



## The Newsletter of

Korea Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages Autumn 2021 Volume 25 Issue 3

# TEC: Celebrating 25 Years of Publication

**A**s part of our celebration, past editors of *The English Connection* were asked to complete a sentence regarding their time heading up the TEC team. The following are their responses to this prompt:

**“What I liked most about working on TEC was...”**

“...the dedication of the editing team and the enthusiasm of the contributors.” — Louisa van Dijk [formerly Kim], Editor-in-Chief (2004)

“...collaborating as part of a team, being mentored by others along the way. This was a meaningful experience that stays with me to this day.” — James “Jake” Kimball, Editor-in-Chief (2004–2008)

“...the ability to connect with and get to know people across the organization and the ELT content areas they were interested in.” — Kara Mac Donald, Editor-in-Chief (2008–2011)

“...that our editorial team was given the freedom (and budget) to update the design and reimagine what TEC could be. I’m happy to see that many of the design changes we made a decade ago are still present in the latest issues.” — Tim Thompson, Editor-in-Chief (2011–2012)

“...that I was able to provide a great benefit for KOTESOL members. I also got the chance to work with some great people.” — William Mulligan, Editor-in-Chief (2012–2014)

“...that I got to work with people with better English skills, knowledge, and experience than me. And learning stuff.” — Julian Warmington, Editor-in-Chief (2014–16, 2018–19)

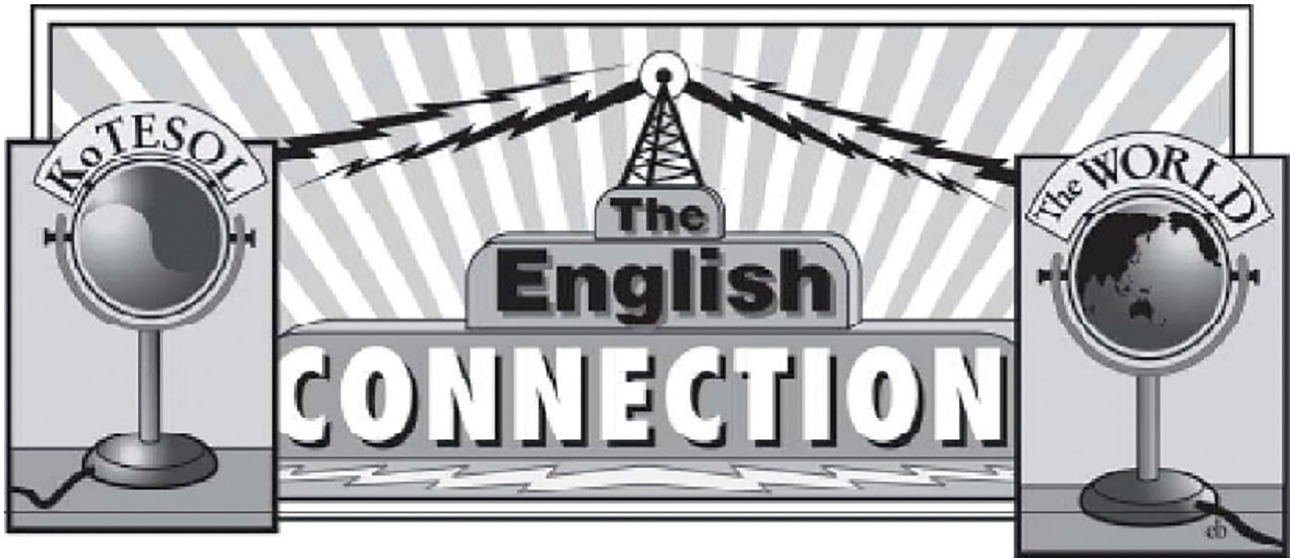
And from our current editor-in-chief...

“...being able to stay connected with current ESL research and trends, combined with the constant efforts of the production process, working with my KOTESOL peers.” — Andrew White, (2019–present)



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



## The English Connection

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CELEBRATING **25** YEARS

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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.

## Editorial

# 25 Years...It's Personal

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

I am writing from Portland, Oregon, on the day my daughter will be taking an English level test and meeting with a counselor to enroll for classes as a new 10th-grader in an American public high school. I'm excited (as is Lola), as I anticipate the new culture she will be immersed in, the friends she will make, and the more social and less strenuous life she'll probably lead, when compared to the one semester of Korean high school she was exposed to and reacted against.

Along with excitement, I'm also anxious. English is not her first language, and despite having an English-speaking father, as well as school and afterschool English classes in Korea since 4th grade, she is not fluent. I know this is normal, and I'm optimistic that in a few months she will have picked up that final level of fluency and pragmatic competence that higher leveled learners have (and which native speakers demand) to be considered polite and normal in communicative interactions. Yet I've had to come to terms with my teaching successes and failures when it comes to my number one student.



My daughter's opportunity brings attention, I believe, to my 25+ years as an EFL teacher, and our Korean EFL community as a whole. This is coincidentally the same 25 years that TEC is now celebrating, as this edition has been chosen to highlight this anniversary. While I have not been involved with KOTESOL nor TEC for anywhere near that time (I'll leave it to others, who share their messages and memories in this edition), I have been involved and academically curious about this thing called second language teaching as a teacher, student, researcher, and in Lola's case, a parent, and for that reason, TEC's 25-year anniversary is especially meaningful. As the current editor-in-chief, I am proud to hold the reins on this magazine's production, knowing full well the numerous capable and energetic editors that came before me and will no doubt come after me as well. The academic research, perspectives, member spotlights, and KOTESOL news gathered over the last 25 years have been tremendous. And for the several reasons mentioned above, for me, it's been personal.

## Special Message

# Celebrating 25 Years!

By **Dr. David Shaffer** Publications Committee Chair

I'm sure you've noticed by now that this year's issues of *The English Connection* are sporting the "Volume 25" label, indicating that this periodical has been around for 25 years. Twenty-five years! I am quite joyed – a bit giddy, actually – to trumpet that we have selected this issue of TEC to recognize this milestone and the magazine's contributions. (See our interview with an old hand at TEC and our 25-year timeline.)

I remember how happy I was to receive the very first issues of TEC, replacing with regularity its newsletter-cum-journal predecessor publication. I also remember being approached soon afterwards to write a piece for the Culture Corner column, which proved to be the start of some 20 years of association I have had working on TEC. To reminisce a bit more, TEC has brought to our readers so many useful articles on ELT praxis and numerous articles by widely known ELT authorities such as Rod Ellis, Stephen Krashen, Thomas Farrell, and Scott Thornbury. Many popular columns have also appeared in TEC over the years: Reflective Practice, Professional Development, Training Notes, Techniques, Grammar Glamour, and Presidential Memoirs, to name a few (all available in collections on our Article Series webpage).



The content appearing in TEC has not somehow magically appeared out of thin air. Authors have contributed many thoughtful hours into creating the richness of TEC's articles, and editors of all sort have poured many more hours into creating the final product – thousands upon thousands of hours. But something just as important as the printed product that rolls off the press is the professional development that working with TEC provides in writing and publication skills, and the camaraderie that is formed among the staff. We hope that you will continue to enjoy *The English Connection* for the next 25 years – as a reader, or a contributor, or a staffer. Korea TESOL, *manse!* TEC, too, *manse!*

## President's Message

# Let's Feel Appreciation – And Excitement, Too

By Bryan Hale KOTESOL President

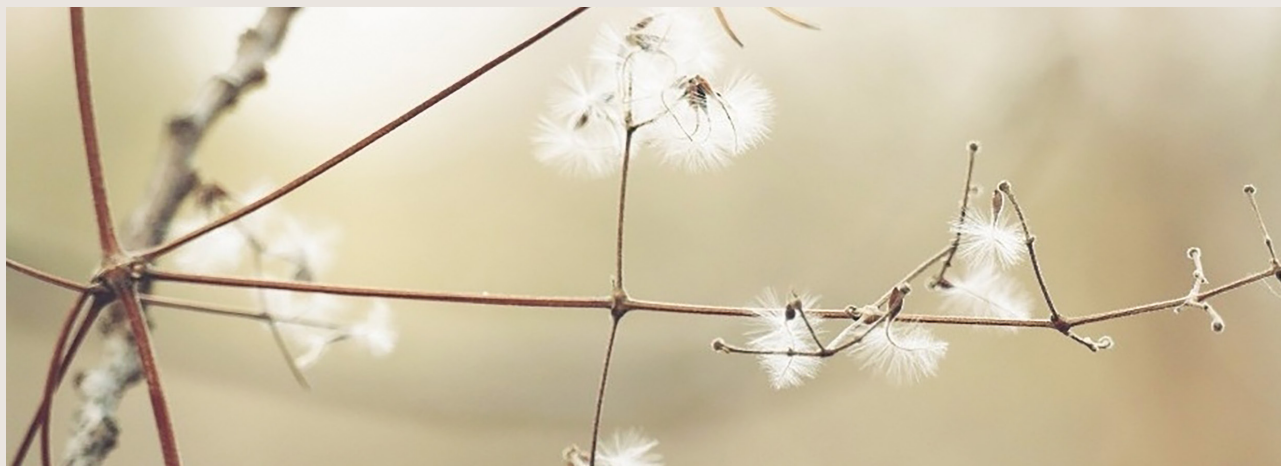
Can I be honest with you? I'm feeling a little anxious about writing a message for this anniversary issue of *The English Connection*. I feel giddy thinking about all those years of expertise, experiences, research, and reflection. The work that has gone into TEC – by contributors and, especially, by all the volunteers who have edited, designed, and created the magazine over those many, many issues – is tremendous, and needs to be honored. I feel like I am still too new, still have too much to learn about our organization, to be the one doing any of the honoring. But this is silly! I mean, obviously, I have been around at least long enough to end up KOTESOL president! And throughout all my experiences with KOTESOL, from when I started out as a member, each issue of TEC has been a wonderful gift prepared with passion, prowess, dedication, and love. I'm actually really lucky to have the opportunity to honor those gifts with this message. Thank you, TEC, and all those who have put so much into it, past and present!



This isn't my first time to feel a little anxious about stepping up to do something for KOTESOL. Like a lot of people, my first experience of KOTESOL was attending an International Conference, and I was blown away by the smorgasbord of delights on offer. Right away, I was eager to seek out the other benefits of membership – chapter workshops, special interest groups, and of course publications – and I thought I would be more than happy to feast on this great banquet of professional development as a forever-guest. A well-mannered and grateful guest, for sure, but far be it for me to get involved in planning the party!

However, if you spend some time in KOTESOL, you may eventually be invited to help out in one way or another, and at various stages those already involved behind the scenes in KOTESOL have been generous enough to extend these invitations to me. Each time I have felt a bit of trepidation. Did I really have the knowledge, ideas, experiences, or capability to contribute? But each time I have said yes, because for me KOTESOL has been exciting, essential, nourishing, and I would love to do what I can to pass on these benefits to others. And each time, I have found that there was nothing to really worry about. Behind the scenes, KOTESOL is fuelled by collaboration, camaraderie, and care. When we work together collectively, it's very achievable to do great things for the benefit of the ELT profession in Korea.

Perhaps you've guessed my ulterior motive in talking about this. I'm hoping you can consider saying "yes" if you're invited to support KOTESOL in some form. Although a lull in activity might not be apparent from some vantages (I mean, just check out the issue of TEC you have in your hands!), at the moment we are taking a little longer to fill volunteer positions than usual, and in some areas we would really benefit from more helping hands (and minds). We're facing these challenges for a few reasons, but most obviously for the big reason that surely does not need to be mentioned at this point (even the historians centuries in the future poring over issues of TEC won't need reminding!). Right now there's a lot of pressure on everybody, and my message here is not intended to add any more pressure! I just hope that, if you do have the opportunity, and the time and capacity, you'll consider stepping up for KOTESOL in the understanding that our organization is what it is, thanks to members like you stepping up. It's natural to have a little hesitance, but I hope you'll see that KOTESOL is for all of us and by all of us, and you really do have something to contribute – be it through your chapter, a special interest group, a publication or special project or event, or even at the national level. I hope this issue of TEC will help you to appreciate and honor all that our organization has achieved, but also to feel excited about the possibilities for your involvement.



