

Your favourite website: I don't know if I'm going to get stoned for saying this on the pre-event questionnaire to a conference for English language teachers but at the moment it's DuoLingo! I'm not a natural language learner. I don't pick up patterns, assimilate rules or notice very much at all. I don't much enjoy digital exercises either. What I *have* always been able to do, and enjoyed doing, is memorising fairly random sentences from an audio.

I've been to Russia twice in the last year and the most recent visit found me in a corner shop one evening completely unable to communicate anything - let alone the 100 serviettes I wanted for a workshop activity the following day. So I started Russian on DuoLingo and can now say: *Have you got...? This is... and The women have apples and plates.*

At the recent Ih Conference in Barcelona lunch was provided at the venue. I ended up sitting at a table with two teachers from Moscow and one of the options for dessert was an apple, which both ladies had gone for. A fortuitous coincidence? Maybe...

I am now also learning random sentences in Portuguese which I will unleash upon shopkeepers and hotel staff in Aveiro in April when I go there for the APPI annual conference.

A gadget you can't live without: I'm going to stretch this one a little bit and talk about an object which is useful. I've been spending a lot of time typing up talks and methodology over the winter months and have found a hot water bottle on the feet to be a great comfort.

Something you'd never throw away: I have a Sony Walkman cassette player. Originally, I used it to play a ten-tape audio lingual series in Arabic. I still keep it for when the post-digital holocaust hits us. I showed it to a class in Barcelona when I worked for the British Council there - and this was some years back. One 13-year-old lass asked: *But where do you put the new music in?* I flicked out the tape: *Six songs on this side and six on the other.* She looked at me like I was an idiot.

Who or what inspires you? I read recently that George Lucas originally wanted to get a real monkey to play Yoda. Can you imagine that? A real live monkey jumping around there instead of the iconic puppet that we know. That's an example of brilliance and creativity going off the rails and flirting with disaster but at least he wasn't scared to have a crack. I also read that Elon Musk was selling flamethrowers on eBay for people to use at parties. That's another one. I like the idea that apparently very smart individuals don't always do smart things. I find it comforting.

What I find less comforting is the realisation that most of the people in charge of

things that have serious implications for our quality of life - the state, health, industry - are not always very smart at all, just greedy with a bit of animal cunning thrown in there.

Your favourite lesson: I've been doing student-led lessons with my pre B1 teens again (originally did a write up in *English Teaching Professional* magazine **107** for anyone who's interested) where they plan and execute an hour-long class, giving the instructions, presenting, correcting, explaining and evaluating their classmates' performance. The extra functional language and some of the exchanges that these types of lessons occasion are fantastic.

I've also been enjoying whole class chats with my higher-level teens. Once we get the turn taking down and students are actually listening and responding to each other - not just to the teacher - then I think these are my favourite classroom moments.

Your favourite bit about your talk: I'm doing a couple of sessions - one for primary one more general - and to tell you the truth, I'm very happy with them both. I enjoy standing there for a while giving my two penneth. I don't like dancing in public or singing. I get absolutely no pleasure from those whatsoever - but talking about teaching, yeah. My favourite part of any talk is when I get a positive audience reaction: nods, aaahs, yeses etc which show I've pitched a point correctly or brought something to the table that people either identify with or can take away and use.

A lesson you've learnt while teaching: Got a few for you this time. a) You need cooperation - from your director, from your editor, from the conference organisers. Nobody teaches in isolation and these relationships matter. b) There's no value in comparing yourself to your colleagues. c) Your core activity needs to be solid. You can write or present or train but your own classes are the font of what you have to offer. d) You can ruin your experience of a good conference by not getting enough sleep while it's on. I've done it, various times, but am slowly getting better.