

Interaction Online

Lindsay Clandfield and Jill Hadfield
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Reviewed by James Kimball

INTRODUCTION

If you are like everyone else in TESOL, you have likely spent a great deal of time on the internet teaching your classes and communicating with students. Unfortunately, because of the coronavirus, the days of teaching traditional face-to-face classes have become a distant memory. This turn of events, foisted upon teachers regardless of experience and qualifications, is expected to continue. As a result, teaching online is now a basic skill set all teachers must acquire.

It turns out that some instructors already had a background in digital technologies and were comfortable acclimating to the virtual landscape. Others, at all levels and sectors, had a rockier introduction to teaching online. It is not only teachers who have to master a learning curve. Our learners, too, must adapt to studying online. The issues are two-fold: The first, platform familiarity and bandwidth; and the second, content and interaction patterns.

Luckily, there is a helpful resource for readers in search of guidance and ready-made activities: *Interaction Online*, by Lindsay Clandfield and Jill Hadfield. More specifically, it is a resource book with activities and focuses on improving online interaction. It should also be noted that this is not a how-to book covering technologies or online tools, although it does touch on this subject briefly.

SUMMARY

Interaction Online is part of the Cambridge series Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers. This means that it is an idea bank of practical activities, not an in-depth technical or academic dive into online learning. For that topic or issue, consult *How to Teach English with Technology* (Dudeny & Hockley, 2007).

Interaction Online begins with an introduction covering who the book is aimed at, the principles of interaction, and why it matters for success in online learning, a brief look at tools, and how the book is organized.

Chapter 1, *Setting Up and Managing Online Interaction*, is indispensable for getting started. In addition to technical considerations, such as platform or application, there are classroom management tips: setting rules, giving instructions, setting deadlines, using students' names, encouraging interaction, and managing time and lesson activities.

Skipping all the way to Chapter 7, *Feedback and Assessment*, readers will find a number of useful tips on why and how to give feedback and correct errors when teaching online. What sticks in my mind is the section on extending language, or upgrading language. These are springboards for nurturing interaction and upgrading language skills. The assessment sections are also valuable. What part of an online course does an instructor assess? The problems and solutions unique to online learning are not as cut and dried as in a face-to-face class. Chapter 7 offers assessment examples and sample rubrics to explore for your own use.

Chapter 8, *Task Design*, illustrates how teachers can design online tasks to fit their own context. There are many issues to consider when setting up an activity. As task type and content are rarely a one-size-fits-all prospect for every class, it is worth exploring different ways of implementing an activity to meet the needs of a specific context.

Sandwiched in between are Chapters 2–6. On offer are practical, creative ideas for activities – 79 of them. They are divided into categories based on type of task: personal interaction (13), where students share and exchange personal information; factual interaction (19), where students share information about people, places, and things; creative interaction (19), where students engage in collaborative tasks; critical interaction (15), where learners debate, rank, and share perspectives on issues; and fanciful interaction (13), where learners solve

puzzles, role play, and create.

And there is a common denominator among most, if not all, of these activities. They are *tasks* (Nunan, 2004), in that learners are mainly focused on meaning, not form. Language use is authentic and outcome-based (target or pedagogical).

EVALUATION

There is much to like about this bank of tasks. The content and design are bound to enrich online interaction among learners. For many teachers and learners, navigating the online environment is a work in progress, and the five categories of tasks give reflective, imaginative teachers free reign to adapt topics and activities within a principled framework. Unit 8, *Task Design*, emphasizes the need to choose among different interaction patterns and lesson staging options.

Fostering interaction is the main goal of these activities. Genuine participation is one area of my classroom experience that I am always working to develop. Getting students to integrate themselves within a dialogue with others is not easy. In *Online Interaction*, instructors are reminded to provide learners with language to agree or disagree, to comment, reply, or negotiate meaning. The simple tasks worked well for me, and not just with beginner to elementary students (A1–A2). The tasks for this level work well as warm-ups with higher-level classes. These easier tasks allowed students to bond or build a community before tackling more complex tasks.

