The English Connection

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대한영어교육학회

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The English Connection

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Contents

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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
Delivering on Learner Needs: A Diagnostic

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

One of the most crucial areas to emerge in recent years of ESL research is that of learner needs, and by association, needs analysis. When we as teachers understand that not all students in our classrooms behave the same, nor are created equally (socially, mentally, motivationally, and physically), we can identify these differences for us to be more effective in our teaching. The varied challenges students present to us in terms of learner needs can be both positive and negative (fast learners compared with slow learners, for example, or motivated vs. unmotivated), and the awareness of students as individuals can thus help teachers more efficiently plan lessons and organize the classroom, and create a better learning environment, one that can better create interest and satisfaction, and grow talents.

Yet the process of actually identifying learners' needs is often glossed over, as if teachers can magically scan over their students on the first day of class and simply categorize them into neat skill sets, social sets, behavioral sets, and so on. This "identifying" can be challenging enough with a group of housewives wanting a free talking discussion over coffee, but what about a mandatory General Ed. basic English conversation class of 40-plus mixed-major college students using a required coursebook and a fixed regulation syllabus? The idea of promoting the individual can suddenly get lost in the crowd, popping up sporadically whenever a brave student raises their hand, or reserved for those sitting in the first row. Teachers can easily be forgiven if they've ever asked if it's worth it, or even possible, to separate the trees from the forest.

One must assume the students sitting before you have been vetted in some calculable way, whether by survey, level test, paying tuition, or just a unanimous "Teacher, we want game!" and thus we already have results on general learner needs. These methods are helpful and can help create both a directional focus in lesson planning and a cohesive unity in your classes, but they all can be inexact, especially towards the individual, as mentioned above. What is needed is a more procedural diagnostic that teachers can apply to help determine the feasibility and usefulness of addressing individual learner needs in the classroom.

1. **An awareness and desire to identify learner needs.** Is this something you even want to do? Or is your best teaching done to the majority, as you've pre-planned your course to be?
2. **Choosing a method of analysis.** Teachers should have a good idea of what students are expecting before a course begins, either by survey, interview, mind-mapping, an entrance exam, etc. Observational assessment methods as courses progress can be evaluations, noticing student responses, homework, reticence, interaction, and behavior. And of course, listening to what a student says they want, and an overall vibe of the class, including those of the less outspoken.
3. **What is the need?** Is the need linguistic or productive in nature, such as improving pronunciation or grammatical accuracy? Is it socioeconomic, like preparing to immigrate or needing English skills for a new job? Does the student have advanced or below average skills, deserving of extra guidance? Is it a physical challenge affected by the classroom setting?
4. **Feasibility to address the identified need.** Can the teacher even take on this additional treatment to select learners? Teachers, often in institutionalized settings, can be handcuffed with fixed syllabuses and required coursebooks, compounded with large class sizes. Can it be justified to give a few students needed job interview skills in a general English conversation class? Does the teacher's have the skills or training to deal with mental and physical handicaps? Learning differences? Counseling? Do they have the power to adapt a lesson, or the strength to single out individual students?
5. **If feasible, what is the divergent impact?** How will addressing a learner's need affect the general course? Will the curriculum expectations be altered? Reprimanding a student's poor behavior may take 30 seconds one on one as you walk around the classroom, whereas realizing that students need additional vocabulary exposure may require an entire restructuring of the syllabus. To what detriment might addressing the needs of a few have on the needs of the many? What is the toll on the teacher's time and energy?
6. **The actual treatment.** What is the best method to actually address the need? So often discussions on needs analysis start and end with non-invasive observations like identifying, awareness, and recognizing with little actually done. But the teacher's proactive treatment or strategy is far more important to create improved learning opportunities. Perhaps methodological tweaks are suggested, like altering the syllabus or adapting the coursebook? Psychological interventions, such as individual counseling and encouraging pep talks? Adjusting environmental conditions, including changing partners or rearranging the seating chart might be the effective solution? A better bearing on homework?
7. **Observation period and resolution.** How, and for how long, will the monitoring take place to observe if the treatment has been effective? Can the teacher be satisfied by observing individual students' progress week by week? Is additional testing or mid/final course evaluation needed?

To consider individual learner's needs is a decision all teachers should make. Hopefully, this diagnostic can help determine if it's feasible for you.

President's Message
Organizations Like KOTESOL Are More Important Now Than Ever

By Bryan Hale KOTESOL President

Here are some things that have been tripping me up and confounding my sense of time: tattered, weather-worn posters with faded COVID-19 information; Facebook "memories" from already deep into the pandemic; the cheapie headset I bought when I realized I might be doing a lot of Zoom at work rasping out its last crackle of audio and dying; the realization that I'm about to wrap up my time with high school students who I have only taught during the pandemic. I keep feeling like all the upheaval of online teaching, socially distanced teaching, and online KOTESOL events has only just begun, but that's not the case at all. And, of course, I have also completed one term as president of KOTESOL — a term that began well into this situation. I am not processing time in the same way, and it sometimes feels unreal that such a substantial part of life has taken place since the beginning of the pandemic. But it really has been substantial, and I sense a need to start consolidating the experiences so far in order to prepare for the coming years, in which "there's no going back to normal."

Professional organizations like KOTESOL are more important than ever before. In part because KOTESOL's volunteers and membership have been demonstrating such tenacious resourcefulness and merit. Our Filmmaking Festival and National Conference was a fabulous showcase of the possibilities awaiting us when we make digital platforms, content, and interaction more central to our professional development events. It was uniquely innovative, but also representative of the great things KOTESOL has been doing during this time. But on a slightly broader timescale, beyond individual events, professional development organizations have a vital role to play for teachers in the next few years. With the initial upheavals of the pandemic settling into an extended, ongoing period of disruptions, English language teachers and professionals truly need the knowledge development, collaboration, support, and voice that organizations like KOTESOL can help sustain.

Although the pandemic has made the value of teachers' work more apparent to the world at large, I think it has also shown how deeply misunderstood that work is. We have struggled with learning management systems that do not seem to be designed for real learning, we have bent tools designed for corporate interests to our pedagogical needs, we have found ingenious workarounds and negotiated new spaces and conversations with our learners. We have contended with policies that have sometimes been unclear, confusing, or not in the best interests of us, our students, or our communities. There has been so much spotlight on education, but teachers' perspectives have sadly often been overlooked in the glare.

So I think this is an opportune time to remember KOTESOL's purpose of promoting scholarship and expertise, and facilitating understanding among all those concerned with English language teaching in Korea. Now that we are moving well beyond the initial scramble, I hope that KOTESOL can support its members in transforming experiences into acknowledged expertise, and needs into a strong community discourse.

I have heard from many members and volunteers that, despite the quality of our online offerings, they are not getting the same energy and emotional reward without face-to-face activities. Safety obviously remains paramount. But as social distancing rules change over the coming months and year, and as we also continue to improve the way we do things online, we will be keenly focused on how best to meet members' social and emotional needs, as well as their professional development needs.

We have a lot to be confident about and excited for in the coming year. Personally, I think the theme for our 2022 International Conference – "More Than Words: Teaching for a Better World" – is tremendous, and just the right focus at just the right moment. The call for proposals is open until January 15 (have you considered submitting something?). Our chapters and special interest groups will continue their splendid offerings. Our publications have continued on their already impressive pre-pandemic schedule, and continue to provide us with a wealth of insights and information (as well as opportunities to contribute ourselves!). Most of all, I'm looking forward to collaborating with KOTESOL members to make the year ahead the year we need it to be. "There's no going back to normal" is something that makes me feel bad when I hear it, because it implies that I can't have any control over what's to come. But I don't think that's really the case, especially if we support each other.
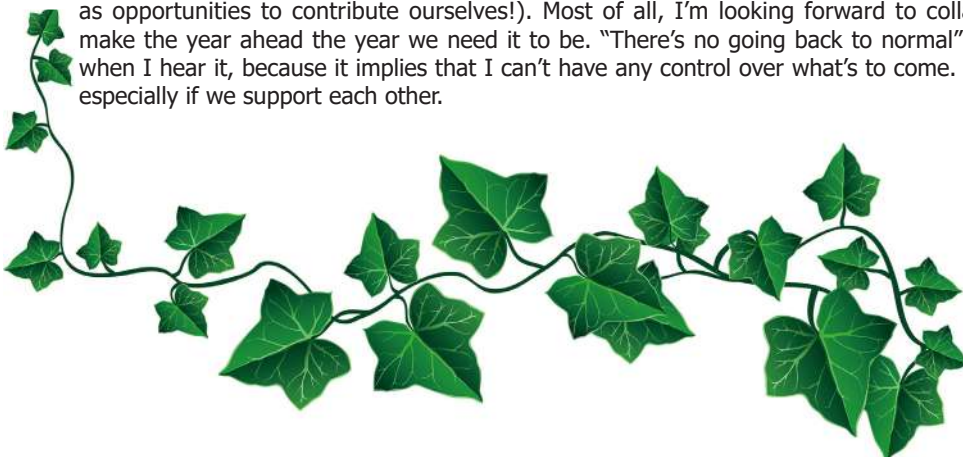
Lexicographic: Using Data Visualization Techniques in Creating Online Dictionaries

By Andrew Prosser

The growing popularity of online dictionaries is in part explained by their accessibility and the fact that they are usually free to use. However, language learners have other important demands when it comes to the dictionary they use. Research into user preferences reveals that users of online dictionaries still prioritize features long associated with good dictionary design: clarity and speed (Müller-Spitzer et al., 2011). Clarity may be understood in terms of the clarity of definitions and examples, but also clarity of the design and formatting of the dictionary. Speed may be understood as the demand that reference materials help the user find answers to queries quickly and accurately.

Data visualization is the technique of representing data graphically and ranges from the simple bar chart to the more complex interactive infographics one finds in online newspapers. One benefit of data visualization when presenting information is reduced search. By grouping connected data, a visualization can make searches faster and more efficient. In addition, with computer-based visualization in particular, very large data sets can be represented, often on one computer screen. Moreover, because information is represented graphically, for example, through color, shape, or spatially, that information can be absorbed "pre-attentively" – that is, without the need for cognitive processing by the user (Card, 2012). Another benefit of data visualization when presenting data is enhanced pattern recognition. Because visualizations often allow related data to be viewed in parallel rather than separately, the user does not have to recall information from earlier searches when trying to establish links between that data. Instead, the user of visualization will typically scan the information presented and select the data that seems pertinent to their search before having the relationships within that data represented by the visualization. With a computer-based interactive visualization, information can be aggregated to give an overview of data before being filtered to show specific relationships within that data set (Card, 2012). Each of these proposed benefits of data visualization could contribute to delivering both clarity and speed to the design of a dictionary and access to the data within it.

