The English Connection

A Korea TESOL Publication

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KOREA TESOL
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The English Connection

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

Editorial

Alleviating Enmeshment

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

Case 1: During finals week, I run into a large group of my students staggering to the subway. They've clearly been drinking. They bow to me and apologize profusely, as if suddenly ashamed for getting caught celebrating at the end of the semester. I would normally wish them well. But their final speaking exam in my English conversation class is the next morning! And they all should be preparing!

Case 2: I'm in the habit of randomly placing students' name tents in the classroom, creating a surprise seating order and partner arrangement for each class when they come in. I have to watch like an eagle to prevent them from switching seats and partnering up with their regular friends.

Case 3: Favorite food? "Chicken." Favorite hobby? "Computer games/listening to music." Favorite teacher? "Andrew." In a class of 40, invariably the majority of them will hit upon the same stock answers. Is Korean fried chicken really that good? And when did listening to music become the default popular pastime?

Enmeshment is a psychological and relational concept that describes a situation where personal boundaries between individuals – and in the cases I've described above, among classmates – become blurred or overly intertwined. This dynamic can lead to an excessive emotional dependence, where individuals struggle to differentiate their thoughts, feelings, and identities from others in the classroom relationship. Hyun Kim, a professor of psychiatry at Columbia University, explains that enmeshment often arises from well-intentioned but overly involved or controlling relationships. While it may foster a sense of closeness, it can inhibit personal autonomy and healthy emotional development – in this case, as it pertains to English language studies. Enmeshed individuals may experience challenges in forming independent relationships, setting boundaries, or making decisions without external validation. SNS hyper-induced social isolation, as well as traditional aspects of Confucianism and the collective society of Korea compound the problem.

I've noticed this enmeshed blurring of emotional boundaries more and more over the years: an over-reliance on "others" within the classroom that has been significantly hindering Korean students from speaking up in my conversational English courses, which rely on communicative, student-led output. They often have difficulty in expressing individual opinions, stemming from a cultural emphasis on collective harmony and obedience to hierarchical norms. Conversations and other pair work, which requires my students to engage actively, share ideas, and take initiative, seems to conflict with these deeply ingrained tendencies. Many hesitate to participate fully in discussions, fearing judgment or making errors, which could undermine their confidence. Enmeshed students overly rely on their partners, typically elders by just a year, to lead conversations or complete tasks, minimizing their own opportunities to practice speaking.

The three examples above are some ways Korean college students want to stay tight – want to stay together. In Case 1, the bonds that come from going out on a drinking party *hoeshik* tend to outweigh the individual studying needed during exams. In Case 2, being comfortable talking with regular friends prevents the chance to meet new ones, to expose themselves to varied personalities and speaking levels, and ultimately broaden their English communicative skills. In Case 3, why should a student draw attention to themselves with answers that are unique and diverse, when the textbook answer can be the obvious choice, and the teacher can quickly move on to the next student and their display answer?

But the Asian collectivism in these cases highlights the minimal engagement and emotional disconnect, often found in Korean education but especially in English speaking classes. Of course, a certain degree of safety and closeness are needed when sharing viewpoints in reflective and sometimes revealing discussion, more so when vulnerably speaking in a second language. But as Hyun Kim points out, enmeshment is an over reliance of the strong collective relationship, as a safety feature, to prevent the kind of risk-taking needed in spoken language production.

What to do? To address these challenges, teachers must create a supportive environment that gradually encourages autonomy and ensures that students feel safe to make mistakes, share ideas, and engage fully in communicative activities. In other words, talk. I find that rearranging the seating order and mixing partners, while concerning in the first couple weeks, actually encourages conversations and gets students meeting new classmates quicker than they would otherwise. And when the topics with the partner to the left and right have been exhausted, they can turn around to the classmate behind them. Repetition can encourage confidence and autonomy.

In addition, sharing results with the class creates multiple benefits. Even if it's just standing up for 10 seconds with a partner and reciting a couple of opinions they discussed, reporting results pressures individuals to more actively contribute and cooperate. Being accountable is also a great way to avoid embarrassment, in the sense of "we all are going to have to speak in front of the class, so I might as well do a good job." There's an ironic sense of creating group cohesion through standing out with an individual contribution that uses enmeshment as a motivating strength. I encourage praise through group applause, if just to recognize individual effort and boost self-efficacy.

As students brainstorm on a discussion about favorites, I write on the board, "No fried chicken. No listening to music. No Andrew." Out come erasers as they attempt to come up with better answers, digging deeper for some personal insight. The struggle is real. But it's a start.

Cultivating Community and Connections with KOTESOL

By Dr. Lindsay Herron KOTESOL President

Why are you involved in KOTESOL? Have your goals and motivations evolved over time as you've changed and grown? I started going to workshops and conferences as a novice teacher, tossed into a classroom with minimal training and desperate for ideas and insights from more knowledgeable veterans. Today, I'm celebrating twenty years in Korea – and with two decades' worth of experience, training, and coursework now under my belt, my focus has shifted to giving back: to sharing my own experience and research while learning new skills to support our organization in a variety of personally meaningful ways. But my main reason for sticking around is the people! KOTESOL provides a rich, multifaceted space in which we can collaborate with likeminded individuals and cultivate lasting friendships; indeed, we offer opportunities to connect at a personal, regional, national, or even international level. Our culture of community and connection is evident in the accomplishments of KOTESOL so far this year.

First, the 32nd Korea TESOL International Conference (#KOTESOL2025) saw a record number of in-person participants since the pandemic. We had around 570 participants representing 35 countries, plus numerous educators across the globe who accessed the conference's free asynchronous (online) sessions. The KOTESOL Café made a return, selling snacks and beverages for the very reasonable price of just 1,000 won each – and also provided complimentary coffee to anyone with a KOTESOL tumbler, available for purchase at the Membership Committee booth. The basement area of the Prime Complex featured registration, the poster sessions, and our sponsors' booths, including the new Marketplace @KOTESOL2025, a collection of small businesses offering handicrafts, baked goods, and more – itself an innovative example of productive collaboration between KOTESOL and the local community. The Social @KOTESOL2025, our annual gala event, was held once again in the Han Sang Eun Lounge on the seventh floor of Centennial Hall, attracting nearly 100 attendees. The evening featured passed hors d'oeuvres by Spoon Seoul, amazing night views, and copious libations. Gratitude to the conference team for the thousands of hours they invested in this conference – and indeed, to everyone who participated. I hope you had as much fun as I did!

Also at the conference, we celebrated the recipients of many KOTESOL awards. First, I presented the KOTESOL Patron's Award to Dr. Kara Mac Donald for her generous contributions to our organization. It was Dr. Mac Donald who founded and funded our first-ever presenter travel grant this year. This grant, awarded to Thanh-Huong Dang from Vietnam, Dammar Singh Saud from Nepal, and Sayed Rafiqul Hasan Milon from Bangladesh, was designed to facilitate conference participation by accepted presenters with demonstrated financial need and from areas traditionally under-represented at KOTESOL conferences. Dr. Mac Donald is one of the most kind-hearted, generous, and inspiring people I have ever met; she constantly looks for ways to create and support opportunities for people who need them, and I'm happy we could recognize her efforts in some small way.

The Publications Committee also announced the recipients of their annual awards. Congratulations to Seoul Chapter's Christopher Miller, recipient of the 2025 Reflective Language Teacher Award; Gyeonggi Chapter's Maria Teresa Martínez García, recipient of the Research Paper of the Year Award for her article "Bridging the Gap: Leveraging Neuroeducation to Enhance Teaching Methodologies" in the *Korea TESOL Journal*; international member I-Jiuan Ting, recipient of the *KOTESOL Proceedings* Best Paper Award for "Analyzing the Felt Sense of Writing in English"; and Michael Duddy, recipient of *The English Connection* Article of the Year Award for "Strategies to Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching in the Korean Context."

This year also sees our partner connections thriving. The international conference featured representatives from two of our domestic partners, KATE and ALAK; in-person participation by partners from ELTAM (Mongolia), ETA-ROC (Taiwan), JALT (Japan), MELTA (Malaysia), PALT (Philippines), and ThaiTESOL (Thailand); and online participation by representatives from HAAL (Hong Kong) and ELTAI (India). Reciprocally, our International Outreach Committee is hoping to send KOTESOL representatives to upcoming partner conferences in Hong Kong, Mongolia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Serving as a representative of our organization is an enjoyable privilege, and KOTESOL members are encouraged to apply for this responsibility!

The upcoming months promise many more opportunities for connections and community, from local workshops to regional conferences, from book discussion groups to larger social events, and from reading our amazing publications to sharing your own experiences and research in them. What are your plans for connecting with others this summer and fall, and how can our community of practice support you in your goals and aspirations? KOTESOL is there for you!

Making Sense of Multimodality and Social Semiotics in TESOL

By Dr. Stafford Lumsden

One of the more interesting shifts in language teaching in recent years has been the move towards multimodality. But what does it mean to teach *multimodally*? What is a *multimodal pedagogy* (especially when teaching English language learners or training their teachers)? And what are social semiotics; how do they fit in? This article introduces multimodality and social semiotics, looks back at the history and theoretical development of this branch of linguistics, and asks how a multimodal approach to teaching English could be applied in the classroom, despite some of the challenges that we might encounter in pursuit of a multimodal pedagogy for TESOL.

A Brief History of Multimodality

The study of multimodality emerged from the recognition that words, both written and spoken, are not the only way we can construct and communicate meaning. In the late 20th century, scholars like the late Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen expanded on M.A.K. Halliday's (1961) systemic functional linguistics. In their seminal work *Reading Images: A Grammar of Visual Design* (1996), Kress and van Leeuwen posited that communication is rarely, if ever, confined to one mode. Instead, a communicative act is the combination of multiple modes that contribute to meaning-making.

The Theory Behind Multimodality and Social Semiotics

At its core, multimodality is the understanding that meaning is made through multiple modes. Social semiotics is closely tied to multimodality and offers a framework for how we can analyze different modes. Rather than seeing language as an isolated system, social semiotics looks at how all elements in a communicative act contribute to the overall meaning.

Kress and van Leeuwen's work in social semiotics redefined the way we understand meaning-making by recognizing that each mode has distinct affordances, i.e., strengths and weaknesses, that influence how effectively it can communicate specific types of information. While written text is precise in conveying complex ideas, an image can often convey emotion more directly. The combination of modes allows for more nuanced and effective communication, especially in educational contexts where engagement is key.

What Is a Mode?

In multimodal social semiotics, *mode* refers to a system of communication used for making and expressing meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Written and spoken language are the two modes we are probably most familiar with. Then, images and video. However, there are a plethora of other modes, for example, embodied modes like gesture, audio, and even the use of physical space are all modes, each mode having its own affordances.

Then How About Semiotic Resources?

In contrast, a *semiotic resource* refers to the specific tools or materials within a mode that are used to make meaning (van Leeuwen, 2005). These resources are the building blocks that people put together to create messages and what we have to "pull apart" to interpret them. In the visual mode, semiotic resources might include color, composition, and line, while in the linguistic mode, semiotic resources include vocabulary,

grammar, and syntax. My research centers around the use of non-linguistic semiotic resources, e.g., typography (bold, italics, font size, etc.) paragraphs, lists, alignment, and emoji, and their ability to enhance linguistic modes in online TESOL teacher education (Lumsden et al., 2024). Semiotic resources, like written and spoken language, are culturally and socially defined and continue to be shaped by their use and the people that use them.

Table 1 (itself a non-linguistic semiotic resource used in a written mode) provides a comparison between mode and semiotic resources.

Table 1. A Comparison Between Mode and Semiotic Resources

	Mode	Semiotic Resource
Definition	A system or channel of communication used to create and convey meaning.	The tools or elements within a mode used to construct and interpret meaning.
Examples	Text, image, gesture, sound, spatial arrangement.	Color, grammar, gestures, intonation, composition.
Scope	Broader category of meaning-making.	Specific components used within a mode.
Function	Facilitates communication by using different sensory or expressive means.	Contributes to the detailed realization of meaning within a mode.
Influence	Modes determine the general form of communication (e.g., visual, auditory).	Semiotic resources shape the specific meaning conveyed (e.g., tone, emphasis, structure).
Affordances	Each mode has distinct strengths and limitations for expressing meaning.	Affordances of resources determine how effectively they communicate meaning within a mode.

