

# The English Connection

A Korea TESOL Publication

SUMMER 2021, Volume 25, Issue 2

## The Language 2.0 Edition

Articles on online English, interaction, and learner/teacher roles.

## Interviews

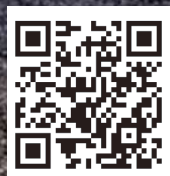
Les Timmermans: Teacher, Actor, Brewmeister  
Member Spotlight: Andrew Griffiths

## Columns

Thwaites: The Classroom Connection  
Kelly: The Brain Connection

And more...!

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# The English Connection

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To promote scholarship, disseminate information, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding among persons concerned with the teaching and learning of English in Korea.

# Moving into Language 2.0 (Kicking and Screaming)

By **Dr. Andrew White** Editor-in-Chief, *The English Connection*

"Hello? Can you see me? Hello? Is this thing on? Am I muted?"

With so many courses, and interactions in general, transitioning to the online medium, introductions like the above are frustrating but commonplace. We are struggling to learn and adapt not only to the technical issues and jargon (think mic volume, log-ins, and internet connections) but in the seemingly normal experience of talking and conversing with our fellow head-in-a-box interlocutors, whether we be in a virtual classroom, conference presentation, or casual conversation. What are we losing, and gaining, in this forcible nudge to Zoom, as we try to maintain some semblance of our accustomed prior f2f conversational selves?

One obvious issue is that online interactions lessen the human element. We're not there. We're far away from each other. We're in pixilated 2D, talking into cameras and mics. And much of what makes f2f interactions rewarding is the immediacy of the exchanges. We take turns speaking (ideally with nice brief gaps in between), but we also overlap, interrupt, backchannel, and finish each other's sentences. These are also, by the way, some of the hardest and highest level linguistic features to be learned by students in English speaking classes. In f2f, we utilize our non-verbal clues (facial expressions and gesturing, many unique to English) that are necessary in communicating. These features all enrich our communication and the experience.



Online mediums, as we have all no doubt experienced, have altered these finer elements in conversation. Slight transmission delays have stilted our speech, making it harder to jump in on someone's thought. Pausing extends into seconds (research has shown that even 1.5 seconds between speaker's turns can cause awkwardness and annoyance) as speakers struggle to figure out the next turn-taker. Then there's the body language and non-verbal cues. Eye contact? Forget about it. Despite the social pressure of being watched and conscientiously needing to perform, which can elevate stress levels in group speaking, nobody is truly making eye contact in video interactions (Do I look at the tool bar, my PPT, or the camera? Is the light catching my bald spot?). Gesturing and facial expression inevitably resort to extremes of 100-yard stares and strained searches deep into the computer screen at one extreme, to overacted waves and forced smiles at the other.

In this edition of *The English Connection*, teacher researchers address this move to teaching online, with a specific focus on how Zoom and other synchronous video communication platforms have altered the ways we (1) use language, (2) interact with each other, and (3) determine our roles as speaker/listener and, in the case of e-learning, learner/teacher.

Student preferences on the roles of native and non-native teachers is under investigation in Holland's (page 6) article, with advice offered on how learners' needs can be better met in future online formats.

Baldwin (page 9) provides several benefits to introducing chat rooms into online conversation classes, as a method to improve engagement and alleviate learner anxiety, while de la Salle (page 12) examines output and overall satisfaction of the Zoom context, discussing both positive results and implications.

Two articles specifically investigate the language produced in online lessons. Owens' analysis (page 18) of an online teaching discourse investigates the negotiation of interactional competence found in the linguistic marker *but anyway*. Manning (page 15) explains how organizational talk increases when speaking tasks are done online, highlighting differences in LREs (language-related episodes), pauses, and interactional moves.

Struggling to provide effective and efficient formative feedback in learners' online writing assignments? Chan (page 20) explains the benefits, and outlines several methods and specific technologies to incorporate into feedback, rubrics and evaluations, and peer reviews.

The honeymoon period of online teaching is over. As we transition (some of us kicking and screaming) into this vast medium full of new and exciting methods, we should be mindful not only of what we're sacrificing but of the broadening adaptation and potential we can discover and offer to our students. The research contributed in this Summer edition can hopefully help you with this growth. I hope you find it useful.

# President's Message

## Path-Breaking Progress

By Bryan Hale KOTESOL President

Here I am, at home (still stuck at home!), about to dive into this new issue of *The English Connection*. I'm excited to explore its focus on changing roles and relationships. This theme, at this time – halfway through the year (the second year of you-know-what) – prompts me to reflect on the developments we are seeing in our organization. It's easy to feel that we are in the midst of incessant tumult. In fact, though, in many ways we have been making deliberate and valuable headway. Before we take the plunge into TEC, I'd like to use this message to consider some of that progress.



Last year, the team behind the National Conference moved everything online quickly and adeptly. The event was a path-breaker, forging ahead into new territory and lighting the way for following events, not only our own International Conference in February this year but also events hosted by our partner organizations.

So the plans underway for this year's National Conference are thrilling. The planned showcasing of film and video projects, both from the classroom and from teachers themselves, promises to be a fruitful way to work with the screen technologies so important in recent times. I appreciate the positive possibilities here, the potential to embrace the ways in which screens and tech can bring us together and allow us to enrich each other. I'm sure this will extend to all aspects of the conference, and I look forward to a creative cornucopia! Those at the helm include some of those crucial to last year's NatCon success and also many newcomers. The Busan Chapter is playing a pivotal role again, but people from throughout KOTESOL, both in Korea and abroad, are stepping up with time, knowledge, and dedication.

This evolution and blossoming extends all around KOTESOL, as so many recent chapter and special-interest-group events attest. I am wary of naming specific people, chapters, and SIGs, because I haven't made it to every event, and I don't want to leave anybody out. But let me tell you about one such event. Recently the Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter hosted a workshop on public speaking by Wayne Finley, speaker extraordinaire and KOTESOL's Publicity chair. Not only did Wayne share his own expertise in a crisp, engaging, and accessible manner, but he had taken the time to reach out to many experienced KOTESOL speakers, who generously contributed video messages brimming with stories and wisdom. All delivered seamlessly over Zoom, with ample opportunities for attendees to mingle and discuss, this workshop was an excellent exhibit of the kind of richness, maturity, and depth now on offer at KOTESOL's "local" online events. A feast, ready to sate your professional development appetite! (If I've made you ravenous for Wayne's workshop, you can find it on the KOTESOL YouTube channel. But I hope you'll check out upcoming events, too!)

Beyond the spotlight of conferences and workshops, things are evolving, too. Not only National Council and all its committees but also chapter officer meetings, SIG meetings, and more are now carried out online. While aspects of in-person meetings are missed, these new developments have allowed increased efficiency, accessibility, and transparency. These benefits extend internationally: We've seen fantastic cross-pollination between KOTESOL and JALT (Japan Association for Language Teaching) events, for example, and in PAC (Pan-Asian Consortium), we have more opportunities than ever for inter-organizational collaboration.

I want to say a huge "thank you" and let out a hearty cheer for everybody involved in all these ventures, for their commitment, contributions, and also for being present with each other. And TEC, of course, has been a guiding light. I think I'm ready to delve into all the expertise, advice, ideas, and companionship in these pages. See you on the other side!



# Learner Preferences on NEST and NNEST Teacher Roles in the Online Classroom

By Scott Holland

Any diligent native English-speaking teacher (NEST) or non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) would likely agree that their professional priority is to educate, while establishing a level of professional trust and respect by satisfying the personal, academic, social, and career-based needs of any adult student. It may be suggested that NNESTs and NESTs have been pigeonholed into particular areas of English education. As language teaching moves into the virtual world, will this status quo evolve or remain unchanged?

One may ask why this is the case? Moreover, could a NEST's or NNEST's own pedagogical approaches help to remove these boundaries? As the language learning world becomes a more virtual, online experience, we should be asking how NESTs and NNESTs can evolve to satisfy the needs of their students in an online teaching context.

This research consisted of two distinct phases, involving firstly, surveys of students; and secondly, semi-structured interviews of NESTs teaching in Korea and Korean NNESTs. The students of an adult private academy completed two surveys: one generally framed (34 students from NEST/NNEST classes participated) and the second more detailed (88 students from NEST/NNEST classes participated). The participants surveyed were enrolled in NEST-taught English discussion classes and NNEST-taught TOEIC and IELTS classes.

**“The upsurge of online classes potentially offers an opportunity to the diligent NEST to access a vast library of online resources...”**

Eight teachers (four NESTs and four NNESTs) from my own adult private academy were interviewed twice on a semi-structured basis. The transcripts from the first interview were reviewed and significant themes or ideas were considered for inclusion in Survey 2. The results of the second survey were presented to the focus group for the second semi-structured interview.

Research results displayed the range of opinions students possessed, indicating that NEST or NNEST teacher preference depends on circumstances. Some alleged stereotypes were confirmed, such as NESTs being the preferred teachers for conversation-based classes, while NNESTs were the preferred choice to teach grammar and assist with exam preparation. However, the strength of this support may not have been as great as anticipated.

The survey results indicated a willingness of students to consider new online formats.

Results from the student survey below display the level of importance students placed on the following NEST and NNEST teaching qualities. In the survey students were asked to choose from five options regarding the level of importance: VI (*very important*), I (*important*), N (*neutral*), LI (*less important*), and NI (*not important*). This excerpt focuses on the areas of speaking, writing, and grammar.

**Table 1.** Learners' Preference of NEST/NNEST by Subject

Subject	NEST		NNEST	
	VI	I	VI	I
Speaking	79%	21%	62%	29%
Writing	32%	47%	56%	24%
Grammar	50%	44%	56%	35%

Note. VI – *very important*, I – *important*. (Holland, 2020, pp. 20–21)

The teachers and adult students raised a variety of issues worthy of further discussion, such as grammatical teaching methods, NEST and NNEST professionalism, and methods of teaching, along with issues relating to cultural understanding. One of the major points of discussion was how these issues related to future online classrooms.

I have chosen the following issues to focus on and discuss, using statements taken from the teacher surveys as illustration (Holland, 2020, pp. 33-52).

## Technical Skills

1. Native teachers have a reluctance to teach structurally, which essentially in Korea gave rise to the belief that native teachers don't know the structure of their own language, which to some extent is true. [NEST 2]
2. The Korean teachers tend to have strong technical skills; however, the native teacher can transfer the technical skill over to a performance skill a little easier than the Korean teacher can. [NEST 3]
3. The ones who can't explain well are not well prepared. This problem needs is bad for native teacher reputation. When the unprepared native teacher cannot explain grammar problems well and I have to help them with Korean explanation much more. [NNEST 3]

There are vivid concerns about the grammatical teaching ability of NESTs. As Ellis (2006) suggests, NNESTs have a significant advantage in this area due to their L2 language learning experience. One NEST rightly highlights the fact that they have the ability to transfer these technical abilities into practical ones. The upsurge of online classes potentially offers an opportunity to the diligent NEST to access a vast library of online resources when previously they were limited to a board and a pen in the classroom. However, if the NEST cannot transmit these messages clearly in the appropriate context, the issue will remain. Online classes will only amplify issues regarding theme and message transmission.

### Professionalism and Teaching Methods

1. There is one teacher who we started working together here, he used to be a great teacher, but then his class became really popular and then he got lazy, he just thinking about the money all the time. He stopped doing what made him a good teacher when his classes were big. [NNEST 3]
2. I don't want to misconstrue my own words, but I think a lot of native teachers forget that they are actually supposed to be teaching. They think it's all about them, or it's a happy hour of conversation minus the margaritas. [NEST 1]

These two comments express concerns about complacency, such as a successful teacher no longer being prepared to adapt to an online medium. Again, the professionalism of some teachers is questioned, such as that of those NESTs and NNESTs who may have been resting on their laurels, possibly forgetting their primary teaching obligations. Wang (2009) argues that NESTs' greater creativity with their use of materials may help them to adapt to an online medium more successfully (cited in Aslan & Thompson, 2016). This viewpoint suggests that NNESTs must not fall back on what they feel is comfortable and familiar.

The differing social and methodological rhythms of an online class require the teacher to keep the student frequently engaged, or they may no longer be logging in. There are too many distractions in an online medium that are easier to avoid in an offline context.

### English-Speaking Culture and L1 Language Use

1. Sometimes I would be trying to explain the meaning or an idiom, grammatical form, or expression, and I learned I had to be very careful with my language. My early awkward explanations were wrapped up by a 30-second explanation by a non-native teacher (in L1). So that was something I had to work hard to improve. [NEST 4]
2. I don't think you can improve your English significantly if you keep turning to Korean when problems arise. If the teacher keeps explaining things in Korean, you're saying that it's ok for the students to do that. [NNEST 2]

The opinions of the NEST demonstrate that they can articulate themselves successfully if their language is graded appropriately. In online classes, it may be more difficult to check student understanding while maintaining student engagement, so the NEST must be prepared for the challenges of this new virtual world. NNEST 2 expresses concerns about excessive L1 usage in the classroom and how it can hinder L2 development. However, as Shin argues, "While it is preferable to use L2 in class, using L1 enables course content to be completed more efficiently" (2012, p. 53). The old adages of striking the right balance or finding the appropriate moment may be paramount here.

