

Amazing! Canadian Newspaper Stories

Susan Bates

Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1991

ISBN 0-13-026014-2

Instructor's Manual: ISBN 0-13-026022-3

Amazing! Interviews and Conversations

Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1993

ISBN 0-13-012386-2

Instructor's Manual: ISBN 0-13-014390-1

Three Audiotapes: ISBN 0-13-0342165

Amazing! Canadian Newspaper Stories and *Amazing Interviews and Conversations* are two ESL textbooks/workbooks that are based on the premise that second language acquisition is enhanced if lessons are based on specific topics or themes. The development of a knowledge base on a specific topic helps students not only classify incoming information, but also handle increasingly complex information. Whereas *Newspaper Stories* uses unusual news items as a vehicle for teaching vocabulary, geography, Canadian facts, general reading skills and much more, *Interviews and Conversations* uses the same stories as a basis from which to develop more complex language skills. Whether used alone or in tandem, these texts provide an opportunity for learners to develop their English language skills while expanding their knowledge of Canadian culture.

One has to wonder why these books were titled as they were. The titles are cumbersome. A person even has to alter his or her voice intonation to say the title correctly: *AMAZING! Canadian News Stories*. I presume that the author intended *Amazing!* to refer to "out of the ordinary" or "unusual," rather than "terrific" or "fabulous." But after reading the stories, I felt as if most bordered on Ripley's *Believe It Or Not*—Man Catches Child Who Fell From Highrise, Man Finds 147 Pound Lobster, Woman Sees UFO, Man Finds Lottery Ticket, Wins \$1.2 Million. Considering the intended readers for this material—newcomers, some refugees, from different cultures, who are going through the settlement process, I find it puzzling that such topics were chosen. I would have thought that more common situations would be depicted that could represent real-life situations, social issues that could orient newcomers to Canadian culture and cultural norms, that could empower newcomers. I can't imagine what Bosnian refugees would think about Canada if this was their introduction!

The *Newspaper Stories* book is a reading and language textbook designed for mid-beginner to low-intermediate ESL learners. The text is derived from actual newspaper stories that have been simplified and illustrated. The illustrations throughout the text were well planned, well drawn, and clear. How-

ever, the nature of the illustrations may suggest to some readers that the situations they depict are more cartoon than real life. Although photographs would have been costly, time consuming, or impossible to obtain, they might have been preferable to reinforce to adult learners that they are reading about real-life situations and Canadian culture.

Each of the 12 chapters highlights an unusual human interest story. The stories are sequenced in order of difficulty. Learners experience a wide variety of reading skill exercises focusing on skimming, scanning, main idea, inference, and evaluation, combined with newspaper reporter role plays, paired interviews, classroom discussions, student interactions, and writing assignments, expanding the reading lesson into a fully integrated language learning experience. Prereading exercises utilize actual photographs, headlines, captions, and Canadian facts. Readers are challenged through the various exercises to predict the story, build background knowledge of the topic, and become familiar with appropriate vocabulary. Teachers can guide students through maps that provide a local and national context for the stories, and picture stories that illustrate the most important points of the story. Reading and comprehension exercises help to ensure that students with varied learning styles have absorbed the material. Following these exercises, students learn to synthesize information, relate stories to their own experience, and extend the information by learning about new material related to the story.

The *Instructor's Manual* contains the original version of each newspaper story, along with generic activities (called General Procedures), Supplementary Materials, creative suggestions and samples for using the text in the classroom, and a Quiz Key. Each chapter also includes a sample week-long lesson plan. The author has paid close attention to the importance of practice and repetition for language development. The format of the lessons is anything but redundant. Although teachers can refer to the same set of General Procedures when planning each chapter, different teaching ideas are presented with each chapter. How the material is used will also vary with the specific interests, needs, and abilities of the learners. This material is ideal for multilevel classes. The *Instructor's Manual* is conveniently three-hole punched so that pages can be easily removed. However, only the Supplementary Materials section may be copied for classroom use.

