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## Reviews/Comptes Rendus

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### **On Target: A Resource Book of Stage One Assessment Tasks Referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks**

*Christine W. Mitra (Editor)*

Bow Valley College, 1998

ISBN: 0-9681233-4-1, 217 pages

One particular result of the Canadian Language Benchmarks implementation has been the development of some welcome and highly useful resources. *On Target: A Resource Book of Stage One Assessment Tasks Referenced to the Canadian Language Benchmarks* is one of those resources.

*On Target* is a resource of reproducible sample language assessment tasks for Stage I (basic proficiency) of the Canadian Language Benchmarks. It is intended for classroom teachers and others who “face the challenge of providing meaningful proficiency assessments of their students and clients,” (An Overview) and want those results to be CLB referenced.

There are tasks for all three skill areas (Listening/Speaking, Reading, and Writing) organized in lightly color-coded sections. Each skill area section has a variety of assessment tasks for each CLB level, and each level has tasks for the four competences. In the Listening/Speaking section, at CLB level 1 for example, there are the following tasks: two Instruction, four Social Interaction, two Information, and four Suasion. Most tasks have line drawings that provide additional context, and there are also clear instructions for administering and scoring the tasks.

The resource has a number of notable strengths. It is a decidedly inviting, accessible resource. There is significant compatibility to the CLB, even down to the various icons that have been used throughout the book. The selected tasks are for the most part functional and realistic and emphasize the view reflected in the *CLB Working Document* that “language is communication.” Listening/Speaking tasks use discourse completion activities, dialogue participation, map directions, and a number of other creative communicative activities. Reading tasks use modified authentic texts, such as TV listings, appointment schedules, laundry labels, ads, and recipes. Writing tasks include activities such as writing notes to school, get-well cards, cheques for magazine subscriptions, and video rental agreement forms. Scoring procedures reflect the CLB’s focus on negotiation of meaning as the primary intent of tasks.

The book is well laid out and clearly formatted. The typeface is large, clear, and easy to read (even for the bifocal generation!). The administering

and scoring instructions are user-friendly and accessible, and—oh joy, oh bliss—the resource is photocopyable under certain conditions. A private purchaser may make copies for use in his or her own classroom, and school purchasers may make copies for use by the staff and students in the school only. As is reasonably to be expected, there is a cost for this photocopying privilege. The price of the book is \$85.00.

There are, of course, a few aspects of the resource that should be addressed in its next printing; however, for the most part they are minor. As mentioned above, there are several tasks for each competence described in every skill area. For the most part tasks related to one competence are grouped together. Reading level 3 is the exception. For some reason—probably an oversight—the tasks are more randomly organized, which makes this section somewhat confusing. There are also occasional inconsistencies, such as between Canadian versus United States spelling (*color* on page 54; *cheque* on page 182) and the use of Information Text versus Informational Text in the headings. The blank numbered pages between the skills are also a bit disconcerting. They suggest on first reading that there is missing text, which there is not. The idea of color-coding the pages to separate the sections is a helpful idea, but the differentiation in color is so slight that we did not even notice it until it was pointed out. The difference in the texture of the pages is more discernible than the color variations.

Somewhat more problematical are a couple of tasks that should be looked at again. In the Writing level 3 task on page 186, the wording *What was your trip like?* although common in everyday English is likely to cause a lot of confusion as students interpret it as *Did you like your trip?* Possibly this could be reworded in a future printing. The task on page 190—also Writing level 3—uses a sequence of pictures to prompt the writing of a paragraph in the past tense. These pictures, however, show typical routine activities that any teacher might use to initiate language in the present tense. On page 196 another Writing level 3 activity to write a get-well card reminds students to *address ... the card*. Students may well assume as we first did, that this instruction means to address an envelope to the recipient, rather than to put the recipient's name on the card.

The most problematical task is a Reading level 1 task on page 66. This is a formatted text activity using a calendar as the text. Strangely, the calendar shows only four days across the top! This lack of authenticity seems so unnecessary and certain to cause students confusion. I hope this will be addressed in a future edition.

In spite of these concerns, *On Target* will no doubt be an instant hit with everyone who sees it. It is an invaluable resource with multiple applications. It is not in the least bit intimidating, and by its communicative nature it

informs teachers and other users about the nature of enjoyable, realistic language tasks. One awaits Stage II with great anticipation.

*Joanne Pettis and Margaret Pidlaski*

### *The Reviewers*

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## **The Gage Canadian Dictionary (expanded edition)**

Gage Educational Publishing, 1997

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*The Gage Canadian Dictionary*, a recently published volume in the Dictionary of Canadian English series, is an important new resource that has much to offer ESL students. It is designed for high schools and universities and, in the words of the contributors, "is comprehensive enough for general use by Canadians in education, business, and writing" (p. vi). Although intended for use by a general Canadian audience, it is clear that the contributors are aware of the needs of ESL learners and took these needs into account as they compiled the dictionary.