# Group Presentation Skills: Teaching with a Student-Centered Approach

By Hall Houston

A successful group presentation involves many elements. Unlike an individual presentation, presenters must learn to work together as a group and deliver a smooth, professional presentation where they appear as a unified team, not a random group of strangers standing on a stage. The presenters' use of their voices, where they stand, how they move across the stage, how they dress, and how they interact with the audience are as important as the content and organization of the presentation.

I currently teach undergraduate students at a national university for nurses and health professionals in Taipei, Taiwan. On Friday mornings, I teach a presentation skills course for freshmen. One topic not covered in the coursebook is how to give a group presentation.

I designed a two-lesson module about the basics of group presentations. I used the topic of the coursebook unit we had been covering: a how-to presentation. By the end of the module, the students would be able to give a professional group presentation on a practical, how-to topic.

I wanted to avoid a teacher-centered lecture where students listen to me talk continuously (or just pretend to listen), and concentrated on imparting important presentation skills, including where each group member should stand on stage and how members of the group should interact. So, I aimed to include elements of active learning, where students are involved in the process of learning, either through summary writing or discussion. As Felder and Brent (2009) state, active learning is "anything course-related that all students in a class session are called upon to do other than simply watching, listening, and taking notes." I think using an active learning approach helps students retain more from the lessons, encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning, and generally makes classes more enjoyable.

## Lesson One

I began the module after midterm exams, past the midpoint of the semester, when students had already developed

many important presentation skills, such as using eye contact correctly and managing anxiety. At the start of the first lesson, I asked students to discuss these two questions in pairs:

- *What's the difference between an individual presentation and a group presentation?*
- *What are the key principles of a good group presentation? Think of at least three principles.*

After a few minutes of discussion, I called on several students to answer the questions. I tried to get as much information from them as I could before I moved on to the next step. I did this to tap into their pre-existing knowledge about group presentations, which would get them ready for the next part of the lesson.

I showed them a series of PowerPoint slides with key principles for doing a group presentation. Instead of turning it into a long, uninterrupted lecture, I stopped after I read out each principle and asked a student to explain what he thought it meant. For example, the first principle was "Presenters must work together as a team, not as individual presenters." After reading out this principle, I paused and asked students to explain this principle in their own words and suggest concrete ways of achieving it. I continued with the other principles, listening carefully to their ideas and providing some correction where necessary.

Here are the seven principles I shared with the students:

- Principle 1: Presenters must work together as a team, not as individual presenters.
- Principle 2: The presentation should be uniform in style, which includes speaking style, body language, and dress.
- Principle 3: The presentation should flow smoothly, which requires that all participants practice together as a group.
- Principle 4: Presenters should interact with each other and make eye contact.
- Principle 5: Presenters need to plan how they will move



▲ Smiles, eye contact, and gestures are the keys to a great presentation.

across the stage during the presentation.

Principle 6: Presenters should always face forward and stand up straight, even when they're not presenting.

Principle 7: Each presenter should spend roughly the same amount of time presenting.

Afterwards, I showed them a YouTube video titled "Group PowerPoint Presentations: #3 What Not To Do." This humorous video provides numerous examples of mistakes that presenters make in a group presentation. Some

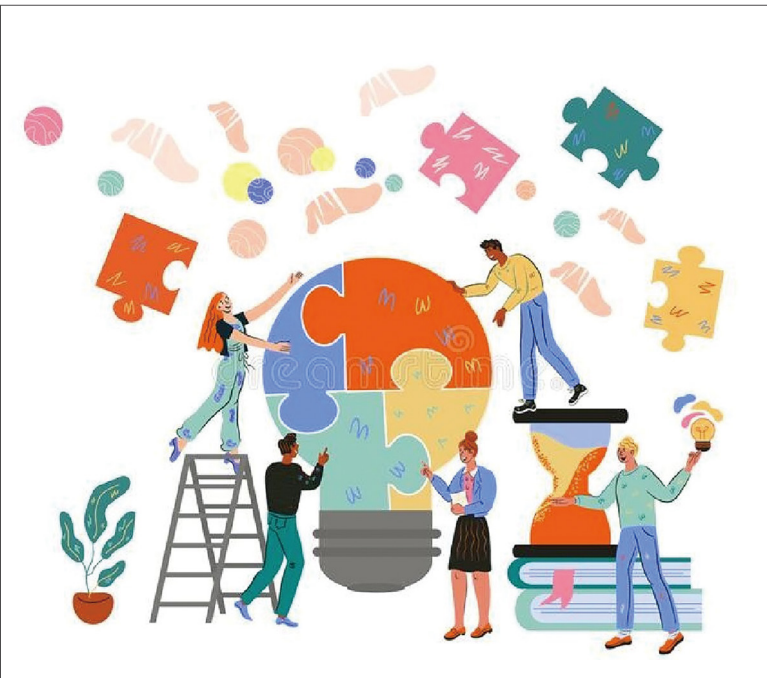
didn't need to prepare anything, but they had to come to class on time.

Over the next few days, I started to prepare for the second lesson. I found short instructional videos on subjects such as how to make a book out of a sheet of paper or how to get to sleep better. I created QR codes for the videos, printed them out, and put each one into an envelope. I also made a rubric that covered the principles that we had discussed in the first lesson.

### Lesson Two, the Following Week

In the second lesson, I asked a few recall questions about group presentation principles. Next, I arranged the students into groups of four and handed out the envelopes. I told them to open the envelopes, scan the QR codes, watch the videos, and discuss the main points. Afterwards, they would need to plan their presentation. As they watched the video and prepared their presentations, I walked around and checked on their progress.

In the second part of the lesson, I passed out the rubrics, and went over each item. Also, I told the groups that once we began the presentations, they needed to pay full attention to the other groups' presentations, instead of continuing to prepare for their own presentations. As far too many university students in Taiwan tend to tune out presentations and chat or engage with their smartphones, I emphasized that it's a sign of respect to give undivided attention to a presentation or performance. To keep them focused on the presentations, I asked the students to refer to the rubrics, take notes, and write down one area in which the presenters excelled along with one area where the presenters could improve.



of the mistakes include standing in front of the screen, consuming snacks and soft drinks during the presentation, not acknowledging others in the group, and dressing too informally. The class watched it a couple of times, and I challenged students to spot all the problems in the video. I also pointed out a few things they missed. While the video is highly entertaining, it gave them an opportunity to see what an unprofessional group presentation looks like and understand what they should avoid.

Then, I asked the class what duties the first presenter and the final presenter have in a group presentation. I asked them to take notes on index cards and then discuss in small groups. After that, I called on each group to tell me a few things that they had discussed. Then, I gave them an overview of the different roles of group members in a presentation. For example, the first presenter should greet the audience, use an opener to get the audience interested, and announce the topic of the presentation, as well as introduce the members of the group and what they are going to present. The final presenter should summarize the main points, optionally give an additional tip, and thank the audience.

Next, I put students into groups of three or four to review all of the information about group presentations. I asked each group to make a list of the top three things they had learned about doing a group presentation. I rounded things off with some quiz questions to check their understanding. At the end of the lesson, I announced that they would be doing group presentations in class the next week. They

**"I think using an active learning approach helps students retain more from the lessons, encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning, and generally makes classes more enjoyable."**

One by one, each group gave their presentation. When each presentation was over, I applauded and gave the group some positive feedback. I asked the groups in the audience to refer to the rubrics and discuss the presentation they had just seen. A few minutes later, I called on each group to share their notes and reflections on the presentations.

The groups did quite well, and I praised their efforts. I also pointed out a few things they could improve on, such as looking at the audience (not their note cards), making smooth transitions between presenters, interacting with other presenters right before a transition, and standing at attention with good posture in a line during the moments they are not presenting.



▲ **Speakers can critique each other individually in preparation for a group presentation.**

For the final exam, students once again did a group presentation on a how-to topic, but they chose their group members and their topics. As a result of this two-lesson module, they were aware of what they needed to do, and delivered impressive presentations. One group even showed how to make a greeting card out of a sheet of cardboard, and presented their teacher with a “Thank you, Teacher!” card.

to showing them a video of a flawed problematic group presentation, I will show them one or two video clips of successful group presentations and ask students to discuss the strengths of each presentation. I also plan to quiz them on the principles of group presentation skills an additional time, two or three weeks after the module is completed.

If you’re teaching presentation skills, I would encourage you to aim for a student-centered approach. Keep it active by assigning tasks and quizzing them on the material from time to time. Encourage them to evaluate the other groups and give each other specific feedback based on the criteria in the evaluation. Also, you might consider making videos of presentations to share with future classes.

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“I asked the students to refer to the rubrics, take notes, and write down one area in which the presenters excelled along with one area where the presenters could improve.”

**My Reflection**

Overall, I think this module was successful, as it gave students an opportunity to understand the principles of doing a good group presentation, not by reading articles or watching videos, but by actively discussing, planning, and implementing a group presentation. It also reinforced a lot of the content we had covered during the first part of the course. I will definitely use this module again with future classes and possibly make a few modifications. In addition

**The Author**

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# Ideas First, Structure Second: Academic Writing Revisited

By Bryan Alkema

Some time ago, I had a minor confrontation with a former colleague over the value of academic writing. This colleague told me that academic writing is irrelevant, artificial, and – worst of all – boring for both students and professors. His point was of great concern because my duties at Handong Global University (Pohang, South Korea) involve preparing students for English-mediated courses in their chosen majors, and therefore, the courses in our English program consist primarily of academic writing (paragraph, essays, and reports) and also academic presentations. This article's purpose is to describe one possible response to my former colleague's hypothesis, along with practical implications for the recent pandemic-based push for online learning.

## Problem Description: Tool or Trap?

One of the major difficulties teachers of EFL face is a severe lack of time, which leads to a wide array of practical challenges: limited depth of learning, lack of reinforcement opportunities, and motivational challenges, to name just a few. Another such challenge is an unfortunate tendency to focus on structures at the expense of the ideas that those structures are intended to support.

From top (administration) to bottom (students), the push for immediate and number-oriented results creates a level of conflict between best practices and test scores. Students may learn long lists of vocabulary items and yet be unable to use or remember those items a month later. Similarly, students may have a technical understanding of what a compound sentence is, and yet persist in beginning sentences with coordinating conjunctions such as "but" or "and." Chomsky's separation between competence and performance may be a little old, but it still has value in the EFL class setting!

The student reaction to this pressure is unfortunate and yet entirely understandable: They begin to view structures – from single-sentence grammar to overall essay cohesion – as traps rather than as tools. Long experience with tests based on teacher-centered methodologies such as multiple-choice questions (so easy to mark!) has resulted in students who focus on getting the correct answer about structures instead of enjoying the complexity and interplay of the concepts supported by those structures. In directing our students to focus only or primarily on form during the input stage, we are actually showing them that ideas are secondary to structures – and when we take the same approach during the output stage, we confirm that bias. The unintended result is a segment of students who believe, based on repeated experience, that the merit of a paragraph, essay, or presentation is entirely based on structure rather than content. It is this paradigm that leads to academic writing that is irrelevant, artificial, and – worst of all – boring.

The paradigm is rarely the intention of the teachers, of course. However, even a quick analysis of my own paragraph and essay rubrics demonstrated that most or all of the score was based on the merits of structural elements

(direct topic sentence, correct use of transition words, restatement of ideas in the conclusion) rather than the merits of the ideas expressed through those elements. I had fallen into the same trap!

