

“Nveer epxailn gaammr relus or aks yuor sdutens to”: Discovering the richness of using sketches, images, and icons to direct and embolden students to speak accurately and correctly

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Dedicated to Darlene Larson

Most dictionaries have sketches of what are usually called content words, especially nouns. In classrooms around the world you can see posters showing vegetables, animals, fish, fruits—ditto for flash cards. For recognizing words in isolation and associating the meanings with the pictures, such pictures can be useful. But seeing the word *elephant* under a sketch of an elephant in a dictionary or the word *apple*—or even less concrete words like *stop* or *open*—is not only no help to how to use these words but present incomplete or, one might even say, incorrect information. The word *apple*, for example, has to occur with *an* or *the* or in the plural form: apples. We give all sorts of reasons for students having trouble with articles; a rarely heard one is that the first time they see count nouns they see them without articles and never in a position in a sentence.

I asked students to draw a sketch to represent *an* on a flash card showing an apple and the word *the* in *The apple on the card is beautiful*. They drew sketches so quickly that I started to ask them to represent all the words in a few sentences with sketches or symbols. From this small beginning, students began to comment that “writing” with sketches was similar to the Egyptians’ use of hieroglyphics and the Chinese and Japanese use of characters.

I illustrate how sketching all words—content words plus function words—*the, are, to, do, etc.*—as well as different forms of words—*does, do, like, likes*—can be a useful activity for practicing any grammatical pattern in a way that integrates structural words and sentence patterns with vocabulary and decreases the need to explain grammar.

A Rationale for the Title

The most common reaction I get when I meet people and say that I teach English is “I didn’t do well in grammar in English class.” Most of these people have jobs in which they write, read, listen to and speak English all day long without difficulty! Nevertheless, they feel they have a deficiency. I think two of the reasons for this: (1) they did not enjoy memorizing grammar rules and terms in school, and (2) they did not see the usefulness of learning about *gerunds*, infinitives, *participles*, or *anomalous finites* (words such as *is, are, do, and will*).

Grammar has a wider range of meanings than many people are aware of. When I ask people to write down the first words that come to mind when I say the word *grammar*, they have written this: *the way a language works, attempts to describe how language works, how we should speak and write in formal situations, word order, syntax, morphology, illocutionary force, clear writing style, rules to memorize, difficult subject, structural words, and sentence patterns*.

When I use the word *grammar*, I refer to the way a language works in all areas: word order, function or structural words like *of, is, a, when*, various forms of content words such as *walk, walked, walks, walking*, taking turns in conversations, the conventions of writing stories and different types of essays or letters, intonation, stress and rhythm, punctuation and spelling conventions, to name a few. *Grammar* in most textbooks refers to rules, such as for using the past perfect, *could* versus *should*, verb and subject agreement, the use of *a* with count nouns like *pineapple* and no article with so called non-count nouns like *rice*, and the alternative pronunciations of the *ed* in *waited (id), combed (d)* and *walked (t)*.

Many believe that if students memorize rules for using the *past perfect*, they will be able to write, say, or understand the past perfect correctly. This is in spite of the fact that to produce or understand any sentence in any tense requires us to access at least half a dozen rules. Our minds cannot work that quickly in conversations and even have great difficulty juggling these rules to write one good sentence.

We store memorized grammar rules in a different part of our mind from the ways we use our mother tongue or foreign languages. We might be able to access them to write or edit individual sentences. But if we are trying to write or speak or listen or read fluently, we have to think of meanings first. To consider the content of what we want to express or understand and to access and apply these rules at the same time is very, very difficult, if not impossible.

Language fluency is a skill. We can improve skills only through practice and use. Reading about how to play the piano, rugby, or a video game is no substitute for actually doing the activity. Language is too often considered a subject to study rather than a set of skills to develop.

In the following section, I contrast teachers teaching how language works as if it is a subject and as if it is a skill—*language usage* and *language in use* as Widdowson described the distinction (H. Widdowson, *Teaching Language as Communication*, Oxford University Press, 1978).

Some Usual and Unusual Ways for Learning How Language Works

The following dialog has been written on the board in five different classrooms.

Two friends talking at a sports center

1. Akiko: I like to swim.
2. Do you like to swim?
3. Juan: No, I don't like to swim, but I like to play basketball.
4. Do you like to play basketball?
5. Akiko: No. But I like to jog and to do judo.
6. And I love to dance.

Five Scenarios Showing Teachers Using This Dialog

Scenario 1

Melissa asked her students to draw lines to form 3 columns in their notebooks and to write "to swim" on top of one, "to do judo" on top of another, and "to play basketball" at the top of the third.

She then asked them to write other activities that match the underlined phrases that are on the top of each column.

