College).

* * *

My career of 'being a teacher' developed over the next twenty-one years (1980-2001) as an ESL teacher at Kwantlen. For almost all that time, I taught Beginner level students. That was where I gained experience and honed skills as an educator.

From the time I dropped out of the Masters program at The London School of Economics, I had applied for and been accepted by five (!) different Masters programs, these being a Masters in Special Education at McGill, a Masters in Education at Concordia University, a Masters in Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (O.I.S.E.), a Masters in Adult Education at the University of British Columbia (U.B.C.), and a Masters in Education at Simon Fraser University (S.F.U.). With the exception of one course at Concordia and one course at S.F.U., in every case I had been haunted by the ghosts of L.S.E. and kept changing my mind about whether or not to do graduate studies.

However, the course at S.F.U. had been worthwhile. It was described simply as 'Curriculum Studies' and the teacher was Professor Maurice Gibbons. In 'Becoming a Teacher', I mentioned that I had been deeply influenced by two teachers at Graduate School. One was Norman Henchey at McGill. The other was Maurice Gibbons.

The following is a quote from an article written by Professor Gibbons, entitled "Walkabout; Searching for the Right Passage from Childhood and School".

"My special interest and my thesis focused on self-directed learning (SDL), finding ways to encourage and guide students in creating their own learning programs ... one night I saw the Australian film Walkabout, a story of two white children about to die from exposure in the desert-like outback when they are saved by a young aboriginal on his Walkabout, a six-month challenge of survival that was a transition to adulthood that he had been preparing for all his life. I was moved and asked, "What would an equally appropriate preparation be for youth in a sophisticated urban society like our own?" The activities had to be challenging and they had to include skills and experience in several fields. The fields I chose were adventure, creativity, service, practical skill, and logical inquiry. Then I added a program of goal setting, planning and action for pursuing projects in these areas. The first test was students challenging themselves; the final test was students presenting their achievements at a 'graduation' ceremony to demonstrate their readiness for adulthood. Each student is supported by a group of five to seven other students and a teacher to guide their progress and to help them understand and overcome their personal difficulties in achieving success."

The article 'Walkabout ...' was published by 'The Kappan' (Phi Delta Kappan, a professional magazine for educators) continued;

"The Kappan experienced an overwhelming response to the article and began a Walkabout Newsletter that ran for several years. Ten years later, the Kappan published "The Walkabout Ten Years Later" with articles by people running Walkabout programs, including an article by Peter Copen. Several years after that, Peter established a Walkabout program in New York State, and later he established an international program through the Internet called iEARN (www.earn.org). He wrote to me years ago and said, "Maurice, if you worry that Walkabout is fading, I can tell you that at any given time we have between one and two million students from over 140 countries following a program based on the Walkabout philosophy. Congratulations."

One day, Professor Gibbons showed us some impressive examples of his own program of self-education in the area of wood carving. I was already a believer in self-education - learning to play the piano by ear being the most obvious example. Although I liked Professor Gibbons and his course, it wasn't enough to convince me to write a thesis. I already had a job at a Community College. It seemed like I didn't really need to have a Masters. I wanted to learn experientially as a teacher in the classroom, not by further graduate level research and study.

Good educators, like Henchey and Gibbons, above all want to furnish their students with the tools of how to learn, and how to use those tools (process) and with what objective in mind (product). As a language teacher, I wanted to 'self-educate' to learn what were the best tools and the best way of designing them and using them. Because I made it clear that I *wanted* to teach Beginners, I was able, over the next fifteen years, to dig deeply into the syntax and context of the English language. And at the same time. I was able to experiment with my new teaching tools and assess how good they were as far as functional aids for my students.

* * *

At this point, I should say that **the next section may be of interest only to Teachers**, or more specifically, only *ESL* teachers, or maybe even ... only *Beginner Level/ESL* Teachers! ... oh, one more I ... only to *Adult* Beginner Level ESL Teachers! Whatever. I will just plow on trying to find the best words to do justice to my experience.

Kwantlen College (later to be Kwantlen University College, or KUC) ran federally supported ESL classes. There were three levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced. This later became five levels: lower beginner, upper beginner, lower intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced. I always taught lower beginner, or 'beginner beginners'. That meant dealing with new immigrants (some refugees, many traumatized), most of whom had only a few words of English. The important point there is that you cannot make any assumptions about which words are going to register and which ones won't. As a teacher, new to Beginner level ESL, there is a gradual and ongoing observation and paring down of one's own 'low frequency' words and phrases (especially idioms). You become simpler, briefer and more consciously purposeful with your choice of spoken words (and that can even spread into your out-of-class conversational mode).