### Cultural Understanding and Error Correction

1. We invited two American teachers to talk to a class of students; both had worked in American universities. They really didn't know about Korean culture. He used some quite serious terms, and then that class was screwed up; even though the students were very young, they were very offended. The students all condemned that teacher strongly. [NNEST 1]
2. The native teacher who understands the learning experiences of their students knows when to be good cop and bad cop. Bad cop teacher sees a clear error, highlights it quickly on the board; the teacher then gives

a simple concise explanation of the mistake and what to do in this situation so the students can clearly understand before moving on and allowing others to speak. [NEST 4]

NEST 4 highlights the importance of correcting errors in a calm and professional way. The general consensus was that, on occasions, teachers don't do this enough. The account of NNEST 1 shows the importance of understanding and respecting the values of other cultures; if the bond between teacher and student is broken, it is very difficult to repair, due to the differing social rules and rhythms of an online class. Wenger's (1998) method of collaborative teaching emphasized the importance of community, learning, and practice, as well as identity and meaning (cited in Lee & Cho, 2015). This emphasizes the importance for any teacher to build bridges with students and maintain them rigorously.

### Recommendations to Satisfy Students' Online Needs

After a detailed analysis of the survey and interview results, the following recommendations can be made to help enable NESTs and NNESTs to satisfy the online requirements of their students.

A template for these recommendations was established by the work of Hunt (2017), who developed a critical analysis of trends in Korean language classrooms that provided valuable guidelines for NESTs and NNESTs to follow. My own recommendations, however, are centered on the evolving online medium we encounter in 2021. Hunt's analysis focuses more on Korea's overall educational strategy, while my own recommendations place a greater focus on "ground level" online teaching issues.

#### — NEST knowledge of the language

Through ongoing professional development, NESTs can enhance their technical teaching abilities either via obtaining more enhanced qualifications or more targeted lesson preparation. NESTs should also ask themselves how many complex grammatical issues they can explain in a clear concise manner to students. NESTs must ensure that these standards are maintained in an online scenario and that learner language output is reproduced as it would be offline.

**"The online teaching medium offers NESTs a unique opportunity to bond with students in a more unique environment to escape the straightjacket of the textbook..."**

#### — NNESTs and native-speaker knowledge

NNESTs should be encouraged to embrace target language culture and studying abroad. Passing on this unique knowledge can help avoid stereotypes and generalities. L1 explanations can help to reinforce this knowledge. Online classes provide the opportunity and the resources to pass this knowledge directly on to students instead of by the predictable and formulaic conventional textbook.

### — NEST knowledge of non-native languages

A grasp of Korean language would assist NESTs in understanding student thought processes, its grammatical structure, and how it influences L2 learning. If the NNEST can transfer a greater level of material into their virtual classes with more online resources, the NEST may well need to reciprocate and enable the transference of online class themes to be more efficient, especially when a visual aid such as a whiteboard may be less effective online.

### — NNEST and NEST togetherness

The online teaching medium raises the possibility of professional discussions being reduced. An online NEST–NNEST engagement period, perhaps once a week, can allow both groups of teachers to play the role of mentor and mentee and assist each other with new teaching methods, the exchange of grammatical teaching points, and valuable expressions to teach. This sharing of ideas stimulates creativity and professional development.

### — NNEST teaching methods

Devoting more time for communicative teaching approaches would enable more direct English language practice for the students, encourage use of expressions, and develop student confidence and fluency. The approach could be linked to various grammatical themes or particular subject themes that would encourage increased student interaction and thus allow more constructive and corrective feedback. This may be a step outside of the comfort zone for some Korean students who are familiar with a Confucianism approach to learning, but it may assist with what is widely identified as a Korean language learning weakness: spoken fluency. These approaches should be maintained online but adapted accordingly. In order to stimulate language learner output from their students, NNESTs are advised to not fall back into “comfort zone” teaching methods in a more unfamiliar online teaching context.

### — NEST and NNEST employment conditions

It may be more appropriate to hire and pay teachers in relation to their achievements, ability, or experience rather than their native background. However, it is a concern that the successful NEST or NNEST may have to prove themselves all over again in an online setting. One may ask if students are willing to pay the same amount of money for an online teaching experience, which may possibly create a more diverse international online marketplace. NESTs and NNESTs will need to justify the fees that students are paying, which could arguably lead to higher standards.

### — NEST understanding of students

In Korea, the Confucianism-related fear of “loss of face” still hinders students. NESTs need to appear welcoming while making classes easily accessible physically, mentally, and emotionally for students. Culturally relevant lesson planning with clear objectives, useful feedback, teacher patience, and greater understanding of the learning experience may be beneficial. The online teaching medium offers NESTs a unique opportunity to bond with students in a more unique environment to escape the straightjacket of the textbook and explore the full range of online teaching materials and experiences.

### — Reevaluating the terms “NEST” and “NNEST”

If some of the above approaches are followed, which allows NNESTs to teach areas that are the traditional strengths of NESTs and vice versa, one may consider whether these terms are truly necessary virtually or in the classroom itself.

An alternative approach may be to enable teachers to specialize in certain areas of language learning, potentially removing the traditional NEST and NNEST stigmas and enabling teachers to flourish as individuals, allowing their background to become a secondary issue. Could the online teaching universe cause any cultural or behavioral shifts? Traditionally, students young and old may walk down the corridor from the NEST’s room to the NNEST’s classroom and vice versa.

### In Conclusion

The survey and interview results suggest that adult students are becoming more open-minded as to what learning approach is best and are prepared to consider a more bespoke approach to learning in the online medium. In the focus group interviews, teachers acknowledged a desire to expand their teaching abilities and be recognized as all-around professionals to remain relevant as language education evolves towards an online context. The recommendations I suggest offer a potential pathway to enable all teachers to achieve this.

NNESTs and NESTs should examine potential methods of evolution and development to remain relevant in a future of ongoing change and high technology. Both groups possess vast individual qualities that could help one another. This sense of togetherness may well be better than facing the challenges ahead alone. The NESTs and NNESTs who can embrace the future, utilize traditional yet up-to-date teaching methods, and challenge their students in a welcoming online environment are giving their students the raw materials to achieve a wide variety of learning goals.

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# Back to the 90s: Introducing Chat Rooms to a New Generation

By Jeffrey Baldwin

## Introduction

A lot can change in a year. I used to see my students every day – in person. If I wanted to have a group discussion, all I had to do was start asking questions, and maybe call directly on a few unlucky students to get initial contributions. I'm not saying students were always thrilled to be the first to speak up, but eventually we'd get there. For the last year, I've only seen my students through small windows on my computer screen. Entire relationships have been built between my students and myself without knowing what kind of shoes they like to wear. If this sounds familiar, you've likely also found that online class participation is different than in person. I tried different ways to encourage open participation and conversation, either about our weekly lessons, or world events, or which celebrity couple had the juiciest gossip. Crickets. The fear of speaking out of turn has been magnified by the knowledge that students' faces will be highlighted on everybody's screen. Of course, there are other factors: Students were likely working on other assignments as I conducted class, or possibly on social media. I can't be too upset. Information and entertainment are at the tip of their fingers, and I'm in the corner talking about transitional phrases.

Still, I wanted engagement. While researching ways to improve communication in my online class, I came across a dated article from Yuan (2003) that described the successful integration of chat rooms into a structured class setting with regular meetings. Participants in this study found the combination of varied learning environments challenging and enjoyable, and after dissecting the chats, a measurable uptick in participants' self-repairs was found. Reading that article took me back to when I was in school: I'd waste hours talking to friends on AOL Instant Messenger and was thrilled to hear the "ding" indicating someone had sent me an upside-down smiley face. While many SNS platforms provide users with the ability to communicate through text, the idea of a chat room, where the entire purpose of the network is to facilitate a discussion between a large group of people in real time, seems to have fallen in popularity, seemingly antiquated.

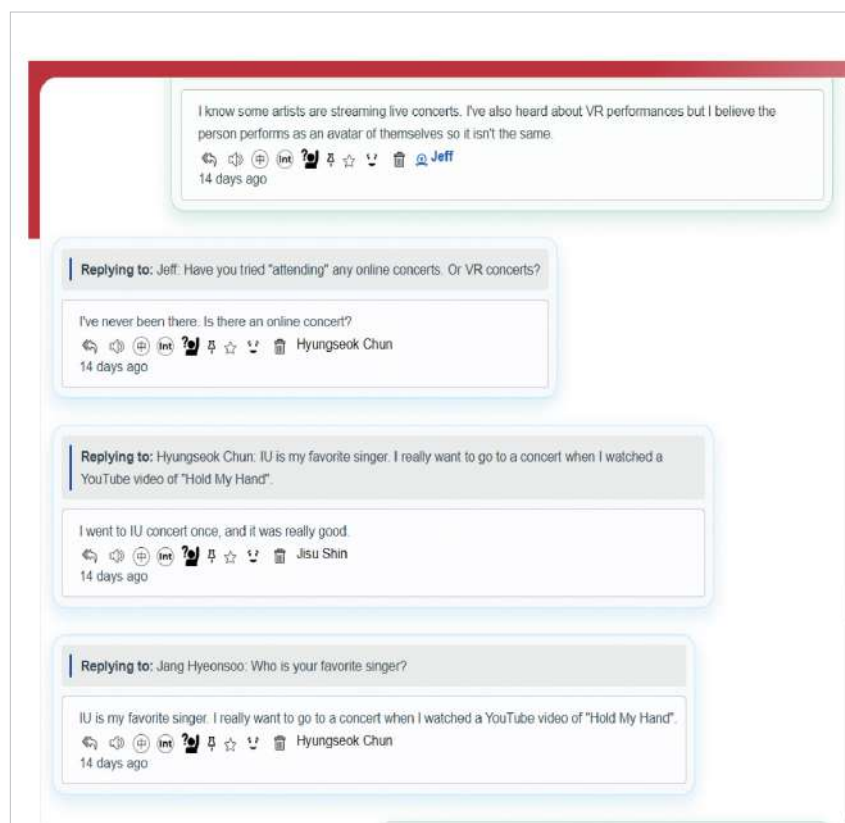
In my teaching context, chat rooms function as a type of synchronous writing activity in which students participate in a collective discussion that is monitored by an instructor, but that is simultaneously free flowing and collaborative, giving students a sense

of presence and spontaneity as opposed to discussion forums (Ene & Upton, 2018). Synchronous online writing tools have advantages over more asynchronous tools, such as discussion forums or blogs, by allowing for interpersonal dialogue and real-time engagement, as well as avoiding miscommunications and allowing for addressing problems in real time (Mick & Middlebrook, 2015). The decision to use chat rooms to improve interaction between students in my courses has been and continues to be an engaging and enjoyable experience.

## Setting Up Chat Rooms

While there are a multitude of platforms that can be found, setting up a chat room for your classroom will require some consideration as to your students' needs. I used a program called YoTeach (YoTeachApp.com). It is free and easy to get started and can be accessed on your computer or phone. This site has few restrictions and is great for my classes, as my students are all university aged, and therefore I allow a certain amount of freedom due to expected maturity. I understand many instructors don't have this luxury, and there are other options for instructors who require more options for moderating language and behavior for their students.

It is further important to establish chat room etiquette before the first session. During a live video class, we reviewed what responsibilities students would have during chat room discussions and set standards for the frequency



and quality of student posts. While comments such as “Wow, great idea!” or “You’re very smart” are encouraging, they don’t add a lot of substance or work to further our discussion. I set challenging but achievable benchmarks for what would count as participation during our chat room classes. For example, during the first chat room session of the semester, I set a relatively low benchmark of 7+ posts per a 45-minute discussion, or roughly one post every 6.5 minutes, to give students a chance to learn the process. I increased the standard each week for a few weeks but soon found this unnecessary, as students were consistently active and the chat room thread was constantly moving. While setting initial standards was necessary, at a certain point I felt that increasing the post count would be detrimental to the quality of the conversations.

During this etiquette lesson, we also reviewed issues of style and tone. I allowed students to use emojis, abbreviations such as “LOL” and other types of speech not often used in academic settings but commonly found in an internet chat room. I also reviewed issues that might arise concerning the pacing of a live chat room and how to engage in the chat more comfortably.

**“...directly beneficial to my students was the ability to mix high-level discourse with more casual and even idiomatic English skills.”**

### **Student Success**

Initially, I moved one session a week from Zoom to the YoTeach chat room program, and the uptick in engagement was immediately noticeable. I contribute this to two main factors. First, students are used to this type of communication; it is familiar to the current generation of Korean learners. When I walk around my campus, and regrettably sometimes my classroom, I see students hunched over, working their thumbs tirelessly to keep up with a hot Kakao group chat. The chat room dynamics I am introducing are governed by the same rules and structures as these Kakao or Facebook groups. I don’t want to imply that time on Facebook is equivalent to time spent in the classroom, though current research, while undecided, does show promising results when incorporating different types of social media in combination with classroom settings (Manca, 2020). Chat rooms are different from other forms of social media as they are synchronous and take place in the moment. Students are expected to stay on topic and contribute meaningfully to the subject in a set time period, but overall, the functions of a chat room resemble forms of communication students have a previous comfort with.