Another highlight for me is the numerous examples of task feedback meant to improve interaction with learners. These include sentence starters and ideal stages in the task cycle to give feedback. Just like in a face-to-face class, learners might feel disconnected from class and lose motivation. This feedback, which typically marks lesson stages, is also meant to maintain student motivation.

As far as activities are concerned, they work. In my experience, the simple, universal topics work the best. For example, *Foodies* (p. 36) and *Post a Recipe* (p. 74) generated a lot of interest among students. Food is universal. And I was pleased with the success we experienced with *Art Monologues* (p. 85). *Estate Agents* (p. 108) generated a lot of questions and answers and opinions among older learners with life experience.

Not all of the topics work well on their own, so they need more context or sufficient cultural background information to engage students. *Number Plate Story* (p. 103) did not work smoothly. Unfortunately, personalized license plates do not transition well in my context, especially if learners do not yet drive cars. And *Extreme Ironing* (p. 96) did not generate much enthusiasm or output. More trial and error with context and background is necessary to make some of these tasks engaging and meaningful. This does not equate to failure on our part (or the authors). It simply means the teacher should adapt the task by choosing a more relevant topic/meme. And try again.

Classroom management and interaction patterns matter in both face-to-face and online classes. This resource book is designed to be used as a supplement to fully online courses and blended or flipped courses. For example, some of the more time-intensive, complex tasks found in the Critical and Fanciful groups work better if learners have had time to prepare. In a post-coronavirus world, this resource book will still be of value.

As with other books in the Cambridge series, each activity is headlined by a simple graphic highlighting the *outline* (what is it about), *level* (minimum suitable level to complete the task), *learning focus* (language), *time* (how long does it take to complete), and *preparation* (how much time will the teacher need to invest). This makes it quite fast and easy to select a suitable task.

One minor complaint: There is a companion website for the book (<https://esource.cambridge.org/#interactiononline>), but it is a bitter disappointment. After inputting your activation code found at the back of the book, readers access a small selection of activities from the book itself. There is little value to downloading a few PDFs. For Cambridge's consideration: Supporting materials, such as bonus tasks not included in the book would add value. Or more examples on adapting tasks would be helpful. Or perhaps feedback from teachers on how they have used the tasks.

CONCLUSION

Interaction Online is just what we need right now. We are moving more firmly into online learning with every age group and level, in every setting, whether public or private, tertiary or primary. Instructors

are also grappling with how to foster learner interaction and promote language acquisition. Gone are the days of the static, one-way online listening laboratory, the multiple-choice grammar quiz, and read and check. These outdated, computerized activities are not inherently bad. In fact, they have a time and a place in a distance learning component of an ELT program. But technology marches on. In fact, it is zooming right along. For teachers who want more ideas, who want to conduct more effective, meaningful classes (synchronously or asynchronously), *Interaction Online* offers a practical, creative, useful resource.

THE REVIEWER

James Kimball holds an MSc in educational management in TESOL from Aston University, and his research interests include program evaluation and classroom dynamics. Taking part in teacher development activities has been a long-time interest. He is an assistant professor of English in the Liberal Arts Department of Semyung University in Korea.

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Online Teaching at Its Best

Online Teaching at Its Best: Merging Instructional Design with Teaching and Learning Research

Linda B. Nilson & Ludwika A. Goodson

Jossey-Bass (2017)

Pages: x + 272. (ISBN: 978-1-119-24229-1, paperback)

Reviewed by Tory S. Thorkelson

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, it is quite clear that this book is primarily a textbook for faculty (and perhaps graduate students), designers of online courses, and administrators. Still, it is a lot more than that. It is well researched, covers the necessary research and lessons from pedagogy, methodology, cognitive science, motivation, and even social interactions, and stresses the importance of professional development. It manages to link all of these things together fairly seamlessly and with minimal repetition of content, except where necessary.

