

“I’ve Always Considered Teaching as Working Collaboratively with Students”

Dr. Judy Yin, Korea National University of Education

Judy Yin is a professor at Korea National University of Education – the nation’s premiere provider of elementary school teachers. Prof. Yin is a featured speaker at our April conference, presenting “Collaborative Teaching and Learning in TEFL” as her featured session and “Using Drawings and Metaphors to Explore Teacher Identity” as her invited second session – both being in areas that have yet to be widely researched in the Korean context. Recently, Prof. Yin kindly provided The English Connection with the following interview. — Ed.

KOTESOL: Hello and thank you for making time for this interview. You will be providing a featured session at our international conference this spring. I’m sure our readers are interested in learning a little more about you before the conference. Would you tell us a little more about yourself?

Prof. Yin: I got my first teaching experience at the American School of Las Palmas in Spain. I visited there after I got my BA in art history from UCLA, hoping to get some experiences living in Europe. While I was teaching secondary English there, I had so many questions about foreign language teaching that were often left unanswered. Since I had no academic background in TEFL, I decided to study at a graduate school for professional development. My graduate years at Seoul National University allowed me to gain a holistic view of the English teaching context in Korea and how it differs from other EFL contexts. So, I’ve made it my goal to empower English teachers in Korea by helping them to practice reflective teaching and reinterpret theories and methods that are not based on the Korean context so that they can better suit the needs of Korean students.

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Prof. Yin: I’ve always considered teaching as not showing what the teacher knows but working collaboratively with students. In this sense, I think “coaching” is a better word for what we should do in the class. I’d like to show a few examples of how this can be achieved. Also, I think researchers and teachers need to work together to create theories and methods that are practical and applicable. Teachers can conduct action research to reflect on their teaching practice as well as provide the necessary data for further analysis and research. I’m planning to mention some studies regarding co-teaching to suggest effective ways for Korean and native English teachers to teach collaboratively. And I’d also like to discuss how we can collaborate with machine translation to help students use it strategically rather than rely on it to produce what they should actually be producing.

KOTESOL: Your mention of machine translation brings to mind ChatGPT, which has been in the news recently as a threat to teaching. Do you foresee a way that it might be of benefit in language teaching?

Prof. Yin: Just as the creation of the calculator hasn’t taken away math teacher’s jobs, I don’t think ChatGPT is a threat. Depending on how it is used in the classroom, I think it can expose students to input and encourage students to produce without anxiety about errors.



KOTESOL: You also mentioned “teachers reflecting on their teaching practice.” How closely would you say your ideas on reflective practice align with those of Thomas Farrell and/or Jack Richards, two other speakers at our upcoming conference?

Prof. Yin: I agree with their concept of how reflective teaching allows teachers to be aware of their teaching context along with their own needs and their students’ needs, which can help them make the best decisions when adopting a method that was developed abroad. I also believe that effective teaching cannot come from a ready-made method. It has to come from within the teacher who has reflected on their beliefs and practice.

KOTESOL: How and why did you get involved in collaborative classroom learning?

Prof. Yin: I remember working in groups in most of my classes from elementary through high school in the States. So for me, when I came to Korea in 2002, I experienced culture shock. Back then, there weren’t that many English classes that encouraged students to work collaboratively in class. And even if they were placed in groups, the students did not know how to work “collaboratively.” They seemed to be sharing the work they had already completed on their own, which defeats the purpose of having them work in groups. The students also seemed to have difficulties in sharing their ideas in groups. That got me thinking about how we can engineer participation in group activities so that Korean students can collaborate effectively in learning a foreign language (which can be face-threatening).

KOTESOL: Do you draw a distinction between the terms “collaborative learning” and “cooperative learning”?

Prof. Yin: I think cooperative learning involves a complete individual contributing their share of work, whereas collaborative learning is associated with incomplete individuals who need to depend on each other to generate ideas. Personally, I see cooperative learning as being more product-oriented when compared to collaborative learning, which is more process-oriented.

KOTESOL: There appears to be little research on collaborative classroom learning taking place in Korea. Why do you think that is?

Prof. Yin: It may be that it’s difficult to conduct research and collect data in secondary schools due to the test-oriented lessons and schedules. There have been a number of studies at the tertiary level, but I’d also like to see as many studies at the secondary school level.

KOTESOL: Your invited second session is on “Using Drawings and Metaphors to Explore Teacher Identity,” which I am also quite interested in, as I have used image schema in teaching metaphors, idioms, and proverbs. Could you give us a peek at what your session will focus on?