The second reason students were more willing to engage via a written chat room setting is that this platform alleviated some amount of anxiety felt in peer-to-peer teleconferencing classes such as those held using Zoom.

While I have my students use their names or student ID as part of their username, there is a level of disconnection that can’t be replicated in a video call. Their comments are not directly linked to their faces; there is a larger degree of anonymity. Studies have shown that online identities can help students overcome problems with face-to-face communication due to the added anonymity (Hosni, 2013; Hirvela, 2006). While my students are made aware that they may participate verbally at any point during our Zoom lessons, they are often unwilling to do so, even when I ask open-ended questions. In comparison, a recent 45-minute chat room session saw an average of 12.4 responses per student, with 73.07% of contributions being a direct response to a previous statement in the chat thread. Students also likely felt that they had the ability to construct their thoughts and then reread them before pressing the send button, an option nonexistent in live communication.

### **Practical Benefits**

Using chat rooms continues to influence communication throughout my online courses. I found students to be comfortable discussing complex topics that we were covering in class. Graduate students I work with often have high expectations on the quality of their work; therefore, students often seem uncomfortable contributing towards difficult concepts related to writing and presenting in academic English. This was less pronounced in a chat room, where students seemed to enjoy sharing their experiences when it came to academic English lessons and were able to build upon prior knowledge while seeing how their classmates’ had similar concerns and anxieties. In a recent class discussion about aspects of the introduction of a research paper, students who had previously never voluntarily contributed during Zoom classes – and even had trouble working in small breakout rooms – were directly responding to their classmates, asking questions about how to successfully make connections between their research and existing research or giving advice based on previous knowledge in this area. One student asked the following question:

*I think “result and discussion” section is most difficult to learn. We have to explain result in reasonable way, and suggest next studies. I don’t know how to suggest future works,*

which prompted this response:

*I recently published my research results in a journal. The result of sound focusing using acoustic metamaterials was published in Applied Physics Letters. I am still preparing to publish my research results, but I am also having difficulty writing them because I have to read a lot of papers to write the manuscript and my mother tongue is not English.*

Students were able to provide background knowledge and support, as well as ask questions in a comfortable environment. This all took place 20 minutes after an engaging discussion on what we were binge-watching on Netflix that week. In a previous class held over Zoom the same week, participation from the same students was nearly nonexistent, despite being asked similar questions.

I won’t argue that chat rooms should replace live conversation in the classroom, but there are aspects of chat rooms that mimic live conversation, including some

aspects of turn-taking when contributing (teachingenglish.org, 2021). Students need to find a space to make a contribution in a discussion. They also need to engage in a conversation that is constantly evolving. Topics shift, and students need to keep up with a flowing thread while sharing their ideas. There is a challenge to staying current in the conversation, but students also have the ability to collaborate and build off each other's responses to find deeper understanding. Students can use tools in the program to respond to previous comments or highlight sections of a classmates' text, but they also need to be aware of shifts in topics and understand when callbacks are appropriate and not appropriate. These are similar to the skills that are used when sitting at a coffee shop enjoying a conversation (Hirvela, 2006).

Also, as topics moved from casual discussion to academic discourse, students learned that they needed to participate in multiple interweaving parallel threads. Students improved on their ability to reread remarks made by their classmates, construct their own responses, and look up difficult vocabulary or phrases. They balanced all this with the constantly moving chat window. Despite this being a fast-paced activity, the receptive aspect of a chat room allows students to notice linguistic forms used by their instructor and classmates, while also producing grammatically challenging sentence structures in a real-language situation (Yuan, 2003). This involved considering responses to two or more different topics, and constructing accurate and applicable responses while the chat continues to flow. (My classes have up to 15 students in one chat room.)

**“The decision to use chat rooms to improve interaction between students in my courses has been and continues to be an engaging and enjoyable experience.”**

A final aspect of chat rooms that was directly beneficial to my students was the ability to mix high-level discourse with more casual and even idiomatic English skills. While the ability to speak and write using academic discourse is the ultimate goal of my students, they also realize that within an academic environment there will be instances where more casual English is called for, such as meeting colleagues at international conferences or speaking with international students in labs. This blending of registers allows students to engage in discussions using different skill sets that might be necessary in their academic careers. I often opened chat rooms with more casual topics to allow a more comfortable and informal beginning

to our sessions. Students were quick to contribute to topics that interested them, such as where they'd like to travel after COVID restrictions lift or what kind of pet they will own in the future. This gave students the chance to use slang and idiomatic phrases as well as acronyms and other aspects of language often seen in online communication. This often bled into our more academic discussions, where the line blurred between higher discourse and casual conversation. Being able to practice both aspects of communication simultaneously was beneficial for the students.

### Conclusion

COVID-19 will end. That's what people keep telling me. But digital learning isn't going away. It was prevalent before COVID and will continue to be a way for learners to equitably gain knowledge. YoTeach has provided my students a comfortable environment to engage in a way that they are unwilling or unable to in other online settings. It also provides space for students to ask questions about class topics they might not be comfortable asking verbally, and producing them with linguistic features covered during class. As location-independent education continues to advance, we as educators must continue to consider what learning programs are effective in an online learning environment.

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# Zoom: Nearly a Perfect Classroom

By Gerald de la Salle

A common sentiment among many educators is that online learning is inferior to face-to-face (f2f) learning. I frequently hear claims that the two are “just not the same.” However, in my experience teaching adults, online learning seems to have caught up to f2f learning and the two are the same. That is, in both environments, I experience the same challenges and employ the same teaching methods. Though it might sound counterintuitive, online learning might have actually surpassed f2f learning, especially when it involves Zoom.

Before I say more, I will briefly describe my two online teaching contexts. First, from August, 2016 to August, 2017, as a volunteer tutor, I privately taught law (in English), via Skype, to non-native English speakers located in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. These were small one-hour lessons consisting of only myself and a pair of learners. My objectives were two-fold: (a) teach legal content and (b) facilitate incidental language learning (Krashen, 1982; Brown et al., 2008; Leow & Zamora, 2017). Some lessons, especially in the first month, focused more on delivering the legal content, but as time went on, there was greater opportunity for the learners to participate in group work, which allowed for more speaking.

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lution, instant polling,  
easier-to-administer oral exams,  
and chat boxes for  
additional modes of  
communicating.”**

The second context is my full-time job, teaching Academic English at Korea University (Sejong): four-skills courses that emphasize speaking and writing. These four-hour-a-week classes consist of approximately seventeen students representing various majors, mostly with low-intermediate English proficiency. I devote about 50 percent of the class time to speaking. Though neglected in Korea’s English education system, roughly 75 percent of my students

(based on an informal in-class survey I conducted using Zoom’s polling features) regard this as the most important skill to learn. For the past year, I have been teaching these classes online, using a combination of email, Blackboard, Google Classroom, and most importantly, Zoom. As for speaking, I provide very little grammar or vocabulary instruction nor speaking tips. Instead, I follow the advice of many EFL researchers and focus on developing learners’ speaking fluency (Thornbury, 2005; Long, 2015; Derwing, 2017; Sato, 2017).

Thornbury (2005) states it is essential to establish a classroom culture of speaking, which cannot be accomplished merely through reading, writing, vocabulary, and grammar exercises. According to Thornbury, learners can acquire vocabulary and grammar as they practice speaking. In TEC, Ellis (2019) recently wrote that focusing on learners’ speaking fluency is more important than grammar and that fluency can be achieved by engaging learners in speaking tasks. To enhance their fluency, regardless of the teaching context, I usually take a back-seat and allow my learners to speak continuously, rarely interrupting to correct them (Thornbury, 2005; Kim, 2017).

## The Skype Context

Over the twelve-month period in which the law lessons were held, the learners participated in a number of speaking tasks, eight of which were investigated: a simple-grid information gap task, a split information gap task, a guessing game, a communicative crossword puzzle, a consensus task, problem-solving, role-playing, and a speech. Each session involved a pair of learners and myself.

## Findings from the Skype Context

In the tasks that required higher-order thinking skills (de la Salle, 2020), the learners demonstrated that they fully grasped the legal concepts taught during the Skype sessions. Moreover, all of the tasks successfully facilitated ample opportunity for the learners to practice speaking. In fact, in seven of them, the learners did well over 90 percent of the speaking. The implication is that teaching pairs of learners in the videoconferencing context should not be viewed as a barrier to establishing the conditions necessary for teaching content or developing speaking skills.

## The Zoom Context

In the fall of 2020, I set out to determine how much my learners’ speaking proficiency improved. A one-to-one (teacher–student) speaking test was administered via Zoom in both Week 1 and Week 15 of the semester. On both occasions, the learners were required to answer a few questions and give two short speeches. Data was collected from 40 students across four different classes: three in the fall of 2020 and one from a four-week winter (December–January) version of the same course (testing

on Days 1 and 15). All four classes featured the same amount of instruction time. I recorded the two exams, transcribed them, and then compared the first 90 seconds of both the Week 1 and Week 15 speeches. Though this data is still being analyzed, I will share some of the results below. Additionally, sixty-one learners completed a questionnaire about their learning experience via Zoom.

### Findings from the Zoom Context

In Week 1, the learners spoke 63.84 words per minute. In Week 15, they spoke 83.37 words, a 24-percent increase, suggesting a significant improvement in speaking fluency. There was very little change in the learners' spoken accuracy (mainly grammar), which actually declined slightly from 42.1 percent to 41.1 percent. However, compared to Week 1, the learners in Week 15 spoke with a greater variety of sentence structures. For example, their use of dependent clauses increased from 13.8 to 18.7 percent, an impressive 26-percent improvement. Thus, by Week 15, the learners spoke more rapidly (or fluently) and with a greater variety of sentence structures while exhibiting only a minimal sacrifice in accuracy.

The questionnaire yielded positive results as well. Table 1 illustrates that most of the eight speaking tasks were perceived to be quite helpful. Table 2 shows that the learners enjoyed most of the tasks including the 1-1 speaking task, which represents three speaking exams and the 3-2-1 exercise, a solo activity that required learners to each give successive three-, two-, and one-minute speeches.

**Table 1.** Learners' Perceived Helpfulness of Eight Speaking Tasks via Zoom

Speaking Tasks	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Mean
1-Word Conv	0	0	8	16	37	61	4.46
1-on-1 Exams	1	3	4	21	32	61	4.31
Problem Solving	0	1	11	18	31	61	4.30
CXS Drill	0	1	15	18	27	61	4.18
Consensus	0	3	9	23	26	61	4.18
3-2-1	1	3	11	16	30	61	4.16
True-False Game	0	5	9	24	23	61	4.07
Ranking Tasks	1	2	15	19	24	61	4.03

Note. N = 61, mostly in breakout rooms. 1 = not helpful, 5 = extremely helpful.

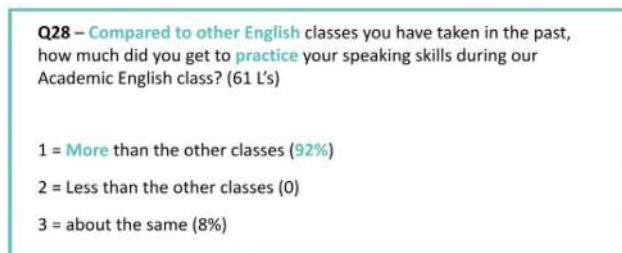
**Table 2.** Learners' Perceived Enjoyment of Eight Speaking Tasks

Speaking Tasks	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Mean
Problem Solving	0	5	5	18	33	61	4.30
Ranking Tasks	0	2	12	20	27	61	4.18
1-word Conv	2	4	9	15	31	61	4.13
True-False Game	3	2	8	20	28	61	4.11
Consensus	0	6	13	20	22	61	3.95
1-on-1 Exams	4	4	15	20	18	61	3.72
CXS Drill	4	7	18	15	17	61	3.55
3-2-1	3	11	18	15	14	61	3.43

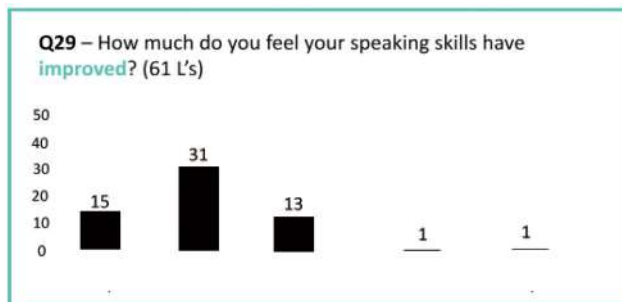
Note. N = 61, mostly in breakout rooms. 1 = not enjoyable, 5 = extremely enjoyable.

When asked if they were satisfied with the quantity of speaking practice, 95 percent of the learners answered "yes." Figure 1 also shows that 92 percent of the learners stated that they had more speaking practice in the Zoom version of Academic English than in any of the other English classes they had taken, most of which were presumably in the f2f context. Finally, using the 1-5 Likert scale illustrated in Figure 2, the learners were asked how much they felt their speaking had improved. The mean response was 3.95, also very encouraging.