Scenario 2

Colin pointed out that we use *play* only with sports we do with others like *basketball, baseball, volleyball* or *tennis*; that exercises such as *swimming, jogging, skiing, boxing* and *running*, which we can do alone, we don't use *play* with; and that *judo, tai chi* and *karate*, maybe because they are not English words, we precede with *do* or *practice*.

A student said she wanted to share some rules she found in a grammar book she had bought. Colin was delighted and asked her to the front of the class, where she read these rules:

Play is used when we talk about sports we use a ball with, or something similar to a ball like a shuttle cock we use when we play badminton. Sports like skiing jogging and race walking are verbs, so we do not use *play* with them. Sports that do not have an *ing* form like *kendo*, *karate* and *aerobics* we have to use *do* or *practice* with. *Bowling* is an exception. Even though we use a bowling ball, we do not say “play bowling” but “go bowling,” different from *practice* or *do kendo* and different from *play badminton*.

Colin thanked her and said, “So we need only a few rules and one exception to be able to use these words correctly. I will write these on the board later so you can copy them and memorize them.”

Scenario 3

Joel asked his students to read the dialog silently. Then he asked them to write why they think we use *to* with some physical activities, *to play* with others, and *to do* or *to practice* with others.

Scenario 4

J. G. told her students in rows 1, 3, and 5 to draw one sketch for each word in lines 1, 2, and 3 of the dialog and those in rows 2, 4, and 6 to draw one sketch for each word in lines 4, 5, and 6.

She also said to “make sketches with as few lines as possible. This is not an art class, so draw your sketches without many details and as quickly as you can.”

Scenario 5

Akiko, after telling her students to open their textbooks and look at Table 22, read aloud the words in the title of the table, the words in the table, and the reminder under the table. This is a type of table and explanation that commonly appears in textbooks.

Table 22 Like versus Like + s

Some girls	like to play	volleyball.
Some boys		
Ali	like + s to play	basketball.
Alice	like + s to play	

Remember that we use *like* with plural and *likes*, the base form plus *s*, for singular. *I*, *Ali*, and *Alice* are singular. *Girls* and *boys* are plural.

She then asked individual students to read aloud the words in the table to form sentences: “Some girls like to play volleyball. Some girls like to play basketball. Ali likes to play volleyball,” and so on.

The teachers did what they did because . . .

Write at least two assumptions about learning you think each of the teachers in the 5 Scenarios holds. I have written summaries of each Scenario below. When you are finished, continue reading to see what others thought.

- **Scenario 1**—Asking students to write words that fit each form. *Melissa*
- **Scenario 2**—Explaining why we use *to*, *to play*, and *to do* or *to practice* with different sports and physical activities. *Colin*
- **Scenario 3**—Asking students to write why they think we use *to*, *to play*, and *to do* or *to practice* with different sports and physical activities. *Joel*

- **Scenario 4**—Asking students to draw images of each word in the sentences. *J. G.*
- **Scenario 5**—Reading sentences in a table aloud and then asking students to say sentences from the table. *Akiko*



Others' reasons

Scenario 1—Melissa

"The teacher believes that students need to see and produce examples of patterns to say the patterns correctly. She probably based the lesson on hearing students say, 'I like to play swimming.' or 'I like to play judo.' So, she also believes in basing her lessons on student needs rather than a syllabus alone. I guess this teacher believes in the title of this episode, as well."

Scenario 2—Colin

"Sounds like the teacher thinks grammar rules are important. Or, he might simply be following the teacher's notes for the textbook he is using. He might be explaining because his students like to hear explanations, believing they can learn them more easily than how to say different sentences correctly. They might have to take tests in which they are asked for the type of explanations the teacher is giving, so he believes he is being responsible."

Scenario 3—Joel

"Perhaps this teacher believes in having learners suggest reasons rather than telling the students reasons and in accessing students' thinking skills. The teacher probably also thinks that the more descriptions students hear about reasons for using different words with different sports and physical activities the more likely students are to remember how to use *to*, *to play*, and *to do* or *to practice* correctly. Student-centered activities seem important, as well."

Scenario 4—J. G.

"The teacher has to be thinking that we get meaning more quickly from images than from letters. She might also believe that all students can draw quickly, but not all can write quickly. She believes that experiential words like *love*, *play*, *basketball* and structural words like *to*, *do*, *and*, *but* are of equal value since she asks students to draw both kinds. This was new to me.

"I have never seen structural or function words represented as sketches in dictionaries or on flash cards. In fact, under pictures of words like *apple*, only *apple* is written, not *an apple*, though we cannot use *apple* without an article. So, she is doing something different from authors of dictionaries and producers of flash cards. She also believes in student-centered work. Novelty in teaching has to be another assumption about learning."

