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The Young English Learners in Korea Edition

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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
What Us Old Folk Can Learn From Young Language Learners

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

Oh, blessed be the young, who seemingly soak up languages like a sponge. And don't I regret my parents not optimizing that valuable window of opportunity with me, that critical period of brain plasticity, when as a kid, I could have picked up new languages like cub scout merit badges. Exposure and immersion, living, using, and functioning in the language: Spanish Sesame Street, French homestays, Chinese nannies; it all seems like a simple, fast tracked method of youthful advantage to attain multilingual proficiency. No books, no grammar or vocabulary lists; just watch Abelardo and Pancho "jugar" on Plaza Sésamo and help Āyí fold the laundry singing old Chinese folk songs, and let the young brain's neural connections absorb the new information input. Language learning is all fun and games.

These young language learners (YLLs) possess neural circuitry networks that are fairly unrestrictive in that they easily make rewired connections when experiencing new information, such as language. Since children lack extensive experience in life (and language), their brain's networks treat nearly everything as unfamiliar, and absorb this fresh information with hardly a thought, pardon the pun. Extensive language exposure and interaction is key, mostly done as play.

However, as our perspective on the world becomes more fixed, these cells start to filter what they absorb – the gates start to go up. This neuroplasticity typically decreases with age, beginning at around 14 and "hardening" by 18. And this reduction in flexibility, of absorption, helps explain why YLLs "soak up" new languages better than adults.

But as we all know, and presumably have faced first-hand, adult language learners (ALLs) can be successful, too – with a little more conscious effort. We have greater experiences in the world, thus can manage our study techniques based on our own preferences. By utilizing our cognitive strengths and motivations, we can become more focused and dedicated learners. This enables us to grasp and decipher complex grammar rules and analyze language patterns. Kids may be better at DOING puzzles, but ALLs can excel at turning language learning INTO a puzzle. This focus helps us to see it through with a goal in mind. We have the ability to make connections; not the YLL brain's neural kind, but rather connections with our first language, connections with other learning resources, and connections with our life experiences, all that we can capitalize to our advantage. In short, ALLs have more experiences, drive, and patience, and are better at WORKING at language learning. We have the know-how.

But what about the other end of the lifelong learning spectrum, the so-called "third age" population I'm going to refer to as "old language learners" (OLLs). Cognition levels off in our 30s and gradually declines over time, with short-term memory, multitasking, and attention spans being noticeably affected. By the age of 60, nearly everyone will experience some decline in cognitive skills as mental activities shrink and the connectivity between neurons becomes less and less effective. Does this reformation of the brain in middle age and beyond affect how OLLs undertake the struggles of language learning?

I'm 54 years old, so this all strikes home. My successes at learning Korean over the last three decades have been patchy at best. I've been disillusioned with immersion and its failings, not been able to dedicate myself to focused study, and probably forgotten more Korean vocabulary words over the years than I've managed to remember. What should I expect as I enter this third age?

Memory is one of the key factors. Short-term and working memory are needed for receiving new language input (like foreign vocabulary) and staying on task, but it needs to be saved in long-term memory to be recalled later. But for OLLs, actually the benefits of language learning go both ways: memory is essential (think of all the new words!), yet learning a new language also actively ENHANCES memory, both in the short and long term. It stimulates the brain and strengthens cognitive function, which supports recall and retention across various types of memory. In this way, language learning joins Sudoku, crossword puzzles, jigsaw puzzles, and other mind games to help trigger the mind to focus and think. So there you have it, OLLs and YLLs engaging in brain-boosting play of different kinds with the same net effect: learning language.

Repetition is another method us old folks can utilize. Studies have shown that the brain forms new pathways when a task is repeated often. Thus new language items are remembered better and retained longer. So go ahead and be that silly old person talking to themselves on the subway. Don't forget, children often speak and repeat new information out loud as well. Not to mention singing, one of the most beneficial activities in early childhood, which stimulates the brain to release important mood enhancing hormones (a happy learner is a smart learner!), in addition to providing repetition of words and phrases to facilitate verbatim memory. Immersion and engagement in a new language environment can provide this repetition as well, as we repeat common language in daily activities. Again, YLLs do this, in their imaginative worlds of role plays and pretend play, where they can experiment with a variety of new words and expand their vocabulary naturally.

Both young and elderly language learners benefit greatly from social interaction, though their motivations and needs differ. YLLs thrive on praise and a sense of personal achievement, which helps build confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Socially active settings allow them to use new language skills in engaging ways that support their development. OLLs, on the other hand, often pursue language learning as a way to ACHIEVE self-fulfillment, as life changes (such as retirement) can put strains on life satisfaction and sense of purpose. Like YLLs, they also benefit from social involvement, finding connection and a sense of purpose through interaction, which enhances both their language skills and quality of life.

As I enter this third age, I'm beginning to realize I'm too old to work at language learning in the conventional ways, so maybe a YLL perspective is the approach to keep me young at heart, and mind.

Reflections and Resolutions: Celebrating the New Year with KOTESOL!

By Lindsay Herron KOTESOL President

The past year has been a busy one marked by change for many KOTESOL members: new jobs, new degrees, new countries and paths. It's been quite a successful one for our organization, as well, replete with new partnerships, successful collaborations, solid growth, and amazing events!

In the past year, we inaugurated the new Incheon Chapter, which has hit the ground running with multiple events, as well as resurrected the previously inactive Young Learners and Teens Special Interest Group (YLT SIG). Our publications offerings have expanded, too, with the introduction of *KOTESOL Happenings and News* (*HAN*), a quarterly online magazine that offers detailed updates on our organization, including our committees, chapters, and SIGs, as well as our members' accomplishments and career highlights.

Our partnerships have also flourished over the past year, with representatives from nine of our fifteen international partners participating in the 2024 KOTESOL International Conference. In addition, KOTESOL members officially represented our organization at six conferences hosted by international partners and two events hosted by domestic partners, as well as in a less official capacity at a variety of other ELT events around the globe. In October, we also established a new domestic partnership with the Korea Association of Secondary English Education (KASEE), and we look forward to many future years of productive collaboration.

