

The English Connection

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SPECIAL EDITION **Games and the Gamified Classroom**

A Review of the 2022 International Conference

A KOTESOL Member Spotlight on Greg Lewis

And our regular columnists...

Thwaites with The Classroom Connection

Kelly with The Brain Connection



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The English Connection

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Contents

Summer 2022 / Volume 26, Issue 2

4

Editorial

"Teacher! Teacher! Game! Game!"
by Dr. Andrew White

5

President's Message

Good Games, Good Professional Development
– It's About Synergy
by Bryan Hale

Articles

6

Saving Nexus: A Tabletop Roleplaying
Game for the Korean Classroom
by Daniel Savage



9

Let's Get Ludic!
by James York



12

Gamification of Vocabulary Learning:
Using Quizlet Live in an ESL Classroom
by Abigail B. Capitin-Principe

15

Why Use Games and
Gamification in ELT?
by Dr. Deborah Healey



18

Looking Anew at Gamification and
the "Big G" Game of
Language Learning
by Vance Stevens

21

Gamification Through AfreecaTV
and YouTube in Korean ELT
by Jae-hyun Im



KOTESOL News & Happenings

24

"More Equipped to Work Towards a
Better World": A Review of the 2022
International Conference
by Melvin Dixon

26

Member Spotlight:
Greg Lewis

Regular Columns

28

The Brain Connection

Teacher Well-being and Talking to
Strangers
by Dr. Curtis Kelly

30

The Classroom Connection

Encouraging Creativity in Korean
Classrooms
by Dr. Peter Thwaites



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

Editorial

“Teacher! Teacher! Game! Game!”

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

The chorus is a familiar one for anyone having taught in after-school programs, *hagwons*, private lessons, even adult conversation groups. It comes either as an introductory greeting as you enter the room, or as an abrupt urging as students catch you glancing at the clock in the final minutes of class, attempting to find a chink in your ironclad lesson plan armor.

You relent, pulling the well-worn pack of Uno cards from your briefcase, to the cheers of the now fully awake crowd, giving up the teacher role and feeling slightly guilty as you wonder, “*Is this what they’re really paying me for?*”

“Okay, okay. Just one game.”

But instead of what we’re supposedly giving up, shouldn’t we rather consider the opportunities we’re giving to our learners? When teachers depart from the traditional methods of teaching and learning and introduce games and other activities, what are some of the benefits for students’ learning needs? There appear to be many. One benefit is shown in the simple exchange above. Authentic language emerges as students express real-world desires. By using English as a tool for communication, we allow our students **equal footing as speakers** of the language, permitting a communicative environment often lacking in teacher-fronted lessons. Such a simple back-and-forth might seem overly common, even fruitless, but against a backdrop of learning English in an EFL setting versus using it (at whatever level they might be), teachers shouldn’t underestimate the value such interactions can contribute to learners’ improvements and esteem. And in an ever-increasing push towards student-centered learning, we should be listening when learners express wishes with such equal footing.



And this carries over to the actual playing of games, even simple non-linguistic-based ones like Uno, Bingo, Simon Says, and board games. Quite simply, they provide a **meaningful context for communication** to occur. Granted, being proficient in uttering “Draw four,” “Reverse,” and “Skip” isn’t going to improve TOEIC scores or help a student order a cup of coffee in Los Angeles, but games allow for players (both teachers and learners) endless opportunities to nominate, command, comment, question, respond, praise, and utter numerous other functions found in normal spoken language. This can be a rich linguistic environment the teacher can exploit for **interactive and natural language use and exposure**. “I want to deal.” “It’s your turn. No, his turn.” “Hold on, I’m thinking.” “Who’s got one?” “Go. You’re winning.” “Wait.” Teacher–student roles immediately disappear, and in order to play and win, speaking English simply becomes a tool for expressing feelings, thoughts, and ideas. And isn’t that the overall purpose of language, and what we should be guiding our learners’ towards?

Another benefit games have for learners is that they increase engagement – a lot. Students may be tired, unfocused, and unmotivated in their studies, but as soon as a game is announced, they become autonomous players, asking about rules, forming teams and alliances, planning strategies, and wanting to win. In short, **enthusiasm and motivation increases**, and continues as the game plays out. Teachers may be tempted to think of a quick, fun game at the end of a lesson as a type of reward, and from the students’ perspective, it very well may be, but that doesn’t mean a learning environment isn’t there. In fact, the teamwork and motivation to play well and win might be exactly what more disengaged learners need to come out of their shell and contribute to the best of their abilities. So often, students’ English production is forced, in stilted and highly structured teacher-initiated questioning patterns, and student turns are judged as a composed response in order to display accuracy. Playing games, on the other hand, allows for a non-obtrusive context where learners have high motivations towards a goal (winning), plus autonomy and intrinsic urgency to speak for meaning.

Needing more credence about the legitimacy of games for language learning? **Just consider them tasks**. As explained, games offer a realistic interactive context, group learning, authentic language, personal relevance, and being engrossed and motivated. These are all major tenets to task-based learning, and by reframing games as tasks, teachers can attach all the academic support and benefits this methodology has shown. These benefits can of course be compounded when teachers consider more linguistically focused ESL games that specifically target the levels and needs of learners in their classes.

Playing games as an English learning activity can perhaps be a case of too much of a good thing, and anxious bosses and mothers alike may wonder why students are having too much fun in class. In this special edition of *The English Connection*, however, international authorities attempt to alleviate these concerns by introducing specific games for language benefits, as well as how to gamify the classroom for increased enthusiasm and motivation. I hope you find these articles useful.

President's Message

Good Games, Good Professional Development – It's About Synergy

By Bryan Hale KOTESOL President

Coming to understand games more deeply, and taking the relationship between play and learning seriously, has been a fundamental part of my journey in TESOL. Of course, I'm always excited about the latest issue of *The English Connection*, but I'm particularly pleased about the theme this time. That's because I have this particular professional interest but also because I think the topic of games epitomizes the different levels and timescales on which our teaching can flourish through professional development.

Ever since I first started attending KOTESOL events, I have appreciated the many conference sessions and workshops in which presenters share some of their tried-and-tested classroom games and activities. I think many language teachers realize fairly quickly how effective and energizing games can be. Unfortunately, we sometimes also encounter disparaging attitudes about activities that are "just fun," and we might ourselves be wary about how we use our time in the classroom and whether everything we do is as productive as we hope it to be. When experienced teachers share some of their most treasured and trusted classroom games, those are gems! They're often fantastic activities, obviously, but I've always found they help me to feel reassured about choosing to focus on engaging and dynamic classroom experiences.



There is a lot to recommend taking the time to understand games and play more fundamentally, and I think KOTESOL has a lot to offer on a more extended timescale of developing professional expertise, too. Play is an endlessly fascinating and slippery phenomenon, so clearly important to learning but also so complex. Games are universal but diverse, and the culture around games and gaming is rich. When I first moved to Gwangju, I got involved with the local meetings of the Reflective Practice Special Interest Group, and it was through these meetings that I started sharing with others my growing interest in the scholarship around playfulness and learning. Exploring this area with the input of professional peers was a great experience and a fantastic motivation to keep digging deeper. Eventually, I chose this area as the focus of the research component of my Master of Applied Linguistics (TESOL) program, and throughout the ups and downs of postgrad study, the advice and support of others in my chapter was a lifeline. Additionally, being able to share what I was learning via workshops and research presentations at various events, both local meetings and larger conferences, helped to strengthen and consolidate my understandings, and to hone my research and its classroom applications. As I have become more heavily involved in KOTESOL, I have even had opportunities to meet with some of the thinkers I admire in this area – a real highlight.

All of this is to say that, if you find the contents of this issue engrossing (and I'm sure you will), maybe that engagement can become part of a longer professional development journey. I've been to lots of individual workshops and conference sessions, and have read so many individual articles, which were amazing and enriching. But in the end, my extended pathway of learning, collaborating, and serving our professional community has been more than the sum of its parts. I think the best games, too, offer this kind of synergy, helping players connect moments and minutes to learning developed over months, years, and lifetimes.

That's my theory, anyway, but I'm looking forward to approaching the contents of this TEC with an open mind!

In recent months, some important changes have been going on in Korea, including the end of social distancing measures. (I feel a little wary committing that last sentence to print – I am touching various kinds of wood and crossing several things as I write!) During its April meeting, the KOTESOL National Council discussed this possibility and agreed on policy to guide event organizers, who now have the discretion to organize face-to-face events, so long as events have prior approval from venues and follow any extra rules and restrictions the venues have in place. I know that many of us have been missing the atmosphere, the warmth, and the beautiful noisiness of face-to-face events, so the prospect of their return is encouraging.

Please rest assured, though, that online options are not being taken away! Zoom and other virtual meeting possibilities have often proven to be convenient, effective, productive, and accessible. Although I confess to the occasional bout of Zoom fatigue, I'm grateful that we now have a richer repertoire of ways to connect and organize. So, whether it's face-to-face or online, here's hoping we run into each other sometime soon.

Saving Nexus: A Tabletop Roleplaying Game for the Korean Classroom

By Daniel Savage

This article aims to share a task-based content and language integrated learning (CLIL) project I used during a Korean high school summer English camp. It will briefly lay out the reasons to use a tabletop roleplaying game (TTRPG) as the foundation before going through the activities in detail. I also want to share a collection of materials we used, which is accessible using this link: <https://tinyurl.com/4tanruhk>

What are TTRPGs?

TTRPGs are narrative games that include rules and structure but also a great degree of freedom and creativity. Players roleplay a character that interacts with a situation and non-player characters (NPCs) set out by a game master (GM), thereby co-constructing the story in collaboration with the GM, the other players, and chance as expressed by dice (see Youakim, 2019 for more on the nature of TTRPGs). These games were traditionally played in person but online play has grown in popularity. This has accompanied a general increase in the popularity of TTRPGs as well as TTRPG shows on platforms like Twitch and YouTube. The most well-known TTRPG is Dungeons and Dragons, which served as the basis for this project.

“Creating and running an adventure may not look like traditional language study, but doing so in one’s second or additional language (L2) provides great opportunities for learning and practice.”

Why TTRPGs in the Classroom?

Although there has not yet been extensive research on the efficacy of TTRPGs in the language classroom (Farkaš, 2018), there are reasons to expect that they can be a useful tool for language teachers. The games allow for design and play activities that are motivating and enable “naturalistic acquisition through meaningful use,” which Moore and Lorenzo (2015, p. 336) explain fits with both task-based language learning and CLIL. Creating and running an adventure may not look like traditional language study, but doing so in one’s second or additional language (L2) provides great opportunities for learning and practice.

Language use is firmly embedded within TTRPGs, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Unlike some language classroom activities, these games involve a lot of improvised speech. The focus on improvisation can encourage learners to respond more quickly in conversation and worry less about every minute detail of their utterances, hopefully shifting their focus more towards the communication of meaning while reducing stress and lowering affective filters.

These games are motivating thanks to the agency granted to participants, players’ investment in their own and others’ characters, and the shared authorial power that is baked into the co-constructed narrative. They also provide great opportunities for a wide variety of creative extension activities. These include many possible writing tasks: writing the game narrative from the perspective of your own or another character being the most obvious example. TTRPGs also allow for the exploration of aspects of narrative like plot, character, and setting, and so can be useful for more English literature-focused courses as well (Youakim, 2019).

What Did the Project Involve?

I ran this project in a Korean public high school summer English camp over a two-week period totaling ten classes of 70 minutes each, delivered entirely online. The following paragraphs describe the variety of activities included in the project, leading broadly through phases focused on study, design, and execution of the final product. Materials mentioned herein are available at the link provided above.

We started with an explanation of the twenty-sided die system, character ability scores, and how they interact. I used a modified Fifth Edition Dungeons and Dragons (5e) system in service of simplicity, using four different abilities (strength, dexterity, intelligence, and wisdom) rather than the six used in 5e. Next, we examined example tasks to show how the abilities and their related scores are used. Students rolled dice for each example and the results of the dice determined whether a character successfully accomplished the task or not. This practice helped students understand how to use dice to navigate the ability score system. I then introduced the character classes (fantasy genre specializations like fighter, wizard, etc.), which were available to students for later character creation.

We then watched a short video clip from a recent episode of a popular TTRPG show (Critical Role, 2021) and discussed the demonstrated aspects of RPGs. This also provided a model of what the learners’ final products might look like, with GMs and players collaborating to negotiate meaning and create the oral narrative. Next, we read a short introduction story that explained how the characters came to be together in a new and mysterious location, a town called Nexus. Students read the short

passage out loud and asked questions. These included both comprehension questions and also questions on the NPCs that appeared in the story to gather more information about their situation and their next steps, which I answered from the NPCs' perspectives.