Judy Yin: I tried out this idea with my graduate students to get a more in-depth view of how they perceive themselves as English teachers in Korea. It was after reading an article regarding teacher identity, and we tried it out as an activity. The results that came out were very inspiring and even heart-breaking.

KOTESOL: You are the general secretary of AsiaTEFL, a position in which you work very closely with the AsiaTEFL presidents. Could you give us an update on AsiaTEFL activities?

Prof. Yin: Usually, AsiaTEFL conferences are held abroad in East Asian countries such as Thailand, China, Japan, or Indonesia. This year, AsiaTEFL is having its 20th anniversary International Conference at the Daejeon Conference Center (August 17–20). Our theme for this year is “Celebrating ELT in Asia: Visions and Aspirations.” Our conferences always resemble a great academic “party” with so many teachers and researchers from Asia truly celebrating their profession and passion for teaching. This year, our keynote speaker is Youngsuk “YS” Chi, who is the chairman of Elsevier, the publishing company. We’ve also invited teachers and scholars from China, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea, Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Australia as our plenary speakers to share their views. It’s going to be a great academic festival for all participants. You can get more information when you visit our website at <https://www.asiatefl.org/>.

KOTESOL: You’re a tenured professor at KNUE – Korea National University of Education. Could you tell us about the teacher training that it offers, and especially about the EFL teacher training it offers?

Prof. Yin: Our university is basically a teacher’s college that offers a variety of courses for pre-service and in-service teachers. We have two types of graduate programs: one that is offered during the spring and fall semesters with 15-week courses, and the other is offered during summer and winter with 2-week courses (4-hour classes from Monday to Saturday). The spring and fall courses are for students who have a BA but are not certified teachers and for in-service teachers who were provided an official leave from their school to obtain a graduate degree. The intensive summer

and winter courses are for teachers who cannot take courses during spring and fall. We offer both masters and doctorate programs for teachers who are interested in conducting research to enhance their professionalism in education. The courses include theories and methods in TEFL, teaching English through literature, syntax, and phonology courses, and a variety of courses that focus on reflective teaching. Many of the courses are conducted in English, so if you are interested in pursuing a graduate degree, please visit our website at <https://knue.ac.kr/smain.html>.

KOTESOL: Would you give us your impressions of Korea TESOL as a teachers association?

Prof. Yin: My impression of Korea TESOL is that it deals with “real” issues that are pertinent to teachers by focusing on topics that are aligned with the needs of the teachers. I also feel that there is always constructive communication between the officers of the association and the members, which is probably why the conference offers presentations that are timely and appropriate.

KOTESOL: What changes do you foresee in TEFL in Korea in, say, the next five to ten years?

Prof. Yin: The new 2022 national curriculum that is now in effect will change a lot of things. The intention of the credit system in high school is to allow students to have more freedom in choosing the classes that are associated with their future college majors, but it also means that teachers will have to develop classes from scratch. This process may require Korean and native English teachers to collaborate much more than they do now. Also, the importance of process-oriented assessment will also provide more opportunities for students to be assessed in various ways, but the stability of this assessment will take some time, I think. In terms of digital tools in the English classroom, I don’t see drastic changes if the college entrance exam remains the same.

KOTESOL: And what changes do you foresee for Judy Yin – professionally and/or personally – in, say, the next five to ten years?

Prof. Yin: I’m hoping to expand my perspective and knowledge regarding ways to practice reflective teaching in Korea. I got deeply interested in this area when I was forced to teach online without any preparation in 2020. I felt lost and even intimidated to be placed in a teaching context that was so alien to me. In retrospect, I think that is when I began to notice that I had been stuck in mannerism and had built a comfort zone that blinded me from so many things that could have made me a better teacher. I’d like to have more opportunities to communicate with English teachers to help them with their emotional labor and empower them by training them to practice reflective teaching.

KOTESOL: Before we conclude this interview, do you have any final words for our readers of *The English Connection*?

Prof. Yin: I see myself as being in a middle position between Korean and native English teachers, so I can see how each teacher can work together in the classroom. There are so many things both types of teachers can offer to enhance students’ learning experiences. I’d like to see more chances for Korean and native English teachers to communicate and share ideas.

KOTESOL: Thank you for this wide-ranging interview, Prof. Yin. I’m sure I’ll be seeing you at the conference!

Interviewed by David Shaffer.