What makes this dictionary unique is the large number of entries that name and define aspects of Canadian life. A wide range of Canadian English words and expressions are provided in the dictionary, from *Social Insurance Number* and *sovereignty association* to *poutine* and *loony*. References and phrases particular to specific regions of Canada are also included, and the regions from which they come are clearly identified (e.g., *bank barn*, especially in Ontario; *silver frost*, especially in the Maritimes; and *caisse populaire*, especially in Quebec). Canadian slang expressions (such as *sin bin*) are also included, and the fact that they are slang is clearly indicated. For ESL students in Canada, these entries provide brief, accessible explanations of many aspects of Canadian life about which they may have heard or read.

The dictionary is not restricted to expressions that are uniquely Canadian, but provides the full range of words and expressions used by Canadians. In total the dictionary includes over 140,000 entries. The definitions are written in clear, straightforward language. For instance, definitions given for the verb *to attract* are "be pleasing to; win the attention and liking of." An example is then given: "Bright colors attract children." This definition would probably be clearer for an ESL student than, for example, the *Merriam*

*Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1993), which defines this usage of the verb to *attract* as "to draw by appeal to natural or excited interest, emotion, or aesthetic sense." The goal of the contributors to follow "the principle of clarity and simplicity of definition" (p. vi) is generally achieved. This aspect of the *Gage Dictionary* is clearly advantageous for ESL learners.

Another aspect of the *Gage Dictionary* that is significant for ESL students is its use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). A phonetic transcription using the symbols of the IPA follows immediately after each entry except in cases where the entry involves two or more words and these words have been transcribed elsewhere in individual entries. The symbols of the IPA and their corresponding sounds are provided on the front and back endpapers. This makes it easy for users to find the pronunciation key quickly. In addition, the writers of the dictionary have included a two-page summary of the "Spellings of English Sounds" (pp. xii-xiii). The variations in spelling are shown for the sounds of English. This may be of interest for those ESL students who have difficulty connecting sounds and spelling in English.

The one area in which the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* may fall somewhat short for ESL learners is in the area of examples that illustrate how the entries are used in natural contexts. Although the use of examples in the *Gage Dictionary* may be "liberal" and "far more extensive than in comparable desk dictionaries" (p. vi), there are many instances in which examples are not given. Thus learners using the *Gage Dictionary* may miss out on some of the grammatical and collocation information that is part of knowing a word and can be supplied, at least to some extent, through examples.

In sum, the *Gage Canadian Dictionary* is a resource that complements well the growing number of Canadian ESL reading and listening textbooks currently used in classrooms. This dictionary may well become an invaluable tool for many ESL learners, especially because of its Canadian content, the clarity and simplicity of the definitions, and its inclusion of the IPA.

*Kathy Block*

#### *Reference*

*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. (10th ed.). (1993). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.

#### *The Reviewer*

Kathy Block, MEd (TESL) teaches EAP courses at the English Language Centre, the University of Manitoba. Her areas of interest include ESL reading and writing, vocabulary building, and materials development.

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## Expanding Our Vision

*David Mendelsohn (Editor)*

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David Mendelsohn has given us a 10-article introduction to the value of having mentors from outside our field. It is a most welcome addition to our professional libraries and we thank you, David, for making use of your broad network to open up our field to the refreshing breezes of men and women of greatness from many disciplines.

As with any edited work, the approach taken by these authors varies considerably from chapter to chapter. My personal favorite is the first chapter, Adrian Palmer's. Palmer writes on Joseph Campbell, a well-known mythologist. What I appreciate most about Palmer's article is his personal, reflective writing style, which gets the message across so fluently that he transcends his own medium. Unlike some of the authors who seem to feel obligated to write in a technical academic style with strings of referents after each idea, Palmer writes from the heart. In watching him struggle with Campbell's ideas himself, we are led to our own questions regarding the relationship between our teaching and our own life journeys. He concludes with a valuable question: how can we engage our teaching enthusiastically without imposing our own values?

Judy Gilbert presents the work of Joseph Bogen on complementarity of the brain hemispheres and from that gives us a rationale for multisensory teaching and learning.

Robert Oprandy writes on Jane Jacobs, a colorful, passionate woman who fought hard for people-centered cities. The importance of our environment, the role of gender in decision-making, and the essence of ethnographic research are all interesting topics in this article.

Mary Ann Christison takes from the poetry of Gabriela Mistral the importance of honoring one's roots, being committed to learning, finding balance, and living out of humility and modesty. Like Thomas Scovel's mentor, his missionary mother Myra Scovel, Christison sees teaching as a form of service and approaches it with that attitude. I appreciated Scovel's article. It would not have been easy to find the reflective distance he achieves in this article, and yet the humor and courage he sees in his mother's work are attributes that serve us well in ours.

Articles by Williams and Burden on Feuerstein and by Bassano on Simon, respectively, highlight the importance of understanding the role of values in our multicultural classrooms. Mendelsohn's own article on a Polish educator shows us the value he places on love and respect in the classroom.

These and other chapters are important for us to read, not only for the content they contain, but for the recognition that we have much to learn from

other disciplines. The time is long overdue to go beyond methodological and linguistic concerns to broader understandings as to the nature and scope of the work we do and its effect on our lives as human beings creating our world, learner and teacher alike.

*Virginia Sauvé*

*The Reviewer*

Virginia Sauvé is a TESL educator, consultant, and author living in Edmonton. At this time she is working primarily in workplace education.

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