In terms of dictionary design, one consideration is the "access structure" of the dictionary (Luna, 2004). Simply put, this is the means whereby the user can access information. If we look at the major web-based dictionaries (including synonym dictionaries) for language users, typically initial searches are enabled first by search bars. Following these searches, either one of two main strategies are employed: (1) menus, where the different meanings or synonyms for a particular word following a search are listed in a clickable menu at the top of the page, anchor-linked to entries further down the page (www.macmillandictionary.com) or hyperlinked to separate pages (macmillanthesaurus.com, dictionary.cambridge.org/thesaurus); and (2) signposts, whereby sense indicators representing the different meanings of a particular word are placed directly in front of each entry on a scrollable webpage (ldoceonline.com, dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary, oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). The visual potential of a webpage seems underexploited on these sites (e.g., using color and font weight for highlighting, but relying largely on text as the primary mode to communicate information). Possible reasons for these design decisions are a wish to maintain continuity with the house design of existing book-
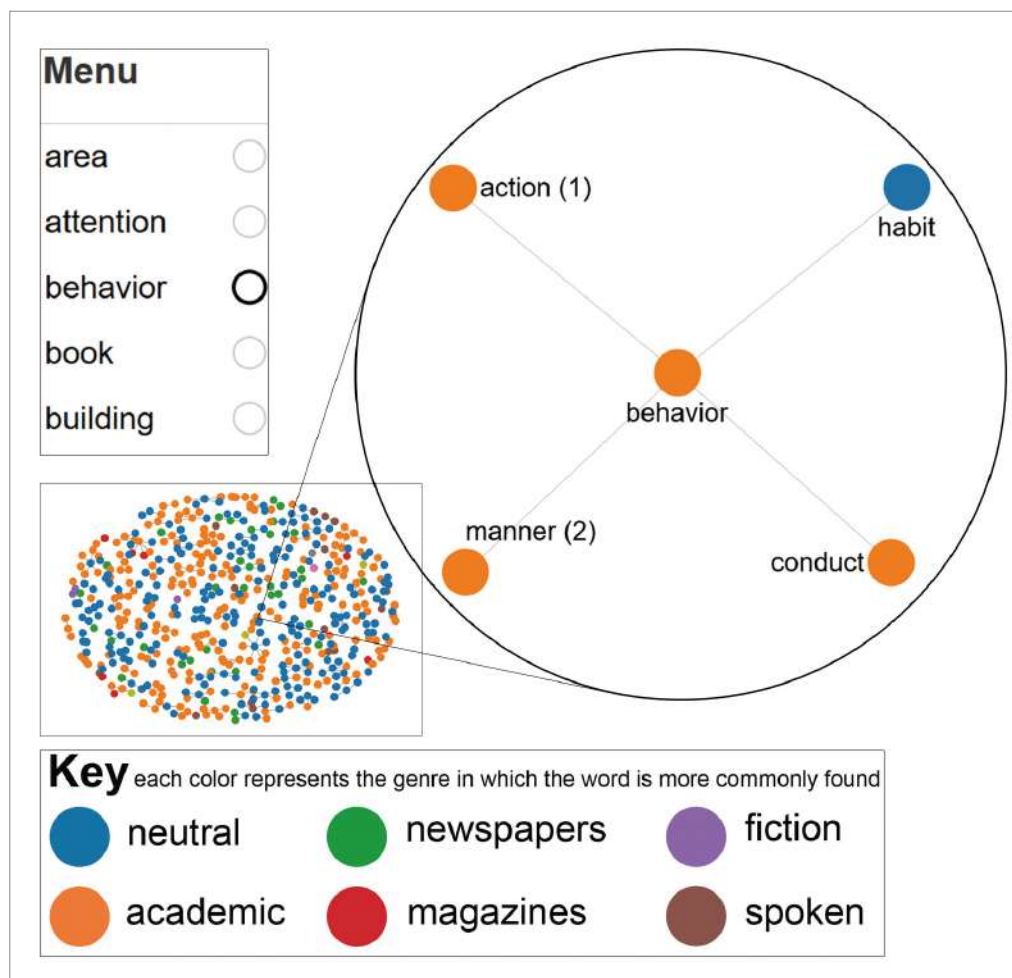
▲ **Figure 1.** Synonyms Network Panel with Menu, Key, and Magnification of Node-Link Element
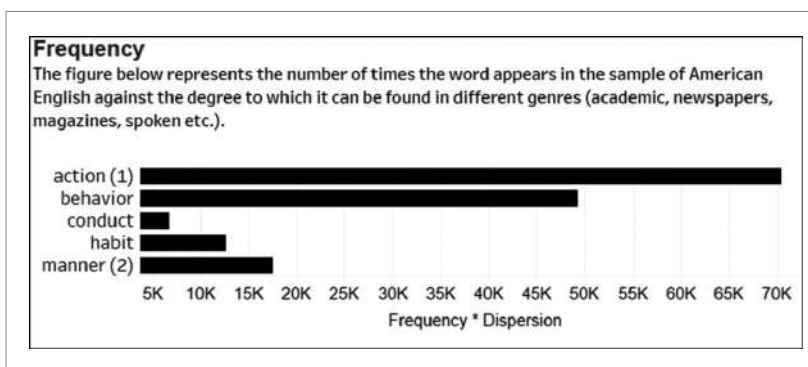
based formats and, in addition, an assumption of user familiarity with these existing conventions (Lew & Tokarek, 2010). It is possible to find much less well-known dictionary resources online that employ techniques derived from data visualization, such as Visuwords.com, a dictionary/thesaurus that uses node/link networks to organize information, employing color and shape to communicate information about lexis visually, and it is arguably in this direction that future online dictionary design may go.

Visuwords.com, like all the aforementioned dictionaries, provides a search bar for initial searches, and this leads us then to a potential issue with employing this facility. Search bars are common on websites, and research suggests that the majority of internet users are search bar oriented (Krug, 2014). With a monolingual language learner dictionary, however, the possibility arises that the user cannot recall at that moment a word in English, perhaps one that they know in their own language. A basic principle of web design is to prioritize "recognition" before "recall." In practical terms, this often means offering the user a menu from which the user can select an item rather than having to remember the term before entering it into a search bar. Such an option is used in the design of the following visualization.

An interactive visualization was created in part using the online data visualization website Public Tableau (www.public.tableau.com). The data set was created using 122 "keyword" nouns taken from the most frequent 900 words listed in *A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary American English* (Davies & Gardner, 2010). Their synonyms included elsewhere in the list of 5000 words were also included in the dictionary, making up a total of 528 separate noun entries. The dictionary provides statistical information regarding the relative frequency of words, dispersion across genre, association with particular genres, and high frequency verb and adjective collocates. The visualization has been created to support university students as a reference on a writing course. Unlike *A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary American English*, which presents words in list format (i.e., overall frequency, alphabetically, and parts of speech), it was decided to present words in the visualization in groups of synonyms, as it is supposed that language students' common requirement from this kind of data is to show comparisons between words with similar meanings, from which they could then make a choice.

Looking at the elements of the visualization (Figure 1), on the left of the visualization are the 122 keyword nouns in menu format and in alphabetical order (seen here in truncated form). As these 122 nouns are in the top 900 words, it is supposed through their high frequency that they are likely to be known to most language learners using this visualization. Moreover, as opposed to a search bar, which operates on the principle of recall, as argued earlier, the menu works on the principle

of recognition. The learner is supported in their search in that they do not have to "recall" various synonyms for a word, but "recognize" a high-frequency base form of the word they are making a search about and then choose that from the menu. The filtering capacity of the infographic is enabled by choosing a radio button next to a word in the menu, which then shows information about the keyword and its synonyms included in the visualization. The four other panels are then visually adjusted to show just information about that word and its synonyms. One panel is a node-link network (see Figure 1), in which "synonym" is a "node" visualized as a circle. Each circle has a color that represents the genre in which that word is commonly found (e.g., orange = academic writing, green = newspapers, blue = no specific genre association). The definition of each word is also given in a tool tip. The frequency panel in the form of a bar chart shows the frequency against dispersion

▲ **Figure 2.** Frequency Against Dispersion Across Genre Panel

▲ **Table 1.** Verb Collocates Panel

across the genre of all the words in the infographic (see Figure 2), and a collocations panel includes the verbs and adjectives that collocate with the nouns in order of frequency (see Table 1). Furthermore, in the verb panel, a small dot motif is used to indicate whether the verb commonly appears after or before the noun. All of the above data is provided by *A Frequency Dictionary of Contemporary American English*.

Why the choice of different styles of visualization for the different kinds of data? When representing ordered attributes, different channels have different degrees of effectiveness, particularly in terms of the human eye accurately judging values. Position on a common scale is the most effective channel for allowing the viewer to accurately ascertain a value and judge that value relative to others. As a goal of a learner using this material was presumed to be judging the relative frequency of synonyms, the most effective channel for this (i.e., position on a common scale) was chosen in the Frequency Bar Chart panel. Spatial position is also an effective means of representing ordered attributes, and so the verbs and adjectives are ordered left to right in terms of descending frequency (this order can, of course, be different in some cultures). In addition, the dot motif is used before or after nouns to represent the common position of verbs. Color, meanwhile, is among the most effective ways of representing categorical attributes (in this case, genre), and so was chosen to represent this in the node-link network (Munzner, 2015).

With the proposed benefits of data visualization, including reduced search and increased pattern recognition, these may contribute to possible design improvements in the formatting of online dictionaries, particularly in terms of user needs, namely, the clarity and speed of information presentation they require.

View infographic online: https://tabsoft.co/3AmWdC8

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Six Similarities Between Korean and English Histories That Provide Insights into Their Language Development

By Dr. Tory S. Thorkelson

This article endeavors to show similarities in the Korean and English histories that can provide insight into their respective language development. Although there are many differences between the English and Korean languages, there are a number of historically based similarities, which are presented here in six sections: (a) struggles for control by a number of local tribes/kingdoms/interests, (b) geographically and historically akin environments involving an island (or islands) versus a peninsula surrounded by potential enemies, (c) leading to multiple invasions/occupations, (d) both languages borrowed words from others to enrich themselves, (e) they have or are evolving into language varieties/dialects, and (f) their languages/alphabets have been taken by other countries/cultures for their own use. Perhaps in the future, the varieties of Korean will serve the same purpose as the varieties of Global Englishes are coming to serve for English, but that is yet to be seen.

1. Struggles for Control by a Number of Tribes/Kingdoms/Interests

Probably the most well-known example of competition for control of the Korean Peninsula is the Three Kingdoms Period, which ran from 57 BCE to 668 CE. During this time, the Baekje, Goguryeo, and Silla Kingdoms fought together and amongst themselves for dominance with occasional support and competition from the Gaya Confederation in the far south. In the end, the Silla Kingdom along with the Tang Dynasty of China were victorious in the late 7th century and created Unified Silla (Cartwright, 2021).

Such struggles made their mark on the Korean language and culture. In England, the desire of the church to maintain control of the religious faith and understanding of the people was challenged by those who wished to create an English version of the Bible to be shared with all who would desire to read the Bible in their own language (Gardner & Gretsky, 2015).

Huntington and March (2011) wrote, "Despite the pleas for an English...Bible, the Roman Catholic Church refused…[t]hose who read from an English Bible,...would become less dependent upon the clergy…, be… misled by their personal (and false) interpretations of the scriptures, and be more willing to disagree with church practices.... Any Bible translated outside the jurisdiction of the church was considered the work of heretics. Thus, church authorities obsessed over ways to repress unsanctioned Bible translations."

Their struggles were finally brought to an end by the King James Bible, which used the best from the Tyndale and Wycliffe Bibles to create a new Bible more widely accepted by religious leaders and clergy than any of the previous English Bibles (Pruitt, 2019).

2. An Island Versus Peninsula Surrounded by Potential Enemies

While it may seem obvious, the geographic and political environments of Korea and Britain shared neighbors who were potential enemies rather than friends. Looking at a timeline of Korean history, a few key events and dates clearly show Korea has a long history of conflict with its neighbors, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Examples of Invasions of Korea During Various Periods of History (Wikipedia, Timeline of Korean History)

Goryeo period:

1231: Mongol invasions of Korea begin

Joseon period:

1592: Japanese invasion of Korea begins under Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Admiral Yi Sun-sin employs the Turtle ship to repel Japanese naval forces.

1627&36: Manchu invasions

1866: French Campaign against Korea

1894: Donghak Rebellion prompts the First Sino-Japanese War and Gabo Reforms

Korean Empire period:

1905: Japan–Korea Treaty of 1905. Korea became the protectorate of Imperial Japan.

1910: 29 August. The Japan–Korea Treaty of 1910 started the annexation of the Korean Empire by Imperial Japan

Japanese colonial rule:

1945: Empire of Japan surrenders to the Allies. Korea becomes independent

Thus, prior to the Korean War, Korea had a long history of invasions, protectorates, and efforts to achieve independence.

According to *Historic Allies and Enemies of Great Britain*, "…since the Act of Union in 1707, the Kingdom of Great Britain has fought in over 120 wars across a total of 170 countries" (Johnston, n.d.). Their list of traditional enemies based on the number of times they were on opposite sides include: France (20), Spain (9), Russia (6), and China (4; Johnson, n.d.) Thus, neither Korea nor Britain were left in peace to develop their languages and cultures for much of their history.