With the integration of online tools and digital media into our teaching, the boundaries between written, spoken, and visual communication are not as clear as they once were. Social media posts, YouTube videos, and web platforms – and of late, generative artificial intelligence – mean we need to develop an understanding of how various modes work together to create meaning. Multimodality, therefore, is not just a theoretical lens, it is also a necessary approach to understanding and navigating modern communication.

Applying Multimodality in TESOL Classrooms

The application of multimodality in TESOL has the potential to be really powerful. Teachers can employ any number of semiotic resources available to both them and their students to communicate ideas, model language use, and check understanding. Here, I explore how multimodal approaches can be used at different levels:

1. Elementary School

At the elementary school level, the use of images, sounds, and gestures is crucial for scaffolding language acquisition. Young learners are naturally inclined towards visual and physical learning (consider the usefulness of Total Physical Response, e.g., Asher, 1969), which makes multimodal resources such as picture books, songs, and interactive games highly effective. By carefully considering and using storybooks with vivid illustrations, a teacher can guide students through the language and the visual narrative, enabling comprehension through both linguistic and visual modes. In this setting, teachers can encourage students to create their own multimodal texts, such as creating their own picture books to accompany spoken stories or acting out stories using gestures to emphasize (and for the teacher to check understanding of) the target language. This helps to solidify understanding,

> **... the boundaries between written, spoken, and visual communication are not as clear as they once were.**

helps commit target language to long-term memory, and makes abstract language concepts more concrete.

2. Higher Education
In higher education, multimodality can increase critical engagement with authentic materials. Analyzing YouTube videos or advertisements offers students a chance to explore how language works alongside images, music, and camera angles to create persuasive messages. Along with exposure to the target language, this encourages a critical awareness of how different modes influence meaning and allows learners to transfer these analytical skills to their own language use (and the use of their first language).

In academic contexts, multimodal tasks can help students learn to express their ideas across multiple forms, such as combining writing tasks with a visual presentation. Not only is the target language reinforced through the transformation from one mode to another, written to visual and spoken, these tasks also help learners build competencies that go beyond traditional language learning, preparing them for the many communication demands they will encounter outside the classroom.

3. Post- and Continuing Education
For adults in post-education settings, such as workplace, language learners, multimodality can be especially relevant. In business English courses, for example, students might be asked to create a multimodal presentation, combining spoken language with visual aids like graphs, images, and infographics, reflecting real-world tasks. Additionally, incorporating digital literacies into language learning, such as teaching learners how to craft an effective LinkedIn

profile in English and incorporating target language, is an example of multimodal learning that meets the demands of the workplace. These practices help adult learners navigate a world in which effective communication increasingly depends on multimodal competence and the ability to communicate complex ideas in multiple modes – spoken and written reports, emails, presentations, etc. – using a variety of semiotic resources.

The Challenge: Lack of a Unified Approach
Despite the potential benefits, there is no unified understanding of what a "multimodal pedagogy" for TESOL looks like or should look like. This stands in stark contrast to established theories of second language acquisition, such as Krashen's input hypothesis or Swain's output hypothesis, which have been widely accepted and adopted in language classrooms and TESOL training programs.

One reason for this lack of consensus is the complexity of multimodality. Unlike written and spoken language, which has relatively well-defined rules and structures, modes like image, gesture, or even layout are less standardized and more context dependent. Consider for example the differences between a resumé prepared for a job application in Korea versus one that might be submitted as part of a job application in Australia or the United Kingdom. This makes it difficult to create a one-size-fits-all pedagogy that can be easily implemented in classrooms across different cultural and educational settings.

Similar to continued critique of language imperialism or the homogeneity of so-called American English, it is also important that the shared, predominantly Western, understandings of semiotic resources aren't (implicitly) imposed on learners. The digital divide further complicates the implementation of multimodal approaches. While classrooms increasingly have access to the latest technology, enabling students to create video projects or interact with digital whiteboards, others may still rely on more traditional resources. Multimodal pedagogy, therefore, must be adaptable – not only to different educational levels but also to varying resource availability.

Building Towards a Shared Understanding
To advance multimodal pedagogy in TESOL, educators need to share their experiences, insights, and challenges.

Multimodal approaches offer an exciting avenue for TESOL educators to engage students and enrich their learning.

Conferences, like the Korea TESOL international conference, provide a platform for such exchanges. By engaging with peers and creating communities of practice, teachers can collaboratively build a more unified understanding of how multimodal resources can be used effectively in the classroom.

We also must be willing to embrace experimentation. Multimodality, by its very nature, is dynamic. Teachers should be encouraged to continue developing the innovative approaches they already use and empowered to try new approaches, be it through digital storytelling, using comic strips to teach narrative structures, or incorporating more physical elements like gesture and role-play into their lessons. Reflective practice will be key in refining and defining a multimodal approach that works for TESOL.

Conclusion

Multimodal approaches offer an exciting avenue for TESOL educators to engage students and enrich their learning. By understanding the history and theory of multimodality and by exploring its applications in different contexts, teachers are better placed to support their students in making meaning through a variety of modes. However, the journey towards a cohesive multimodal pedagogy is ongoing, requiring collaboration, creativity, reflection, and a willingness to embrace the complexities of modern communication.

Looking forward, we should be always asking how we can better integrate multimodal practices into our teaching to enhance language learning but also to prepare our students for a world where communication is multimodal. In doing so,

and through our collective efforts in collaboration and sharing, the next decade will be an exciting time in multimodality and social semiotics as we see the development of a more unified, robust approach to multimodal pedagogy in TESOL.

(This paper contains text generated by GPT-4o Preview with Canvas [brainstorming, literature synthesis, structure] and Apple Intelligence [spelling, grammar, syntax].)

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Bridging Language and Culture: The Role of Artificial Intelligence in ESL Education

By Marc Santamaria

Effective English as a second language (ESL) education encompasses more than mere linguistic proficiency; it necessitates a focus on meaningful communication and cultural awareness. The interconnection between language and culture is profound, and fostering this understanding is essential for students' success in real-world interactions. This pedagogical approach transcends traditional methods such as rote learning, instead emphasizing the development of communicative competence and a genuine connection with the language.

Central to this approach is the recognition of the cultural context in which learners are immersed, as it significantly enhances their motivation. When educational materials resonate with students' personal experiences and reflect the cultural realities they navigate, their engagement is deepened. Establishing strong connections between characters, their actions, and emotions, and the learners' own lives enhances relatability, rendering the learning process more meaningful and dynamic.

Cultural alignment serves as a powerful catalyst for motivation – a critical driver of language acquisition. Students who establish a profound connection with the target culture through relevant experiences often form stronger bonds with the language, fostering persistence and dedication. Highly motivated learners are more inclined to invest time and effort into revising their work, completing assignments, and actively engaging with the language, ultimately leading to improved proficiency and long-term success.

How can educators create these meaningful connections? By integrating culturally relevant materials that resonate with students' personal experiences, teachers can enhance engagement and foster a more profound understanding of the language.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to revolutionize ESL teaching by offering personalized cultural content and simulating real-world interactions that resonate with students' individual contexts. For instance, AI tools can analyze learners' backgrounds, interests, and language proficiency to create lessons that include practical scenarios. Imagine a student from Korea learning English through an interactive module about the local food scene in New York, where they virtually "join" a food tour, learning not only the vocabulary related to dining but also the cultural nuances of tipping practices and regional dishes.

Additionally, AI-driven simulations can provide immersive environments where learners practice communication in engaging and realistic settings. Picture a virtual café where students can role-play ordering coffee, negotiating prices, or engaging in small talk with a native speaker, all while receiving real-time feedback on their pronunciation and grammar. These experiences are not solely about language skills; they build cultural confidence, enabling students to navigate social contexts seamlessly.

AI also plays a crucial role in dismantling cultural stereotypes and expanding access to underrepresented cultures, thereby promoting a more inclusive ESL environment. For example, AI can curate content that highlights diverse voices within the target language. Imagine a lesson that includes interviews with speakers of various dialects or accents, showcasing the rich tapestry of the language. Students would gain exposure to the linguistic diversity of English, from the melodic tones of Caribbean English to the distinct phrases used in Indian English, fostering an appreciation for the complexity within the language.

Furthermore, AI can enhance accessibility to lesser-known languages and cultures by generating engaging lessons that incorporate regional dialects or indigenous languages. For instance, a language learning app could present stories from local folklore using both English and a regional dialect, allowing students to appreciate storytelling traditions while improving their language skills. This not only enriches the learning experience but also supports cultural preservation and diversity.

In conclusion, effective ESL education must embrace a holistic approach that prioritizes not just linguistic proficiency but also meaningful communication and cultural awareness. By recognizing the intertwined nature of language and culture, educators can create engaging learning experiences that resonate with students' personal backgrounds and interests. The integration of AI technologies offers exciting opportunities to personalize and enhance language learning, making it more relevant and immersive. Through real-world simulations and culturally diverse content, students can develop communicative competence and cultural confidence, preparing them for authentic interactions in a globalized world. Ultimately, by fostering motivation and inclusivity, we can guide learners on their journey to not only master a new language but also to appreciate and navigate the rich cultural landscapes that shape it.

The Author

Marc Santamaria is an ESL instructor, attorney, and AI trainer. He teaches law at UC Berkeley and ESL at City College of San Francisco. As an experienced educator, he explores the intersection of AI, education, and the law. He advocates for innovative teaching methods and advises on AI's role in education, particularly in English language learning. Email: marc@usimmigrationplan.com

Literature in the Multicultural Classroom

By Aulia Djunaedi

Introduction

Literature is a vast and diverse field encompassing written works that express ideas, emotions, and experiences through language. It includes various genres, such as poetry, prose (fiction and nonfiction), drama, and oral literature. Literature entertains, informs, provokes thought, and reflects on the human condition. It often explores themes such as love, loss, identity, societal issues, and the complexities of human relationships. Major literary movements and periods throughout history have showcased different styles, philosophies, and cultural perspectives.

Moreover, an English language teaching approach can use literary works, such as novels, plays, and poems, as a tool for language instruction. This approach aims to teach students a more engaging and effective way of learning English by exposing them to authentic and diverse texts.

Using literature in the English language classroom is complex and multifaceted. It requires a deep understanding of these literary works and the cultural, historical, and social contexts in which they were created. Using literature in the classroom is a productive way of engaging the learners individually. It delivers excellent opportunities for learners to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

Importance of Literature in Language Teaching

First, literature exposes learners to authentic language, which can help them develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. By reading and analyzing authentic texts, learners can improve their vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while understanding how language is used in real-world situations.

Second, literature can expose learners to a wide range of cultural attitudes and knowledge, broadening their horizons and enabling them to think critically about the world around them. Learners can develop empathy, tolerance, and understanding of diverse perspectives by reading literature from different cultures and periods.

Finally, yet importantly, using novels in English language teaching can foster critical thinking skills, as students analyze the story's themes, characters, and plans. Teachers can use strategies like pre-reading activities, post-reading discussions, and writing assignments to help students engage with the novel and improve their language skills. Therefore, novels offer a window into different cultures and perspectives, broadening students' horizons and expanding their worldviews.

Practice in the Multicultural Classroom

It is a privilege to teach diverse students from a rich mix of cultures, such as those of Nepal and Uzbekistan. The class comprises first- and second-year students, each bringing their own unique perspectives and experiences to our literary discussions.

The literature class that I teach is counted as one credit. It is an hour long and not a required subject. I assigned four works: *The Metamorphosis*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and the play *Macbeth*. Two works assigned before the midterm and two after.

To introduce a work, I usually start by showing pictures from the book covers and ask students what kind of story it might be. Then, I divide the students into groups of three to five people and give them pieces of a screenshot picture that I took from YouTube. The students then put the pieces of the picture into place. After that, I ask them to tell me the order of the pictures, and I arrange them in front of the class using the computer. This can be considered Activity 1.

After Activity 1, I tell the students the beginning of the story and ask them to check their picture arrangement, rearrange the pieces of the picture as the storyline, and try to predict what will happen. These exercises are designed to help students visualize the work's narrative structure, enhancing their comprehension and engagement. I always pause to give the students enough time. Then, I give them some pieces of the picture again and ask them to predict the ensuing story. This can be considered Activity 2.