**Figure 1.** Speaking in Zoom Version of the Academic English Class



**Figure 2.** Learners' Perceived Improvement in Speaking Proficiency



### Conclusion

These findings demonstrate two instances of language and content instruction being delivered successfully via videoconferencing. Unlike Skype, which accommodates only one group of learners, Zoom's breakout rooms allow several groups to collaborate simultaneously. Like the f2f classroom, many kinds of speaking tasks can be performed in the Zoom context even when there is no direct teacher supervision. For me, the challenges – for example, learner-motivation and poorly written speaking textbooks (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2018; Sato & Oyanedel, 2019) – are nearly identical. More significantly, I feel I still establish the sought-after "classroom culture of speaking" that Thornbury speaks of (2005). In the Zoom version of my Academic English classes, without ever meeting my students in person, I essentially teach the same way as I do in the f2f classroom. The learners still get the same amount of speaking practice.

**"... teaching pairs of learners in the videoconferencing context should not be viewed as a barrier to establishing the conditions necessary for teaching content or developing speaking skills."**

Given these early, but encouraging, results, it seems that the quality of learning in both contexts (f2f and Zoom) is quite similar, and therefore Zoom should not be viewed as a barrier to learning. Zoom should be embraced rather than feared. In some ways, it is better than f2f: quicker to assemble groups, higher attendance, less noise pollution, instant polling, easier-to-administer oral exams, and chat boxes for additional modes of communicating.

Having said all of this, it should be noted that there are some limitations in my research: (a) We still don't know what exactly occurs in unsupervised breakout rooms, and (b) taking the Week 1 speaking exam would likely have, at least in part, influenced the learners' speaking performance in Week 15.

### Implications and Future Directions

A logical next step, post-COVID-19, is to conduct similar studies in the f2f classroom and compare the results with what happens in Zoom. Based on my own teaching experience, I suspect that if teachers employ the same pedagogical approach in the f2f classroom as they do in Zoom (or vice-versa), the results will be very similar. The implications for this are potentially enormous. Instead of constructing new buildings, universities and other institutions might consider expanding to the virtual world instead. Using Zoom and similar videoconferencing tools can reduce financial costs and attract students from around the world. It is also important to provide learners with choices – perhaps the option of taking certain courses either in the f2f classroom or online. If Korea is serious about competing globally (Sejong campus claims to be a “global” campus that emphasizes “global leadership”), Korean institutions ought to lead the way in videoconferencing classes rather than waiting to see what educational institutions in other nations do.

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# Turning Offline Tasks into Online Ones: Not Such a Simple Task

By Shaun Justin Manning

## Introduction

When the pandemic struck, the university where I work, like almost all others, was thrust into “emergency online teaching” to keep classes going and students learning. They quickly provided an online videoconferencing tool for us to use, but there was a serious flaw: The system allowed only a single space for the lecturer to talk to students. As a result, there was no way for students to do the pair and small-group work needed for language teaching. When I was complaining about this, some friends from KOTESOL suggested using Zoom (www.zoom.us). It had the capacity to split students into small groups, known as breakoutrooms, and although its free version limited meetings to 40 minutes, the company had just decided to lift this limitation for educational institutions. So, I signed up and moved my classes to Zoom.

Communicative language teaching in general and task-based language teaching (and its sub-forms) hold as their basic premise that language learning requires interaction. So, the move to online lessons prompted my skeptical response: Are the students interacting, and if so, are they interacting in the same way and to the same extent as an offline class?

## Interactional Assistance in Language Learning

Interaction with an interlocutor during language learning is beneficial in many respects. It provides immediate feedback as to whether or not one’s utterance has been understood. An interlocutor, even one of the same age and educational background, will have a different learning history and different background knowledge and can thereby serve as a source of language and content information. Interaction also provides a realistic scenario for out-of-class language use. Indeed, there are proponents of task-based learning who recommend using tasks that mimic real-world language use (See, for example, Ellis, 2003; Samuda & Bygate, 2008 for discussions of the relationship between classroom tasks and real-world activities.)

Personally, I prefer to take the view that interlocutors act as a source of assistance to their peers. An interlocutor helps or assists the learner in a variety of ways, including the following (taken from Foster & Ohta, 2005):

1. By engaging in language-related episodes (LREs), which are moments during a conversation during which students notice their own or others’ language production and openly reflect on it or discuss it (Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Such reflection and/or discussion can be as simple as self-correction (aloud), talking to oneself, explicitly asking another, or even explicitly correcting their partner’s language.
2. By continuing a partner’s utterance when they cannot continue.
3. By reacting to the content of the other’s utterance, including making suggestions and offering information or corrections.
4. And simply by waiting for the other person to restart their talk after a pause or perhaps using a gesture.

These types of assistance are well attested in the second language acquisition (SLA) literature as conducive to learning, from both cognitive (Long, 1996) and sociocultural (Ohta,

2001) perspectives. Foster and Ohta (2005) framed assistance from both perspectives and claim the following:

*Assistance that is offered, accepted, and used creates a joint performance which can be seen as an important precursor of individual production.* (p. 414)

*Learning happens when learners do something with assistance that they were not quite capable of doing without help before.* (p. 415)

Also, from a sociocultural perspective, Ohta (2001, p. 9) defines the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in SLA as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined through language produced collaboratively with a teacher or peer” (Ohta, 2001, p. 9), the implication being that improving a learner’s produced language through interactive assistance will improve the potential for that learner’s development.

So, given that assistance aids learning but requires interlocutors, which requires interaction, my question was “Does the movement from offline learning to online learning change the assistance that learners give to each other?”

## The Values Clarification Task

I used a class procedure for my offline classes described by Manning and Song (2021). The focus of this study was on the final 20–30 minutes of a 100-minute lesson, the stage of the lesson during which students do a values clarification (VC) task.

The VC task was proposed by Gower (1981), and I revised it later to focus the task more on language than on expressing opinion (Manning, 2014, 2019). The task starts by giving the students a set of somewhat controversial prompts related

**“... Are the students interacting, and if so, are they interacting in the same way and to the same extent as an offline class?”**

to the topic of their lesson, which incorporates vocabulary and/or grammar targets for the lesson. Students read the prompts silently and indicate their level of agreement (*strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree*). They then move into groups and begin their conversation by choosing which prompt to discuss first. They organize their conversation in whatever way they choose, but they have to make sure that for any prompt they each state their level of agreement, give their reasons behind their opinions, and listen to others. Where my version differs from Gower’s (1981) is that I require them to finish their discussion of each prompt by rewriting it into a reworded version that all of them now strongly agree with.

### Four Phases (Moves) of VC Talk

In a VC task, the students go through four distinct phases of talk (Manning, 2014).

1. Organizing the discussion: Deciding which prompt to discuss, choosing a writer, etc.
2. Understanding the prompt: Making sure they and their peers understand what the prompt means. This happens because the prompts have been seeded with target grammar and vocabulary from the lesson, and the new language can be problematic for some students.
3. Expressing opinion: Students say what their level of agreement is and why. They often also express which part of a prompt is disagreeable or agreeable for them.
4. Negotiating a consensus (and writing it down): One student is responsible for writing down the final, reworded prompt. The others tell the writer what words to write. While doing this, there is much more talk about grammar and wording than while expressing opinion (Manning, 2014).

### The Study

Due to COVID-19, we were forced to teach online, but in previous semesters, in an attempt to grade participation more accurately and to provide samples for students to transcribe, I had recorded all conversation classes. And with student permission, I was able to use some recordings for this research. So, I had the chance to compare offline discussion talk with online talk. My primary research questions were the following:

- RQ1. Are there any differences in VC performance online and offline?  
 RQ2. Are the four phases of the VC still present online?  
 RQ3. Are there differences in assistance online and offline?

### Classes and Participants

Two first-year, English speaking classes from each semester were investigated. Their general details are in Table 1. There was no substantial difference in makeup across semesters (i.e., the students' gender, nationality, major, etc. were basically the same across both groups). This looks like a quasi-experimental design, but it is perhaps best to consider it a comparison of two case studies. The main issue was the use of current affairs for input materials: The two semesters' materials were different. But I felt that examining the interaction could still point me in the right direction for a more rigorous future study.

**Table 1.** Comparison of Offline and Online Classes

2019 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester	2020 2 <sup>nd</sup> semester
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offline</li> <li>• 2 classes, 16~20 students per class</li> <li>• Mostly first year students</li> <li>• Some repeat students</li> <li>• Readings were current affairs related</li> <li>• All classroom interactions were audio recorded</li> <li>• VC task was approximately 20 min at the end of 100-min class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online</li> <li>• 2 classes, 16~20 students per class</li> <li>• Mostly first year students</li> <li>• Some repeat students</li> <li>• Readings were current affairs related</li> <li>• All zoom breakout room activity was recorded (but there were some tech issues)</li> <li>• VC task was approximately 20 min at the end of 100-min class</li> </ul>

For my preliminary examination, I selected the VC tasks from the sixth and seventh week of the semester and transcribed them. I then examined the transcripts for LREs, pauses, and the presence and enactment of the four phases (above). The quantitative results were so surprising to me that I stopped the transcribing – I had reached data saturation.

### Results

Table 2 shows the frequency counts and averages for LREs and pauses (measured in seconds) and the total count of

moves spoken to organize their task performance. The table reveals a clear difference in all three measures. There were far more LREs offline, far shorter pauses offline, and more organizing talk online. These seem to indicate that online interaction was less focused on language learning as indicated by fewer LREs, it was more sparse in general, with an average of over three minutes of silence per twenty minutes of task, and what talk there was featured more organizational talk and less content- or language-related talk.

**Table 2.** Differences in Interaction Between Offline and Online Classes.

	Offline	Online
LRE total	141	32
LRE ave.*	15.7	2.9
Pause total (sec.)	480	2112
Pause ave. (sec.)	53.3 (0 min 53 sec)	192 (3 min 12 sec)
Organizing talk (moves)	96	133

\* Ave = the average per group per 20 min task

This might be depressing; less talk during a speaking class is not really a good thing, but as I was listening to one recording of online talk, I heard one student say, "I sent it to you in chat," and I realized what was happening. Students were using the online chat function in Zoom to replace their discussion of language (i.e., LREs) and simply solve their wording issues by chatting in text instead of talking about them – leading to the longer pauses and fewer LREs found in the transcript. I shut down the data analysis at this point for two reasons. Most importantly, I did not have the chats for each group. Although Zoom allows for them to be saved automatically to the host's computer, I had not done this. The other problem was the mismatch of topic across the two semesters.

The increase in organizational talk merits explanation, however. Manning (2014) characterizes VC task organizing talk as points in the task during which students talk about their respective roles and what is needed for successful task completion (p. 109). Organizational talk includes things such as choosing a captain, deciding what prompt(s) to discuss, who the team's writer would be, and deciding on whether they could move on to another prompt. This type of talk typically appeared at the beginning of the overall VC task and at the switch-points between prompts.

Typical examples of organizational talk from the current study's data include these:

- Choosing a captain: "Let's do rock paper scissors to decide the captain" and "I'll be the captain."  
 Choosing a prompt: "So we have six questions, so which one do you guys want?" "How about statement one?" and "Anything is okay with me."  
 Revising a statement: "So, how can we change the statement?" "[Name], what do you think?" "How about [suggestion]?" and "Is this okay?"

In the present study, as expected, both offline and online conditions included organizational talk about choosing a captain, a prompt, who should speak, etc. The difference in the amount of organizational talk between the two conditions was primarily due to a large increase in the number of attempts to correct a single organizational mistake – forgetting to revise the original statement into one they all strongly agreed with (the final step of the VC task).

This means, when doing the VC task online with Zoom, there was a great deal of additional organizational talk about needing to revise the statement because the group had skipped the revising step. Some examples are "[A] Can we move on? – [B] No, did we rewrite?" "We should rewrite,"



"We need to write it down," and "Write it on the [Google] doc, right?" In some cases, there were multiple turns of students reminding the others they had to write a new revised statement. That is, after discussing one prompt, they had to remind each other to write down the new, strongly-agreed-upon sentence, and on the next prompt they had to remind each other again. In other cases, groups discussed a few prompts without rewriting anything and then had to go back and do it. The moves (expressions), in such cases, included "We should have changed the statement first and then moved on to the next" or "We have to go back and rewrite the statements."

At the time the recordings were made, the students had done VC tasks a few times, so they knew the demands of the task and had done it before. So, it is unclear why the final step was forgotten online when it was always remembered offline. There are potential explanations. First, offline, the teacher is watching everybody at one time, perhaps keeping students focused on giving him their answers (revised statements) at the end of the lesson. In contrast, online, the teacher can only visit one group at a time and therefore is not omnipresent during group work. Another explanation is that online students are typically using one screen, and if the Zoom screen is open and visible, their shared Google Doc is not salient. Students need to remember to click on it and do the last step. Out-of-sight, out-of-mind, so to speak. Screen sharing might solve this issue and bears future investigation.