3. Multiple Invasions/Occupations

However, while internal divisions were problematic, the interactions with China and Japan as its closest neighbors also impacted the Korean language and culture in many ways. China's influence was seemingly more benign. Korea incorporated many elements of Chinese into its most elite levels of culture, including their characters and Neo-Confucianism. While Buddhism's roots are in India, it also traveled through Korea from China and on to Japan. Korea was a respected member of the Chinese "tribute system," giving regular gifts and recognizing the superiority of the Chinese Emperor over the Korean monarchs for many centuries. However, while China outwardly offered military

protection and political legitimization, Korea was pretty much left alone to manage its internal affairs (Armstrong, n.d.).

Japan, on the other hand, was very much the opposite. According to Armstrong (n.d.), "Japan, China, and Russia were the main rivals for influence on Korea in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and after defeating China and Russia…between 1895 and 1905, Japan became the predominant power…. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea outright…and for the next 35 years, Japan ruled in a manner that was strict and often brutal. Toward the end of the colonial period, the Japanese authorities tried to wipe out Korea's language and cultural identity, and make Koreans culturally Japanese, going so far in 1939 as to compel Koreans to change their names to Japanese ones."

Thus, Korea has experienced many difficulties throughout its history in maintaining its language and culture. English in the modern-day UK also experienced many similar challenges. Perhaps one of the most important of these was during the reign of Alfred the Great (871–886), when he not only beat back the Viking invasions threatening his kingdom but also lived during the Carolingian Renaissance, a period of heightened interest in learning and the written word in western Europe. Due to this, his reign is among the best recorded of the entire Anglo-Saxon period. Further, he appears to have taken a strong personal interest in the production of English language texts and commissioned a series of translations into Old English of key Latin texts. (Alfred the Great: King of the Anglo-Saxons, n.d.)

Without his efforts, the English language would likely have disappeared or, at best, remained a minor language on the brink of constant extinction. As written in Chapter 2 of *The Story of English* (McCrum et al., 2011), "The…making of English is the story of three invasions and a cultural revolution…the language was brought to Britain by Germanic tribes, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, influenced by Latin and Greek when St. Augustine and his followers converted England to Christianity, subtly enriched by the Danes, and finally transformed by the French-speaking Normans." That transformation and evolution into a world language has continued to the present day.

4. Borrowed Words from Other Languages to Enrich Themselves
According to Wikipedia (Sino-Korean, n.d.), Sino-Korean words make up about 60 percent of the vocabulary of South Korean, with the rest being taken primarily from English, aside from native Korean words. Sino-Korean words are most often used in formal or literary contexts and to express complex or abstract ideas.

In looking at the number of borrowed words in the English language, Bradley (2021) states, "…there is no such thing as pure English. English is a delectable, slow-cooked language…. As lexicographer Kory Stamper explains, 'English has been borrowing words from other languages since its infancy.' As many as 350 other languages are represented and their linguistic contributions actually make up about 80% of English!"

Thus, both Korean and English have been enriched by words and expressions from other languages.

5. Varieties/Dialects in the Making
Following on from the section above, it is worth noting that, while South Korea has welcomed Konglish into its language and culture, North Korean has not.

Wikipedia (2021, September 7) tells us that "North Korea has been purging foreign influences for many years since language is used to further its propaganda as well as as a 'weapon' to reinforce its ideology and the 'building of socialism.' Today, the North Korean language,… 'Munhwaŏ,' or 'cultured language,' [started] in 1966, consists of nativized Sino-Korean vocabulary and…has eliminated foreign loanwords from its lexicon."

Some argue that the Jeju or Pyeongyang varieties of Korean are separate members of the same linguistic family (Eberhard et al., n.d.). However, the Asia Society suggests there are a number of regional dialects. While officially there may be only two recognized varieties of Korean, namely the Seoul dialect in the South and Pyeongyang's in the North, that is only according to the national language policies of their respective governments. In fact, dialects roughly correspond to provincial boundaries. Thus, the South Korean regional dialects include Kyeongsang, Chungcheong, Jeolla, and Jeju Island and the North's include Hamgyeong, Pyeongan, and Hwanghae. Some of these dialects are not mutually intelligible making the argument for diverging language varieties even stronger (Snellinger & Fulton, n.d.).

English, on the other hand, has an ever-growing variety of Global or World Englishes including, according to Nordquist (n.d.), more than 100 countries, and the varieties of World English include Babu English, Banglish, Caribbean English, Chicano English, Chinese English, Denglish, Euro-English, Hinglish, Irish English, Japanese English, Nigerian English, Philippine English, Singapore English, South African English, Spanglish, Taglish, West African Pidgin English, and Zimbabwean English.

Thus, while the Koreas are slowly forming two separate dialects of the same language over time, English is being reinvigorated by an ever-widening pool of varieties of English.

Figure 1. English-Speaking Countries (Wikipedia.org)

6. The Language/Alphabet Has Been Taken for Use by Other Countries/Cultures
Hangeul has not remained as an alphabet used solely by Koreans. Shin (2009) reported, "A minority tribe in Indonesia has chosen to use Hangeul as its official writing

system in the first case of the Korean alphabet being used by a foreign society.… The tribe in…Bau-Bau,…Buton, Southeast Sulawesi, has chosen Hangeul as the official alphabet to transcribe its aboriginal language, according to the Hunminjeongeum Research Institute."

English has been adopted by a number of countries as a common language of communication between diverse ethnic and cultural groups. Countries like Fiji, Singapore, and India come to mind, but there are many more.

Concluding Remarks

Therefore, while Korean and English are very different languages from disparate geographic and geopolitical regions, there are more similarities in terms of their overall history than it would seem. Ultimately, they have traveled parallel paths to reach their place among the medley of world languages with Korean ranked 13th and English 3rd (Kim, 2014). In fact, according to Ethnologue, "Korean and Turkish are the only two languages whose number of speakers increased by more than 10 million…" (Kim, 2014). They are, additionally, the only languages that have climbed by five ranks or more.

Originally attributed to G. B. Shaw, this quote sums up nicely what many think has happened to English (and what is gradually happening to the two Koreas): "England and America are two countries separated by the same language!" Nevertheless, varieties of Global English often help to enrich the dominant Englishes, and perhaps the ever diverging dialects of Korean will do the same.

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The New Media Literacy of Video Games: Bringing Them into Classroom Practice

By Dr. Jeff Kuhn

Introduction

Anyone who has sat down to a board game or picked up a controller is well aware of the swirl of communication inherent in the act of gameplay. Language educators are perhaps even more acutely aware of the nature of games to foster language use. We have been making space for games in our classroom for over fifty years for their ability to get people talking. Susser (1979) describes the use of games in the classroom as a way to "move from pseudo to real communication, display competence in natural communicative use, [and] allow [students] to engage in autonomous interaction" (p. 57).

Given our long experience with games in the classroom, perhaps more than other educators, language teachers are also acutely aware of how challenging it can be to marshal the inherent communication in games toward achieving class objectives or educational outcomes. This challenge is even more apparent when it comes to video games. The field of digital game-based learning research is filled with the possibilities of video games to motivate and engage learners but lacks clarity on just how to achieve more concrete educational goals. This has led some researchers to consider video games for learning as vaporware (deHaan, 2021). More critically, deHaan encourages teachers to shift from students learning from video games to considering what we as teachers can do to help students learn more around video games.

That shift from video games as a text that teaches toward a philosophy of using them as a space where teaching and learning occurs can level up games and learning research, but as a wise Hyrulean hermit once said, "It's dangerous to go alone." Educators need more opportunities to share the mess of lesson plan development and the outcomes of action research when they bring games into the classroom.

The goal of this paper is to sketch briefly the opportunities and challenges around using video games as a text and video games as a space and to help build the discourse around the practical realities of using video games to teach. It also serves as a companion piece to my presentation at the 2021 KOTESOL National Conference titled *The New Media Literacy of Video Games: Bringing Them into Classroom Practice*, where we dived into more examples and ideas of how to bring the world of games into our classroom.

Video Games: The New Media Literacy

The Pew Research Center estimates that over 50% of those under the age of 50 play video games (Perrin, 2018). The US$150-billion-a-year video game industry itself is a global enterprise with publishing giants such as Ubisoft, Electronic Arts, and Sony Entertainment having development studios across the world where English is often a requirement for jobs. Video game technology is evolving into a universal storytelling tool and being used to create real-time special effects in television shows such as *The Mandalorian* and providing directors such as James Cameron the opportunity

to film the Avatar sequels in virtual reality. The growth of competitive video gaming, or esports, into a US$2-billion-a-year industry has created new career opportunities for gamers in areas such as streaming, esports announcing, and team management. Video games are a cornerstone of modern entertainment.

Even with this acceptance in mainstream culture, video games have seen slow adoption into the classroom practice of educators on a large scale. For some educators this stems from an unfamiliarity with video games and their affordances and how best to merge the openness and freedoms of games with the culture of the classroom, i.e.,
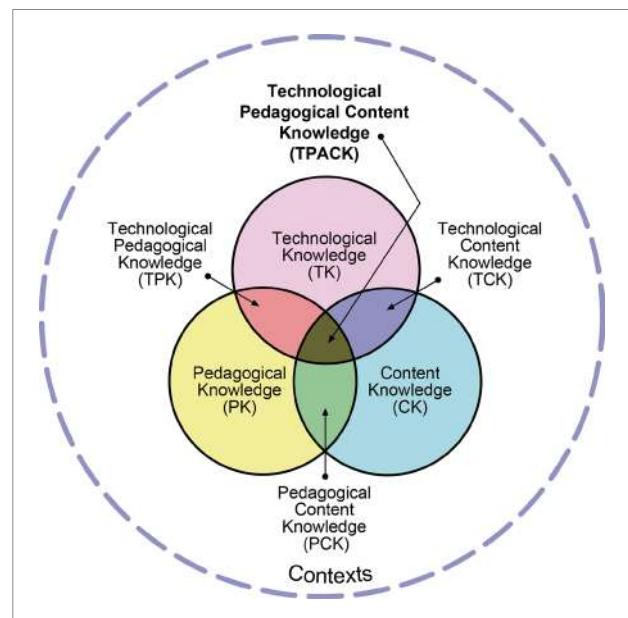
▲ **Figure 1.** The TPACK model encourages educators to consider how teaching, content, and technology intersect and influence one another.

what we can call the challenge of cultural integration 2.0 (Kuhn & Stevens, 2017). It can be challenging knowing where to begin with video games, especially as video games tend to be considered as novelty tools that have received the lion's share of attention in the research literature (Young et al., 2012). However, this focus on the power of video games to engage and motivate over how teachers implement them into classroom practice is beginning to wane.

As Reinhardt and Thorne (2020) assert, "Games represent a pedagogical shift from models of learning based on information presentation toward theories of human development that emphasize engaged problem-solving, collaboration, social interaction, and, in some cases, competition" (p. 410). Spano et al. (2021) suggest that game-based learning shift from a focus on the games themselves to a focus on pedagogy, so that the field might better understand, and consequently more effectively

implement, the constructivist learning environments video games can bring to the classroom. This paper makes a brief attempt to loosely sketch this shift and map ways in which educators can implement games into their classroom practice while maintaining an active role in student gameplay.

Crafting a Classroom Practice

Beavis (2017) states that video games are not a magic portal to enhanced learning but serve as a catalyst for creative experimentation. For this experimentation to work, educators must begin by crafting the proper classroom recipe for games to be effective. This starts with an understanding of the role of technology in our classroom and how it alters the alchemy of our classroom practice. Implementing video games into classroom practice begins with understanding what must change about our teaching and the content to make space in our classroom for the affordances video games bring. Teachers new to games would benefit from starting with an overview of the TPACK model.