Because of limited time, each work was discussed in three meetings, which can be considered Activity 3. The first two meetings used picture stories; in the second meeting, I told the story or showed a short version of it from YouTube. In the third meeting, we reviewed and discussed the main characters and morals. To reinforce their understanding, I sometimes used a digital spin-the-wheel to randomly select discussion topics or have the students make a big circle, ask a question randomly, and throw a ball to a classmate they want to get a question from, encouraging active participation and engagement.

After we watched a short summary on YouTube, the students retold the story slide-by-slide in pairs. This retelling can be considered Activity 4. Then, as a whole class we viewed the slides, representing the entire episodes of the work. The students were given many questions during the retelling exercises to create an active learning atmosphere and check whether they understood the storyline and characters in the story. This comprehension check through question-and-answering can be considered Activity 5.

▲ *Students watch a short version of the work to review and discuss.*

I only gave two assignments, before and after the midterms. The assignment was to submit a 5- to 8-minute voice or video recording explaining *The Metamorphosis*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Macbeth*. I prefer assignments that verbally explain things, not written explanations, because, besides wanting my students to be able to express themselves in front of the camera (being conscious of their tone), this keeps it 100% AI free. Therefore, no writing assignments are given. These homework assignments can be considered Activity 6.

Methods Used in Discussing Literature
First, pre-reading activities. Before students begin reading the work, teachers can use pre-reading activities to help students understand the context and background of the story. This can involve introducing essential vocabulary, discussing themes and topics, and making predictions about the plot and characters. Pre-reading activities are essential, as they provide a foundation for students to more effectively understand and engage with the text.

> It delivers excellent opportunities for learners to communicate their thoughts and feelings.

Second, the reading strategies. Teachers can use various reading strategies to help students engage with the text actively while reading the novel. This can include asking students to highlight and annotate important passages, identify literary devices and figurative language, and make connections between the text and their own experiences. Teachers may also provide students with reading comprehension questions or encourage students to ask their own questions, thus promoting critical thinking and analytical skills.

Third, the post-reading discussions. After students have finished reading the work, teachers can facilitate post-reading discussions to encourage critical thinking and reflection. These discussions can include themes, character development, and plot. Teachers can also encourage students to connect the text and their lives, allowing them to understand the literature's relevance to the world around them. Post-reading discussions allow students to share their thoughts and ideas, thus promoting collaboration and communication skills.

Last are the important activities that support reading comprehension, such as writing assignments, role-play, and drama activities. Writing assignments can help students expand their language skills and critical thinking capabilities. Some teachers may opt to assign different writing tasks, such as essays, summaries, and creative-writing assignments, to help students engage with the work. Meanwhile, role-play and drama activities can also help students interactively understand the characters and plot.

The Students' Feedback
The insights from the students who took the literature courses last semester are invaluable. To ensure I captured their most honest reactions, I conducted interviews with them pertaining to the four works we covered.

The interviews were conducted with great care and were held individually to obtain unbiased input, lasting 30 to 40 minutes. Below is the list of pertinent questions and their answers. Student A is a 23-year-old Nepalese second-year culinary arts major, and Student B is a 20-year-old Uzbek second-year business major.

▲ *The author (right) with one of her students.*

1. What do you like the most from the class?
Student A: "I like the professor the best. I like how understanding she was towards us. She was very concerned about our learning and comfort. I like most of my classmates as well."

Student B: "I like the method that the lecturer applied, which included having a pair and group discussion, throwing questions, and a fun quiz."

2. What do you like the least from the class?
Student A: "What I liked the least was a few of my classmates because they sometimes made noises during the lecture and when some students answered the lecture questions."

Student B: "Some classmates, including me, like to come late. Students kept coming late, which distracted the class's learning process and mood. Sorry, I came late several times as well."

3. Do you think that an hour is enough?
Student A: "I don't think it was enough. I think 2 hours will be better because literature requires a lot of thinking and is interesting."

Student B: "Definitely not enough. Two hours with a 10-minute break will be perfect for Western Literature because this is interesting, and I felt we were always in a hurry, chasing time."

4. Which book or story from the class did you like the most?
Student A: "The book or story I loved the most was *Macbeth*. The reason I like it is because it is about betrayal and karma. I am glad that Macbeth and his wife were dead at the end. I like this kind of story, such as crime, murder, etc."

Student B: "I like *Macbeth* the best because of the story. I like stories that involve life lessons on it."

5. Do you like how the lecturer applied the subject?
Student A: "I liked how the lecturer applied this Western literature with pictures, telling the story, watching the video summary of the literature, and reviewing together. I like it when we are given time to share our thoughts with classmates."

> "I liked how the lecturer applied this Western literature with pictures, telling the story, watching the video summary of the literature, and reviewing together."

Final Thoughts

Western literature is a perfect subject to apply in any classroom, whether it is mono-cultural or multicultural, not just to develop English vocabulary but to also improve reading and writing skills. If we play a movie or video related to literature and have discussion or role-play, then the English listening and speaking skills can also be sharpened. Literature can also expose learners to various cultural attitudes and knowledge while encouraging students to think critically about the world around them. We can also learn how to be more tolerant of others.

The interview with my students made me realize the challenges and difficulties of applying Western literature in a multicultural classroom. It is not just about nationality or background; gender and generational differences also play a role in choosing novels and how to lead the class. By having discussions with my adult students, I also learned that other methods of giving an exam can be carried out to fit the level of the students, so that a better understanding of literature is achieved. In summary, literature is a helpful minor subject that can be applied at the university level.

Student B: "The lecturer, which was you, use videos to help us understand faster about the novels. You also made a pair and group discussion, which I liked."

6. What could have been done differently?

Student A: "I think a writing section would be good because we needed time to process the information and feelings. More assignments would not do any harm because we can be more critical and familiar with the stories or books, and our feelings and thoughts. On top of that, I think eight books need to be applied in one semester. I wanted to read and discuss as many books as I can."

Student B: "I think there were too many books that we covered. We studied *The Metamorphosis*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Macbeth*. I think just two novels would be enough. Also, any stories that are not too sad and have no romance would be good."

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Turning Things Around: Generative AI in the Writing Classroom

By Rebecca Bae

"Seventy-two percent of text is likely AI-generated." "Your text is likely human written." Wading through authoritative sounding GPT detection results has become the new purview for writing instructors. However, are these detectors reliable and is this even the best way to approach the generative AI writing era? To address these questions, this article will report on action research regarding the usage and detection of generative AI in an undergraduate EFL academic writing course. The primary finding is that detection software (in this case, Turnitin) is unable to accurately and consistently identify generative AI prose in EFL learner language. Hopefully, this article will help teachers consider their own generative AI policies and, secondarily, give teachers ideas about how to integrate generative AI into their classrooms.

The Course

This action research was conducted in an introductory academic writing course, designed for Korean sophomore college students. There are two main objectives in the course: (a) to produce academic essays that show an understanding of basic writing structure, including, but not limited to, introductions, transitions, supports, and conclusions and (b) to correctly use formal citation. The culminating assignment for the course is a researched essay, which can variously be called a research paper, passive research, or an opinion essay using sources.

After the spring 2024 semester, I knew something needed to change with the course. Plagiarism occurs fairly regularly, often attributed to (a) poor notetaking and losing track of sources, (b) misunderstanding the purpose and use of quotation marks, even if just one sentence in length, and (c) misunderstanding how summarizing for an annotation is different from incorporating information into one's own prose. However, with the continued normalization of generative AI, and even with a generative AI policy and a discussion on disclosures, the rate of academic misconduct increased by 15% over previous semesters (average of Spring 2020 through Spring 2023, 8 semesters, $N = 197$ compared to the average of Fall 2023 and Spring 2024, $N = 55$).

Although this increase was shocking, it was not unexpected. Instead, my biggest cause for concern was how the release of generative AI was changing the essay genre itself. I saw a marked increase in the number of sources per paper, which might indicate better papers. However, that was coupled with the distinct realization that for the first time in nearly 20 years of teaching, I did not want to read my students' submissions. I could imagine that my students took a generative AI essay as the core and diligently went fact-by-fact searching the internet for a matching source. The students certainly made strenuous efforts spending two to three hours finding 12 to 25 sources for just a five-paragraph essay. I felt that writing had become a game of whack-a-mole. My students were whacking statistic after statistic, trying to list enough source websites to avoid the dreaded plagiarism accusation, and I spent equally copious hours trying to whack out the plagiarizers in attempts to maintain fairness and integrity in my courses. I knew that something needed to change in my writing courses, if not for the sake of the students, then for my own mental health.

The Assignment

The primary change that I made to the course in Fall 2024 was that all writing had to be supervised, in class, a decision in line with Bailey (2023). Writing was also completed on GoogleDocs created in my own Google account and open only during class time. In order to compensate for students who might be disadvantaged due to poor writing fluency, students could schedule an appointment to come and write in my office – supervised – at any time if they felt that the time provided during class was not enough.

As with any change, some students at first tried to subvert this policy, writing and using generative AI outside of class and quickly copying and pasting their work when the GoogleDocs were opened. However, some gentle coaching and a firm adherence to the new rules established a clear direction for the semester. Interestingly enough, this policy led to a number of unexpected benefits. Students showed better time management as the semester progressed, and there was a palpable decrease in the stress level, especially during the penultimate week of the semester. More philosophically, the time limit forced the students to face their own inevitable imperfection as humans and perhaps consider that their own imperfect work was more valuable than any thirty-second generative AI essay.

The first assignment for the semester was a basic opinion essay (aka five-paragraph essay). The use of anecdotes as personal evidence was promoted, and the use of the internet for sources was discouraged, since we had not yet reviewed citations. Instead, students were told that they would be able to use generative AI software after we discussed it in class. During the first two class periods, students free-wrote about a possible topic, read a sample essay, chose a topic, created an outline, and then wrote the first two body paragraphs of the essay.

> ... my biggest cause for concern was how the release of generative AI was changing the essay genre itself.

This led to the third class period, which introduced generative AI. Generative AI was framed as a writing tool that could be used at each step of the writing process (pre-writing, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing). For each step of the writing

process, students were shown a graphic indicating how much generative AI was reasonable/acceptable and what form of notification was required if they used generative AI. In efforts to overcome the language barrier, a large red O, Δ, or X also clearly communicated how these tools should be used. In sum, the writing process gave me a framework to clearly and consistently discuss using generative AI in writing.

This first generative AI class began with a lecture, outlining the controversy around generative AI and then introducing the framework and graphics. Pre-writing and drafting were specifically discussed with example prompts shown. Disclosure statements were emphasized, also with multiple samples shown. Then, it was time for the students to try out generative AI for drafting. I had the students generate three different possible paragraphs for the third body paragraph of their opinion essay. First, I asked them to use a simple prompt, for example, "Write a paragraph about the negative effects of smartphones on mental health." For the second prompt, I told students to give the GPT their outline for the third body paragraph. For the third prompt, students were asked to train the GPT by feeding it their first and second body paragraphs and having it produce a third paragraph in the same style on a specified sub-topic. On the whole, students were surprised by how well generative AI composed a paragraph similar to the one they had envisioned when they created their outline. Following this exploratory activity, students picked one paragraph as the third paragraph for their essay and wrote a disclosure statement.

This one class was integrated into a larger major assignment and further into a course, so it might be difficult for other teachers to implement given their own scaffolding and needs. However, this one activity was so powerful in effectively introducing and practicing many of the key objectives behind using generative AI in writing, including
1. analyzing the output created by generative AI;
2. recognizing the importance of prompting language, even just a specific verb choice, and its impact on the desired output;
3. writing a disclosure statement;
4. using an original outline as best practice for drafting with generative AI; and
5. training a GPT with an individual writing style as best practice for drafting.

... if I had a "no generative AI policy" in my classroom ... I would only be able to identify approximately one third of the students who violated the policy.

In later classes, I was able to expand on this list:
6. revising the output to match what I want to say;
7. checking the output for sourced information and adding a citation;
8. using generative AI for short specific tasks, like a conclusion, as best practice for generative AI drafting; and
9. having generative AI create a list of possible changes (to grammar or content) so that students can decide and make the changes, rather than having generative AI do the revision itself.

