

# The English Connection

A Publication of KOTESOL

## This Issue:

An interview with Lindsay Clanfield

Teaching with Skype

Korea vs. Mexico

Life of an NSET

The NEAT Test

Culture in the Classroom

KOTESOL Views

Winter 2012 Volume 16, Issue 4



**Student centered-  
Dogme**  
Chia Suan Chong

**Tolerance of Ambiguity**  
Ben Naismith



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

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**Cover photo:** *Mt. Taebaek, known for its fierce winds and deep snow, is home to Korea's ancient Yew trees aging nearly 1,000 years. Wind driven snow creates decorative "Snow Flowers" extending several inches from the branches. (David Hasenick)*

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# Editor's Welcome

Dear Reader,

KOTESOL's International Conference has come and gone, and by all the good comments I heard it was a great success. Congratulations to Phil Owen and his entire team for putting together a terrific conference. It was great to meet KOTESOL members and hear what they like about The English Connection, and how we can improve. It was also good to talk to some of our contributors from the fall issue such as Scott Thornbury and Fredricka Stoller. I hope that you enjoyed our conference preview, and we look forward to providing more previews next year.

In this issue we cover technology with articles about using Skype, and #KELTChat. We also focus on video conferencing in the latest installment of KOTESOL Views. We've also got two great features focusing on tolerance to ambiguity, as well as student-centered Dogme. We also have our continuing comparison series which focuses this time on Mexico vs. Korea. TEC's own Maria Pinto contributed this issue's piece.

This issue will also mark the last of The Report Cards from the Edge series. Jason Burnett has been a great contributor to The English Connection, and we would like to thank him for all his work. We hope you've had a little chuckle at the end of the issues.

Sincerely,

*William Mulligan*

William Mulligan

Editor-in-Chief

**In the next issue of The English Connection:**

**What to look for in a training course**

**Using other classes's work as input**

**KOTESOL Views**

**Plus much more!**

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# Student-Centered Dogme

## Chia Suan Chong goes in depth about Dogme

Over the last decade, discussions about Dogme have inspired many journal articles, blog posts, social media groups, DELTA essays, MA research projects, and conference talks. Yet another article to define Dogme might be superfluous, and perhaps what we need is a discussion on the issues our learners might have with the approach and how we can make it work for us.

Dogme lessons are based on three tenets:

1. They are conversation-driven. There is a significant focus on tasks and activities that generate a lot of student talking time, through interaction and the negotiation of meaning, language use is being practiced;
2. They center around the students and not pre-defined lesson plans, and therefore are materials-light. Dogme is often known as the “coursebook-less” method, but in actual fact, it is more about not letting the coursebook and materials take center stage;
3. The language output that students produce acts as a resource in language-focus stages, and such emergent language is key to determining language input.

These are certainly not principles that are exclusive to *Dogmeticians*. Critics often state that the practice of Dogme is not vastly different from what a good teacher might do when adapting the coursebook or lesson plan, and that Dogme is simply about being principally eclectic, albeit in an improvised fashion.

However, most of our students have also been students of language classrooms prior to our encounters with them. Their own learning experiences invariably influence how they see the language learning process. They, therefore, have certain expectations of what their classes should entail. They are apprentices of observation (Lortie, 1975), and one of their expectations might very well be a structured journey through a coursebook.

When confronted with a materials-light lesson, students might find the lack of structure daunting. They might feel they are not learning anything in class. They might not be able to recognize the conversation-driven skills work as language learning when little grammar is involved.

How then can we make our Dogme classes less of a shock for such students?

### 1. Needs Analysis

In a classroom where there is no pre-determined syllabus or coursebook, a detailed needs analysis should be carried out on day one to enable the Dogme lessons to be tailored to the students' interests, language needs, and expectations.

Here are some Needs Analysis questions that can be used at the beginning of every course:

- Why are you learning English? Why did you decide to come to this city/school?
- Who will you be speaking English to in the future? In what kind of situations?
- Do you find it more difficult to speak or to understand? Why?
- Do you use English outside the classroom? When and who with? How do you feel when using English in these circumstances?
- Do you read the news or watch English TV programs? Do you use English when you are online?
- Which skills would you like to work on? Speaking? Reading? Writing? Listening?
- Which systems do you think you need to work on? Grammar? Lexis? Pronunciation? Discourse? Why?
- Do you find it difficult understanding native speakers? What about non-native speakers?
- What did you like about your previous language classes and what didn't you like?
- How do you think languages are learnt? What are your beliefs about language learning? What do you expect to happen in a language classroom?
- How do you think you improve your English best? How do you try to remember and use the new vocabulary or grammar structures that you learn?

If students are provided with coursebooks, they could turn to the content page and discuss the topics and language areas (grammar, functions, lexis) that they wish to cover. To add to the topics in the book, put up several topics on the board (e.g. Travel, Food, Current Affairs, Fashion, Health, Education, Politics & History, Technology, Music, etc.). The negotiation process would then begin. Students could confer with their partners and the class could vote for the topics they would like to see in the coming weeks.

This negotiation allows me to steer conversations towards the areas they are interested in, to ask more questions when these topics come up, and to be ready to use the appropriate activities/methods from my teaching 'bag of tricks' to address their language needs. My end-of-day-one notes would often look like this:

## Student Profiles

### Maria

Nurse from Spain, been here for 2 months, staying for another 3.

- Needs English to keep up to date with the advances in the medical field and to communicate with people from different countries when travelling.
- Loves shopping and clubbing.
- Lives and hangs out with other Spanish-speakers after class. Watches many English films with English subtitles.
- Finds it more difficult to understand native speakers. Especially those from Scotland and Australia.
- An organic learner who prefers to pick chunks of lexis up through frequent contact.
- Thinks that she needs to work on her grammar because her last teacher told her it's important and that she's bad at it. Believes that if she knows the grammar of a language, she would be able to speak it well.
- Hates activities that require her to stand up.

### Yukiko

Flight attendant from Japan, been here for 1 month, staying for another 5.

- Needs English for work and loves the sound of the language...

## Results of Needs Analysis and Negotiation

*(in order of the one with the most votes to the one with the least)*

**Systems** : 1. Lexis; 2. Grammar; 3. Discourse; 4. Pronunciation.

**Skills**: 1. Speaking; 2. Listening; 3. Writing; 4. Reading.

**Topics**: Food (10 votes); Education (8 votes); Health (8 votes); Current Affairs (5 votes).

**Grammar Areas in Coursebook**: Conditionals 2 & 3; Relative Clauses;  
Passive Structures; Story-telling tenses.

## 2. Explaining why I do what I do

We do sometimes go around with the “teacher-knows-best” attitude assuming that our students will trust us no matter what approach we use. Students, however, often have a set idea of how they learn best.

Sometimes, gently going through the hows and whys of the approach we are employing could not only take the mystery out of this unfamiliar way of teaching and encourage students to see the benefits of it, but also help them to move beyond fixed or preconceived ideas about language learning. Every time a new activity or method like progressive deletion, running dictations, or Task-Based Learning is employed consider providing students with the pedagogic rationale behind it.

## 3. Working with emergent language and corrections.

Dogme has been accused of being “winging it elevated to an art form.” For it to rise above being merely a chat, it is crucial that the teacher notices opportunities to write on the board and extend upon the language emerging, listens for the language problems that students are having, and finds the right moments to work on them.

## 4. Drawing attention to the language covered

Make a habit of keeping a language column on the side of the board that you would gradually fill out with the lexico-grammatical input you feed in or focus on during the lesson.

This language input can be reaffirmed at the end of the lesson (“Look at all that grammar we’ve done today!”) by getting students to tell each other what they have learnt à la the end of a Sesame Street episode (“Sesame Street was brought to you by the letter Z and the numbers 1 to 10”). Carrying out recycling activities at the start of the next lesson and recalling what was discussed in the previous lesson also helps students see the structure and progression in their learning process.

## 5. Taking notes

Without a coursebook acting as a written record of what is covered in class, it is all the more important to get students to keep an organized notebook. Get your students to keep two notebooks. One for taking notes in class and one to keep at home, where the lexico-grammar covered in class can be re-organized into either alphabetical order or by topic.

The transferring of information from their class notebook to the one at home helps students to remember and revise what they have learnt that day and allows them to have the time and space to raise questions about the use of that language. But more importantly, having an organized notebook means that students will be able to easily find the language they

have learnt (but might have forgotten) in the future, and perhaps continue adding to it after the language course is long over, instead of relegating the notebook to a dusty corner of some bottom drawer.

So, spend some time at the beginning of your course discussing the merits of keeping an organized notebook, and show the students examples of other lexical notebooks that are not simply lists of words, but ones filled with collocations, phrases, fixed/semi-fixed expressions with example sentences. On a day-to-day basis, make sure students are given time in class to write down what you have boarded and clarified.

## 6. Controlled-practice exercises

Coursebook-less classrooms do not only mean fluency-focused classrooms. There can be accuracy work done too. This could take the form of pairwork or groupwork. Consider these examples of meaningful controlled practice that allows for authentic communication:

- Teaching “there is/are...some,” and “there isn’t/aren’t...any” at an elementary level: Tell your partner about the shops near where you live;
- Teaching a mid-intermediate class past modals of obligation: “Tell your partner about the rules you had when you were at school”;
- Teaching relative clauses to upper-intermediate students: “Bring a photo of your friends and family tomorrow and tell your partner about the people in the photo.”