The companion text, *Amazing! Interviews and Conversations*, intended for high-beginner to low-intermediate ESL students, encourages the development of listening and speaking skills. The text expands on the stories from the *Newspaper Stories* book, utilizing a conversation and interview format. It also introduces and explores related topics. Every chapter has a similar format. Each begins with a Facts Section that provides background and cultural data based on current information compiled by Statistics Canada. Using audiotapes, the learner then listens to interviews or conversations that

describe or relate to the events in the newspaper stories. Finally, short conversations, also on tape, focus on specific language functions or strategies for effective communication.

Although the taped interviews are described in the text as "authentic" and representing the natural flow of the English language, some of the interviews did not sound natural. Words were often repeated by either party in an awkward fashion, for example:

- I: "We-were you fixing the car?"
A: "Pardon?"
I: "I, I said, were you fixing the car, fixing the car?"
A: I was, I was working ...
A: I see.

To me the laughter sounded scripted and contrived and did not leave me with the impression that I was witnessing a "person-on-the-street" interview as was intended.

The accompanying *Instructor's Manual* includes not only General Procedures, Instructor's Notes, and Supplementary Materials, but also tape script from the audiotapes.

Although I noticed that the problem of having to flip back and forth between the chapters and the Supplementary Material in the *Newspaper Stories Instructor's Manual* was rectified in *Interviews and Conversations*, the latter manual was still difficult to maneuver. The General Procedures, Instructors Notes and Supplementary Material, Tape Script, and Answer Key were all in separate parts of the book. The material might have been more user-friendly if these areas had all been integrated into each chapter.

This material is well developed. Each chapter has been field tested. It is terrific to see that it is all Canadian content. It is attractively laid out. It is exciting to explore. It is challenging to find with every new chapter how many new and creative ideas there are for teaching and learning the material. This material creates an interactive learning environment that challenges instructors to keep their minds open to new ideas, to be creative, to be daring, and to apply the ideas to subjects outside the context of these texts. The material encourages readers to interact with the material: to explore, research, absorb information, and look beyond the stereotyped, narrow definition of language training.

The approach taken in these two texts is one that could be applied to other material, such as daily newspapers. The format of the books and their underlying methodologies are terrific. I hope that these texts will encourage teach-

ers to approach new material with new eyes and the knowledge that they can adapt *any* material to an appropriate level for their students.

Cindy Stewart

The Reviewer

Cindy Stewart is the Editor of Manitoba's ESL reader *Welcome News*.

Follow Francis: Video and Manual

Lorna Jamison.

Action Based Communications, 1993

Box 68143, Bonnie Doon, Edmonton, AB, T6C 4N6; Fax: (403) 469-4799; Tel: (403) 469-1563

ISBNs: No captions 0-967111-1-5; Captions 0-9697111-6-6; Audiocassette 0-9697111-3-1; *Teacher Guide* 0-9697111-2-3; *Student Book* 0-9697434-9-1

Follow Francis is a video program for learners at beginner to intermediate levels. It consists of a tape of 20 vignettes based on everyday activities, a method for using the video, and a variety of accompanying exercises. Each 3-5-minute vignette shows Francis, an affable but inept mime character, going through a series of ordinary actions while a narrator gives instructions, asks questions, or makes comments. Then there is a review of key vocabulary as still shots flash on the screen.

The video is aimed at "both adults and younger viewers" and incorporates the Total Physical Response approach with communicative exercises. The overall tone is comic but low-key and consistent with the stated aim of putting the learners at ease.

Francis is central to every lesson. In attempting to create "a likeable character with universal appeal," the producers have wisely chosen a mime/clown figure. The mime escapes the usual labels we assign to people. He is ageless. He does not need a job or status or nationality. He does not need a spoken language, a dialect or an accent. In this case even gender is ambiguous, as the actor is a woman with a false moustache and longish hair, which refuses to remain tucked into her hat. So Francis should be a character with whom many people can identify. The response of teachers and learners to Francis is key to the usefulness of this video.

The selection of topics and vocabulary is relevant and practical for adult learners. The tasks performed include cleaning the house, making a tuna sandwich, and sorting laundry. These are accomplished with simple stage settings and basic props. Although the figure of Francis will also appeal to younger learners, the topics will not be so appropriate for them. Francis is a childlike adult, but he does not play. He follows an exercise tape to lose

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weight, he goes on a date, he prepares a fancy dinner. These are activities that young people may observe rather than actually doing themselves.