Scenario 5—Akiko

"Most textbooks I have used contain the type of table Akiko used. The idea seems to be that showing the patterns in a table highlights them and the reminders under the tables are meant to draw attention to features the students should notice."

Sometimes, high school, college, or adult students initially consider drawing sketches childish and beneath their dignity. However, when teachers ask older students to write some negative and positive reasons for drawing sketches to represent all of the words in sentences, a few point out that they not only feel comfortable using symbols in physics, math, chemistry, and physiology classes, but using these symbols enhances their understanding. Not surprisingly, art students say they are thrilled to be able to connect images of reality with words. They also realize that drawing symbols for *I*, *she*, *to*, or *but* is a different experience from drawing sketches for *tennis*, *judo*, or *baseball*.

Content words convey experiences of the world and are nearly infinite in number. However, there are relatively few words that convey grammatical information. They could all

fit on one sheet of paper. Here are a few: *the, a, might, is, could, of, in, upon, what, are, do, where, did, does, for, that, I, they, or, but, and, should, not, she, we, used to, their, there, however.*

Scenario 4, continued

When the students finished their sketches, J. G. pointed to these directions she had written on the board:

- Draw these columns on the board in your notebooks. (See below.)
- Write 0, 1, 2, etc., above the columns.
- Write ? word above column 1, person above 2, etc.
- Substitute your name for Akiko in Column 2.
- Sketch the images you drew in the columns in your notebooks.
- Draw sketches for "and, but, or" in Column 7.
- Then, work in pairs and compare your sketches in the columns.
- Cross out any sketches you drew in the wrong column rather than erasing them. Then draw them in the correct column.

As the students drew the columns and inserted the sketches, J. G. walked around the room. When a student drew a sketch in the wrong column, she pointed to the column where it belonged and indicated that the student should redraw the sketch in that column and cross out the sketch drawn in the other column.

Columns to draw sketches in:

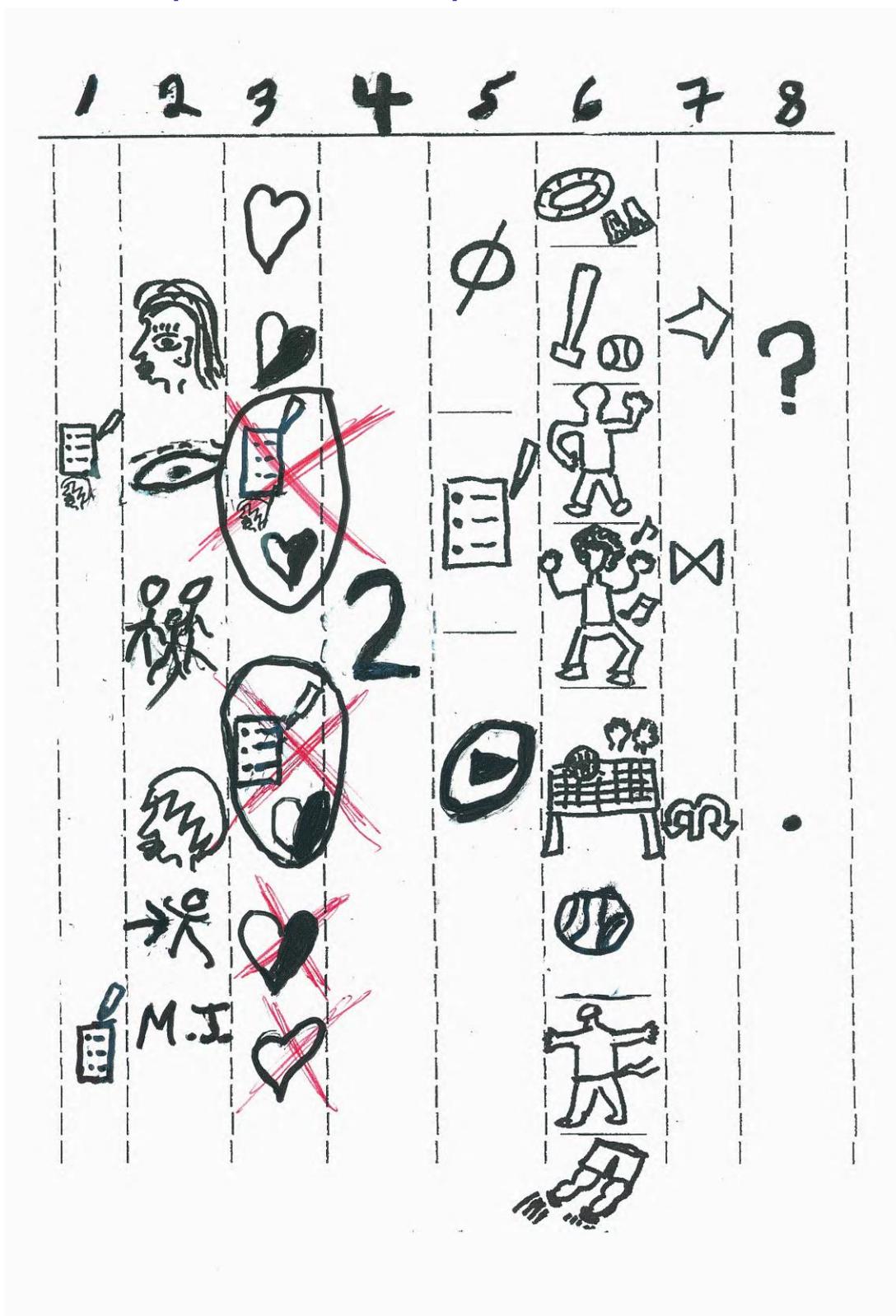
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
?			2-letter	3	exercises/		
word	person	+ -	word	choices	activities	a, b, o	? / .