## Problem Resolution: Steps on a Journey

Where I differ from my former colleague is in the response to this problem: Rather than giving up on academic writing, I now support and supplement it. Courses now begin with a description of the purposes of academic writing and speaking – purposes that extend beyond getting a good score on the assignment! Students are encouraged to consider that a paragraph is a tool (not a trap!) for the efficient transfer of a single idea from the writer to the reader, and that there are specific methods that can lead to greater success in that transfer. In short, students are exposed to the pragmatic value of a paragraph before either reading or writing. In class time, textual analysis (learning about structure) is balanced with conceptual analysis (discussing the ideas supported by that structure). Implementation of this approach includes consideration of offline and online resources now available to teachers and students. In 2020, the learning community was pushed into



the deep end of the digital classroom with little preparation, a sink-or-swim situation that I for one am not eager to repeat! However, in 2021 we can now build upon those areas in which, because we did not sink, we learned to swim. The following examples are based upon a blended classroom in which the first session is a recorded lesson (asynchronous learning), and the second a face-to-face session (synchronous learning).

## Example 1: Input → Structure Supporting Ideas

In the recorded lesson, students are required to read a sample paragraph located on our department's website. The sample is a well-structured paragraph of approximately 250 words and is followed by questions related to both structural elements and content concepts; students are expected to read the paragraph and answer those questions before the week's face-to-face meeting. In that meeting, attention is first drawn to the structural elements through a Q&A session in which students give answers to the provided questions. This helps them to "notice" the structural

elements leading to effective transfer of ideas from the writer to the reader. Directly following this structural focus comes a discussion activity in which students share their individual responses to the paragraph's content – which they prepared through answering the content questions – in a small-group setting. Each group then shares one key feature of the discussion with the entire class.

This process provides value and legitimacy to the concept of the paragraph at the individual, small-group, and class level of interaction. Students are guided in observing the relationship between an idea and the way in which that idea is expressed – and this observation prepares them for the next stage of learning.

### Example 2: Output → Ideas Supported by Structure

For the input process described above, students first analyze the structure and then focus on the ideas. For the output process, however, that sequence is reversed. Students first prepare a basic outline for a paragraph on a related theme, including identification of an ideal response from the reader; this requires them to consider their content and the reception of their ideas from the intended audience. Only after this has been done are the structural elements – which help the writer create the intended effect – applied and assessed. In terms of execution, students can prepare an outline as an in-class or Zoom-based activity, while the structural elements are evaluated through a

specific requirements, mostly based on increasing length over the semester; however, some of these requirements are related to increasing student awareness of, for example, compound or complex sentences. However, the structural elements are secondary to the value of the ideas students provide in the entries.

Students complete ten journal entries over the sixteen weeks of our semester, and I respond to each entry with a short comment about the value of their ideas and experiences. The results have been exceptional! Many students begin by viewing the journal as an assignment, but through the back-and-forth of an asynchronous dialogue, they quickly shift to a more authentic and



“...considering their message before their medium, and to ensure that sentences and structures remain tools rather than becoming traps.”

submission program – our department uses Turnitin, which offers a comprehensive plagiarism check as well as a set of feedback tools.

The process used for output is designed to guide students in considering their message before their medium, and to ensure that sentences and structures remain tools rather than becoming traps. Some students have been clearly unprepared for a situation in which their ideas are the primary focus and have needed guidance in choosing topics that go beyond the simplistic or banal.

### Example 3: Supplemented Output → Use of Journal Entries

Structured reading leading to structured writing sounds good, and it has been effective within our department; but it is not complete on its own. In tandem with the writing of effective paragraphs, students are also expected to write regular journal entries in which increased fluency rather than improved accuracy is the desired outcome. At the beginning of the semester, students are provided with individual Google Docs that I create and share – fortunately, all Handong students have a Google-based email account. Students are provided with journal prompts and a set of

personal form of writing. In a follow-up interview to the 2021 spring semester, several students told me that the journal was both effective and interesting – a win for any educational encounter!

### Closing Comments

Content and form are not enemies; there should be a healthy tension between the two. Students need to learn that a weak idea, supported by a solid structure, remains a weak idea! On the other hand, a strong idea written poorly is also not effective in achieving the intended result. Ideally, students will see the value in a strong idea supported by a solid structure – whether at the sentence, paragraph, or essay level. This approach requires teachers to integrate students' ideas with the target language structures, but the payoff is that students will begin to see the usefulness of the skills taught in language courses.

### The Author

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# What's in a Name? Lots, When It Comes to Teaching English

By Eric Flynn

The cultural differences between Western and Korean names (specifically surnames, titles ["Mr.," "Ms.," etc.], and their pronunciation) are items that Korean students often never explicitly learn, yet play an important role in English. Here are ways to cover this topic in classes for young Korean learners of English.

## The Placement of Surnames

One point of confusion for many Koreans regarding Western names is the difference in placement of surnames and given names. Though some students are vaguely aware of this difference, it's seldom presented as a concrete topic. As a result, their knowledge of it ends up foggy at best. It's important for teachers to make sure their students can clearly identify which parts of a name are given names, and which is/are the surname. Teachers can also introduce the concept of middle names, and the method most often used when English names are written on official documents or in records.

**"An acrostic poem involves taking a name, and thinking of words that start with each of its letters."**

## Mr. and Ms.

"Mr." and "Ms." can be a bit of a puzzle for Koreans, and especially young students, since they don't often address their teachers in the same manner as students in the West. And to make things even more confusing, foreign teachers in Korea often, in order to create a feeling of familiarity, encourage students to address them by their given names (e.g., John, Jane).

Learning to use titles when addressing elders, clients, and guests of honor is an important skill for Korean students to learn; failure to do so can lead to perceptions of rudeness. In order for students to become accustomed to this, it is recommended that, in the presence of a foreign English teacher, students be encouraged to use "Mr." or "Ms." plus the teacher's last name (e.g., Mr. Romero, Ms. Banks).

## Capitalization

Not only younger learners, but also many adults

struggle with name capitalization. This stems from the inconsistency shown in transliterating typically disyllabic Korean given names into English. Sometimes they are written as separate names, and sometimes not; sometimes written with a hyphen, and sometimes not. Students should be taught, though, that, while there are many methods and choices for writing Korean names, *anytime* there is a space before a part of the name, it should be capitalized (e.g., Kim Minsu, Kim Min-su, Kim Min Su).

## Lesson Ideas

Now that we've touched on some of the basic concepts related to Western naming, let's look at how instructors can incorporate the topic into their lessons.

### 1. Mini-lesson

The easiest way to teach about names is to just spend about 10–15 minutes on the topic at the beginning or end of a class. (This can be a great time filler for those days when a lesson finishes just a little too early!) I often like to incorporate this subject as part of my first-day introduction. I tell students my full name – Eric Flynn – and then ask them, "If we were in a Western classroom, would you call me (1) Eric, (2) Flynn, (3) Mr. Eric, (4) Mr. Flynn, or (5) Eric Teacher?" After entertaining their answers, I go into my explanation, using a slide presentation to illustrate key points. School students are often thrilled if teachers demonstrate various spelling methods using their names. If teaching on Zoom, I have students change their Zoom names into English, giving corrections and feedback where necessary.

An important note: In order for students to truly learn this content, teachers must *put it into practice*. If not, students will forget it soon afterwards. The good news is that class presents many chances for them to do this. Add a space for students' English-written names at the top of any worksheet you give them, and insist that they write their names in English on any projects they turn in – perhaps even giving them minor penalties for mistakes! After all, in real-life situations, poor attention to names can mean the difference between a CV getting read or ignored! You can also have students write their teacher's name on their papers in order to help them practice "Mr." and "Ms."

### 2. Projects

Three easy projects can be found below, for those wishing to give extended focus to names.

**Name Art** – This is an easy art activity even for non-artistic students (and teachers). Simply give students a piece of A4 paper and some colored pencils or markers, and have them write stylized, decorated versions of their names. Teachers should encourage students to incorporate both their given names and family names so as to give them proper practice.

As an alternative, instructors can give their students smaller pieces of paper, or even card stock, and have them design name tags or desk placards (see Figure 1 for an example).

**Figure 1. Desk placards and name tags are a great way to focus on name usage.**



It should be noted that a criticism of this activity is that the comparatively small amount of actual practice might not justify the fairly large time requirement (which amounts to about one full hour or more). Teachers should take this into consideration.

**Acrostic Poems** – Not everyone might recognize the name of this activity, but almost everyone has seen the activity in use. An acrostic poem involves taking a name, and thinking of words that start with each of its letters. Ideally the words chosen will relate to or describe the named individual. Here’s a sample acrostic poem for the name “Hong Gildong,” which, when written in the Western manner, is converted to “Gildong Hong”:

**G**reat at English  
**I**ntelligent  
**L**ucky  
**D**oesn’t like homework  
**O**kay at math  
**N**ot good at sports  
**G**oes home at 4:30

**H**appy  
**O**ldest brother  
**N**oodles are his favorite food  
**G**reen is his favorite color

Although it might seem a bit cliché, this activity not only familiarizes students with their names, but also promotes creative thinking and vocabulary use.

**Passports** – This can be a nice supplement to a lesson on travel. Additionally, it helps students review things such as writing their birth dates and more. Simply make and provide students with blank, mock passports and have them write in the necessary information. Students can fill the passports out individually, or in pairs, asking their partners relevant questions (“What’s your name?”

How do you spell it?” “When were you born?” etc.). For added realism, a quick image search will provide many backgrounds and images that can be used. (A sample template for this activity is shown in Figure 2.)

**Figure 2. The information needed in a passport template can be matched to learners’ levels.**

	Surname
	_____
	Given name
	_____
	Nationality
	_____
Date of birth	
_____	
Date of issue	
_____	

Note that the template has a blank square in which young, artistic learners can draw a picture of themselves or their classmates. Instructors can add things like eye color, height, and blood type. Teachers are also encouraged to change some of the wording to be more accessible to lower-level students when necessary, e.g., “home country”

instead of “nationality,” or “today’s date” instead of “date of issue.”

### 3. Choosing English Names

It’s common for Korean students to have the option to have English names, finding it fun to research and choose Western names for themselves. There are many websites full of Occidental names, as well as the history behind them; one of the best known being *Behindthename.com*. The students can research and choose traditional Western names, and briefly present them to the class. This could also be combined with some of the activities above.

### 4. Global Culture Lesson Supplement

ESL teachers in Korea will notice an emphasis in the Korean English curriculum on teaching about other cultures. Often this is accompanied by a lesson at the beginning of a textbook on different countries, and perhaps the inclusion of recurring textbook characters of different nationalities. These internationally themed lessons provide a good opportunity to help students gain proficiency in English naming conventions.

For example, when learning about a given country, textbooks will often include landmarks and typical foods of that nation; however, they seldom talk about names, and this can be a good opportunity for native English-speaking teachers to address this topic. For example, in the event students learn about Spain and the Sagrada Familia, they can also learn common names such as “Jose,” “Lucia,” and “Manuel,” as well as their pronunciations.

Particularly multicultural nations allow teachers to challenge students’ perceptions, as well. For example, explaining that “Nguyen,” a surname of Vietnamese origin, is also one of the most common surnames in the U.S. can help prepare students for the degree of multiculturalism they might experience when traveling.

### 5. The Name Game

In this simple game, the instructor introduces a variety of characters from Western culture to the class. Such characters can be historical figures, fictitious individuals, superheroes and their pseudonyms, or celebrities. Important information to include are the characters’

names, faces, and what they’re known for. After giving some memorization time to students (a worksheet is recommended and could even be assigned as homework), the teacher divides the class into two or more teams, providing each team with a small whiteboard and board marker. On a team’s turn, pictures of the previously studied characters are shown on-screen, and participants have around ten seconds to identify the character by writing the individual’s full name. Proper writing of the name (with leniency given for spelling) results in a point for that team. The teacher may wish to assign bonus points for employing proper titles, such as “Ms.” or “Dr.,” and any relevant information about the individual. Teachers are encouraged to also add famous Korean figures, as this gives students practice with converting Korean names into English.