The program was run on a 'continuous entry' basis. For the students, the duration was 14 weeks. Take a moment to think about this: how do you start when a student enters your class with barely any English language?

First, as mentioned, you do not make any assumptions. It may be that they have grammatical knowledge but few or no oral/aural skills. So initial assessment is important (as is progress assessment later). Your teaching starts with building a basic 'survival' vocabulary. Combining images with words as in The Oxford

Picture Dictionary facilitates understanding and retention. Focus on high priority/frequency nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns. Explain the difference between statements and questions (both the yes/no and ‘wh’ variety ... e.g. ‘do you study English?’ and ‘where do you study English’). Remember the teacher’s goal at a beginner level should not be on ‘correct’ grammar but to bolster the ability to communicate. If a student says “I no speak good English”, it is counter-productive to tell the student that it **should** be ‘I *don’t* speak good English, let alone ‘I don’t speak English *very well*’.

But to be an effective teacher, as important as any language instruction is seeing and relating to the person – showing interest in who they were, their story, their feelings and perceptions – creating a supportive environment. In my experience, field trips were a good way to get to know each other and orientate the students to a new culture. Knowing a few words in their language was important. It validated their knowledge and experience and allowed the teacher to engage in a ‘low status/high status’ interaction, whereby for a moment or two, the students could become the teacher and the teacher could play the struggling learner.

The irony of me being a language teacher is that I had not been a good language learner at school. I got confused by grammatical complexity. But I knew that in the same way playing piano could be simplified, there must be a way of simplifying language acquisition. Gradually, over the course of several years, I was able to deconstruct and simplify how I taught beginner level English.

From Maurice Gibbens, I had learned that a teacher could be a (a) ‘curriculum user, (b) a ‘curriculum chooser’, (c) a ‘curriculum developer’, or some combination of all three. What this meant was that at first it helped to find and follow a useful textbook. Then, as knowledge increased of what was available and what had worked in practice, it was natural to select one’s teaching materials from different sources. Finally, for a creative teacher, the next step was to design one’s own materials.

In my case, as a predominantly right brain learner, I wanted to use and create learning tools that utilized images and graphic diagrams. I started using a resource named ‘See it, Say It’ cards. For example



I would show students a card like this and get them to practice the 4 basic language structures (in their simplest form) of:

- (1) + statement: subject + verb + object; e.g. *she take(s) cookie*
- (2) – statement: “ + auxiliary + verb + object;
e.g. *‘she no take cookie’* (lower beginner)
‘she doesn’t take a cookie’ (upper beginner)
- (3) Yes / no ?: auxiliary + subject + verb + object
e.g. *‘does she take a cookie?’*
- (4) ‘WH’?: WH + aux + subject + verb + object
e.g. *‘when does she take a cookie?’*

These 4 structures were the building blocks (or learning tools) that lead to further construction. For example:

‘Where’ questions would lead to **prepositions of place** in the response ...

e.g. (Q) *Where are the cookies?* (A) *‘in the jar’* *‘on the shelf’* *‘up on the shelf beside the fridge’* etc.

‘When’ questions would lead to **prepositions of time** in the response ...

e.g. (Q) *When does she take a cookie?* (A) *after* her mom leaves ... *before* her mom returns;

OR: (Q) *When will she take a cookie?* (A) *in* a minute

OR: (Q) *When did she take a cookie?* (A) 5 minutes *ago*

I would pin charts of ‘WH’ question and appropriate response words on the wall. For example:



Over time. I further developed these learning tools. Eventually, I produced a Resource Book for students that included such materials as the following