### Discussion and Conclusions

This small investigation was not planned in advance to be an experimental comparison, but emerged as an ad hoc comparison of cases. It found differences in the performance of a values clarification (VC) task whether it was performed online (in Zoom) or offline (in class). In short, students on Zoom spent more time and turns discussing what they needed to do (i.e., organizing themselves) rather than discussing the topic or language. Students also used the online chat feature of Zoom rather than communicate orally leading to less talk about language (LREs). It is hypothesized that the former is due to less teacher presence during breakout room (small group) work, and the latter is due to the efficiency of communication by text when trying to revise a written statement. Using chat helped students complete the task, but if the goal of the task is to stimulate talk, however, student use of chat may be viewed as problematic by teachers.

The study highlights an important point in the online teaching situation in which we continue to find ourselves. Learning requires some inefficiency (i.e., learners need to mentally engage with unknown language in order to master it), but online environments maximize efficiency (online dictionaries, grammar-checkers, etc.). For my students, it was easier to write in a messenger than to speak out their ideas. I had not foreseen this, and I had not adapted my tasks or the learning environment to maximize speaking (i.e., the class' objective), leading to fewer LREs.

It is apparent from this study that more investigation into precisely how students do tasks online and how this differs from offline performance is needed. It is not merely a question of finding the right computer program (e.g., Zoom) and plugging offline activities into it.

### Takeaways: Going Forward with Online Teaching

On a larger scale, this study has left me wondering about the place of communication-facilitating apps in communicative language learning. Does the efficiency in communication provided by Zoom and other online media impair or assist learning? Or, perhaps more precisely, which efficiencies help which learners, and which do not?

Teachers need to be highly aware of how online media available to their students (not necessarily the app the class is operating in) changes the trajectory of a classroom activity (here the VC task). Offline, the teacher can see if the student has their phone out. Online, the students have a multitude of apps to help them. If a communicative task is intended to recycle vocabulary and grammar, and thereby prompt oral discussion of language (LREs), but the learning situation allows for quick, written solutions, what do the students lose in terms of learning opportunities? And what do they gain? More importantly, how can teachers adapt the task to maximize the students' gains in relation to course objectives?

The forced emergency online teaching of the past three semesters has brought such questions to the forefront. I hope that by sharing my experience with you that I have piqued your curiosity about the potential benefits and drawbacks of technology. Technology will transform teaching and learning. It is up to us to reflect on our practice, examine what our students do, and determine if our intentions, their needs, and the affordances of available technology are aligning properly or not.

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# “But Anyway”: An Example of Interactional Competence and Its Development in 1–1 Online Lessons

By William Owens

This article describes *interactional competence* (IC), one of the lesser-known competences of second language acquisition (SLA) studies, and illustrates it with two short examples of dialogue from an online 1–1 conversation-based English lesson.

“Competence” has been something of a buzz-word in SLA since the 1970s. Chomsky and others argued for “linguistic competence” (i.e., grammar and vocabulary) as the object of language learning. Hymes disagreed, pointing out that “a child from whom any and all of the grammatical sentences of a language might come with equal likelihood would be of course a social monster” (1974, p. 75). He argued for “sociolinguistic competence” or “pragmatic competence” as equally necessary (i.e., knowing when, and why, certain grammatical combinations of words are appropriate). In 1980, Canale and Swain added “discourse competence” and “strategic competence,” and tied all of the previous together as “communicative competence,” which was then mostly agreed on as being what we should teach (with “intercultural competence” as an optional cherry-on-top), which was how we got Communicative Language Teaching.

Like any dominant theory, the framework of communicative competence is often criticized. One of the many camps from which the ballistae fire is the small-but-growing overlap between SLA and sociology/ethnomethodology, which is where my work and the ideas discussed in this article are situated. We don’t use communicative competence, for two main reasons: first, because it focuses on the individual language user and their internal cognition rather than the interaction between language users and contexts; and second, because it prescribes what the attributes of a successful language user should be and tries to teach them rather than observing what successful communication looks like in real life and works backwards from there. IC, on the other hand, starts with this simple fact – “put simply, some people seem to be better able to communicate than others” (Walsh, 2012, p. 1) – and works backwards from there, asking “why?”

This allows it to account for some significant facts that traditional SLA tends to overlook: first, that talking can be a very efficient and effective information-exchange system despite being an overlapping, stop-starting, constantly-self-repairing mess; second, that some “native speakers” are poor communicators despite the fact that they theoretically have maximal scores in all the competences by default; third, that some people just don’t click together despite each being “great communicators”; and fourth, that sometimes a hand gesture is a better way of getting a point across than a sixty-second monologue.

The upshot is that IC research is entirely qualitative, meaning that it generates detailed verbal descriptions instead of scores and statistics. This is because IC describes “competence” as being the implicit understanding, creating, negotiating, following, and breaking of innumerable, very complex, detailed little conversational rules and patterns, which are largely “unwritten” (although writing them down is one of the major goals of IC research). As such, using IC does not

provide an analysis of a person’s language ability per se but instead provides an analysis of the overall communicative success of *this* person talking/arguing/flirting with *that* person in *this* language in *that* time and place with *these* contextual factors. Qualitative descriptions of this type are less generalizable and more demanding to produce than the test scores generated by traditional SLA and communicative competence models, but one could argue that they are also more accurate and more useful. In summary, SLA argues that taking into account all the messy facets of real-world interaction means that IC has little to do with the SLA research paradigm, while IC researchers argue back that this means the SLA research paradigm has little to do with the messy facets of real-world interaction.

What follows is an example, in the form of one of the little conversational patterns mentioned above. It comes from my own research, which involves teaching 1–1 online classes in a deliberately open-format, emergent, Dogme style (Meddings & Thornbury, 2017) to an English user, “Garnet,” who teaches English herself. The classes involved no webcams, meaning that the embodied actions (gesture, body alignment, gaze, facial expression, etc.) so important to interaction management (and IC) were unavailable, and all levels of the interaction were conducted using nothing but the voice, much like in a telephone call, albeit with a shared whiteboard and shared PowerPoint slides. The focus here is on how Garnet developed and used a particular strategy in this context, using “ANYway” (with heavy stress on the first syllable) to divert the conversation away from particular anticipated upcoming topics that she dispreferred and adapting that strategy to make it more successful in the context, and how William (the author) responded to it.

## Extract 1

```
G: I told you before.
   (pause)
W: did y-
G: I, well I shared like, like bit of- e- the
G: exper-, I-... the experience when we were talking
   about speaking and i said ah I, I... I (rarely)
   made any mistakes when [I was talking to my students. ]
W: [(inbreath) oh of course you did ]
   of course you did
G: yeah... [ah-]
W: [yes:] and you said you were-
G: that's fine but 'ANYway, haha [ha, yeah ]
W: [you were] less
   adventurous: with your language and you [on]ly
G:
W: used safe sentences.
   (long pause)
G: <<quietly>> yeah exactly
W: that's it i- sorry, hh
```

Extract 1, from an earlier class, shows William impolitely forgetting something Garnet had previously told him and her reminding him of it. He responds by demonstrating that he remembers the previous conversation, overlapping Garnet’s “yeah... ah-” by starting to give extra, unsolicited details about it. Garnet’s strategy for guiding him away from getting into that topic has three parts: the first is an acceptance of the implicit apology for forgetting (“that’s fine”); the second is an attempt to end that sequence and move on, using “ANYway”; and the third is a laugh-and-“yeah” to follow the “ANYway.” As a topic-changing device, it failed: William

followed it by picking up where he had left off with the repetition of “you were” and completing the project of proving that he remembered by giving unsolicited detail. He was effectively able to disregard Garnet’s entire turn highlighted in blue. Garnet’s reaction, a pause and quietly spoken “yeah, exactly,” demonstrates the blow that this delivers to the flow of the conversation.

Although “ANYway” is often used open-ended (i.e., at the end of a turn) to show that one wants to close the topic and move on (Park, 2010), what we see here is that when it’s left open-ended, its success in achieving that goal is dependent on the other person picking up on the cue and being willing to drop the current topic and move on. One might speculate that William might have been more likely to respond to “ANYway” as a topic-changing device if it had been deployed in combination with embodied gestures, especially gaze and facial expression, indicating Garnet’s dispreference for this topic to him. Whether this is the case or not, it is apparent that without the support of embodied gestures, stand-alone “ANYway” has limited effectiveness as a topic-changing device.

In another class four months later (shown in Extract 2), we see more sophisticated usage of strategic topic-changing “ANYway.” Garnet seems to have found a way to upgrade it to make up for the weakness of being unaccompanied by embodied actions. By deploying this upgraded version, she makes it much more difficult for William to resist the topic change.

### Extract 2

```
G: and they will have this... look: at us you know
... like ho:w this gonna be a contribution.
W: yeah.
G: so: uhm... we sort of like steppiing,
... maybe to the... to the ↑sssunlight? ↓and
then:,
W: step in[to the sunlight eh? ha]haha
G: [start to... make-]


(pause)


G: HAha ye(ha)ah (inbreath) ↑yeah I know it's
not right (inbreath) ↑UH, ANYway so kind of
like making ↑profits so something that can
be- can be seen and and
W: okay,
```

Garnet coins a phrase, “stepping to the sunlight,” to describe increased visibility in a new role at work, and William repeats it, in conjunction with “eh?” and laughter. This move by William marks Garnet’s coinage as salient and noteworthy, but intelligible, and the “eh?” topicalizes (i.e., focuses the conversation on) the coinage’s form by explicitly soliciting a reaction from Garnet. This overlaps with, and interrupts, her continuing her story (she stops abruptly after “and then...”). She abandons the story momentarily to provide the solicited response to William’s highlighting the form of her coinage (“haha yeah, I know it’s not right”), but she does this with quick and quiet prosody to mark it as a side-sequence before using “ANYway” to end that side-sequence marked by an ending of the quiet and fast prosody by the loudness and high tone of “ANYway.” Notably, this time she also incorporates “so” to mark what she says next (“so kind of like making profits...”) as “emerging from incipiency” (Bolden, 2009), that is, being the “main” conversation thread; and indeed, what she says at that point is a resumption of what she was saying earlier, before she was interrupted. William’s next turn, “okay,” shows that he aligns with her continuing the story (instead of allowing the form of the coinage to be topicalized). By immediately following “ANYway” with “so” and talking about another topic (in this case, returning to the previous topic),

Garnet effectively minimized and deprioritized the sequence of dealing with the form of “stepping to the sunlight” that William initiated when he repeated it back to her, making sure that the sequence happened (i.e., that William wasn’t ignored outright) but not allowing it to derail her story. Given that this is a language lesson, keeping her story on track by swerving around a teacher-initiated form–focus sequence in this way is an accomplishment as well as a demonstration of strong interactional competence. In a deeper analysis, we might say that the format of William’s repair-initiation “step into the sunlight, eh?” facilitated this by making a linguistic focus on the coinage available-but-optional, and that Garnet’s response is a way of selecting the “no, thank you” option, thus constituting a collaboration in the construction of the conversation and its ongoing trajectory.

The comparison of these two extracts aims to show that “ANYway” is more successful as a sudden topic-changing device when its speaker follows it up immediately by talking on their new topic rather than leaving it open-ended, and that Garnet learned this fact and applied it over the course of her series of classes with William, demonstrating the acquisition of an IC strategy over time in a context where visual cues are unavailable and all interaction management and signalling must be conducted vocally. The extracts admittedly do not provide a perfect comparison: In Extract 1, it was William who was in the middle of saying something when “anyway” was deployed, and in Extract 2, it was Garnet, so of course one could argue that that was the determining factor in whether Garnet’s “anyway” was successful in keeping the train on her tracks. This is a limitation of this analysis and of conversation analysis methods in general, though it can be mitigated with a higher number of extracts.

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# Feedback for the Future: Using Technology and Learner Understanding to Give Effective Writing Feedback

By I Lei Chan

In an ESL or EFL context, assigning writing tasks or including writing as assessment is a very common practice. Writing can be roughly classified into two levels. The first is test-based. It is usually genre-specific and aims at training students for testing or examinations. The second is communicative-based, which is viewed as a meaning-making and socially situated activity (Vojak et al., 2011). Through drafting, teachers can provide corrective feedback to learners on aspects such as lexical choice, syntactic problems, content coherence, and grammatical accuracy. Formative feedback can be given in various forms and ways, including (but not limited to) verbal conversations, direct corrections, indirect hints, explanations, comments, suggestions, and rubrics with detailed notes usually from teachers, or other agents (e.g., peers or computers), in order to monitor learner progress. High quality and effective feedback on learner writing is a key method to successfully enhancing language learning. Wiggins (2012) states that feedback should be specific, timely, goal-referenced, and actionable. In other words, students should know where they have made mistakes and how they can do better for future drafts or assessments. The goal is to provide a chance for learners to improve their writing skills and performance, and to achieve the goals they have set for English learning.

However, despite the potential benefits of giving feedback, reality presents some inevitable obstacles that hinder teachers from even giving “enough” feedback, let alone “effective,” “detailed,” or “holistic” input due to the constraints of time, shortages of personnel, limited resources, huge class sizes, and overwhelming workloads. At the same time, the practice of feedback could be unpromising, sometimes even discouraging, for both teachers and learners since there is a “risk of miscommunication through written feedback” (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 98). Moreover, frustrations arise when learners are not engaged with the feedback given and are only interested in the scores (Boud & Molloy, 2012). Thus, feedback must be a two-way dialogue that can motivate learners in identifying and learning from their mistakes (Ronsen, 2013). To overcome such difficulties, some innovative ways of giving feedback on learner writing are going to be introduced. Thanks to technological progress, new forms of feedback (i.e., audio, audio-visual, computer-assisted) have emerged and been proven to be more understandable and engaging for learners (see West & Turner, 2016).