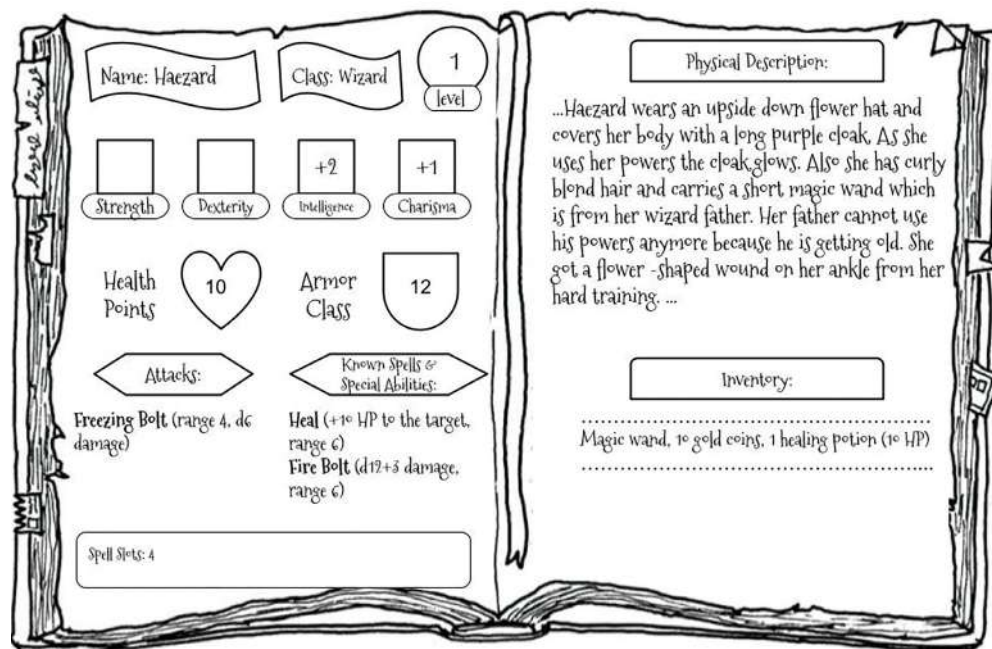
Part of the introductory story explained that the mayor of Nexus had been kidnapped by goblins and taken to their fortress. We played the game to run through a piece

of the story where the characters' goal was to rescue the mayor (based on Sawatsky, 2016). I acted as the GM for that game session, and each student controlled a premade character. We used an online virtual tabletop (VTT) tool called Owlbear Rodeo (McCaffrey & Thouliss, 2021) to share an interactive map with character and creature tokens to help everyone follow the action and have common reference points for conversation and planning. They explored, discussed their plans, engaged in combat, talked with the goblin leader (who attempted to deceive the characters and negotiate for his life), collected

treasure, and finally returned the mayor to town, safe and sound. This game session acted as an introduction and tutorial to Owlbear Rodeo, which the students would use when they ran their own adventures. The premade characters and adventure to save the mayor also played the role of scaffolding for students' understanding and expectations for the characters and adventures that they would create later in the course. It also allowed them to try out a character class that they suspected they might

like before committing themselves to a particular class when they made their own characters.

We then read a mid-adventure story that wrapped up the mayor rescue and laid out the wider structure within which the student-crafted adventures were to fit. The story explained that the town had been unintentionally teleported to some strange nexus of environments and that it could be restored to its original location if some



▲ Student-designed character with game mechanics details, character physical description, and brief backstory details.

missing gems were collected and returned to the site of the magical accident. Students were told to include one of these missing gems in the adventures they designed.

Students designed their own characters following guideline documents for the mechanical aspects (like ability scores, health points, attacks, etc.) and composed their own short backstories. Each student shared their character and I gave formative feedback on the language and any mechanical issues that we needed to clear up. Students could then make adjustments long in advance of actually using the characters in their peers' adventures. The preparatory activities up to this point took up the first five of our ten classes.

We were then ready to get into adventure design. Students broke into two groups, A and B, and we spent some time brainstorming possible adventure locations, monsters, puzzles, environmental threats, etc. We also went through a premade sample adventure document (The Kobold's Lost Treasure) to provide a model for the written document they would create as they planned their adventure and to guide them as they ran it.

Students then moved into their groups and worked to design their mini-adventures and fill out skeletal adventure document templates. They worked together to make choices and create an interesting adventure for their peers. They also set up the maps and tokens in the VTT system to prepare to run their adventures. This process took a bit more than two full classes.

"They explored, discussed their plans, engaged in combat, talked with the goblin leader (who attempted to deceive the characters and negotiate for his life), collected treasure, and finally returned the mayor to town, safe and sound."

Once they were all ready, both groups ran their adventures. First, the members of group A worked together as GMs to run the adventure they had created. Group B played the game using the characters they

documents for further editing and development, possibly even with an eye towards sharing them online. Extension activities could also include creative writing or other projects to enable more individual form-focused practice.



▲ **Virtual tabletop with environment, character and monster tokens, and digital dice.**

created earlier. As GMs, the students of group A drew on what they had seen in the sample video clip and our trial adventure as they laid out the environments and reacted to the players' choices. The characters of group B were successful in recovering a magic gem from a castle nestled in the middle of a deadly swamp. We then flipped roles and group B took control as GMs, running their adventure for group A's characters, who explored a jungle, solved a riddle, and defeated a guardian to recover the second magic gem. We finished with a quick wrap-up that included a description of the restoration of the town to its original place.

I was really impressed by the effort and care the students put into their designs and the detail of their descriptions, especially when improvised in response to the actions of other students' characters. They stepped up not only to attempt something new but to do so in their L2; a challenge for sure, but hopefully one that was rewarding for the learners.

Other Ways to Play

Adjustments can be made to simplify or extend this kind of activity. If you have less time or are working with learners at lower L2 proficiency levels, you could instead use simplified combat-focused materials called "monster slayers," which are aimed at younger players (Wizards of the Coast, 2010, 2015). These materials do not include much design and creative work from students, but they do have the play and improvisation as well as chances for creative extension activities. These pre-made characters, monsters, and maps can be set up quickly and run by the teacher as GM. Students could potentially take over as GMs for additional games, given exposure and sufficient time to prepare.

The project could also be expanded, given more available time. This could involve having students design the story framework (rather than being handed a pre-designed framework), creating more extensive adventures with more developed NPCs, and returning to their adventure

Conclusion

I hope that some readers will be able to make use of the project and materials detailed in this article. TTRPGs can be an interesting and motivating additional option for language teachers. They give learners chances for creativity, group design work, improvisation, and open-ended speech. They may even lead students to explore related English media, like fantasy novels, podcasts, live-streamed TTRPG games, pre-recorded games, and more.

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By James York

In this article, my goals are to get readers to think about (a) their current teaching practices in terms of games and play, (b) the terms *game-based learning* and *gamification*, and (c) what might be possible in their own context based on numerous examples of LLP. I end the article with a call for teachers to join the conversation around games and play in language teaching.

What is ludic?

First then, on ludic. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines it as: "of, relating to, or characterized by play: PLAYFUL." More concretely, however, in language education, the term has been used to denote a playful disposition towards curriculum design and the incorporation of games and play into the curriculum along with other playful practices (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011). These include identity building, improvisation and story creation, failure, critical analysis and retrying, and exploring multimodality.

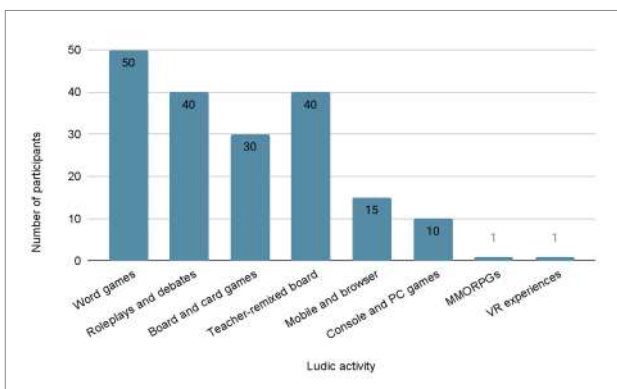
If I asked how many of you have played Simon Says or Find Someone Who... in the classroom, I'd expect a large number would raise your hands. Additionally, I'd expect around the same number if I mentioned roleplays, debates, and discussions. Now, if I up the ante a bit and ask the follow-up question "How many of you have played *Snakes and Ladders*, *Monopoly*, or the *Game of Life* in the classroom?" there may not be so many hands raised, but still, I'd estimate that there would be a fair few. Wait, how about I rephrase the question to "Have you ever remixed one of those games towards a language learning goal?" Now I would expect there to be a large number of hands in the air again.

Continuing with this thread, I might ask about playing mobile and browser games in class (*Among Us*, *Werewolf*, *PUBG*, *Scribblenauts*, *Clash of Clans*, *Words with Friends*, *Spyfall*, *Gartic Phone*, etc.), and we may see some hands fall down. Then, we move on to video and console games in class, and perhaps not many hands are left up. Finally, we enter the world of MMORPGs, such as *Final Fantasy 14*, and we are probably left with not many hands up at all, if any.

"What was the point of this exercise, James?"

I wanted to map out the broad range of ludic activities that teachers engage in and see the frequency of teachers utilizing those activities. What we might be left with is something that resembles Figure 1.

Figure 1. A Hypothetical Representation of Teachers Implementing Different Ludic Activities in Their Context



Now, of course, the conversation and graph are hypothetical. But from my own experience of running workshops for teachers (such as a recent TESOL EVO course), reading the research literature on games and play in language teaching (Nurmukhamedov & Sadler, 2020; Peterson, et al., 2021), reading popular opinion pieces on educational news sites (Ferlazzo & Sypniewski, 2021), and finally looking at the terms *games*, *language teaching*, and *classroom* on Twitter, a similar pattern emerges: Teachers engaging in the use of low-tech games to teach specific skills like vocabulary, spelling, or "speaking."

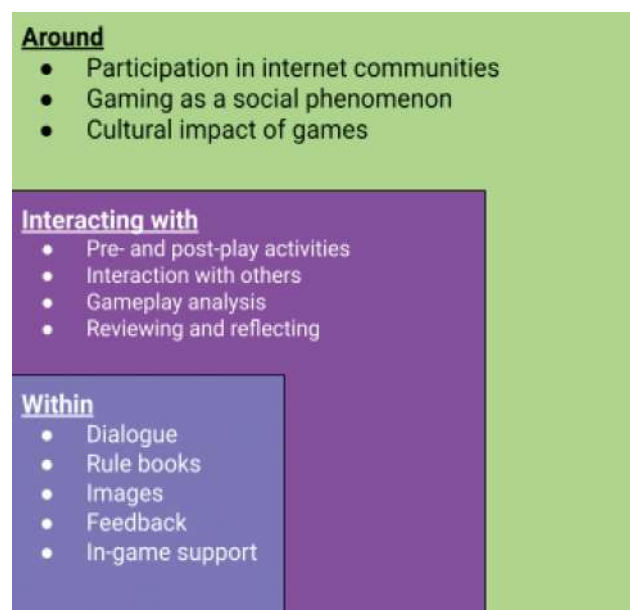
I do not have space in this short piece to discuss or critically examine whether this trend is good or bad, or why the trend is skewed towards certain items. It may be that teachers do not have a high enough game literacy to implement "real" games (Blume, 2019); they may not care about digital game research or have access to technology (Swier & Peterson, 2018); the use of smartphones or games may be prohibited in the classroom; or they get pushback from students, administration, and other teachers (Molin, 2017).

Regardless, my point is that *all of the above activities* fit under the *ludic* banner.

But why get ludic?

As an advocate for the inclusion of play and games (ergo, ludic activities) in language teaching, I'll introduce the potentials and benefits of being ludic for language teachers. Yes, students are *engaged* when they are having fun. People like to play. Yes, games can be remixed to practice vocabulary or other knowledge. Yes, games can be used as a reward for good behavior on a Friday or as a refresher from the more "serious" textbook work. However, there is more that can be done. There are various layers to games, play, and gaming culture that can be *leveraged towards language learning goals* in the classroom. Consider Figure 2 as three ways in which learning may be instantiated (modified from York et al., 2021).

Figure 2. Layers of Learning Available Through Ludic Activities



What language exists within ludic activities?

At the New York University conference Practice, Daviau said that boardgaming is a hobby in which one practically sits a test before playing (NYU Game Center, 2019). What he meant by this is that in order to play a boardgame, we have to figure out the names of pieces, how they interact, the goal of the game, what we can and cannot do, and so on. All of this learning is mediated by language: written, in the case of a rule book; or spoken, in the case of a "how to play" video on YouTube.