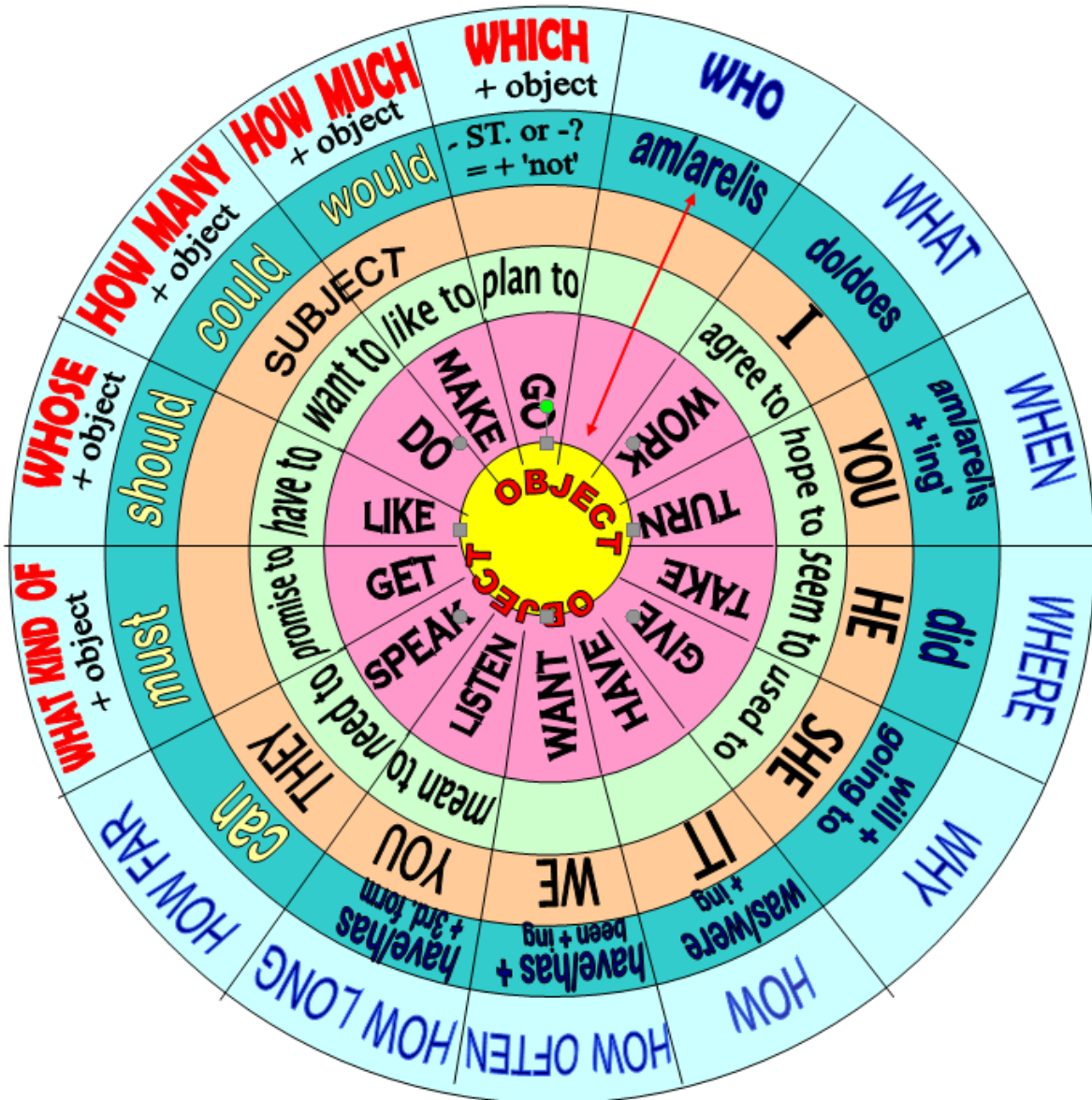
LEARNING MAPS:

8 TENSES → 6 STRUCTURES ↓	S.P.	P.C.	PAST	FUTURE
AUXILIARY	DO/DOES	AM/ARE/IS + 'ING'	DID + 'ED'	WILL AM/ARE/IS + 'GOING TO'
TIME EXPRESSION	'EVERY' + F.A.'s <i>i.e. always, usually, often, sometimes, rarely, seldom, never</i>	TODAY, NOW, AT THE MOMENT,	YESTERDAY, AGO, LAST, JUST	TOMORROW, IN, NEXT, ABOUT TO
+ STATEMENT	She sometimes speaks English at home.	She is speaking English at the moment..	She spoke English 2 days ago.	She'll speak English well in a year. She's going to speak English.
- STATEMENT	She doesn't usually speak it in the coffee break..	She isn't speaking English now..	She didn't speak English yesterday.	She won't speak it next week. She isn't going to speak it next week.
YES/NO ?	Does she speak English at school every day?	Is she speaking English to her neighbour right now?	Did she speak English last week?	Will she speak English after class? Is she going to speak it after class.
'WH' ?	(Q) Where does she sometimes speak English? (A) At home	(Q) Who is she speaking English to at the moment? (A) Her neighbour.	(Q) Why did she just speak English to her mother? (A) Because she wants her to practice.	(Q) Why's she about to speak English to her relatives in India? (A) She wants to practice.