SUMMARY

The eight chapters cover a lot of ground. Chapter 1 begins with an exploration of best teaching practices according to research, including with an understandable nod to the first author's previous book on that topic, namely, Linda Nilson's *Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*. Chapter 2 discusses how to set realistic and achievable outcomes for courses, and Chapter 3 moves to the course level, with tips and advice for designing unified and coherent courses. Chapter 4 is dedicated to an online methodology based on cognitive science, and Chapter 5 discusses how to motivate students to succeed in

their online studies. Chapter 6 is all about the social aspects of teaching, including interactions between students and faculty, student-to-student interactions, and building a sense of community. Chapter 7 deals with accessibility in terms of attitude, knowledge about tools and format, and knowledge about implementation. Appendix B offers lists of resources for implementing strategies to enhance accessibility in six areas to supplement the chapter. Finally, Chapter 8 discusses how to build a supportive culture for online teaching through professional development and a favorable institutional attitude towards supporting such programs properly. Appendix A is a step-by-step checklist for online course development, with tips and additional resources for implementing many of the most important ideas discussed in the book.

EVALUATION

This book's advantage is the overview of so many related topics of importance and interest to those trying to design or provide the best online experience for their students. The chapters are filled with links and examples of real courses and online resources in strategic locations. This is so that all readers – even those who do not want to read the entire book from cover to cover in the order it is written – can easily find the page or section necessary for their particular needs. Numerous exhibits summarize the key points in a given area for quick access. As previously mentioned, Appendix A does an excellent job of summarizing essential aspects of the overall book in a few pages for those who do not want to read all 216 pages. There is also some overlap between certain sections and issues, such as assessment, which is dealt with in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, but this is natural and necessary when so much information is being provided in separate chapters with topics that often overlap.

The chapter on motivation was a pleasure to read because it offered some updated information and research on an area that has been of personal and professional interest to me for many years. For example, the authors state that psychological research has recently progressed beyond behaviorism and considering a necessary balancing of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The focus has moved to factors impacting students, including interest, goals, self-efficacy, choice, autonomy, achievement, and social needs (p. 110).

The disadvantages are less numerous but do exist. Trying to balance a readership's needs as diverse as faculty, students, designers, and administrators is undoubtedly not an easy task. The target audience of faculty means that a true beginner might be a bit lost when trying to connect all themes and topics into a comprehensible whole; however, it will be of practical use to the groups mentioned previously, especially readers who have at least some prior knowledge of such areas as course design, teaching, and educational theory. Another concern, as internet content is ever-changing, would be how likely the links and tools from 2018 are to still be active in 2020 and beyond. For example, there is not one mention of Zoom or similar platforms/technologies anywhere.

The final issue is the focus on North American examples and references. While this is understandable, it made me sigh as I read of the policies and initiatives offered at so many universities in the US and Canada. These offerings have yet to be established or dealt with in our EFL environment here in Korea. For example, faculty and students may be willing to switch from offline to online courses with a reasonable amount of lead time and preparation. Unfortunately, without IT support and a lack of institutional infrastructure and incentives, the faculty are destined to succeed or fail alone or feel unappreciated by their colleagues or the university as a whole. Regardless of what students expect or believe, this only adds to the obstacles in making a genuinely meaningful educational experience for those who take the chance to develop or enroll in such courses.

In the end, I was impressed with the depth and breadth of material covered by this book. It is not an ideal choice for a true beginner – and I would probably not use it for teaching undergraduate students or recommend it to a novice in the fields of education or course design, for example. However, as both a reference and resource book for someone in higher education – particularly those in need of a balanced overview with both theoretical foundations and practical insights along with numerous examples of successful courses, tools, techniques, and policies that have worked for others facing the same challenges, I would highly recommend this book for a place on their shelf. While there are other books available, and I did look at a few online and peruse their reviews, this volume lives up to its high rating on various sites. It will not quickly be replaced by something better until a second edition or future editions update the tools and suggestions, hopefully from a post-COVID perspective. That is something the authors could not have realistically

anticipated, any more than the rest of the world did, so I will not be holding my breath or planning to do so anytime soon.

