

Reviews

Comptes rendus

New Canadian Voices

Jessie Porter (ed.)

Toronto: Wall and Emerson, 1991

Jessie Porter, Head of ESL at Jarvis Collegiate Institute, in the city of Toronto, has been collecting her students' writing and publishing it for other students to read for many years. Now the best of these pieces have been collected and published as a classroom text.

The pieces are arranged in theme chapters; each chapter is subdivided into sections exploring different aspects of the theme. For example, the first chapter, "Adjusting to Canada," has as sub-topics "First Experiences," "Laughter and Tears: Learning a New Language," "Making Friends," "School," "Jobs," "Parents: Newcomers to Canada," and "Family: Strangers." Several levels of writing complexity are represented in each topic, so that students in a multi-level class can read material at the appropriate level on linked themes. The pieces reflect many aspects of the immigrant experience, as it is lived by adolescents. The tone is sometimes sad, sometimes nostalgic, sometimes optimistic, and sometimes humorous. These stories, scripted scenes, essays, and poems will stimulate much discussion, personal reflection, and writing in the ESL class, where students will recognize their own experiences and understand them as part of an adjustment process that thousands of young people face in our schools.

The final section consists of pieces by graduates of the ESL program at Jarvis: young people at university or just starting their careers, looking back on their earlier experiences, looking forward to the future, offering advice to younger readers. This section adds dimension to the immigrant student: not just a newcomer, someone who has trouble adjusting to life in Canada, someone who has to learn English, but also someone who grows, someone who becomes a part of the whole.

Porter's introduction explains how she elicits this kind of writing from her students, and how she directs the writing process. In fact, the whole book provides a wonderful model of the writing process,

from pre-writing to publication. Each section is followed by suggestions for student activities. These include tasks for groups, partners, and individuals, and students can select talking and writing tasks at one of two levels of difficulty. Many of the tasks involve the students in personal responses to what they have read. Each section ends with a choice of assignments for writing folders.

ESL teachers are the most likely to buy and use this book, but it would be a pity to restrict its use to the ESL classroom. In the mainstream English classroom it would provide valuable opportunities for Canadian-born students to understand and admire immigrant students for their fortitude, their rich experience of life, and their tenacity in learning English well enough to be able to write for the pleasure and education of others. Teachers, too, can learn a lot about the immigrant students in their classes by reading some of the pieces in this book.

Elizabeth Coelho

THE REVIEWER

Elizabeth Coelho, is Program Leader for ESL/ESD with the North York Board of Education in Metropolitan Toronto. She is the author of teacher resource books, professional articles, and classroom materials.

TESLvision. A Video Resource for TESL Training, Grammar in the Learner-Centred Classroom (54 minutes); Scenes from the Adult ESL Classroom, (26 minutes)

The Board of Education for the City of Toronto, Continuing Education Department, 1990.

It's a Dream, Not a Nightmare

One of the teachers shown in the videotapes in this material uses an activity called "Dreams and Nightmares." If you apply those categories to the TESLvision kit, I would say it is a teacher educator's dream. The two videotapes and manuals which make up this package are designed for use in teacher preparation and professional development programs. Their purpose is to provide examples of planning and instruction using a flexible, learner-centred, communicative approach appropriate for adults. Apart from these stated purposes, this resource can serve several other important needs in teacher education, such as modelling ways to motivate learners, showing teacher-learner interaction, and demonstrating the integration of language skills and grouping in the classroom. The material encourages users to explore beyond what is presented, to be critical and analytical. It is shown as an example of good practice, rather than as a prescription for it.

The quality of the TV production is good, although probably not broadcast level. The developers of this material have succeeded in the difficult task of showing students and teachers at work. They appear natural and uninhibited by the recording of their activities. The producers of the tapes overcame the common tendency to regard the teacher as the key performer. They succeeded in demonstrating that the classes they taped are learner-centred.

The Manuals are well laid out, easy to read and at an appropriate level of sophistication for student teachers and teacher educators. They are not manuals in the sense of "how to do it," but rather contain overviews, discussion questions and activities that educators can use to enhance their exploration of effective teaching and their understanding of teaching issues. These materials will help instructors to become better classroom decision makers rather than imitators. Given the content, a more suitable label for these valuable books would be "guide" or "handbook".

The videotapes, *Grammar in the Learner Centred Classroom* and *Scenes from the Adult Classroom* are complementary in that they show the same teachers and students in different parts of the same class-

room activities. *Grammar* shows a progression from planning to teaching. *Scenes* focusses on four specific aspects of teaching ESL.