“But those are normal semi-controlled/freer practice activities!” I hear you exclaim. While the controlled gap-fills and sentence transformation activities in coursebooks and grammar workbooks tend to use random, and sometimes contrived and de-contextualized sentences, improvising such activities on the spot enables you to exploit the context that delivered the language and helps students to focus on not just the form, but the meaning and use as well.

However, with some grammar structures, it can be difficult to keep all the practice within context. In such cases, use the following mantra when improvising controlled practice exercises, to help aid memory and retention of the language input:

- 1) Personalize
- 2) Keep it visual
- 3) Make it funny

I remember teaching a student the structure “so + adj + that + clause” the day after he had been to the dentist. Among the many sentence transformations about his classmates was one that read, “Ahmed looks so gorgeous with his shiny new teeth that everyone standing beside him now looks ugly” Ahmed laughed and said, “I’m never going to forget this structure now!”

## 7. Ensuring variety

We tell trainees on the CELTA in week one about different learning styles, and how important it is to vary the activities we use in the classroom. But so many of us start to rely on the tried-and-tested tricks that we know have worked for us when the going gets tough.

Teachers might resort to the same ready-made lessons or activities in their favorite book day after day, month after month, and then find themselves starting to lose the will to live. Even Dogme classes could stagnate into a predictable format of “So, what did you do this weekend?” followed by a list of lexical item after lexical item related to what students have just said. If the teacher is not having fun, the students are unlikely to have any fun either.

## 8. Not letting gimmicks and technology dictate

Some teachers spend a lot of time preparing their lessons and trying to spice things up by creating the most amazing materials using the plethora of features that the internet and interactive white boards (IWB) have to offer. As much as I believe teachers should harness their creativity, these fancy tools could end up overshadowing the very people we are teaching. After all, one can still make lessons interesting and ensure variety by focusing on the lives of our students and the stories they have to tell us.

The novelty of IWB gimmicks might impress students to start with, but when that starts to take center-stage, the development of our students inevitably suffers. We are not in competition to see who can create an all-singing all-dancing lesson about the present perfect continuous. We are in the business of helping students understand and use the structure. I am all for an efficient way to do this.

## 9. Giving homework

Homework in my classes often entails students keeping their notebooks up to date, reading an article their classmates have brought in, doing some research on a topic online, preparing presentations or writing emails, blog posts, journals, or essays.

Depending on the needs analysis, including writing skills work is essential in giving students a ‘rounded experience’ of learning English. Using the controlled practice exercises in coursebooks as homework can also placate students who feel like their coursebooks are going to waste, and help them to see that the language covered in the classroom does correlate to the syllabus in the coursebook.

## 10. End-of-course retrospective round-up

At the end of a course, after rigorous rounds of recycling and revision activities, I get my students to turn to the content page of the coursebook, like they have done on day one. They then discuss in pairs which topics and which language areas they have covered during the course. Students are often pleasantly surprised to find that not only have they covered everything they were meant to cover in the book, but that they have also acquired structures and language beyond the syllabus.

## Conclusion

I have been a *Dogmetician* teaching without a coursebook for over 4 years. Admittedly, all teachers apply Dogme in very different ways. After all, it is what a teacher has in their “bag of tricks,” how quickly they can adapt to what is happening in the classroom and improvise accordingly, and how principled their version of improvised eclecticism is.

But Dogme and eclecticism often imply a lack of structure and even though languages are not necessarily learnt in a linear fashion, many students yearn for some form of structure in their learning process.

*“But the students want to follow a syllabus...they want to use a coursebook,”* and *“You can’t sustain teaching Dogme over a long period of time,”* are often arguments cynics throw up against the Dogme approach. Hopefully, using the ten tips in this article, we could start making student-centered Dogme more student-friendly.

## Bibliography

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# Book Review: Memory Activities for Language Learning

*Memory Activities for Language Learning*, published as part of the Cambridge Handbooks for Language Teachers series, is one of the more recent publications from Cambridge University Press. The author, Nick Bilbrough, regards memorization as a fifth skill, and focuses on the role of memory in language learning. The book defines models of memory then looks at incorporating memory activities into the classroom. Bilbrough considers the much-derided audio-lingual method, which focuses on repetitive oral student drills, as “the glue that binds us to the world of language around us and within us” (p.1) with the book looking at creative ways to improve learner memory.

The initial chapter, *Mental stretching*, focuses on extending and training learners’ ‘working memory’ so that they become more fluent with speaking as they improve their long-term memory. One activity within this chapter focuses on showing pictures to learners for a limited amount of time, and getting learners to describe the picture. Other creative activities in this chapter involve drilling, the broken telephone (a version of Chinese whispers), as well as dialogue reconstruction. Bilbrough regards memorization and drilling in the classroom as beneficial, however, it could be argued that these do little more than test immediate memory and may de-motivate or raise affective filters, with learners having difficulty retrieving lexical chunks or language items.

The second chapter, *Making language memorable*, develops the idea of making language memorable and more immediate in four ways: firstly, by having students create verb and noun word clouds; secondly, by teaching students to associate words with other words or phrases; thirdly, by having students personalize language; and, lastly, by having the teacher use emotional chants in the classroom. This chapter offers wonderful ideas to make language more personal within the classroom and would benefit teachers who seek inspiration or ideas for classroom activities.

The third chapter, *Retrieving*, is related to aptitude. Examples of ideas suggested here include recycling language that emerged or was presented during current or previous lessons. Aptitude looks at not just at the ability to memorize and store lexical items, but the ability to “retrieve (these) quickly and efficiently” (Thornbury, 2007, p.16). Essentially, linguistic aptitude looks at the learner’s ability to store and retrieve language much like a computer is able to store and find files.

The fourth chapter, *Repeating and reactivating*, looks at exploiting reading and listening texts. Ideas introduced within the chapter improve dry coursebook activities. Other activities within the fourth chapter include ‘*The next word*,’ whereby learners complete sentences and react to prompts with selected phrases. Learners monitor and summarize debates, and repeat role-plays to memorize lexis and phrases.

The fifth chapter, *Memory techniques and mnemonics*, looks at improving memory using memory surveys, and general knowledge quizzes, as well as creating memorable links between language items with learners having to creatively exploit two language items. For example, ‘*a lump*’ and ‘*a lobster*’ = “*The girl got a lump on the head when a lobster fell on it*” (p.138).

The following chapter, unimaginatively named *Learning by Heart*, focuses on memorizing language. Activities here include exploring humor and puns within the English language, as well as exploiting poems and news stories in the classroom. It is a relatively short chapter but offers teachers a fresh perspective on the use of dialogues, poems, and jokes in the classroom.

The final chapter considers the use of memory games to improve language acquisition. As Bilbrough suggests, memory games “are a great way to provide repeated and intensive exposure to a particular area of language” (p.187). Some of the suggested games include the very well known ‘*Kim’s game*’, pelmanism, as well as matching one set of collocations or phrases with another.

Bilbrough offers a refreshing and engaging perspective on the use of memory activities in the classroom, with ideas that could be exploited in various teaching settings. The accompanying CD is Windows and Mac compatible and includes the templates introduced throughout the book. The CD makes the activities easily accessible for printing and photocopying. I would recommend this book for teachers who wish to focus on mnemonics and gain insight into memory in language learning. This book deserves a place on any teacher’s bookshelf.

## References

- Bilbrough, N. (2011) *Memory Activities in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Thornbury, S. (2007) *An A-Z of ELT: A dictionary of terms and concepts used in English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Education.

**Martin Sketchley ([www.eltexperiences.com](http://www.eltexperiences.com)) has been a teacher for 7 years with experience in South Korea, Romania, and in the UK.**

# An Interview with Lindsay Clanfield

## Michael Griffin talks with author and text book developer Lindsay Clanfield

*Lindsay Clanfield is (among other things) lead author of the textbook series Global, co-founder of “the round,” and series editor of the Delta Development Books for Teachers series and he was kind enough to sit down with TEC’s Michael Griffin in Seoul in September.*

**TEC:** This is your first time to Seoul, right? What are your first impressions?

**Lindsay:** My first impression of Seoul from walking around the first day is that it reminded me so much of Toronto. Really big streets, and big sidewalks. Totally safe, I felt safe everywhere. Good public transport, I was able to move around by myself. That is like Toronto as well. Nice people, polite. I feel like I am at home, except everything is written in Korean. I like it, I feel really comfortable here.

**TEC:** And what are you working on here?

**LC:** I am training teacher trainers to write material for their own courses and for online courses. Online courses for students and online courses for teacher training. So, I am working on materials design and course design with an eye especially on online course design.

**TEC:** And you have been in those areas for a while?

**LC:** Yes, I have been in both those areas for quite a while. Materials writing for the past 11 or 12 years and online course teaching and design for the past 6 or 7 years. There has been a lot of changes in that time. I have often done workshops and mini things but this is the first time I have done a full week devoted just to that, just a course on materials design. I was very happy that I was able to get the chance to do this

**TEC:** Sounds like a good experience.

**LC:** Yes. Once you have been writing materials for a long time you work with lots of other authors; you work with editors and publishers and get a feel of what is out there. Eventually you think, lots of these skills can be taught. There are a set of skills on writing material, writing accessible and motivating exercises and things like that. There are tricks to the trade.

**TEC:** It’s not some mystical kind of thing, then?

**LC:** No, there’s part science, part craft and part art. The art part is the part you can’t teach. So, a person either has really creative ideas or they don’t. But, we can think about how making exercises that make sense, or ways of adapting authentic texts. People are often interested in adapting authentic texts for language learners and for communicative type exercises. Also, generating interaction online is something a lot of people are interested in and it can be a big challenge for many institutions.