Mishra and Koehler's (2006) TPACK model frames pedagogy, content, and technology as a trifecta, with each exerting influence upon the others. The framework stresses the need for educators to think and act critically regarding how technology is integrated into their classroom practice (Niess, 2011). Without considering what our pedagogy or content must change to make space for video games in our classroom, we may discover that video games do not live up to the potential for engagement and motivation that are often promised in the games and learning research. As Van

Eck (2006) asserts, "A balance between the needs of the curriculum and the structure of the game must be achieved to avoid either compromising the learning outcomes or forcing a game to work in a way for which it is not suited" (p. 10). Managing the balance Van Eck describes can best be achieved through a focus on backward design.

Wiggins and McTighe (2005) suggest that many educators erroneously begin lesson planning with a textbook in mind or a favorite activity and then determining the goal of the lesson. Instead, they champion an approach in opposition to this: Determine the goals or outcomes desired, decide acceptable performance that indicates mastery of the goal, and only then decide what content to use. Educators new to video games may find themselves taking the traditional lesson design approach, for example, seeing the popularity of Among Us with their students and deciding to use it in class without a full consideration of the learning goals for the lesson. Having a robust literacy in games is the first step. Much like being able to pull the correct textbook off the shelf to support a planned classroom activity, we need a robust understanding of which games can support students in demonstrating acceptable performance of our course goals. Developing this literacy takes time, and one pathway toward this literacy is to start by using games in much the same way we use books, movies, or music in the classroom.

Using Games Like Traditional Media

Reinhardt and Sykes (2012) advocate for the use of commercial video games to support more traditional classroom practice, for example, teaching vocabulary, which

▲ **Figure 2.** Quandary provides students a shared context in which to explore argument structure, persuasion, and debate.

▲ **Figure 3.** Simulation games, such as Pocket City, provide students a collaborative space around which educators can structure activities.

can be an effective entry for teachers keen to use games in the classroom, but unsure where to start. In a sense, this method uses video games as a text in much the same way we might use a book, movie, or music in classroom practice to be the subject of discussion, teach vocabulary, or provide listening practice.

Miller and Hegelheimer (2006) exemplify this approach to games in the classroom. Their study investigated the use of *The Sims* as a medium for vocabulary acquisition and retention. The researchers note that careful preparation of students for the linguistic features they will encounter is key. Hampering this preparation is the fundamental aspect of games: player control. Unlike books or movies, students playing video games may not access all the same content depending on the choices they make during gameplay. This player control requires educators to think carefully on how the game is used in class, for example, having students play only specific levels of the game or through companion worksheets that focus player attention on specific areas of the game.

Scaffolding is key when using games as text, and students benefit from having tasks to complete before, during, and after gameplay such as reviewing, completing, and checking their work on a graphic organizer. Games such as *The Sims* are rich with vocabulary and partner well with word web-style graphic organizers in which students are tasked with classifying the words they find in the game (i.e., furniture words, words related to throwing a party, or work vocabulary).

In the videogame *Quandary*, players assume the role of a captain of a futuristic space colony. As a captain, they must tackle community issues and make decisions for the colony. *Quandary* teaches players how to sort fact from opinion, collate information, and then use what they have learned to develop a convincing argument (Kuhn, 2021). Problem-solving graphic organizers pair well with *Quandary*, as students can chart the comments of each colonist and be

tasked with explaining which colonists' comments are facts or opinions and why. The completed graphic organizers could then be used as the foundation for a class debate, as students have all engaged with the same problem facing the colony but perhaps come to different conclusions on how best to solve the problem.

Video Games as Spaces
Sid Meier, creator of the classic video game series Civilization, once defined games as a series of interesting choices and within that sentiment is where video games can shine in classroom practice. If we think about games not as a tool to deliver content such as vocabulary and not as a traditional text like a book, but as problem spaces – where students can engage in low-stakes risk taking and then see the consequences of their decisions – then games can provide us a platform for more task- and project-based learning.

With this approach, we give the students a game as an "object to think with" (Papert, 1993, p. 23), where they are free to make choices, devise strategy, and problem-solve. In this approach to video games in the classroom, the language output does not arise primarily from interaction with the game but from students communicating with each other about the game.

Using games this way occurs less frequently due to the need to have a strong literacy in games and "that we understand not just how games work but how different types of games work and how game taxonomies align with learning taxonomies" (Van Eck, 2006, p. 8). We need to know what games provide our students the problem space that will generate the type of language we want them to practice to achieve the learning goals established during lesson planning. Using this approach, we can leverage the digital world of a video game as a space for authentic, experiential learning that can assist language educators in providing to students as many of the eight optimal

conditions for second language acquisition outlined by Egbert et al. (2007) as we can.

The challenge for educators in these open-ended problem spaces is how to assess the free production of language generated by students when engaged in game play. Creating further challenge is the argument advanced by Purushotma et al. (2009) that mistakes are a sign of progress and students may be more prone to mistakes when operating in a game environment and producing language simultaneously. The solution here is to design the lesson from a clearly established learning outcome, and that while the game itself may be hectic and rapidly evolving, that flux can still be anchored in a highly structured class activity. York (2020) outlines an approach to using games in the classroom where students

1. learn to play the game (such as by reading the rulebook);
2. play the game and record spoken audio, and then transcribe it as homework;
3. review the transcriptions, and then watch videos of native speakers playing the game;
4. play the game again, record it, and transcribe it again; and
5. reanalyze their gameplay, and then compare sessions for changes in language.

York's approach provides students the time and space to play and communicate, but shifts the analysis and error correction to after the gameplay, where students can devote more time and energy to achieving learning outcomes for the activity.

Another solution would be to tie gameplay into time-tested active learning strategies. For example, students can engage in a role play scenario using one of the many city-building video games such as *SimCity, Cities: Skylines,* or *Pocket City*. These city-building games can be the foundation for a class project where students work collaboratively to grow a village into a thriving metropolis almost akin to a class pet that is maintained and visited many times through the class calendar. These simulation games can serve as an experiential learning site at the core of a RAFT activity. RAFT stands for "role," "audience," "format," and "topic." In this case, students can serve as city council members addressing an audience of fellow council members in a speech format to advocate for a city law they support, such as a new recycling ordinance. Another option could be to have the students share the experience of running the city together, which would then be the foundation for a class debate on what new laws are passed for their virtual city. In this example, the game provides the foundation for experiential learning that would normally be outside the ability of a teacher to provide.

Final Thoughts
This article only begins to sketch out the boundaries and the possibilities inherent in using video games in classroom practice. When educators ask me what video game they should use in the classroom, my typical response is to ask what it is that they need the video game to do in the classroom. It is an exchange that reflects the many open-ended ways we can incorporate video games into classroom practice and acknowledges the best approach is the one that best serves each individual educator's lesson goals and learning outcomes.

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Reframing Language Class: Student Perceptions, Engagement, and Outcomes

By Dr. Suki Jones Mozenter

Introduction

When it came time for English class, my students seemed reluctant. As their English language development (ELD) teacher, I worked with small groups of students from different grade levels in an elementary school in a metropolitan region of the U.S. The students had a primary language or spoke languages other than English, so they were assigned to me for ELD instruction. Over the course of their instructional day, we spent 30–60 minutes working on developing their proficiency in English. Although students seemed to enjoy the ELD class, they also seemed reluctant to leave their classrooms for ELD. This led me to consider what may be impacting their motivation to go to ELD and how their motivation may also be impacting their language development.

In this article, based on a presentation made at the online KOTESOL International Conference in 2021, I describe a study conducted to see how a simple psychological

intervention may impact the students' interest and engagement in English class. I used a survey, observation tool, and English proficiency assessment to measure changes in the students' academic identity, observable engagement behaviors, and English language acquisition. I found that reframing the language course had a positive impact on the students, noting unusual progress in English acquisition and decreases in negative aspects of academic identity. This study suggests that teachers may be able to institute relatively simple interventions with big impacts.

Targeted English Instruction or Ability Grouping?

What we know about English language instruction is that it is most effective when it is targeted to the learner's linguistic proficiency level. Providing students with targeted, "just right" instruction boosts acquisition of targeted forms. We also know that embedding the language practice in relevant and learner-appropriate functions supports acquisition and linguistic development. This type of differentiated language instruction in heterogeneous school settings often occurs in small groups. Often referred to as a "pull-out" model, students are grouped according to grade level and English language proficiency for targeted language instruction. They are typically "pulled out" from their homeroom for one period a day, multiple days each week.

This pull-out model, however, is similar in nature to ability grouping. Ability grouping, or tracking, as it is often called at the secondary level, is an instructional structure in which students are grouped homogeneously according to assessed or perceived ability level. This is commonly done within a single subject or discipline. A student, then, might be in a lower-ability group for mathematics and a higher-ability group for writing. Ability grouping is designed to provide targeted instruction for students according to their ability levels. The thinking is that this form of targeted and differentiated instruction will adequately support struggling students and challenge high-achieving students, meeting the needs of a diverse group of learners.

The research relating to ability grouping, though, suggests that it might do more harm than good. Students who are placed in the lower-ability groups are less likely to ever catch up with the grade level expectations or their already higher-achieving peers. The curriculum in lower-ability groups often does not cover the material appropriate for the grade level, pushing the students further and further behind. The teachers assigned to work with lower-ability groups are often less experienced and skilled than teachers assigned to work with higher-ability groups. Somewhat surprisingly, students placed in higher-ability groups also do not fare particularly well within an ability grouping system. There appears to be very little benefit for these students, who show no larger gains than similarly high-achieving peers in a heterogenous setting.

There are also questions about the impacts of ability grouping on the students' academic and social identities. Students who are placed in lower-ability groups tend to develop a poor academic identity. They might believe that they are, for example, no good at math. In a language setting, they might describe themselves as someone who is just not good at languages. Within institutional contexts that

REFRAMING WORKS!

practice ability grouping, other students and teachers might also identify students in lower-ability groups as being poor students overall.

Academic identity has been shown to impact students' sense of belonging, engagement with the learning, and motivation to learn. Therefore, ability grouping's impact on students' academic identity might also impact their sense of belonging, their engagement, and their motivation. It seems, then, that grouping students for targeted language instruction according to proficiency level may do more harm than good. Is there a way, though, to structure ability grouping according to language proficiency level without the negative impacts of ability grouping? This was the question that I, as an ELD teacher and graduate student, set out to investigate.

Reframing Language Class
I was teaching multiple groups of students between grades K and 5 each day. Students were grouped by grade level and English proficiency level. I worked with them for 30–60 minutes each day in their small, homogenous groups, 3–5 times per week. For this research, I developed an intervention that I call a "reframing of language class." The students would continue to work in the same groups. There would be no change in their teacher as I would continue to teach them. The curriculum would continue to be teacher-developed and would be consistent with the teacher-developed curriculum that I had been using prior to conducting this study. Their schedule and classroom would not change either. Most aspects of the students' experiences in ELD would remain the same.

The only change would be how language class was framed. At the start of the intervention, I announced to the students that we would be starting a "course of rigorous language instruction." I explained that they would each need to apply to the course. I then explained that students who were accepted would be in this "course of rigorous language instruction." I also explained that I would continue to teach the course, that it would happen in the same classroom and at the same time, and that everyone in the current class would continue to be in the class. In other words, everyone would be accepted into this "course of rigorous language instruction."

For each group, I designed an application that served as an instructional tool targeted to their grade and English proficiency. Older and more proficient students completed application essays after watching videos about college applications and analyzing application essays. Younger, less proficient students completed application forms by answering, orally and in writing, questions like "How old are you?" and "Where do you live?" This was similar to the types of teacher-created curricula that I had been using for instruction prior to this study. It was targeted to provide students with modeling and practice in forms and vocabulary through relevant functions.

Students worked on their applications in ELD over the course of two weeks. On the final day of the application period, I issued acceptance letters. Keep in mind that I was not changing who was in ELD, the groupings, the schedule, the teacher, or the location of ELD. This meant that every single student received an acceptance letter. I personally handed out the letters to the students during their recess. Quickly, the playground was filled with excitement as the students raced around, waving their letters in the air. Roughly one third of the school's students were in an ELD group, and these students became swarmed by their peers who wanted to know what the excitement was about. Before recess ended, I had students who were proficient in English asking if they, too, could apply for ELD. This is akin to students in a higher-ability group asking if they could be placed in the lower-ability group. Suddenly, ELD was a desirable space that students wanted access to.