The different maps were color coded so that I could say to the students, e.g. "look at the blue map".

THE GRAMMAR WHEEL: (see illustration & explanation below)

GRAMMAR WHEEL



I used The Grammar Wheel as an explanatory graphic. Unfortunately for one reason or another, I never completed the project which was to get it produced as a cardboard device of 4 rotating disks around 2 central disks - 14 high frequency verbs and an innermost disk ('object'). At the centre and holding the disks together was a rivet. Students could visually understand and practice 'statement', 'yes/no question' and 'WH' question structures by rotating the disks accordingly. So, for example: in the image above, at 3 o'clock, is the verb 'take'. If we skip the light green 'modals' ring and follow the 'slice' outwards to the orange 'pronoun' ring, you see the word 'he'. If you look at the green 'auxiliary' ring, you see 'did'. Finally, in the blue outer ring. We see 'where'. Let's say that the object word is 'cookie', then we can see and produce the following structures:

- (1) Instruction / direction (imperative): V (verb) – O (object): e.g. take a cookie
- (2) + statement: S (subject) -V – O: e.g. He take(s) a cookie
- (3) Yes / No question: auxiliary – S – V – O: e.g. Did he take a cookie?
- (4) WH question: WH – aux – S – V- O: e.g. Where did he take a cookie?

It can be readily seen that by rotating the disks, the examples could convert to:

- (1) Make a cake
- (2) She make(s) a cake
- (3) Will she make a cake?
- (4) When will she make a cake?

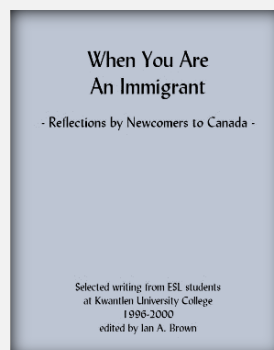
These visual learning tools were of great benefit to the students. I had one student who was a celebrated author from mainland China. He had written books that were critical of the Maoist regime which is why he had found it necessary to come to Canada. As is often the case with people who are highly literate in their own language, this man, Gu Hua, had great difficulty opening his mind to, let alone grasping a foreign language. Visual aids made that task that much easier.

Here is a picture of Gu Hua and me on the ferry to Victoria:



We were on a field trip to see the provincial museum and B.C. Legislature.

I wanted to facilitate introduction to Canadian culture but at the same time, I wanted to allow the students to reflect on their own cultures and the huge changes they were having to tolerate. To this end, as the students progressed with their acquisition of basic English, I introduced them to the computer lab and encouraged them to write about their homeland. So much of their initiation to Canada consisted of stressful experiences in which they felt their previous role and status was overlooked, it was important to validate who they were beyond and beneath 'ESL students'. Eventually, I put together a book of students' writings entitled 'When You Are An Immigrant'.



It was divided into chapters that had themes such as, ‘Leaving my country’, ‘My family of origin’, ‘Marriage and other customs in my country’, ‘The political situation in my country’. ‘First impressions of Canada and Canadians’, ‘Second impressions – what I like/dislike about Canada’, etc.

I have mentioned already that knowing a few words in the students’ language helped establish mutual trust and respect. Over many years, I compiled actual or phonetic translations to the lyrics of ‘Everybody Loves Saturday Night’ in 35 different languages. Once in a while, I would model the lyric (and make a fool of myself trying to get comprehensible Mandarin or Vietnamese intonation and pronunciation!). Then I would get the student, whose language it was, to play teacher and correct my attempt and then lead the whole class in a rendition. Overall, an opportunity for lots of laughs and validation of each student’s mother tongue.