As another example, and in the case of a digital mobile game like *A Normal Lost Phone* (2016), are non-linear, narrative-driven games where the method of playing is reading, interacting, and choosing options to progress the story from a dialogue tree. Due to the *Choose Your Own Adventure* nature of the games, students may have different experiences, which could be the impetus for further conversation and language work in the classroom after playing.

All of this language is an essential part of the experience of gaming, built into the object itself, waiting for us language teachers to tap into it. How can the language in games be used towards your own students' learning needs?

What language is generated when students interact with ludic activities?

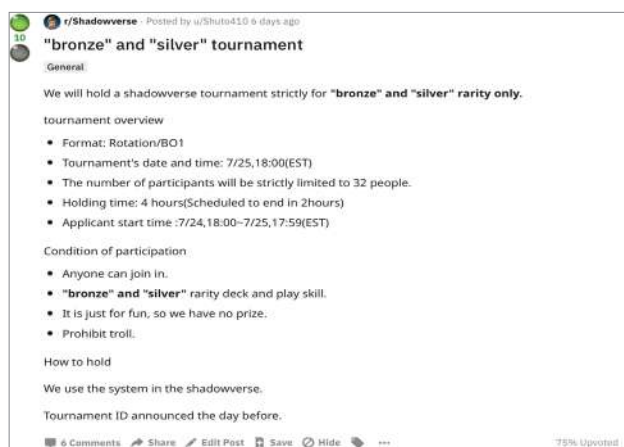
For example, what language emerges when students engage with a ludic activity like hangman? On the surface, the key teaching point appears to be the vocabulary in the game itself, perhaps chosen by the teacher before class. But, take a closer look. Students speak to each other as they play. What do they say? "It's your turn." "So close!" "Let's try S." "I think it might be 'robot.'" and so on. And that's just for a simple game like hangman. With suitable pedagogical support, the teacher can squeeze a lot more learning out of any ludic activity in their classroom (York, 2020).

In sum, Friday afternoon gaming or vocab-drilling games are a good starting point, but what else is possible when the teacher supports play with other/further/critical-thinking activities?

What language exists around ludic activities?

In terms of authentic examples of language "in the digital wilds" (Sauro & Zourou, 2019), gaming communities offer bountiful examples of language use by target language speakers. In a project I conducted last year (York, 2021), I had students join Reddit communities connected to their personal interests, where a large number of students decided to join game-related communities. The students collected posts that they wanted to learn more about, and together in the classroom, we examined posts in terms of language use, audience, and multimodality. Finally, the students participated in the communities they had joined by asking questions, sharing their own media, or in the case of gaming, playing games together (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Invite to a Game Tournament Posted on Reddit by Students



How could you leverage interest in gaming or (online) gaming communities towards your own students' learning?

What about making/designing ludic activities?

As the barrier to entry for game creation lowers and the list of game genres grows, teachers can not only choose specific games for their needs, but also design analogue or digital games, such as by remixing *Monopoly* to learn Spanish verbs. As a concrete example, Bradford et al. (2021) created simple paper-based escape room games for German students. Students may also design games as part of a constructivist approach to learning. The generation of games by students links to participation in wider gaming communities and the development of technical skills (Kafai, 2015).

But what about gamification?

Gamification has a simple definition, but is interpreted in different ways. From my own experiences, it has become a sort of bucket term for teachers, which catches anything to do with the keywords "games" and "education."

The clinical definition of gamification is the application of game mechanics to non-game contexts (Deterding et al., 2011). In other words, taking the things we find in games and applying them to the classroom.

A simple implementation might be to refer to classroom terms in the parlance of gamers. For example, grades may become "eXperience Points," homework becomes "quests," your group may be called your "guild," and a gold star reward might be a "badge" or "achievement." Thus, gamification is similar to doing what we have always been doing as a teacher but framing it in a way that should appeal to learners. This manifestation of game-terms-as-engagement-booster, or in other words, the appropriation of a limited subsection of game mechanics has been called BLAP gamification by Nicholson (2015), referring to the most commonly used game elements utilized, i.e., badges, levels and leaderboards, achievements, and points (Zainuddin et al., 2020). Have you ever given students a gold star or an "A"? Then, you may have been engaging in gamification all along; you just didn't know it.

Additionally, by tapping into self-determination theory and our inherent need for autonomy, relatedness, and competency, a teacher could also offer

- Choice of activities (or "quests") for students to complete, or a number of different pathways that students could take in order to complete course content,
- The option to retake a test (or "boss battle") if they do not achieve a high enough grade the first time, or
- Bolster relationships between students in the classroom with more group work activities (or "missions").

Finally, in an attempt to go deeper than surface-level terminology replacement, a teacher may add narrative elements to their class. Thus, the class may be themed so that students are characters in a story that unfolds over the course of the curriculum. This type of gamification, I would argue, exists already in the form of content and language integrated courses, English for specific purposes courses, or in "strong" TBLT textbooks, where students are roleplaying towards gaining real-world, necessary skills, not just collecting badges for doing reading assignments.

Finally, I will mention that the lines between gamification and game-based learning get blurred frequently. Perhaps this is because the two terms both connect to games and gaming? Perhaps it's because a game-based learning context (or "ludic language pedagogy" [York et al., 2021]) can be gamified (points can be awarded after a debate/roleplay/gameplay session for participation, winning, speaking the most, etc.). Whatever the cause of this blurring, here are three examples:

- Many teachers I interact with think that game-based learning is gamification, i.e., playing games, or using games as a subject of focus in the classroom is a type of gamification.
- In a paper by Pho and Dinscore (2015), the lines are blurred back the other way, as they refer to gamification techniques in teaching, but call this approach game-based learning.
- Finally, Matera (2015, "Myth #6," para. 2) laments in the opposite direction again: "Almost every time I talk with people about the topic of gamification, the first thing they bring up is how much they like the game of *Monopoly* and that they should include more games in their classroom."

What does gamification mean to you? Has this article changed your thoughts? Is education already *gamified*? Do we need to gamify classes to get students engaged? Do students continue the required behavior after the class finishes? These are all questions that can and should be explored further.

Want to play?

In summary, I introduced a broad overview of ludic activities that teachers engage in, highlighting digital games as a small fraction of the overall picture. Following that, I introduced three porous layers of language learning potential when *being ludic*. This culminated in the following questions:

- How can the language in games be used towards your own students' learning needs?
- How could you squeeze more learning out of a game with pedagogical supports such as pre- and post-play activities?
- How could you leverage students' interest in gaming or (online) gaming communities towards your own students' learning?

"There are various layers to games, play, and gaming culture that can be leveraged towards language learning goals in the classroom."

Are you interested in learning more, discussing or criticizing my ideas here, and wrestling with the "seriousness" of ludic teaching? I edit an open-access journal that publishes work on teachers' explorations of games and play in their teaching contexts, aka *Ludic Language Pedagogy* (York et al., 2021). We also have a Discord server where you can chat with other teachers and researchers directly. We'd love to hear your stories and answer your questions. Let's play!

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Gamification of Vocabulary Learning: Using *Quizlet Live* in an ESL Classroom

By Abigail B. Capitin-Principe

Introduction

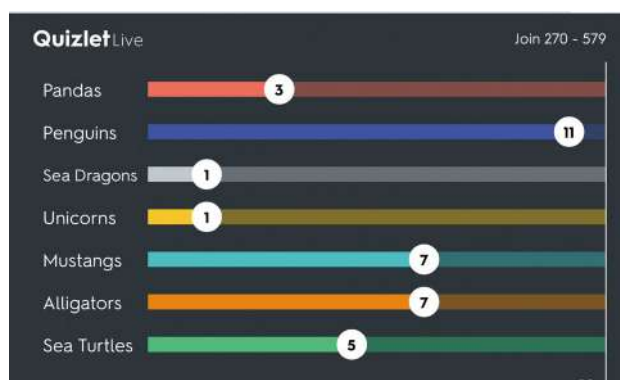
According to Bi Worldwide (n.d.), gamification is “adding game mechanics into nongame environments, like a website, online community, learning management system, or business’ intranet to increase participation. The goal of gamification is to engage with consumers, employees, and partners to inspire, collaborate, share, and interact” (para. 1). Games can be a powerful motivator for students, since many have been playing games since they were old enough to hold a console, a switch, or even just a smartphone. Games have evolved from board games to video games to mobile phone games, and everyone has, at one time or another, played some sort of game.

This article will talk about how gamification can be used to help students learn target vocabulary in second language learning, specifically by using *Quizlet*.

Vocabulary learning can be challenging. There are few people out there who think that learning a list of words is the height of excitement. When people hear “vocabulary,” the image that often enters their mind is a big, heavy dictionary. However, since vocabulary learning often involves learning a list of words, their meaning, and their use, encountering a long list of words might be daunting for some English language learners.

Additionally, when the pandemic set in, a lot of classes switched to online, and with this came the lack of motivation to learn. Classes being online is not the only discouraging thing for many students. The enormity of

the situation itself is discouraging. Graduating students in 2020 didn’t have a “normal” ceremony to mark the end of their college life. Freshmen students in 2020 didn’t have the welcome events that were designed to ease their transition from high school life to university life. Especially for freshmen students, many experiences were denied them, and this would have contributed to their lack of excitement when starting their freshman year online. Giving this group of learners a list of vocabulary words to learn would probably not yield the best results.

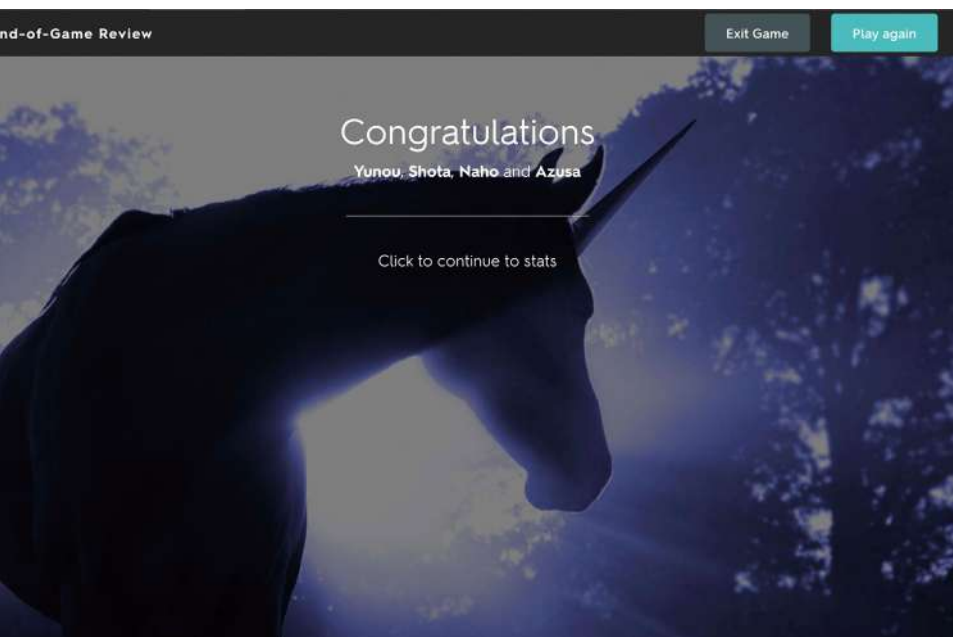


▲ **Game screen showing the progress of each team. The first team to get 12 correct answers wins.**

This is where gamification comes in. Interestingly enough, there is one “online,” or rather “digital,” activity that most students seem to never tire of. No matter where they are or the time of day, students can spend hours looking down at their phones, with fingers nimbly dancing around the screen. Sometimes they belt out the occasional “whoop” of joy at passing a level, getting an item, or beating an opponent. Students are often playing games on their phones, and they always seem motivated to play games.

So, why not make learning a game? Adding game mechanics to a learning management system has the possibility of encouraging student engagement, and perhaps giving them the motivation to reach the learning goal that has been set for the course.

Pre-pandemic, I was using different games in my classes to encourage participation and cooperation among my students. One of my favorite games is using *Quizlet Live*. Recently, I have started using *Quizlet Live* for my online classes as well. The dynamics have changed, but the end result, that of motivating students and encouraging them to learn, remains the same.



▲ **End-of-Game Review screen, showing the winning team and names of the members. This gives the winning team bragging rights and motivates the other teams to try to win the next round.**

“Students are often playing games on their phones, and they always seem motivated to play games. So, why not make learning a game?”

Setting Up

Quizlet is an app that can also be accessed using a browser. Educators and learners can choose how to access Quizlet. There is a free and a paid version. This article will only be referring to the free version.