**TEC:** How did you get started in publishing?

**LC:** My writing career started with OneStopEnglish in 2001. That’s when the website was just starting out. I started writing because they had a Lesson Share competition. This was back in 2001 when blogs and wikis weren’t really used that much. It was pre-Facebook, it was pre-YouTube and all this stuff. The guy who started it was really forward-looking

in the sense of getting teachers to submit their own lessons and then publishing those lessons online. This creates motivation for the teacher and you get a little prize. I was one of the first winners of the Lesson Share competition. I was motivated and so I did it again and again and won again. In the end, he offered me some work and that is how it all started.

OneStopEnglish, I would say, is amazing training for a writer because it teaches you deadlines. You had to have something new up every month. So, on the 21st of every month you had to have that lesson, with the notes and everything, done, ready and delivered. It was really good discipline for a writer.

**TEC:** I think a lot of our readers might want to get their foot in the door in publishing and materials writing. Do you have any advice for them?

**LC:** They still have the Lesson Share. OneStopEnglish is a great way to get things reviewed externally by a publisher, to get a foot in the door there, perhaps. Although, now, there are so many other ways. Now, people can just do a blog or share their own lessons in other ways. So the world has moved on, but publishers still need material writers. Things like Lesson Share and similar things from other publishers is one way of getting things out there.

**TEC:** Thanks. Do you have any other advice for people that are interested in getting involved?

**LC:** Go to conferences. Get on Facebook and Twitter. Twitter is easier because you can meet more people easily than you can on Facebook in terms of the professional, because you can just follow people. OneStop is just one way but I would say start putting your stuff online on a blog or a repository of your lessons. Try to connect with other people on Twitter to try to get reactions from different people and so on. And then, get to conferences. Get in there talking at the publishers’ stands. Find out where the editors are, tell them what you are doing, give them your card or your website. Follow up, and see where it goes.

**TEC:** You are co-founder of “the round?” Can you tell us what it is?

**LC:** What is *the round*? Ok, *the round* is a project that I set up with a colleague of mine. His name is Luke Meddings. Some of your readers might know him from Dogme. Luke Meddings was one of the co-authors with Scott Thornbury of the book *Teaching Unplugged*, which was the first, and only book really, to address this whole Dogme thing that they started 10 years ago. Why 10 years before a book came out on it? Well, publishers weren’t really interested in doing that. I was series editor of a new series at Delta Publishing and I was able to commission a couple of books. One of them was this one. I said, “Let’s commission a book on Dogme” which became *Teaching Unplugged*. I worked really closely with both the authors. We found we have a lot in common, which was weird because they advocate an anti-coursebook kind of approach to language teaching that is very

materials-light and a lot of my other work is about creating materials. I create materials which is a lot of materials-heavy stuff. But we have a lot in common, Luke and I, in our outlook on education and what we thought was important and the importance of a critical approach to education and how we thought it was lacking in a lot of ELT materials. So we originally wanted to start a blog ourselves, which would be a series of kinds of lessons that were critical of the status quo and things like that. And then we thought, this could become a book. We've got enough to make a little book here. But no publisher would give it a look in because it was too critical. Publishers, for lots of reasons, tend to avoid PARSNIPS, which is politics, alcohol, racism, sex, narcotics, -isms, and pork. These are all things that tend to be avoided so as not to alienate certain markets and not to drop the teacher in trouble with sensitive issues. So we thought, they are not going to want to do that but we thought we could do it ourselves, we could publish this book ourselves as a little Kindle e-book. Because, by this time we had figured out that there were authors self-publishing on Amazon and we thought "OK, let's do that." So we started working on it and then we thought we'd need a website for this book and the more we were thinking about it and the more we looked at the economics of the process we were going through we thought, "Why just do it ourselves? Why not get other people who want to do books that wouldn't necessarily get a look in from a big publisher?" We could find people that wanted to do things a bit more niche and invite them to do stuff. We also knew that there were lots of teachers writing blogs and there was really interesting stuff happening out in the blogosphere. What I was seeing was that there was two areas. For methodology for teachers, you either had books, which are more and more expensive and then on the other side you had blogs. These are not edited or anything like that and also they are free. Some teachers working on blogs are producing a huge amount of stuff. So was it only 2 possibilities? Expensive books, or free blogs? In both situations the author is not doing that well. On an expensive book the author is getting a very small percentage of the sales, maybe 10%. And that is from the net receipt. So a \$50 book once the distributor book seller has taken their share the publisher now is getting down to maybe \$25 for the book because half of it has gone to the book seller. Of that \$25, the author would get \$2.50 maybe. Whereas a book that you could put on Amazon and sell for \$5 you would also get \$2.50. So you do the math and you start thinking, I could sell books online. Also, more and more people are now getting comfortable with the idea of buying e-books. We thought, "This is a no-brainer. We are going to do this and we are going to invite other people to join in." We are going to invite other authors that we know and open it up. So people who want to write a book that would be difficult to get a look at it from a publisher, this is one avenue that they could try to do that.

**TEC:** Sounds like an interesting business.

**LC:** The business model of *the round* has three pillars. One, we want it to be great for educators, so we carefully vet every project that comes through. We say no to more things than we say yes to at the moment. We want to establish a good

benchmark of quality. The second thing is we want it to be fair for authors. As I was saying before, the royalty an author would get on a book would be 10%, usually, though sometimes an author gets a fee rather than a royalty. The other 90% goes to the publisher, the distributor, etc. We wanted to flip that model and make it so 90% of everything the author makes goes to them. And 10% goes back into *the round* to pay for the website and all that stuff to keep going. The difference is that with *the round* the author has to make the investment to make the book. When an author does a book for a big publisher the publisher takes the risk financially. They'll pay for the editor, they'll pay for the cover design, they'll pay for the material design, they'll pay for printing, they'll pay for all that stuff. This is why they are going to be looking for getting back that money through a higher margin. And the author just writes the book. In our model, the author also takes the financial risk so the author is the one who pays for their own editor. We insist that it's edited by a professional editor. The author pays for the cover image. The author has to do their own marketing but as the round will grow and we will have more titles we are hoping more people will go to the website and see these books there. The average price for the books we have on there is \$6 and we are not going to go much over that.

**TEC:** What is happening with *the round* now?

**LC:** We started with our book, this book of subversive ideas which became *52: A Year of Subversive Activities for the Language Teacher*. We also did our book first so we would know the process of what it is to create the book. We wanted to be able to tell another author how much it would cost to get a book edited. How much is a design? I should have mentioned before, we are working with a designer. Mark Bain has a good eye for design and he designs the covers and takes a fee for that. We estimate that we were able to produce our book for around \$500. As we worked on *52*, we were learning the other side of the business, the publishing side of the business.

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# Tolerance of Ambiguity

## Ben Naismith explores ambiguity tolerance

Recently, looking through my own notes about a particular group I was teaching, I started to think about the different blend of students that I tend to have, no matter what the country or context. Do any of these descriptions ring true for you?

a) Learners who...

- are so worried about accuracy and making mistakes that their spoken fluency suffers
- stop reading to ask the teacher any time they don't know what a word means
- do not feel that learning collocations or functional language is as useful as learning Grammar rules (with a capital G!)

b) Learners who...

- are content to speak at length, taking risks with language they are not completely sure of
- are bored by grammar presentations and quickly forget the "rules"
- are good at dealing with spoken or written texts, at least on a superficial level, to get the main idea, and do not get discouraged

There are many terms used to describe these two broad categories of learners, with books and teachers often opting for "learning styles," "language aptitude," or the extremely vague, "personality."

While any or all of these perspectives may be of use in helping us to better understand our learners, another consideration I have found to be beneficial is Ambiguity Tolerance (AT). Although many of the former points raised have been extensively written about and have entered the general ELT consciousness, it seems that AT has remained on the fringe. In this article, we will look at what exactly AT consists of, its importance in language learning, and techniques for actively promoting our learners' AT in the classroom.

### What is "Tolerance for Ambiguity"?

In its simplest terms, AT refers to an individual's ability to accept ambiguity, complexity or lack of structure. For example, someone who would only feel comfortable making a meal by following a recipe could be said to have lower AT than someone who is happy to just experiment with the ingredients. As Carver 2007 writes, "some [students] are stimulated by ambiguity, some are threatened." (Carver 2007 Slide 3) AT then, is the "acceptance of ambiguous situations whereas intolerance may entail considering uncertainties and unclear meanings as potential sources of discomfort and threat." (Erten and Topakaya p.30)

Relating this concept to language learning, AT can refer to a learner's ability to deal with unknown language, partially understood information, or unfamiliar situations. It is precisely in these situations that a learner who remains calm and employs useful strategies will be able to communicate more successfully.

### How important is AT in language learning?

This is of course a subjective judgment, so I will let you decide for yourself-take a look at a list of these characteristics of someone with high AT. Would you say that these were characteristics of good language learners?

- Doesn't worry about understanding every detail
- Doesn't overly rely on rules
- Accepts that there isn't always a solution to every problem
- Considers various, possibly contradictory options, without dismissing them
- Is comfortable in any given situation despite limited contextual knowledge

At least in my own experience, learners possessing such characteristics are often the most successful. Seemingly, these learners are able to progress and assimilate what they have learned at a faster pace than their peers.

### The dangers of AT

Interestingly, it is not as straightforward as simply saying that "the higher the AT, the better." In fact, an excessive level of AT carries with it its own inherent dangers.