Our events this year were very well received and well reviewed, too! The 31st Korea TESOL International Conference, held April 27 and 28 at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul, boasted 145 sessions (108 in-person, 37 online), 14 invited speakers, and approximately 400 participants from 25 countries. The Saturday evening dinner during the conference, The Social @ KOTESOL2024, sold more than 130 tickets and provided a classy, relaxed environment for connecting with others over passed hors d'oeuvres. The 2024 ESBB International TESOL Conference and KOTESOL National Conference, meanwhile, took place over three days this autumn at Gwangju National University of Education in Gwangju. The event, organized in collaboration with English Scholars Beyond Borders (ESBB), kicked off with a pre-conference "Highlights of Jeonnam" tour on Friday, October 11, followed by two full days' worth of presentations (81 in-person sessions plus 37 online/asynchronous sessions) and a Saturday evening *hanjeongsik* dinner. About 210 people representing 24 countries participated, with around 170 of them joining the conference onsite in Gwangju.

Also this year, the work of many members was recognized with a variety of awards and grants. The *Korea TESOL Journal* Research Paper of the Year Award 2024 was presented to Nicolas E. Caballero (Suwon-Gyeonggi Chapter) and Megan Yu for "Using Self-Determination Theory to Examine Motivations of Korean EFL College Students Informed by Korean Studies" (*Korea TESOL Journal* 18-2); the *TEC* Article of the Year Award 2024 went to Steven Adoranti (Seoul Chapter) for "Value the Process: Writing in the Age of ChatGPT" (*The English Connection* 27-3); and the *KOTESOL Proceedings* Best Paper Award 2024 was presented to Yutaka Fujieda (International Community) for "Analyzing the Felt Sense of Writing in English" (*KOTESOL Proceedings 2023*). Finally, the Reflective Language Teacher of the Year Award 2023 was presented to James "Jake" Kimball (Daegu-Gyeongbuk Chapter), and a KOTESOL research grant was awarded to Yu Jung Han (International Community).

Grants and awards are just one perk of membership; our Membership Committee is always striving to provide added value for all members. This year's benefits included discounts on IATEFL membership and ZenKimchi tours; three months of free Twinkl Ultimate membership; and complimentary conference booth space for members with small personal businesses. In addition, our Membership Committee was pleased to announce the arrival of new branded items: a broad selection of name-card cases and mini-notebook/pen/sticky-note sets.

With such a productive year behind us, what more could we possibly look forward to in 2025? Well, as I write this, we have another international partnership (or two) in the works, and we're considering expanding our global network even more broadly in the coming months. The 2025 KOTESOL International Conference Committee is already hard at work on the next conference, which will take place May 10–11, 2025, at Sookmyung Women's University in Seoul. We also expect to have a new special interest group starting this winter – details coming soon!

Finally, as the year draws to a close, I'd like to recognize with gratitude our official sponsors over the past year: Anyspeak, Express Publishing, Hawaii Pacific University, Macquarie University, National Geographic Learning, Oxford University Press, San Francisco State University, Seed Learning, Sookmyung TESOL, Sung An Dang/Cambridge University Press, the University of Birmingham, University of Nottingham Ningbo China, and Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. Our organization thrives thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, our members, and our partners and sponsors; we are truly grateful for all of you.

I hope this winter is relaxing and rewarding, and I look forward to seeing you at a KOTESOL event in the near future!

What Makes Young English Language Learners (YELLs) Different?: A Korean Perspective

By Michael Duddy

1. Introduction

One trait for any person seeking a career in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is the ability to recognize the needs of their learners. EFL learners differ in age, background, and level of education, which is why educators must be able and ready to adjust and adapt the classroom to meet the needs of their students. This article will discuss the differences between young English language learners (YELLs) and adult learners (ALs) in South Korea and the different challenges. The article will look first at the published literature surrounding learner styles and characteristics, discussing classroom challenges such as student motivation and behavior and how educators can adapt the coursebook to improve learner outcomes.

Before moving on, it is vital to look at what defines a YELL. According to Cameron (2001), YELLs are between five and twelve years old. Whereas other scholars may disagree, Cameron's definition fits the context in which I work in Korea and, therefore, will be used when discussing YELLs within this article.

2. Differences Between YELLs and Adults

This section deals with learning styles; learning theories, such as the critical period hypothesis (CPH) and the zone of proximal development (ZPD); motivation; and classroom management to compare the differences between YELLs and ALs in the EFL context.

Learner Characteristics

All teachers of YELLs must remember that in the classroom, they must not only fulfill the role of teacher but also take on the role of motivator, parent, friend, and organizer (Vale & Feunteun, 1995). According to Halliwell (1992), YELLs do not enter the second language (L2) classroom unequipped. Through learning their first language (L1), YELLs are already equipped with a set of "instincts, skills, and characteristics which will help them learn a new language" (p. 3). Understanding what YELLs bring to the classroom can help teachers prepare the class material that will suit the learners' needs.

Understanding the differences between YELLs and ALs is necessary for creating a thriving learning environment.

In many cases, the education of YELLs in Korea starts relatively young. Many students begin their English education in private academies called *hagwon* at five years of age (Lee, 2012). In the past, compulsory English classes started in the first grade of elementary school when students are seven. Still, more recently, the government has made changes pushing mandatory English classes back to third grade to alleviate student stress. This move has been heavily criticized by the parents who cannot afford to enroll their children in hagwon.

> **YELLs are more enthusiastic and lively as learners. They learn through having fun and are "doers."**

Cameron (2001) indicated that YELLs, when they are first introduced to the L2 classroom, are unable to make connections to physical objects that they can see and touch around them without the use of concrete vocabulary because when young learners began to acquire their L1, the process involved them sorting out words involving the concrete objects around them. This is what Piaget (1970) referred to as the "preoperational stage" of development. It is during this stage that we can see the emergence of language. However, at this stage, YELLs have not yet gained the skills to deal with abstract words and topics in the way that ALs can. Cameron (2001) recommended teaching non-abstract topics such as family and friends as they are easier for YELLs to process in the L2. Furthering the idea of abstract topics, Burke (2006) explained that the fantasy world younger children live in, concepts such as tenses, discourse, grammar, and lexis, do not exist, so it is conceivable that any attempt to teach such concepts would confuse YELLs. However, ALs have already encountered such concepts during the acquisition of their L1 and can therefore handle abstract topics much easier.

Another important difference between YELLs and ALs is that YELLs are "more enthusiastic and lively as learners" (Cameron, 2001, p. 1). They learn through having fun and are what Holderness (1991) described as "doers" (p. 18). The challenge this brings to teachers is that they must create a fun environment for the YELLs to keep them engaged during lessons. Despite finding a balance between learning and fun being hard, it allows the teacher an opportunity to create a bond with the YELLs. This bond is why YELLs seem more apt to "please their teacher rather than their peer group" (Cameron, 2001, p. 1). ALs, on the other hand, tend to be self-conscious in the L2 classroom and tend to seek the approval or acceptance of their peer group (Castañeda, 2016).

Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH)

Cameron (2001) and Bourke agree that children seem to learn a second language faster and can develop a more natural-sounding accent. Bourke (2006) stated, "It is now generally agreed that an early start is desirable and beneficial" (p. 279). Over the last several decades, there has been an increase in children learning foreign languages. This is evident in Korea with the rise in the number of kindergarten *hagwon*.

We could attribute this rise to two separate factors. First, South Korea has continued to prosper since the financial collapse of the late 1990s. This rise in income means that parents now have the money to spend on extra English lessons for their children, which they see as beneficial for their children's future. Second, the critical period hypothesis (CPH) suggests that children, until puberty, can acquire a second language more easily than their adult counterparts. The literature indicates that the brain acquires a second language in the same way it recovers from severe trauma. It is less likely that the mature brain will make a full recovery (Hakuta et al., 2003). One of the reasons for the apparent success of YELLs in gaining an L2 is that because their brains are still working on developing the L1, YELLs can rely on the same mechanisms to assist in acquiring the L2.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding

When discussing the differences between YELLs and ALs, another influential theory that should be addressed is the ZPD. The ZPD is a concept devised by Lev Vygotsky in the early 20th century. Vygotsky believed that children learn in a social environment by interacting with the people around them. The ZPD looks at the child's potential; it is not concerned with what a child has already learned but looks beyond this to what a child can learn. For any activity to be of any value to a child, it must be adapted to suit the child's potential development (Rogoff & Wertch, 1984). An activity that is too easy will not stimulate a child, and one that is too difficult will confuse or demoralize them. The ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do when working independently to solve a problem and what they can do with the help of an expert or a more competent peer. Vygotsky stated that if a child follows an adult's example over some time, they will become capable enough to do specific tasks without assistance.

Over the years, the concept of the ZPD has been expanded. One example of this is the theory of scaffolding developed by Bruner in 1976. Like Vygotsky, Bruner believed that as children learned new ideas, they needed assistance from their teachers. Over time, as the students' knowledge of the new concepts deepened, the amount of support provided by their teachers could be slowly stripped away. This concept has become known as "scaffolding" because it mirrors how the scaffolding poles that once supported a building during construction are gradually removed as the building nears

completion. Cameron (2001) described scaffolding as the language adults use "to mediate the world for children to help them solve their problems" (p. 8). Furthering this point, Wood (1998) explained that by using scaffolding, teachers can help children focus on what is relevant by providing focusing activities, offering suggestions, and providing praise.

YELLs Attention Span

One factor that will play a role in YELLs' SLA is their ability to remain focused during the lesson. Cameron (2001) pointed out that while younger children respond well to "sound and prosody" (p. 15), they are less likely to maintain their focus and attention on learning tasks that take a lot of time and are more likely to distract or become distracted by other students. To stimulate and help YELLs remain focused, it is essential to use shorter activities and make the explanations of these activities clear, so YELLs know precisely what they are being asked to do and why. According to Paul (2003), children are very active learners, and through teaching, teachers can use a child's natural curiosity to help the child gain the target language. The YELL classroom differs from an adult classroom, and all materials such as games, activities, or songs used for YELLs must be child-centered. This doesn't mean that similar materials cannot be used with ALs, but they must be appropriate, so that ALs do not become self-conscious. A lot of the language used in the classroom to motivate YELLs will also be different; for example, using the "magic finger" (having students raise their index finger in the air and chant "magic finger" before pointing to the passage they are preparing to read) to help YELLs follow along with a reading activity is something I have had success with, but would be too silly to use in an adult class.

Motivation

Research has shown that "motivation is one of the main determinants of second/foreign language learning achievements" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 273). However motivation can change over time and is never set in stone. Therefore, teachers need to identify the YELLs' motivation for learning English.

The biggest motivators for YELLs are their parents or the school they attend. This falls under extrinsic motivation. Because most, if not all, YELLs are only exposed to the L2 during the limited classroom time they receive, it is unlikely that they would be motivated by intrinsic motivation. However, YELLs can be motivated intrinsically with the help of their teacher in the classroom. A teacher can assist intrinsic motivation by providing choices for the YELLs and allowing them to offer their suggestions on how best to complete a task or activity or by introducing a fun, competitive element into classroom activities to boost the YELLs' confidence (Thornton, 2001). One thing that my students love is an interactive Jeopardy-style game based

on the topic of the class. The students compete in teams for stickers to add to their wall chart. By their very nature, YELLs are energetic and curious. Their teacher can nurture these qualities and help them develop a keen interest in the L2.

Paul (2003, p. 23) outlined several questions that the teacher can ask themselves in a bid to positively affect young learners' (YL) motivation, specifically within the EFL classroom:

1. Does the YL view language learning as a personal adventure?
2. Does the YL perceive themselves as being successful in their language learning?
3. Does the YL recognize that what they learn in class is transferable to other meaningful situations?
4. Do the YL's family and friends maintain a positive and encouraging attitude towards the YL's language learning?
5. Is there an absence of extrinsic rewards (and a sense of intrinsic motivation)?
6. Does the YL expect to be evaluated, feel threatened, or watched and checked upon?

If the YELLs feel that they are on an adventure and progressing in the class, the sense of accomplishment will encourage them to be active and participate. The YELL's motivation will increase with parental support and the realization that they can use the target language outside the classroom.

However, ALs tend to be motivated by a variety, or combination, of motivational factors, including intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, or instrumental (Anthony, 2014). Their desire to learn the L2 comes from the want to be more social when traveling or to move up the ladder in their place of employment. In most cases, motivation is less of an issue when teaching ALs and can change over time.