The first step, as with any app or software, is to create an account. Once you have an account, you can create a study set. A study set is your vocabulary list. In the present free version of Quizlet, there seems to be no limit to the number of words you can include in a study set. A quick search on Twitter (see Gaspar, 2014) showed that there are educators who have study sets with more than a thousand words. From the same Twitter thread, it was also mentioned that people have created more than a hundred study sets, again, with no issues from Quizlet. Given this almost limitless space for creating vocabulary resources, Quizlet can be the platform to contain all the word lists needed in a particular course.

After making your study set, you can then do several things to facilitate vocabulary learning.

Quizlet Live

Quizlet Live is the class game mode of Quizlet, meaning this is to be played as a group, or as a class, and not for individual study. There are two modes in *Quizlet Live*: A Classic mode and Checkpoint. This article will describe Classic.

A quick Google search will give you many links about how to use *Quizlet Live* in your classes (see Quizlet Help Center, n.d., in References for more). This can be quick, or time-consuming, depending on how you use the software. But based on experience, after a few games on *Quizlet Live*, most educators get the hang of it and are able to organize a game in the classroom efficiently.

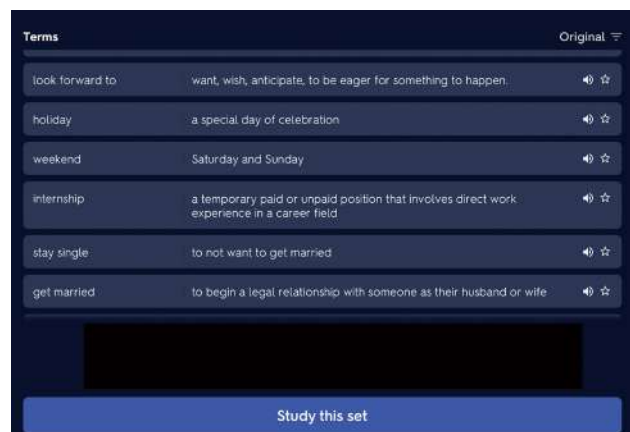
When starting a *Quizlet Live* game, you click on the “Live” icon and choose “Classic.” You then will be asked to choose between “Random Teams” and “Individuals.” If you are doing an in-person class, choose Random Teams. Random Teams will work better with larger numbers of students. For online classes or classes of less than 10 students, Individuals is better on *Quizlet Live*.

When you choose Random Teams, Quizlet will randomly group students into groups of 3 or 4. The bigger the class, the better. Quizlet will then ask you to choose whether the

students will be matching the terms with the definition (meaning the term will appear, and the definitions will be in the choices) or whether the students will be matching the definitions with the terms (meaning the definition will be given, and the terms are the choices). Both are good ways to encourage vocabulary learning.

Once you have decided whether to start from the term or definition, Quizlet will generate a QR code and a number code. QR codes are for students who use their smartphones, and number codes are for students who use their laptops or computers (or if QR codes do not work on their smartphones). One thing to remember, Random Teams requires the students to move around the classroom, and as such, using their smartphones is advisable. This game cannot be played in a computer room, where all the students have desktop computers and cannot move around.

The game starts by putting students into teams with a team name. On their smartphones, they will see their team name; in the free version, it is an animal (for example “tiger” or “dolphin”) and a picture of that animal. They then find their teammates by walking around the room and looking for students with the same animal. Hence, it is important that students are able to move around. Once they have found their teammates, the teacher may start the game.



▲ **Example vocabulary set from my Quizlet Study Sets.**
(Taken from textbook used in class.)

An interesting thing about *Quizlet Live* Random Teams is that it is definitely a classroom activity. Once the students have found their teammates, they have to put their phones on a table in such a way that everyone can see each other's screens. When the game starts, and the term (or definition) pops up on their screens, the answer choices from each device is different, and the correct answer can be found on only one device. So they have to work together to figure out whose device has the correct answer, and then they choose that answer. They can only tap on one device per team when choosing an answer. Each correct answer moves the team forward on the leaderboard, and each wrong answer will move the team back to the starting point. The first team to get 12 correct answers wins. In each game, a random set of 12 words is given. Even if your study set is 50 words, Quizlet will get 12 random words from that set and use them in the game. Each game can have different sets of words from the same study set. I find that this helps students study

all the words in a given study set because they won't know which 12 random words will show up in the game.

A lot of students find *Quizlet Live* fun and challenging. One way to add more excitement in the game is to switch team members round, so that they get to work with all their classmates.

When using Individuals, the mechanics are the same as when playing with a team, except this time, each student plays against the others. Since they are not relying on teams or finding teammates, this mode is recommended for online classes. All students can play (using their smartphones) on Zoom or any video platform.



▲ **Students huddled together, working as a team, to try to win the game.**

Motivations

Playing *Quizlet Live* in class shows how game mechanics, such as who gets to finish first, who can answer without making mistakes, and which team has the largest number of wins, encourages students to study the vocabulary sets. Their motivation comes from wanting to win as a team. In the end, everyone has fun, and students look forward to the next game, saying they will do better and definitely win next time. The game function of Quizlet motivates students who are used to playing games on their smartphones, and when they can use their phones in class, in a situation where they are actually learning the language, a lot of them feel excited and are motivated to do well in the activity.

Quizlet for Self-Study

There are other ways in which Quizlet uses games to encourage student learning. When not using *Quizlet Live* in class, students can do individual study. When students access the study set the educator has made, there will be self-study options given, among which are *Flashcards*, *Match*, and *Gravity*.

Flashcard is the main screen of the Quizlet study set and shows the terms and definitions. It functions much like a paper flip card, where the term is on one side and the definition is on the flip side. On Quizlet, you tap on the card to flip it and see the definition.

Match is a matching game where students are given 12 sets of terms to match with their corresponding definitions. The object of this game is to match the terms

and definitions in the shortest possible time. It works like a memory-match game, except all the options are visible, and all the students have to do is read. This game is popular with my students and easy to play on their smartphones.

“Their motivation comes from wanting to win as a team. In the end, everyone has fun, and students look forward to the next game.”

Gravity is a typing and spelling game. The set-up is that asteroids are dropping on Earth, and the student has to stop these from hitting Earth. The asteroids will either be terms or definitions depending on how the game is set up. Then as the asteroids are dropping, students have to type in the corresponding term or definition. The object of this game is to stop the asteroids from hitting Earth by typing the terms that match the definition. *Gravity* develops reading, spelling, and typing skills. Most students find this challenging. This game is best played with a laptop or desktop rather than a smartphone.

Conclusion

Gamification is something that educators are just starting to apply in the ESL classroom. There are many game-like resources out there that may help language learners be more motivated to acquire the target language, and Quizlet is just one of them.

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Why Use Games and Gamification in ELT?

By Dr. Deborah Healey

Using Games

Teachers often use games in the classroom. To better understand why and how, let's examine *game components*. According to Kapp (2012), a game is any system with the following elements:

• Rules

If there are no rules, it's play. All games, even informal ones, have rules of some sort. Most people have a strong sense of fairness associated with playing games "by the rules." This can be especially tricky in a classroom with very young learners, some of whom may have a clear sense of fairness while others have a deep need to win by any means.

• Challenge

Without a challenge, there is little purpose in playing the game. But the type and level of challenge must match individual interests to be effective, especially in the classroom. Too hard, and it's not fun. Too easy, and it's not fun either.

• Feedback

Game feedback can be quite explicit – awarding points or gaining a prize – or more subtle, such as the sense of figuring something out correctly and supporting one's classmates. Like everything else, feedback needs to feel appropriate to individual learners.

• Interaction

Interaction can be with another person or within the game itself, but there is some way that things change as a result of what players do while playing the game.

• Fun

An important note about the element of fun comes from Jane McGonigal (2011). Fun can come in a variety of forms, from play-like fun with few rules and perhaps not a lot of challenge, to "serious fun" like chess. As teachers, we need to be aware that different people can have a different sense of fun and be ready to adapt a game as needed.

• (Often, but not always) an Emotional Response

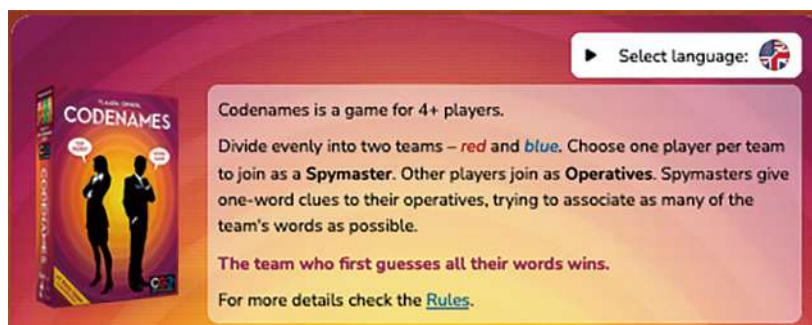
We have probably all seen the emotional response from a winning or losing team; players are fully engaged, and their engagement includes emotion. Games for change (see more below) can also provoke an emotional response because of the subject matter.

As a classroom teacher, I have used games as a frequent go-to option in several situations:

- To reinvigorate my learners' energy in the classroom
- To make necessary practice more interesting
- To build enthusiasm for content
- To fill the last five minutes of class

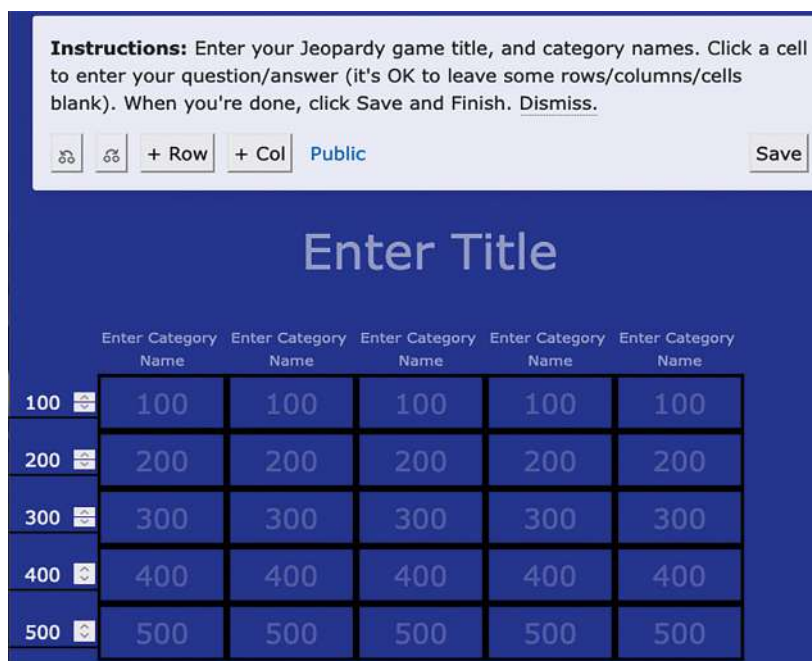
Games work in all these situations and more, so like many teachers, I have built games into a variety of lessons. I have added collaboration, speed, and competition to vocabulary or grammar work, where the first team finished with a crossword or worksheet would be the winner. Kahoot games do the same digitally, and even keeps score. *Codenames* is about finding synonyms. It's a commercial board game that can be played online for free (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Codenames*, a Board Game About Finding Synonyms



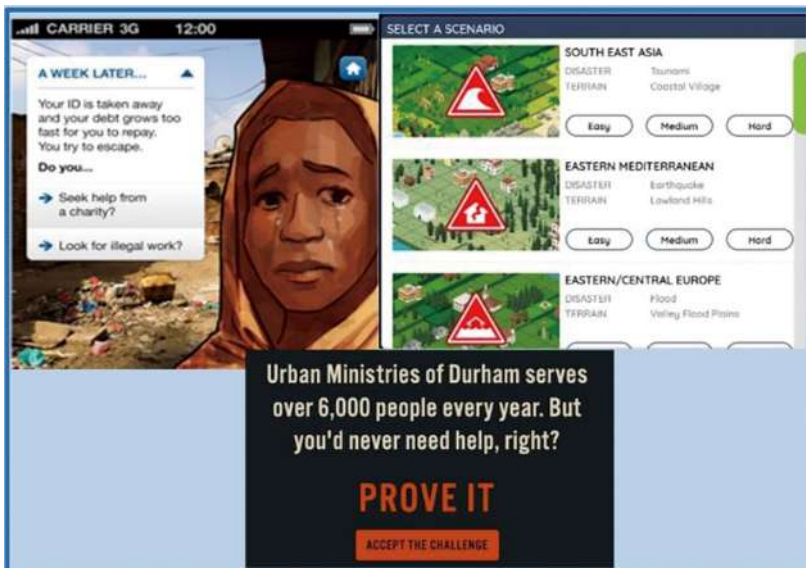
Templates allow teachers to customize games for their own learning objectives. I have used templates online to create *Jeopardy!* games (see Figure 2). Custom-made *Jeopardy!* allows learners to compete and collaborate in teams while practicing a range of content.