The videotape, *Grammar*, is in seven segments. These deal with: choosing an approach; assessing needs; planning; introducing a lesson; teaching a grammatical structure; practising with control; and, practising in a communicative manner. The tape shows how teachers base classroom tasks on actual, rather than assumed needs of adult learners. The teachers choose grammatical teaching points on the basis of what the learners need to do with the language. In one case, students learn to follow and give directions; in the others, more advanced students learn to ask for information about an apartment. *Grammar* is kept in perspective, as an element in clear communication, a vehicle for meaning. It is not treated as an end in itself. The tape makes the larger context, what students have learned in the past and what their levels of English are, clear to the viewer.

A voice-over comments judiciously on what is going on in the lessons. It helps novice teachers to appreciate elements in planning and instruction which they may not initially perceive.

The seven minute segments provide convenient bites of content to work with. The Manual that supports *Grammar* includes hints on what to watch for when you view the tape, preview and postview questions and suggested activities with which to follow up. Copies of the classroom materials the teachers use in the activities are included along with permission to copy them. They will be helpful to those who use this kit.

Scenes from the Adult Classroom works as an adjunct to *Grammar* in that it focusses on specific aspects of teaching ESL: The Adult Classroom; Giving Instructions to Learners; Teacher Talk; and, Pronunciation. This tape leaves considerable responsibility with the teacher educator to provide background and use the scenes in the context of a course. There is no narration to guide the viewer. For each scene, the Manual provides an overview for the educator, a summary of the scene, and suggested ways to work with the videotape. Almost all of the questions for discussion are effective. Three of the four topics have short bibliographies, helpful to those who want to delve into the issues in more depth.

Of the two tapes, *Grammar* is the more effective. One or two rough spots show up in *Scenes*. In one place the camera loses the student who is speaking. In another, the scene is blocked out, as if someone walked in front the camera. These are rare flaws in an overall good production.

I was surprised to find the use of the terms "trainer" and "trainee." Those terms are inconsistent with the educational approach throughout the material.

I like this kit because it represents a model consistent with effective teaching and adult learning, and is grounded in good sense. For example, the tape shows how the teacher limits the controlled practice in the lesson rather than lets it ramble on and become mindless and meaningless. She uses this part of the lesson to promote accuracy and focusses error correction here. The tape emphasizes the value of communicative practice and the teachers devote a major amount of time to it. The material does not resort to jargon. Where technical terms are used, the authors define them either in the text or in the case of *Grammar* in a short glossary.

The Board of Education for the City of Toronto, Continuing Education Department and its staff deserve congratulations for publishing such a needed and useful kit. I intend to use it in the teacher preparation course I am soon teaching. It will help to take teaching out of the abstract and aid us in studying the specifics of flexible planning and teaching. I hope those responsible will consider continuing to develop such materials.

Mary Selman

THE REVIEWER

Mary Selman, an English as a Second Language specialist, has a major interest in creating access to education. She has twenty years experience in the adult field as an instructor, a teacher educator, and an administrator. She also has experience in working in curriculum development and special projects. Her current work as an educational consultant includes ESL teacher preparation and an ESL program evaluation project.

The Skillful Teacher: On Technique, Trust, and Responsiveness in the Classroom

Stephen Brookfield

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990.

At first blush, this book may seem to be somewhat removed from the interests of readers of the *TCJ*. It is directed towards "college teachers" in the U. S. sense (which I presume means teachers of undergraduates in what Canadians would call universities), and to teachers of secondary school students in the higher grades. More explicitly, the target audience seems to be teachers of humanities subjects to native speakers of English. The author is careful to point out that he has not taken into account cultural differences among students or between students and teachers. However, this book has much to offer to both beginning and experienced teachers of ESL to high school students and adults in Canada.

The book is about the human experience of being a teacher of (relatively) mature students in the context of the constraints of North American educational institutions. In an educational world that seems to be dominated by prescriptive exhortations about the importance of certain methodological approaches to teaching specific subjects and the content of those subjects that must be addressed, this book provides a refreshing step back from those preoccupations to look at the human relations that always are at play between teacher and student and between student and student no matter what the subject matter of the class or the backgrounds of the students and the teachers. For example, the author devotes whole chapters to topics such as the personal complexity and compassion of teaching, to the importance of having a personal vision of one's teaching enterprise, to the appreciation of the tensions and emotions of learning, and to the rhythms of learning.