Classroom Management
As mentioned in a previous section, YELLs and ALs differ in their ability to remain focused during classroom activities. This can be an issue for the teacher in the YELL classroom, and they must be able to manage the classroom and create a fun and positive learning environment for the YELLs. The issues surrounding the behavior and need for discipline are highlighted by Dörnyei (2001a) when discussing the expectations for teachers transitioning from adult teaching to teaching YELLs. To guarantee that YELLs remain focused during classroom activities – which is not a simple task – Cameron (2003) noted that teachers should be able to think on the spot and be ready to adjust a task or activity to suit the direction that YELLs may take it. Still, the key to a successful class with YELLs is knowing when something does not work and being able to adjust it on the spot to ensure YELLs get the maximum benefit from their limited class time. One helpful way to help students contain their energy in the class if they become too active or if they enter the class on a high, perhaps returning from lunch or a class such as physical education, is to use what Halliwell (1992) referred to as "settle activities" (p. 20). These included copying or coloring activities, giving YELLs something to focus on, and individual tasks. However, during a class, the teacher may need to raise the energy of YELLs, and here they can use "stir activities" (Halliwell, 1992, p. 20). These activities include group work and oral work, and the aim is to get YELLs to engage with each other and the target language.

Another factor that can disrupt the YELL classroom is using the L1. Many private academies in Korea have a strict policy that the students and teachers should only communicate in the L2, which can be very difficult, given that many YELLs have very limited L2. Even if the material has been adapted to fit the needs of the learners, it is unlikely in a mixed ability class that all the students will fully comprehend the goal of the lesson. In recent decades there has been a shift in attitudes by some who feel that limited use of the L1 may be beneficial for the students. For example, Harbard (1992) explained that using the L1 may help stimulate discussion and aid SLA.

3. Adaptations
This section first looks at adapting the coursebook and then at how storybooks can be used to best meet the needs of YELLs.

Coursebook
A mistake made by many teachers (including myself) when beginning to work in the EFL field is relying solely on the coursebook, following it page by page and word for word. As Hutchinson and Torres (1994) indicated, the "textbook is an almost universal element of ELT teaching" (p. 315), and while the coursebook is practical, there are many other materials such as music, games, and storybooks that can also be used to enhance the learning experience. Halliwell asked two questions when trying to figure out what aspects of the coursework are beneficial for the learners, what can be adapted and what can be left out: What does the coursebook do well? and What does the teacher do better? Once a teacher can answer these questions, they can get to work sourcing other materials or making the necessary adaptations to improve the coursebook for their learners. Something I have had substantial success with in the past is using simple storybooks, such as *Go Away Big Green Monster*, coupled with flashcards and songs to help teach YELLs colors, shapes, and body parts. The song and dance routine were fun and engaging, and the flashcards were then used to create a memory game to allow the YELLs to test their knowledge and the teacher to evaluate progress.

Supplementing with Storybooks
As mentioned in the previous section, storybooks can be used in conjunction with coursebooks in the YELL classroom. Storybooks are helpful for several reasons. First, they are an effective way for YELLs to practice reading. Even for very

> **YELLs benefit from learning environments that are interactive and engaging, aligned with their developmental stage and intrinsic curiosity.**

young learners who may not be able to read the text, they can still benefit from storybooks. A storybook read by the teacher will provide YELLs with the opportunity to practice their listening skills. Second, some coursebooks used in the EFL classroom may be dated or use very rote language, which does not offer YELLs an authentic experience with the L2. However, as Ghosn (2002) suggested, storybooks can offer a more authentic language experience while simultaneously motivating the learner and providing them with a source of entertainment.

Storybooks also provide YELLs with an opportunity to practice their comprehension skills, and this can be done in two ways, depending on the age and competency of the students. For more advanced students, a series of comprehension questions aimed at checking how well the students understood the story could be asked once they have completed reading the story. This approach may prove difficult for lower-level students who struggle with writing in the L2. One way of combating this is to have the students design a mini-book or comic book and draw pictures to show the different events from the storybook. This is not only enjoyable for the students, but it allows the teachers to check their comprehension of the story.

4. Conclusions
In conclusion, the distinct characteristics of young English language learners (YELLs) and adult learners (ALs) in South Korea highlight the importance of tailored instructional approaches in EFL education. YELLs benefit from learning environments that are interactive and engaging, aligned with their developmental stage and intrinsic curiosity. These learners often rely on extrinsic motivation, driven by societal expectations and parental pressure, necessitating a balance between structure and fun in the classroom.

In contrast, ALs approach language acquisition with specific goals in mind, whether for career advancement or personal fulfillment. Their learning is more self-directed, often requiring practical applications of language skills. While the critical period hypothesis suggests advantages for younger learners, ALs can achieve significant proficiency with sustained effort and appropriate support. The zone of proximal development remains relevant for both groups, emphasizing the need for scaffolding to ensure tasks are optimally challenging.

Motivation and classroom management strategies also differ between YELLs and ALs. YELLs need dynamic activities to maintain focus, while adults benefit from a supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and practical engagement with the language. Ultimately, a one-size-fits-

all approach is ineffective in EFL instruction. Educators must adapt their methods to the developmental, cognitive, and motivational needs of their students, enhancing the learning experience for both YELLs and ALs. By understanding these differences, educators can foster a more effective and supportive learning environment, contributing to the overall success of EFL education in South Korea.

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Promoting Child-Centered Research

By Yuko Goto Butler

With a growing number of children learning an additional language (AL) in instructional settings, we are seeing more studies on AL education for children (here defined as children up to the age of 12, or the end of primary school). While there is extensive research on second language acquisition (SLA) among adult learners, the specific nature of children requires additional considerations when conducting research with them. For example, research techniques and instruments that have been widely used among adult learners may not be applicable to children. As a way of raising awareness of such considerations among researchers and educators, I focus on child-centered research in this essay.

Annamaria Pinter at the University of Warwick and I recently conducted a project concerning child-centered research in applied linguistics (Butler & Pinter, under review). In this project, we approached several experts on children's AL learning worldwide and asked them for their thoughts on child-centered research as well as the possibilities and challenges of conducting such research. As expected, their concerns and experiences varied depending on their epistemological and methodological traditions (e.g., experimental quantitative researchers and qualitative researchers).

What Is Child-Centered Research?
Readers may wonder what child-centered research entails in the first place. Historically, the notion of child-centeredness has been conceptualized in various ways. Annamaria and I initially gave the experts a few tentative definitions of child-centeredness as a starting point. The experts' views and experiences highlighted four key conceptualizations of child-centeredness in research. It should be noted, however, that these conceptualizations are not independent but closely related.

1. How to protect children's rights and respect them as social actors
This idea is primarily grounded in key articles of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which emphasizes the importance of respecting children's voices and rights. Children have their voices and feelings, and they should be heard and taken seriously in research. But how much do we, as researchers, seriously listen to their voices in practice?