<u>EVERYBODY LOVES SATURDAY NIGHT</u>		
1.	ENGLISH:	<u>EVERYBODY LOVES</u> SATURDAY NIGHT.
2.	CHINESE: (Mandarin)	<u>MAYFF GUI IN</u> DOSEE WHONE SING CHI LIU.
3.	CHINESE: (Cantonese)	<u>MUI GOH YUN DOE</u> HAY FOON SIN-KAY-LOOK MAAN.
4.	CZECH:	<u>KAZDY MA</u> RAD SABOTU VECER.
5.	DANISH:	<u>ALIE FL SKER</u> LORDAG ASFTEN.
6.	DUTCH:	<u>IEDERFFN FIND</u> ZATERDAG AVOND FYN.
7.	FARSI:	<u>MARDOM PANDI</u> SHANBEH SHABRA DOUST DARAN.
8.	FINNISH:	<u>YOKINEN RAKASTAH</u> LAUWANDAI ILLTAH.
9.	FRENCH:	<u>TOUT LE MONDE</u> AIME SAMEDI SOIR.
10.	GERMAN:	<u>JEDER LIEBT</u> SAMSTAGABEND.
11.	HINDI:	<u>SABEE SHENIVAR</u> KO PIAR KATAY HEH.
12.	HUNGARIAN:	<u>MINDENKI SZERETI</u> A SZOMBET ESTET.
13.	ITALIAN:	<u>TUTTI AMA</u> SABATO SERA.
14.	JAPANESE:	<u>MEENA DOYOBI</u> GA SKIDESU.
15.	KOREAN:	TOY YOQIL BAM EH <u>MODU</u> SA LANG HABSIDA.
16.	LAO:	<u>TUK TUK HOON</u> HAKLANG ONE SOW.
17.	LEBANESE:	KILL - AL - NESS <u>BEHABOO</u> LIELIT (AL) SABIT.
18.	LITHUANIAN:	<u>VISIH MEFLIH</u> SOOBATOS VAKARRA.
19.	NORWEGIAN:	<u>ALLE ELSKER</u> LORDAY KVELD.
20.	PHILLIPINO (Tagalog)	<u>LAHAT AY</u> MAHALIG SA KANLA.
21.	POLISH:	<u>WSZYSCY (VSHISTI)</u> LUBIA SOBOTNI WIECZOR (VIERCHOR)
22.	PORTUGUESE:	<u>TODOS GOSTAN</u> DOS SABADOS A NOITE.
23.	PUNJABI:	<u>HARIC SHENICHURVAR</u> NOO PIAR KARDA HEH.
24.	RUSSIAN:	<u>VSIFM NRAVITSA</u> SOBBOTA VIETCHERAM.
25.	RUMANIAN:	<u>EICAREE IUBESTE</u> SIMBATA SEARA.
26.	ARABIC:	<u>KOI WAHED</u> YAHEB YOM EL SABET.
27.	<u>SIERRA LEONE:</u>	MAWFAY MONI S'MAH HAH BEKAY.
28.	SINGHALESE:	<u>SAMADAMA SANASURADE</u> VAKARRA.
29.	SLOVENIAN:	<u>KAZHDAY IUBEE</u> SOBAUTU NAUTZ.
30.	SPANISH:	<u>A TODOS LES</u> GUSTA LA NOCHE DEL SABADO.
31.	TURKISH:	<u>HERKES .IOMARTESI</u> AKSHAMANI SEVER.
32.	VIETNAMESE:	<u>MOY NUHFF</u> EYOU TUT DOY TOO BUYEE.
33.	YIDDISH:	<u>YEDER ENER</u> GLACHT SHABBAS BA NACHT.
34.	BULGARIAN:	<u>VSICHKI OBICHAT</u> SIRBOTA VERCHER.
35.	ESTONIAN:	<u>KUIK IMIZED</u> ARMASTAVAD LAUDAVA OCHTU.

(Please excuse approximate phonetic interpretations, in some cases!)

In addition to ‘Everybody Loves Saturday Night’, I compiled a Students Songbook of simple and well-known songs that illustrated some grammatical or functional point. For example ‘Bring Back My Bonnie To Me’

illustrates verb tenses in simple present, past, present perfect and imperative forms. It is also what I would call a 'transcultural song' in that the melody has been translated into many languages and is widely known.