The following Monday, we began our "course of rigorous language instruction." I added a sign to the door of the classroom welcoming students to the course, but everything else remained the same. Over the next six weeks, I taught the students using teacher-developed curricula and instructional practices aligned with what I had used prior to the study. It seemed that students were more engaged in the work, less resistant to coming to ELD, and were making good progress, but I needed more evidence to understand any impacts.

What We Found
I used three different measures to assess the impacts on students. The first measure I used was the oral assessment of English proficiency that the school used to assess students' proficiency at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. In this case, the mid-year assessment was the baseline, as it occurred just prior to the reframing. I then assessed students again at the end of the six-week unit for the purposes of the study. The second measure was a student engagement observation tool completed by a

colleague while I was teaching. They used the observation tool during a period of instruction prior to the reframing and after. The third measure was a self-reporting survey on both positive and negative aspects of academic identity. Students completed the survey before and following the reframing.

In terms of English language acquisition, the students made significant gains. The assessment used was typically given every three months, and we expected students to progress one proficiency level in one academic year. Following the reframing, we saw the students gain a proficiency level or more after just six weeks. Of course, linguistic proficiency is cumulative, so whatever gains were behind this progress did not just happen during the period of the intervention. However, the percentage of students who made at least one level of growth was significantly greater than was typical over the course of a year. Also, we saw the greatest gains for students who were at the higher levels of proficiency, where we typically saw students plateau in their progress.

The second measure was the student engagement observation tool. The rationale was that students might demonstrate observable engagement behaviors (e.g., choral response to oral prompts) with greater frequency after the reframing. However, the observation tool showed no significant differences in student engagement in instruction prior to the reframing when compared to student engagement during the reframing.

There were interesting findings relating to the academic identity surveys. In the initial survey, the students generally had high positive academic identity indicators. The indicators of negative academic identity were not as high, which suggested that students generally saw themselves more positively than negatively in terms of their academic identities. This initial result made me wonder if we would note any change at all following the reframing. We did not see any significant change in the indicators of positive academic identity following the intervention; they remained generally high. However, the indicators of negative academic identity did drop significantly. This suggested two things: (a) Positive and negative aspects of academic identity operated independently in this study, and (b) the reframing reduced students' negative academic identity. While their positive views of themselves as students remained relatively high

and stable across the intervention, their negative views of themselves as students diminished.

What does all this mean for English language teachers in a variety of settings? How students view a class matters. This seems like something all teachers experience at some point. Students who are forced into tutoring might be resistant to learning. Students who would rather be somewhere else may not apply their full attention to the work at hand. Students who believe that being in the class somehow stigmatizes them may disengage to protect their own identities. These are experiences that are familiar to many teachers.

What may be new is how a reframing of the course may be possible – and the impact such a reframing may have, not just on the students' learning but on their identities as learners as well. Simple psychological interventions have been found to have lasting impacts on students in terms of learning and affective factors. Figuring out a way to reframe a course that students might otherwise be resistant to could be a path forward for teachers seeking to boost motivation, engagement, belonging, identity, and language learning.

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Anything, Anytime, and Anywhere: Connecting Virtually with a Personal Touch

By Dawn Gillis and Geff Heathman

Connecting, making connections, building relationships, expanding timelines, and blending the here and now with the past and the future via virtual spaces that have become the classroom is not only a daunting task but a necessity within education. Adapting and adopting innovative strategies and technologies to meet the ever-changing situations that are presented in this educational landscape are vital skills that can help enable virtual connectedness and enhance motivation for learning in these virtual spaces. To this end, teachers have creative license to break traditional thought patterns, explore potential realities, and create new avenues of interaction in order to achieve desired learning outcomes within a given situation. Connecting with and between students, virtually connecting as a class, and motivating students necessitate the liberal use of this creative license.

This article explores some possible realities for developing virtual connectedness and motivating students for learning within online learning environments. Findings from a study that investigated students' perceptions on virtual connectedness and motivation for learning provide a basis for this exploration. The findings reveal a number of difficulties that educators may need to overcome within online learning. Pedagogical implications based upon the findings are the focus within this article. Insights on various processes and activities for enhancing students' engagement in the learning process and enhancing motivation within virtual spaces will be discussed.

Students are stakeholders within these virtual spaces, and they can connect as a class through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous modes of communication. These modes can allow for students to virtually connect beyond the confines of a scheduled class. Time and space should not limit the possibilities available to them; they may develop increased motivation in certain realms. However, awareness-raising, self-reflection, and student empowerment might be needed for students to connect virtually with a personal touch.

Going beyond the traditional teacher and learner relationships may need strategic planning; not all students may be ready to take on a greater role within the educational experience. Heavily ingrained preconceptions on traditional relationships can be a barrier to reimagining the vast possibilities available. Awareness-raising along with gradual shifts within traditional relationships might be needed to support weaker and more dependent learners so that they can take a more active role in their learning. Communicating about and demonstrating possibilities are vital within this process. As such, a greater emphasis on facilitation might be needed for the teacher. Self-reflection on learning and one's role within such learning is needed as well. Self-reflective activities can help students gain awareness as learners and help motivate them to bring their ideas and input to their studies. Student empowerment is achievable as a result. To truly free oneself from the self-imposed chains that provide a false sense of security can be an overwhelming if not daunting task. Yet, that is the path forward.

The following principles, with the acronym BASIC STIR, were gleaned from the findings of the study that investigated students' perceptions on virtual connectedness and motivation for learning, and these principles have guided the development of the pedagogical implications in this article.

- **Blended** – Make use of multimodal learning materials and environments. There is no need to put artificial limits on learning. Going beyond these limits can allow for a wider learning experience and greater forms of engagement; video, audio, text, and images can be combined in various ways throughout the learning experience.
- **Authentic** – Use authentic example texts and promote authentic communication. Authentic examples are not limited only to examples from daily life but also include real texts that the students themselves create; students as creators of materials used for exemplification helps individualize learning for students' actual needs.
- **Self-Directed** – Promote independent learning and learner autonomy. Learner empowerment can be enhanced through creating options, choices, and decisions for the learners throughout the learning process. From text selection and creation through development of activities and content input, these can become the responsibility of students.

- **Investigative** – Incorporate guided exploration so that students can gain insights and greater understanding of areas of interest. Student-selected areas of exploration are more meaningful and relevant; depth of study in learner-chosen areas of interest can be interwoven to reach desired learning outcomes.
- **Contingent** – Promote contingent communication within the activities and the choices of activities. Topics could also be contingent on student involvement; a partial or full process syllabus can evolve in certain situations.
- **Student-Centered** – Place students as active participants and facilitators. From topic creation and decision-making through implementation of activities, students can be lead actors on the stage; this shifts the passive absorbing participant to a more active role within the learning process.
- **Togglable** – Create easily switchable lessons that can toggle between classroom and online modes of learning

with minimal need for modification. Any class should be easily delivered in either mode of learning; changes in modes of learning could be within a given class period, each lesson, or over greater periods of time.

- **Individual** – Support the individualized needs of students through the provision of ongoing feedback, individual consultations, and individualized curriculum. The individual is the personal, and through promoting the individual, the personal connections can take shape and develop along with increased motivation.
- **Revolutionary** – Allow for a constant state of evolution as technological tools advance and educational theory develops. New tools, strategies, insights, and activities are all on the horizon, and they can be harnessed for education one fine day in the future. With an open mind, innovation can create new possibilities.

The pedagogical implications below take a macro view for developing interconnections within virtual environments. The key is to break through the digital divide that separates the individuals in these environments and try to create a more humanistic experience.

Spice Up the Tedium

Routines can become dull very quickly. Though routines provide consistency and a framework that may support educational endeavors, one could likewise provide consistency within an inconsistent framework that could make things more interesting. From lesson planning through to the grand picture of course planning, deviations and detours along the pathway can make learning fun. As such, it is necessary to chart out the course ahead and thicken the plot with twists and turns at pivotal junctions. For example, this week we will use Flipgrid to share thoughts and feelings about a given topic. And then next week, we move onto something else. We may go back to Flipgrid later on or may never revisit that endeavor. However, it did provide a noticeable break from the monotony that educational experiences often become. Now, learning is becoming an experience.

Name It

As you plot your journey, name the weeks or lessons. Bringing a name to a lesson not only provides a focus for it, but it also creates a greater range of possibilities for the course to explore. It is not just "unit 2, page 45"… ho hum. But now, we have Introductions, Foundations, Flipgrid Week, Application Practicum, Advanced Conceptualization, and whatever other intriguing titles one can imagine. Next week, we have Asynchronous Online Class; imagine the possibilities. The course should deviate along with the names as it progresses. Once again, this takes careful detailed planning in the development of a course.

Celebrate with Cosmic Candy

Yee haw! Let the party get started. Zoom may have been new and exciting for a brief time. Yet, it does not fully replicate the basic enjoyment of in-person interaction that feeds off spontaneous conversation. The tired dribble emitting through the airwaves from some remote location is understandable but not always desirable. Just as in a "regular"

class experience, teachers within online environments should project their voices and use increased intonation to make a point and attract students. This may be needed in a much more dramatic fashion while online. Yes, energy cocktails can pump up that adrenaline to make it lively. Spontaneous outbursts, sound effects, and applause can help ratchet up the mundane and create excitement within the online environment. So, unleash the inner kraken!

Cultivate Follow-up Communication and Collaboration

Asynchronous interaction through blog posts, discussion forums, Flipgrid videos, wikis, and various other avenues plays a pivotal role in connecting virtually. These forms of communication and collaboration can be used within class time and outside of regular class. Once again, using a variety of online tools should increase motivation and allow for a greater range of possibilities. Furthermore, asynchronous communication can be used as a basis for feedback and discussion within a synchronous class as well. As such, for example, an asynchronous blog post created in a previous week can be used as an authentic example for further input on a topic. This not only promotes the asynchronous work but also helps to individualize the instruction for the learners' needs.

Given uncertain times recently, educators have had to change and adapt rather quickly to accommodate such changes. While it's important for teachers to integrate various tools and methods into the lessons, it's equally important for the students to take ownership of their learning and be active. Providing students with the opportunity to self-reflect can be pivotal as well as encouraging in their learning process. This can allow students to realize that connectivity can only be fully achieved when both parties are willing to take those extra steps.