In child studies in psychology, sociology, and other related fields, traditional approaches to research have been criticized for ignoring children's voices (Christensen & James, 2017). Traditionally, child research has been predominantly conducted in the form of "research *on* children" or "research *about* children." Research *on* children is typically employed in experimental studies where children are given some tasks or tests, and their behaviors are measured or observed. In research *about* children, which is often seen in qualitative studies, children's behaviors are observed and interpreted solely from adults' perspectives. In these types of studies, children's voices are not sufficiently heard.

Researchers in child studies, especially those with experimental quantitative studies, often make efforts to listen to children's opinions on the tasks and instruments *before* their implementation. One could argue that this sheds new light on the role of pilot studies. Researchers commonly use pilot studies to examine whether tasks and instruments are workable with the target group (e.g., Children can complete the task on time). However, if children's voices in the pilot study are heard and meaningfully incorporated into task revisions and implementation, the significance of pilot studies can be broadened. Researchers may be able to increase the validity of their tasks and instruments.

However, we should note that children in pilot studies rarely benefit directly from sharing their views with researchers. Even when researchers seek children's feedback *after* the experiment, which occurs much less frequently in reality, they can quickly realize that it is not easy to genuinely "listen" to children's voices. There is an inherent power imbalance between adult researchers – including teacher-researchers – and children. We must remember that children tend to please adults; they tend to tell adults what they think the adults want to hear (Cameron, 2001).

The difficulty with listening to children's "true" voices is not limited to experimental studies. It also applies to qualitative studies, such as interview studies. Talmy (2010) argued that researchers often treat interviews as merely research instruments – a tool to elicit information. However, we need to recognize that interviews are social practices where "data" are constructed between the interviewer and interviewee. Therefore, researchers' reflections on the co-construction process of meaning-making between the interviewer and interviewee are critical. Following this argument, interviewing children does not necessarily give them a voice. Researchers must be sensitive to how power imbalances influence the co-construction process of meaning-making in the interviews.

2. How to make sure that children are ready to consent
The second issue concerns how to obtain informed consent (or *assent* because they are underage) from children, along with consent from their parents or guardians. The procedure for obtaining such informed consent includes ensuring that children fully understand the purpose and the procedures of the study, their rights (e.g., the right to freely decide whether or not to participate and to withdraw from the study), and the potential risks and benefits of participation. Researchers, including the experts in our project, have made various efforts, such as using plain language or non-verbal means (e.g., pictures) to explain the study purpose and procedures, and their rights.

In practice, however, there are many issues. How can researchers be sure that children "fully" understand the study's purpose and procedures? How old should children be to grasp the concept of "rights"? Is it realistic to assume that children can make decisions freely without being influenced by parents and teachers? Can they refuse to participate if their teacher encourages them to join? When I conducted a study in China

as a foreign researcher from the United States, the principal of a focus school objected to a statement in the consent form stating that the children could make autonomous decisions about participation independently from their parents. In his view, this was contrary to the local educational philosophy, which holds that children should always listen to their parents and follow their guidance. There are undoubtedly cultural differences in how concepts such as "children," "childhood," and "children's rights" are understood (Butler, under review).

Protecting children's privacy is becoming increasingly challenging and complex as they engage in activities using digital technology. In virtual environments, the boundary between public and private spaces is fuzzier. Is it considered a violation of children's privacy if a researcher examines the content of their chat boxes and messages through social network services (SNS)? Children also often participate in virtual activities anonymously. For example, in researching children's digital game-playing and its impact on their English learning, their game-playing behaviors may conflict with their family's game-playing rules; they may not want their parents to find out. How can researchers protect the privacy of unconsented individuals (e.g., fellow game players) who remain anonymous? We have a long list of questions of these kinds (Butler, under review).

3. How to make the research appropriate for children and ensure they are primary beneficiaries

This conceptualization addresses how to make research tasks, instruments, and procedures suitable for children's ages, interests, and daily lives. Researchers need to be sensitive to the cognitive and socio-cognitive demands for completing language tasks and make sure that they do not exceed the capacities of the participating children. When adapting existing tasks and instruments that were originally designed for adults, many researchers simplify the procedures, reduce the number of items, and use plain language in items and instructions. They also select engaging materials for children and make tasks relevant to their daily lives and activities.

However, we also need to remember that designing research "appropriate" for children goes far beyond merely making the task contents and procedures "simpler" and "easier" for them. Modifying tasks to be linguistically and cognitively simpler does not necessarily guarantee that they will be valid, reliable, and most importantly, meaningful for children. How do we know that children are truly interested in tasks? For instance, if a researcher enters the classroom with a video camera, children may appear engaged in the task. The novelty of the situation may hold their attention, but that does not necessarily lead to meaningful learning. This issue raises a fundamental question: Who is the research for? Whose benefits should researchers prioritize? It is essential for researchers to critically and humbly reflect on whether their research serves their own intellectual curiosity or truly benefits the children.

4. How to create democratic partnerships with children

The final point relates to *child-centered education*, a concept rooted in the ideas of Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, and others. This concept values democratic relationships with children. I mentioned some criticisms of traditional research in child studies earlier (i.e., "research on children" and "research about children"). Moving beyond such traditional approaches, researchers who subscribe to the notion of child-centeredness often advocate for greater active participation of children in research, namely, "research *with* children" and "research *by* children." In "research with children," children play more active roles in the research processes, and in "research by children," they are involved in the entire research process, from planning to reporting, under the guidance of adults.

Research with or by children typically takes the form of participatory or project-based studies and may not apply to other types of studies. Furthermore, if the research is conducted as a one-time project, disconnected from children's regular learning and teaching, participatory studies are unlikely to make sustainable and positive contributions to their learning (Pinter, under review).

> **Children have their voices and feelings, and they should be heard and taken seriously in research. But how much do we, as researchers, seriously listen to their voices in practice?**

Conclusion

Readers can see by now that child-centeredness is a complex concept. There are multiple interpretations of it and many unsolved questions associated with it. Child-centeredness is also an idea that many researchers agree with in principle, but it is difficult to implement it in practice. Researchers have addressed a number of challenges as well as opportunities when adopting child-centered approaches to research. Part of the challenge is attributable to the fact that child-centeredness is context-dependent. Prescribed ethical guidelines may conflict with local understandings and practices of "ethics." Moreover, it is changing over time. While digital technology can help us conduct research, it also creates new ethical complexities that we must thoroughly discuss and consider. Reflection is the key to this process. I believe that reflexibility should be part of the research validity concern, rather than something to be minimized as a sign of subjectivity, regardless of the research traditions that researchers follow (e.g., experimental quantitative studies, classroom-based qualitative studies, action research, etc.).