Figure 2. *Jeopardy!* Game Template, Which Can Be Customized



“Games for change” provide another option for teachers. These are games with a social justice message that raise awareness of current issues. Teens and adults may be particularly interested in these games, especially games that connect to their own context. Examples include *My Life as a Refugee* from the UN High Commission on Refugees, *Stop Disasters* from the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and *Spent* from Urban Ministries of Durham (see Figure 3). Learners can discuss the issues raised before, during, and after playing the game.

Figure 3. *My Life as a Refugee*, *Stop Disasters*, and *Spent*



Some teachers use *game-based learning*, an extended use of a game in the language classroom. Games should be chosen with an eye to meeting learning objectives – linguistic or content. Some board games have many rules and are challenging to learn, making them good for longer-term play. The teacher can create a jigsaw reading with the instructions in board games like *Pandemic* (another game for change), so that learners are responsible for teaching each other. Digital games such as *Civilization* and *SimCity* (see Figure 4) can be linguistically challenging, as learners need to understand what the game is displaying on the screen in order to make appropriate decisions as they play. Preparation before and resources provided during the game will be helpful.

Figure 4. *Civilization IV Maya*, *Gran Colombia Pack*, and *SimCity Classic*



Many more possibilities exist. The key is to have lesson objectives in mind when choosing a game, explaining gameplay to encourage language use, and adding follow-on activities to extend the learning outside the game.

Using Gamification

Games and gamification are different. *Gamification* is defined as the use of game elements and game mechanics in a setting not normally considered a game, e.g., the classroom. *Gamifying* a classroom means looking deeper into the choices that game designers make, and choosing the “game mechanics” – those elements that make games playable and engaging – that will work best with your learners. Gamifying means thinking like a game designer and turning the classroom into an environment where learners are active players, and the teacher’s goal is to motivate and engage the players so deeply that they do not want to stop.

One key change in a gamified classroom is the *points system*. In games and a gamified classroom, everyone starts with zero points. Learners add points by accomplishing tasks of different kinds. These can be homework assignments, large projects, class discussions, working with a partner, or just about anything that can be awarded points. The total always goes up. With grades, learners start with 100% and lose points with each mistake on an assignment and quiz. A change in grading to add up rather than down would give the learner points and a sense of success with each assignment. Points can be converted at the end into letter grades. Another feature is that points do not need to be solely academic. They can also be social. My gamified classes included experience points (XPs) based on assignments, quizzes, and tests (“tasks”), and larger projects (“quests”). To pass the class, players had to achieve a certain number of XPs on tasks and successful quests. But that was not all: They also had to accumulate a certain number of collaboration points (CPs). These included comments on online discussion posts by others, peer reviews, in-class teamwork, and other collaborative activities. As it turned out, those who did better on XPs were not the same as those who did better on CPs. This was a way to reward the collaboration I also expected in class.

Another important feature of games is the ability to recover – players have multiple lives. Gamers try to learn from their mistakes and keep playing. In a classroom, this does not mean that we let learners take tests multiple times. But there should be ways to gain points by doing extra work. It’s the ability to recover and to catch up that makes a gamified class especially powerful for our weaker learners by encouraging resilience. Building points motivates them to do more and do better.

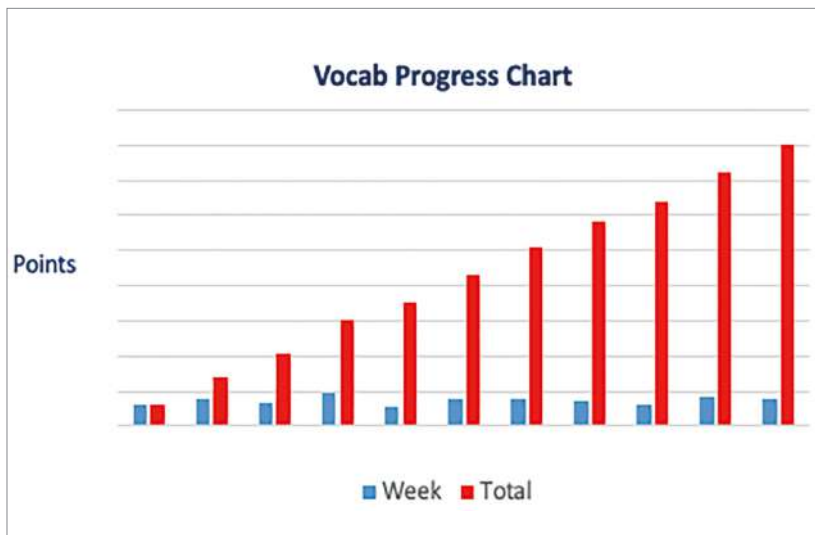
Looking at the range of game mechanics, it is clear that teachers already employ some game mechanics in the classroom, such as

- Onboarding (starting out simple and building up to more complex ideas and expectations)
- Collaboration (party/team) and competition (player vs. player)
- Rewards (such as stars)
- Experience Points (numerical value for actions, such as grades)
- Game Constraints (rules)
- Quests (a mission with objectives, as in project-based learning)
- Epic Challenge (the sense of accomplishing something big, such as a project that goes outside the classroom).

Game mechanics that teachers could add would be

- Do-over (consistent ability to make up points and try again)
- Levels (points lead to rewards)
- Badges (visible/digital signs as rewards)
- Progress Display (visual depiction of progress, always increasing) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Progress Display



Gamification is more than just adding points, badges, and levels. As Dodson points out (Catalano, 2012, para. 9), “the way the user experience is framed – providing feelings of competence, of being in control, and that the outcome matters – is critical.” As teachers, we should see our learners as active in the classroom, i.e., as “players” with choices. Learners need to do more than accumulate points for the work they do. Badges can be used to reward collaboration or other desirable classroom behavior. The levels that students achieve via points should be meaningful and show actual achievement. Gamification has to be implemented thoughtfully and carefully to work well. Too much focus on extrinsic rewards can reduce intrinsic motivation. But done well, gamification can enhance motivation for those learners who otherwise lose hope as their grades keep dropping and they feel they cannot succeed.

Whether using games in the classroom or gamifying the class, the teacher’s role is to establish a learning environment that is motivating, engaging, and linguistically rich. The teacher needs to build intrinsic motivation, not just extrinsic with wins and losses, points and badges. When learning is motivating, that’s intrinsic motivation. It’s where we want our learners to be.

“Gamification can enhance motivation for those learners who otherwise lose hope as their grades keep dropping and they feel they cannot succeed.”

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Looking Anew at Gamification and the “Big G” Game of Language Learning

By Vance Stevens

The TESOL-sponsored Electronic Village Online (EVO) takes place in January and February of each year. EVO offers a variety of free workshops in sessions in which anyone interested can participate. Since 2015, one of the sessions offered has been EVO Minecraft MOOC. EVOMC started out as a group of language teachers who had documented evidence of language development in their students (and their children) attributable to *Minecraft*, and the teachers at the time wanted to learn how to play the game in order to understand and be able to leverage its affordances for language learning.

In the ensuing eight years, our community has developed its own inventory of some of these affordances. As lead moderator of EVOMC, I have documented my observations of how *Minecraft* leads to language learning. Some of these observations challenge the prevailing notions of (a) how gamification is defined, (b) the nature of games in language learning, and (c) the games we should actually be focusing on.

Regarding gamification, Deterding et al. (2011) define *gamification* as “the use of game design elements in non-game contexts” (slide 10). They also expand on what game elements, game design elements, and non-game contexts are in ways that leave room for interpretation. Fitz-Walter (n.d.) follows essentially the same definition. He defines *gamification* as the application of game-design elements and game principles in non-game contexts, but adds this caveat: It can also be defined as a set of activities and processes to solve problems by using or applying the characteristics of game elements.

It is my contention that *Minecraft* is a highly gamified tool with positive outcomes for language learning. However, its gamified elements all occur in a game context. They essentially serve to keep people playing the game of *Minecraft*, thereby increasing their opportunities for target language development in the wider context of language learning. However, this appears to violate the stipulation that gamification must occur in non-game contexts. To help us see what is going on here, it will help to broaden our conception of games.

Keeping in mind Gee’s distinction between “Big G” and “little g” games (Stevens, May 15, 2019), a Big G game addresses the learning goal in its wider context whereas a little g game is the immediate means by which that wider goal is accomplished. I see this as an example of the Big G Game of Language Learning being supported by the little g game of *Minecraft*, which happens to be highly gamified, as well as having potential for game-based learning.

There is a similar example in the appendix of York et al. (2021), where there is a reference to the digital game-based vocabulary learning (DGBVL) approach, which “integrates the elements of gamification, such as goals, competition, rules, timing, rewarding, and feedback,

into vocabulary learning” (p. 25). I have had success with students doing activities such as those provided by Memrise, where the gamified elements keep them on task (almost addictively) to the point where they form strong associations between paired elements (e.g., words and their definitions) and can then regurgitate these successfully on tests. Leaving aside the implications of this accomplishment for success in the Big G Game of Language Learning, *Minecraft* does much the same, and much more: *Minecraft’s* affordances for communicative interactions extend much more broadly into language acquisition.

In the eight years wherein our community has coalesced from EVOMC15 through EVOMC22, we have surfaced many examples of how this takes place. One such example is teachers setting up a scenario for data-driven learning, as described in Stevens (2020), where students were taught how to fish in *Minecraft* and then asked to fill in a Google Sheet, documenting what they caught along with associated data points. Fishing itself is a compelling activity in *Minecraft*, and the discourse over how to do that, plus the data produced, are rife with language learning potential.

Another example (Stevens, 2019) demonstrates how teachers created a house in *Minecraft* where ancient scrolls were stored in chests. The students had to retrieve pieces of the scrolls, mount them on the walls, and then reorder them and orient them so that their messages emerged. The pieces stored in separate chests were all parts of a larger story.

Though meant for an upper-level literature class, this activity provides obvious insights into an approach on how to develop activities for the reading of texts in a foreign language. It also illustrates how teachers, by becoming familiar with playing *Minecraft* themselves, can develop the skills on a platform, which they can use as a tool where they learn from peers how to design tasks applicable to whatever they are teaching. This is especially true for language learning, since everything done in multimode in *Minecraft* involves so many levels of communication with teachers and other players, often through a lingua franca target language.

But what makes *Minecraft* so compelling is how students can be encouraged and motivated to stay in the game, as well as work through their flow state through the many subtle and not so subtle ways that gamification is built into the game, as where Carr (2014, para. 4) says that “to master a video game, a player has to struggle through *challenges of increasing difficulty, always pushing the limits of his talent*. Every mission has a goal, there are *rewards for doing well...*”

Fishing, as noted above on how it might be applied to a DGBLL scenario, is one good example of what Carr alludes to as requiring many discrete steps, which both



▲ **Fishing in Minecraft is a productive gamified endeavor.**

teachers and students gradually become aware of as they experience game play in *Minecraft*:

- Killing “mobs” (e.g., zombies and spiders) will earn them experience points.
- When killed, mobs drop potentially useful items; i.e., in the case of spiders, string.
- Players can use the string in conjunction with sticks to make fishing rods.
- Fishing yields not only fish but might pull up other treasures such as enchanting books; both fish and detritus fished off the bottom earn players experience points.
- Players can use experience points to enchant items.
- You can cook and eat the fish, or use fish to tame cats.

I have observed players in survival mode in *Minecraft* focus on fishing as a productive gamified endeavor. If they are playing alone, they might just enter into a flow state as they watch their experience points (XP) climb. If they are playing with others, they converse with one another about what they are catching. In survival mode, they also have to attend to (and discuss with others) the time of day and be sure they have constructed or are near shelter when it gets dark. This is because if mobs attack them, they could lose all their experience points. As a result, part of the game strategy is working with others to keep everyone alive long enough to accumulate high XP and also be in a position to use it.

Gamification also pushes players into sustainable modes of play, where they might cultivate trees, cane, sheep, and other farmable and husbanded items. This will enable them to be able to not only feed others while scaffolding upwards in the game but avoid having to denude the land of trees or sheep in order to get sticks and other wood products crafted from wood, such as beds for sleeping

at night (to fast forward the time and set spawn points), which require wood planks and wool from sheep.

You can find sheep in the wild and kill them for their wool, or you can build fences from wood and corral the sheep. In addition, once you come upon iron when mining



▲ **While shearing sheep, students can share techniques for sustainable play.**

underground, you can craft shears and get all the wool you want from your corralled sheep. You can also feed the sheep carrots and multiply them. Farming and animal husbandry also accumulate XP and keep players on task while developing linguistic skills in the Big G Game while players remain locked in the ebb and flow of gamification in the course of spending time playing the little g game of *Minecraft*.