Between my work as an ESL Teacher and my later work as a Music Therapist, I became increasingly interested in what I called 'The Music of Language' and 'The Language of Music'. In the 1990's, the work of Carolyn Graham became popular with ESL teachers in North America. She produced a book called Jazz Chants followed by another book entitled Small Talk. The chants are organized into lines of call and response dialogue and all contain elements of rhythm, rhyme and repetition. Whereas the objective of Jazz Chants was to illustrate grammar points, the goal of Small Talk was to give examples of functional English, e.g. 'inviting', 'offering', 'requests', 'suggestions', 'giving directions' etc. I felt Carolyn Graham was like a soul sister. We were both ESL teachers and performing musicians. From the beginning, I could see how effective these chants were. Here is one chant I used:

INVITING/ SUGGESTING

| Let's have | lunch today.

| - O | K.

(N.B. 2 beats per line, stress where bar lines indicated)

Let's have lunch today.

OK.

Let's have lunch.

Let's have lunch.

Let's have lunch today.

OK.

Let's have dinner tonight.

All right.

Let's have dinner tonight.

All right.

Let's have dinner.

Let's have dinner.

Let's have dinner tonight.

All right

Students loved practicing these chants. Their applicability was immediately apparent as I would hear students using the function in differing contexts. For example, at coffee break, I might hear one student saying to another, “let’s go for coffee now”.

I have worked with various music therapy populations including geriatric, psychiatric, stroke and dementia. In most cases, if I say, for example, “Jack and Jill”, it will not take long to hear the response “went up the hill”. We remember childhood nursery rhymes because rhyme and rhythm get processed by the right brain into long term memory. So Carolyn Graham’s chants worked because: (1) they supplied the high frequency conversational English that students needed in everyday interactions, (2) they were easy to understand, practice and apply, and (3) because they were easily repeated and retained.

Focusing on ‘The Language of Music’ and the ‘Music of Language’ was how I brought together my two career paths of ESL Teaching and Music Therapy. In 1996, at the annual TEAL (Teaching English as an Additional Language) conference, I gave a workshop with the above title.

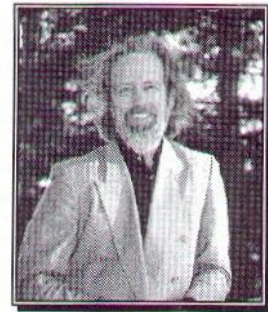
Calgary Convention Centre, May 9 -11, 1996

The Language of Music and the Music of Language

Ian Brown, BA, BIT.ED

This workshop will focus on ways in which spoken language and musical forms/contents interact. Specifically, the presenter will draw from his experience with geriatric, psychiatric, palliative, stroke and immigrant populations. The workshop will be highly experiential and will involve exposure to different categories of songs (why, when and how to use them with different clients), song writing, chants etc.

Some musical techniques from the world of language teaching, with which music therapists may be unacquainted, will be introduced and explored. The role of verbal interaction, vis-à-vis non-verbal uses of music, will be explored, as it pertains to music groups (small and large) and one-to-one work (e.g. with brain-damaged, palliative, stroke, Alzheimer’s, psychiatric, G.I.M. clients).



In addition to using music, it always helped to have a sense of humor – to make jokes and to take jokes:



Not a bad caricature! (by a Polish student)

Or play the fool once in a while:



Other things had to be taken much more seriously. For example, several times a student from India would tell me that she was being abused by her husband. I knew how sometimes a woman would be forced to have an abortion if an ultrasound showed that the first child was going to be a girl. I also knew that if a woman was disloyal to her husband, the repercussions could be harsh. It took a lot of courage for somebody to even approach me with such problems. She would be aware that this action itself would be regarded as disloyalty. It was also important that I maintain an appropriate boundary, The right thing to do was to listen, be empathetic, and then advise the student to see an on-campus counsellor.

Another serious issue arose with respect to students who has been highly qualified professionals in their country, e.g. doctors, being told that they would have to go through re-training in order to practice in Canada. Eventually, enough pressure was exerted on government such that a program entitled Prior Learning Assessment (P.L.A.) was set up. This entitled the immigrant to receive credit for his or her qualifications and experience in their home country.