I hope that this essay serves as an opportunity for researchers to increase their awareness of child-centeredness and enhance our reflexibility so that we can improve our research practices.

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Korean Parents' Perspectives on NESTs and NNESTs

By SuSie Park

Introduction

English is widely known as the lingua franca of the world, serving as a common means of communication for people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. As English has grown in importance, an invisible divide has emerged between native and non-native English speakers (Medgyes, 1992). As a result, many non-native speakers prioritize learning English over other foreign languages. South Korea is a prime example, where most parents emphasize English acquisition for their children from an early age, often before introducing any other second language. Korean parents tend to invest heavily in their children's English education, recognizing the language's significance for both academic achievement and future job prospects (Kim, 2010).

In South Korea, English is viewed not only as a practical tool for communication but also as a critical factor for success in school and beyond. Despite the recognition that non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) can help students achieve high levels of English proficiency, many Korean parents, particularly those with young children, show a preference for native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). This preference is based on the belief that NESTs, as native speakers, are better equipped to enhance children's communicative abilities in English. Many parents believe that enrolling their children in English kindergartens where NESTs teach will help improve their children's fluency in speaking, listening, and overall communication (Lee, 2016).

> **To foster a more effective English learning environment in South Korea, it is essential to consider not only the perspectives of NESTs and NNESTs but also the needs and expectations of Korean parents and students.**

According to Medgyes (1992, 2001), NESTs are often seen as creating a more relaxed and motivating classroom environment, allowing students more freedom to engage with the language. However, one of the drawbacks of NESTs is that they may not fully understand the educational expectations and cultural nuances of Korean parents. In contrast, NNESTs, who have themselves experienced the Korean education system, are more familiar with the structured, exam-oriented approach that many parents expect. NNESTs typically focus on rigorous teaching methods that emphasize grammar, memorization, and test preparation, aligning more closely with the goals of the Korean education system. While native speakers are often seen as ideal language models, Davies (1991) critiques this notion, emphasizing that linguistic competence is not limited to native speakers alone. Given these differing strengths, it is difficult to definitively say which type of teacher is more suitable for Korean students (Lee, 2016).

To foster a more effective English learning environment in South Korea, it is essential to consider not only the perspectives of NESTs and NNESTs but also the needs and expectations of Korean parents and students. Although there has been much debate comparing NESTs and NNESTs, relatively few studies have specifically examined the views of Korean parents regarding their preferences for their children's English education. This study aims to address the gap by exploring the perspectives of parents of both young learners (ages 3–9) and adolescent learners (ages 10–19). It seeks to understand which type of teacher these parents believe is better suited for their children's English education.

The Study

This study involves four groups of participants: nine parents of young learners (YLP), seven parents of adolescent learners (ALP), ten native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), and six non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs). The research methodology is based on a combination of Google surveys and phone interviews. This approach allows for a thorough examination of the different perspectives and experiences of the participants. The study takes into account both the broader Korean educational context and the specific needs of students when learning English. It also explores the diverse personal views of parents and teachers regarding the strengths and weaknesses of NESTs and NNESTs.

While the surveys and interviews with Korean parents focus on their children's needs and preferences for NESTs or NNESTs, the responses from NESTs and NNESTs shed light on their views of the Korean educational environment and their thoughts on what changes are needed to more effectively support Korean students' English learning.

Findings

The findings of this study are divided into three main sections: (a) the perspectives of parents of young learners, (b) the perspectives of parents of adolescent learners, and (c) the insights of English teachers in South Korea.

1. Perspectives of Parents of Young Learners

The first section focuses on the parents of young learners, whose children are between the ages of three and nine. The analysis is based on surveys and interviews conducted with these parents.

### The Effects of South Korea's Declining Population on English Education

The declining birth rate in South Korea has had a significant impact on education, particularly in how parents perceive the importance of English for their children's future success. According to the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS), the total fertility rate in South Korea fell to an all-time low of 0.78 in 2022 (Kim, 2022). This demographic change has led parents to become increasingly focused on providing their children with every possible advantage, including strong English skills, in a highly competitive environment.

One parent, YLP-A, emphasized that English education has become even more critical due to the shrinking population:

"I believe that English education is a prerequisite and foundational education in that it is a necessary tool. In particular, considering the generation of our children whose population is seriously declining, it will be difficult for them to get job opportunities in Korea when they become adults. English education is essential in that they will have to work in any field around the world." [YLP-A]

This view was echoed by several other parents of young learners, who expressed a strong preference for NESTs, believing that their children's ability to communicate fluently in English was paramount. YLP-A also noted that while NNESTs can provide valuable explanations in Korean, the ability to communicate directly with native speakers is key to mastering the language. All of the young learners' parents in this study considered communication skills to be the most important aspect of their children's English education (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Purpose of Learning English (Perspective of Korean Young Learners' Parents)
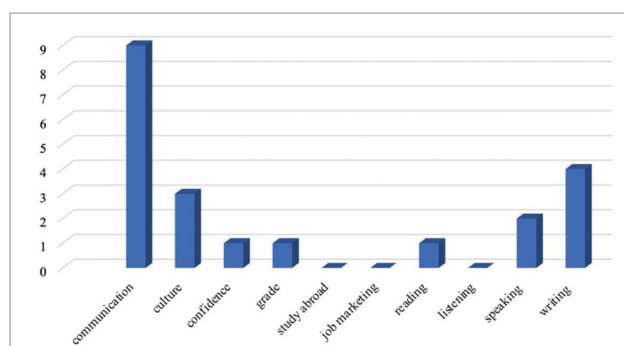
Furthermore, seventy-eight percent of the young learners' parents wanted NESTs who have been exposed to English-speaking cultures for their children to practice English with. While none of them chose NNESTs only, 22% of them preferred both types of teachers in that NNESTs are able to explain to young children in Korean when necessary since NESTs often do not speak Korean (see Figure 2). The population decline has shifted the expectations of English education for parents of young children. Rather than prioritizing school grades, they believe that hands-on practice with NESTs is a crucial aspect of English education before their children reach adolescence.