I stress here the importance of experiential and community-based learning in video games like *Minecraft* for language learning. In Stevens (2021), I presented snippets of evidence from teachers and students talking about their experiences with *Minecraft* and how these games have promoted pragmatic and second-language acquisition in surprising ways, e.g., in helping students cope with a broad spectrum of accents.

Since *Minecraft* has so many sustainable ways of doing things built into it (such as shearing sheep whenever you

“I stress here the importance of experiential and community-based learning in video games like *Minecraft* for language learning.”

need wool), you can collaboratively build fences and keep sheep, feed them carrots, and breed them. You can also accumulate plenty of wool and share it with others. You can grow carrots for that purpose and to feed yourself and all your friends. You can plant trees for fencing rather than cut them from the land (i.e., when you cut a tree, harvest its saplings, and plant another one or two). In sharing these techniques in *Minecraft*, students discuss why they chose to do it the way they did, share techniques for sustainable play, and relate how this extrapolates to the real world.

In summary, here are the reasons why we should use *Minecraft* in language learning:

- Autonomy
- Computer literacy skills
- Critical thinking
- Departure from traditional teaching and learning

- Family and community
- Motivation
- Opportunities for language acquisition
- Typing skills
- Understanding accented language
- Using language for reflection
- Vocabulary and spelling

This brief article argues for a look beyond accepted definitions of gamification into a view of the concept of games themselves that indeed makes almost anything to be a Big G Game, if we choose to view it that way. As in any game, the trick is to keep your eye on the ball. If your students are playing little g games like *Minecraft*, this could advance them in the Big G Game of Language Learning, as revealed in eight years of observations by the EVO *Minecraft* MOOC community, 2015 to 2022.

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Gamification Through AfreecaTV and YouTube in Korean ELT

By Jae-hyun Im

The emergence of new online platforms, along with the development of communication technology, has provided us with diverse ways of being connected to each other in a virtual space and has allowed us to interact in multimodal ways. This change has also positively impacted the methods of teaching and learning English as an additional language, situating teachers and learners in an educational discourse in which they co-construct and enjoy a new definition of English education that might look different from traditional classroom-based contexts. One aspect that reflects this trend is the gamification in literacy education.

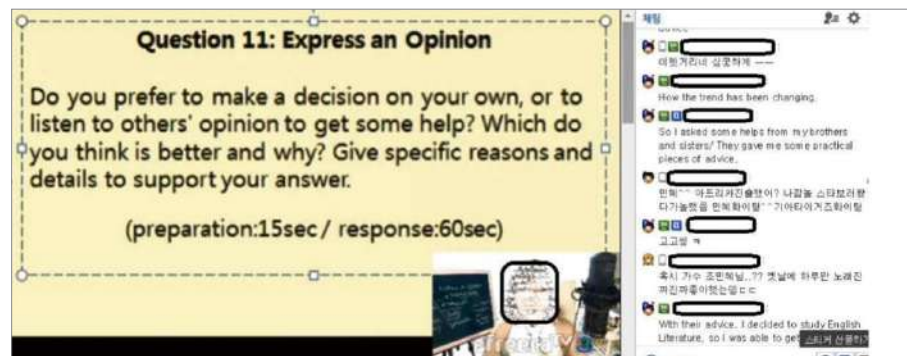
The inclusion of elements of games or the gamification of education can be roughly defined as an approach or a method of teaching and learning that is designed to embrace the crux of games to stimulate various aspects of literacy development (Gee, 2003). For example, video games almost always give users quests for which players individually or collaboratively seek out solutions and receive rewards at the completion of their missions. Throughout the journey, players gain experiences, and this allows them to “level up.” Applying this principle to English learning, language learners in a gamification class are given fun tasks that are designed to improve learners’ proficiency. And after their engagement in the learning process, their reward for their hard work is the enhanced ability to use English as a “level-upped” English speaker.

Recently, numerous studies on the influence of this game-like learning style examined how English education can be realized in a way that is similar to playing games. I also examined the ways English as a foreign language (EFL) education in the Korean online context reflects the gamification trend in popular mobile platforms including AfreecaTV, YouTube, and other social media (Im, 2020, 2022). By looking at several examples of new types of online English teaching and learning practices from these two articles, I firstly aim here to showcase characteristics of gamification to utilize and promote in Korean ELT, and secondly suggest several research agendas that invite more academic discussion.

On AfreecaTV, streaming teachers contextualize their teaching more as a lively interaction in which learners can feel as if they are playing games. The following image is a part of the English teaching content to prepare for English speaking tests (see Figure 1). The female streamer’s teaching fully utilizes visual stimuli and audio resources, all of which are combined with other semiotics such as the learners’ online synchronous chats, their use of emoticons and emojis, and the streamer’s kinesthetic reactions. This

combination of multimodal elements in turn makes the English learning more participatory and dynamic.

Figure 1. English Teaching on AfreecaTV

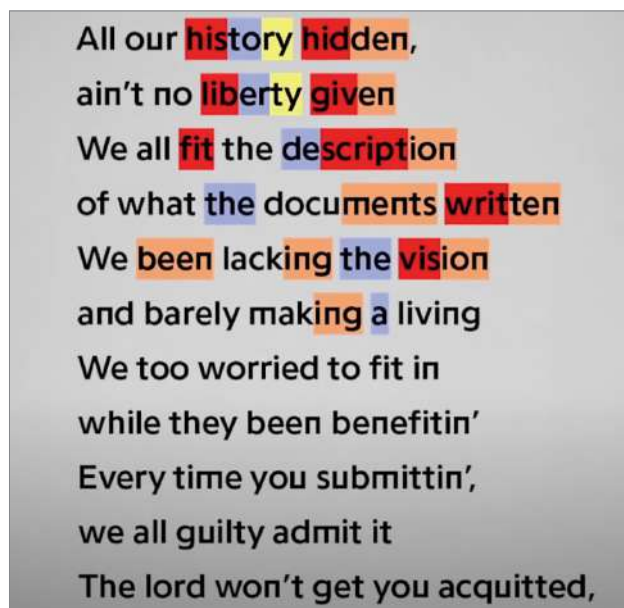


When the streaming teacher posts a question on a big screen and gives instructions, they answer in written form (i.e., typing their own answers) in English in the chat box and ask questions in Korean. With opportunities to try again after incorrect answers, the teacher constantly helps learners to find answers and guides them to more complicated learning topics, encouraging other learners to work collaboratively and to use multiple in- and out-of-class resources. And when learners propose right answers, she chooses some of the best answers and gives rewards such as sending a gift card. When one question ends, she moves to another that is more difficult, through which those participating in the teaching show are provided with more opportunities to level up their skills. In other words, each question provided by the streamer becomes a quest for the viewers in the live-streaming room, and learners seek to find a better answer through collaboration and constant trials, without any penalty for incorrect answers. Thus, these game-like features render English learning more personalized and entertainment-oriented, which is regarded as important for successful learning (Chik, 2014; Reinders, 2012).

Another example of gamification is from a rapper’s YouTube channel that teaches about hip-hop. Although the channel is not specifically intended to teach English to Korean learners, those who are interested in hip-hop culture can take advantage of the opportunity to learn hip-hop-specific English while learning the basics of composing rap music. The rapper-teacher’s content explains basic elements of rap-making, such as verse, rhyme, and flow, and teaches frequently used hip-hop terms such as *flex* and *esskeetit* [let’s get it] in Korean. These types of clips can be regarded as a game manual that hip-hop players should read before joining the hip-hop scene, in order to understand essential rules of the community. As shown in Figure 2, the rapper-teacher plays a song and shows how words are rhythmically arranged for poetic effect. Each element of rhyming technique is color-highlighted as music is being

played, which allows viewers to better understand the way a rapper designs his lyrics.

Figure 2. Rhyming



As shown in Figure 3, another type of content that explains the origin and the meaning of popular hip-hop terms is an example of how manual-like content can become a source of English learning. This functions as a guide for beginner rappers (Korean learners of English) who are interested in hip-hop and with which they can further enjoy the streamer's hip-hop-related content that deals with poetic aspects of rap. Within the content, linguistic cues are always presented multimodally, which helps viewers enjoy learning a part of English and American culture that might not be covered in public education.

Figure 3. Hip-hop Terms



The examples above are interesting and innovative. But they also pose several important questions that have to be answered before we consider embracing elements of video games and recontextualize our teaching practice into games. For example, we still do not know (a) up to which level of language learning gamification would be effective in the long run, (b) how authentic and legitimate their teaching materials would be in accordance with what is taught in our current curriculum, or (c) how focused learners would be during the gamification classes, and

many more questions that have not been thoroughly examined. During my involvement in the above game-like English learning content while researching and writing my aforementioned articles, I felt that the combination of seemingly distracting elements could be so powerful that they might overwhelm the "learning" per se. Although the importance of a stress-free learning environment cannot be underestimated, it is at the same time questionable how well learners would be invested in balanced literacy development. There is no doubt that the mere copying of seemingly tempting elements of games will not guarantee positive learning outcomes.

In this short article, I have aimed to showcase how the English learning in Korea that takes place in online platforms embraces components of games in which teachers and learners join in playful interaction. This can facilitate teachers' teaching, learners' learning, and their interactions in a multimodal way. Over the past years, despite tremendous difficulties that teachers and learners have suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our transition from in-person, classroom-based education to online education has opened a new chapter to expand the definition of teaching and learning. New concepts are also knocking on the door of English education in Korea through which we can see innovative technology (such as the metaverse or AI-assisted programs) search for roles that have not been provided for within the traditional sense of schooling. It is time that we language teachers seek to experience (from learners' perspectives), what it means to learn English in this new era with new and smart tech devices, and to think (as teachers) of how to teach to learners with a new mindset.

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“More Equipped to Work Towards a Better World”: A Review of the 2022 International Conference

By Melvin Dixon

If you have attended a face-to-face KOTESOL international conference in the last 10 or so years, chances are pretty high that you've seen me there. However, the chances are pretty low that you have met me there. I don't make a habit of meeting new people at those events. Inside of workshops and sessions I am cooperative, work with my partners, and talk with my neighbors but not so much outside.

During this period of Covid, I've attended a fair number of conferences online hosted by organizations around the world. This past year in particular, I started noticing a difference between many of them and KOTESOL conferences. In one of the events I participated in last year, my breakout room group finished our activity a little early. My partners were educators working in different countries, with different insights, perspectives and experiences than my own, so I asked if we could exchange emails and chat about topics from time to time. They seemed excited at the idea. This year when I joined the same event, I never had the time in breakout groups to chat with others

“...a quick illustration of how the path to happiness can consist of simple choices, which was a theme of the workshop.”

beyond our given tasks, and at the end of the event, despite having learned new things, I felt alone. I quickly thought about previous KOTESOL online conferences and all of the opportunities to interact that were programmed into the experience. From the coffee chat to the Discord server, there are spaces to socialize, network, ask follow-up questions, and continue discussions started in earlier sessions. KOTESOL online conferences have done a great job of keeping me from feeling like I'm alone in my room staring at rows of faces. That is the energy I carried with me going into this year's IC; the anticipation of learning as well as connecting with others.

In many countries at the moment, there seems to be ongoing conversations on the purposes of education and what should be taught. Using narrow definitions, education can get reduced to a transactional practice; students come

to teachers, teachers tell students what they should know, and the students leave with what they need. This thinking seems to ignore research on how learning happens and what needs to be in place for effective learning to happen. The 2022 KOTESOL International Conference, April 30 to May 1, was titled “More Than Words: Teaching for a Better World,” a theme chosen by the Conference Committee chair, Lindsay Herron. It gives us an answer to the purpose of education in its title. The conference's design also addresses how learning best happens with its focus on well-being of both learners and teachers.

Friday night immediately delivered on both of these fronts. The pre-conference plenary, “Building a Better World by Breaking Bias,” hosted by Anu Gupta, offered pathways to a better world through self-reflection. The two guided meditation exercises certainly helped my well-being by allowing me to relax and to open myself to information presented that night and in the days to follow.

On Saturday morning, after the greetings in the Morning Coffee chat, the Opening Ceremony formally started the events. Welcome messages from Kathleen Stephens, former U.S. Ambassador to Korea, KOTESOL President Bryan Hale, and Lindsay Herron also further explained the conference theme and its importance. Lindsay Herron in particular gave context and focus to what to expect and the importance of the mission. As conference chair, she also provided procedural information and instructions as orientation for participants to allow for a full and meaningful experience.