Of the 20-35 utterances in each episode, about 10 items are chosen for repetition. The vocabulary is presented in context and in phrases or sentences so that there is a focus on collocation. "You should flatten the cardboard box," "Don't buy eggs in foam cartons," "The shirt is wrinkled." The words are useful and high-frequency items in daily conversation.

The integration of grammar and idiomatic usage are achieved simply and clearly by varying verb tenses, incorporating prepositions and including such items as partitives, negative forms and various parts of speech. In this way Following Francis goes a little beyond the typical TPR focus on the imperative. Integrating TPR and communicative methods, the video presents new language in context and in chunks which are authentic, as seen in the following examples:

Put on a warm jacket.
Zip it.
It's on backwards.
Unzip it.
You have to take it off.

You're all dressed up.
Is company coming?
Why don't you comb your hair?
That looks better.

In clips like these the medium of video is very effective. The gestures are natural and understandable facilitating acquisition. These are actions we all perform regularly, but many are almost impossible to illustrate in books.

The humor in *Follow Francis* sometimes takes the form of a punchline, as when Francis carefully makes popcorn and then sprinkles sugar on it instead of salt. In other situations, the comedy runs through a series of exercises to lose weight, but continues munching junk food all along. Unfortunately, the first episode "A Day Off With Francis" is not as funny as those that follow it and makes for disappointing first impression.

The background music in each segment subtly sets the mood and adds to the relaxed nature of the presentation. Putting the students at ease is one of the purposes of the method described by the authors. The four-step approach is typical of TPR:

1. Watch—listen—do the actions.
2. Listen—do the actions.
3. Repeat after the narrator.
4. Speak before the narrator.

This approach seems more likely to appeal to younger people than to adults. The authors have anticipated some resistance or reluctance on the

part of both learners and teachers, and reassure us that the method does work. However, the question remains, will the expectation that the students imitate the actions in fact lead to another form of stress? The use of TPR in ESL seems to be generally as an adjunct, an approach used in the context of other methods. This suggests reluctance on the part of teachers to ascribe to TPR basic methodology status. This video package will be adopted more readily by those who are willing to adapt it and who don't feel bound to follow the suggested approach but can integrate the material into their own eclectic method.

The manual that accompanies the video explains the methodology and then goes on to suggest numerous expansion activities for speaking and writing, as well as lesson-by-lesson warm-up and/or discussion topics. The main part of the manual consists of 20 reproducible exercise sheets (one per lesson) with written exercises: matching, fill-in-the-blank, scrambled sentences, and so forth. The photographs on some of these pages are regrettably of poor quality, but on the whole the layout is clear. The manual is quite concise and admirably accessible. It is also a good source of ideas that can be adapted to other content.

Follow Francis provides a lighthearted and well-thought-out presentation of daily functional English. Its uses may be more varied than the manual suggests. Teachers and learners may find it useful for reviewing topics, not only introducing them. The simple and clear presentation of language in both the video lessons and the exercises in the manual are to be commended.

Nabiha Atallah

Acknowledgment: Thanks to Gina Ordoñez and her class at Red River Community College for their helpful comments.

The Reviewer

Nabiha Atallah is an ESL instructor at Red River Community College in Winnipeg. She is currently working on curriculum development and resource.

Reviews/Comptes rendus

How Languages Are Learned

Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada

Oxford University Press, 1993

ISBN 0-19-437169-7

Writing an introduction to second language acquisition for language teachers requires a special kind of dual expertise: a comprehensive grasp of research and theory in the field combined with a clear understanding of the issues that teachers have to grapple with. For such a volume to be accessible to nonresearchers, it needs to be clear and succinct, but not simplistic; to adequately represent the field and serve teachers truly, it must deal forthrightly with controversial issues, acknowledge uncertainties, and not descend into dogma.

How Languages are Learned, a new addition to the Oxford series of handbooks for language teachers, stands up admirably to the test. As internationally recognized scholars in the area of second language acquisition, authors Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada bring to this work an in-depth knowledge of the field. At the same time, their experience in teacher education and their strong background in ESL classroom research in Canada give them a clear appreciation of, and respect for, the point of view and concerns of language teachers. This slim 135-page volume is a lively, highly readable account of the field; it avoids getting bogged down in details yet is meticulous in its evenhanded coverage of the issues. Its avowed purpose is to provide second and foreign language teachers with information that will help them to evaluate the claims of new language teaching methods and texts, and that will encourage them to reflect on their teaching experiences, thereby achieving greater understanding of themselves as teachers and of their students as learners.