Figure 2. Preference for NESTs vs. NNESTs (Perspective of Korean Young Learners' Parents)
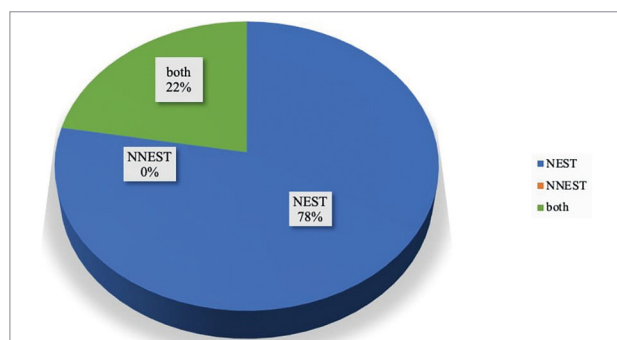
English Kindergartens Chosen by Korean Parents

As shown in Figure 1, all participants who were the parents of young learners chose the importance of English communication skills for their children's English education, followed by improving English creative writing skills and understanding the culture and ideology of English-speaking countries. Looking at their overall responses in Figure 2, they regarded it to be crucial to speak and write in English without hesitation. Because of this aspect that they considered important, most of them preferred NESTs as English teachers.

YLP-F commented that NESTs teach better with an English accent and vocabulary for young children. However, she viewed communication between NESTs and the learner's parents to be difficult. The role of NNESTs is important because they can more easily enhance communication, as most Korean parents are not native English speakers. Nonetheless, YLP-F still preferred NESTs over NNESTs if she had to choose. She said so because the advantages of NESTs are much more important than those of NNESTs. She also indicated that the difference between NESTs and NNESTs seems subtle, but there is a big difference in terms of English expressions and the vocabulary that they use. Like many parents of young learners, she considered her child to be more fluent in English after two to three years of learning English at an English kindergarten with NESTs.

With the same belief, many Korean parents choose to enroll their children in English kindergartens, believing that early exposure to English through NESTs helps their children develop fluency more naturally. YLP-E, whose child attended an English kindergarten, described the benefits of this early exposure:

"It is an unavoidable fact that young students like my child who graduated from an English kindergarten have more exposure to English than children who attended kindergartens taught only in Korean. It seems that my child has gained confidence in speaking English by constantly practicing English with native English teachers and is superior in such areas as pronunciation, listening, and free talking." [YLP-E]

In the case of English kindergarten, children spend a lot of time using English because the NESTs teach lessons in English. The parents claimed that exposure to NESTs is important. They felt that when children first encounter English at a young age with relatively little to study, they can naturally learn how to listen and speak through native English speakers, and they can accept English without difficulty.

However, not all parents shared the same positive view. YLP-I, who is both a parent and an English teacher, expressed concerns about her son's experience in an English kindergarten. She explained that her son found it difficult to understand the NESTs and became frustrated by the language barrier. She believed that NNESTs would have been more effective at helping her son at that stage because they could explain complex ideas in Korean when necessary. She emphasized that young children who have not yet fully developed their Korean language skills might struggle in an all-English environment.

2. Perspectives of Parents of Adolescent Learners
This second section focuses on parents of adolescent learners, whose children are between the ages of 10 and 19.

Great Importance on Academic Performance
The parents of adolescent learners valued native-like communication skills but questioned the long-term benefits of the English kindergarten system in Korea. While they recognized the advantages of learning from NESTs, they were uncertain whether their children's early experiences in English kindergartens would have a lasting impact.

As children grow older, their parents tend to shift their focus from communication skills to academic performance. While parents of young learners prioritized their children's ability to communicate fluently in English, parents of adolescent learners placed greater emphasis on academic achievement. ALP-A explained:

"I was more obsessed with English classes that were taught by NESTs for my children, and I had a strong desire for them to accept English as one of their languages when they were young. As time goes by, they need to focus on Korean-style grammar education and study for the entrance exam to get their academic grades right away." [ALP-A]

Here, according to ALP-A, English communication skills are important for their children, but what mattered more as time went by was getting good English grades in school.

Similarly, ALP-E emphasized that her child's ability to excel in school exams had become her primary concern, surpassing the need for conversational fluency. For many parents of adolescent learners, success in school is critical for their children's future career prospects. As a result, these parents often prefer NNESTs, who are better equipped to teach the grammar and test-taking skills necessary for academic success (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Purpose of Learning English (Perspective of Korean Adolescent Learners' Parents)
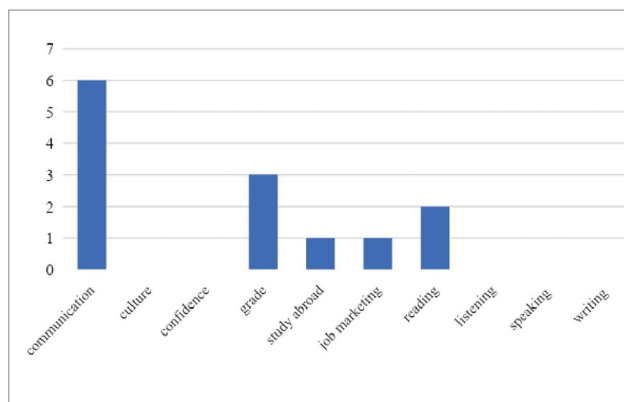

Teaching Strategies of Korean Teachers
While all the young learners' parents in this study showed a preference for NESTs, the adolescent learners' parents did not show such an extreme preference for NESTs. As shown in Figure 4, a significant number of the adolescent students' parents chose NNESTs (57%) over NESTs (29%). The parents of the adolescent students did not see English education as merely a means to communicating in English and learning more about English-speaking countries' cultures but rather as a means to engaging in more practical purposes for their children, i.e., academic performance and global job marketing.

These parents felt that NNESTs were more effective in preparing their children for the exams that play a crucial role in the Korean education system. ALP-C pointed out that NNESTs' ability to communicate in both Korean and English helped her child better understand difficult grammar concepts. She believed that the structured, systematic approach of NNESTs was better suited for academic purposes.

Figure 4. Preference for NESTs vs. NNESTs (Perspective of Korean Adolescent Learners' Parents)
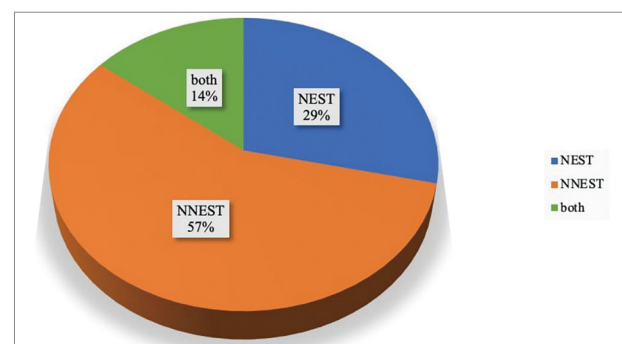
However, some parents expressed concerns about the rigidity of NNESTs' teaching methods, noting that the focus on grammar and test preparation could limit their children's creativity and enthusiasm for learning English.