*As with most aspects of language learning, in the end it comes down to trying to find a balance of approaches and techniques in order to meet the varying needs of the individual learners.*

Of significant importance is the lack of self-awareness and self-monitoring that high AT may entail. Without the ability or motivation to try to improve one's own language accuracy, error fossilization may result as learners are "unable to recognize the differences between their interlanguage and the target language." (Lightbown and Spada 2006 p.80)

Likewise, for learners who are not overly concerned with lexical precision as long as communication is achieved, there may be a tendency to overuse fillers, repetition, and vague expressions. (Thornbury 2005 p.7) Should this occur, a false sense of fluency might be achieved, but at the expense of such precision.

As with most aspects of language learning, in the end it comes down to trying to find a balance of approaches and techniques in order to meet the varying needs of the individual learners. In fact, most studies have demonstrated that learners "are likely to be more successful in SLA and likely to go further in their study of the second language if they have a moderate level of tolerance for ambiguity." (El-Koumy 2000)

Based on my own observations however, typical curricula, coursebooks, and materials already provide tasks to help learners with excessively high AT, including learning exact meanings, specific grammar “rules”, and a plethora of controlled practice activities in which the answer is either right or wrong. As such, we will now look at a selection ideas for helping learners with low AT.

### Practical Ideas

Before searching for ways of increasing learners’ AT, it first needs to be decided whether or not AT can be taught. My own experience would indicate that while individuals are naturally predisposed to having certain levels of AT, through learner training and specifically selected tasks, it is possible to further enhance this feature. I would liken this process to that of a naturally shy person to overcoming their introverted nature in order to give a public speech.

### Using authentic texts

As with any aspect of language learning, exposure to the target language is a critical element in developing the learners’ awareness. To this end, it is necessary to first consider what types of language items might cause ambiguity. Listed below are those suggested by Erten and Topakaya:

- multiple meanings
- vagueness, incompleteness
- fragmentation
- probabilities
- lack of structure
- lack of information
- uncertainty
- inconsistencies and contradictions
- lack of clarity

(Erten and Topakaya *ibid*)

I would argue that nothing contains these elements quite like authentic material, especially unscripted dialogue between native speakers.

Possible reading or listening tasks could therefore include any that help learners with reading for gist, deducing meaning from context, or inferring speaker attitude or opinion.

### Humor

One text type that relies heavily on multiple meanings and implicit references is humor. So why not use jokes as a means to understanding subtext and culture? Apart from anything else, it is an enjoyable way to engage learners while dealing with useful, and often neglected, elements of communication. As Medgyes writes, “A joke may be perceived as an intellectual challenge,” exercising the creativity of “people with a high level of mental agility and ambiguity tolerance.” (Medgyes 2002 p.2)

In his book, *Laughing Matters*, a number of different tasks dealing with humor are suggested, with the explicit aim of

helping learners to understand and appreciate the ambiguity, cultural clues and contextual clues inherent in humor. These tasks include reading and listening comprehension activities for various genres, writing jokes, proverbs, and quotations; enacting role plays and dialogues; and comparing and translating jokes between learners’ L1 and English.

### Songs and Poetry

Creative and musical forms such as songs and poetry have long been a rich source of texts for teachers to exploit for teaching purposes. Typically, however, gap-fills tend to be by far the most common exercise to accompany these texts. True, this will help to develop learners’ ability to listen for specific information, but it does very little to deal with the meaning of the text. When one considers that lyrics and poetry are often deliberately obtuse and require interpretation on the part of the listener, it would seem that a certain level of AT is, in fact necessary.

Tasks that do require AT include interpretation of lyrics, discussion of meaning, and having learners create their own non-literal texts. For an example of a short lesson involving student analysis and creation of poetry, Anthony Gaughan’s blog post, *Poetry and the Art of Teaching Practice*, is a highly recommended starting point. In his description, Gaughan details the stages of his lesson and how he uses a haiku to develop his learners’ ability to analyze and consider possible meanings, while simultaneously working on their listening, speaking, and writing skills.

*Continued on pg. 21*

Ben is originally from Victoria, Canada and has spent the last 10 years working as a music and English teacher in Toronto, Thailand, Costa Rica and Dubai. Currently Ben is the Director of Studies at International House Dubai where he also works as a teacher trainer on CELTA and other courses.



# NEAT Test

## Bradley Serl talks about the newest national test

The NEAT, the National English Ability Test, is, in the words of a friend of mine, like the Loch Ness monster: everybody knows somebody who claims to have seen it, but nobody's had a first-hand encounter with it. My purpose here is to help to dispel some of the rumours circulating about this test, to give clarity to some of the classroom implications that this test will hold for many of us, and to give current best-guess information about the test; for I too, have never seen the beast. I will start with the first I heard of the test.

The first time I heard about the NEAT was a couple years ago. I work in a teacher training institute and the local board of education tasked us with putting together a training course for teachers to prepare them to teach the NEAT. Our first problem was, obviously, that we had no idea what the test was about. We thus asked said BoE for their information on the test, and visited bookstores to see what materials they had. We were able to find enough information to craft a best guess syllabus, and assemble a one-month training program that addressed key challenges of the NEAT: a requirement for an increase in English fluency across all 4 skills, and the requirement to teach productive rather than purely receptive English skills. It was only after we finished our training course that specific information, like that below, was accessible.

*The NEAT is currently being piloted, and will continue to be so until 2015 . . .*

The NEAT is a tri-level, computer-based, English test. The Korean government commissioned it to replace the English portion of the KSAT (NEAT levels 2 and 3), and the TOEIC (NEAT level 1), they did so in the hope that this new test would ease the financial burden on parents and learners of English, but it remains to be seen if this end goal will be realized, or if it will exacerbate the problem. Students will be able to sit the test twice a year, as opposed to the current once per annum KSAT. The NEAT is currently being piloted, and will continue to be so until 2015 when the government must choose to either replace the current English portion of the KSAT with the NEAT, or to run the two tests in parallel. I honestly don't know what this second option will mean for teachers and students: Will students have the choice to do either? Will teachers have to teach skills required for both tests in their classes? Will separate teachers have to teach separate English classes with differing focuses depending on which test the students in each class will take? I am very dubious about this second option, and hope that it does not materialize.

Regardless of the government's end goal, the test's writers have clearly taken this opportunity to make the test focus more on communicative competence. This is a good thing, as the English portion of the KSAT has, in my opinion, a deleterious effect on the productive skills of Korean high school students.

The KSAT, focusing almost exclusively on reading comprehension, forces teachers in high schools to disregard speaking and writing almost entirely in their classes; and stops teachers from using more communicative activities in class; as students are unwilling to devote time to anything that won't help them on the test, and parents place great emphasis on the applicability of their children's education.

The NEAT intends to change the current myopic fixation on reading comprehension: it incorporates writing, reading, speaking and listening. I won't spend much time talking about the listening portion of the NEAT as (currently) it's quite mainstream and offers few surprises. The other three areas require a more detailed examination as they will have a huge washback effect on grade school English education, and in the competencies that students will have post-high school. I will also be limiting my discussion to the NEAT level 2 test, as that is the exam that will have the greatest impact on the greatest number of teachers and students in Korea.

The speaking portion of the exam will feature four types of questions: narrative questions, problem/solution, picture description, and a presentation. Each of these may or may not have sub questions or follow-up questions, and the students will have a total of 15 minutes to complete the entire speaking section. This section raises some troubling questions, and some interesting implications for teachers, markers, and students. The first question that I had, especially when I saw the grading rubric, was on lexical selection: what lexical items will the marker deem correct? For example, in many text books used in public schools in Korea, the appropriate phrase to use when serving someone food or a beverage is "Help yourself." No native English speaker I've talked to about this would use this expression in this instance, and so if it is native speakers who are determining response suitability, students are being unintentionally set up to fail by their Korean English teachers. The reverse is also possible: a student doesn't use certain phrases in certain situations because their native speaking teacher told them such expressions were non-standard. Do they get marked wrong because it is a Korean who is adjudicating appropriateness of response? Finally, the rubric for speaking states, "Every local pronunciation allowed." Does this mean the entire spectrum of English accents? Or perhaps just all English accents from inner circle countries—which is still a huge range. Also, who will be grading the responses: Koreans? Native English speakers? A computer operating off an algorithm? I'm very curious to see how this issue is addressed.

*Students will be required to read 6000 words of text and answer questions about said text in 50 minutes.*

The reading portion of the test deserves some scrutiny as well. Students will be required to read 6000 words of text and answer questions about said text in 50 minutes. If students take an average of 10 minutes to read the instructions, and read and answer the questions, that leaves 40 minutes to read 6000 words, or roughly 150 words per minute. A colleague of mine runs the extensive reading portion of our program, and he states that when public school teachers enter our training program, they read level-appropriate graded readers at around 100-150 wpm.

Expecting students to be able to read as fast as their teachers seems ambitious; perhaps overly so, as I fear the reading passages in the NEAT will probably not be as easy to read as level-appropriate graded readers. To further illustrate the difficulty of attaining this goal, this paper is around 1600 words. Students would have to read and comprehend it in under 11 minutes.

The writing portion of the test is the section that has most of my trainees the most worried. Writing is a skill that traditionally hasn't been focused on in school, even in Korean. The NEAT will feature 2 essay style questions, each approximately 100 words long, and students will have 35 minutes to complete them. According to my best information, this section will be graded by an algorithm, and in my opinion this is the only way it could be done. Roughly 625,000 students sat the KSAT this year. Finding a group of teachers to fairly evaluate 1.3 million responses twice per year is daunting, both in terms of the man-power required, and the cost in time and money not only to pay the evaluators, but also to train that many educators to arrive at consistent evaluations. Also, by handing the task off to a computer, the ministry of education will probably be able to head off much of the parental skepticism of the fairness and objectivity used to grade these essays.