When students move from pair work to class work, you will have to select common sketches for all the words. So, if one pair writes a 2 for *to* and another II and others • •, you will have to decide which to use. One option is to just say, Pair 3, we are going to use your sketch for *to*. Another is to have the pairs draw their sketches on the board in the columns and vote to select those that are most popular. This, of course, is more time consuming.

However, I have found that 70% to 90% of students from dozens of countries draw the same sketches! For example, almost all students draw an equal sign, =, for *is* and either two equal signs side by side, = =, or one equal sign above the other, = = for *are*. Larger than is often > and smaller than is <. After all, in other classes they use standard symbols for a lot of words.

You will see this sketch in the table below  for the word *play*. It is a symbol used on video and audio players for the play button; 90% of the students drew it and had no difficulty connecting it with baseball and other sports that we play. A majority of people from many countries also drew the "to do list" icon as a piece of paper with dots and lines and a pencil in column 5 for *do*, and repeated it in Column 1 and 3 for *do* and *does*. Ditto for the red x's to indicate the negative—*hate, don't like, doesn't like*.

Here is a completed table from one pair of students





Here are some transcribed sentences and questions generated from the sketches in the table that others wrote

I love to play volleyball but I hate to sing.
 I like to dance, swim and jog, but I don't like to play baseball.
 Do you like to swim or do judo?
 I like to play baseball and ping-pong but I don't like to dance or sing.
 Ichiro loves to play baseball but he doesn't like to do judo,
 swim, dance, sing, or jog.
 Michael Jackson loved to sing and dance.
 Michael Jordan loves to play basketball, sing and dance, but he hates to swim.
 Do you like to swim and jog?
 Does Maria like to play baseball or volleyball?
 Akiko and Junzo like to do aerobics and they like to dance.
 Matsui loves to play baseball.
 Does Ali love to play baseball?

The teacher, J. G., did this because . . .

Write at least two ideas about learning languages you think J. G., the teacher in *Scenario 4, continued* has. Do this before reading others' ideas below.



Some ideas from others

- "J.G. must feel that the small number of examples in textbooks is totally inadequate for learners to master any pattern. And though there is one contrast in the table, in Column 5—*no word, play and do* (some added a sketch for *practice*)—she keeps the rest of the pattern the same. In textbooks, there are usually many differences between the examples used to illustrate the patterns."
- "J.G. has confidence that when students produce language from images they will avoid translation. She also thinks it is better to use students' sketches than her own because their sketches will be closer to their perceptions of the lexical meanings for words like *love, baseball, play* as well as grammatical meanings such as *to, do she, but.*"

Many teachers have their students substitute words in sentences, listen to grammatical explanations, write explanations and memorize grammar rules. But dealing with a table of columns with sketches in each column is a new experience for most.

In the beginning, J. G. had her students stick close to the original names of people in the dialog. But she soon encouraged the students to relate the sentences to their own experiences. This is why we see *Michael Jackson, Michael Jordon, Maria* and *Matsui*. Saying the names of people students do not know is not as meaningful as saying their own names, the names of their friends, and the names of people they talk about who they see on TV or read about in magazines.

J. G. realized that the goal is not just to repeat sentences mindlessly without context or meaning or to memorize them. Rather, it is to say sentences accurately and fluently that are true to the students' experiences. In this way, the sentences are processed and absorbed by the learners' minds because they express real meaning at the same time that they

unconsciously practice the patterns. She realized that one reason for using symbols and sketches rather than words is because saying words we see requires no thinking. Changing images into words requires some type of mental activity. Picturing and imagining the meanings in our minds is a much richer and more memorable experience.