### Conclusion

The ancient Egyptians believed that everyone had a secret name, and that if one knew the secret name of another, it gave the knower power over it’s owner. While maybe not quite that important, names nonetheless hold influence, and if we don’t educate students on their English application, we’re missing a key component of the language.

### The Author

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# Screen Fatigue Is Real: Harnessing Student Mind-Wandering in the Online Classroom

By Federico Pomarici and Kara Mac Donald

Abruptly transitioning all instruction to an online format in the spring of 2020, teachers logically focused on delivering meaningful instruction on the technology platform selected (e.g., Zoom). Through incorporating engaging on- and off-screen activities, teachers have aimed to positively impact students' well-being and motivation, while encouraging active participation. However, the

## Mind-Wandering Explained

A lack of attention has been linked with poor cognitive performance (Fernandes & Moscovitch, 2000). This type of learning obstruction has also been connected with increasing episodes of mind-wandering, a sub-type of distraction. One characteristic feature of mind-wandering is that it is an unguided (Fox & Christoff, 2018), unintentional, and spontaneous form of thought. In particular, "in contrast to the more desirable pursuit of 'rational' thought, mind-wandering is often portrayed as undesirable, wasteful mental diversion and potentially dangerous distraction" (Fox & Christoff, 2014, p. 299).

Mind-wandering usually occurs when the brain starts departing from the primary activity to focus on a different one. This is a result of the brain becoming disengaged with its original main task. For example, two potential consequences of mind-wandering in a reading class are the



amount of time Korean students spent in the classroom was already taxing before the pandemic, and switching to online learning further stretched the learners' ability to actively engage. Furthermore, the nature of on-screen device learning generates fatigue, complicates learning, increases misunderstandings, and results in loss of focus.

Even though the distribution of vaccines suggests a return to face-to-face (f2f) instruction, the situation will remain fluid, as some contexts may extend online instruction or adopt hybrid instruction for certain age groups before returning to a f2f paradigm. Consequently, teachers will benefit from revisiting a discussion on student mind-wandering based on insights from cognitive and educational psychology with respect to online learning, including strategies that approach and reduce mind-wandering in the online classroom.

**"...consider some common or recent daydreaming narratives to develop oral stories, write descriptive essays and roleplay dialogues, perform skits, develop poems, create poetry, and write songs."**



“...teachers will benefit from revisiting a discussion on student mind-wandering based on insights from cognitive and educational psychology with respect to online learning...”

increase of reading time (Foulsham et al., 2013) and the difficulty in meaning processing (Reichle et al., 2010), thereby reducing overall reading comprehension. A 2018 meta-analysis specifically conducted by D’Mello (2018) on a variety of online learning experiences confirmed how learners’ performances were negatively impacted by mind-wandering in this environment.

Regardless of the ecosystem and the activity, according to Killingsworth and Gilbert (2010), mind-wandering occurs 46.9% of the time the brain is engaged in any activity. This means people occupy their minds with something else rather than the task at hand almost half of the time they are cognitively engaged. As teachers, all of the above-provided data raises the question of how to address

students’ mind-wandering and distractions in general in the online classroom. The following sections provide tangible recommendations.

### **Practical Solutions to Address Students’ Mind-Wandering**

From a methodological standpoint, practitioners can minimize their students’ mind-wandering episodes. In this sense, the literature on the topic is very rich. One of the key elements to reduce learners’ mind-wandering episodes seems to be that of increasing motivation to lower cognitive disengagement. In their research on the relationship between student voices and motivation in a small sample of high school students, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) reported that when learners “engaged in activities because of the value inherent within, they were much more likely to sustain that engagement” (p. 46). This emphasizes the importance of working on curricula, and lessons in particular, that are highly relevant and afford space for the students to choose. The consequence is that our crucial role becomes that of trying to identify what our students desire to learn within the parameters of our given curricula, but also their goals for such interests and how we can incorporate these through supplementary material into the established curriculum.

As for students, mounting evidence shows that practicing mindfulness decreases mind-wandering episodes. In particular, possessing and adopting mindfulness strategies is connected to a decreased incidence of mind-wandering and an increase in working memory task performance. Mindfulness qualities consist of regulating and sustaining attention in the present moment with a nonjudgmental attitude. In this sense, training learners to practice mindfulness reveals a broader purpose for us as educators, which is to serve our students in their developmental process.

### **Harnessing Mind-Wandering in the Classroom**

Having so far looked at the theoretically unproductive side of mind-wandering, as well as promoting mindfulness to limit it, it is worthwhile to hypothesize if it is possible to exploit the students’ mind-wandering and their daydreaming as a subset of mind-wandering. A good body of research has shown how mind-wandering can be productively redirected in the classroom. Fox and Beaty (2019) assert that although “overwhelmingly self-referential” and resulting in “few if any implications beyond the life and immediate social circle of the individual” (p. 126), there is a profound analogy, perhaps even a direct relationship, between mind-wandering and creative thinking for storytelling. Self-referential elements of daydreaming consist of one’s beliefs, values, memories, and desires, which are related to the students’ immediate social circles. For language students, these personal components constitute the body of language accessible at novice and intermediate levels. Also, learners within this range of proficiency are conscious of the meaningfulness of this reservoir, as it informs their daily life narratives and impacts the negotiation of their identity with other learners in their “social circle.”

Individuals in general and students in particular naturally tend to rely on daydreaming and mind-wandering to mentally draw stories and connect them to larger narratives. Teachers can harness these daydreaming representations to build activities that enable learners to reflect on who they are and to confront themselves

with struggles and successes. Students individually or in groups can be guided to consider some common or recent daydreaming narratives to develop oral stories, write descriptive essays and roleplay dialogues, perform skits, develop poems, create poetry, and write songs.

In particular, to exploit daydreaming, creating activities that ask students to use the future tense seems like a particularly suitable approach. As shown by Baird et al. (2011), “a significant part of the mind-wandering state involves thoughts of the future” (p. 1608) and “autobiographical planning” (p. 1610). Within this perspective, in order to guide them to better appreciate their role as individuals in their society and to increase awareness of the composition and values of their immediate social circle, the students could be asked to interview themselves about their future plans by creating and responding to a self-interview form. Depending on the students’ proficiency level, this self-interview form could focus on different topics: travels, studies, ideal profession, life ambitions, or desired social goals. To execute the activity, individually, the students would complete the interview form focusing on one of the identified future plans mentioned above and then answer in writing. To include a collective, socially significant meaning to the activity, a second step would solicit the students to exchange their interview forms with a partner or within a small group of peers. This would allow them to become aware of each other’s plans and visions. In other words, this phase would contribute to a meaningful development of their social circle. The students could finally discuss ideas and strategies in order to fulfill their own and their partners’ ambitions. A closing step would entail individually returning to the original self-interview form to expand it with the integration of the new ideas assembled during group work.

In capitalizing on mind-wandering and day-dreaming through the cited sample activities, we can assist our learners in negotiating with their overall identity within their social circles. More specifically, we can further enable them as language learners to meaningfully and autonomously express personal meanings using the target language.

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# On Seeing What They “Can Do” vs. Seeing What They “Can’t Do”

By Mary Eddy U

We’ve all heard the saying “Is the glass half full or half empty?” Are you an optimist or a pessimist? You probably know which way you see your life (for the record, my glass is usually half full or a bit more). However, when I get feedback, from teachers or colleagues or someone else, I’m a “can’t-do” person. Does that mean I get depressed when I’m criticized? Not at all. It means I gloss over the compliments and look for the (constructive) criticisms because I believe those suggestions will help me to improve my performance. I seriously consider comments about what I “can’t do” this time, so I can improve and do it better next time. Because I’m optimistic that I will be able to do a good job in the end; I have confidence that by paying attention to what I “can’t do” yet, I will be able to make changes so that I “can do” it in the future.

This question is not just a personal one; it’s got a lot to do with being a language teacher! What exactly? Let me give you another example.



I’m a mother of two kids, and I’m blessed to have one of each kind: a can-do kid and a can’t-do kid. My son ignores his D in Chinese and gets excited bragging about his A’s in English and math. Meanwhile, my daughter looks at her D in Chinese and gets depressed, while ignoring her A’s in English and math. It’s not a matter of getting different feedback from their language teachers; in fact, they just react to the same sort of feedback very differently!

As teachers, we tend to develop our own styles of giving feedback. I’ve met teachers who look at a student’s writing riddled with errors and think, “This student’s English is terrible.” The red pen comes out, and the final comment is “You need to ask if you don’t understand” or “Try harder next time.” I’ve met other teachers who see the same student’s writing and think that despite a lot

of mistakes with English grammar and vocabulary, this student was able to express a lot of interesting ideas. The red pen only gives a mark and the comment “Great job! This is really interesting writing. Keep up the good work!” Which teacher did the right thing? It’s hard to say, actually, because it depends on how the student perceives the feedback they received.

Those same sentences could be perceived very differently by different students, and unfortunately as teachers, we often don’t know which way they will be perceived. For example, “You need to ask if you don’t understand” could be interpreted in a few different ways. One student might interpret this comment to mean “You submitted such a terrible assignment. What’s wrong with you! Why didn’t you ask me before how to do it?!” Another student might interpret the same comment to mean “You mostly followed the instructions correctly. Well done! Next time, you can ask me to double-check before you submit so you can get it all correct.” A third student might interpret it to mean “I want to remind you that I am happy to answer any questions you have. But if you don’t have any questions, you don’t need to do anything.”

So in fact, there is quite a range of ways students perceive feedback. Certain types of feedback over time can have major impacts on students’ interest and motivation in the subject. Here are several scenarios I’ve experienced in my own teaching career. Perhaps you will be able to relate to some of these scenarios from your own students.

## Mainly Negative Feedback

Scenario 1 – Sara got poor scores in English all through her school career. Her teachers told her over and over to “try harder,” but Sara didn’t know what her mistakes were or what she should do differently. Depressed and frustrated, she ends up spending her time discussing her demotivation rather than trying to improve her English.

Scenario 2 – Coco has average English for her class. Based on her ability, she certainly would not fail, but her teachers told her over and over that she needed to be a bit better, a bit more careful. She ended up lowering her standards to protect her self-esteem; as long as she passes, it’s good enough for her.

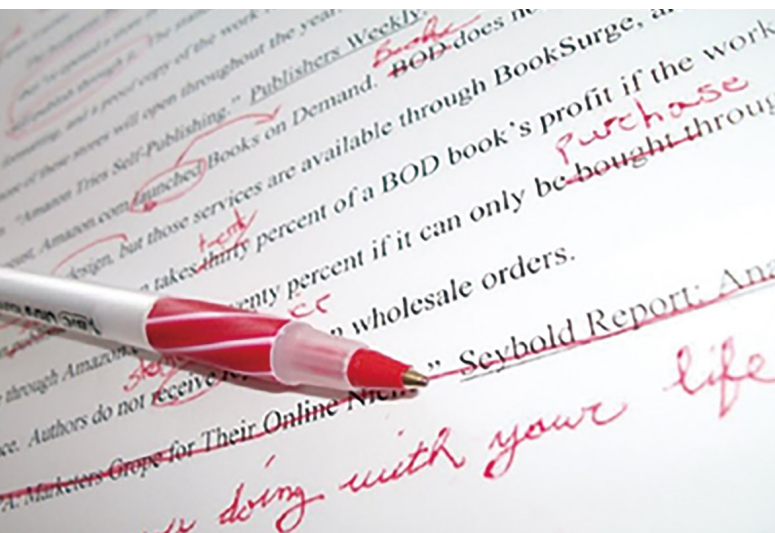
Scenario 3 – James has excellent English and is highly motivated. Whenever he has English assignments, he keeps asking for multiple rounds of critical feedback to help him improve. He improves a lot, but also feels stressed and frustrated because the teacher never thinks his work is good enough.