To supplement traditional methods of providing feedback (written and oral), integrating modern educational technology into feedback practices allows teachers to give unambiguous and personalized feedback to today’s tech-savvy learners. Multimedia-rich feedback can help learners achieve greater learning and foster their academic motivation (Henderson & Phillips, 2015). The question now is what technologies and how can they be used? You probably have used or tried a variety of feedback tools. For example, the learning-management system (LMS) in your institution, such as Blackboard, Moodle, or Google Classroom, is often utilized for feedback practices. Other new forms of feedback, the corresponding applications, and their advantages can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Online Applications for Each Specific Feedback Type

Feedback Type	Features	Applications
Rubrics (creations or built-in)	Scoring guides to comment and evaluate written texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LMS built-in rubrics</li> <li>• Rubric Creator</li> <li>• Rubric Maker</li> </ul>
Annotations or comments	Digital comments on written assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LMS built-in annotation tools</li> <li>• Microsoft Word or Google Docs (Embedded comments and tracked changes)</li> </ul>
Audio	A file with your voice commenting on written work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocaroo</li> <li>• SoundCloud</li> <li>• Kaizena</li> </ul>
Video (screencasts)	A digital recording with visual and audio narration on learners’ work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Screencast-o-matic</li> <li>• Screencastify</li> </ul>
Automated (computer-assisted)	Computer-generated instant scoring, general and specific feedback on written work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammarly</li> <li>• Criterion</li> <li>• Academic Writing Wizard</li> </ul>
Peer Review	Online platform that enables learners to review and comment on others’ work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peerceptiv</li> <li>• Peergrade</li> </ul>

## Rubrics

The use of rubrics can make the grading process more transparent, and teachers can easily communicate their expectations for certain writing tasks and assessments to learners. Two online free tools, Rubric Creator and Rubric Maker, can be used to quickly create a rubric by inserting the assessed components and the criteria. Once a rubric has been made, it can be imported to the learning-management system to hasten the process of grading because teachers can simply click on the appropriate criterion and the grade will be calculated automatically. It is worth mentioning that sometimes the LMS also has a built-in rubric tool, which allows you to design rubrics for a specific assignment.

## Annotations or Comments

Similar to the traditional way of giving feedback, where teachers scribble written feedback on the relevant parts of a text, the embedded functions in Microsoft Word or Google Docs (i.e., comments, tracked changes, and highlighting) and the built-in annotation tools in the LMS can be utilized to add digital feedback on learners’ essays and assignments. Teachers can strategically employ these functions to make a color-coded system for corrections (e.g., yellow for grammar mistakes, red for inappropriate transitions), add in comments to show specific concerns, leave some links to direct learners for self-study, or ask self-reflective questions to prompt critical thinking. Using built-in annotation tools in an LMS could even save more time since teachers can leave comments directly on learners’ submissions without the need of downloading every file. Additionally, comments can be frequently reused. This feedback enables learners to track and monitor their mistakes easily.

## Audio

If you are looking for a time-saver, audio feedback may be your best choice. Learners reported that this type of feedback provides greater and clearer details, which are easier to understand (Lunt & Curran, 2010). Applications such as Vocaroo, SoundCloud, and Kaizena allow teachers to record their voice giving feedback on learners’ work. Teachers can easily provide thorough explanations of mistakes and how to correct them. Also, learners can repeat the audio feedback anytime and anywhere to enhance their understanding. It is particularly beneficial for larger classes. Since teachers might not have the time to meet with every learner (or “conference”)

to talk through written feedback, audio feedback can help learners feel more connected.

### Video (Screencasts)

If you are looking for a way to provide timely, generic, and engaging feedback to a large group of learners, video (screencasts) is perfect. Screencasts are digital recordings of one's computer screen together with the audio narration. The most popular applications are Screencast-o-matic and Screencastify. Video-based feedback has been found to be able to facilitate learners' writing development (Odo & Yi, 2014). Teachers can record a mini lesson as group or individual feedback to walk learners through their writings and explain the correct and incorrect elements using audio feedback. Then the video can be made accessible to learners through the LMS or other means.

### Automated (Computer-Assisted)

One of the strongest advantages of automated (or computer-assisted) feedback is that rapid (almost instant) feedback is given to learners. The timing of feedback is proven to be closely related to learners' success (Kulkarni, Bernstein, & Klemmer, 2015). To solve problems in their writing, many learners prefer to use digital software, such as Grammarly, to help check spelling and grammar errors. The emergence of automated writing evaluation (AWE) enables learners to receive an instant score and general or specific written feedback on their writing practices. For learners who want to focus on exam drilling, Criterion (an AWE program at criterion.ets.org) evaluates their writing skills as it provides immediate feedback and automated score reports. For learners who want to improve academic writing, teachers can give Academic Writing Wizard (AWW) a try. Four stages of writing a cohesive text are demonstrated in AWW to enhance the content of learners' essays. AWW has different instructions on how to apply cohesive elements in writing, such as transitional signals, backward or forward referencing, patterns of lexical repetitions, and lexical phrases based on academic corpora. One good thing about this program is that teachers can also add in their feedback on learners' essays, which makes the feedback doubly effective.

### Peer Review

For scaffolded assignments that require frequent and multiple feedback, peer review feedback can be an ideal option. Learners can help evaluate each other's earliest drafts so that improvements and adjustments can be made before submitting a final version for grading. Online systems such as Peerceptiv and Peergrade allow teachers to anonymously pair up learners with different strengths and weaknesses. Teachers can also upload a rubric and invite learners to comment on specific aspects of the text.

While there are many digital applications or extensions available, we should not just use them for the sake of using something new; thorough consideration is needed before any adoption. Each tool has different functions and advantages. When you first try an innovative technology, you should bear in mind that one size does not fit all. Hence, a combination of feedback approaches (e.g., rubrics, written comments, annotations, audio, and automated feedback) can empower your feedback to be more effective, engaging, and timely.

Sometimes knowing what learners are thinking is also crucial; their feelings and preferences can be gathered via a survey or a poll. A survey recently conducted by the author showed that students preferred teachers to provide direct and comprehensive feedback on their writings. They also hoped to have more chances to talk with their teachers with regards to the feedback given. This result has proven the

need for the adoption of technology-assisted methods in the feedback process, as it would well accelerate the time of giving meaningful feedback. Giving the right type of feedback at the right times to learners plays a key role in their writing development. With the right technology, truly effective feedback for learning can be delivered. For instance, students often shared with me their appreciation of the detailed feedback given to them via the use of the built-in annotations tools on Turnitin on Moodle (the LMS used by my institution), especially the function of adding texts and comments, inserting rubrics, calculating scores, recording audios, and checking similarity rate, as they greatly benefited from this comprehensive feedback, which enabled them to self-edit their draft and produce a much more qualified version later. Finally, there are many approaches for giving feedback on different written tasks (for regular classroom assignments or for exams). Carefully evaluate each tool and your own learners, and select the ones that best fit your teaching context. Have fun in this journey of giving useful feedback!

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# Les Timmermans: Teacher, Actor, Brewmeister

*Les Timmermans is a Canadian who has been living in South Korea since 2006. After receiving a Bachelors of Education degree from the University of Calgary, he moved to Seoul to begin teaching and has lived in Pyeongchang in Gangwon-do since 2011. He is now the owner of White Crow Brewing Company, producing award-winning craft beer currently sold across Korea. Here is The English Connection's interview with Les. — Ed.*

**The English Connection (TEC):** First of all, Les, thank you for agreeing to this interview and sharing your experiences with our readers.

**Les Timmermans:** I'm pleased to contribute to your fine publication, Andrew!

**TEC:** Could you perhaps say a bit about who you are, your background, and how you've made Korea your home?

**Les:** I originally came to Korea to gain international teaching and living experience. I thought that would really inform my practice as an elementary public school teacher in Canada. Growing up, I had some amazing, well-traveled teachers who really inspired me to also become a teacher. I found my experiences in Korea to be challenging, rewarding, and fulfilling, and I opted to stay year after year. Since that first year, I have taught in a wide variety of positions, including at after-school academies, elementary schools, middle schools, and universities. I've co-authored middle school texts and SAT prep resources. I was the EPIK district coordinator for Pyeongchang-gun from 2013 to 2015. Fast forward a few years, and now I'm building a craft beer brand as a business owner. It hasn't been boring – that's for sure!

**TEC:** You've definitely taught a wide gamut of EFL positions. What advice can you give to younger teachers looking to find their satisfying niche? What's been your approach to successful language teaching?

**Les:** Challenge yourself to keep learning, growing, and bringing your best to your students. Accept opportunities to grow into new positions, and look for ways to keep adding to your skill set and list of experiences. If you're too comfortable, you're probably not growing as much as you could be! And challenge your students as well to really get the most out of their time.

**TEC:** Along with your wife, you've recently started filming an English program on EBSe. That must be quite an experience. How did this come about?

**Les:** From February of this year, we have been busy creating a new TV program on EBSe called "Who Am I?" targeting mainly elementary and middle school English learners. My wife, Sujin Kim, has actually been involved in projects with EBS for many years. She is a high school English teacher and has hosted a number of educational TV programs. I hosted



an EBSe middle school English program back in 2011. So we both have had some experience with this kind of thing. But creating this current program together with my wife has been a really unique opportunity.

"Who Am I?" was the idea of EBSe Chief Director Joon Sung Kim. He was visiting our restaurant when he came across the illustrated books on English idioms that my wife had produced. She made them while I was studying beer brewing in Canada. Mr. Kim had been thinking about a new program involving an artist drawing something as the audience guesses what it is. Each episode is about ten minutes, and as she draws, I make a series of wild guesses introducing key vocabulary and expressions, until eventually I get it right. It's fun, and definitely a bit silly.

**TEC:** What is a day of filming like?

**Les:** It starts with an early KTX train to Seoul. Once we arrive at the EBS building in Ilsan, we get into costume and have our hair and makeup done. Then we move into the studio where we work with a program director, computer graphic



designer, and cameraman to shoot the episodes. These episodes will air on EBS five times a week until September this year, so we've got about 130 shows to write, practice, and film. Every day we are in the studio, we try to get through eight or nine episodes. The trip from Pyeongchang to Ilsan and back will be our new commute for the next few months.

**TEC:** How would you describe the viewing audiences' involvement during the show and the methods of learning going on?

**Les:** I hope that viewers will be interested in the drawing as it takes shape and guess along with me what it might be in the end. We introduce and repeat key words throughout the episodes, and share some interesting facts and jokes as well. So far the drawings have focused on animals and occupations. Sujin does a bit of Korean translation for the viewers, and they can read both English and Korean subtitles to help understand.

The short, ten-minute episodes will also be available online and will move quickly enough so as not to fall outside of a young viewer's attention span. A main challenge with filming as opposed to face-to-face teaching is that as an instructor, you must work without any of the simultaneous feedback that would be otherwise available. Back-and-forth interaction, facial cues, live participation – all of these are missing when filming a lesson. To compensate, I essentially play the role of the student in the shows, trying to guess what the picture is. And I hope the viewers will mirror my attempts to guess the picture, and learn and practice speaking new words and phrases.

**TEC:** In addition to your varied teaching experiences over the past two decades in Korea, you are also living what many would consider the ultimate dream: Living in the mountains of Gangwon-do and owning and operating a brewery. Tell me, what is it like living such a fantasy life?

**Les:** I've always dreamed of living in the countryside. The fresh air, the silence, the changing of the seasons, even neighborly interactions – all of these are so much more



**“Accept opportunities to grow into new positions, and look for ways to keep adding to your skill set and list of experiences.”**



abundant and noticeable outside of the city. Despite barely having enough energy to lift my arms at the end of the work day, I love having a vegetable garden through the warmer months and doing (most of) the outdoor work around the house and brewery. It's all pretty fulfilling.

When my wife and I moved to Pyeongchang, we really thought we had it all. Except one thing – a place nearby serving great beer! That's why and when I began learning to make beer at home. A few years later, from 2015 to 2017, I studied in Canada to make beer professionally, and in early 2019, we opened the doors of our business, White Crow Brewing Company. In two years, we have become a recognized name in Korea's craft beer scene, and I'm really pleased and proud at how far we've come already.

**TEC:** Any thoughts on ways to connect English teaching, the Pyeongchang mountainsides, and delicious craft beer?

**Les:** Well, it can all be part of a really busy – but ultimately fulfilling – lifestyle, let me assure you! For me, it's a glass of good beer that can tie it all together: Satisfying work, vibrant community relationships, and beautiful places.

**TEC:** Where would you like to see yourself in the future?

**Les:** I've never been great at forecasting where I'll be in five, ten, or fifteen years, but what has served me well is jumping at interesting opportunities to challenge myself and keep learning as I go. I suppose I'll keep doing that for as long as I can.