Over the course of the next two days my conference journey was guided by the theme. I learned how to combine EFL improvement with lessons of different kinds of peace from Rebecca Oxford, I learned about global citizenship education from Francis Daehoon Lee and skills for conflict resolution on personal levels from Cheryl Woelk. All of these sessions provided philosophical explanations along with frameworks for facilitation and activities that I can implement in my classes. They were all quite useful.

I value the threads of related topics and issues often present in KOTESOL conferences, but truthfully, I rarely complete the thread. This international conference offered me a short bridge to reach the resolution of completion as I attended the two session loop offered by Constance Steinkuehler on Saturday and Kurt Squire on Sunday on the topic of games (mainly electronic and online) in language learning. Both sessions were as well attended and lively as the last time I stuck my head in a *PC-bang*.

A memorable moment was the session on English language education myths presented by Youngeun Jee and Ryuko Kubota. First of all, Youngeun Jee presented the session in Korean. Before she began she told us that it was a special occasion for her because in the course of her doctoral research this was her first opportunity to present in her native language. It was a touching moment

because it was apparent how much it meant to her. Also, a participant made the point that this may have been the first presentation at a KOTESOL IC conducted in the Korean language. This was a lesson on inclusion, on learners being able to see themselves reflected in their work and an illustration of what the abstract advertised as “ways of thinking that would contribute to linguistic and human diversity and equity.”

On Saturday, I scheduled myself for a pretty full day. I didn't see a clear break in sessions from, say, 12–1 p.m. for lunch, so I tried to meet the expectations of the planners, and I powered through until evening. That did, however, include me having pizza delivered, which I ate at my desk with my camera turned off. Sunday was a nice day weather-wise, and I promised myself a lunch break and a walk outside. In the positive psychology session with Marc Helgesen after my lunch break, as part of a “savoring” activity, he had us tell about a positive event in our lives to our small group. I didn't dig too deeply and told my partner about my lunchtime walk. I was soon relieved of any guilt for having missed an hour block of sessions because my walking experience was put to immediate use in the learning environment, and it offered me a quick illustration of how the path to happiness can consist of simple choices, which was a theme of the workshop. I joined a positive psychology group a few years ago, and I became interested in using some of the activities from that group in my classes. In this session, Helgesen showed some activities I could use in my classes, but even more compelling were the methods he showed to infuse positive psychology into my existing activities and practices.

I was delighted to see that Edzil.la was again selected as the facilitation tool for the event. It is easy to navigate, and access to the many features of the conference was always seconds away. After two long days, I took a deep breath. I could have used another guided meditation from Anu. After having allowed myself a few days at the end of the live sessions, I began to review and reflect. I appreciated the ease with which Edzil.la allowed me access to watch YouTube videos of sessions I attended but also videos of sessions I missed and of the asynchronous sessions. The

partnership between KOTESOL conferences and Edzil.la is money well spent for the organizers and the participants like myself as well.

Again the Discord, the Morning Coffee chat, and the Zoom hosts willing to keep rooms open when the time permitted for extra questions and friendly conversations built an atmosphere around the conference that was welcoming and engaging.

After attending the conference, I feel more equipped to work towards a better world through my practice. I am more aware of maintaining and improving my own well-being, that of my colleagues, and also my learners.

Like many of you, I do eagerly await the first face-to-face event in our near future, but I am grateful that the online versions have taught me the importance of the socializing and networking possibilities these events offer. I'm prepared to take advantage of these possibilities when the time comes.

The Reviewer

Melvin Dixon currently works at Gyeonggi University of Science and Technology, where he teaches and works in the Global Education Center preparing students for work and study abroad. His educational interests include reflective practice, the social brain, and lately he is excited about the research behind brain breaks, both for students and himself. Email: englishgtcc@gmail.com



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Member Spotlight: Greg Lewis

If you are at all familiar with the Yongin-Gyeonggi Chapter of KOTESOL, if only for a short period of time, you are sure to be familiar with the podcasts that the chapter is producing with much regularity. And if you have been attending KOTESOL online events with much regularity, you are sure to have met up with Greg Lewis, the hands and brains presently behind these podcasts. The English Connection has recently met up with Greg to unlock the mystery surrounding this chapter's best-kept member secret. — Ed.

TEC: To start off this interview, Greg, could you let our readers know a little about where you're from and what you did there?

Greg: I'm from a small town in southern Ontario, Canada. I think I've always been driven by curiosity, plus cancer at



▲ **An earlier version of Greg Lewis with his now-adult daughter.**

21 injected me with a desire to live life fully. That meant farming, so I hired onto a big agribusiness outfit where I learned a lot of the basics I would use later in life. For five years, I got my hands dirty and loved the process. Then my oldest brother called for help, so I moved my family to the West Coast to start a healthy food restaurant. When I returned to Ontario, I had learned about all I wanted to learn about agribiz, so I bought an ad in the original *Harrowsmith Magazine*, asking for the use of a

farm in exchange for vegetables. I got several responses and eventually settled on a 200-acre farm. I learned to work a team of Norwegian Fjord horses and then bought a wise old French Percheron mare named Peggy to help me in the bush. She taught me a lot about patience and how to "lean in." She also gave me two handsome colts who are still working today, as far as I know.

TEC: Many expat teachers in Korea come here early in their adult life, but I believe you came a little later. What made you pull up stakes and start a new career in a new country with a new language?

Greg: I began building homes, which took me across Canada, a stint in Germany, and an extended period in Japan. It was in Japan that I first heard of teaching English as a "thing." By this time, I was a licensed realtor, had co-founded a community theater, and had gotten involved in municipal politics. After losing the 2001 mayoral race, I took a course in teaching English and applied for a business degree online. To my surprise and delight, my extensive experience in business meant I was qualified to get a business degree. (I believed in miracles in those days!) Within days of receiving some fancy new documents in the mail, I was on a flight to teach English at a brand new *hagwon* in Daegu. Of course, the fact that I had just forked over thousands of dollars for nothing didn't sit

well with me, so four years later, I got my degree in business administration from York University in Toronto. Later, I went on to get my Masters of Applied Linguistics from USQ in Australia.

TEC: So, after flying into your academy teaching position in Daegu, what drew you to KOTESOL and to becoming an active member?

Greg: I was just curious. I went to a few KOTESOL conferences, then discovered that I had been referencing the *Korea TESOL Journal* during my CELTA course. In 2018, I found some podcasts on the Yongin-Gyeonggi Chapter's webpage, thought "hmm," and sent an email. Either James Rush or Stewart Gray, maybe both, replied and suggested I attend the upcoming conference.

TEC: You've become quite involved in podcasts these days, one of which you are doing regularly for the Yongin-Gyeonggi Chapter. Would you tell us about them and how you got interested in podcasting?



▲ **Presenting Greg Lewis!**

Greg: Yes, podcasting has taken on a life of its own. I have always loved theater of the mind, but it was only a fantasy until I stumbled onto the Yongin-Gyeonggi Chapter podcast that James Rush had started. I took what had been done and put my spin on it. It's a work in progress, and of course, I keep learning as I go. It's a lot of fun, and it gives me an excuse to bother people.



▲ *Ceramic lamp from a joyous January 2020 reunion Greg had in Mexico with his two brothers.*

a microphone?!" One thing I have learned from my previous life is that if you want something, you need to ask for it. You don't always get what you want, but you never know until you ask. So that's what got the ball rolling.

TEC: Yeah, "but if you try sometime, you just might find you get what you need," as the Rolling Stones once hummed into a microphone. The contest sounds like fun, but let's now turn from singing to questions on teaching. Would you tell us a little about your teaching context and what you enjoy most about teaching?

Greg: I've mostly taught university freshman English for the past 13 years. I've only taught at two universities, with my current job close to my home and away from Seoul. It's small and quiet, and more in line with what I want now: less hours. Teaching for me is a creative process. Creating opportunities for my students to discover connections is the most beautiful part of teaching for me.

TEC: And now let's turn 180 degrees: What do you find to be the biggest hurdles that you have faced in teaching?

Greg: Despite what I just said, I can be a bit of a tough guy in the classroom. I need to lighten up. I think I struggle with parsing learner intelligence from learner knowledge. Particularly in online classes, I will often neglect good concept checking and make assumptions about comprehension that are flat-out wrong. Then I get uptight and place unfair demands on students when really I'm the one who needs to be better prepared and pay closer attention to the details.

TEC: Paying more attention in the classroom is something any teacher can benefit from. What was teaching in the Covid era like for you? Were you prepared for it? Did it require paying more attention?

Greg: My classes remained live, online. It was initially a challenge, but I took it as an opportunity to learn more about what I had only touched in my MAPL CALL course. I have enjoyed online teaching, and I'm really looking forward to

TEC: I hear that you're creating a podcast contest of sorts for your chapter. That sounds like an interesting project! Please tell us a little more about it.

Greg: Yup, another excuse to bother people. Yeah, that baby was still wet and squirming in my arms when I mentioned it to you. The first person I mentioned it to was Martin Todd, who I hadn't seen in-person for two years. I guess I was excited, blabbed about my idea, and he said, "That's a great idea." Then that evening I got an email from you asking me about this interview, and I thought, "Is this an opportunity to possibly, maybe, hopefully, entice David Shaffer into humming a few bars into

getting back into the classroom. I flipped half of my classes back to face-to-face for the second part of last semester. It took a bit to convince my students to leave their cocoons, but once they did, they got pretty excited. They did fine online, but the shift in energy in the classroom was palpable. That was a delight to see, and I'm looking forward to that classroom energy again soon.

TEC: What would you like to see KOTESOL doing more of, or doing better, going forward?



▲ *Greg Lewis in a contemplative mood.*

Greg: Oh, I would love to see a well-defined long-term plan to reach people outside of KOTESOL. I suppose the chapter podcast is my little effort to that end, but it's certainly not reaching beyond KOTESOL. In my opinion, organizations like this need to be constantly re-inventing themselves to remain relevant. I just want to see people excited about the future of KOTESOL, but it takes new blood and active participation from a lot of people to keep the necessary momentum.

TEC: Also going forward, if you look into your crystal ball, what do you see Greg Lewis doing in the next, say, five to ten years?

Greg: I want to retire in a year or two. I take that back. I am looking forward to not working "for" anyone, but rather "with" people. I love designing and building and creating. I'm a sculptor, so I'm itching to get my hands dirty again and start some new projects.

TEC: Well, the best of luck in sculpting that next phase in your multi-faceted journey, and many thanks for so nicely sculpting this interview!

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

The Brain Connection

Teacher Well-being and Talking to Strangers

By Dr. Curtis Kelly

A few months ago, KOTESOL's delightful Sydney Lee and Andrew Griffiths asked me to do a presentation on teacher well-being. "What?" I said, "I've done research on *student* well-being, but not on teachers. Maybe I should do..." And they replied, "Nope. We want teacher well-being," and that led me to a couple months of learning all I could about the topic. Along the way, I made a fascinating discovery I'll get to later, one that made me fixate on strangers. Here is what happened:

To prepare for the talk, I read a number of articles and watched numerous online videos. You can see some quite good ones on YouTube, made by people in our field, such as Brierton, Palmer, Santos, and my favorite, Mercer and Gregersen.

Until I started doing this research, I was hindered by the feeling that it was kind of selfish to worry about our *own* well-being instead of that of our *learners*, but if there was one thing these experts kept hitting on, it was the overall importance of having a healthy, happy teacher to make healthy, happy classroom experiences for our students. Our well-being is a big factor in theirs. The need to maintain teacher well-being was particularly obvious during the pandemic. In the US, for example, so many teachers have quit because of work overload and other stresses that substitute teachers are being paid as much per day as a professor in Japan, about \$250, and even more if there are signing bonuses. We need to better support our teachers. Sarah Mercer related something she had read: "If you want to do the best for the kids, start by loving and caring for their teachers."

So, a concern with teacher well-being is not so selfish after all, is it? This leads us to the next point, how we can maintain it. A healthy lifestyle – getting enough sleep, eating well, and so on – play a role, but most of us already know that. We know we should exercise, quit smoking, meditate, and get our flu shots, so there is no reason to say so again here. In fact, in Susan Pinker's (if you recognize the

name, good job. She is sister of the famous cognitive psychologist, Steven Pinker) TED Talk on longevity, she offered research that showed that all these factors keep older people healthy. However, two other factors far outdo the rest, and since they are related to the social brain, a topic I often write about in this column, they were of personal interest to me.

The second most powerful predictor of longevity is having *close relationships*; not very surprising since that information has been out for quite a while (and it explains why men are twice as likely to die in any given year as women; women tend to be better at maintaining close relationships). But the top predictor for longevity was an eyebrow raiser. It was *social integration*, meaning having interactions with the people around you all day, whether it be family members or the person who makes your coffee.