## Mainly Positive Feedback

Scenario 4 – Anthony’s English ability is quite low, but after transferring to a new school, he has been given mainly encouragement in his English class about his English learning effort and achievement. He began asking more questions about the lessons and assignments, using

his limited English to communicate, and showing more agency to improve. Not surprisingly, his scores are also improving.

Scenario 5 – Stephen has good English compared to most of his classmates, so feedback given is almost exclusively praise and encouragement. Not knowing what needs to be improved, he submits the final assignment without making any changes or corrections. When he is awarded only an average mark, he questions why his mark wasn't higher and feels cheated.



Scenario 6 – Vicky has good English compared to her classmates and is given mainly praise and encouragement. She takes initiative to seek the teacher out to find ways to further improve and takes over responsibility for her own English study. Soon afterwards, she gets a 7.5 on the IELTS on her first try.

In fact, as language teachers assessing and giving feedback to our students, we are not playing the same role as an IELTS or TOEIC assessor. We are not just assessing the student's current ability. The feedback we give is also shaping the student's motivation, direction, and steps to improve, as well as our relationship with them.

It's difficult to find a student, especially a weak student, who is motivated by only negative feedback. Positive feedback is encouraging, but only if students perceive it as true – if a student is told "great job" and gets a 7/10 without being told how to improve, is that really a great job? Or will the student feel cheated out of an explanation on how to get that additional 30% of the score they didn't receive?

It's also difficult to find a student, especially a student with relatively weak English, who gets along better with their teacher because of receiving mainly negative feedback. It's natural really. We gravitate to people who make us feel good and who enjoy being around us. If people are constantly criticizing us and making us feel bad about ourselves, we'll avoid them. When that happens with our students, they'll be less likely to ask us questions when they don't understand, less likely to approach us for advice, and less likely to pay attention to the feedback we do give them.

Criticism works in both directions. When we constantly criticize someone, we tend to feel negatively about them and their ability to change, while also devaluing the importance of a relationship with them. In contrast, when we praise others, we feel more positively about them, their progress, and our relationships with them.

To sum up, as language teachers, we can't just give the kind of feedback that comes most naturally to us. If we are lucky, we know which type of feedback the student responds well to, and we can give more of that. However, with big classes or new students, we usually don't know. As teachers, we need to balance our assessing and motivating roles and give both "can do" and "can't do yet" types of feedback. Here are some ways you could do that: – Here are some things you did well: .... Keep up the good work. And here are some things you can improve: .... Here

**"As teachers, we need to balance our assessing and motivating roles and give both 'can do' and 'can't do yet' types of feedback."**

are ways to improve it: ....  
– Here are some things you now "can do" better than last time: .... And here are some things you "can't do" now, but you "can do" better next time if you follow these tips: ....

We don't know what feedback our students will attend to, so be aware of both the positive and negative aspects. However, keeping the students' long-term development in mind, it's probably better to err on the side of kindness.

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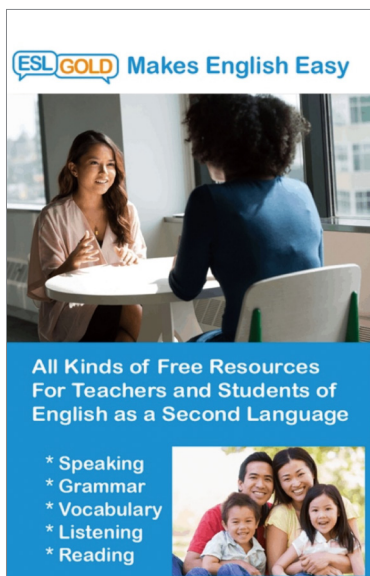
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Reviewed by Musa Nushi, Niloufar Nikou, and Maryam Housieni



New and fast-growing technologies have been changing the landscape of second and foreign language teaching and learning (Nushi & Eqbali, 2018). The focus of this article is a website called ESL Gold, which, as the name suggests, is specifically designed for ESL learning and teaching.

### Sections and Appearance

Upon opening the website, users will be presented with

several options to choose from, one of which is "Start Learning English Today" (<https://eslgold.com/learn-english-today/>). Clicking on this link opens another page that contains some questions about the user's reason for learning English, the skill(s) the user needs, the type of materials and techniques via which they wish to learn the skill(s), the conditions under which they are going to study English, and their English proficiency level. There is also a section that provides users with some of the most popular ESL resources containing materials for speaking, vocabulary, grammar, and some free lessons. The section also presents a daily topic as well as some multi-level materials related to that topic. Furthermore, some sections are specified for learning and practicing the main skills and their components.

Irrespective of how a section is accessed, each section branches off into many parts. There are some sections common for all language skills and components, namely books, products, teacher resources, and quick links, and some others that are specifically designed for each skill or component. These include "Phrases for Conversation" for speaking, "Explanations, Examples, and Exercises" for grammar, "ESL Dictionary" for vocabulary, "Listen to Podcasts" for listening, and "Articles by Topic" for reading. Other interesting opportunities this website provides are "Fun Quizzes" and "Business English." By going through the former, the users can take a quiz of the selected skill by level. The latter provides useful English expressions needed for a particular profession.

This website can also help EFL/ESL teachers, as they can use the handouts, lesson plans, and textbooks in their teaching, all of which are provided in the section called "Teacher Resources." Last but not least is the opportunity provided to the users to find ESL classes near them. On

the list, there are different schools in various countries, such as Korea, Canada, Taiwan, and the UK, which users can refer to and learn more about.

### Evaluation

This website can obviously contribute to learning English via the large amount of free materials it provides for its users. The website focuses on each language skill and its components. An interesting feature is that different skills and components may be related when necessary; for example, learners who choose the speaking section can also learn about the related vocabulary and grammar. Despite the advantages, the website suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, the website has no offline functionality. Second, the website has rather limited materials in some sections. For instance, in the quiz section, there are few questions for the users to answer and practice English. Third, the website does not have a corresponding application (e.g., a mobile app). Fourth, some of the materials, particularly the audios, are artificially made and lack authenticity. The lack of feedback, especially on the pronunciation, is the fifth disappointment, as users cannot gauge their progress or determine potential areas for self-improvement. Given the strengths and weaknesses of the website, it is recommended that teachers and learners use it as a supplementary resource for learning and teaching English, in or out of the classroom.

### References

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### The Reviewers

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## Member Spotlight: Kimberley Roberts

*In this issue, The English Connection shines its spotlight on a member of the Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter. You may have seen her around: possibly in Daegu, where she teaches; possibly at a KOTESOL conference, where she goes for PD; possibly at a Daegu Chapter meeting, where she is chapter president, or possibly at a National Council meeting, where she holds a seat at the council table. Yes, this is Kimberley Roberts, and TEC brings you more about her in this recent interview that she did with us. — Ed.*

**TEC:** I know this is a busy time of year for you, Kimberley, so I want to sincerely thank you for allocating time for this TEC interview. Would you begin by letting our readers know a little about you: things like where you are from, what you did there, and what brought you to Korea?



**Kimberley:** Hello and thank you for contacting me to interview for TEC! It's a great magazine and I always look forward to receiving a copy! So, a little bit about me. I'm from Sheffield in the UK, and I came to Korea in February of 2016. Growing up, I had an aunt who taught English in Japan, and it had always

been a dream of mine to do something similar. I was working for a bank in the UK as a software tester; while I enjoyed my job, I couldn't stop thinking about teaching abroad. I decided to just go for it, took the CELTA and booked a flight over! I haven't regretted it. In fact, I found a whole new career I love!

**TEC:** I believe you are presently a public school teacher. Could you tell us about your work: the joys, the challenges, the students? Is teaching here in Korea different than you had first expected?

**Kimberley:** Yes, I'm a public teacher at a girls' middle school in Daegu, and in my fourth year of teaching at

this school. I absolutely love my school and my students. When I started working here, I was told that the students were generally at a low English level, and I should tailor my classes to that. It is certainly a challenge to make beginner-level content that is also enjoyable for teens, and I've had some hiccups along the way, but now I love working with this level and age group. I recently received a letter from a student saying how that, even though English was a difficult subject for them, my classes were fun and accessible, which made them more interested in learning. That for me is the ultimate goal of working with lower levels and makes me feel my efforts are valued.

**TEC:** I'm glad to hear that you are so satisfied with your workplace and your students. However, we're a year and a half into the COVID chapter of our lives now. How has this affected you and your teaching?

**Kimberley:** The focus of my class is conversation, so finding ways to keep to social distancing guidelines while still having a speaking focus has been a challenge. Luckily, my school is small, so we've had little online teaching and mostly face-to-face classes. Last year, I was aware of how painfully boring my classes had become without the usual group and pair work activities. My aim this year has thus

**"I really hope to put together a team of enthusiastic people who can help push the Daegu Chapter back to the big, active group we were before!"**



▲ Kimberley performing in the Daegu Art Center's *janggu* club for expats.

been to find ways to provide more engaging content while keeping within the guidelines. One example is playing board games, where each student gets an individual board and moves are determined by playing rock paper scissors with a partner at a desk two meters away. The winner moves three spaces and speaks, the loser one space and speaks. While not ideal, things like this can keep the

class fresh and fun, and give everyone an opportunity to practice speaking and get involved.

**TEC:** Has KOTESOL in any way had an influence on the way you approach language teaching?

**Kimberley:** Oh, for sure! I have attended so many workshops and conferences over my years with KOTESOL and picked up many things along the way. I always appreciate finding a new activity to try in class, and KOTESOL has also made me consider my approach to teaching; for example, after a workshop I tried to reduce my TTT, teacher talking time, and allow more time for students to speak. I think this greatly improved my classes too.

**TEC:** How did you get involved with KOTESOL – through conference-going? Did you join as soon as you found out about the organization, or did you scope it out over time before making a move?

**Kimberley:** I found KOTESOL through Facebook before moving to Korea, actually. I was interested in joining, but for my first year here, I mostly just traveled and enjoyed living in a new country. When I decided to stay for a second year, I thought, "Maybe this is a career I'm interested in." That made me decide to join KOTESOL so that I could start working on professional development and network with other teachers in the community. I'm so glad I made the move to join!

**TEC:** You've been the Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter's president for several years now. What do you see as recent accomplishments and as future initiatives, after or during the COVID calamity?

**Kimberley:** Like for everyone, COVID has made it a real struggle to hold meetings and workshops. Last year, Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter took a hiatus, as we tried to wait out the pandemic. Unfortunately, it seems like we're going to be stuck with COVID for a while, so this year we hosted some online events to get the chapter started again. Unfortunately, several of our long-term members have also left within the last year. Going forward, I really hope to put together a team of enthusiastic people who can help push Daegu Chapter back to the big, active group we were before! If anyone's interested in helping, please get in touch!

**TEC:** As chapter president, you have served on the National Council and are familiar with KOTESOL policy, plans, and programs. What direction would you like to see KOTESOL move in?

**Kimberley:** I would love to see more outreach to public school teachers. Generally, the training provided when we come here is not enough to prepare us for the classroom, and a lot of people end up struggling in their first year here. I would love to find ways to support and help

more public-school teachers and would hope this would encourage more to join KOTESOL and see why it is such an amazing network of people.

**TEC:** Outside of English teaching and KOTESOL, what do you do with any free time that you might have – inspiring professional development, interesting hobbies, incurable habits?

**Kimberley:** It is no surprise to anyone reading this who already knows me, but I'm a big nerd! My free time is spent mostly gaming and watching anime. I also enjoy walking and exploring new areas of the city, and playing *janggu* (the Korean hour-glass-shaped drum). Pre-COVID, I also enjoyed eating out and finding new restaurants and cafes. In fact, I'm hoping to launch a blog this year to share all my findings of the best places to go in Daegu. As for PD, following on from a great workshop with Wayne Finley this year, I'm hoping to increase my presentation skills. Last weekend, I gave a presentation to 180



▲ Kimberley opening a session as chapter president at one of Daegu-Gyeongbuk KOTESOL's monthly workshops.

students, which was a big step for me! Watch out for my name popping up at future KOTESOL events.