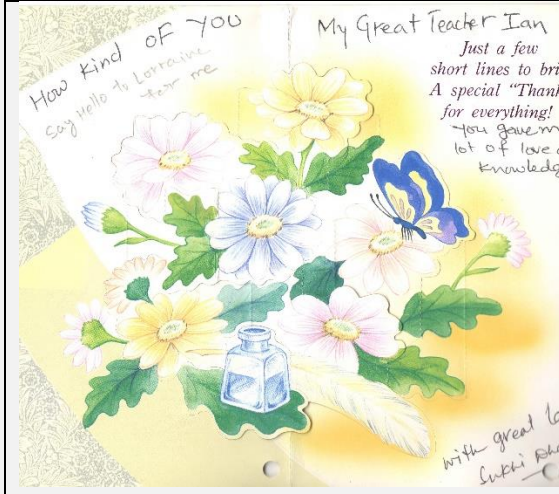
* * *

I taught at Kwantlen University College for nearly 20 years, first in a temporary part-time position and then as a full-time regularized Instructor. For the last few years before retirement, I gave a workshop entitled 'Music In The E.F.L. Classroom' (E.F.L. = English As A Foreign Language = E.S.L.). The workshop at Vancouver Community College (V.C.C.) was for student-teachers in the T.E.F.L. (Teaching English As A Foreign Language) program.

Conclusion:

As I approached retirement, I knew I had made the right career choice. I loved teaching and being a teacher. I loved learning and seeing others learn. Students can tell when a teacher feels enriched and fulfilled by their occupation. My students knew that I enjoyed what I did.

Here are some comments from both students and colleagues, as well as some images:

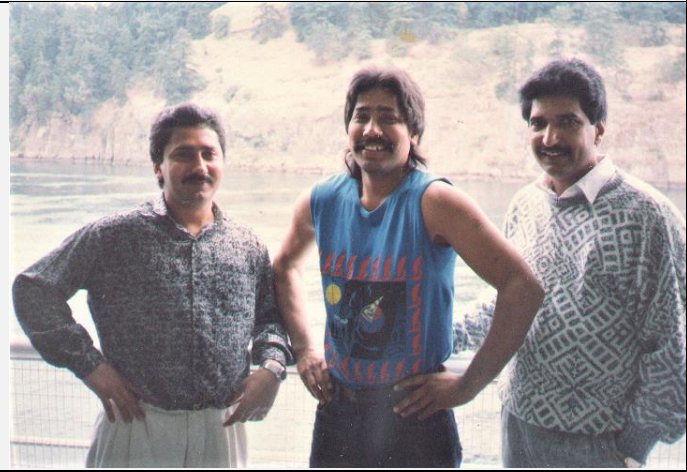


Dear Teacher Ian:

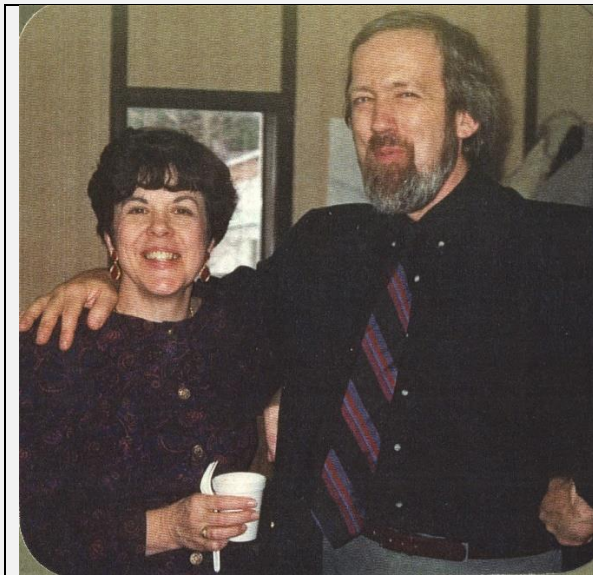
In our life we have many friends but no body is like you. We hope you'll have a happy cristmas and a new year — with you Family very very beautiful.

A teacher who's as helpful
And as nice as you all year
Deserves an extra share of fun
When Christmastime is here!

Merry Christmas
Our better wishes to you
From:
Mareo Lázaro
and
Virgilia Lázaro



My colleagues (the second image taken at my retirement party):



From the day I started at Kwanter,
I was impressed with your
genuine concern for the students.
You cared, you shared, you listened,
you taught, you reached, you played,
you loved. Thanks for your patience,
and generosity of spirit. Thanks
for your dedication to the students.
May you realize your dreams.

Lorraine

PARTS OF SPEECH

(as they pertain to Ian)

NOUNS: empathy, spirit, concern, trust,
love, joy

VERBS: share, care, teach, reach, sing, play,
listen, love

ADJECTIVES: creative, dedicated, innovative,
caring, gentle, thoughtful, kind