The Authors

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Geff Heathman is an instructor at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and has taught English in Asia for 25 years. His current interests include professional development, curriculum design, assessment, and process writing. His past research has focused on fostering learner autonomy, multimedia design and communication, and collaborative learning environments. Email: gheathman@gmail.com

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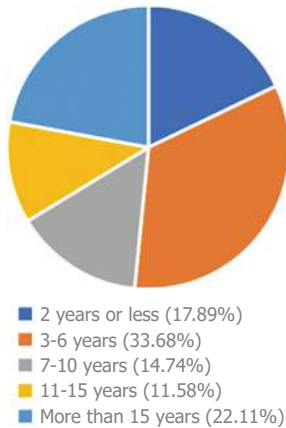- Pay per module

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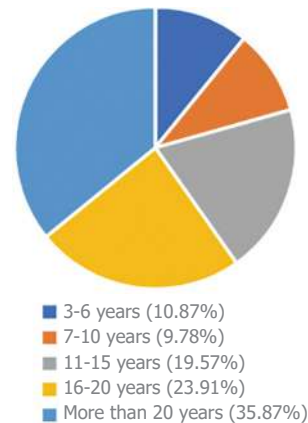
Snapshot of KOTESOL Members, 2021

Select results of the 2021 KOTESOL Membership Survey
(Sent to 321 recipients; 95 responses total)

Compiled by Lindsay Herron
Membership Committee Chair

Years of KOTESOL Membership

- 2 years or less (17.89%)
- 3-6 years (33.68%)
- 7-10 years (14.74%)
- 11-15 years (11.58%)
- More than 15 years (22.11%)

Years in Teaching

- 3-6 years (10.87%)
- 7-10 years (9.78%)
- 11-15 years (19.57%)
- 16-20 years (23.91%)
- More than 20 years (35.87%)

Most common current primary employers:
1. University departments (58.7%)
2. EPIK, JET, or other gov't program (12%)
3. University language centers (8.7%)

Most common areas of focus:
1. English language dev. (ESL/EFL; 70.65%)
2. Adult education (46.74%)
3. Teacher ed./professional dev. (38.04%)
4. Postsecondary ed.; Research (tie; 36.96%)
5. Curriculum dev./instructional design (33.7%)

Racial Identity

- Asian (15.29%)
- Asian/Pacific Islander (2.35%)
- Black/African (2.35%)
- Mixed/Multiple (5.88%)
- White (74.12%)
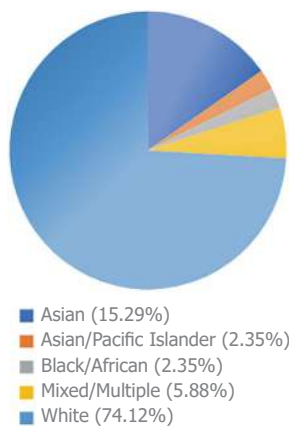
Most common education & teaching qualifications (completed or in progress):
1. TESOL certificate (50%)
2. Master's in TESOL/Linguistics (42.39%)
3. Bachelor's (not in English/education/TESOL; 31.52%)
4. Bachelor's in English (20.65%)
5. Master's (not in English/education/TESOL; 19.57%)

Nationality

Australia (5.75%)	Philippines (2.3%)
Bangladesh (2.3%)	Romania (1.15%)
Canada (18.39%)	South Korea (6.9%)
China (1.15%)	South Africa (4.6%)
Germany (1.15%)	Taiwan (1.15%)
Ireland (1.15%)	Ukraine (1.15%)
Netherlands (1.15%)	United Kingdom (5.75%)
New Zealand (1.15%)	United States (43.68%)
	Vietnam (1.15%)

Gender

- Female (50%)
- Male (48.86%)
- Other (1.14%)
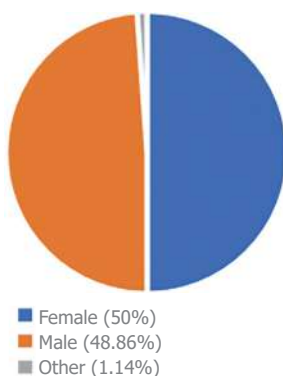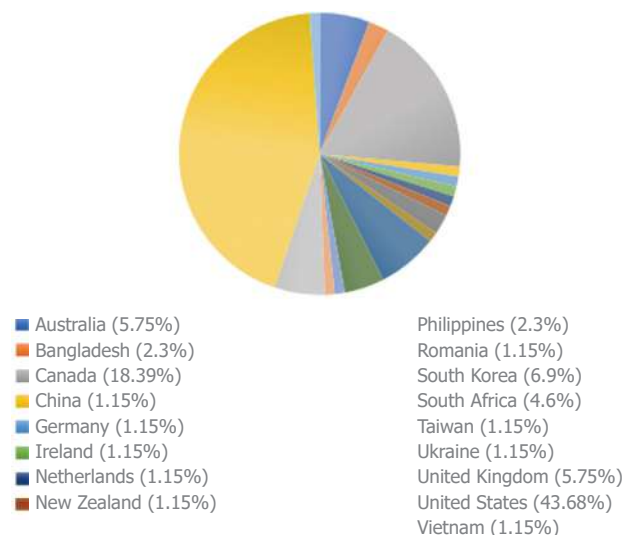
CONGRATULATIONS

to the 2021 national award recipients and the newly elected national officers

KOTESOL SERVICE AWARDS

PRESIDENT'S AWARD

Lindsay Herron
Rhea Metituk
Dr. David Shaffer

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Wayne Finley
Michael Free
Dr. Kara Mac Donald
Phillip Schrank
Dr. Andrew White

MERITORIOUS SERVICE AWARD

Robert J. Dickey
Lucinda Estrada
James "Jake" Kimball
Heidi Vande Voort Nam
James Grant Rush II

"STEPPING UP" AWARD

Kirsten Razzaq

2021-2022 Elected Officers

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Bryan Hale

First Vice-President
Lucinda Estrada

Second Vice-President
Kirsten Razzaq

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Lisa MacIntyre-Park

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Dr. David Shaffer

International Conference Committee Co-chair
Garth Elzerman

Treasurer (Approved by National Council)
Danielle Kinnison

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Publications Committee Chair
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Outreach Committee Chair
James Grant Rush II
Technologies Committee Chair
John Phillips
Sponsorship Committee Chair
Robert J. Dickey
Financial Affairs Committee Chair
Daniel Jones
International Conference Committee Chair
Lindsay Herron

The Reel to Real Report:
A Review of 2021 KOTESOL National Conference

Reviewed by Jessamine Price

Anyone who has been to a KOTESOL conference knows the cycle. It starts with anticipation as you note the sessions you want to see. Then you attend your first session, still sleepy and perhaps wondering why you gave up your free time for some more learning. Next, there's excitement as you find your rhythm in the second and third sessions. You're running into people you know and connecting with new people. You feel like part of a community, a community with a larger mission. Your everyday teaching appears to you to be more meaningful because you're one of many people working together to improve English education around the world. The last afternoon, your brain is buzzing and overloaded with new ideas. You don't have any energy to take notes during the last two sessions. You collapse into bed afterwards physically and mentally exhausted.

The KOTESOL national conference, November 3 to 7, followed this familiar trajectory for me, even though it was completely online. Titled "Reel to Real: 2021 Filmmaking Festival and National Conference," the event started Wednesday evening. It continued Thursday and Friday evenings, and throughout the day Saturday and Sunday. I barely left my living room over the weekend, yet I was still exhausted at the end, thanks to a wealth of new ideas and interesting interactions.

Like many English teachers in Korea, I've spent many hours online during the pandemic. I miss seeing everyone from KOTESOL in person. On the other hand, the online format made it possible for people to attend from all over the world. Extra credit goes to Jeff Kuhn, who called in from "a semi-reputable hotel on the East Coast of the USA," and KOTESOL President Bryan Hale, who sent a video of his welcome when he suddenly had to rush his cat to the emergency vet.

Given my enjoyment of the international conference in February, I expected the event would be well-organized, include a lot of interesting speakers, and give me a chance to see familiar faces from around Korea and the world. But when the conference announcement came out, I wasn't sure what exactly to expect. A filmmaking festival? In cooperation with the Liquid Arts Network? Gamification? Would this actually end up being totally different than February's event?

The organizers set out to do something different with the national conference. We were online again, like in February. But as conference chair Rhea Metituk said in a discussion Friday night, the conference committee wanted to introduce novelty to the now-familiar virtual format. The novelties included gamifying the conference, a call for presenters to submit video abstracts, and a focus on the educational role of film and emerging media such as video games.

On the first day, these novel elements were obvious, as we started with Anika Casem (conference co-chair) talking about "gamifying the conference." As she described the conference Discord server,

Fliphunt, the Easter egg hunt, and the online Escape Room, I felt a bit overwhelmed. I realized this is probably how my students feel when I throw new technologies at them too quickly. I reminded myself that I didn't have to master these technologies, just try them at some point during the conference.

Wednesday evening also included a presentation on Korean film history from Michael Free, followed Thursday night by the film festival "watch party." The submissions from non-students included familiar KOTESOL members as well as new faces. One memorable video from a group of Mongolian teachers wished us Happy Teachers Day from their students in Mongolia, reminding me of how English connects people around the world. I also got a lot of joy from the comic sketch "Annual Meeting of the Onion Society" by a team of KOTESOL members.

The student videos were mostly from Japan, and told simple, sincere stories about things like applying to university and making friends. It was inspiring to see students making the effort to speak English on film – and equally inspiring to see non-students (English professors) making the effort to speak Korean and Japanese in their films. I've never made a film in my native language, much less in a second or third language. I was impressed by the effort that went into these films.

Friday night's plenary session with Kieran Donaghy was titled "Visual Literacy in the Language Classroom." It included great strategies for encouraging students to think critically about images. I've used famous paintings occasionally in my English classes, but this talk gave me a number of new ideas for resources and activities.

Saturday and Sunday's schedule included concurrent sessions, so I had to make some tough choices. The highlights of these days included Jeff Kuhn's talk about teaching through video games, Frank Solak's ideas about personal videos for
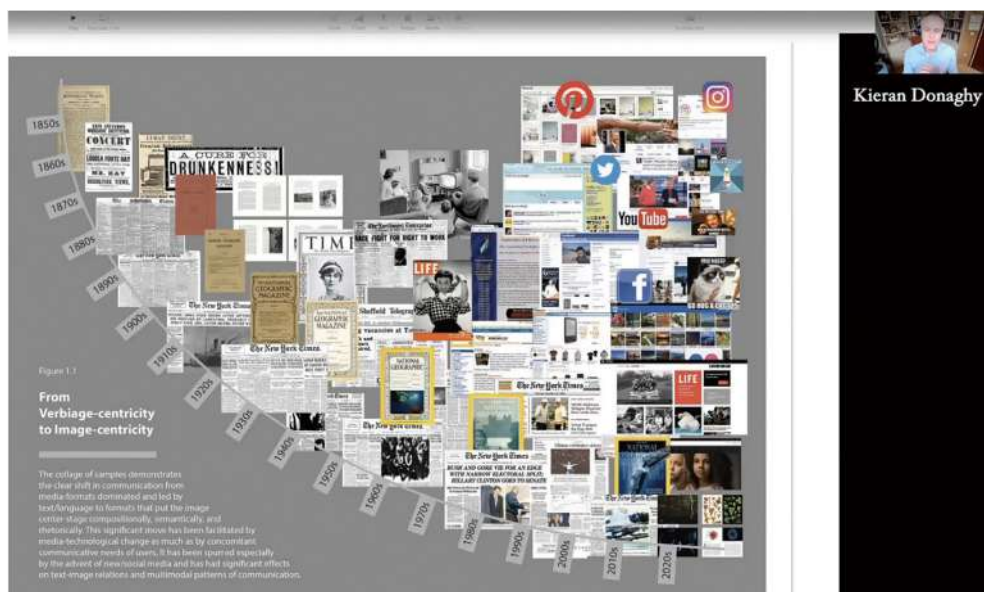
▲ *A powerful image from Kieran Donaghy's plenary, "Developing visual literacy in the language classroom."*

classroom use, Sophia Mavridi's suggestions on student videos in the classroom, and Shannon Rosol's excellent presentation on motivating young learners in a Korean extensive reading program. (Note that if you missed the conference, all sessions were recorded, so you can still watch and learn from the comfort of home.)

I was also inspired by Dorothy Zemach's "Let's Get Visible" and overcome with the cuteness of Fiona MacMartin and her ten-year-old son presenting together (talking about the process of making their Seoul Trail video). An unusual session I attended was Saturday evening's panel of Chinese high school students sharing their experiences with English. Given that travel has been virtually impossible during the past two years, it was refreshing to hear from students in another country.

As always at a KOTESOL conference, there was a sense of community and cooperation. The opening ceremony felt friendlier and more informal than usual because we were in a Zoom "room" instead of a large auditorium. I felt a new

▲ *Dorothy Zemach's "Let's Get Visible" presentation: a grid view of attendees.*

appreciation for how hard everyone worked to organize the conference. Every session was introduced by a KOTESOL member, giving the events a conversational atmosphere. And there were opportunities to hang out and talk informally in Zoom.

At the same time as I was trying to attend as many panels as possible, I was trying to find time to play the conference games. Finally I had a little free time to try the Escape Room. As I worked through the first two clues, I looked at the clock and panicked. Only half an hour left! For a minute, I pondered giving up on the whole thing. I didn't think I could ever work through all ten clues before the next session.