I believe *social integration*, talking to people, protects teachers as well, an idea supported by the research available on educationsupport.org.uk. They found 77% of the teachers surveyed during the pandemic reported substantial work-related anxiety, depression, or exhaustion (only surpassed by their administrators who reported 84%), and more than half of the teachers considered quitting. They also reported that talking to someone was the best way to combat these problems. A quarter of the teachers had no one to get support from, with the rest finding support from family and friends (58%), a partner or spouse (52%), and colleagues (24%). Support from an employer came for only a measly 10%. The researchers concluded that the administration should show their appreciation more, but also, provide opportunities for teachers to help each other, such as by encouraging ad hoc groups.

In short, talking to others is more important for well-being than we realize, and that includes talking to strangers. Let me say that again, "talking to strangers," something we far

undervalue and often portray as dangerous.

At another event, I ended up in a breakout room with Cambridge University Press' amazing Nigel McQuitty. The lockdown in Australia had just ended, and he talked about how he loved going out again to talk to strangers. He taught me that there is an art to it; just saying "hello" rarely works. Instead, you need something that begs a more detailed response. For example, if you see someone fishing, you might ask "Are you going to take home all the big ones?"

What Nigel was saying hit a nerve with me. I often note how my Japanese students shudder at the idea of having a conversation with someone they do not know. It is sometimes called "willingness to communicate" in our field, but I do not think the term is accurate. The *will* might be there, but not the *know-how*. And yet, won't the ability to talk to people they do not know become an important language skill once they enter companies? They will have to interact with all kinds of people, including strangers. So, I often make a homework assignment in which my students are told to start a conversation with a stranger (old folks on the train are the best).

"Whereas we tend to fear strangers in these modern times, ancient peoples... used to think of strangers as gifts from heaven."

Following that interesting conversation with Nigel, he mailed me a book to read, one he was also reading himself: *The Power of Strangers* by Joe Keohane. It was mesmerizing. Whereas we tend to fear strangers in these modern times, ancient peoples (except those ravaged by Europeans) used to think of strangers as gifts from heaven. Visitors would bring them new technologies and information about the outside world. They were the mass media of the day.

Well, those times are gone, but the book listed study after study in which even people who do not like talking to strangers reported they enjoyed the experience when they did. Likewise, although their biggest fear was being rejected, that fear was generally unwarranted.

The Columnist

Curtis Kelly (EdD) founded the JALT Mind, Brain, and Education SIG and was a professor of English at Kansai University in Japan until he retired. His life mission is "to relieve the suffering of the classroom." He has written over 30 books, 100 articles, and given over 500 presentations. This article was based on one he wrote for the *MindBrainEd Think Tanks*, so please subscribe! Email: ctskelly@gmail.com

I so enjoyed the book that I wrote Joe Keohane about it, knowing that as a stranger, he'd feel compelled to answer, and he did. I asked if he had any advice for starting the conversation, obviously the hardest part. He wrote back:

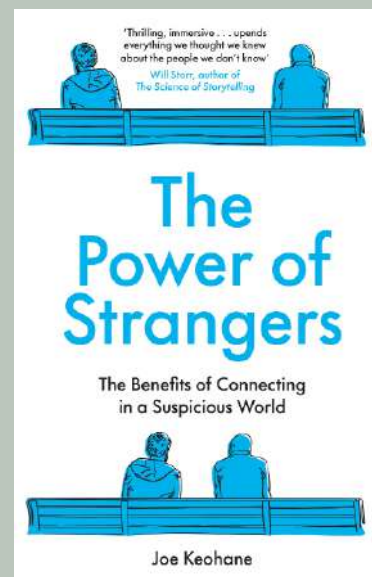
Sure, just follow your curiosity. If someone is doing something interesting, or has something interesting, or even if you've noticed something interesting and want to share, go for it. Be respectful, be curious, don't be a creep. People tend to be wary at first, but generally warm up and are frequently quite wonderful (personal communication, February 2022).

He also passed on a tip from a communications expert in London, Georgie Nightingall:

When someone asks you how you're doing – in a store, say – you usually say "Fine, how are you?" This is a big missed opportunity. Georgie suggests giving a numerical answer. "I'd say I'm a 7 out of 10. How are you?" This is like a magic trick. People usually give a numerical answer back, and all of a sudden you're talking. Once you start talking, your job is to listen.

To summarize today's article, we can safely say that teacher well-being is essential for learner well-being. The research indicates that talking to others is probably the most important factor in teacher well-being, and longevity in general. Talking to others does not mean just talking to our closest friends and family, it means talking to everyone, including strangers as well, despite our apprehensions.

So, my friends, do you see where I am going with this? Have you figured out one of the best ways for you to thrive and be happy? Well, guess what? It is right here. Welcome to KOTESOL!



Reference

Keohane, J. (2021). *The power of strangers: The benefits of connecting in a suspicious world*. Penguin.



The Classroom Connection



Encouraging Creativity in Korean Classrooms

By Peter Thwaites

Language learning is an inherently creative endeavor. We do not passively absorb new language; we construct our linguistic system through mental activity. Much of this requires creativity. We create hypotheses about language, for example, and test them in our speech or our writing, learning from the feedback we receive.

A willingness to take risks is an important part of this endeavor – so says a 2013 article by Jack C. Richards, entitled *Creativity in Language Teaching*, which lists characteristics of creative classrooms, framing risk-taking as a key component. Creative teachers are risk-takers, Richards argues, willing to try out new methods and use varied approaches to match with students. Good learners also take risks. Richards describes one student who took the risk of showing samples of his creative writing to his academic writing teacher and was rewarded with encouragement to make use of his creative writing skills in his research reports. When Richards turns to the properties of classroom activities which encourage creativity, risk-taking is again an essential component. In order to stimulate creativity, Richards implies, activities must encourage learners to let go of their worries about making mistakes so that they can push their linguistic boundaries.

In my experience, a willingness among learners to take risks and behave in creative ways is strongly influenced by a country's educational culture. I have taught in contexts where the local culture encouraged students to be talkative and unafraid of trying out new language in class. I've also taught in contexts (and many of my classrooms in Korea fit this category) where students are risk-averse and need considerable encouragement to be creative. If it's true that the willingness to take risks is culturally bound, then it follows that our approach to nurturing classroom creativity should also vary from one context to another.

What I'd like to suggest in this article, though, is that there is one very general technique which, when used appropriately, can help us to bring out our students' creativity in almost any context. This technique is the creative application of constraint.

The role of constraint on creativity is well described in an article published November 22, 2019, on the Harvard Business Review website (<https://hbr.org/2019/11/why-constraints-are-good-for-innovation>) that addresses a conventional wisdom on creativity, namely, the view that “by getting rid

of rules and boundaries, creativity and innovative thinking will thrive” (para. 1). The study's authors argue that this view, though apparently widely held amongst business leaders, is incorrect. Reviewing more than a hundred studies on the relationship between creativity and constraint in businesses, the authors found that when managers imposed constraints, employees generated more varied solutions and connected ideas from more diverse sources than when working under freer, less constrained conditions.

In addition to challenging this misconception about creativity, the HBR article also offers a helpful taxonomy of productive constraints. It contains only three items: limiting resources (such as the working budget), imposing specific processes (such as following a pre-selected method for generating ideas), and specifying detailed completion criteria (such as the need to use certain materials in the construction of a new product).

It isn't too difficult to think of ways to apply these constraint types to language classrooms. In fact, we use them all the time. We limit resources, for instance, when we restrict students' dictionary usage or provide them with limited time to complete a task. We often impose specific processes when we insist that they produce a written essay plan or first draft before submitting a final essay. And we set completion criteria whenever we provide students with a rubric for their assignments.

But is the creative use of constraint really effective in all contexts? Does it apply equally well to the gregarious, risk-taking students I taught in Spain or the Middle East and to the quiet, risk-averse students I often face here in Korea? I would argue that it can but that a different approach is required in each setting.

Several years ago, while working at the British Council in Oman, I was asked to teach a month-long summer school for a group of teenagers. My students were the school's most linguistically advanced – confident, intelligent, self-motivated people with diverse interests. Seeking to give them room to spread their wings, I developed a “blank slate” project-based course in which they would be given free rein to create, in groups of three or four, a creative project that showcased their skills.

The students' initial reception to this idea was positive. They were excited by the broad remit,

and threw themselves into the process of gathering ideas. By the second or third lesson, work had begun on school newspapers, short films shot on mobile phones, and blogs about video games. There was energy in the atmosphere. But by the midway point, it was becoming clear that something was going wrong. Enthusiasm was in decline, and progress on many of the projects had stalled. Some groups claimed to be finished, but their work was low on quality and barely hinted at the students' language skills. Confidence dropped as learners began to realize that their projects would not match their expectations. Conflicts emerged over the direction that projects were taking, and accusations began to fly over who was pulling their weight and who wasn't. Most groups rallied as the course ended, but a sense of disappointment still hung over the finished projects.

In the light of the conclusions of the HBR article, we can interpret this situation as being a problem of too little constraint. Though my students' started with great enthusiasm and creativity, somewhere along the way they switched from this creative mindset to what the HBR article terms the path-of-least-resistance, a unspoken decision to get things wrapped up as quickly and effortlessly as possible, and in doing so, taking comfortable options rather than pushing for greater achievement. My students wanted their projects to be successful, but they also wanted to relax and conserve energy (it was a summer school, after all). A more proactive set of constraints, such as specifying the use of multiple media or insisting upon a live presentation to wrap up the projects, might have helped to tip the balance from lethargy to creativity.

Here in Korea, I've found myself faced with a slightly different challenge when seeking to stimulate my students' creativity. Although hard-working and diligent, my Korean students tend to be reluctant to take risks with their English. In my conversation classes, for example, the most trusted strategy often seems to be to simply keep quiet. When teaching presentation skills, the biggest challenge is often persuading students to let go of their scripts. Admittedly, my Korean students are often less linguistically advanced than the Omani group I described above, but even lower-level students in Oman, and several other contexts in which I've taught, seem much more at ease with the idea that risk is a part of the learning process.

It can be tempting to believe that this risk aversion is itself the result of constraint, that students already feel somehow restricted in their language use. We might therefore feel that our priority should be the removal of constraint, not its addition. But even in the Korean contexts described above, I believe this would be the wrong approach. Admittedly, the approach to constraint that I've found most helpful here in Korea is not the same one that I ought to have used in my Omani summer school. There, I needed constraints to raise the stakes, to ensure no easing-off on the risk-taking. Here, I've found the

most useful approach to be one that helps to make higher risk levels manageable. In other words, where in the Omani context I needed to use constraint as a "push" factor, here in Korea I need it to "pull" my students.

A task sequence that illustrates some "pull" factors is provided by Dave and Jane Willis in their 2009 book *Doing Task-Based Teaching*. Their activity focuses on the topic of drug abuse, and it contains a sequence of increasingly demanding tasks that slowly pull students towards the boundaries of their competence. Firstly, students are asked to individually respond to a series of statements (e.g., "All drugs should be legalized," "All convicted drug dealers should be given long prison sentences") by rating them on a four-point scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*, making notes to justify their opinions. These ratings and notes are then used as the starting point of a group discussion in which each student explains their own rating. Then follows the negotiation of a "group rating" for each statement. Finally, the results of this negotiation are presented to the rest of the class.

Compare this sequence to a simpler approach in which students simply talk to their partner about the same topic, and you'll see how much constraint is built into Willis and Willis' approach: constraints in what aspects of the topic are discussed, in the processes used to generate ideas, and in the task completion criteria. The goal of these constraints is to nurture students who are, in the Willis' words, "confident enough to make the most of their language with all its shortcomings and inaccuracies," thereby laying "a basis for [future] language development" (p. 33). They do this by breaking down a large and potentially intimidating topic into a series of much less intimidating sub-tasks. Together, these provide the pull factor needed to encourage students to use their linguistic resources creatively. The risk has become tolerable.

When planning lessons here in Korea, I believe that learners benefit when teachers use constraints to scaffold their exposure to risk in this way. It follows that teachers can benefit from reflecting on ways that constraints could be integrated into their classes. Imagine a speaking activity in which pairs of students discuss their morning routine. What constraints can we add to bring out students' creativity? Could we limit their resources? Specify that only the first thirty minutes from waking up can be discussed. Could we specify a process? Before the discussion, make a detailed list of everything you do within this period, and then base the discussion on these lists. Could we set completion criteria? Students must identify as many similarities with their partner's routine as possible, and be prepared to report these to the class. By constraining tasks in this way, you might find that your students' creativity finds the conditions it needs to emerge.

The Columnist

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