**TEC:** I'm sure it will! Although the COVID crisis has put a damper on much short-term planning, what do you see Kimberley Roberts doing in, say, five or ten years from now?

**Kimberley:** I very recently finished my MA in TESOL, so I'm taking a year or two out to rest right now. I'm hoping to go back to studying in a couple of years though. I'm considering a PhD or my teaching license but need to think a little more first. I can't see myself leaving Korea anytime soon, so I hope to meet everyone again at future KOTESOL events and workshops, whether online or face-to-face!

**TEC:** Congratulations in getting your master's in TESOL, and it sounds like I will soon be able to give congrats on your next post-graduate milestone. Today I'd like to thank you for your work at the helm of the Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter and for giving your time for this interview for *The English Connection*.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

# The English Connection's Timeline

1996, Dec. Publications Committee decides to divide its single publication into three: *The English Connection*, *Korea TESOL Journal*, and *Proceedings*.

1997, May. First issue of *The English Connection* (TEC) published. Jeong-ryeol Kim, editor-in-chief. Bi-monthly with 36 pages.



1999, Nov. Robert Dickey takes over as editor-in-chief /managing editor.

2000, May. David Shaffer writes the first of his 150-plus articles, interviews, reports, and edited sections for TEC.

2001, Nov. Trevor Gulliver becomes managing editor.



2002, Jan. Cover design changes to more modern design.

2002, Nov. Robert Dickey steps in as managing editor / editor-in-chief after three issues with no head editor. "Professional Development" column begins with Andy Curtis as columnist, and later with Thomas S.C. Farrell and others.

2003, Sept. First use of color (outside cover only), for the annual conference issue only.

2003, Dec. TEC shrinks to 28 pages.

2004, Mar. Louisa van Dijk (then Kim; as interim editor-in-chief) and David Shaffer volunteer to fill the editorial vacuum. TEC becomes a quarterly publication, 40 pages.

2004, Sept. First full-color cover, front and back, inside and outside.

2005, Mar. The column "Chapters in History" begins, chronicling KOTESOL's chapters.

2005, Sept. James (Jake) Kimball takes over as editor-in-chief.



2005, Sept. TEC gradually expands to 60 pages and later gradually reduces to 44 pages.

2007, Mar. The popular column "Presidential Memoirs" begins its 15-issue run.

2008, Mar. Kara Mac Donald takes over as editor-in-chief. TEC now 44 pages.

2009, Mar. TEC begins sporting a color cover each issue.

2010, Mar. TEC pages have again increased to 60 per issue.

2010, Sept. Interview with Alan Maley appears in TEC.

2011, June. Tim Thompson appointed editor-in-chief. Cover design changes to full-page photograph. Full-color format. Contents becomes ELT-related articles only (KOTESOL-related news and regular columns discontinued). Pages shrink to 32.



2011, Sept. Articles by Stephen Krashen, Barbara Hoskins Sakamoto, Keith Folse, Ken Beatty, and Nicholas Groom appear in TEC.

2012, Mar. Interview with B. Kumaravadivelu appears in TEC.

2012, June. William Mulligan becomes editor-in-chief.

2012, Sept. Articles by Scott Thornbury, Fredricka Stoller, Frank Boers, Rob Waring, and Brock Brady appear in TEC.

2013, June. Article by Keith Folse appears in TEC.

2013, Sept. Articles by Annamaria Pinter, Dick Allright, Graham Crookes, Charles Browne, and Curtis Kelly appear in TEC.

2014, Sept. Julian Warmington takes over as editor-in-chief. International Conference and other KOTESOL-related news restored to TEC.

Interviews with Scott Thornbury and Ahmar Mahboob, and articles by Michael Long and Gabriel Diaz Maggioli appear in TEC.

2015, Dec. Five-year reflective practice column by Thomas S.C. Farrell begins.

2016, Sept. Gil Coombe moves up to the editor-in-chief position. Articles by Willy Renandya and William Littlewood appear in TEC.

2017, Mar. Ongoing column "The Brain Connection" by Curtis Kelly begins.

2018, June. Julian Warmington returns as editor-in-chief for one year. Solar energy theme runs through TEC covers. Environmental and social justice themes included among articles.

2018, Sept. Article by Stephen Krashen appears in TEC.

2019, June. Andrew White moves up into the editor-in-chief position. TEC covers become more diverse.

2019, Sept. Articles by Rod Ellis and Andrew D. Cohen appear in TEC.

2020, All. TEC continues scheduled publication without a hiccup during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2021, Sept. Volume 25, Autumn issue of TEC commemorates the 25th year of *The English Connection*!

— Compiled by Publications Committee Chair, David Shaffer.



## TEC at 25

### An Anniversary Interview with Rob Dickey

*The English Connection* was first published in May of 1997. In commemoration of the 25 years of the publication of *The English Connection* (TEC), we bring you an interview with an early and longtime mover and shaker in TEC-related matters – Robert J. Dickey. Rob is a professor at Keimyung University in Daegu and continues to be very active in KOTESOL. — Ed.

**TEC:** Hi, Rob. I want to thank you for doing this interview for *The English Connection* on the occasion of its 25 years of publication. I know that you have been associated with TEC in many ways over many of those 25 years. Could you describe your multiple roles with TEC for our readers?



**Rob:** I think I've done a little bit of everything over the years. I'm not a big believer in titles or job descriptions in volunteer-based organizations: We all take on tasks that need to be done, and worry about labels later. For much of the time, I used the title "managing

editor" rather than "editor-in-chief." I've been a columnist, a section editor, and handled advertising, as well as written book reviews and news stories, taken photographs, done page layout, and dealt with the printshop and the mailing of TEC to members.

**TEC:** How did you first get associated with KOTESOL and then with TEC?

**Rob:** I don't recall whether I went to a Busan Chapter meeting before my first conference. The 1995 KOTESOL National Conference at Yonsei University was a wonderful experience. I was a *hagwon* teacher then, and it was hard to get away on Saturdays for chapter meetings, so I didn't participate much. At the 1996 conference, my former housemate Greg Wilson and I were so disappointed in the conference program book, and we told conference organizers that. They asked if we could do better for the next year, we looked at each other, and said "Yes!" In many respects that was the restart of KOTESOL publications. Across the next 18 months, working under then KOTESOL Publications Chair "Jay" Kim Jeong-ryeol, TEC, *KOTESOL Proceedings*, and the *Korea TESOL Journal* were born, as well as a printed membership book and a teacher's handbook (<https://koreatesol.org/content/kotesol-handbook>).

**TEC:** Looking back over the 100-plus issues of TEC that have been published over its 25-year history, what stands out as being the highlights of the magazine among its columns, articles, or other contents?

**Rob:** First, TEC has never missed an issue! There were six issues per year through 2003. I recall that the first issue was made with the same software we used for the first seven years (Adobe PageMaker), but was printed out on an office computer, and then the printers worked from that. From the second issue, we produced a higher-quality PDF, which printers worked from. But it's hard to pick out "highlights" because every reader will have their own favorites. There are some themes that I think people would relate to and perhaps might influence future decisions. The name, for example. None of the staff really liked *The English Connection* as a title; it was sort of a placeholder while we found a better name. But 25 years later...

Highlights surely must include the people. So many gave so many, many hours, both writing their own wonderful articles and editing/proofreading the work of others. There's simply no space here to name them all. But there was a strong bond, a "community" in those early years, even though we seldom met as a group. Travel was slower, no Zoom or Skype meetings possible! Many submissions came through fax or the postal mail.

TEC was founded very much as a "newsletter" – even the layout was more like a newspaper. That reflected the work history of Greg and I. Content in those late '90s also reflected the fact that very few KOTESOL members had the internet; in fact, only about half of the National Council had email! Most issues had a "Who's Where in KOTESOL" section in the back with a listing of officers at national and chapter levels, with phone numbers, many with fax numbers and postal addresses, and where available, email addresses. Each chapter had space for reports of recent and upcoming doings. As time went by, the KOTESOL website started to carry more of these things, and TEC became more magazine-like.

**"I've been a columnist, a section editor, and handled advertising, as well as written book reviews and news stories, taken photographs, done page layout, and dealt with the printshop and the mailing of TEC to members."**

**“TEC provided a connection, delivered bi-monthly (back then) to homes and offices across the country. It showed we had survived, while many other teacher associations around the globe went dark.”**

Finally a time came when TEC moved to a “professional magazine” design: By that I mean both the content was more “profession-driven” and the appearance of TEC was magazine-like. Lots of color photos. Mostly “feature” articles and discussions, less “news.”

One of the elements I was most happy with was the deeper news on KOTESOL. Presentation of budgets, analysis of expenses. Invitations for participation staffing various activities. And we’ve had some terrific columns across the years that were both fun and impacted teacher know-how. Covering areas such as grammar, vocabulary, reflective practice, web resources, culture, young learners, and teacher development. All those old TECs are available on the KOTESOL website, and Dave Shaffer has been working to compile various thematic collections from these (<https://koreatesol.org/content/english-connection-tec>).

**TEC:** Here is a hypothetical question for you: How do you think KOTESOL might be different today if KOTESOL never had an association magazine such as TEC?

**Rob:** Oh my gosh! TEC was born in a vacuum. The old publication, *Language Teaching: The Korea TESOL Journal*, faded in the mid-1990s due to health issues of the then editor, Dr. Dwight Strawn. That’s a good example of over-dependence on one or a few individuals! At the same time, KOTESOL was facing challenges as an organization – a few local chapters were doing fine, and the annual conference was popular, but the membership (mailing) list was lost, with no way to communicate about future events beyond phone calls to chapter leaders. The early years of TEC were essential to the organization in terms of communicating opportunities to members. It made individuals aware of activity outside their chapter meeting, made SIGs possible, encouraged individual professional development, jump-started the chapter and regional conferences, and

expanded participation in conference staffing such that conferences could be more than a bunch of sessions held around the same time in the same building(s).

If not for TEC, I don’t think KOTESOL would have survived the IMF [aka Asian Financial Crisis] exodus of teachers from Korea. For those who stayed in Korea, TEC provided a connection, delivered bi-monthly (back then) to homes and offices across the country. It showed we had survived, while many other teacher associations around the globe went dark.

**TEC:** As the world is increasingly going digital, do you see this as affecting TEC, which is now published both as a print version and online?

**Rob:** As mentioned above, the early TEC provided info at a time when there was little access to the internet. Okay, so I’m of an age where I appreciate “print” materials, but I get it. Increasing numbers of folks prefer blog-like free-standing web-only articles with heavy links. I use them, too. There probably comes a time when it doesn’t make sense to pay for page layout. And I’ll be sad. But this is a reading preference, and a media-delivery choice, not a question of content. Tablets and smartphones don’t do PDF as well (small type). But I would like to feel a cohesion, where each periodic issue feels self-contained, not just occasional articles popping up whenever. So maybe TEC’s delivery moves closer to the *KOTESOL News* (<https://koreatesol.org/content/kotesol-news-email-newsletter>)?

**TEC:** Time will surely tell. TEC has evolved over the past 25 years and most likely will continue to change. Thank you, Rob, for taking us back on a journey into and through *The English Connection’s* past.

Interviewed by Publications Committee Chair  
David Shaffer.



# The Lattice (An homage to The Matrix as PR for KOTESOL National Conference 2021)

By David Kluge, Gregory S. Lewis, and Sunil Mahtani

## Characters

**Red Pill (RP):** A trip on the short film magic bus  
**Blue Pill (BP):** A journey of personal development through presentation and interaction  
**Niall (Neo look-alike):** By day, a language teacher; by night, a provider of bootleg software  
**Unity (Trinity androgynous Two-Spirit look-alike):** Conference+Film Festival  
**Morforus (Morpheus look-alike):** Leader of the Resistance  
**Shirtless man (SM)**

## Scene: Niall's apartment

**Narrator:** Niall is asleep in front of his computer. The beep of a message wakes him. "Reel to Real: Do you want to know?" Feeling like he's been waiting his whole life for this moment, he keys back "Yes." "Follow the lattice" appears, followed by three hard knocks on his door. He opens it, revealing a shirtless man.