Now that I've touched on some of the challenges of this test, I will discuss their teaching implications. The first is that many public school teachers are uneasy about this test, and if the record rate of early retirement among English teachers is anything to go by, many of them want nothing to do with it. This is understandable: with a totally new paradigm, the old ways will no longer be sufficient, and those who can't adapt must be phased out. As cold as it sounds, I have no problem with this. To those Koreans who continue to teach in public schools, and to those native speaking teachers working in EPIK, SMOE, or other public school programs, the best advice I have for you is to immerse yourselves and your students in extensive reading programs starting at as early an age as possible. Students will need to be able to parse huge amounts of text very quickly if they hope to meet the challenges this test poses. Get your school to set up a fully stocked library of graded readers and get your students reading. The other huge thing that needs to happen is for the teaching of writing to take a more prominent place in the English curriculum. Academic writing, extensive writing, and creative writing: all of these things will help students

meet the demands of this test, and might even enhance their critical thinking skills. Less problematic, but equally important is the need for high schools and middle schools to incorporate speaking and listening classes into their English curriculums.

While it may sound like I have more concerns than commendations for this test, such is hardly the case. I see the NEAT as an essential step in Korea's English education, away from the ghastly grammar test method forced upon the system by the KSAT and towards a test that will beneficially affect Korea's ability to communicate with the world in English.

Brad Serl came to South Korea in 2002. Since that time he has worked with students as young as six and as old as seventy-five. His undergraduate degree is in Rhetoric and Composition from Thompson Rivers University. His M.A. is in Applied Linguistics from the University of Birmingham, and was completed in September 2010. He is currently president of the Busan-Gyeongnam chapter of KOTESOL

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# Across Time and Space: Teaching English Through Skype

## Vicky Loras shows us how to use social media in the classroom

A little bit of my story first...

When I moved to Switzerland in 2008, I started using Skype to communicate with my parents and sister who live in Greece, and to keep in touch with friends. Little did I know I would use it for a different purpose one day – teaching! Before I start describing what happened, I need to say two things. First, although a great number of posts and articles have been written about teaching with Skype, my personal experience with Skype was so helpful and eye-opening for me that I feel the need to share it. Technology has really brought enormous changes into our lives and we can use it in multiple ways and in our teaching as well. Second, my sisters and I used to have a school in Greece and when we moved to Switzerland, we left wonderful students behind.

Here is my Skype experience...

Vassilis is a wonderful person and student that my sister first and then I (a little bit later) have taught ever since he was eight (he is now ... 23!). He is a graduate student at the Business and Economics University of Athens, Greece, in the Department of Informatics. As with a great number of our students, Vassilis kept in touch with me even after I had left, and one day, while telling me about his plans to do a postgraduate degree abroad, he mentioned that he needed to pass IELTS to be accepted by the institutions he will apply to. We talked about it and, in the midst of nostalgia for our lessons with him in the past, I blurted out, "I can teach you if you like." "How?" he asked. "Via Skype." "Do you think it's going to work?" "We can try and see!" I answered, recalling the time that I had tried this with another student in the past, though not as formal teaching, but just explaining some grammar.

So, that is how Vassilis and I started our lessons through Skype. I do not claim to be an expert, but as our lessons progressed, I started to get new ideas and read about other educators who have used it in their teaching. The technology expert that he is, Vassilis also came up with ideas. One of the most important things we learned was that distance learning can happen in many ways. A significant point of our session was the time element – with Greece only an hour ahead of Switzerland, it was not so difficult to find a suitable time for both of us, even though on a couple of occasions, we did confuse the time. For instance, I announced my time for the next lesson but Vassilis had Greek time in mind. I made mistakes in the same manner, forgetting the time difference and thinking of Swiss rather than Greek time, but we quickly picked up on that and made it more specific! Fortunately, Vassilis was very patient with my schedule. As he knew I teach taught most of the day, he understood and accepted why our lessons sometimes took place at 10.00 in the evening or so – (thank you for that, Vassilis!). On the whole, it was a great experience from which we both learned a great deal.

## How can you use Skype?

Skype's video feature enables participants to see each other face-to-face, albeit virtually. It was wonderful to see my student's face and expressions and for him to see me. We both felt like we were in the same room together. However, Vassilis and I rarely used the video for technical reasons. It used up a lot of the internet bandwidth and having too many windows open at the same time often caused serious interruptions in the connections. Given that experience, I would therefore recommend using this only at the beginning of the lesson to set the mood and start it in a more personal way – it is great to be able to see each other!

For my session with Vassilis, we used the audio feature mainly and this was useful in giving him extensive practise in speaking. During our lesson, I listened to Vassilis, corrected him on the spot when needed, and used the chat box on the bottom right of the Skype screen to write notes for him such as providing synonyms or antonyms of certain words and other important vocabulary chunks.

The chat box: It can be used as a virtual blackboard to write simple notes, which you can hand over to the student simply by pressing Enter. Using the Send File feature (which you can find on the button with the plus sign), you can share PDFs or other files, or pictures if you are doing picture descriptions with your students. While the student opens the files, the conversation goes on while various things are done in the meantime. Sometimes I immediately shared files with Vassilis if I felt I had to give him more material on certain topics. Most of the time I gave him the speaking topics in PDF form, as the IELTS requires students to read a card with information and plan a small presentation.

Emoticons can also be used for reinforcement in the chat box.

Sure, there can be tech glitches (choppy sound or video, the connection cuts out, and so on), but investing in a good internet connection is one of the things I have never looked back on for all it has to offer. When an interruption occurs in the middle of the lesson, simply hang up and call again! It usually works.





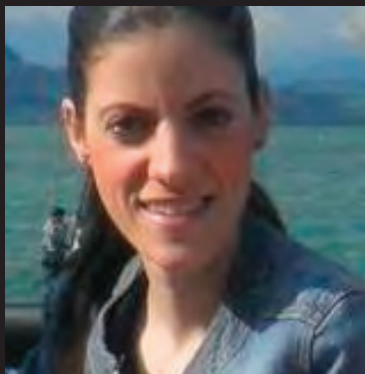
There are numerous blog posts written by educators who have used Skype to communicate with other classes worldwide, or have even had an author Skype into their classrooms and talk with the students about a specific book they have been reading. Skype can be used in so many more ways in education and I am looking forward to using it even more!

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*Continued from pg. 13*

**TEC:** What other books do you have so far?

**LC:** 52 came out in the beginning of 2012. Since then, another book by Nicky Hockly on webinars came out. This is another type of book and is the kind of thing we want to do. This is a niche area. More and more teachers are being expected to do webinars. Teacher trainers are doing webinars. Often at a conference you might have to do a bit online or some kind of webinar kind of thing. This is such a niche area that it wouldn't really warrant a big book. No one would want to buy a big book on webinars. It is too small, but for a cheap little e-book it is perfect. This is exactly the kind of thing we are thinking about. That is the other advantage of writing something for *the round*, it can be small and niche. Our imperative is not how financially successful it is. That is up to the author. We just want something that is good. We want to be like the indie record shop that are not necessarily big. Webinars is one. We are really happy that Scott Thornbury has agreed to do one based on his blog. We are thinking that some people might want to take some of the material from their blogs and re-work it into some kind of book. Scott Thornbury is doing exactly that. He's doing a book called *Big Questions in ELT*, which is a compilation of his best blog posts formulated into teacher training sessions.

**TEC:** What else is in the pipeline?

**LC:** We also have a book on business apps that could be used to teach Business English. It is called *Appivities*. It's activities that people could use with apps. Activity ideas for apps. Again, totally niche. A teacher from Turkey and a teacher from Argentina are working together to do something on web 2.0 tools for young learners. That's coming out. Things are going well and we have lots of ideas coming in.

**TEC:** I look forward to seeing those. Sounds like there are lots of interesting things going on. Thanks so much for taking the time. Any final thoughts?

**LC:** Thank you. I have been really impressed with the teachers I have talked to in Korea and I am looking forward to coming back soon. I'd love to see more coming out of Korea in terms of materials, writers, books for *the round* and see you guys online.

#### **Related Links:**

OneStopEnglish [www.onestopenglish.com/](http://www.onestopenglish.com/)  
<http://www.onestopenglish.com/lesson-share/the-round> <http://the-round.com/>  
Global (textbook series from Macmillan)  
<http://www.macmillanglobal.com/>  
Delta Publishing Teacher Development Series  
<http://www.deltapublishing.co.uk/titles/methodology>  
Six Things (Lindsay Clanfield's currently inactive blog)  
<http://sixthings.net/>

*Continued from pg. 15*

Thus, as we can see, the specific tasks themselves will determine whether or not the use of the text promotes AT, and that it is up to the teacher to decide whether this a worthwhile use of class time.

#### **Conclusions**

Whether or not AT will be a useful concept to a teacher, depends entirely upon the individual and how they choose to interpret their learners' performance. For those teachers who do find value in the concept of AT, it would be worthwhile devoting class time to tasks which will help learners in this regard.

And finally, if you or your learners would like find out your own level of AT, you can take a short online quiz at <http://bit.ly/yj0uyj>. Don't worry if you yourself have low AT, the questions are all multiple choice and your score is given a numeric value!