The book consists of a brief introduction followed by six chapters clearly organized according to topic and each concluded by a short list of sources and suggestions for further reading. Most chapters also contain one or two awareness activities for the reader to carry out. In the introduction, for example, readers are invited to begin by indicating their level of agreement or disagreement with a number of popular views about language learning. In the final chapter, the authors return to these popular views and present their own opinions on the issues based on their reading of the research. The five chapters in between deal respectively with (a) first language acquisition, (b) theories of second language learning, (c) factors affecting second language

learning, (d) learner language, and (e) second language learning in the classroom.

Based on the premise that there are important similarities between first and second language acquisition, the authors begin appropriately in Chapter 1 with an outline of three major theoretical approaches to first language acquisition: behaviorist, innatist, and interactionist, each of which is seen to contribute to an understanding of different aspects of children's language development. In Chapter 2, these three theoretical approaches are reconsidered in relation to second language learning, and a brief discussion of cognitive theory as a newer psychological approach is added. The treatment of Krashen's "innatist" creative construction theory is a good example of the authors' careful presentation. This theory is recognized as having been influential in strengthening the emphasis on communicative language teaching. The reader is warned, however, that despite its intuitive appeal, the theory has certain shortcomings.

With the current emphasis on learner-centered approaches to teaching, the role of individual characteristics in language learning is clearly of major interest to teachers. In Chapter 3, the authors review the evidence for the effects of various learner characteristics on second language acquisition, such as intelligence, language aptitude, personality, motivation and attitudes, and learning styles. The research results are interpreted with due circumspection, given the difficulty of measuring such variables and their complex interactions. Several pages are also devoted to a consideration of age differences and the important administrative issue of when second language instruction should begin.

In Chapter 4, the concept of learner language is examined, readers are given a taste of error analysis, and some examples of developmental sequences in English as a second language (negatives, question formation, and relative clauses) are neatly summarized. Chapter 5 concentrates in some detail on classroom environments for second language learning, how they may differ from natural acquisition contexts and from each other in terms of input and interactional opportunities, how different proposals for language teaching relate to theoretical views of acquisition, and what relevant research studies have shown. Of considerable importance for teachers is the conclusion that there is a need to balance form-focus and meaning-focus in language teaching.

Further noteworthy features of this excellent book include its amusing cartoons, its useful glossary of technical terms, and its well-organized index. Also refreshing to this reviewer was the polished appearance of the volume—not a single typo to be seen.

Books in this handbook series are designed not only for language teachers but also for teacher trainers, to serve as a basis for courses and seminars as well as to provide reference texts for practicing teachers. *How Languages are*

Learned is exceptionally well suited for both these professional development purposes. It is fully deserving of its first place prize in the recent Duke of Edinburgh English language book competition.

Birgit Harley

The Reviewer

Birgit Harley is a professor in the Department of Curriculum at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education where she teaches courses in second language learning and teaching and does research in second language classrooms.

Learner-Based Teaching

Colin Campbell and Hanna Kryszewska

Oxford University Press, 1992

ISBN: 19-43716-38

Campbell and Kryszewska wrote their book as a result of working together at the English Language Center, University of Gdansk, Poland. Unable to depend on sophisticated materials and technology in a resource-poor environment, they developed an alternative approach to teaching. They moved away from dependence on the predetermined content and format of published materials and allowed learners to take over decision making. Learner input and the learners themselves were their primary resource for teaching materials. Language skill development was interactive, challenging, and fun. Students were actively engaged and in control.

The book begins with a series of questions and explanations that provide an introduction to the learner-based approach and subsequent activities. Following a definition of learner-based teaching, the authors consider with advantages and potential problems the role of the teacher, course books, and teaching materials.