**SM** (wad of money in his hand): Got a disc for me?  
 (Niall takes the money, hands him a disc.)  
 [Close-up shot on disc's label: SHORT FILM]

**SM:** I'm going out tonight. Wanna come?

**Niall:** Nah, I better not.

**SM:** Suit yourself.

**Narrator:** The shirtless man turns to leave. Niall notices a large lattice tattooed on his backside. Chills run up and down Niall's spine.

**Niall:** Hey, wait for me.

## Scene: Morforus' office

**Narrator:** Morforus, in a black coolstone leather greatcoat, stands facing the fireplace. Niall is ushered into the room, and on cue, there is a crack of thunder as Morforus turns, s-l-o-w-l-y. Niall tentatively accepts Morforus' hand in greeting and takes a chair. Morforus offers Niall two pills.

**Morforus** (speaking prophet-like): Take the blue pill and find yourself at the KOTESOL National Conference – a highly respected language education conference: teachers giving presentations, watching presentations, and networking. Or, ... take the red pill and learn all about "the short film." It will change your life.

**BP:** Pick me! Develop your inner teacher.

**RP:** No! Pick me! Completely change your life!

**BP:** Niall. Listen to me. No one has ever regretted going to a National Conference. No one! Ever! You will be free to wander the rooms of knowledge and learn from some of the best minds connected with education. Yes, I said, "connected," but don't be afraid; it makes you stronger, smarter. Come with me, Niall, to the koreatesol.org website to register.

**RP:** Oh, give us a break, will ya, Blue?! He doesn't want to be stuck in stuffy conferences. He wants to get out, smell the air, the rain, the busses. Capture it all on film. Feed his creative inner kid. Niall, listen to me! You must climb out of your rabbit hole into an oasis of creativity. Pick me!

**Narrator:** Red Pill and Blue Pill go on arguing. Suddenly, Niall pops BOTH pills and swallows. In that moment, Unity appears, dressed in a purple coolstone leather uni-suit, standing before him.

**Niall:** Who...are...you?

**Unity** (in a multi-voice sounding mysteriously like a melding of the voices of BP and RP): We are the intertwining of both the red and blue pills.

**Narrator:** They say they will show Niall what that means and take his hand to escort him out of the room.

**Unity:** You will learn how to take your short film, enter it in the Filmmaking Festival, and learn how to fully participate in the KOTESOL National Conference. They are... We are... One.

## Scene: The good ship Methuselah.

**Narrator:** Methuselah is under attack by *ojing-eo*. Beeping lights and flashing sounds erupt as an ominous voice warns, "They're inside." Nearby, Niall lies comatose with Unity holding his hand, protecting him.

(Cut-cut to Niall running, searching for a ringing phone he really needs to answer. Rushing into the room with the phone, Niall is instead confronted by a smileless Agent Smyth, a fully-loaded poisonous fountain pen pointed straight at Niall's chest. Smyth shoots. Niall can't believe it – his favorite shirt, ruined! He falls to the ground, thinking, "It's over...")

(180-degree cut back to Unity hovering over comatose Niall, ... not the Niall with the ink stain, well yes, that Niall . . . but not; it's the Lattice... It's complicated.)

**Unity** (whispering in Niall's ear): I know how to get the stain out. (Lays their healing hands on the stain.)

**Narrator:** Niall has been changed somehow. He suddenly opens his eyes.

**Niall:** I know taekwondo.

**Narrator:** Cut back to inked Niall laying on the floor. The ink stain drains out of his shirt. He floats to his feet.

**Niall:** Apologize!

**Agent Smyth:** I...I'm...I'm s-s-sorry . . .

**Narrator:** The apology is too much for Smyth, and he literally falls apart.

**Niall** (whispering to himself): I believe.

**Narrator:** Niall soars off into the sky to the KOTESOL National Conference/Film Festival 2021. On the computer in his room, a message flashes across the screen:

Everyone! Take both the blue and red pills.  
 Follow me. – Niall

— THE END —

"Reel to Real"  
 2021 KOTESOL Filmmaking Festival and National Conference  
 – In Partnership with the Liquid Arts Network –  
 November 3–7, 2021 (Wed. – Sun.)

<https://koreatesol.org/nc2021>



# The Classroom Connection

## On Being Ready for Anything

By Peter Thwaites

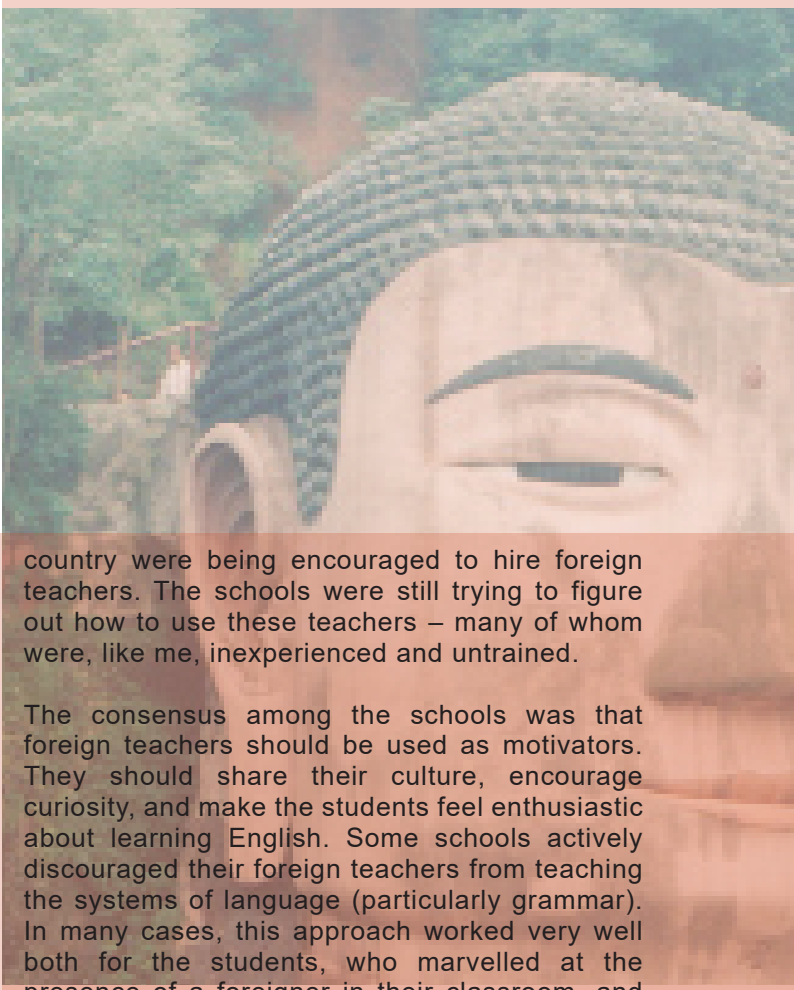
The day I taught my first class as a language teacher, I thought I was going sightseeing. I'd only been in China a few days, and my manager had arranged for me to observe a teaching demonstration being given by a colleague in a city named Leshan. A primary school there was hoping to recruit a foreign English teacher for the following semester. I was grateful for this opportunity because, having only recently graduated from university, I had no idea how to teach English (or anything else), and I needed to learn the ropes. But the thing that I was really thinking about, as we followed the signposts to the city, was the legendary Great Buddha. Leshan is home to the world's largest pre-modern statue: an enormous, seated Buddha hand-carved into a cliff face on the outskirts of town. Surely we'd have time to visit?

Then, as we pulled off the highway and into the city, my manager's phone rang and a Chinese-language conversation began. Moments later, everyone started looking at me. Worriedly.

I spent the final ten minutes of the car ride trying to piece together a lesson plan. There was no textbook available, my manager said. They had no topic or language item that they wanted me to teach. No materials. They just wanted the opportunity to compare my teaching with that of my colleague, she explained. I should just teach whatever I felt was appropriate. My panicking brain interpreted these words as "You're on your own!"

It was almost impossible to imagine, as I stepped out of the car and towards an inevitable humiliation, that I would end up spending almost five years as a popular and highly regarded teacher in China. Still less could I have imagined that I would eventually come to feel that I owed so much of my success to being plunged into exactly this type of situation: no materials, no syllabus, no time to acquaint myself with the students, only "Here is your classroom, Mr. Peter. See you in 45 minutes."

My day in Leshan was an artifact of Chinese language education policy. Schools across the



country were being encouraged to hire foreign teachers. The schools were still trying to figure out how to use these teachers – many of whom were, like me, inexperienced and untrained.

The consensus among the schools was that foreign teachers should be used as motivators. They should share their culture, encourage curiosity, and make the students feel enthusiastic about learning English. Some schools actively discouraged their foreign teachers from teaching the systems of language (particularly grammar). In many cases, this approach worked very well both for the students, who marvelled at the presence of a foreigner in their classroom, and for us teachers, who often didn't know much about language or about teaching, but had an abundance of curiosity and enthusiasm. However, there were also cases in which teachers had mistaken their school's open-minded attitude for a kind of apathetic permissiveness and offered very little benefit to their students. Stung by these experiences, schools began to shy away from employing teachers directly, and instead recruited them from agencies such as the one that I worked for. This way, the schools could observe teachers before hiring them, as they were doing that day in Leshan, and could subsequently recruit teachers on a part-time basis rather than being stuck with them, full-time, for a whole school year.

While this system worked well for the schools, it led to some challenging circumstances for teachers. In my first year in China, I taught at a different school on each day of the week. In some cases, I would get to work with a group of students on a regular basis. But just as often, I would visit a school only once, never to return. On these occasions, I would usually not find out the students' age, or their proficiency, or how many would be in the class, until I entered the classroom. Class sizes ranged from less than

twenty to more than eighty. In most cases, the only materials I could rely on were a blackboard, some chalk, and a roomful of students.

I started out by handling this situation in much the same way as my colleagues: I developed a repertoire of “stock” lessons that I could roll out at any time. There was my lesson about families, a balloon debate about occupations, and a handful of others. My students seemed to find these lessons enjoyable enough, and having this stock helped me to overcome my fear of unplannable teaching assignments (a fear that began on that day in Leshan). But within a few months, my enthusiasm for this approach began to wear thin. For a start, it was boring. I didn’t like teaching the same things week after week. More importantly, I was beginning to notice that my students all had unique strengths and weaknesses, and that my “one size fits all” approach was not meeting these diverse needs. I needed a way of teaching that allowed me to respond to my students as individuals.

Looking back, a few fledgling elements of that eventual approach were present even on that day in Leshan. The lesson started with me asking the students how they were feeling. I got back a chorus of “Fine, thank you, and you?” I found this unconvincing, so I asked “How are you *really*?” and the students told me that they were hungry, excited, and happy. After that, I asked the students to tell me about themselves. A few of the braver ones told me their names, ages, and hobbies. One student – a nine-year-old of exquisite empathy – appeared to sense my terror of the lesson never ending and spoke for a full four minutes about his family members.

An older, wiser version of myself would have been able to carve a productive lesson from these nuggets of language. I might have taken their “I’m hungry!” and their “I’m happy!” responses and shown them how to develop them using adverbs (“I’m extremely hungry!”), or use conjunctions to add a little nuance (“I’m really excited but a little bit hungry!”). I might have helped them to expand their repertoire of verbs for talking about their hobbies. I might have responded to their family descriptions by telling them about my own family members and then challenging them to reconstruct what I had said from some prompts on the board.