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# Korea vs Mexico

## Maria Pinto compares Mexico to Korea

I first moved to Mexico in 2002. I ended up in Mexico by accident – I was heading south to Latin America, from El Salvador, and took a wrong (right?) turn somewhere. I spent three years living in Mexico, where I worked in two regional universities in the southern state of Oaxaca. At the second of those universities, I decided I wanted to do a Master's degree in Education. I also realized that it would take me years to save up enough money to pay for each module of the Master's if I stayed in Mexico! My solution was to move to Korea.

I moved to Korea in mid-2005 (with my two Mexican cats), and worked first for a year at Woosuk University, near Jeonju, and then at the Gyeongju campus of Dongguk University for five years. I moved back to Mexico at the end of November, 2011 (again with the cats), and now teach again at the first of my two Mexican workplaces: the Universidad Tecnológica de la Mixteca, in Huajuapán de León, Oaxaca.

### Mexico

Mexico is the fourteenth largest country in the world. It gave the world chocolate, chilies, corn, the poinsettia plant (known as “noche buena” in Mexico), and the ancient cities of Teotihuacan, Chichen Itza, Palenque, and Monte Alban. It is known for the ancient Aztec and Mayan civilizations, which coexisted with several others, such as the Olmecs, the Toltecs, the Mixtecs. [This year, the Mayan calendar has been in the news, because it ends on the 21st of December 2012.] Modern Mexico is in the news, because of reports of drug-related violence and deaths.

Mexico is comprised of 31 states, and one Federal Territory. I have lived in Mexico for almost four years, but have only seen a fraction of the country. And I have only ever worked in rural Mexico, and only in the state of Oaxaca (pronounced “wa-ha-ka”), which, because of the large indigenous population, is one of the poorest states.

I live in the Land of the Cloud People: the Mixteca. Most of the local people are short, with dark brown skin, and many have the sharp cheekbones, flat foreheads, and beautiful hooked noses of their Mayan ancestors. Time doesn't exist, and we are, simultaneously, outside of time, here in the Mixteca. Ancient mixes with modern: , with concrete houses built all the way up to the base of the ruins of Cerro de las Minas, and people in jeans and T-shirts walking alongside women in huipiles and men in sombreros and sarapes. On Wednesdays, we have the tianguis, the weekly market which is the Mexican version of the Korean o-il-jang, but you can get your weekly shopping done at one of the fruit, vegetable, and meat markets in town, or at one of the two supermarkets. The restaurants and comedores in town mainly serve Mexican food: tacos, tamales, tortas, mole, chilaquiles, atole, or the soft drinks and hamburgers that represent “world cuisine” here.

There are only two seasons in the Mixteca: the wet (July to October this year) and the dry – though the locals like to pretend there are four. Days are hot – T-shirt weather even on the coldest winter day – and nights range from cool to cold (a sweater or a jacket). The locals start wearing beanies(winter hats) when the temperature drops below 20C. My city, La Heroica Ciudad de Huajuapán de León, to give it its full name, sits in a valley in the northern Sierra Madre mountain range. It's a two and a half hour journey, by minivan (or “suburban”) to the state capital, Oaxaca City, which lies in the Central Valleys of Oaxaca state. It's a five hour journey, by bus, to Puebla City, and seven hours to the capital, Mexico City.

Rural Huajuapán (pronounced “wa-hwa-pun”) is all about noise: colectivo taxis (which run instead of buses) honking; gas trucks bleating “Gas, gas gas!” through loudspeakers; garbage trucks; knife sharpeners; tamale-vendors; and, churches, all ringing their different bells. Fireworks - all bang and no flash - go off regularly at churches, weddings and parties, and music and announcements blare out of passing cars.

The mountains of the Sierra Madre are brown for most of the year, changing to a vibrant green during the rainy season. A variety of cacti and succulents cover the slopes, along with thorny bushes and short trees. The riverbeds are dry for most of the year, but flash floods are common after rain.

### Work

Work hours are longer here, at least at my university: In Korea, I was not required to stay at work outside of teaching and office hours; here, I am at work from 9am to 7pm five days a week (with a two hour break for lunch). I earn about half of what I earned in Korea, and most of what I earn goes to pay for living expenses. However, it's still possible to save about \$150 US a month. Teachers at private schools generally get paid a lot less, as do Mexican teachers who teach English in the local school system.



To work here, foreigners generally used to come in on a tourist visa, and then change this for a work visa (formerly known as the FM3) in their first month in the country. Many jobs are not advertised internationally, so it has been necessary to be in the country to find a job here. Immigration rules changed in November 2012, and the implications of this change have yet to be felt. However, from now on, teachers will have to get their work visa outside Mexico, and enter on it. The teacher pays for his or her visa, and a one year work visa costs between \$2000 and \$3000 pesos (approximately 166,000 – 249,000 KRW). The teacher also finds and pays for his or her own accommodation.



Korean and Mexican students are very different. Conversations with students in Korea centered on them talking about wanting to lose weight to “make” a boyfriend or girlfriend. Here, my students introduce me to their boyfriend or girlfriend, or openly make out with them in town. People are not so obsessed with losing weight; the philosophy seems to be, that the more curves you have, the sexier you are. In Korea, if I asked students to call me by my first name, you it risked blurring the line (for them) between “friendly” and “friend.” In Mexico, I can go to a nightclub, run into students, dance with them, and then see them in classes, and no one becomes overfamiliar.

### Teaching English and professional development

Korea’s KOTESOL is matched by Mexico’s MEXTESOL. Most states have at least one chapter (some states have more than one), and they generally have monthly meetings. The annual MEXTESOL Convention is held in a different city each year (it was in Puerto Vallarta this year), and is four days long. [A comparison of the MEXTESOL Convention with the KOTESOL International Conference appears in this month’s TEC News.]

The Mexican government announced a plan for the teaching of English in elementary schools in the country in 2009, and the implementation of the PNIEB (Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica) is the focus of much discussion among local English teachers. Unlike Korea, where governmental policy regarding the native speaker of English in the classroom changes continually, in Mexico it is expected that the PNIEB teachers will be Mexicans.

There are two questions locals (in any country) always ask the foreigner: (1) What do you like about my country? (2) Which, of all the countries you have visited, is your favorite? I think what I like about Mexico is self-evident, from this article. To answer the second question, I don’t have a favorite country. Each one has given me something different, made me a different person.

### Conclusion

Korea was incredibly good to me. The few not-so-good experiences I had were at the start of my stay, at Woosuk, and were more than made up for by the wonderful time I had at Dongguk and Gyeongju. I will always be grateful to Korea for my Master’s degree, KOTESOL, the opportunity to experience a culture that was based on beliefs often diametrically opposed to mine and to come to terms with this, the hiking, and the friends I made there.

Six years ago, when I left Mexico for Korea, I didn’t think I’d ever return. Yet, here I am, back again. Mexico has my heart. Even before I left, I said I was Australian, of Indian descent, con el corazón latino (with a Latin heart). I have yet to decide which part of me Korea has. Probably my eyes, because I had Lasik there, and because I learned a new way of seeing the world, a very different way to what I was used to. Eyes, because Korea has such a visual way of seeing the world, and the concept of face is so important. Perhaps that’s who I am: an Australian, of Indian descent, con el corazón latino, and Korean eyes.

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# Working With Korean Culture in the Classroom

## Robert Kim discusses using culture in the classroom

For native English speaking teachers (NESTs) who teach English in Korean classrooms, there may be moments when there are some subtle cultural problems that create a divide with their students. Issues, such as lack of camaraderie, unfamiliarity with student-centered learning, minimal student participation, and not picking up on subtle nonverbal cues, can lead to intercultural misunderstandings between the teacher and students. To overcome cultural clashes, it is up to NESTs to understand various aspects of Korean culture and find ways to create a beneficial teaching environment that eradicates the gulf that divides them and their pupils.

NESTs must understand that the Korean classroom setting is totally different to classrooms in their home nation. First of all, Confucian values are very strong in Korean society, with the teacher being fully in charge. A strong hierarchical division exists between the educator and their pupils (Martin, 2003). The learners tend to have few chances to ask questions or state preferences in public. Also, there may be no mutual dialogue between the students and their teachers. In some instances, learners are not being taught to have responsibility or to be accountable for their learning (Martin, 2003).

Another factor to be aware of is Korean classrooms, especially in secondary schools, can be centered around the teacher. Depending on the school, students may have little opportunity to be actively involved. For English learning, students mainly focus on developing accuracy and grammar instead of conversational skills. There is often little emphasis on practical and creative language development. Instead, students have to cram, memorize, and get the correct answer. Also, in high school, students have to prepare for their *sooneung* test for college admission instead of developing their oral and aural English skills. Likewise, any attempts by English teachers to try to use alternative instructional approaches, such as group work, role-play activities, and presentations have the potential to meet resistance from parents, other teachers, school administrators, and even students (Flattery, 2007). These issues can hamper chances for student-centered learning to function.

With respect to Korean culture, English teachers must be aware that Korea is a high context/low contact culture. Korean society is not really an expressive society, especially in a brick and mortar classroom setting that is highly formal and hierarchical. There is a high value on silence, less emotional expression, and unspoken nonverbal modes of communication (Wlodkowski, 2008). Modesty and deference in the presence of educators is the norm. Also, depending on the school setting and student background or ability, individualism may not be accepted in the classroom. Showing one's intelligence, asking questions, actively participating, and speaking one's mind could be deemed disruptive. Instead, collectivism and group harmony are paramount for a solid classroom setting.