To complete the major assignment, students had time to revise their generative AI output, wrote introductions and conclusions, conducted a peer review workshop, and lastly, had an entire class period for revision and editing. For the conclusion, students had the choice of using generative AI, so no one essay had more than 40% of generated text.

The Results

Having observed all of my students ($N = 10$) during the seven days of the project, I was relatively confident in my understanding of how much each student had used generated text in their essay and where. This was supported by the student's reported disclosures. Therefore, during grading, I was not trying to ascertain if students used GPT output and how much. Using generated text was part of the assignment, and no student was cited with an academic violation for doing so. Instead, I could use the essays to verify whether my switch to all-monitored writing was justified. Could Turnitin, our school's GPT detector of choice, serve as a reliable tool for detecting generated text if I allowed my students to write freely outside of class? The results of the accuracy of Turnitin detection software can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Turnitin's Ability to Detect Generative AI Text Incorporated in EFL Student Writing, in Raw Number of Essays

False positive	.5
Detected correctly	2.5
Suspected usage lacks evidence (<20%)	3
Not detected	3
No generated text used	1
Total	10

These results show that Turnitin cannot accurately detect generated text within EFL student essays. Of the nine essays that used generative AI (one student did not want to use generative AI at all), only 2.5, or 28%, were detected. For one third of the essays, Turnitin suspected generated text, but there was not enough evidence. To state this finding another way, if I had a "no generative AI policy" in my classroom and allowed students to write freely outside of class, I would only be able to identify approximately one third of the students who violated the policy.

The more concerning evidence, however, was the false positive and the undetected samples. One student struggled specifically with paraphrasing over multiple class periods. This was identified by Turnitin as suspected of using a paraphrasing tool (highlighted purple rather than blue on the submission). Reviewing the GoogleDoc history versions, I could see how the student had modified the sentences, even following my advice, to reach the final version, which had grammatical errors. This is clearly of concern for EFL teachers, who, as a matter of course, deal with imperfect interlanguage.

Secondly, of the three undetected texts, two of the students used the generative AI output well and modified it to better fit their style and what they wanted to say. The integration was smooth, and these samples might represent the future for human–generative AI writing. However, for the third student, the generated text was only four sentences in length, so the detection software dismissed it. However, it was poorly integrated and obvious. Clearly, with the lack of reliable detection software, an instructor would have difficulty maintaining fairness in their class if they allowed students to write outside of class or even if they allowed students to complete assignments outside of class that they started in class.

Due to the emotionally charged nature of plagiarism accusations and grade point averages, I decided to turn the tables on the conversation and instead graded students' generative AI integration as a part of the essay rubric. The scalar descriptors and point distributions can be seen in Table 2. I used the Turnitin detection results as a somewhat objective baseline for this score. Detected writing was "fair," suspected writing was "good," and non-detected writing was "excellent." Then I used my own judgement if I felt the score needed to be modified from there.

Using this form of grading helped to transform the nature of the conversation. Rather than being confrontational about using generative AI text or not, I could communicate to the students how I felt they had used generative AI as a tool. I could also frame integration as an area for future work or practice. Most importantly, these descriptors emphasized the need for a disclosure statement, a tool that I feel my students will most certainly need if they continue their studies, wish to publish, or decide to seek employment abroad.

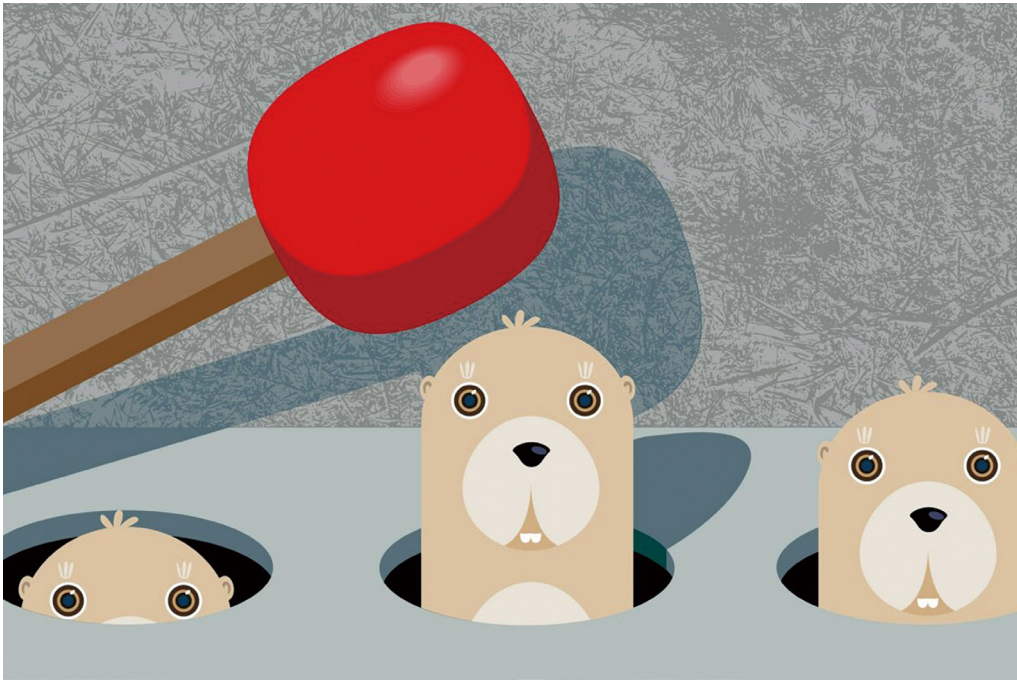**Table 2.** Rubric Descriptors for Grading Generative AI Integration in an Essay and Associated Point Values

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Needs Work
GenAI Integration Descriptor	Disclosure mentioned grammar revision and new writing. Integration is smooth with changes to citation and style as necessary. OR GenAI is not used at all; originality is supported by a disclosure statement.	Disclosure mentions grammar revision and new writing. Citations have been added as appropriate, but no other changes are apparent. Flow is okay.	Disclosure mentions grammar revision and new writing, but flow is not smooth. No revision is evident.	Missing disclosure statement.
Point Value	10	8	7	2

Note. Full essay grade out of a possible 100 points.

Discussion

These results are consistent with Chaka (2024a), which reviewed 17 articles from 2023 and found that all of the tested generative AI detection tools showed inconsistency and lack of reliability. Chaka (2024b), which tested 30 different detection software with both L1 and L2 student essays, goes on to emphasize that "free-to-use AI detectors are not fit for purpose" (p. 127). Therefore, I believe the switch to monitored writing is justified and that no-generative-AI policies are not enforceable.

With the lack of dependable detection tools, teachers must reconsider how they structure and execute writing assignments. Monitored writing shows positive promise, but we should use this moment to explore various approaches. I know one teacher who is using hand-written journals at the collegiate level, and I've also been ruminating on how content teachers might limit sources in order to maintain credibility of information while keeping grading manageable, something like the document-based question on the AP History exam. For myself, I want to show my students that writing is an exploratory and expressive practice rather than an authoritative or tedious one. I hope this article has given instructors ideas as they continue to navigate the post-generative AI landscape.

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Beyond "Filling the Gap": How to Use Pop Music to Spark Learning, Discussions, and Creativity in EFL Classrooms

By Natalie Thibault

We have all seen, and most likely used, fill-the-gap listening worksheets for popular songs in our English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. Some ubiquitous tunes – yes, I am looking at you, *Lemon Tree!* – have lingered in EFL teachers' files for years. While music is recognized as a great tool for language learning, its usage can become stale in the classroom if it is limited to straight-up listening exercises. Why not use songs through a more holistic approach to language teaching? After all, music is an incredible gateway to culture, not only linguistically but also in terms of ideation, critical thinking, opinion sharing, and creative written and spoken production. It is undoubtedly in teachers' and learners' best interest to utilize it in EFL classes.

Why Use Popular Music in EFL Classes?
Research has shown that popular music works wonders in EFL classes. Listening to music remains among the most common activities for language learners outside the classroom (Mannarelli & Serrano, 2024). Songs can be great tools for language acquisition, thanks to their ability to captivate, evoke strong emotions, and facilitate learning. The magical combination of repetitions of high-frequency words and usage of first- and second-person pronouns in pop songs often allows listeners to feel emotionally involved (Murphey, 1990). In addition, a recent study reported a significant positive impact of language learning through music on academic achievement, creative thinking, and self-esteem of elementary-level EFL learners (Chen et al., 2024). Not only can music contribute to vocabulary development and building, but it can also help improve student listening comprehension, enhance pronunciation, and address multiple learning styles simultaneously. With all those benefits in mind, why not tap into this amazing resource for in-class learning?

In addition to measurable academic gains, popular music used in EFL classrooms contributes to the creation of a positive learning atmosphere that can reduce anxiety for students (Degrave, 2019). A more relaxing environment, where students feel less nervous about speaking English, is more conducive to language learning. Furthermore, songs can be catalysts to facilitate cultural understanding, as they contain cultural references, big and small, that can be used as paths towards discovery and comprehension of diverse cultures. Every country or region has songs that illustrate its unique cultural characteristics, and they can offer EFL students a window into traditional and current cultures; such rich materials can be of great help to instructors eager to provide students with more lively language learning experiences.

Moreover, using songs in language learning can help students develop their critical thinking and interpretive skills when studying lyrics closely and spending time analyzing or discussing imagery and metaphorical language. Finally, using popular music promotes learner autonomy and engagement by sparking learners' curiosity and interest towards a specific artist, band, or genre, inciting them to pursue self-study and language learning through playlist building, active listening, singing, and sharing with peers.

From Songs to Activities
How can we turn a song into a catalyst for learning and engagement to channel the power of music in language learning? One avenue is to use a song as a starting point for curriculum design. It can become the core of a mind map that develops and expands exponentially (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. How to Use Songs to Develop Various In-Class Activities

Use Songs to Develop Activities

Let's look at a concrete example using the song *Penny Lane*, from the legendary band The Beatles. With *Penny Lane* as the ignition point, one can quickly create a list of themes or topics related to the song's contents, such as life in the neighborhood, public places, daily habits, jobs and workplaces, etc. Grammar and vocabulary points could include differences between British and American English (e.g., mac/raincoat, motorcar/automobile, etc.) jobs and workplaces (e.g., banker, barber, etc.), or usage of the present simple or "there is/are" structures ("In Penny Lane, there's a barber showing photographs of every head he's had the pleasure to know. And all the people that come and go, stop and say hello").

Branching out from those topics and grammar points, an array of in-class activities could be designed about and around *Penny Lane*, from discussion on childhood memories to descriptions of hometowns and their main drags, along with listening comprehension and drawing activities (e.g., "Draw" Penny Lane, based on the song lyrics), content creation (e.g., Add new characters/verses to the song), speaking practice (e.g., "Act out" the song by personifying characters, reenact a conversation between the barber and banker, etc.), or open discussions (e.g., talk about your hometown and how it has changed since you were a child, etc.). Topics and themes identified in and around the song can then be used to create questions or templates for pair or group conversations, essay questions for written assignments, worksheets for in-class practice or homework, model conversations for speaking practice, or even flash cards for games, review, and assessment.

This is only one example of a song that can spark the creation of activities addressing one or more core language competencies for students of all ages. Since a song has such potential to be used as the ignition point for curriculum development, its usage can be scaled up or down to

> **A more relaxing environment, where students feel less nervous about speaking English, is more conducive to language learning.**

accommodate various age groups, skill levels, and learning environments. The possibilities are limitless!

What Songs to Pick?
One of the challenges of using popular music in the EFL classroom is finding songs that are engaging, culturally rich, and accessible without being too easy. Experience has taught me that fame is not essential when choosing a song to use in a lesson. While it is tempting to gravitate toward songs students will most likely know and like, let's not forget that discovery is also part of engagement. I have noticed how students tend to react better to upbeat songs that are not too long. Songs with a strong repetitive chorus can be a good choice, especially for lower-level students who seem to find comfort in the familiarity of the chorus. For instance, *Piano Man* by Billy Joel is an engaging song with an appealing chorus; it often triggers humming or gentle swaying from students in the classroom.