I've seen students have this reaction many times. In fact, my institute recently built a physical escape room where students have to solve English puzzles to find a treasure. (We do not actually lock the children in a room however much we are tempted.) Some students dive into solving the puzzles, but others become immediately overwhelmed and give up. And some get close to the answers and then stop just at the verge of success. When I was tempted to give up on the KOTESOL Escape Room, I reminded myself of these students. I forced myself past my time panic and discovered that I could actually solve all the puzzles in time. Victory!

Saturday is also when I got excited about hunting for Easter eggs. During concurrent sessions, presenters shared movie titles with us. If we collected all seven movie titles, we could enter to win a prize. In the future, I would definitely enjoy more Easter egg hunts, as a way to make conference door prizes more meaningful and fun.

Two games still awaited me, but they were more challenging. To participate in the Fliphunt, I had to download Flipgrid to my phone – so far so good. But I had to activate it with my Google account and suddenly my phone wouldn't accept my Google password for love or money. After what felt like hours of trying different methods to log in, I tried with yet another account – an old account I rarely use – and it worked!

My reward? Now I could make a video to share with everyone.
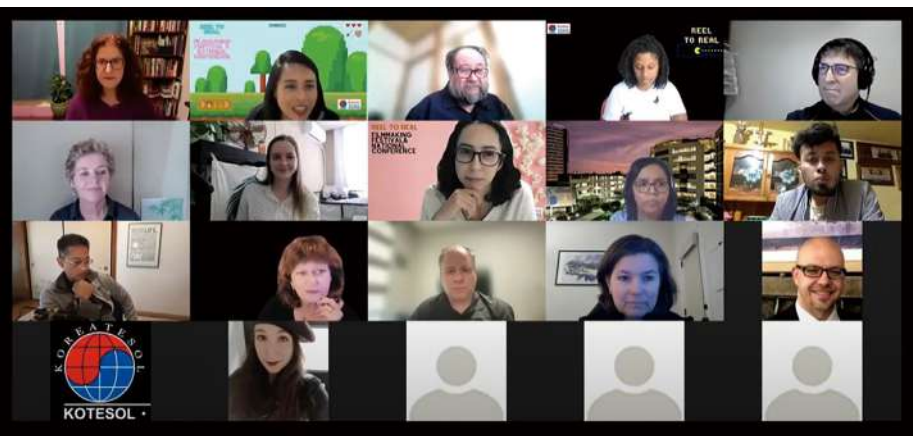
I froze up. Even after 20 months of digital learning, I still don't like seeing my face on a screen. After fooling around with Flipgrid for half an hour, I discovered that I could edit the videos I made, to remove the wonky bits. In my first attempt, I accidentally erased my entire video, but in my second attempt I made something I could upload. Finished, I slumped onto my couch in exhaustion.

I couldn't help but feel like this was my punishment for all the times I've asked students to do something new on unfamiliar technology. I could immediately see all the ways that Flipgrid would be a great tool for online English learning. Even though we're all pretty good with technology these days, it takes time to learn anything new. How long did it take me to make my first 90-second Flipgrid video? About an hour, including the time to learn how to use the app. It's a worthy assignment but perhaps not a quick one.

On the positive side, watching the videos made by other KOTESOL members was a pleasure. Heidi Nam singing a few lines from a musical she wrote herself, Stewart Gray laughing at his grandfather's jokes, and Greg Child talking about kindness were memorable. Watching them made me feel more included in the KOTESOL community.

Despite those moments of wishing I had my own personal IT department, "Reel to Real" was refreshing overall. Again and again, presenters pointed out how quickly the internet has changed from a text-based medium to an image-based medium. A common theme of many sessions was that images and videos are becoming (or have already become) the most prevalent media. To continue reaching as many English learners as possible, TESOL professionals have to think about this shift and take it into account.

Our next steps can take many forms, such as teaching visual literacy, encouraging learners to make videos, or making our own videos to share with students. This conference shook up the usual paradigm and pushed me to think about how I'll teach differently in the post-pandemic world.

The Reviewer

Jessamine Price currently teaches all ages and levels at the Chungnam Office of Education International Language Institute. She has master's degrees in history and creative writing, from the University of Oxford and American University (Washington, DC). Her poetry and essays are widely published, and she's a real-life Jeopardy champion. Email: jessamineprice@gmail.com

Member Spotlight: Dr. Kevin Kester

In this issue, The English Connection *(TEC) points its spotlight in the direction of Kevin Kester. You may have seen him at a KOTESOL conference or presenting at one of the chapter workshops around the country. You may have also met Dr. Kester through reading one or more of his numerous research papers or his book on peacebuilding and social justice. Or you may have run into him in Daegu, where he taught until recently, or in Seoul, where he now lectures. TEC recently caught up with this busy and most interesting KOTESOL member for an interview. The following is what Dr. Kester shared with us. — Ed.*

TEC: Thank you, Kevin, for taking the time to do this interview for *The English Connection*. To start things off, could you tell us about Kevin Kester before he came to Korea?

Kevin: First, thank you for the invitation to participate in this interview. I am humbled that your readers may be interested in learning more about my background and work. I am from London, Kentucky, USA. I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains, studied music, and completed my BA in Kentucky. During my undergraduate years, I had several opportunities to study abroad, which initiated my interest in a potential international career. In 2004–2006, I moved to Japan where I taught on the JET Program for two years. I have more or less been living in Asia since then, with the exception of leaving for my MA and PhD studies in Canada and the UK, respectively.

TEC: Many expat educators come to Korea for many different reasons. What made you decide to come to the Land of the Morning Calm?

▲ *Dr. Kevin Kester*

Kevin: The short answer is political economy. I needed a job after my master's degree and this is where I landed that job – in a small rural village just outside of Daegu. The position was with the University of Colorado. They had (I think they still do have) a partnership program with a college down there. I worked for them for one year. I left Korea shortly thereafter to pursue an MA degree in comparative international development education at the University of Toronto. Following my studies in Toronto, I then returned to Korea as a non-tenure-track faculty teaching international relations (IR) and peace studies at a university in Daejeon.

TEC: A lot of your research is in peace studies, peace education, and related areas. Can you tell us how you got interested in this area?

Kevin: When I was working on the JET Program in Japan, I enrolled in a teacher-training program at Teachers College Columbia University. They have a branch campus in Tokyo. At the time, they had two programs: TESOL and Peace Education. I was not particularly interested in the technical aspects of TESOL, so I chose Peace Education. The latter field is more sociologically oriented and thus fits my interests better. That was the beginning of what has become a very exciting career that has thus far culminated in my PhD and

postdoc at the University of Cambridge and my work with various United Nations agencies.

TEC: How can the expat EFL teacher incorporate peace education into their classroom activity?

Kevin: Peace education is a philosophy and a practice. As a philosophy it entails teaching the knowledge, values, and dispositions that underscore a culture of peace and nonviolence. This could include, for example, teaching lessons about key peacemakers, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr, or Wangari Maathai. But it may also involve teaching (or critiquing) the international norms of human rights, participatory democracy, and sustainable development, as well as more indirect lessons that teach the values of respect, tolerance, sharing, cooperation, and ethical decision-making.
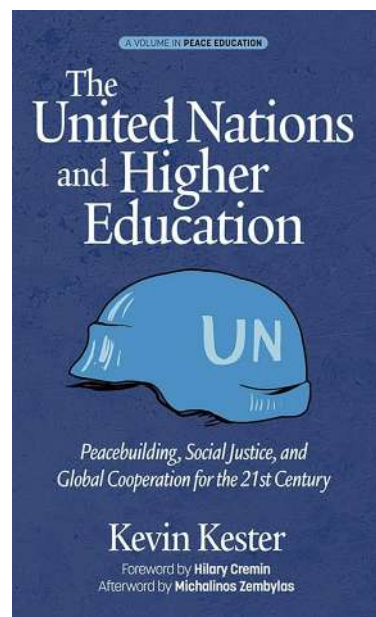
▲ *Kester's monograph on the UN and higher education.*

As a practice, peace education involves teaching communication and conflict resolution capacities, including active listening, nonviolent communication, negotiation, mediation, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills. It may be useful to think of peace education as involving the promotion of three key capacities: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. I will not rehearse these concepts here, but I encourage readers who are interested in a more complete description to read my paper in the *Journal of Transformative Education*.[1]

TEC: You also do quite a bit of work in decolonization. Could you describe that work for us and possibly how the language teacher might incorporate some of these concepts into language learning classes, lessons, or even courses?

Kevin: Decolonial thinking is a resurgent practice in much educational research today. It is not new, but it has been reinvigorated in recent years. In short, it involves contesting traditional knowledge claims made within the academy, in particular concerning hegemonic concepts (especially Western and Northern assumptions) of economy, culture, politics, and education. In this light, it is closely related to movements for economic, social, political, and epistemic justice. Teachers

can engage with these ideas theoretically and pedagogically through decolonial acts to make curriculum, pedagogy, research, and policy more inclusive. For readers interested in detailed strategies for practicing decolonial education in universities, I suggest they scan my recent paper (coauthored with other members of KOTESOL) on this topic in the *Korea TESOL Journal*.[2]

TEC: Yes, that issue, along with others, is available on the KOTESOL website. What projects are you presently working on or have plans to start working on soon for the classroom, for research, and/or for life in general?

Kevin: I have three ongoing funded projects at the moment. The first is a two-year qualitative empirical investigation into conflict-sensitive teaching practices with university faculty in Afghanistan and Somaliland. The project outlines strategies that faculty employ to work with students in and from conflict-affected settings. The second project explores the theoretical, pedagogical, and policy intersections of peace education and global citizenship education. This project has involved creating training videos for schoolteachers and university academics, as well as published research papers.[3]

The third project involves interviewing faculty in Korean universities about their self-proclaimed practices related to higher education pedagogy for social change. This includes interviews with faculty who self-identify as democratic educators, peace educators, and social justice educators. I am interested in understanding how and why they choose to teach prefiguratively for democracy, peace, and social justice, and the challenges that they face. All of these projects are deeply theorized, for example, through the lenses of neoliberalism, critical cultural political economy, prefigurative politics, or post-abyssal ethics.

TEC: What direction or directions would you like to see Korea TESOL move in or what projects or programs would you like

▲ *Providing research training to graduate students.*

▲ *Cambridge commencement in 2017.*

to see Korea TESOL get involved in in the next year or so?

Kevin: Korea TESOL has diversified significantly in recent years through its new social justice, reflective practice, and research SIGs. This is a positive direction for the organization. I look forward to seeing KOTESOL become more diverse and more robustly research-oriented in the years ahead.

TEC: I'd like to ask you what you like to do in your free time, but I really wonder whether you have any time that you can call "free."

Kevin: I won't sugarcoat it. The truth is many young tenure-track faculty today work 70–80+ hours most weeks. I am no exception. Thankfully, I love what I do, so although the hours are long, time passes quickly. But if I do have a few hours off, I quite enjoy getting away from work to escape into the world of cinema. Truth be told, my secret vice is Korean CGV popcorn (caramel + cheese). I have eaten too much of it! My other escape is an evening of socializing over chi-maek [치맥, fried chicken and beer].

TEC: Ah, chi-maek – one of Korea's favorite pastimes! Any last thing that you'd like to share?

Kevin: I'd like to share my research lab with readers.[4] My work mostly involves training new PhDs in the fields of comparative international education; sociology of education; and peace/development studies. I invite members of Korea TESOL who are interested in these areas – and considering graduate studies in Korea – to reach out to me.

TEC: Well, thank you, Kevin. Thank you for sharing your time, your work, and your thoughts with us.

Kevin: Thank you again for generously inviting me to participate in this interview.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

Footnotes
1 Kester, K. (2017). The case of educational peacebuilding inside the United Nations universities: A review and critique. *Journal of Transformative Education*, *15*, 59–78.
2 Kester, K., Sweeney, L., Chang, C., Watkins, M., & Cha, J.-M. (2020). Decolonizing higher education: Some practical examples from international and intercultural educators in Korea. *Korea TESOL Journal*, *16*(1), 27–53.
3 The two training videos for schoolteachers and university academics are available at https://proxy.learningfit.co.kr/Unesco/15/15_03.html and at https://proxy.learningfit.co.kr/Unesco/16/16_03.html
4 Readers can learn more about my Education, Conflict, and Peace Lab at https://kevinkester.weebly.com/

The Classroom Connection

What's the Point of Coursebooks?