In trying this alternative, as in making any changes, discussing the pros and cons with the students very often not only leads to understanding of the new option but also to acceptance—from *Huh?* to *Aha!* Many realize that it is crucial to practice the short words like *but, I* or *to* with the longer words like *baseball, tennis, or judo*. So, in addition to writing your reflections, ask your students to write their reactions to any activity you do.

What level are the students at?

"I like to play baseball, but I don't like to dance." would be too easy for many advanced classes and a bit difficult for some beginning classes. Cutting the conjunction would decrease the difficulty for beginning classes. Doing only one pattern at a time rather than all three would also make the activity easier. "I like to play . . ." for 10 minutes or so in a couple of classes, then "I like to do/practice . . ." for a couple of classes, then both in contrast, and finally "I like to . . ."

Changing the tense and diversifying the patterns would increase the difficulty for advanced students, as these examples illustrate.

- I used to like to play tennis, but now I am a lot older and my legs are too weak to play.
- I would like to play tennis, but I am too busy with my work.
- I loved to play tennis when I was young, but I don't like to play now because I get too exhausted.

Of course, it would not clarify the patterns if these diverse structures were practiced together. One problem in most textbooks is that the range of tenses and structures introduced to teach contrasts such as *play baseball, do or practice judo* and *swim* are too diverse.

Asking students to describe scenes in which the dialogs might take place would remind them of the importance of the relationship between settings and the grammar and vocabulary and meanings of what they are saying. Talking about exercise is more likely to take place in a sports center than at a funeral to state an extreme example. Students have had these kinds of conversations in their first language so they can usually easily describe the places where they talk about exercise, movies, or whatever.

Further Steps

I believe that when we change a picture into language or language into sketches our brains make more connections than if the mediums remain the same. I also believe that learners become more engaged with novel, surprising tasks than with the usual ones they have done many times.

Here are two alternatives to sketches: (1) using the everyday objects; (2) using Cuisenaire rods. Manipulating objects engages not only different parts of our minds from drawing and saying, writing, reading, and listening to language, but also illustrates how to translate a well-established fact—combining movement with language use aids retention and mastery—into action.



Are carrots more expensive than onions?
 Green beans are cheaper than green peppers.
 Garlic is healthier than red peppers.



Do you like to play tennis? Do you like to swim?

Moving beyond the humdrum to *Huh? . . . Aha!*

While saying and writing patterns given in sketches that represent ways we use language is initially surprising, tapping sketches to signal that students should write or say new combinations of structural words quickly becomes routine. And routine leads to boredom for both teachers and students.

An important premise of mine is that learners are more attentive when they do novel, surprising tasks rather than normal ones. Below, I describe ways a teacher named Mari added variety to the activity of having students draw sketches and then tap them.

Mari's Variations

Day 1 Mari on Monday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch at a time.

Mari: "Some students are late because they have been practicing for the school festival. So let's do a few activities before we start the regular lesson.

"Look at the sketches we drew on the board last week.

"As I tap each sketch with my pointer, write down a word that matches the sketch."

(Mari taps the sketch of an eye in Column 1 and waits for the students to write **I**. Then she taps one heart in Column 2 and again waits for all the students to write a word that fits the sketch. She taps each word in the same way.

The students take 10 to 30 seconds to write each word.)

Elapsed time: 3 minutes

Day 2 Mari on Monday at 16:00 in the teachers' room looking at a video clip from her 9:00 class—Some *Aha!* moments

Mari: "I am amazed how slowly my students wrote each word. I can write each word in 3 seconds. Tomorrow, I have to tell them to write faster.

"I will also tap a word in the first 3 columns and ask them to write the first 3 words together rather than one at a time. 'I love to . . .' makes more sense than 'I . . . love . . . to.'

"I will also erase the lines between the columns since the point is to say groups of words, not individual words."

Elapsed time: 10 minutes

Day 3 Mari on Wednesday at 9:00 in her first-period class—Tapping a few sketches at a time

Mari: "I have finished our regular lesson a few minutes early. So, let's do some practice with your sketches. Open your notebooks and put your pens on your notebooks."

(Points to the top sketch in column 1, the half-blackened heart in column 2 and the 2 in column 3. Waits 15 seconds.)

"Write words for the 3 sketches I pointed to."

Students: (Some write *Akiko*, some *she*. and others *I* in column 1; some write *love*, some *loves*, some *likes*, and some *like* in column 2; almost all write *to* in column 3.)

Mari: "Put your pens on your notebook.

Look at your words and compare them with what I say:

'Akiko likes to' or 'She likes to.'

Change your words to match what I said."

Students: (Some start to erase words. but Mari asks them to put their erasers in their pencil cases. She writes *Akiko likes to*. and *She likes to*. on the board and points to the words. Students edit what they had written.)

Mari: "Write words for the sketches I point to."

(Points to the symbol of play from audio and video recorders in column 4 and the bat and ball in column 5. Waits 10 seconds.)