Keep in mind that variety is key. Exposing students to a wide variety of genres – country, hip-hop, jazz, pop rock, reggae, or blues – offers valuable opportunities to widen their cultural horizons. In my semester-long repertoire, I deliberately include one or two songs I suspect my students will not like; this offers chances to express dislikes and share critical reservations. While talking about enjoyment comes naturally, voicing criticism is a skill that students rarely practice.

To find new songs, it is a good idea to build playlists; keep a notepad on your desk (or a note file in your phone) to write down new songs or artists. The app Shazam is a wonderful tool to capture new music that you hear in public places. You can also invite your students to recommend songs to you and your class; this can be turned into a great speaking activity or assignment, either in a presentation or in-class discussion. Finally, music streaming platforms and services can be of great help for suggestions.

More Than Audio
Beyond listening, music videos can be extraordinary tools to enhance learning and speaking. They add an interesting dimension to language learning through songs, by deepening connections students can make between what they hear, read on the lyrics page, and see on the screen.

The music video for the song *All-American Girl*, by country superstar Carrie Underwood, is a great example (see Figure 2). While the song tells the rather banal story of an American girl adored by her father and her boyfriend-turned-husband, the music video offers a completely different experience to listeners. In short, it displays Underwood in more than 20 different jobs, including flight attendant, pastry chef, president, Olympic swimmer, and fashion designer. The video is a goldmine for learning about professions and workplaces and can be an ignition point for deeper and more substantial conversations on topics such as gender roles, societal success, family, feminism, or work–life balance.

Figure 2. Music Video for *All-American Girl* by Carrie Underwood

(Source: YouTube)

Some music videos can be used as short films to integrate cultural elements into the lesson, check comprehension, build vocabulary, generate or enhance pair or group discussions, and inspire storytelling. For example, the music video for the song *You Belong with Me* by Taylor Swift offers great potential (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Music Video for *You Belong with Me* by Taylor Swift
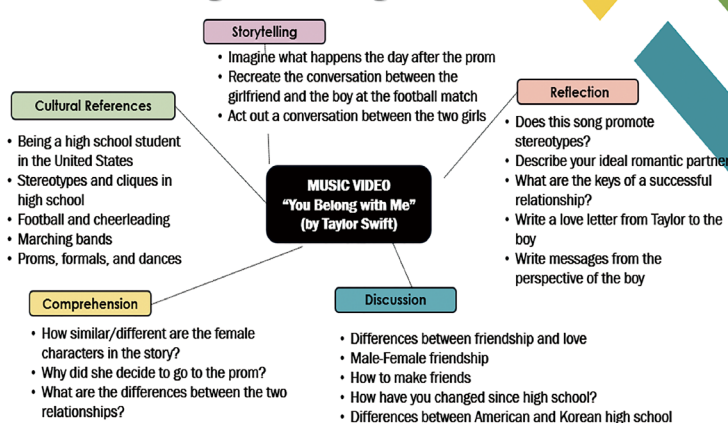

(Source: YouTube)

The music video plays out as a short teen-romance movie in which Swift stars as both the main heroine and her love interest's girlfriend. It is filled with references to American teen culture, including high school cliques, football, cheerleading, marching bands, prom, and budding romance. Such tropes, especially engaging for teenage or young adult ESL learners, can be used to design a variety of in-class discussion, writing, and reflection activities (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. How the Music Video for *You Belong with Me* Can Lead to Numerous In-Class Activities

> *... push that old fill-the-gap song exercise aside and allow yourself and your students to embark on a different journey.*

Final Thoughts and Takeaways

Whether you teach young learners in an academy or public school, or you conduct lectures in a university, songs can be great sources of inspiration to develop engaging and effective lesson plans. Music videos can be used as short films to enhance discussions and inspire storytelling. Incorporating music in your class can allow students to discover new genres and artists and to develop their tastes. Learning to express impressions, opinions, and sometimes reservations about cultural products is an undoubtedly valuable experience for students. Skills developed through music are assets that can help students become more sensitive, open-minded, curious, and articulate. Keeping in mind that students might need a bit of time to assimilate and forge an opinion, a song can be assigned as homework, which would give students enough time to listen, think, and analyze its content. In the following lesson, the song can be presented in class, discussed, and used for various activities, including pair work, group discussions, content creation, or writing projects.

Music can offer more than simple listening practice; push that old fill-the-gap song exercise aside and allow yourself and your students to embark on a different journey that will take you all to new territories of discovery, critical thinking, ideation, storytelling, and open-hearted discussions. You will not regret it!

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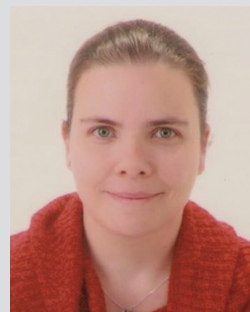
Sorting Through Class

By Kara Waggoner

Introduction

According to LinkedIn, there are benefits for both students and parents when a teacher's LMS (learning management system) is well organized. A streamlined LMS can guide students to the work and information they need quickly and can help teachers decrease the cognitive load that comes with planning and preparation. Here are some strategies shared at the February 2025 KOTESOL Gangwon Chapter meeting, with the ongoing themes of consistency and clarity.

1. Structure When You Post Information

When able, posting information on the same day and at a similar time will help your students learn when to look for announcements, assignments, resources, etc. Having a consistent pattern from their teacher to rely on can aid them as they learn to develop time management skills. Think about the example posting schedule below and adjust for your needs.

Table 1. Example Weekly Posting Schedule for an LMS

Example Weekly Posting Schedule	
Sunday	**Weekly Announcement** Activities students will do. Content students will learn. Assignments that are due. Important information & reminders Encouragement.
Monday	Activities and assignments students will work on. Helpful resources.
Tuesday – Friday	Post assessments throughout the week as they occur.
Saturday	

2. Consider What to Show or Stow

Instagram and TikTok creator @jenny.for.your.thoughts uses the term "shows vs. stows" (Salatovka, 2024) to describe how one can organize their spaces, which can be applied to an LMS as well. In the context of an LMS, "shows" can be items an educator wants upfront for quick student access, and "stows" could be helpful resources but ones that students might not need every day. The information and files that one stows or shows can be fluid as well, as pointed out by Byran Hale when he attended the *Sorting Through Class* presentation. The content being taught or resources to help with an upcoming test might be shown for one week but later on can be stowed away for reference, as needed. Look at the following examples, and determine if you would show them or stow them (and where):
• Course/class syllabus
• Exam review guide
• Plagiarism and AI policies
• Attendance requirements
• Video clips about /d/ and /t/ pronunciation
• Participation expectations
• Teacher contact information
• Office hours (with location and/or link)
• Weekly spelling lists

3. Label Items Consistently

After determining what items and information can be shown or stowed away, think about naming assignments, resources, and folders in a manner so that students can quickly locate what they need. Unclear and vague file names won't help anyone, and the amount of questions a teacher receives will increase. While the image in Figure 1 is not from an LMS, the same principle of clearly labeling information applies. If you want students to find the image of a bee with a crown, clicking through every file in Figure 1 until they open the one they need is time-consuming and will cause frustration.

Figure 1. Unclear Labels for Files and Documents That Will Cause Confusion

Until students are familiar with you and your class, it's best to avoid using abbreviations, acronyms, or academic jargon when naming your files. Using the examples below, what kind of file names will be easier for your students to find, especially in the first few days or weeks of class?
• "G1 homework" or "Complete Sentences Homework (Grade 1)"
• "SVO prac" or "Subject-Verb-Object Practice"
• "April skills" or "Irregular Nouns (April 2025 skills)"

Finally, if an activity, assignment, or assessment is repeated throughout the academic term, consistently label the item in a manner that allows your students to know what number it is in a series and for what timeframe. Consider the following ideas and adjust for your needs:
• Participation Week 1 (Date)
• Participation Week 2 (Date)
• Participation Week 3 (Date)
• Writing Contest #1 (Spring 2025)
• Writing Contest #2 (Fall 2025)

4. Post Information by Topic or Timeframe

There are benefits and challenges to sorting your information by topic or timeframe in which the learning occurred. When sorting information by topic, the information will remain the same no matter the learning environment. You can simply

> **A streamlined LMS can guide students to the work and information they need quickly...**

pull from your resources about said topic, but you might have to make adjustments based on student needs. When sorting information by week or month, you have a chronological outline of what was done in the past to guide future teaching syllabi. However, if the curriculum changes, you will need to rearrange your information. Whichever you choose, remain consistent for the duration of the academic term, especially once your students become familiar with your method.

Having resources, files, and important webpage links organized on your own document in the same way you want to organize them in your LMS can help you find information quickly as well. If the information you want is structured in the same manner you want to post it on your LMS, you can simply check to make sure that links work and the information is relevant, then post as needed.

5. Note Important Dates Everywhere
"If I put the information in enough places my students will accidentally stumble upon it" is something I've learned in my many years of teaching. Listing the due date in the assignment instructions, posting it in an announcement, and telling my students the date during class have been successful. If a student requires more concrete parameters, the time an assignment is due with the time zone has also been stated in the aforementioned places.

6. Demonstrate Your LMS Setup to Your Students
Your organization method will work best when you communicate your thinking to your students. Show them how you sort everything in the first few days or weeks of class.

Eventually, have a student come to the front of the class to show their peers where an item is located while you guide them through your LMS. Finally, ask your students to find a particular item in your LMS and show a partner. Making your organization system work for you and your students will take time at first, but a benefit in the end will be independent students who can find the information they need by themselves.

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The Ins and Outs of Pair and Group Work

By Bryan Hale

For many language teachers, pair work and group work are a staple of classroom practice. However, it's not the case that all language teachers use pair work and group work, and certainly many of our students might not arrive in our classrooms with much experience of these participation structures in their time as students. Far from being self-evident or straightforward, student-to-student classroom interaction is complex, and relates in subtle ways to the expectations and dynamics of our learners, our institutions, and wider social and cultural forces. In this article, I want to consider some scenarios based on my own experiences as a teacher and explore some ideas that might be useful when it comes to pair and group work in the interactive EFL classroom in Korea.

Scenario 1: One student in a class you teach is ostracized by other students, both in and out of the classroom, and during pair work you often notice this student and their partner disengaged from each other and the task.

Considerations: In this scenario, there may be more important issues at play than the success of the pair work, and depending on the context and individuals involved, valuable steps to take might include talking sensitively with the student, or with other teachers or caregivers. However, in my experience, different versions of this scenario have occurred in quite different contexts, with quite different people, and there have been times where the dynamic seemed to be stable and not something I could help with. There are, however, relevant considerations in terms of pair work itself, and how it is set up.

Teaching can sometimes involve benevolent masterminding, and controlling who ends up in which pair is a legitimate strategy. One common pair-making activity is to give learners cards that match up in some way; for example, students mingle and figure out who has matching words, images, or similar. Scrivener (2012) suggests engineering the outcomes of this kind of task if helpful, and I think it could be a way to ensure an ostracized student ends up with a supportive partner. Even with simpler techniques, such as pulling student names out of a tin, you could cheat your own system a little. In a pinch, "that Popsicle stick says whatever name you need it to," as Elden (2013, p. 82) quotes an experienced teacher saying.

Of course, this tactic only works temporarily, and socially conscious adolescent students in particular might be sensitive to it. A contrasting strategy is to go as truly random as possible and to make this visible to students (Liljedahl, 2021). There are many ways to pair students up with cards, names pulled out of a hat (without cheating), and so on, but I have found adolescent students seem to appreciate computerized randomness. I like using the group generators at http://www.online-stopwatch.com, but there are lots of online choices. In my experience, frequently making and re-making truly random pairings and groupings seems to help students leave social dynamics outside of the classroom and focus on language practice.

Even if you just want to pair students up quickly on the spot, a useful strategy is to ensure you deal with odd-one-out logistics first, and not as an afterthought. For example, if students are to work in pairs but there will be one group of three, organize the three first (Prodromou & Clandfield, 2007). This saves you from the situation where you turn to the final three and realize with dread that one of them is going to be completely left out. In any situation where one student, pair, or group is going to somehow be in a different arrangement than the others, proactive planning can help ensure all students are included and engaged.

Scenario 2: Your students strongly prefer to choose their own groups, but when they do, their engagement is not ideal, with issues such as the use of Korean, or one group member doing most of the work.