By Peter Thwaites

It was monsoon season in Malaysia, and the rain was heavy enough to close roads. Out of the window of my classroom at the British Council Penang, I could see people dashing for taxis, going from dry to drenched in a flash. Indoors, it was time to start class. But only two students had arrived, and the other teachers were wandering the corridors, shrugging hopefully at each other. As I wondered how long I could manage to wait for the other students, the two shook off their umbrellas and excitedly retold, in Hokkien, the dramatic story of their shared journey to school. I couldn't understand what they were saying, and since there didn't seem to be much point in beginning my lesson yet, I asked them to switch to English so that I could follow their story. They looked at each other, an expression of "How do we start?" crossed their faces, and then they began.

The students spoke excitedly at first, blurting out big chunks of story in disjointed phrases. I made them slow down. We focused on getting one good sentence out at a time. I gave hints when helpful, and corrections when necessary. Utterances like "We not get wet. Don't know how!" became "Somehow, we didn't get wet!" When a sentence felt right and the students could say it to each other error free, I wrote it on the board, and we moved on to the next one. As more students arrived, the original two recounted the story again in their L1, so that the newcomers could join in. I facilitated, encouraging them to think of different language for expressing the events in the story. There was a buzz as the students experimented and dots got connected. The text on the board slowly grew. By the time we finished, we had three paragraphs of text, error free and with an impressive range of expression, and a group of 14 students who had all surprised themselves with their ability to create it. Then, each student used the text as a model for telling the stories of their own journeys to school. This process ended up spanning the entire two-hour lesson.

I offer this story as an example of classroom magic. The setup was so minimal – we had nothing more than an idea (the story), a task (writing the story with accuracy and expression), and a set of collaborators (the students and myself) – but the resulting lesson generated more student involvement, linguistic exploration, and moments of understanding than almost any other I've taught. Exactly why it worked so well is hard to put my finger on. But I think that all teachers have had these moments of magic, and I wonder whether yours shared some of the underlying simplicity of my "monsoon lesson." My guess is that they were similarly spontaneous and collaborative – similarly emergent from the experiences of the people in the room.

"If coursebooks can't generate the magic buzz, why not just ditch them?"

To take the idea of classroom magic a little further, moments like these rarely happen when we teach from a coursebook. I'd be surprised, astonished actually, if such a thing were to originate from the teacher saying something like, "Now do Activity B on page 62." So, here's a far-out question – if coursebooks can't generate the magic buzz, why not just ditch them?

Actually, there's a simple answer to this question – it's because coursebooks are useful. I've used them throughout my career, and now that I teach teachers, I teach them to use coursebooks, too. They provide invaluable support for less experienced teachers, lend legitimacy to classroom proceedings, and cut teachers' workloads. Academic coordinators rely on their ability to standardize classroom content, and students feel reassured by their presence.

But what I want to argue here is that coursebooks can only take us so far. In certain situations, such as in our early careers, at times when our workloads are particularly heavy or in situations in which multiple groups of learners must cover the same content, we may find them to be an invaluable ally. But in spite of these benefits, we must learn to teach without them. And I'll go further:

We must constantly be awake to opportunities in our classrooms to put the coursebook to one side and instead allow classroom content to be guided by the voices of the people in the room.

One way of thinking about the benefits and drawbacks of coursebooks is by using the metaphor of a shield. Shields protect people by serving as a barrier between themselves and some undesirable reality. Coursebooks serve this purpose, for example, by shielding teachers from their early-career skills gaps. As I recounted in the recent Autumn edition of *The English Connection*, I learned much of my teacher's craft by teaching without materials; but one thing I struggled with was planning a syllabus or a series of classes without a coursebook. The sheer randomness of classes sequenced in unprincipled ways can affect both teacher and students motivation. Coursebooks can shield us from such shortcomings.

But there are classroom realities that teachers should not be shielded from. Although coursebooks have a range of very practical benefits, they carry the risk of becoming a barrier between teacher and students. It is all too easy for busy teachers to begin seeing their classes as a matter of the "delivery" of coursebook content, and from there it is only a short step to seeing all of your students as essentially the same. That's when opportunities start getting missed.

One of these opportunities, for me at least, is the opportunity to experience joy in the classroom. Throwing away the shield means allowing my teaching to be spontaneous and responsive. Of course, there are times when classroom detours lead nowhere useful, and on these occasions, the coursebook can help us to get back on track. But on other days, allowing my learners to take control leads to the most meaningful of learning opportunities, when personal experiences lead learners to discover and resolve their own linguistic needs. In these moments, a sort of trinity of fulfilling emotions emerges: trust in my own professional competence, delight in helping the learners to express themselves, and pride in the linguistic gains that they appear to be making.

It is, perhaps, slightly selfish to think of classroom success in terms of how it makes me feel. But the benefits of teaching without a coursebook do not stop with the teacher's own sense of satisfaction. A more pedagogically oriented opportunity that can be lost behind the shield of a coursebook is the chance to discover and respond to each student's learning agenda – their "internal syllabus," in Michael Breen's term – which strongly influences what they take from our classes. Responding to the individual needs of our students not only helps our learners to progress; it also boosts their motivation and creates a sense of trust in the classroom.

Coursebook syllabi vary in the extent to which they might meet the individual needs of our learners, but it is arguably those that are most popular (i.e., coursebooks mass-produced by large publishing houses for global consumption) that do so least effectively. Such books rely on generalized estimates about what learners at a given proficiency level require. An experienced teacher with a good ear for their students' language ought to be able to do a better job both of diagnosing and treating these needs; a language course that never deviates from a coursebook syllabus can scarcely be called "learner-centered."

The temptation to fall back on coursebooks is strong – and with some justification. But we must resist it. On a rainy day somewhere in Southeast Asia, the convenience and face validity of a coursebook might lead a teacher to politely ask their students to turn to Unit 4, where they will study an impersonal lesson on the simple and progressive aspects of the past tense (example sentence: "It wasn't raining when I left the house"). In doing so, they might inadvertently ignore the animated conversations of their students, and thereby lose an opportunity to teach a more strongly contextualized, diverse, and meaningful lesson. The truth is that, had a few more students arrived on time that day in Penang, my "monsoon lesson" would have been passed over for a pre-planned coursebook lesson. Instead, I went with the stories of the people in the room, and the result was richer and more fulfilling for everyone.

The Columnist
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The Girl in High Heels Walking Towards the Door

By Dr. Curtis Kelly

Tick…Tack... Tick…Tack... The beat of her high heels as Maiko headed for the classroom door. An angry beat. Maiko decided she was leaving. It happened because I had won at Jan-Ken-Pon (rock, paper, scissors) in a poorly thought-out ploy.

I have been a full-time university teacher in Japan for over forty years, and, mostly at schools having what are politely called "difficult learners." I prefer the term "3Ls," students caught in the cycle of low proficiency, low confidence, and low motivation. I considered Maiko a 3L. To help me understand these kinds of students, I spent decades studying TESOL, intercultural communication, psychology, and now, neuroscience. That has helped. So let me share what I have found.

Teens are a time when they are genetically programmed to become more independent, to break away from their parents. We can see that in their attitudes. As an American mother once said on a radio talk show, children are like dogs, cats, and then dogs again. When they are little, they want to be around you all the time, like dogs. Then, something happens in their teens, the cat period, where all they want are your maid services. Then, after they grow up and get married, they become dogs again, with attitudes like, "Sit down, Mom. I'll do that for you." Psychologists Piaget and Kolberg termed that period of seeking autonomy as "moral development," a time when young people develop their own sense of right and wrong so that they can be less dependent.

Unfortunately, as Malcolm Knowles (1990) pointed out, school does not keep up with this growing need for independence. As a result, we become a barrier to their natural growth. And what do people do to barriers that stop them from satisfying their needs? They either go around them or smash right through them. Maiko was doing the latter.

Tick…Tack. The sound stops. Now, Maiko is reaching for the door handle. Was I really going to let her leave class? Or was I going to do something about it? The other students were watching me, fiercely, wondering which.

Maiko was a first-year college student. As I wrote in the 2021 summer issue of *The English Connection,* the end of high school and beginning of college is a particularly hard time for students. Research on the mental health of Japanese students indicates that for the one-year period between studying for university entrance exams and the end of the first semester at the university, they enter a period fraught with troubles. Tomoda et al. (2000) reported that over 20% of the Japanese college students they studied had suffered a *Major Depressive Episode* in this one-year period, as defined by criteria in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (MSD-IV). The pressures of "entrance exam hell," followed by the challenge of adapting to a new – but somewhat hostile – college setting, carry severe social integration and self-esteem risks. And it is worse for female students who, for genetic, hormonal, and social reasons, are more vulnerable to these risks. The rate of depression is 28.4% for female students, almost three times the 10.2% of their male peers. And according to

a study by Mizuta et al. (2017), the biggest cause is something simple: not having a friend. Let me repeat that: not having a friend.

How about Korean students? Rates of student depression in Korean youth suggest a similarity (Yun et al., 2019), but what makes the similarity crystal clear are the rates of suicide. Suicide, the heart-breaking end product of depression, is the leading cause of death in South Koreans in their twenties (Kim & Kim, 2008).

So here is what happened with Maiko. She was in my first-year English class at a women's college, and she was definitely a "difficult" student. She never did any English homework, she was absent far more than she should have been, and when she did come, she was always late. Then, one day, something happened. She walked into my 90-minute speaking class exactly 45 minutes late. Right in the middle. I said, "Maiko, I don't know whether to mark you as present or absent today. So, let's do Jan Ken Pon. If you win, I'll mark you as present. If I win, I'll mark you as absent."

> **"...let's do Jan Ken Pon. If you win, I'll mark you as present. If I win, I'll mark you as absent."**
>
> **That was not very smart. It never occurred to me that I might win, but I did.**

That was not very smart. It never occurred to me that I might win, but I did. So, I told her I had to mark her as absent. As soon as I said that, she stood up and started walking towards the door. She said, "In that case, I'm leaving." As she high-heeled along, the other 14 women in the class watched me intensely. Would Kelly keep his word and mark her absent? Or break it? Of course, every teacher is taught that if you make a rule, you have to be firm with it. But could I? They wondered and I wondered too.

Just as she reached for the door handle, I broke. I said, "Okay, Maiko, please stay. Sit down. I'll mark you as present." She did, and everyone else looked down and smirked. "She broke Kelly."

Then, a week later, on my birthday, something odd happened. I got just one congratulatory email, and guess who it was from? Maiko! Even more surprisingly, she started coming to my office to talk to me about her problems with our school. She said she didn't think the college teachers were tough enough on her. In high school, her teachers always made her study hard, but that was not happening in college. Naturally, I asked, "Then, isn't it odd that you chose me, your least tough teacher, to talk to?" and she became quiet. Knowing Maiko was on her own journey of moral development, I added, "College is not like high school; we expect students to walk on their own two feet." I was cultivating the autonomy she sought.

She also told me she didn't have any friends at our school.

After that talk, she changed. She started doing things by herself, including studying, selling sweets at our speech contest (without prior permission), and, one day, even bringing her own lesson to teach in my class. I did not stop her, because I knew that this was her way to gain independence – an internal locus of control – and even if she was overdoing it, I knew it was part of the process of her finding her powers.

In the end, I helped her transfer to another department on another campus, where I later heard that she did well. Three years after that, when she graduated, I had a surprise. She came to visit me with a present. She gave me a name plate she had made to put on my door, and on the back was a poem she had written. The poem said that as we embark on the journey of life, we sometimes meet people that help us grow. And even now, fifteen years later, that poem is still hanging on my office door.

So, that day, I broke a basic rule of teaching. I also opened a door.

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The Columnist

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