**TEC:** Good luck with the TV program “Who Am I?” and the brewery. I wish you good fortune, and will be following your continued success. I will proudly wear a White Crow T-shirt when you send me one. Thank you for your time.

**Les:** I will be pleased to hand you a shirt in person, as soon as you come to visit! Thank you Andrew, and best of luck and success to you and all the readers.

Interviewed by Editor-in-Chief Andrew White.

# One Teacher's Journey to Being a Reflective Practice Enthusiast

By Kristy Dolson

*Two years ago, reflective practice guru Dr. Thomas S.C. Farrell suggested that Korea TESOL institute a Reflective Language Teacher Award. The award was launched and is supported by Dr. Farrell. The annual award is announced at our international conference, and this year it was announced that the award winner was Kristy Dolson of Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter. Part of the award is the opportunity to write a reflective practice article to appear in The English Connection. Kristy enthusiastically opted to contribute the following article on her road of reflection. — Ed.*

When I first arrived in South Korea, I had just received my BEd from Brock University in St. Catharines, Ontario. After years of theoretical study and steeped in a culture of post-lesson reflection from my teacher certification courses, I took thorough notes during my first week of primary school English classes. Anticipating a reflective discussion with my co-teacher, I remember sitting across from her at the end of that week, brimming with eagerness, and asking "So, how did this week's classes go? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?"

my reflective needs. I did my best to attend each monthly meeting and became an active participant over the years. I loved the workshops, discussions, and community. I didn't particularly enjoy leading large presentations in my first few years of membership, even though sharing our knowledge, experiences, and skills is one of the greatest services we can do for each other. This is why I was ecstatic to join Gwangju-Jeonnam Chapter's Reflective Practice Special Interest Group.

When two prominent members of the Gwangju-Jeonnam KOTESOL launched their RP-SIG branch, I became a devoted attendee. As an introvert, I prefer smaller, more intimate gatherings for discussion and community building. It was so meaningful to have a place to go every month to pose teaching problems and discuss solutions with a close-knit group of like-minded peers. Keeping a reflective journal to help identify patterns and areas for improvement in my teaching has played a key role in my reflective practice, but having access to a community of reflective peers and role models was a much-needed addition. My participation recently provided the opportunity to win the Reflective Language Teacher Award this year, a significant achievement and beautiful bookend to my reflective journey in EFL as I wrap up my life and career in South Korea.

In the past decade, I have regarded teaching as a difficult yet rewarding profession. I started my EFL career teaching at a primary school English Town, but after five years there, I felt myself stagnating and decided to leave South Korea to pursue other options. After a year of traveling and spending time with family, I was offered my dream job of training teachers at the Jeollanamdo Education Training Institute in Damyang. Shortly after my return, JETI moved to Yeosu and transformed into the Jeollanamdo International Education Institute. Although



▲ **Kristy ready to give a presentation on effective questioning to the November 2018 intake of JLP English teachers. (It was Halloween.)**

In the movie of my memory, my co-teacher does the slow blink of not comprehending before tonelessly announcing "It was fine" and turning back to her computer in a gesture of dismissal.

I was devastated. While I'd been hoping for an experienced teaching mentor, she was just happy she'd won a competent, energetic foreigner from the roulette wheel of NET placements. It would be some time before she would be open to the reflective exchanges I was seeking, although we did eventually build an amazing relationship.

I learned very quickly that if I wanted professional development as a guest teacher in South Korea, I was going to have to look elsewhere for it. Fortunately I discovered KOTESOL, the professional organization tailor-made for

"After ten years of reflection and growth, I have learned that being a compassionate, reflective role model is my number one teaching objective."



JIEI is a center that handles multiple programs for English and multicultural education, my main role there continued to be training Korean English teachers.

As the microteaching instructor, I was uniquely situated to lead the KETs in teaching demos and reflection with the goal of improving their teaching and reflective skills. I encouraged them to start reflective practice groups of their own, often sharing the benefits I'd gained from my involvement with KOTESOL and the RP-SIG. In fact, I maintain that the greatest long-term benefit from JIEI's Six-Month Intensive English Teacher Training program is not what they learn from the classes, but rather the opportunity to create supportive and collaborative communities that they can continue to access once they return to their schools.

In addition to encouraging the trainees to reflect often and together, as the native teacher coordinator, I led several reflective practice meetings for my team of instructors. Once a semester, I organized informal open classes to promote professional observation, feedback, and growth. These experiences helped my team build rapport, community, and their own teaching and feedback skills. It was extremely satisfying to take resources and activities I'd experienced through KOTESOL and share them with my colleagues.

Furthermore, in pre-pandemic times our center hosted the spring and fall orientations for the Jeollanamdo Language Program as well as an annual renewal meeting. As a senior foreign staff member and experienced teacher, I was a regular presenter for these events. Being such, cultivated my competence and passion for giving large presentations. I discovered that I was ideally placed for spreading information about KOTESOL and encouraging new and returning teachers to seek out its resources and communities. As my presenter confidence grew, I was encouraged to create a presentation for the online National Conference in 2020 as well as contribute submissions for *The English Connection* and *Voices*.

When I first arrived in South Korea, I had a student mindset, eager for reflective feedback from my mentors. All these years later, I am still a student, but I can see that my story has a cyclical nature. As the senior native instructor at JIEI, I was the person others came to for reflective feedback. I stepped up to offer my experience, knowledge, and skills, and led others in developing their own. Whenever someone asked me "Do you have any suggestions for improvement?" I never said "It was fine."

I owe immense credit to KOTESOL for the confidence, success, and satisfaction I felt as an EFL teacher in South Korea. It was a fount of professional development opportunities and source for reflective feedback in a culture that too often overlooks their importance, particularly among the foreign teacher community. Even now that I've left South Korea, the support network I made there has continued to

provide valuable guidance, friendship, and opportunities during my transition away from overseas teaching.

Reflective practice doesn't just happen. We have to make space for it. Not everyone feels driven to pursue it, and not all organizations promote it. The teaching profession requires all kinds of individuals and groups in order to best serve our students and societies. After ten years of reflection and growth, I have learned that being a compassionate, reflective role model is my number one teaching objective.



▲ **Membership of the Gwangju RP-SIG has expanded over the years, but it retains the close-knit community feeling its core members appreciate. (2018)**

Witnessing my students' and colleagues' personal and professional development alongside my own has led me to the realization that I want to do more with reflective practice than just using it to better my own classroom practices. I want to continue helping my fellow educators by discussing the difficulties and opportunities of teaching while inspiring people to reflect and seek improvement. I don't yet know what the future holds, but I no longer see myself in a traditional classroom environment. Reflecting on reflective practice has set me on the path away from public education, but I hope that I can continue making space for reflective practice for myself and many others.

### The Author

**Kristy Dolson** moved to South Korea after attaining her Bachelor of Education in Ontario, Canada. After five years of classroom teaching experience, she became a teacher trainer at the Jeollanamdo International Education Institute where she instructed Korean primary and secondary public school teachers in her two courses, Pronunciation Skills and Microteaching, for three years. She has just moved back to Ontario and is contemplating the next step in her teaching journey. Email: [kdolsom@gmail.com](mailto:kdolsom@gmail.com)



## Member Spotlight: Andrew Griffiths

*You may not be familiar with this KOTESOL member, that is, unless you are acquainted with the Daejeon area or have attended one or more of his much-talked-about presentations at chapters or conferences throughout the country over the past decade. He is a teacher trainer for the Daejeon area and a KOTESOL officer for the Daejeon-Chungcheong Chapter. In this issue, The English Connection turns its spotlight on KOTESOL member Andrew Griffiths. — Ed.*

**TEC:** Thank you, Andrew, for the privilege of doing this interview with you for *The English Connection*. Please begin by giving us a little background information about yourself – where you’re from, what you did there, why you came to Korea, etc.

**Andrew:** The privilege is all mine! I come from England originally. I grew up in the Midlands before moving to Yorkshire for university. After I graduated, I worked in IT management. Sometime around my mid-twenties I realized that management wasn’t going to fulfill me personally and that I needed something different. So I took a chance on a new country and a new career, and here I am – some thirteen years later.

**TEC:** I know that you are a teacher trainer at the Daejeon Education Training Institute. Please tell us about your work there.

**Andrew:** I teach Korean teachers in an immersive English program. I originally taught in the public school system, but a few years back I got the opportunity to move into teacher training. I started out as the speaking trainer for the course, but I now teach reading and writing. I also do training courses for other teachers as and when required. I’ve been



▲ **Andrew, the mountaineer (Mt. Gyeryong).**

working at the training institute for eight years now, and it’s a fascinating, rewarding job to have.

**TEC:** How do you like training Korean in-service teachers? Are they receptive to the techniques that you present? I

ask because they most likely come from a test-driven and memorization-focused student life, and quite possibly teach much the same way.

**Andrew:** I love it, and one of the best things about my job is that my trainees are usually so motivated! Most teachers – though not all – come from a school situation where tests and rote learning reign supreme, and as such, they usually come to the training institute wanting to learn to teach in a different way. One of the most rewarding things for me is when I meet or get a message from a former trainee who tells me about how they’ve adapted my ideas or techniques into their class and bettered their teaching as a result.

**TEC:** How has the COVID pandemic affected you and your teaching over the past year?

**Andrew:** We’ve done a mixture of online and in-person learning. Learning how to teach online was a massive learning curve, as it was for so many others. We’ve also taught the trainees how to teach online to their students, which was a big deal for them – a lot of them really weren’t sure how to do it, and it was good to be able to remedy that. While COVID-19 has caused a lot of problems for everyone both professionally and personally, I’m glad I learned those skills as a consequence because I think online learning is going to play a more prominent role in education in the future – for better or for worse.

**TEC:** If you can remember back, would you explain when, where, and how you got involved in KOTESOL?

**Andrew:** It was in 2013. I saw about it online somewhere – I don’t recall exactly where. I went to my first chapter meeting where I met Mike Peacock and a few other Daejeon-Chungcheong Chapter members, most of whom have now left Korea. My first major event was the 2013 National Conference, which our chapter hosted. I learned so much that weekend, a lot of which still informs my teaching. I’ve been going to events ever since.

**TEC:** A major aim of KOTESOL is to promote professional development of its members. How much has KOTESOL done for you in this area?

**Andrew:** It’s done a huge amount. I pretty much always learn something new at whatever event I go to. While I enjoy watching the big names at our conferences, I usually find that it’s the local presenters that teach me the most. There are a lot of teachers with a lot of expertise in this country, and it’s great to have a chance to learn from them.

It’s also important to say that KOTESOL has really given me a chance to become a presenter in my own right. KOTESOL events are always friendly places to present at, and over the years, I’ve become more confident in presenting and more confident in the worth of the ideas I share. Although I enjoy presenting at larger conferences, I have to say that I prefer

presenting at regional chapter workshops around the country. There's always such a friendly sense of community at those events.

**TEC:** Let's turn the previous question around: What things have you done to contribute to the betterment of KOTESOL?

**Andrew:** I do a lot of work at the chapter level. I've been on the Daejeon-Chungcheong Executive Committee for a while now, and I currently hold the position of vice-president. I've done all sorts of things over the years: organizing socials and workshops, writing chapter documents, and so on. The biggest thing thus far was being the chair of our November Symposium last year. This year, I've taken charge of organizing a series of online workshops on Wednesday evenings. They're going really well, and we've had some great presenters thus far. Again, I really like the sense of



▲ **Andrew, the consummate presenter.**

(coffee in the mornings, tea or maybe something a little stronger in the evenings...) is better. I enjoy hiking too – something that has carried over quite nicely from living in Yorkshire to the Korean landscape. Before COVID-19 hit, I also regularly went to see football (soccer) matches in Daejeon, but that's taken a bit of a backseat lately. Traveling, too. I do miss that! With all that said, since the pandemic started, I now spend a lot of my free time eating junk food and watching Netflix with my wife, and I think that's an excellent way to see out an evening or a weekend.

**TEC:** Looking into your crystal ball, or at your tarot cards or *saju*, what do you see Andrew Griffiths doing in the not-so-distant future, and beyond?



▲ **Andrew, the lesson demonstrator.**

community that we have at the chapter level, and that is where my truest passion for KOTESOL lies.

**TEC:** What would you like to see KOTESOL doing in the coming months and years?

**Andrew:** Although I really miss the face-to-face aspects of workshops and conferences, I have to admit that going online has given me a great opportunity to do professional development without having to leave my home, and the convenience of that is fantastic. Take the International Conference, for example – while I missed being able to meet people, I was able to enjoy it from the comfort of my desk. I'd like to see both options being available in the future rather than just going back to only face-to-face events. It would also be a good way to reach people who live away from the urban centers of the country; that's something that we try to be sensitive to in our chapter, as we represent not just a city but a province as well.

**TEC:** I know teachers don't have much leisure time, but do you have any hobbies or any activities that you engage in alone or with your family that you would share with us?

**Andrew:** I read a lot. I prefer non-fiction (current affairs, political science, and philosophy are favorites), but I also read a lot of classic fiction. Reading while listening to some good music – classical, jazz, blues, soul, maybe some metal or rock – is good; having a drink of something with it

**“Again,  
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**Andrew:** There's a lot I want to get done this year. I'm currently working on publishing one or two more articles, as well as working on improving my TOPIK (Test of Proficiency in Korean) score. I've also been considering starting a PhD as well, finances permitting.