In Leshan, though, I could not have done these things because I didn’t know enough about

language or enough about teaching techniques, and was therefore unable to harness the students’ utterances as raw material for learning. It has taken years to learn how to do this, and I’m still learning every day. So instead, that day, I left their utterances hanging, and moved on to something else. But what? A colleague had suggested that I teach some basic verbs for movements: *throw, catch, stand, sit, walk, run*. So for ten minutes, the class resembled a poorly organised children’s birthday party. Things got thrown, people stood and then sat and then stood again. This continued for long enough to allow me to realize that the students had known these words all along, after which I gave up and looked pleadingly at the clock. The only thing I remember of the last ten minutes is the empathic boy shrugging at me while wearing a look of deep sorrow. We did not go sightseeing.

From days like that one in Leshan, though, I learned this: to start from where the students are. I learned this at first as a way of getting through these unplannable classes and later came to understand it as a general principle for good teaching. Get them to say things, get them to expand on those things, and from that linguistic sampling, figure out where to offer improvements. Perhaps a specific language point needs to be worked on. Maybe something more general, such as improved accuracy or fluency, is needed. The teacher’s work is in being skilled enough to spot these snags and knowing the right intervention when the time arrives.

I’m not trying to say that this is easy. Teaching in this manner requires a patient ear, robust linguistic knowledge, and a diverse hoard of classroom techniques to pull from with minimal preparation. It takes time and effort to develop these skills. Nevertheless, I want teachers to make this their priority. So much of our time is spent poring over textbooks or syllabus documents, trying to put together coherent lesson plans for the day’s classes. Our plans completed, we may find that we are led by them. With luck, we leave the classroom feeling that they have worked well and that our students benefited. And we should feel this sense of success, because teaching is difficult. But we must also have an eye for what is missing from such an approach: the ability to respond to those emergent, unplannable moments when our students wished to communicate something, receptively or productively, but could not; and a toolkit for that day when you, too, are thrown into your own “Leshan situation.”

### The Columnist

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# The Brain Connection

## Here's Why You Should Tell Stories

By Dr. Curtis Kelly  
(with Stephen M. Ryan)

Class is about to end. You ask, “We’ve got some time left, so which would you rather do? Another exercise? Or hear a story?” You already know how your students will answer, but did these thoughts also lurk in your mind? Exercise: serious study; story: mainly just having fun.

Serious vs. fun. Isn’t that how most teachers think of stories? I loved the stories my high school science teacher used to tell, but they didn’t help me on the tests.

And yet, and yet. Even when we read academic books, full of high-level thought, it is the stories that stay with us: the accidental discoveries, the personal anecdotes, the experiments that went wrong. So, maybe we are undervaluing one of our most powerful teaching tools.

For, you see, my friends, our brains are built for stories. Remember that. It is important. Our brains are built for stories. In fact, the extreme ease by which we absorb language through stories, as compared to the difficulty of absorbing language through explanations and exercises, is exactly what makes it *seem* that the exercises are *serious study*, and stories are *not*. There are advantages to both approaches, of course, but far too often we underestimate the value of stories.

### Consider This: What Makes Extensive Reading So Effective?

The pundits claim it is because of “comprehensible input” and extensive exposure to language, but excuse me, isn’t that true of most forms of language study, including copious grammar exercises? I think extensive reading (ER) works because it is mainly reading stories, often moving ones. This is not just speculation. As someone who has spent years studying neuroscience, I have come to appreciate that stories are like superhighways for getting language into our brains, and the emotion they provoke is the adhesive

for keeping it there. More on that in a minute, but first, let’s see how effective extensive reading really is.

### Stories and Learning

Numerous studies show ER improves proficiency in reading speed, comprehension, grammar development, and vocabulary acquisition, but my favorite is Nishizawa’s discovery. He looked at the TOEIC scores of high school students who did four years of extensive reading. Students who read an average of 766,000 words (equivalent to 5 Harry Potter books) got a TOEIC average equivalent to fourth-year university students. That in itself is pretty amazing. But students who read an average of 1.8 million words showed a gain that was even more incredible. They did as well on the TOEIC test as peers who spent a year abroad (Nishizawa et al., 2010)!

Now make a small conceptual tweak. Swap out the term “extensive reading” and replace it with “reading stories.” Four years of *reading stories* had the same effect as living a year abroad!

**“In one study where students were told to learn lists of nouns, those that made stories out of them remembered a whopping 6–7 times as many...”**

Other research on stories and learning is equally remarkable. Studies conducted in the heyday of “narrative,” 1960–1990, showed that information delivered through stories is learned faster and retained longer than information delivered by other means, such as lectures and expository prose. In one study where students were told to learn lists of nouns, those

that made stories out of them remembered a whopping 6–7 times as many (Bower & Clark, 1969). Graesser et al. (1980) found that narrative texts were read about twice as fast as expository texts and remembered twice as well.

This should not be surprising. Storytelling was the basis of all education until around 1100 AD, when the lecture-test pedagogy emerged. As E. O. Wilson (2002) puts it, stories “are our survival manuals.” As encapsulated experience, they help us decode the world, exploit our environment, and hone our social skills. Hearing a story is tuning in on the collective wisdom it contains. Obviously, the human brain evolved to learn from stories.

Then again, Stephen M. Ryan might say that maybe it is the other way around. Stories evolved as a format that fits our brains! Like me, Stephen is fascinated with a new view of the brain that explains most of what it does: predictive processing. Our brains form cause-and-effect models of the world based on our experiences, to help us predict what is likely to happen in any situation. Having that ability keeps us safe, helps us prosper, and makes cognitive processing far more efficient. By prediction, we don’t just mean pondering what one might have for dinner. Our brains are incessantly predicting, every second, what we are likely to experience in the next second.

As Stephen often informs me, that is why our brains are so good at identifying patterns, even when patterns don’t exist. Patterns are the language of the brain. Since they are the grammar of cause and effect, they give us that ability to predict. Now think about stories again. Stories are basically a series of little cause-and-effect patterns (She said this, so he did that) put into a larger pattern called the narrative arc.

No wonder we learn so well from stories. They too are the language of the brain.

But more. Having millions of internal cause-and-effect models is great for predicting what happens, but predicting alone is not of much use. We also have to figure out what those possible outcomes mean for our safety and prosperity, and how to use them. We need some kind of steering system to put all those maps into. And that is what emotion is.

Emotion is the steering system that keeps us away from cliff edges and pulls us into pizza parlors. Every cause-and-effect model also has emotional valences built in. Men in uniforms with guns are dangerous; women in brand-name fashions are attractive...or is it the other way around? The point is, emotion colors our cause-and-effect models with positive or negative valences, and thus turn any situation (the cliff edge or the pizza parlor) into an affordance.

The Columnist

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And that is precisely why emotion plays such an important factor in learning. In fact, we cannot learn without it. Brain and emotion researcher Immordino-Yang writes:

*It is literally neurobiologically impossible to build memories, engage complex thoughts, or make meaningful decisions without emotion. And after all, this makes sense. The brain is highly metabolically expensive tissue, and evolution would not support wasting energy and oxygen thinking about things that don't matter to us. Put succinctly, we only think about things we care about.* (Immordino-Yang in McCrickerd, 2016, p. 2)

In other words, emotions label experiences as “important” or “unimportant,” and worth remembering or not. We remember the first time we fell down the stairs; we do not remember the five thousandth time we walked through our front door.

Because stories evoke emotion, the information in them – including the language – is more likely to be retained. And for our learners, who are basically newcomers in the world, these stories carry valuable lessons about how to navigate the extremely complex social milieu we live in. For example, research shows that people who read fiction are generally better at understanding others.

Our learners are not just fond of stories, they crave them. Stories to help them fill out their cause-and-effect models of the world as a part of growing up.

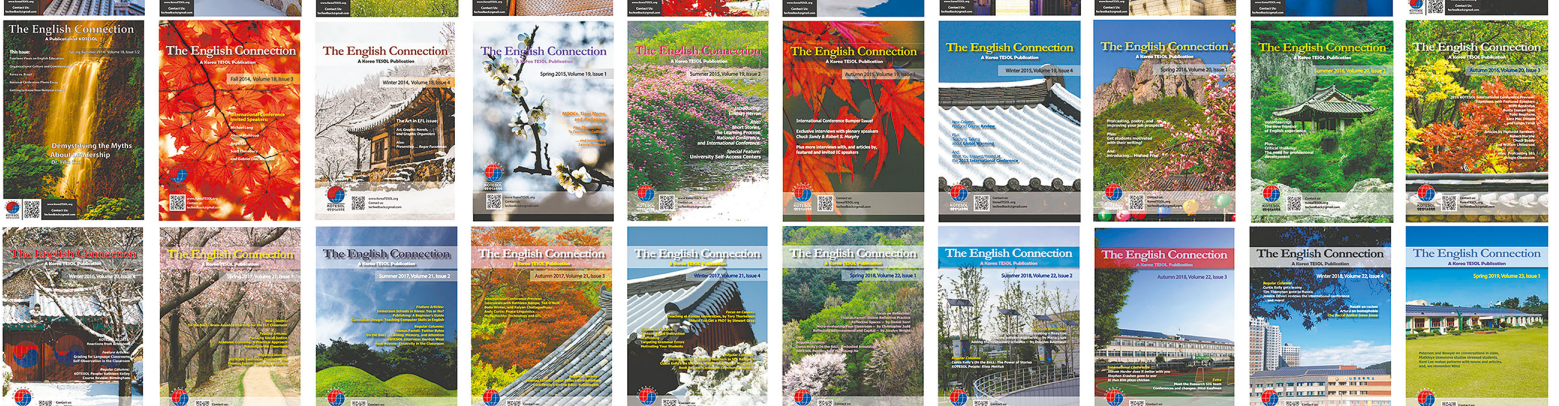
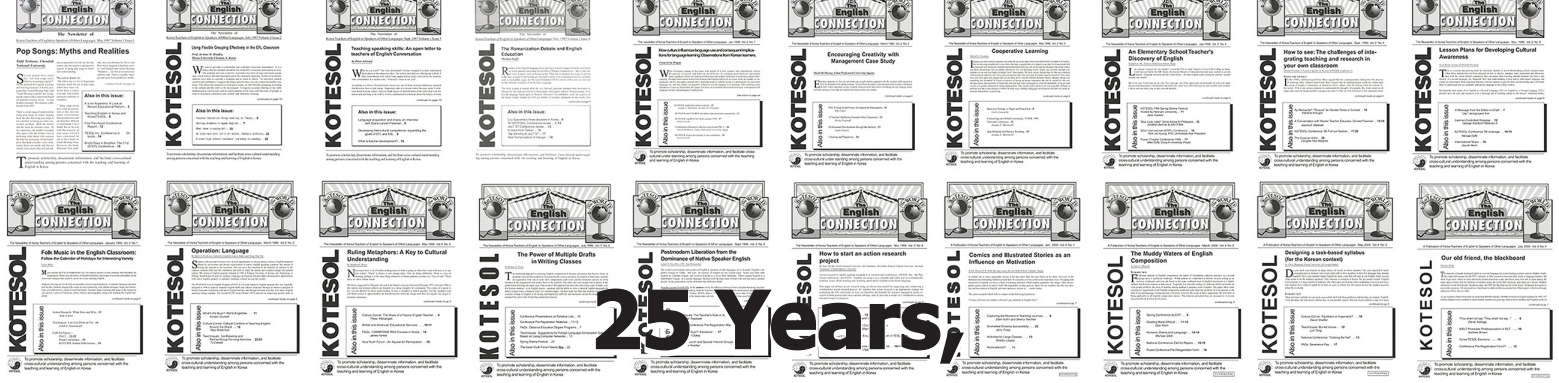
In short, we must recognize that stories are a powerful tool of learning. They do what the brain wants: feed it patterns and evoke emotions. We definitely need to revise that view on what *serious study* really is. And why is that? Because our brains are built for stories.

So, the next time class is about to end, say, “Sit back and relax. I’m going to tell you a story.”

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