The book is organized into seven sections of activities: grammar, vocabulary, integrated skills, writing, translation, games and exam preparation. The authors suggest that teachers look under "language focus" when selecting activities. There is no linguistic progression within the sections of the book. Each section includes 10 activities, the majority for intermediate level students, with an average of 30-60 minutes required per activity. Some activities are for the beginner level, some for all levels. Each activity section is organized with information presented under four headings: title, level, time, and language focus. Sometimes variations, class samples, and remarks are included. The book concludes with an invitation to analyze and reflect on one's own teaching. "Am I doing this already?" "Could I do more?" Two activities show how lessons can be planned using the principles of learner-based teaching.

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The book provides a practical collection of classroom activities that could be used with a variety of student groups. It is unfortunate that there is no definition of ability assumed at a particular stage. As a result, one assumes that many tasks/activities in the book were designed for university level students of EFL in Poland. There is a very different reality from that of the majority of ESL students in Canadian classes, who are dealing with a variety of life situations, settlement and adjustment problems, varying degrees of language sophistication, and multilingual and multilevel classes. Unilingual homogeneous groups of full-time students with academic backgrounds and aspirations are a rarity here.

This is not to say that the book is without merit. There are many good suggestions for resourceful, inventive teachers who are willing to experiment with their teaching situations. Those willing to invest the time necessary to use the ideas offered in the book, and tap into the knowledge and experience of their students, can't help but make their learning more relevant, varied, enjoyable, and interactive.

Classroom Dynamics

Jill Hadfield

Oxford University Press, 1992.

ISBN: 19-43714-76

"My group just doesn't jell": A common complaint made by teachers when class atmosphere and group chemistry seem to undermine the effectiveness and success of their painfully designed and delivered lessons.

Can classroom atmosphere be created so that learning can be facilitated? Author Jill Hadfield shows the reader that it can. She suggests a variety of activities to accomplish the development of a positive learning atmosphere and a sense of group. Her book focuses on a vital element in the teaching/learning process—the belief that language learning should be an enjoyable experience for teacher and learner alike.

The book was written following two survey questionnaires sent to language schools and state colleges all over Britain. These surveys resulted in the definition of an unsuccessful group, and of a successful one. In order to improve relations and atmosphere in a group, there is a need for cooperation and harmony. The morale, motivation, and self-image of the learner have a significant effect on the learning situation. Hadfield explores ways to encourage the development of positive group characteristics and makes practical suggestions from which to select and adapt, according to the preferences and needs of a particular group.

The book is organized into three sections and gives detailed information about 102 different classroom activities that can be used to form, maintain,

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The book is organized into three sections and gives detailed information about 102 different classroom activities that can be used to form, maintain,

and bring closure to group. There is a comprehensive table of contents that lists every activity, the suggested level, and the time required.

Section A suggests 13 icebreakers that aim to create a relaxed and supportive atmosphere in the classroom. Section B, the largest part of the book, comprises 80 practical classroom activities, games, and techniques to encourage the characteristics of a successful group. It includes activities to raise awareness of commonalities and differences, to foster and maintain the group dynamic. Section C suggests nine activities to round off the group experience and evaluate its success.

In many of the activities the author has attempted to incorporate a linguistic as well as a group dynamic focus. The Language Focus Index at the end of the book is a useful summary of topics and structures with a list of section markers for easy reference.

It should be noted that this is not a course book, nor is it suitable for every group. Many activities are interdependent and thus are not designed to be used in isolation or out of context. The activities are all part of the process of developing a cohesive and supportive group. Using the book requires an integrated and balanced approach. It is not an emergency handbook; using it will not repair or regenerate a negative and antagonistic collection of individuals. The author suggests that the book be read in its entirety before any specific activity is selected for use with a group.

Several considerations are offered regarding the selection and integration of activities into the teaching situation. Teaching style, group composition, timing, and program constraints are important in determining which activities can be incorporated into a particular program. The book offers teachers, both new and experienced, interesting and practical suggestions and ideas to add variety to their routine classroom activities while developing and maintaining a sense of group. Individual instructors can select and adapt appropriate activities to enhance and facilitate language acquisition. Who says that learning can't be fun?

Janice Scott

The Reviewer

Janice Scott is an ESL teacher who is currently working with the Settlement and Adult Language Training Branch at Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship Division. She is the Coordinator of Teacher Support for the Community-based Language Training Program.