**TEC:** That is quite a to-do list! I hope you get it all accomplished, and I thank you for this interview.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

# The Classroom Connection

## On Not Being Friends with My Students

By Peter Thwaites



Many years ago, during my first few years as an English teacher, I was struggling with a class of Korean middle school students. The class was small, and the students were polite and respectful, but they were also very quiet, prone to mood swings, and quite good at not speaking English. I was a newly qualified teacher at that time, and I had a naive confidence in my ability to engage. I expected to quickly break through the barriers erected by my students' shyness. I set to work on designing materials that would make the students want to open up. I created language presentations based on amusing episodes from my life, for example, so that the students could get to know me and begin to relate. I personalized grammar and vocabulary activities, and I designed production activities around topics that I assumed they would be interested in.

As the weeks passed by with little change in attitude, I began to feel that my methods were not working. The students responded to my story-based language presentations with polite smiles, but they were no more forthcoming with their own contributions. They seemed to find it endearing that I had adapted my gap-fill activities to refer to aspects of their school lives, such as the boring cafeteria food, but this didn't make them want to use their newly learned grammar and vocabulary to actually talk to each other. I began to drift towards an unhappy conclusion: My middle-schoolers simply didn't want to communicate in English.

At something of a loss, I decided to approach a colleague for advice. He told me, "You have to stop worrying about the atmosphere in the classroom. Just teach professionally, and let the students decide if they are going to learn or not." I had heard versions of this advice before. On an orientation day for another job, for example, I was told, "Don't go wanting to be everybody's friend!" Was this me? Was I that teacher – the one who joined the profession more out of the desire for

a captive audience for his banal life stories than out of a determination to help people to develop their language skills? Perhaps these colleagues were right, I thought, "Perhaps it is time for me to dispense with the chumminess and just teach like a professional."

All the same, skepticism remained. Ever since I had begun teaching, I had been complimented on my ability to develop rapport in the classroom. Even ignoring the hit to my pride, I felt unsure that it really made sense to let go of this aspect of my teaching practice. Surely this rapport improved my students' concentration? And didn't it also motivate them to speak more? But each time I felt this skepticism arise, my middle schoolers answered with their silence. So, with no better course of action available to me, I decided to give this new approach a go. I would prepare efficient, impersonal, technically sound lessons; I would require students to say less about themselves. I would stay closer to our textbook materials. Perhaps I would not teach better, but at least I would worry less.

It would be nice if I were able to now describe the explosive impact of this new approach – whether it be the students' astounding language growth or news of a classroom rebellion. In reality, though, nothing much about the class changed. We plodded on as usual, with low motivation and no noticeable increase in language use. With hindsight, I shouldn't really have expected anything different – after all, I was deliberately disengaging from my students. But one benefit that I might reasonably have hoped for – a reduction of my own stress regarding the class – also failed to materialize. My new approach bored me, and I couldn't shake the feeling that I wasn't doing my job properly.

But as the year went on, other things began to happen. I finally began to remember the students' names, and using them in class made the students

feel noticed. School events brought their mums and dads into the classroom, and this gave me a chance to learn a little about the students' home lives. Occasionally, I'd bump into some of the kids outside of school, and these chance encounters usually gave us something to talk about. Once, visiting a friend at his apartment, a student walked into my elevator, wearing casual clothes and carrying her new dog. In the moment, she was so shocked to see me so close to her home that she could scarcely say hello; but the next time we saw each other in class, she wanted to tell me all about the puppy. Moments like this had an effect in the classroom, building connections in ways that my earlier materials had failed to do.

The net result of these two processes – my sense of dissatisfaction with my new teaching approach and the increasing connections I was forming with my students – ended up leading me back in the direction from which I had come. I began once again to encourage a positive atmosphere. I resumed my work of encouraging the students' voices in the classroom. Only this time, I did not need to contrive teaching materials to make this happen because the students simply started having things to say to me of their own accord. With hindsight, this is what I had hoped for all along, but the actual route to this destination was not the one I had anticipated. We had gotten to know each other, and the barriers had started to come down, but it hadn't happened because of my teaching methods. Rather, it had happened organically, as a spontaneous process that occurred in parallel to, but oriented in the opposite direction from, the distinctly impersonal lessons I had been teaching.

So had my colleagues been right? Had my initial attempts at building rapport actually ended up getting in the way?

I'm still not sure. I certainly think it's possible – perhaps even likely – that the students had found my initial approach uncomfortably chummy. Perhaps they had sensed its contrivance or detected in it an attempt to make them speak English against their will. Perhaps this had led them to hide from it. Some of the students might also have hoped instead for a more genuine connection. I could not blame them if this were so – these would be fair criticisms (albeit of an essentially well-intentioned approach). Perhaps what my more experienced colleagues had wished to tell me all along was not (as I had inferred) that the health of a classroom atmosphere is beyond the teacher's remit but rather that it is something that grows organically and cannot be forced.

For me, though, there have been two key lessons that I learned from this episode. The first has been to trust my instincts regarding the importance of connection in the language classroom. It is not that the students' language learning went through the roof as our classroom came to life (it didn't). But the improved atmosphere opened up new possibilities. We became able to simply speak English to each other – halting, inaccurate,



and modest but nonetheless English. It became less necessary to thoroughly plan my lessons because the things that the students suddenly began to say to me, (“Teacher, I have a new cat”; “Teacher, I spent the whole weekend watching Power Rangers”) were sometimes able to serve as raw materials for our language study. Perhaps more importantly, my students began to find their voices in English. A famous quotation, attributed to Charlemagne, has it that “to have another language is to possess a second soul.” Well, if this is true, then it is also the case that this second soul is not simply given to us as we learn; it must be wrought by us out of the limitless set of possibilities that language presents. Students have to learn how to be themselves in their new language. Put simply, this won't happen if our classrooms contain no space for our students' voices.

The second lesson I have learned from my experience with this class is that although it may not be realistic to try to force a positive classroom atmosphere, it is certainly possible to cultivate one. At the start of that school year, I had not found the best methods for doing this. By the end, I was getting closer. Learn the students' names (and use them in class, every day), show an interest in their lives, and let the things they say have real influence on the direction that classes take. Although I was to learn much more in the coming years about how to develop healthy classroom dynamics, these early lessons became the foundation for the way that I would eventually approach all of my classes, in Korea and beyond.

#### The Columnist

Peter Thwaites is an assistant professor of English Education at Keimyung University in Daegu. He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Cardiff University and is the author of numerous papers and articles on classroom interaction and L2 vocabulary learning. He has taught in Korea for more than seven years.

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# The Brain Connection

## The Way Teaching Has to Change: Insights from the Brain

By Dr. Curtis Kelly



After that, we didn't have time for the usually popular closing video story, those 4-minute tear-jerkers from Thai Life Insurance (Google "Thai Garbage Boy"), so we just did the *Communicards* instead.

*Communicards*, by the way, are an easy way to get students to tell you about their lives. I pass them out at the end of class and ask the students to write a few lines about themselves in English. After all, they get to hear lots about me, but I rarely get to hear about them, so this is the way. I encourage them not to write about the class, but some always do, and often what they say is surprising.



A couple months ago, I'd just finished two of my university classes titled "Introduction to Business English" when something surprising happened. Those classes were first-year-student classes with 65 students each. Not so easy to teach.

"That's odd," I thought. The *Communicards* I had students write at the end of class were so much more positive than usual! The comments I usually get have a couple students saying they like my class, a couple complaining about too much homework, and most of the students telling me about personal events, such as meeting an old friend or having a birthday party. That day, almost all the comments were about how much they liked the class. Student after student wrote, "I loved today's class." Now, why in the world did that happen?

Let's see. What did I do? We had a business English reading and quiz, just like every week. Nothing special there. In fact, the reading the week before was better. It was about how a poorly treated passenger made a YouTube music video, "United Breaks Guitars," that cost United Airlines millions. That class should have got the kudos. Instead, the *Communicards* just said typical things like "Today's quiz was hard" etc.

So, it wasn't the reading and quiz, but what did I do after? We had a speaking activity, but again, just like every week. Nothing special; so un-special, in fact, that I don't even remember what it was. As usual, I taught the students some simple interaction and had them practice it in dyadic circles. That means they did the same interaction again and again with 3-4 different partners. I usually do one dyadic circle each class, but that week I did three, so they had about 10 different partners.

On that day, it was completely surprising. What had happened that made the vast majority of my 130 students write about how much they loved that day's class?

Suddenly, I knew the answer (and from the hints above, you should too). It was the dyadic circles. I usually do one dyadic circle per class, but that day, I did three. That meant each student could interact with three times as many partners. That is what they loved.

Going from four to ten partners with these first-year students might not seem special to us, but developmental psychology tells us that it is crucial for them. First-year university students are at a stage of life where making "friends" is essential to their moral development: a process by which they break away from families and become autonomous (Google "Piaget, Kohlberg, moral development"). I am quite familiar with this theory and their need for friends, but what made their comments really stand out for me was another theory from neuroscience: the social brain and its role in learning (Google "Lieberman, Cozolino, social brain").

Last summer, I wrote a column on the social brain and its importance in online class design, so I won't go into the details here; but basically, the social brain refers to the recently discovered Mentalizing Network, a part of our brain that is constantly mindreading others. It is located in the also recently discovered Default Mode Network, a part of our brain that automatically activates when we are not

focused on some other task. It is the part of our brain that daydreams, ponders other people, weaves stories out of experiences, and makes predictions. Some of us consider it the most important part of the brain.

Lieberman thinks so. He says that the social brain is the only thing that truly makes us human. No other primate gets better than a human three-year-old at understanding others, but our abilities are so amazing that they allow us to collaborate in huge numbers – millions – across continents and generations. He calls it our *superpower*.

Indeed, we often forget how social we are, despite the huge amount of proof all around us. The most severe punishment in the classroom is a *time out*; in prison, *solitary confinement*. Most of our free time is used for entertainment, which is usually reading about or watching others navigate intricate social webs, engaging in group activities like sports, communicating (as I am doing now), or hanging out together. Then too, consider this quip from Lieberman:

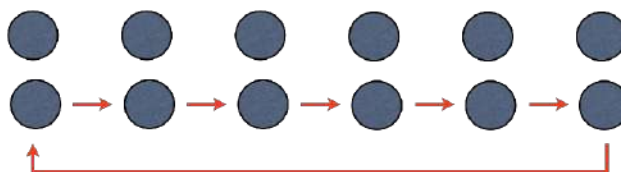
Facebook.... Is it just an accident that the single most successful destination on the internet, or anywhere else, is a place entirely dedicated to our social lives? (Lieberman, 2012, p. 25)

We are social. And our students, especially our first-year students, are even more so. I once gave a survey to my students about their main reason for coming to school, and every single one of them wrote, “to meet my friends.” Indeed, not having friends is toxic for them, not only because of their drive towards moral development as mentioned above but also for general well-being. When I did research on student depression in Japan, I was surprised to find that over 20% of college students suffered a *major depressive episode*, with the majority being women (Tomoda et al., 2000). As I will point out in a future article, this is a problem in Korea too. It is also worth knowing that the most dangerous time for our students is the last six months of high school and the first six months of college, and that the strongest deterrent to depression is...having friends!

So, there it is. That is why those first-year students (get that? *first-year* students!) responded so positively about that one class. The reason is so simple that it is almost embarrassing: They could talk to ten other students instead of just four. Every connection they make helps ground them in safety and comfort. Yet, this driving need to connect is something most teachers are oblivious to. We tend to see socializing in class as a frivolity, or a

nuisance. We rarely see it as a suicide prevention technique or a way to secure learner well-being. But we should. Lieberman says that our social brain is our *superpower*, but do you know what else he says? That school is our *kryptonite* (2013). So, when it comes to student socializing, like the Kabat-Zinn proverb says, we should be riding that wave.

Now, getting back to dyadic circles, or dyadic “lines” to be exact, I use them every chance I can, and I suggest you do as well. A dyadic line is where students pair off, do an interaction, and then one line shifts a person to the right so they can do it again (and again and again). It even works in my fixed-seat, 65-student classes with three columns of pairs going down the aisles.



Dyadic circles are one of the most powerful language teaching techniques in the ELT toolbox but definitely not used enough. We tend to see the bulk of language learning as being an individual thing, and when we do set up pair or group work, we tend to have students do the interaction – like asking one’s partner where they live – just one time. Obviously, a one-time exchange just leads to superficial learning. But if you do dyadic lines with repeated interactions, you’ll see learners go from an initial struggle with just getting the words out to a higher level of mastery where they can focus on meaning. After all, isn’t that what proficiency is all about?

And, of course, dyadic circles are the best antidote to kryptonite.

So that is what I learned from my first-year students that day: that they have a much deeper need to connect than I thought, that the social aspect of class is a mediator of learning, and most importantly, that they like my classes a whole lot more when they can talk to several partners. Now I know. From now on, socializing will be a basic component of every class.

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## The Columnist

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