Students: (Most students write, some look at what fellow students are doing and try to copy what they write.)

Mari: (Writes *play* with a 4 over it to indicate column 4 and *baseball* on the board with a 5 over it to indicate which column each words fits in.)

Students: (Write their words.)

Mari: (Writes the words for the sketches she pointed to.)

Students: (Compare Mari's sentences with theirs and edit their sentences.)

Elapsed time: 7 minutes

Day 4 Mari on Thursday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch in each column

Mari: "I want to practice the grammar point your sketches show. Open your notebooks and put your pens on them, as usual.

(She points to the sketch of an eye in column 1, the whole heart with a red X over it in column 2, the **2** in 3, the sketch of the *to do list* in 4, and the top sketch in column 5, with no pauses. So she taps 5 sketches in 5 seconds. She then taps her desk with the pointer a dozen times.)

"Write.

Students: (Some write *I hate to swim*. Some write *I to*, some *like to*, others *hate to swim*.)

Mari: "Put your pens down. 'I hate to swim. I hate to swim. I hate to swim.' Correct your sentences."

Mari: (Repeats the same steps pointing to a sketch in each column, but writes the sentences on the board rather than saying them so students can edit by reading what she wrote rather than listening to her sentences. Some students edit their sentences in a few seconds; others take 20 to 30 seconds.)

Elapsed time: 10 minutes

Day 5 Mari on Friday at 9:00 in her first-period class—Tapping only half the sketches

Mari: "I want you to write more sentences to practice the grammar point. But today I will not point to one sketch in each column. I will point to sketches in just a few columns.

"Notebooks open and pens down, as usual."

(Points to *M. J.* in column 1, the basketball in column 5, the symbol for *but* in 6, and the sketch of *swim* in 5. She then taps the board very lightly a dozen times, not pointing to any sketches.)

"Write!"

Students: (Some look at other students, some scratch their heads and say "Huh?" Most write *Michael Jordan, basketball, but, swim*. A few write *Michael Jordan likes to play basketball but he doesn't like to swim*.)

Mari: "Look at my lips." (Mouths: *Michael Jordan likes to play basketball but he doesn't like to swim*.)

"Write."

Students: (Most write, but some put their heads on their desks.)

Mari: (Walks up and down each row and when she sees a word missing, goes to the board and points to a sketch that represents the missing word. She says nothing. She just points to the sketches that show the words students did not write.)

Elapsed time: 6 minutes

Day 6 Mari on her second Monday first-period class at 9:00—A few spoken words changed to all written words

Mari: "I will say a few words and you write complete sentences.

Michael Jackson, dance, and, sing, but; judo.

La, la.

Write!"

(As students write, she writes these 15 letters on the board:

M J l t d a s b h d n l t d j

Students: (Most students look at the initial letters of the 15 words she expected them to write, which she had cued with the 7 words she had said, and write from 7 to 15 words. Some students write, "Michael Jackson liked to dance and sing but he did not like to do judo." Others write "Michael Jackson like dance and sing but not judo." A few look out the window. A few others look at the notebooks of students in the row next to them and copy what fellow students have written.)

(When she noticed that some wrote *likes* rather than *liked* she wrote **Michael Jackson died; he is dead.** on the board.)

Elapsed time: 7 minutes

Day 7 Mari on her third Monday first-period class at 9:00—Students take over

Mari: (Gives her pointer to a student and tells her to point to sketches in each column without pausing and then to point to a student and say, "Say the words I pointed to. Other students, write what you hear.")

Student 1: (Points to a sketch in column 1 to 5. Then points to a student to say the words represented by the sketches. Then she says to the other students, "Write what you heard.")

Mari: (Gestures to first student to give the pointer to another student.)

Student 2: (Taps a sketch in column 1, 3, 5, 6 and a different sketch in column 5.)

Mari and students: (Write variations of "Akiko likes to play baseball but she doesn't like to swim.")

Mari: (Gestures to students who wrote correct sentences to write them on the board. Gestures to other students to look at the board and edit what they wrote.)

Elapsed time: 8 minutes

Day 8 Mari on the next Wednesday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Students' opinions

Mari: On the board, she writes

- Please write down 1st, why I asked you to say words for each sketch.
- Second, write down why I did not explain the grammar point.
- Then, write down what you liked and did not like about learning grammar by changing sketches into written and spoken words and just a few sketches or spoken words rather than by my explaining rules. You can write your comments in English or your first language.
- Finally, write down what you learned from other students as you did the activities.

Students: (Fifteen students spin their pens in their hands and write nothing; ten students write one sentence in their first language; 4 students write 2 to 5 sentences in their first language; 5 students write words such as *confusing, excite, fun, think, remember, like, draw*; 5 write comments such as "I love to draw but before these classes I did not like to speak; now I feel good about drawing and speaking; I cannot draw well but it is not important. The main point is to think of the meaning rather than rules.")