THE REVIEWER

Tory S. Thorkelson (BA, BEd, MEd in TESL/TEFL, PhD in Language Studies / Curriculum Development) is a proud Canadian who has been an active KOTESOL member since 1998 and has presented at many local and international conferences. He is a past president of the KOTESOL Seoul Chapter, a past president of KOTESOL, and an active KOTESOL Teacher Training member. He is also an associate professor for HYU's English Language and Literature Program. He has co-authored research studies and textbooks, including a university-level textbook, *World Class English*, with a team of fellow KOTESOL members, several papers like this one, and a few e-books. Currently, he is a regular contributor to *EFL Magazine*. Email: thorkor@hotmail.com

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Applying George M. Jacobs and Harumi Kimura's *Cooperative Learning and Teaching to the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Cooperative Learning and Teaching

George M. Jacobs and Harumi Kimura

Virginia, USA: TESOL International (2013).

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Reviewed by Yih Ren

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of social inequalities and exposed social injustice and racial discrimination embedded in many “-isms” (e.g., orientalism, hierarchism, and nationalism). It has imposed changes and challenges on education itself, as well as classroom dynamics. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents have all shared mixed feelings when facilitating online schooling experiences. Online education, also known as e-learning or distance learning, has been an essential pedagogical tool that benefits learners worldwide. However, it has become the only option for students in different continents. As a result, COVID-19 has opened up more space for critical evaluation of online education.

Cooperative learning (CL) is widely accepted to increase learners' communicative skills and interdependent understanding. Furthermore, CL collectively serves as a discipline for developing effective, collaborative learning and teaching that can be employed not merely in the classroom but also in society. In *Cooperative Learning and Teaching*, George M. Jacobs and Harumi Kimura offer educators different approaches and CL techniques for use in English language classrooms.

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENT

In this well-elaborated, incredibly practical, and still slender book, Jacobs and Kimura give us five chapters with techniques, rich examples, and praxis to English language teaching and learning. These five chapters, including a short introduction, are presented in the manner of peeling back the layers of the onion to see CL for what it is. The *Introduction* (Chapter 1) primarily distinguishes CL from regular group activities and addresses what will be illustrated in the following chapters. Chapter 2, *Why Use Group Activities?*, explains both advantages of group work with CL and obstacles that will require careful preparation throughout implementation. Chapter 3, *Preparing for Cooperative Learning*, is concerned with the elements that will help prepare CL activities, including attention signal design, seating arrangement, group size, and group membership. Chapter 4, *Four Teaching Principles for Interaction*, delineates four core directions for enhancing interactions: (a) maximum peer interaction, (b) equal opportunity to participate, (c) individual accountability, and (d) positive interdependence. Chapter 5, *Four Teaching Principles for Bonding*, on the other hand, highlights the social meaning of CL beyond group and classroom: (a) group autonomy, (b) heterogeneous grouping, (c) cooperative as a value, and (d) using cooperative skills.

CRITIQUE

Readers may ask why I have chosen to write a *critique* instead of an *evaluation*. However, I would argue that the distinction is superfluous. Critique, according to Janks (2012), is both backward- and forward-looking, meaning that it can critically engage us. CL has been studied since the 1990s, and it has also been adopted worldwide within different contexts. In the field of TESOL, CL is an old friend. Its advantage is well documented, but drawbacks have also been shown. Ghufroon and Ermawati (2018) point out that CL can be problematic and counterproductive as it requires preparation, arrangement, and management. Of course, Jacobs and Kimura are aware of several factors that may lead to CL success or failure. They directly address potential issues or concerns on group activity planning (pp. 5–6), classroom management (pp. 10–15), group interaction (Chapter 4), and beyond-group cooperation (Chapter 5).

Also, they underscore the fluidity and flexibility within their teaching methods by emphasizing the importance of particular teaching contexts. Moreover, as Freire (1998) remarked, learning is not merely concerned with memorizing words but with utilizing the language and expressing one's thoughts reflected within the world in which they exist.