One example of Korea's high context/low contact culture is *chemyeon*. This refers to the concept of losing face, which is a very serious issue in Korean culture. Students do not want to appear foolish and stupid in front of their classmates and their teacher. An inability to show fluency, demonstrate accuracy, apply vocabulary, utilize pronunciation, or exhibit comprehension can be embarrassing, which can lead to lack of participation (Martin, 2003). Also, a student is less likely to look into their teacher's eye if a wrongdoing has occurred. *Chemyeon* is also directly connected to a Korean's *kibun* (feeling). Feelings of disappointment to one's parents and teachers can truly be so disheartening and uncomfortable that a Korean's *kibun* can suffer along with *chemyeon*.



*Chemyeon* can play a role in how some students develop their relationship with their teachers. Direct interaction with someone is often avoided, especially interacting with a teacher (with the notable exception of discussing grades and seeking clarity of homework, class assignments, and exam preparation). Rather than directly dealing with a teacher regarding a problem, students may write or rank an instructor very low on a teacher evaluation. If any problem, personality clash, or discomfort with a teacher's teaching exists, they are sometimes left unsaid or a third party may get involved.

In addition to *chemyeon*, *nunchi* is another example of Korea's high context/low contact culture. *Nunchi* can best be elaborated as "eye language." Through "eye language", a Korean can sense a person through analyzing their body language, tone of voice, facial expression, motives, and mindset. It is also used to develop perceptiveness, grasp a situation, and develop social awareness (Gebhard, 2008). For example, in some classroom settings, learners may be conscious about how their classmates (and even teacher) perceive them if they show off their intelligence or superior skills in public. This has the potential of making the learners feel ostracized in class. Therefore, due to *nunchi* awareness, some students may not want to participate due to peer and social pressure.

In spite of the cultural barriers, teachers can win over their students? They have to be friendly and gently point out if clarification is needed for the following: classroom policy, confusing class assignments, anxiety over studying for a test, and specific guidelines of a homework assignment. Over time, students' public (or even private) reluctance to seek clear directions and clarification of class policy will hopefully gradually reduce. Likewise, teachers may try to get to know their pupils' names or create English names. Furthermore, knowledge of Korean cultural days, like Pepero Day and Chusok, and sharing certain aspects from one's home country and culture are vital for rapport. Thus, teachers need to take various steps in order to create a bond with their students.

To ease students' transition from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning, teachers need to make proper accommodations for the change to function smoothly. Predictable routines and procedures must be established so students will know what to expect in each class. To make these approaches work smoothly, instructors must gently state the reason why unfamiliar learner-centered activities, such as role plays, group work, and presentations are being used (Thompson, 2006). These activities are used to overcome students' reluctance to publicly stand out, overcome subtle cultural clashes, and forge an environment where all learners participate.

NESTs need to fully understand the unique dynamics of how Korean culture plays a role in the learning environment. An understanding of the Korean education system and dealing with certain subtle aspects of Korean culture are extremely important for a fruitful teaching and learning environment to operate. At the same time, while introducing novel approaches to learning, teachers must advise first then affirm later and be authoritative instead of authoritarian. With a proper mix of cultural awareness and understanding you can create a sound instructional and learning setting for you and your students.



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# An EPIK Experience in Public Schools

## Jacob Boer tells us of his experience as a public school teacher

As I continue into my fourth year teaching with EPIK (English Program in Korea), I have developed a lot of insights and had a lot of experiences that might be useful to other native teachers in South Korea. Let me share with you how I ended up working for EPIK, some transition experiences, and some insights into education policy in general and the South Korean educational system in particular.

Like most people who find their way to South Korea, I am here because I knew a guy. He had graduated college two years before me, and I bumped into him at a bookstore in my college town while looking through job applications and sample resume books. My friend said he was visiting home while on paid vacation leave from teaching English in South Korea. He claimed that he was treated as a respected professional in a country that values education above all else.

While this appeared to be a sign from the employment gods, I was skeptical; my friend had made teaching in South Korea sound too good to be true. Our bachelor's degrees had been in art and geology. Neither of us had any formal training or experience in teaching English or working with children. I wondered how could there be such a great opportunity waiting for us on the other side of the world.

My friend gave me a couple websites to look over and the contact information for a recruiter. I did the research online and finally made the decision to become an English teacher in South Korea. I was accepted into EPIK and landed a job in Gwangju in February of 2009. At my university, I never took the chance to study abroad. My initial intention when I came to Korea was to come for a single year and experience living and traveling in Asia. I told my family, friends, and myself that I would return home after just one year and then enroll in a graduate program. Four years have passed and I have yet to go back to school or plan my return move home.

The first month in South Korea was an assault on my senses. I was not only living alone for the first time ever, but I was living in a new country and a new culture for the first time as well. I was starting my first real job with normal working hours. I could not speak the language. My stomach was in upheaval over the unfamiliar food. I was not accustomed to being around small children. I was massively in debt thanks to student loans. And, to exacerbate the situation even further, I was the first native English teacher at both of my schools, and neither school seemed to know how to fit me into their system. I felt like an expensive piece of office equipment unexpectedly delivered to these schools without an accompanying instruction manual.

Nearly every EPIK teacher in the country is placed in a public school and is the only native teacher at that school. All the Korean teachers I met and worked with my first year were extremely excited to have me there, but nobody was sure how to react to me or use me in their classroom. My first couple of months demanded a lot of patience, and I appreciated all the patience I received in turn from my

Korean coworkers. I learned a lot about myself as I had to adapt quickly to the features of the South Korean educational system to be successful in the classroom. Accepting the job here not only meant I had to teach others, but I had to teach myself how to teach and conform to Korea's own educational model.

The first prominent feature that stood out as I stepped into a Korean classroom was the Korean elementary school teacher's desk. It was enormous and always at the front of the class, centered in the middle. Thinking back to all my classroom experiences growing up, my teachers' desks were always much smaller and either off to the side or at the back of the classroom. This arrangement left the front area by the chalk board empty. From my time growing up in Western education, I



believe that this open space was designed to be filled by students going before their peers to participate in lessons, present projects, or lead the class themselves in an activity. The difference of something as simple as the size and positioning of a teacher's desk is to me symbolic of the difference between how education operates in South Korea and how it operates in most Western societies.

Traditionally, Korea's educational culture is teacher-centered, molding students into passive learners. Students are supposed to be docile and submissive to their teachers at all times in the classroom. This could be arguably a more efficient use of class time for learning and memorizing as quickly as possible, but I believe it stifles creativity, critical reasoning, and the developmental exchange of ideas. I have theorized that one of the reasons why Koreans have been struggling to teach and learn English in public schools for so long is because a teacher-centered style is not effective for developing verbal communication skills.

In order to speak a language, I believe students need to be constantly speaking. This may seem obvious, but I have had to co-teach in many lessons where the only talking a student does is mindlessly asked to repeat a CD-ROM voice recording. When I have been given the freedom by my Korean co-teacher, my classroom style is very loose and students practice English with me and each other almost every minute of the class. I can tell at times this makes my co-teachers nervous because the class attention is not on them. They are not controlling and directing the class like they would for any other core subject taught during the day.

Korean children are in class eight to twelve hours a day and I might be one of five or six different teachers they see each day. With those long days, I try to imagine what would make my lesson memorable to my students. Showing my personality and giving them opportunities to express themselves has been my approach. Doing this while teaching a foreign language is easy because one of the greatest benefits of this job is that nothing is off-topic. I can present almost anything I want in class as long as it is in English. I create short PowerPoint lessons and culture activity classes to supplement the national curriculum during the regular school year. Four weeks out of every year, I teach special immersion camps and have the pleasure of simultaneously becoming a music, science, art, math, home economics, and gym teacher. These have been some of the best times for both me and the students.

I also have to remind myself that Korean students are not learning English as a second language. They are learning it as a foreign language. Motivating students can be particularly difficult in a mono-cultural Korea where realistically people can survive easily only speaking Korean their entire lives (although their academic and economic prospects will likely be limited). Korean children do not have to learn English because communication in their everyday lives does not require it.



As of right now, Korean students still can succeed in both the Korean testing system and the college admissions system without spoken proficiency in the English language. I have discovered that sharing myself with my students, exposing them to the greater world outside of their own, and emphasizing the importance of being able to speak English abroad has been the best incentive a native teacher can give them.

Working with small children has also taught me that students attend school not just to learn facts and figures, but also to learn how to be a moral person in a civil society. They both attend school to learn how to make friends as well as how to tolerate and work with others they are not friends with. They attend school to both learn personal responsibility and experience consequences.

There is no better time in life to make a mistake than when they are a child in school and they have an understanding teacher there to help them grasp the importance of their choices.

Many schools have built 'English-Only' classrooms and there has been growing support in the Korean education system for changing the style in which English is taught and learned. Having native teachers in the classrooms is not only an opportunity for Korean students to learn English, but an opportunity for them to experience learning in a different way. This is, I believe, the paramount value of having native speaking teachers in South Korea and the best argument for our continued presence in the public school system.

In the four years since I have arrived in South Korea, I have heard and seen the introduction of a range of alternatives to having NESTs (from the seven designated English countries) in public schools. These alternatives have ranged from English speaking robots, remote online teachers from the Philippines, licensed teachers from India, and Korean contract/conversation teachers. Each of these alternatives to the traditional E-2 visa holding teachers that EPIK currently employs has the same thing in common: a reduction in costs.

Although no comprehensive satisfaction survey data exists to my knowledge, the continued existence and success of the EPIK program has been because our students like us, our coworkers value us, and the parents of our students want us available so their child can benefit from the real language and cultural exchange happening from our presence here. Eventually the administrative concern over our cost will outweigh the pressure from the other sources in favor of our continued usage. When that will be is a matter of lively debate right now in the ex-pat community. Korea continues to be a dynamic and rapidly changing place, and it has been my honor to witness and be a part of it.