Mari: (Asks students to read each other's comments silently and write a + if they agree and a - if they disagree.)

Elapsed time: 10 minutes

Here are a few comments from Mari's students.

- "When given a sentence, it is hard to remember it, but if you concentrate on each word by changing it to a picture, it helps you register the meanings to your brain much easier."
- "This could be used to learn any language."

- “You don’t have to have the grammar explained, but by identifying each drawing, you are in fact acquiring the grammar.”

Some Learning Tenets

1. We need to say, write, listen to, and read the same sentence patterns and structural words—*to, do, etc.*—with different meanings and relate them to our personal experience over and over. Saying or writing or listening to or reading a sentence a few times will not result in our being able to use it later. Mari’s students said and wrote 5 to 10 variations of the pattern per minute, so in 5 minutes they experienced variations of the pattern 25 to 50 times each day for half a dozen days: 150 to 300 uses!
2. Almost all books on language learning teach vocabulary and grammar separately. Knowing the meaning of *baseball* or *karate* or *dance* and *swim* is easy, since most of us have done these activities or seen others do them. But the fact that we *play baseball, do or practice judo, and dance or swim* is what learners have to practice and master. What is important is how to use these content words—of which there are thousands. Asking students to draw sketches for both lexical items—*baseball, swim, dance*—and structural or function words—*to, do, I, she*—reminds learners that we get meaning from the integration of grammar and vocabulary.
3. Reading aloud, repeating after the teacher or an audio recording, and answering oral questions immediately are common classroom activities. They require no brainpower, no engagement of learners’ minds. One of the reasons we point quickly and then give students a lot of time before they speak or write is we need to provide time for students to focus on the meaning of what they are going to say before they speak. But once they have had a chance to rehearse, they should write quickly and speak at a normal speed and in phrases, rather than one word at a time. In this way, they can focus on the meaning and not think of the grammar point or the meaning of each word as a separate item.
4. A frequent comment after students say and write 20 to 50 questions and sentences that the teacher or other students invite students to create is “I did not know how much English I knew!” Controlling the options we want students to practice reminds them of how much they know.

One More Task!

I have copied the variations Mari used. In your notebook or on your laptop, place an exclamation mark next to those that you think remind students of what they know and a question mark next to those that show students what they do not know. Said another way, which variations produce the most *Huhs?* and *Ahas!* and which produce only *Huhs?* and no *Ahas!?* I claim that the more *Huhs?* and *Ahas!*, the more the activity reminds students of what they know. If they do not solve any puzzles, I do not think they are learning. As we encounter puzzles, we make sounds like *Huh?* a lot. As we solve the puzzles, we make sounds like *Aha!* a lot.

Day 1 Mari on Monday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch at a time

Day 2 Mari on Monday at 16:00 in the teachers’ room looking at a video clip from her 9:00 class—Some *Aha!* moments

Day 3 Mari on Wednesday at 9:00 in her first-period class—Tapping a few sketches at a time

Day 4 Mari on Thursday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch in each column

Day 5 Mari on Friday at 9:00 in her first period class—Tapping only half the sketches

Day 6 Mari on her second Monday first-period class at 9:00—A few spoken words changed into many written words

Day 7 Mari on her third Monday first period class at 9:00—Students take over



Here are other teachers' comments and evaluations.

Day 1 Mari on Monday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch at a time
"No *Ahas!* Mindless repetition. No different from just repeating single words."

Day 2 Mari on Monday at 16:00 in the teachers' room looking at a video clip from her 9:00 class—Some *Aha!* moments

"A most unusual experience. I have never, never looked at a video of my classes nor have any teachers I have worked with. Mari saw so much so quickly that she could change in her next lesson. I was amazed, astonished. It is so obvious that if we look and listen to what we do we can learn ways to make our teaching more effective for our students and more exciting for us."

Day 3 Mari on Wednesday at 9:00 in her first-period class—Tapping a few sketches at a time

"My students would express frustration, would say they could not say more than one word at a time. But when I tried this over a few days, they realized that in fact they could say more than one word at a time. I was as surprised as they had been. I think I underestimate my students."

Day 4 Mari on Thursday in her 9:00 a.m. class—Tapping one sketch in each column

"Few *Ahas!* But I heard "Oh." now and then. No *Huhs?* But maybe the "*Ohs*" I heard, though not as dramatic as *Aha!* or *Huh?*, represent a necessary step to have the students feel comfortable with the changing of sketches into words and the beginning of becoming aware of which words connect with which other words. *Ohs* . . . Is a crucial part of learning. This activity was very reassuring to many of my students, they told me."