Considerations: Constant random or teacher-engineered groupings can be frustrating for students who would legitimately prefer to work with their friends or in groups based on shared interests (Scrivener, 2012). I have found, particularly for longer-lasting arrangements focused on students' own interests or goals, that having some say over who they are in a group with can help students to feel invested. Even if – or perhaps because – students are expressing strong preferences about how to engage with task-based or project-based learning, it can be important to help them become aware of a range of learning processes and possibilities, and to reflect on the rationale for a particular approach (Nunan, 2004).

One possibility is to make group formation processes part of a project itself. For example, individuals might first prepare pitches or briefs about their own project topic preferences, and offer each other feedback, then reflect on this before moving on to a group-forming phase (perhaps with the help of a little teacher engineering of outcomes). Once groups are formed, varying and rotating roles, such as leader, notekeeper, compromise-seeker, and so on, can keep group work novel and meaningful over time (Scrivener, 2012). Such roles, along with reflection on participation (both pre-reflection, and post-reflection after particular tasks or sequences), can help students to share responsibilities and maintain engagement.

My own challenges with students using Korean during sustained, project-based work have been fairly considerable, however. Especially in an elementary, middle, or high school setting, it may be awkward for classes to use English together when they are spending the entire rest of their day together speaking Korean. Authentic projects can be challenging or exciting in ways that make students want to use their first language. Strategies such as tokens that can be spent on

Korean use, or a "conch" or "speaking stick" that shows only one group member at a time should be speaking (in English) may help (Scrivener, 2012, pp. 207–208). But what I have found most useful with project-based sequences is to do quite a long lead-in of pre-project lessons in which students' language use is quite scaffolded, moving gradually towards the group work that will make up the final stretch. And, sometimes, if students just really don't seem to be in "English mode," I ask them to line up outside the classroom and enter again with more focus, or even put their hands on their heads and twirl around in a circle while chanting "English mode," as a reset.

Scenario 3: A class asks to not do pair or group work, letting you know that they don't enjoy these kinds of interactions, and that they would prefer a more traditional, content-focused approach.

Considerations: Once, I was teaching an all-boys high school group, and I was setting up a kind of "speed round" activity in which students first brainstormed a list of topics, and then discussed the pros and cons of each topic in rotating pairs. During brainstorming, after a few predictable choices such as "soccer" and "League of Legends," one student said, with a determined expression, "Bryan's teaching." I felt a little jolt of dread, but we went through the activity, until we had gone down the list to this topic. At that point, all of the students swiveled from their pair positions to face me, and the determined student started explaining, clearly, that the class just didn't want to do this kind of interactive activity any more. "Our other teachers lecture to us and then give us free time. It's more comfortable." He also explained that they found the kind of interactive participation we had just been doing awkward. "We know why you like this teaching style, but we don't want it."

This was a pretty negative experience for me, and I hope it doesn't happen to you! But, obviously, it is possible for students to dislike or even reject pair work and group work. After being quite upset for a while, I had to accept that the lead student had expressed to me the real feelings of the students (or, well, many of the students – I also had to spend some time reflecting on how much he was actually speaking for everyone). Eventually, I got curious about to what extent the students really were against interactive engagement and what possibilities there were for bringing interaction to life with them.

Pairs and Groups Are Not the Only Interaction Possibilities
Reflecting on these experiences helped me to appreciate the value of interaction configurations other than student-to-student pair work, group work, and mingling. Valuable communicative tasks can also be individual, teacher-to-whole-class, or student-to-whole-class (Ellis et al., 2020). For example, almost any information gap activity designed for pairs can be carried out between the teacher and the class, or between one student and the rest of the class, or even two halves of the class. Many speaking games designed for pairs or small groups can be tweaked for whole-class participation. This might not lead to ideal ratios of individual student talking time, but it's better than nothing (or giving up and letting students gaze like zombies at their phone screens).

These days, one of my favorite tasks to use with new high school classes is to select around four or five students randomly, have them line up at the front of the class, and then show the rest of the students a topic (which the standing students can't see), such as "Most likely to be found playing Roblox" or "Most likely to keep a pet frog in the dormitory," and have the rest of the class arrange the standing students into order from most to least likely, then have the standing students try to guess the topic and explain their guesses. This activity – or anything similar, such as "Put down one finger if _____" or musical chairs where rounds start with a question like "Did you _____ yesterday?" – helps to make space for the relationships and experiences the students are bringing into the language classroom, and also helps them to establish a kind of playful, expressive, collective voice in English. Once that is established, it is more feasible to encourage them towards pair work and group work in English.

After building up a practice of these sort of "collective voice" tasks with that class of boys, I did eventually get them involved enough in interactive participation to reintroduce some pair and group work. Ultimately, it was a valuable experience for me in considering how to balance the preferences and experiences students bring into the classroom with my own ideas about what learning experiences would be best for them.

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Korea TESOL 2025 Publication Awards

Korea TESOL Research Paper of the Year Award
— Maria Teresa Martínez García

Bridging the Gap: Leveraging Neuroeducation to Enhance Teaching Methodologies

Korea TESOL Journal, 20(2), 3–25

KOTESOL Proceedings Best Paper Award
— I-Jiuan Ting

Grammar and Vocabulary in Making Inferences:
A Contributory Exploration of Reading Comprehension
KOTESOL Proceedings 2024, 31–40

The English Connection Article of the Year Award
— Michael Duddy

Strategies to Implementing Task-Based Language Teaching in the Korean Context
The English Connection, Autumn 2024, 28(3), 14–17

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More Than a Gap Year Adventure

Reviewed by Christopher Miller

Introduction

Like a lot of others in the TESOL community, I got started in the world of English education as a vehicle to immerse myself in foreign cultures. However, what happens when you start to realize that life in the ELT industry is pretty cool… and you hope to earn more than a base and stagnant salary for the rest of your life? Martin Hajek's *More Than a Gap Year Adventure* might help younger teachers when they reach that point. Besides Hajek, this self-published volume contains 23 brief articles primarily focused on teachers' experience moving beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom. The book features a wide range of authors including more established authors in ELT, such as Sandy Millin. Major themes include career advancement and professional growth through a variety of avenues.

Getting Ahead

There are many inspiring and very clear templates for how to advance in this profession. One of the book's most forthright articles for getting promoted in ELT-related institutions is Sebastiano Favretto's "Career Development Tips From an Academic Manager." Favretto details his ascent to academic director of studies. He recommends volunteering to help one's superiors, becoming "really good" (162) at teaching a variety of learners, constantly acquiring new skills, and being proactive in seeking to utilize those proficiencies. Hall Houston provides his experience in attaining university positions in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. Hall claims obtaining an MA as the most relevant factor allowing him to advance to those positions (192). Silvinia Mascitti discusses how she became a paid materials writer (174). As Mascitti's experience demonstrates, Louis Pasteur could have been more precise when he claimed that "chance favors the prepared mind"; it also favors the well connected.

Peter Clement discusses getting extra work through his blog (133), specifically in the area of materials development. As Dorothy Zemach insisted in a pandemic-era online KOTESOL presentation, you need a web presence as a professional these days. Michelle Adele Wardman provides some insights into how to leverage your web presence through LinkedIn. Specifically, she provides models for how to build connections with other professionals in that digital space in a non-intrusive manner (99). She also provides advice on how to create an acceptable profile picture (100), which she convincingly argues is essential for a space such as LinkedIn.

For those looking to break away from the traditional pathways to ELT advancement, both in a professional and financial sense, Ariella Moses and Andrew Woodbury offer two divergent suggestions. Moses discusses her shift into online teaching; she mentions a variety of technologically based resources that have helped in her transition, including Figma (similar to what a PowerPoint and Google Docs baby would be like), and the website Fluentize for providing ready-to-use materials. She provides advice pertinent to both the pecuniary and the pedagogical. Pertaining to the former she recommends to "go beyond General English classes" (105); for the latter concern she suggests contextual learning, exposure to diverse varieties of English, and interactivity (106–107). Woodbury asks the reader a series of critical questions and provides seven steps (which are admittedly demanding) for the reader to establish a foundation that may develop into a thriving enterprise (115–117).

Developing Professionally

This book doesn't merely instruct the reader on strategies to move up the "ELT ladder," Hajek's compilation also offers valuable strategies to develop professional skill sets. Jim Fuller provides his own methods for consuming and reflecting on professional literature with his READ framework: Read with intention, Establish takeaways, Apply takeaways to practice, Diligently reflect (85). Fuller provides details for each component of his four pronged framework, including highlighting and note taking (86). There is nothing revolutionary here. That being said, Fuller's advice does align well with expert views on this topic (such as Grabe, 2009). Fuller's contribution is unique. It is the only one in this volume to feature graphic organizers – the READ framework, Cornell notes layout (86), and Gibbs' reflective cycle (89).

Both Andre Hedlund and Sandy Millin provide their personal experience for getting the most out of professional conferences. Millin makes the reader aware that there are grants for interested educators to present and attend conferences. Millin herself was a recipient of a grant for IATEFL Glasgow 2012, and she claims it "completely changed my professional development" (93). Millin recommends determining in advance which sessions to attend, narrowing down preferences, and giving yourself a break. She notes that she doesn't attend as many sessions as possible when at a conference. If an event has eight or nine possible sessions she could attend, she will typically view five to seven of the sessions. Millin often blogs on her experiences at conferences (95). This not only helps her encode her experiences, it allows her to easily reference talks she has attended. In a similar vein, Hedlund recommends that you "don't trust your memory" and afterwards to "review notes for actionable insights" (153).

Encouraging Reflection

A number of contributors provide the reader with a series of questions to guide the reader's reflection. Woodbury and Hajek are the most notable in this aspect. Hajek starts the book off with eight chapters dealing with often mundane but essential aspects of securing employment abroad. Sections and advice include being open-minded (25), watching out for scams, and having enough money to get started (29). After each of the eight introductory chapters, Hajek provides three reflection questions related to each section of every chapter for the reader to consider.

There is also a diverse array of advice provided throughout the essays in this collection. For instance, many authors (notably Houston, Woodbury, Hajek, and Walton Burns) explicitly tell the reader to find your niche. Some niches addressed include undergraduates who need supplementary writing instruction (Woodbury, 113) and approaches that are likely to appeal to specific age ranges (Burns, 186). However, other authors emphasize the value of casting a wider net. Favretto encourages teaching a wide range of ages to justify receiving a promotion. Additionally, Moses believes "one of the best ways to grow as a teacher and gain perspective is to change your location and your

job" (108). Who is right? These somewhat conflicting perspectives help nudge, if not force, the reader to consider what is best for themself.

Getting Technical

A number of articles let the reader in on details of engaging in a more creative outlet that blends professional development and personal hobbies or interests. Clement discusses his experience blogging. He provides the reader with potential topics for blog posts, including "reflection on something that fails miserably," "interesting research … worth summarizing for others," and "things I don't really understand … and want to think through" (131).

KOTESOL's own Martin Sketchley discusses the ascent of his YouTube channel (21,700 subscribers as of this writing). He mentions the equipment upgrades he has made over the years and what the most popular search terms are for his videos (Preply, teaching vocabulary, and teacher training are near the top, 138). He goes on to say, "Creating and uploading content on YouTube has developed skills needed to sit in front of the camera, learning how to use a number of editing softwares, or working towards a deadline. I guess this has also helped develop the confidence needed to speak in front of people, whether it is for a workshop or a teacher training event. Personally, recording my lessons in my early years on YouTube (as well as being an English educator) helped me reflect on my teaching and use some of the videos for helping other teachers."

Laura Wilkes discusses her journey into the world of podcasting and the creation of the TESOL Pop Podcast (co-founded with Eve Conway). Wilkes concisely explains how she maintains a realistic production schedule (142), measures the impact of her podcasts (145) and how she gets feedback from her audience to inform future directions related to content. Wilke's methods for soliciting consumer input include surveys, focus groups, polls and quizzes (146).

