



## 2023 Interski Report

*By Julie Sauvageau*

Taking part in the Interski event was a series of stimulating challenges for me: skiing faster, speaking English, mastering the content, finding time in my schedule to do everything, conversing with the best from each nation and understanding how they work. I've grown through this experience and these challenges, and the information we've gathered as a group will certainly help the CSIA grow.

I've been looking for a common thread in everything I did there, a takeaway that sums up everything I saw, heard and applied. And for me, this was the importance of the visual aspect and body language.

It starts with knowing how to observe. You can observe different things as an Instructor, such as the movements to reproduce, but also teaching methods. That's what I did in the U.S. session led by Brian C. Smith. To make good observations, you need to take a step back. You don't need to hear or understand, just observe body language and non-verbal cues to understand what's going on. This is particularly important at an event like this, where almost everyone in a group has a different native language.



I had the pleasure of meeting Brian C. Smith randomly on a ski day in Killington in May.

Interski is also an opportunity to make new friends!

In their on-snow presentation, the Czech Republic took a much more scientific approach to the use of observation. We talked about mirror neurons (what fires in the brain in order to learn by imitation) and above all about a method for using them, a kind of activation and warming-up of this part of the brain. Step one was to find a partner by making eye contact for almost a minute. You need to establish a relationship (a bond of trust) before being able to do this. Then, with this partner, we had a series of stages where we took turns imitating each other: a simulation of the morning routine at home, the warm-up routine and an imitation challenge game. Finally, at the last stage, the mirror neurons were activated and used to develop skiing skills. Interestingly, my partner in this exercise, Laslo, spoke French. Is this a coincidence, or did our brains recognize each other? There's a fun aspect in this "monkey see, monkey do" method, and I believe that the fun side of things encourages learning. It also gives a lot of information about the movements a skier uses. My partner from Switzerland was doing a lot of jumping, shifting his weight bearing different ways. When we brought this back to skiing, I saw a lot of effective and powerful vertical and lateral movement. It helped me to understand the mechanics of their skiing, and it helped him understand ours (Laslo had taken part in a session in Canada previously, so it provided good continuity for him). At the end of the day, during the indoor session, we were able to look at the results on video and see real differences in everyone's skiing. I'm not sure about the relevance of each step, but I think they make it easier to open up the motor side of people who are more rigid in this aspect.



Jana Hoffmannova from the Czech Republic led the workshop on mirror neurons.

This session confirmed and explained the observations I'd made over the past few years. In the past, I trained with a team of Instructors for a synchronized ski competition. The improvement in skiing and the results obtained by team members in competition and at CSIA events are obvious. I've also seen skiers develop great skills mainly by following skiers better than them. It makes me wonder about the importance of using more synchronized skiing or similar strategies as a means of development.

For several years now, I've occasionally used tactics like those presented by the Czech Republic, and I've always had great success with these methods. Firstly, because they create an excellent working atmosphere within the group, but also because they provide a good motor and cognitive warm-up. I was simply unaware that I was activating mirror neurons in doing so.

I ended my stay in Finland with a presentation by Josh Duncan-Smith from New Zealand. Here again, we worked in pairs on the qualities of good feedback. Many things were similar to our method. What I found interesting was that they wanted to give precise, direct feedback, and to do this they used an image, a drawing, or a video. The aim is to detach the feedback from the person. It's more like feedback on performance. They also note that a proper demonstration of the performance expected by the Instructor is essential to the learner's success.

I've seen the effect of a good demonstration in every session I've led for Canada. As my English skills, and those of other workshop participants on occasion, were limited, I had to use other channels of communication. Gestures, drawings in the snow, visual aids and indirect manipulations are other essential means to create a wonderful experience.

The Interski experience... I never thought that my passion for skiing and teaching would lead me to an experience like this. I came on board simply because I now had the opportunity to be there, to see and be inspired by those who would represent Canada at the event. I had no other ambitions, especially since, as a high school teacher, it's not easy to get the time off. I must say that I would have liked to see more women in the selection process. I asked several of them why they weren't there. I got answers like: "I haven't trained for this", "I'm not good enough", "I don't have enough time to invest in this project", "I wasn't aware of the dates or the process". So, ladies, I challenge you to overcome these obstacles and take part in the selection process. It's such an opportunity to get together and inspire each other at this gathering of Canada's top Ski Instructors. Encourage each other, motivate each other, inform each other so that we can have a great time as a community of women during the next selection process. I hope to see you again, to meet you at the top of the hill, to ski the slopes with you and be inspired by you without judgment. We all deserve our place.