Day 5 Mari on Friday at 9:00 in her first-period class—Tapping only half the sketches

"*Huhs?* right left and center! Wow, my students are so used to saying just one word at a time and not using their brains—because I do not ask them to do very much—that they said, "One at a time!" I persisted. And they become more and more engaged. They and I were both surprised.

"Of course they have to think more and have to move beyond changing one sketch into one word at a time. But if they can say only one word at a time and cannot fill in words represented by sketches I do not point to, they obviously do not know the patterns."

Day 6 Mari on her second Monday first-period class at 9:00—A few spoken words changed into many written words

"So many *Ahas!* but almost as many *Huhs?* A fire engine drove past my school as I was doing this activity with the sirens blaring away, but my students did not hear them! They were so keen to produce the pattern from just half of the clues on the board. Though there were many *Huhs?*, there were just as many *Ahas!* They were more involved than usual."

Day 7 Mari on her third Monday first-period class at 9:00—Students take over

"A very, very, very convincing lesson of how students can teach each other and learn from each other if I introduce the steps for such peer learning. I had to remind some students to tap more quickly, to tell others to point to only some of the sketches rather than one in each column, and to most of them to give the other students time to write before they said they pattern they had tapped.

"When I do role playing, after each pair finishes, the class claps. There was no applause after each student got other students to write many sentences. Rather, the students expressed many "*Ahas!*" Many fewer "*Huhs?*" than I would have expected. Why do I continue to doubt the capabilities of my students?"

A Bit of Background

In the 1940s both in the United States and UK, educators advocated pattern practice and the use of substitution tables. Though only one of the purposes of these activities was to drill or develop habits, a large number came to view them as nothing more than mindless, mechanical repetition of words. Many teachers began to say, "We want our students to use language in a meaningful way; we want them to communicate." So they stopped any kind of practice.

I believe this change has been unfortunate. Of course, repeating sentences mindlessly is not going to lead to mastery of word order, structural words, or vocabulary. But by having students say patterns that express true information, by having students create and generate sentences and questions cued by sketches and symbols, by having students manipulate the word order and structural words by changing statements to questions and questions to statements, and by using a wide range of content words related to their experience, what they say is not mechanical or mindless.

Rather, these variations of the use of pattern practice and substitution tables enable learners to use English not only naturally but also accurately, and to recall it unconsciously when needed for use later.

Asking students in pairs to talk about their weekend using a grammar rule the teacher had explained provides no examples of the many patterns they need to know and use. Telling students to do so, called task-based conversations, do not teach students but rather require them to say incorrect English over and over. Those teachers who have recorded and listened to pair work with such general directions realize that their students are neither speaking English correctly nor using the grammar rule that was taught. How could they?

Asking students to speak in pairs using a grammar rule they had heard explained and were expected to memorize is not teaching but testing. And every statement the students make contains errors of grammar and misuse of vocabulary.

Those who have studied the mastery of vocabulary say that learners have to experience new words five to ten times in different contexts, while reading, listening, speaking and writing in order to learn them. If learners need this much practice and use of single words, how many more experiences do they need to integrate vocabulary with structural words and sentence patterns? Those who developed substitution tables and pattern practice indicated that by combining the items in each column in a substitution table or during a pattern practice, there were often from 150 to 3,000 possible combinations!

Of course, asking students to say patterns cued by sketches or words in substitution tables or pattern practice 3,000 times in one lesson would be absurd. But over the course of a few weeks, unless learners can create and manipulate language in a controlled way, following selected patterns, they cannot master any of them.

The lack of accuracy in the production of learners around the world and the claim that learners' errors cannot be changed—become fossilized—I do not accept. Learners can fossilize the correct forms as well as the incorrect forms. One of the reasons they fossilize the incorrect forms is that they are not taught the correct forms. They are asked to use forms without having had any opportunities to learn them.

Just as when we first play a new tune on an instrument we play one note at a time, so when teachers first ask students to translate the symbols, they point to one at a time. Later, the musicians can play whole bars and pieces, and learners can say whole phrases and thoughts, with their own interpretations and feelings. Reading the many different ways Mari used the sketches shows not only how you can ensure students create hundreds of sentences and questions that relate to their experiences, but also they show how they can express them naturally rather than mechanically and word by word.

Asking students to say or write sentences cued by sketches or objects teaches and tests at the same time because if a word like *play* is added before *swim* or *she* is followed by *like* rather than *likes*, the teacher and student(s) can immediately practice the correct form.

Combining teaching and testing I believe is more powerful than just testing or than teaching and then testing; in addition, it reminds students of what they know and can produce rather than what they do not know and cannot produce.

7,300 words, rounded 71%; Flesch Reading Ease Grade Level 7.3



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