Limitations

The majority of authors were exuberant about their choices related to branching out beyond the classroom. As a reader, I had some lingering questions not answered by several contributors. Many contributors, such as Burns, are direct. You most likely will not be financially independent doing something such as self-publishing (188). Others allude to getting paid, such as Mascitti, creating materials for Fluentize and Peachey Publications (169), but we aren't informed about how much. Perhaps it is inappropriate to be explicit about such a personal topic in a public forum. However, getting paid to produce materials does not necessarily entail a worthwhile investment of time. How much payment is not the only consideration when deciding how to use one's time related to professional pursuits; but it is a relevant one. And many contributors are mute on the topic. We don't hear too much about opportunity costs for the pursuit of a variety of hobbies that facilitate professional development. However, Monica Ruda (184) does allude to having little free time.

Words from a Contributor

As Martin Sketchley is one of the contributors to Hajek's book and is a KOTESOL member, he was contacted for this review. Here I include his responses to four questions asked of him.

Q1: What is your opinion of the book overall?
Sketchley: I feel that Martin Hajek has done a marvelous job getting a variety of insights from the TEFL industry overall. I believe the book is an invaluable resource for those English educators who are wanting to carve out a career in TEFL or who wish to be inspired by the essays within the book. Overall, I am pleased to have contributed, sharing my personal experience of creating content on YouTube and other social media platforms.

Q2: How has uploading content to a YouTube channel influenced your practice as a TESOL/TEFL educator?
Sketchley: Creating content and uploading it to YouTube has developed skills needed to sit in front of the camera, learning how to use a number of editing softwares, and working towards a deadline. I guess this has also helped develop the confidence needed to speak in front of people, whether it is for a workshop or a teacher training event. Personally, recording my lessons in my early years on YouTube (as well as being an English educator) helped me reflect on my teaching and use some of the videos to help other teachers.

Q3: Which of the following have been the bigger challenges in managing a YouTube channel? The technical aspects? The marketing? Or generating worthwhile content for your audience?
Sketchley: One of the biggest challenges that I have encountered in running a YouTube channel is suffering from imposter syndrome. I enjoy creating video content for others who are interested, but I do have a sense that some of my content is superficial and unhelpful, with me asking myself from time to time, "Why am I creating YouTube content? Why would anyone want to listen to me?"

In terms of the technical aspects, this isn't too much of an issue anymore, but for anyone to get started on YouTube, there is a steep learning curve. I am rather embarrassed by my early videos due to their poor quality. However, everyone has to start from scratch, and when getting started on YouTube, you shouldn't be too worried about it.

Q4: Which other contributor from this book do you feel was most inspiring?
Sketchley: There are a number of contributors that I felt were inspiring as well as invaluable for others working in TESOL/TEFL regardless of the length of time. One author that I was pleased to see contribute was Joanna Hebel with her personal insights of becoming a freelancer, despite starting her TEFL career as a non-native English teacher in 2018 and completing the CELTA in 2020 during the pandemic. It is inspiring to see that she has become a successful freelancer and now shares lesson ideas regularly on her website (https://joannaesl.com/). There are obviously many other authors who contributed who share their insights and experiences, ranging from getting into publishing and the benefits of LinkedIn to attending conferences and many others. It was an honor to have been asked to contribute to the book.

Conclusion

More Than a Gap Year Adventure can help readers consider their next step in or out of the world of ELT. The contributors of this work make clear that there are an abundance of prospects to grow in, through, and perhaps beyond ELT. Of course, these prospects generally entail some degree of sacrifice. Ultimately it is up to each individual to determine the best course of action for growth, professional or otherwise. Hajek and his contributors, with their wealth of experience and field-tested advice, can help readers chart a course towards a brighter, more fulfilling destination.

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The Reviewer

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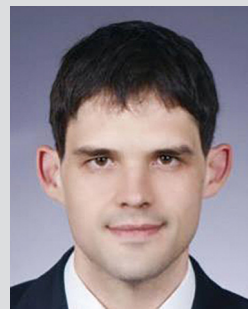
Learn Any Language in Six Months: Trust Me!

By Jake Kimball

That is correct! You, too, can learn any language in six months or less. CEFR C1, no less. Incredulous? I saw it on the internet, so it must be true. Those videos have each racked up an enormous number of YouTube views, which is a testament to the universal draw of learning a new language. Or it could be a sign of our inclination to take shortcuts and follow the path of least resistance; after all, it is easy to be seduced by the lure of easy success. This kind of social media content reminds me of how much of our classroom experience is connected in some way to unreasonable expectations.

Let's start with how long it takes to learn a language. One clue may be how long it takes to improve scores on a proficiency test. Many standardized language proficiency exams (i.e., TOEFL, IELTS) measure language skills. Also, CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Language) is an industry-recognized and generally accepted description of language progression, and many proficiency exams and coursebooks correlate to these levels. They are described in general (okay, somewhat vague) terms as *can-do* statements of competency.

> ... from "the teacher who wants to meet benchmarks" to "the teacher who champions small victories."

Reflection Point 1: How long does it generally take to learn a language? Specifically, how many hours of guided instruction does it take to advance from CEFR A1 to A2? From A2 to B1 or higher?

Cambridge University Press may be of help here. Readers can find their way to a Ben Knight (2018) blog post where he highlighted a research paper outlining what we need to know about this issue. In brief, the truthful answer is… it depends!

It simply is not that cut and dried. It is fair to surmise that we have all had learners who rocketed to English proficiency in little time, much like unicorn polyglots. On the other hand, we have also had learners who continue to struggle to read after 10+ years of seat warming. The general answer is that it takes about 100–200 hours of guided instruction to level up from one CEFR level to the next. Again, it is critical to note that this broad set of hours depends on a range of factors.

How has this issue affected my classroom instruction? To start, I teach university students. They come to class for 15 weeks – each week, two lessons, 50 minutes each. Calculating the math, that is only 25 hours a semester. Now subtract two exam weeks, any holidays, and sprinkle in some festivals for good measure. Then, the occasional cold and flu or a hangover day. Optimistically, that amounts to 20 hours of instruction or less per semester. Is that enough contact time to level up students from A1 to A2 or from A2 to B1 or higher? Not at all. As a result, I have had to change my mindset from "the teacher who wants to meet benchmarks" to "the teacher who champions small victories." Pastoral care and motivation now take precedence over language learning goals. This mindset shift has not been easy. It is an ongoing project that I struggle with because recalibrating one's core values as a teacher takes time and acceptance.

What is the best way to learn English? Over the years, this has been the most frequent question students and parents have asked me. Over to you: In your experience, what influences your learners' success or failure with English language learning? And how can learners sustain their engagement over the long haul?

Reflection Point 2: What factors affect the speed at which students race or stumble through CEFR levels?

Factors that impact the speed of progress play out in everyday life, and they account for a fair number of obstacles that impede excellence. Competition forces many teachers and schools to over-promise on success. Much like nuclear proliferation and the arms race, that starts a domino effect, with programs outdoing each other with more challenging

> **From my point of view, an obvious weak link is the lack of review in most courses or programs.**

textbooks, heavier loads of homework, and more frequent vocabulary tests. No one is the wiser until it is too late.

The cost of education, public or private, is enormous. And that incentivizes the push to do more faster and achieve more earlier. But falling behind starts early. Take phonics, for instance. It is not uncommon for parents and teachers to cover twenty-six letter–sound relationships. Mission complete! Now that the core of phonics has been mastered, it is time to level up and tackle more mature content. Readers may suspect I am being sarcastic or facetious. But I am not. Because of this frenzied pace, some learners never build a solid foundation, and they are shuttled into classes that are too difficult. By high school or university, they have tuned out due to this unrelenting pace.

Looking at exam practice content in public school settings, there appears to be a significant leap in difficulty from year to year. This is especially noticeable regarding content and task types. I tried to tackle some activities myself and found the time limits unrealistic and demotivating. To ask adolescents to undertake this Herculean task is unnecessary. Moreover, the pedagogical payoff seems obscure to me.

This may explain why many students fall behind. Research shows that in their younger years, learners tend to enjoy English, but as time goes by, they lose their motivation (Kim, 2011). This phenomenon is not new. Generations past have walked the same path.

> **Reflection Point 3:** What do you see as the weak link in education programs? The industry as a whole? Your own classroom?

From my point of view, an obvious weak link is the lack of review in most courses or programs. Mine included. Despite our best efforts, periodic review takes a backseat to introducing new content. Unfortunately, this kind of irrational exuberance has implications.

Let me introduce you to Hermann Ebbinghaus, the namesake of the Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve. This name should strike fear into the heart of anyone trying to absorb facts, data, names and numbers, definitions, or ideas. In short, research on memory retention indicates that information gets lost in space if we make no effort to retain it. Bad news, my friends. The first 24 hours after "learning," upwards of 80% of that information has run away from home, so to speak (Thornbury, 2002). This initial drop is depressing news, especially for the legions of students routinely memorizing long vocabulary lists.

How can we address this in our classrooms or coursebooks? Scott Thornbury (2002) has a lot of constructive solutions: Spaced repetition and reinforcement, testing through active recall, and employing learning strategies such as mnemonic devices aid in long-term retention. Doing this at systematic intervals (distributed practice or expanding rehearsal) indeed leads to better gains. Rote learning is no longer in vogue and seems unwelcome in some classrooms, but it is an effective tactic.

On a broader scale, perhaps curriculum designers could use the spiral or cyclical model (White, 1988), including the notion of recycling and expanding content learned previously. This model does not mean simply repeating or reintroducing content. It means providing springboards for revision, fine-tuning, and expansion via entirely new topics.

Let's not leave anyone behind. Our learners deserve suitable language learning opportunities that match their level and interests, delivered at a reasonable pace, and with reasonable expectations of progress.

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The Columnist
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Getting to the Roots of Routines in Language Teaching

By Bill Snyder
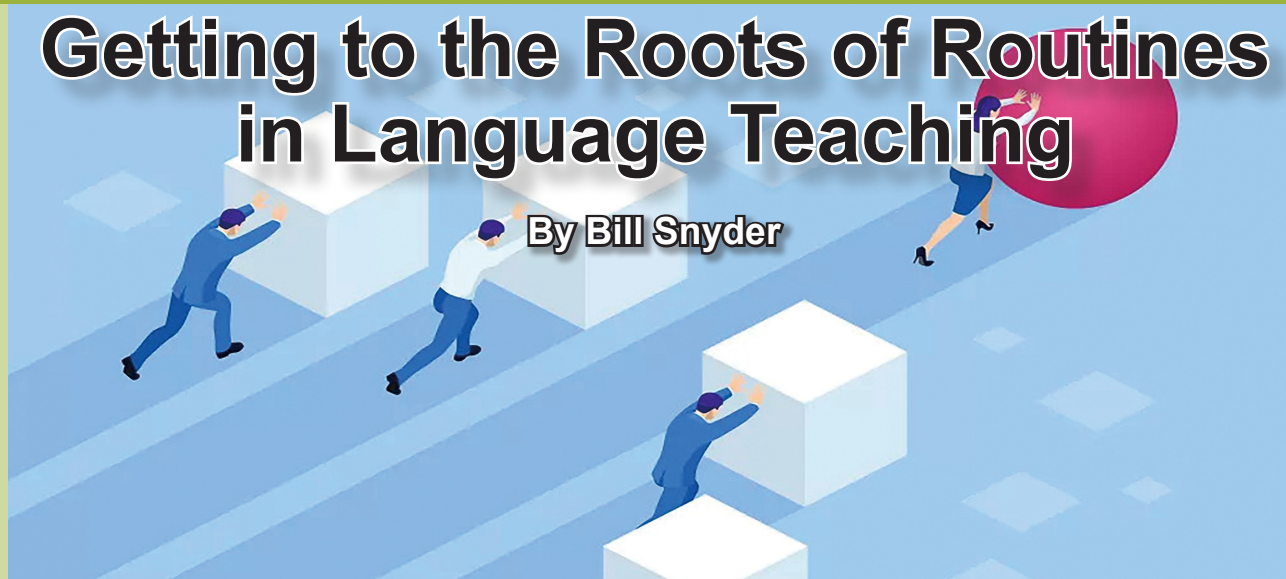
I have a lot of routines that I follow in my classes:

I always begin my Second-Year English classes the same way: I organize the students into random groups of three or four, depending on how many students are in class that day. Then, I present the students with a single, positive question about their week that they all can answer uniquely (e.g., *What was the luckiest thing that happened to you this week?*). I give students one minute to think about what they want to say and how they want to say it. Finally, I ask the students to stand up and tell each other their answers. The listeners in the group are encouraged to ask questions and keep the speaker talking. As they do this, I circulate, listen in, and ask some questions about what I hear. As I walk around the room, I find the students relaxed, smiling, laughing, and engaging with each other. This activity usually takes about five minutes to make sure that everyone gets a chance to tell their story. At the end, students look up and record vocabulary that they felt they needed but did not know. The activity focuses students on using English and sets a positive tone for everything that follows in the class.