Jacob Boer is a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA. He has been with EPIK since February of 2009 and has taught elementary level and adult conversation classes for the Gwangju MOE. He also regularly lectures about the use of technology in the classroom for the NIIED.





# What is #KELTChat?

## Alex Grevett talks about #KELTChat

I have just returned from the 2012 KOTESOL International Conference, which was a fantastic opportunity to learn, meet, present, reflect, and socialize with talented teachers and inspiring people. In the past, going back to work, even with a few extra tools in my teaching toolkit, was a bit of a downer. This year, however, the conference felt like a part of a process of continuing reflection and development, rather than an isolated event. I chose better presentations, contributed more during them, and left feeling much more satisfied. I also found that I knew more people, some seemingly very well, who I had never met “in real life” before. A big reason for this is my participation in and development of an online community for continuous reflection and professional development, a community that we call #KELTChat.

### What is #KELTChat?

#KELTChat is at heart a community. At the moment, this community manifests itself as a stream of tweets organized around the hashtag #KELTChat (a simple way to search for tweets around a theme/community on Twitter), and a fortnightly chat on Twitter. It also has a more fixed home on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/KELTchat/>) and a blog (<http://keltchat.wordpress.com/>). All of these have different, overlapping roles. Twitter is at the heart of what we do, and the hashtag provides a way to stay connected to friends, share links, ask questions, and have brief discussions at any time. The centerpiece of the Twitter activity, though, is the chat (every other Sunday at 8pm), during which educators in and out of Korea gather to exchange ideas about a topic for an intense hour of tweeting. Past topics have included the Lexical Approach, NEAT, and squaring individual and institutional teaching beliefs. The blog serves as a permanent archive of the chats; each one is voted on, previewed, and summarized, with room for further discussion in the comments. The Facebook community serves as a space for announcements and discussions that require more than 140 characters a turn. All of this, incidentally, is just a description of how things seem to work at the moment. There are few limitations on what one can or can't use each medium for.

### Who is #KELTChat?

#KELTChat is currently facilitated by five people: Josette LeBlanc (@JosetteLB), Anne Hendler (@annehendler), Michael Griffin (@michaegriffin), Alex Walsh (@alexswalsh), and Alex Grevett (@breathyvowel). All have been in Korea for a varying number of years (Mike has been teaching here since some of you were in middle school!) and work in very different contexts, but all are connected by a desire to improve their own teaching and connect, in turn, with other educators who can help each other in that process.

### What are #KELTChat's values?

#KELTchat has three key, interconnecting values: connection, space, and reflection. The five people mentioned above joined Twitter in order to connect with other educators, and to gain support and advice in what, for many in Korea, can be an isolated path to becoming a better

teacher. The community grew from this into what it is today. It, is based as much on friendship as professional development, and there are always some light-hearted tweets among the more serious ones. The second value, space, relates to participation in the group. #KELTChat grew organically based on what people wanted from it, and continues to do so. People are free to contribute (or not) to any part of the community, and to find something which suits their style of communication and their aims. These aims contribute to our third key value, reflection. What #KELTChat gives you is the opportunity to think continuously about your teaching, and to share your thoughts with others who can provide feedback, advice, or simply encouragement.

### How do you participate?

Personally, I feel that all my professional development now centers around #KELTChat. Some recent examples include furthering my understanding of the Lexical Approach through a recent chat, discovering and watching the start of several excellent new blogs (which any teacher in Korea would do well to read), getting some great advice on how to grade some “sociolinguistically challenging” exam answers, and most importantly, gaining a network of friends and colleagues with whom I feel comfortable sharing and developing my classroom practice. I would struggle to achieve any of these things through any other medium.

### How do I participate?

That's easy: Just dive in! #KELTchat has no application forms, membership fees, or much formal organization at all. We don't have any expectations on how or why people choose to contribute; we're just happy if you do. As a start, we recommend that you do any of the following:

- Download Tweetdeck or Hootsuite and run a search for #KELTChat
- Leave a message saying hello on the Facebook group
- Check out our beginners guide on the blog (<http://keltchat.wordpress.com/2012/03/04/new-to-twitter-chatting-heres-a-beginners-guide/>).

If this seems unclear, tweet, or message, one of the people mentioned above, and we'll be happy to help you get started. Hope to see you on #KELTChat soon!

**Alex Grevett teaches at Korea Polytechnic University, and has been working in Korea for almost three years. He is a dissertation away from completing an MA in Applied Linguistics & TESOL with the University of Leicester. His teaching/research interests include pronunciation, curriculum design and, of course, online professional development.**



Alexander Graham Bell saw the potential for videoconferencing after the birth of the telephone in 1924, predicting that one day people would be able to see those they were speaking with. AT&T made that a reality when their Picturephone was launched in 1964 (Andberg, 2008). However, it is only recently that high-quality videoconferencing has become accessible at a reasonable cost. Even Bell could not have imagined how far we have come, with our ability to see the person we are speaking with on personal computers, tablets, and smartphones.

Language educators and learners are beginning to realize the great potential of videoconferencing (Craig & Kim, 2011; Wang, 2006). The use of videoconferencing enables learners to simulate face-to-face instruction by accessing both vocal and facial cues (Wainfan & Davis, 2004). In addition, videoconferencing improves social presence, which makes the online learning environment more hospitable and conducive to prolonged engagement (Edigo, 1988). These all play important roles in communication (Gruba, 1997).

Videoconferencing-supported language instruction is a fast-growing industry with some very big players emerging. Some specialize in Americans with teaching certifications: schools such as Eleutian might cost over \$100/hr, while many others run more economical call centers in places like the Philippines, to take advantage of less expensive staffing costs and overhead for less than \$10/hr.

Teachers can choose to work for the companies above for a steady paycheck, but many more choose to be independent contractors to see a better return on their time and effort. Those with an entrepreneurial spirit can find this to be a challenging, yet rewarding venture. However, there does seem to be a lack of good advice for those who want to take this on, both in terms of how to teach online and how to start an online teaching business.

One thing you might want to consider is professional development. One could piece together a good education by engaging others through online social networks like Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn, and reading the thousands of blogs that discuss language teaching with technology and at a distance. If you are interested in doing this, I suggest Jason Renshaw's wonderful blog post on starting your own online teaching business (<http://goo.gl/eoznV>) as a good place to start.

However, piecing together an education from a multitude of different sources may be overwhelming for some people. More traditional options exist at universities that offer courses in teaching online (Curt Bonk's amazing syllabus, <http://goo.gl/t6nzf>) and teaching with technology (<http://goo.gl/wnVWW>), while organizations like TESOL (<http://goo.gl/XJl4q>) and businesses like TheConsultants-E (<http://theconsultants-e.com>) offer certification programs in teaching languages online.

When you think you are ready to jump in, market yourself through past students and colleagues and across your social networks. However, you may find that you need more exposure. You might want to consider listing your services in one of the many tutor marketplaces. These can make setting up a business easier since many not only help to match you with prospective students, but they may also provide an online space to meet with your students, handle scheduling, and payment. This is not free, though. These services will usually take around 20% of your fees.

Going out there and hustling for new students is not for everyone. However, if you are looking for a little extra money or even a new direction in your professional life, online teaching could be just the thing for you.

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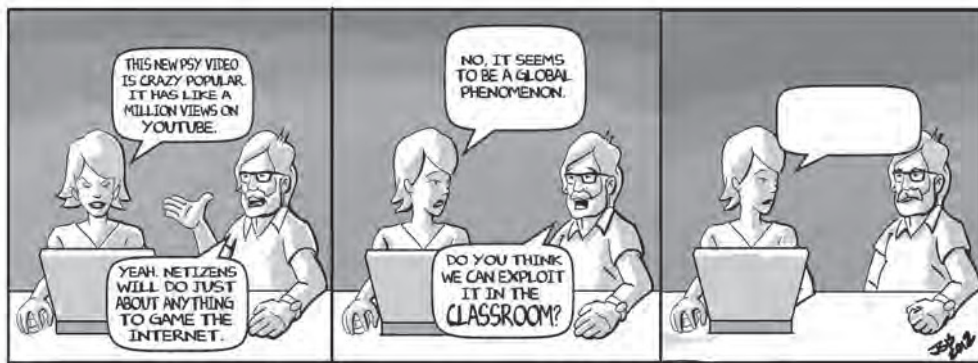
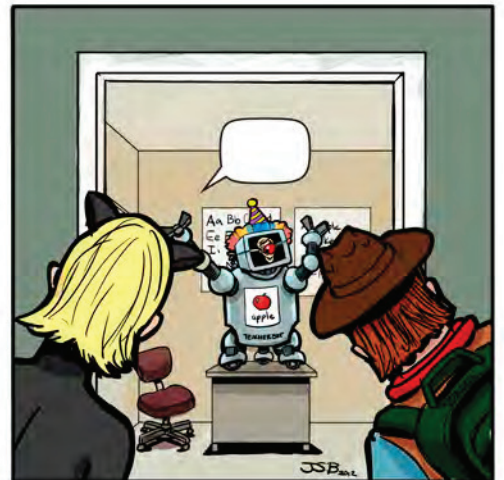
**KOTESOL Views is a monthly column written by members that covers a wide variety of topics.**

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# Report Cards from the Edge

## Jason Burnett



### Best Submission from Previous issue

"Do you want to teach English while dancing like a horse?"

submitted via internet by Tammy P

Report Cards from the Edge is intended to be a fun and interactive comic strip. We encourage readers to use the comics in class.