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY

TESOL's critical pedagogy framework has been getting a bit more attention (e.g., Pennycook, 1999) in developing a more holistic notion that language is not a static object but embedded within evolving identities and social experiences. I am glad that Jacobs and Kimura reiterate such an essential aspect of teaching. Teachers who understand and value this approach to education need to reflect on dynamical social contexts and also need to hear how their students negotiate within social contexts. The CL praxis is the central key to critical education. Understandably, a thin book primarily offering in-classroom, hands-on CL activities does not uphold and prolong the dialogue on this affair with sufficient depth and relevance.

This book walks readers through the implementation of CL activities, from a small stage to a much larger stage. It begins with the *Introduction* (Chapter 1), differentiating CL activities from group activities. Then, Chapter 2 explains how group activities can promote students' learning outcomes. Chapter 3 takes CL to the preparation stage that facilitates cooperation among groups. Chapters 4 and 5 extend some CL techniques to the social dimension related to social interdependence theory (e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1999, 2009). The layout of these five chapters, starting with something as small and detailed as the definition of CL activities, progresses to a large picture that goes beyond school matters. More pointedly, social theories that promote quality cooperation, accountability, group autonomy, heterogeneity, and cognitive competence, interwoven within step-by-step CL activities illustrated in the book, provide value beyond the scope of a technique booklet.

CONNECTION TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed many challenges to education, mainly appearing in underdeveloped countries/regions and disadvantaged communities and families, yet it has opened up an opportunity for us to exercise the spirit of cooperative learning. Ivone et al. (2020) put together nine cooperative lessons, including ideas to help teachers manage online classes. Noticeably, this article reconciles difficulties presented in Jacob and Kimura's book, such as student workload, classroom management, and classroom design. However, the article amplifies even more concerns about social inequalities during the pandemic, such as lack of access to the internet and computer devices, lack of online education experience, and discriminatory pandemic pods (Swerdlow, 2020) that disadvantage students of poverty or disability.

Echoing these nine activities designated by Ivone et al. (2020) for distance learning, we can also see how CL techniques in Jacobs and Kimura's book can enhance learning outcomes and raise awareness of equality and apprenticeship. For example, *The Same Game* (p. 15) and *Circle of Speakers* (p. 22), aiming to help students and the teacher find commonalities and equal participation, can benefit trust- and connection-building among students. Also, the teacher, through careful implementation, can better manage all students to create non-discriminatory learning groups based on their mutual interests, location, or personality. Activities like *Write-Pair-Switch* (p. 20), *Everyone Can Explain* (p. 24), *Circle of Writers* (p. 33), and *Think Aloud Pairs* (p. 35) encourage peer interaction, emotion sharing, thought sharing, and cognitive processing. On the other hand, the teacher's role in the online classroom is questionable because face-to-face intervention and communication are limited. Teachers engaging in CL activities should create a learning space where students and the teacher can share and cooperate, even through Zoom breakout rooms and Google Slides and Docs; this creates a safe space where emotions and feelings are invited.

COVID-19 may have caused pain, grief, and conflict, but it has also allowed us to reflect on the community aspect of learning. Education as a laboratory act of knowing (Freire & Romas, 1993) should empower teachers and students by mapping language, thought, and the world. A conversation between Kimura and Jacobs back in 2009 (Jacobs, 2009) ends with Jacob drawing the connection between CL and outside the classroom. Learning English or a second language is not storing a prior

linguistic system. It is more like negotiating and constructing ideologies through interaction with self and people in the world.

Jacob and Kimura are passionate about learning, teaching, and good education. With concrete examples and techniques, this book actively engages students and the teacher to cooperate within meaningful tasks and dialogues. The book also serves as a reminder that, even through a computer screen, a pair of headphones, Google Slides, or Zoom breakout rooms, we can still achieve what good education intends to do – make society a better place (p. 40; also cited in Archambault, 1964).

THE REVIEWER

Yih Ren is a language teacher, an educator, a researcher, and a film critic nested at the University of San Francisco. His primary research interests include performative bicultural identity and SLA in the Asian diaspora community and second language teacher's education. Email: yihren43@gmail.com or yren27@usfca.edu

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