At the end of classes this semester, I've begun asking students to complete a brief survey about the class that day using Google Forms. I ask them what the class was about, what they learned, and a changeable third question, about what they liked the most or when they were most engaged in class. The students are made to reflect on their own learning and participation and practice writing, while I get

> ... routines can become a way of time-serving for the teacher rather than actually helping students learn.

feedback on how the lesson went and what the students valued in it. I learned that a community vocabulary practice activity (Tomacder, 2023, November) that I tried out one week got rave reviews, more than I had really expected. So, I've repeated it a couple times, have seen similar enthusiasm each time, and may make it a weekly routine to help students meet the vocabulary goals for the class. I've also managed to personalize this activity so that even though the activity is shared, each student is working on learning vocabulary that has been selected by them for themselves.

These are routines, and I follow them religiously, except for presentation days, when I need time for everyone to be able to present to the whole class. At the start of the semester, I have to go over the process of each routine for a couple weeks before students absorb it. The students then come to class knowing what to do and can carry out their part of the activities with little prompting from me. I like these activities because they provide structure to the time students and I have together. They also give students opportunities to practice skills that the class is focused on developing in ways that are comfortable and enjoyable for them. They also let students get to know each other and support a positive environment in the classroom.

Paul Nation (n.d.) has argued for establishing routines like this in language classes as a way to make the activities of the class predictable for students. Knowing what they are expected to do and being able to carry it out without explicit instruction may reduce student's anxiety about performing in a foreign language. In addition, because the students are eventually able to manage the activity themselves, it reduces teacher talking time and makes the whole class more efficient. Finally, I think these activities help create a sense of group identity; they become *our* way of doing English class.

But is all this routine really so good? Are routines good at all? Prabhu (1990) makes a case that good teaching is threatened by an excess of routine, which makes classroom practice mechanical. A number of features of classroom instruction can lend themselves to the construction of mechanical routines. The repeated, scheduled allotments of classroom time, teachers concern with demonstrating the quality of their work in the face of various institutional and social pressures,

and simply the uncertainty of whether any particular teaching results in specific learning can all push teachers towards making their work mechanical (Floden & Buchman, 1993; Prabhu, 1990). Routines provide "a way to claim that the expected teaching has been performed" (Prabhu, 1990, p. 173) when that otherwise might be challenged. In short, routines can become a way of time-serving for the teacher rather than actually helping students learn.

This is a question that concerns me and who I am as a teacher. I don't feel like the routines I currently use are mechanical – neither the ones that I've used for a long time (my opening routine) nor the ones I'm introducing (the closing survey and the community vocabulary activity). But I also know that it is possible for routines to devolve from promoting learning to becoming rote practices that serve other purposes. I have had classes from the start of my career where routines I incorporated around activities

such as sustained silent reading and a homework reading comprehension quiz came to feel like ways to fill minutes rather than promote learning. The students in those classes were resistant and disengaged but obedient as they carried out the routines. The worst part of it was that I persisted with those routines even though they made both the students and me miserable.

Looking back, I can see some of the errors I made in those cases. The students had no input into the routines; they were done to them, not with them. Most of the students could not connect to the purposes I had for the routines. I knew that these were good activities, and I was frustrated that the students did not see them the same way. Today, I would try to get feedback from the students on what I was asking them to do and make adjustments, but back then, I felt that I knew what was good for the students and that they should be glad for my knowledge. I really was doing a bad job with those

> **... developed with a focus not on what I know but on what the students have told me they need.**

students. It took some talking with other teachers who did not have the same problems, even if they were doing similar activities; observing what they did with their students; and some reflection on my limitations to bring about change in how I taught.

It was a learning process, and it still is. I feel confident that the routines I'm currently using are not mechanical for me or the students because I am a different teacher. The activities in these routines have been developed with a focus not on what I know but on what the students have told me they need. I'm familiar with the students in this class because I've taught similar groups the past five years. I surveyed the students at the start of the semester about what they felt they needed to see if this group was very different from earlier classes. I asked about their interests and shared some of mine in replying to their answers. The final survey in each class is a way to keep hearing from my students about what we are doing. I started the course with some planned routines but have been willing to add, delete, and change them based on the feedback I get.

I have routines. They help keep the uncertainty of teaching under control for my students and for me. I have tried to build routines that support learning language based on what I know about learning but also based on what my students tell me about how they learn and what they want to learn. But I'm not wedded to these routines. The mechanical routines that Prabhu feared are a function of not being willing to change. Each classroom is different, even when our students seem to be a consistent type from term to term. I have learned that any routines I use have to be co-constructed with the students in front of me to be effective. It is ultimately what the students do with the routines I offer them that leads to learning. In the co-construction with students of our class lies the real joy of teaching for me, and that process of construction is always ongoing.

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The Columnist
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The Hidden Reason We Should Teach Speaking

By Dr. Curtis Kelly

The Skills Needed in Speaking

Teaching speaking, from my experience in Japanese colleges, means teaching conversation, discussion, debate, and presentation. For others, teaching beginners, it might mean teaching pronunciation, but I am going to leave that out for now. I'm also going to pass over presentation and focus on teaching the kind of speaking that is interactive: conversation, discussion, and debate.

As one who has written speaking textbooks, the purpose of teaching speaking, and the skills needed, has long been a big concern of mine, as it is now. So, let's look at what the pundits say, which is pretty much summarized in a passage Anne Burns wrote:

"Two major currents of thinking have informed contemporary debates on the teaching of oral communication. The first current focuses upon the development of skills for the accurate production of speech forms (phonological patterns, lexis/vocabulary, grammatical form and structure), while the second centers upon enhancing fluency through communicative tasks (Nunan 1989) which, in turn, enable opportunities for developing functional language use through noncontrolled activities." (1998, p. 103)

Pronunciation, proper sentence forms, communicative fluency? Hmmm. I get it, but I have issues with this kind of definition. To me, these skills are all part of the *small view* of language, though "communicative fluency" at least suggests something larger. Still, I think there is more. I believe when engaged in debate, discussion, and conversation, we call up other critical skills well beyond these simple linguistic ones, some that were just barely recognized at the time of Anne Burn's paper, and some we are just identifying now. Yet, I think these higher-level skills, which all have to do with mental processes, are just as important as any other part of language proficiency.

In fact, as I write this, the MindBrainEd Think Tank team is putting together an issue on speaking. Our main editor, Heather Kretschmer, and I have been discussing what higher-level skills speaking requires. One of the first things she taught me is how conversation, usually considered the lowest of the debate-discussion-conversation triad, might actually be the hardest.

Conversation

Think about it. It requires real-time processing of language (and how many people can do that in L2?), fast mental agility with the current topic, appropriate facial and verbal cues, and it is done right to someone else's face! No time for preparation or revision like writing or presenting. On the spot succeed or fail! As Heather pointed out, Cambridge University Press gave a survey to 14,000 students, many of whom wrote that speaking was what they found most difficult in English. I'll bet they were referring to basic conversation, which might seem easy to us but is not to them.

The 40 years I taught speaking, I had never really thought about how hard making conversation is. But looking at the Anne Burns summary, it seems I am not alone. Few other experts have either. In fact, I am coming around to believing that the one key skill we must give our learners, whether reading, speaking, or listening, is real-time processing speed, and that is even more important than other things we measure in our paper tests, like vocabulary size and grammar proficiency.

Heather also passed on a good quote, from a Huberman video (search "Huberman Chang Speaking") that shows how complex any kind of speaking is. As Dr. Chang said,

"We actually have no idea what's going on in our mouth when we speak … how [we're] actually moving the different parts of the vocal tract…. If we were actually required to understand, we would never actually speak because it's so complex…. Some people would say the most complex motor thing that we do as a species is speaking, not the extreme feats of acrobatics or athleticism." (1:11:42)

So now that we have identified that conversation requires higher-level skills than simply "pronunciation, proper sentence

> I believe when engaged in debate, discussion, and conversation, we call up other critical skills well beyond these simple linguistic ones…

forms, communicative fluency," what about debate and discussion? What higher-level skills do they require?

Debate

I don't have much experience with teaching debate, but some of the things our contributors wrote about for our Think Tank issue make sense. In particular, Harumi Kimura does not do formal debate, but something she calls "constructive controversy." She assigns two groups of students different sides of an issue to research, has them advocate their position to the other group, and then, she has them switch sides and do it all over again. Finally, they try to reach a creative solution together.

Having learners advocate a position and form an argument requires some high-level intellectual work. The learner has to bracket their own beliefs and try to see the issue from just one side. Then, if they switch positions, they have to discard all they might have come to believe and do it all over again. This switching requires a well-developed executive function known as cognitive flexibility, one I discussed in the Winter issue of this magazine.

Switching perspectives might seem easy to us, since we have experienced higher education, but it is not so easy for younger adults. It is a skill that must be learned. And as recent politics show, it is not so easy for older adults either. I have realized that the ability of most adults to understand the other side, left or right, is pretty dismal. Having lived in a foreign culture, which builds cognitive flexibility, makes it easier for me, but sometimes I still catch myself yearning to believe the other side is just uninformed, stupid, or deranged.

So, don't you think this skill, being able to handle multiple perspectives, is really important in today's world? I do. And as Heather pointed out, it is an important part of our social life. It fosters our acceptance of others.

Discussion

We have looked at conversation and debate, so now let's get to an area of speaking that has always fascinated me, discussion.

Discussion in English class has been both a ghost ship for me – hard to make happen in the Japanese college classroom – and the siren on the rocks, drawing me in. Something happens in discussion that I can't quite place my finger on, but it intrigues me. Maybe it is that two frontal lobes are exploring and discovering in collaboration. And more. It involves the difficult task of integrating new ideas into what we already know, which often means we must discard some of those existing beliefs. It is the reshaping of our mental models, not always done gently. And so, it turns abstract, impersonal information into something concrete and meaningful. I learned this from my studies in adult education. Malcolm Knowles taught us that to learn, adults need to discuss. It helps them integrate the new ideas into their existing ideas, their view of the world, their life in general. In the process, they often teach each other as well. As Knowles wrote,

"Adults are a learning resource for their peers. – Adult learners have more diverse individual experiences than child learners. They've been around longer to accumulate those experiences, and they have more experiences to build on. … The adult learners themselves are a resource for learning. Adult learning should emphasize learning techniques that make use of the experience of learners, with group discussions, peer-to-peer collaboration, and problem-solving activities, instead of transmitting information one way, from the teacher to the students." (as cited in Naji, 2022, paras. 17–18)

Exploring and discovering with two frontal lobes. And not just exploring the social stuffing of conversation, mulling over the big ideas on how the world works. Just yesterday, I had such an experience with my high school daughter. She read a story about a Bengali immigrant to America titled, "Hell and Heaven." The title with the mixed up order of this phrase was something the Bengali mother said in an emotional fit. This poor woman suffered through a loveless marriage arranged by her parents, and being an honorable Bengali, she could never leave her husband or confess her love for another man she met later. She suffered greatly and tottered on the brink of suicide. My daughter and I discussed all this, and then we realized that her steadfast devotion to her family, even without her love being returned, eventually helped her come to peace with her life.

Then, simultaneously, my daughter and I realized the deeper meaning of the mixed-up title. This story was about how a woman went from her own Hell to a kind of Heaven, a route laid out for her by an ancient moral code. It is what might happen to any of us who adhere to a strong moral line, even if tough, experiencing Hell at first but eventually reaching a gentle Heaven later. I doubt either of us would have reached that deeper understanding of the story on our own, but discussing it led to discovery. Our two frontal lobes had connected and created a new understanding.

There is still so much I need to learn about speaking, especially how to teach the higher-level skills we have examined. So, if any of you have the time, let's discuss it!

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The Columnist
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