My first reaction to the book was that it was patronizing given that it addresses the reader as 'you' and that I had already matured as a teacher along many of the lines on which the author was giving advice. On reflection, I felt that I needed to be reminded of many of the points that were raised and got a number of new perspectives on my relationships with my students and classroom management techniques, to put the latter more crassly than I think the author intended.

To expand on this perspective, I find that the book presents an in-depth look at the personal and interpersonal aspects of teaching (young) adults regardless of the course content involved. It is helpful to read a book on teaching that transcends the 'should' of methodo-

logical prescriptions and talks about how one develops personally as a teacher in relation to students and colleagues. Also, the book describes, in very practical terms, central principles of adult education in a very approachable style. At first I found the presentation to be 'fluff', but as the author got on to topics on which I know I still need coaching after twenty-five years of teaching, I grew much more appreciative of what he had to say. One can still get an excellent overview of adult education principles (focussed more on the needs of the learners rather than on those teachers) by getting a copy of Brundage and MacKeracher (1980) from the Ontario government bookstore (at much less expense). Brookfield's book is more oriented to the individual teacher and the personal processes we all go through in developing ourselves as teachers rather than just reacting to the needs and characteristics of our students and to the fads of teaching methodology. This is not to say that Brookfield does not contribute a great deal about how teachers can relate to their students, but it does it in such a way as to emphasize the teacher's personal development as well as that of the student.

There are at least four ways in which the Brookfield book would be valuable to Canadian ESL teachers, in my view. First, it focusses, as noted above, on the personal, human relationship between teacher and student and among students rather than on contentious methodological principles that our colleagues in each subject area are obsessed with publishing about in prestigious journals. Second, it embodies the principles of adult education in a teacher oriented way. Third, it gives practical suggestions about how to deal with some universal teaching design elements and problems in secondary and adult education. For example, the author goes into considerable detail about his approaches to lecturing, preparing for class discussion, facilitating discussions, using simulations and role plays, evaluating students' work, overcoming students' resistance to learning, and building trust with students. In reading these aspects of this book I was both confirmed in solutions that I had come to in my own approach and made aware of new avenues to teaching that had not occurred to me. To be more specific, for example, he provides strategies for dealing with overly talkative students. Finally, the author does not avoid the political aspect of teaching, particularly in large educational institutions, and provides advice about surviving personally and professionally in these situations. He is general enough in his comments that teachers in almost any institutional setting can draw some useful counsel out of his comments. He talks, for example, about developing collegial relationships, what kinds of battles to fight, and various political aspects of teaching.

In conclusion on the negative side, I would reinforce for *TCJ* readers that Brookfield has explicitly not taken account of students' and teachers' cultural differences in this book. Also, many of his suggestions would not be appropriate for non-fluent speakers of English or would have to be greatly modified to make them work with ESL students. I note, in addition, that he had not gone as far as I would like on at least one point. He has an excellent section in Chapter Four about how students feel themselves to be imposters in their classes for some time because of their insecurity with the subject matter and perhaps the format of the classes. If I were to rewrite this book for ESL teachers, I would downplay the section on learners feeling that they are imposters, since most ESL learners, in my experience, have a clear idea why they are in language classes. However, I would add a chapter on how most of us as teachers feel that we are imposters in a great many of the teaching situations in which we are placed. In retrospect. I appreciate the fact that I have been placed in many teaching situations in which I have felt inadequate, because those circumstances have made me grow, but I would like to share with my colleagues the experience of anxiety that I think we all have gone through when circumstances have thrust us into challenging teaching situations that we did not feel prepared for.

However in sum, Brookfield's book has useful facets for beginning and experienced teachers. As an experienced teacher, it reminds me that I should keep better teaching journals in order to monitor my work as well as giving me new suggestions about how to deal with certain aspects of student relations. For teachers of ESL teachers in training, this book can provide valuable insights into what is ahead for them. It is certainly one person's view of teaching adults, and not all of us develop in the same ways, but reflective teachers and would-be teachers have much to gain from colleagues like Brookfield who are prepared to discuss their personal development as teachers.

Barbara Burnaby

REFERENCE

- Brundage, D. and MacKeracher, D. (1980). *Adult Learning Principles and Their Application to Program Planning*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education.

THE REVIEWER

Barbara Burnaby has taught English as a second language in Japan and in various contexts in Canada. She has done academic work on ESL for adult immigrants, ESL and Native language for Native students, and literacy issues for a variety of populations in Canada and abroad. She is a past president of TESL Canada and of World Literacy of Canada. She is currently chair of the Department of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.