3. Insights of English Teachers in South Korea
This third section presents the perspectives of NESTs and NNESTs who were working in South Korea during the study.

High Investment and High Expectations in English Education
English education is a major financial investment for many Korean families, with many students attending private English academies in addition to their regular school lessons. NEST-C is concerned that this phenomenon has a downside in Korea. The English education in school solely is insufficient to catch up with the private education market. She observed that Korean parents often have very high expectations for their children's English abilities, particularly when they are taught by NESTs:

"In Korea, English is considered overly important and a lot of money is spent on it. If their child doesn't improve their skills as much as expected for the amount of money spent, they may not prefer NNESTs. They may think it's a waste of money and think that it's a teacher problem, not their child's problem." [NEST-C]

NEST-C explained that while Korean parents often expect quick results, achieving native-like proficiency is difficult

> **...this study suggests that a balance between NESTs and NNESTs may be the most effective approach.**

because students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Many students speak Korean at home, hindering their ability to become fluent in English.

Understanding Different Ages and Needs of Students
Students of different ages have different needs and expectations in their English education. Identifying these needs first helps determine which type of teacher – NEST or NNEST – is more suitable for each student. During the early years, such as kindergarten and lower grades of elementary school, the emphasis is placed on the practical use of English, focusing on communicative language teaching. Young learners, in contrast to adolescent learners, typically have more time to freely invest in learning English and can acquire the language more quickly.

Both NESTs and NNESTs agreed that the needs of young learners and adolescent learners differ significantly, which influences the suitability of each type of teacher. NEST-A noted that young learners are more likely to benefit from native speakers due to their ability to quickly pick up pronunciation and natural speech patterns. However, as students progress through their education, NNEST-B argued that NNESTs are better equipped to help students navigate the complexities of grammar and exams.

NNEST-B further explained that, just as Koreans learn their native language naturally without consciously studying grammatical rules, native English speakers similarly grow up absorbing English. For this reason, NESTs may find it challenging to emphasize English sentence structures when teaching Korean students, who often struggle with interpreting certain parts of English sentences, since NESTs tend to take English word order for granted.

NEST-G, based on her experience teaching both young and adolescent learners in Korea, acknowledged that while many parents of young learners prefer NESTs, NNESTs are often more suitable teachers within the Korean educational context for both age groups. She noted that this preference for NNESTs stems from the fact that Korean parents ultimately aim for their children to excel academically and gain admission to prestigious universities. This disconnect leaves many Korean parents uncertain about the best approach to focus on in their children's English education under the current system.

4. Discussion and Conclusion
Korean parents are highly involved in their children's English education, and private English academies play a major role in meeting this demand. While many parents believe that NESTs are superior teachers because English is their native language, this study suggests that a balance between NESTs and NNESTs may be the most effective approach.

The findings of this study show that parents' preferences for NESTs or NNESTs depend largely on the age and needs of their children. For young learners, parents tend to favor NESTs, believing that exposure to native speakers will improve their children's communication skills and confidence in using English. As students grow older and the focus shifts to academic performance, parents of adolescent learners often prefer NNESTs, who are more familiar with the grammar and test preparation strategies needed for success in the Korean education system.

While it is difficult to definitively determine the qualifications of a "good" English teacher, this study provides valuable insight into the differing needs of Korean students and the suitability of NESTs and NNESTs at different stages of education. Ideally, a balance between NESTs and NNESTs would allow educators to leverage the strengths of both types of teachers while compensating for their respective weaknesses.

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National Council Election Results

President
Lindsay Herron

1st Vice-President
Mike Peacock

2nd Vice-President
Wesley Martin

Secretary
Heidi Vande Voort Nam

Nominations & Elections Committee Chair
David Shaffer

Korea TESOL 2024 Service Awards

Lifetime Service Award
- Robert J. Dickey

"Stepping Up" Award
- Victor Reeser

Meritorious Service Award
- Bryan Hale
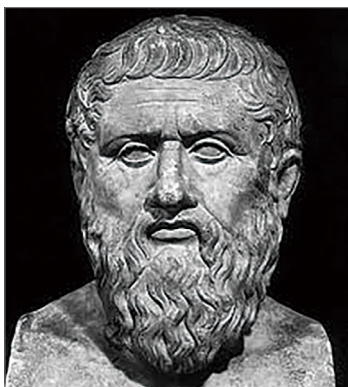- James Kimball
- Rhea Metituk
- Heidi Nam
- Mike Peacock

Outstanding Service Award
- Robert J. Dickey
- Dr. Kara Mac Donald
- John Phillips
- Dr. David Shaffer
- Dr. Andrew White

Using Music Most Effectively with Young Learners

By David Paul

The musical rhythm in songs, just like in nursery rhymes, can make language learning very memorable. I expect almost all of us can remember songs or nursery rhymes we learned when we were children even when we remember little else from that time. In my case, I learned Greek for a couple of years when I was a child. I remember very little Greek now, but I remember we once sang a song in Greek, and I can still sing some of the song now – 60 years later! If music is so helpful in language learning, it is worth taking a close look at how to use it most effectively.

Songs as Part of a Classroom Routine

At least until we know a class well and have built trust with the children, it is generally best for our lessons to have a clear framework and have routines that give the children security, and music can be an important part of these class routines.

▲ *"Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education." – Plato*

There are many teachers who like to use the same song at the beginning of each lesson so as to clearly mark the beginning of the lesson, or who like to use particular songs or instrumental music for other key points in a lesson, such as when signaling a change of activity. I understand the reasons for doing this, and I appreciate that it can be effective, especially with very young children, but personally, I prefer to be a bit less predictable, and set the tone for a lesson where children are challenged to think more. So, rather than having a routine where the same song is sung at a certain point in a lesson, the routine would be that a song may be sung at that point, but the song would vary. There are some exceptions to this, such as when the children seem to lack confidence or feel particularly insecure.

Music as a Classroom Management Tool

There are various ways music can help with classroom management. For example, when you are teaching a class and you feel that the children are not bonding together very well, one of the best solutions is for the class to sing a song together. Though admittedly, this tends to work better with younger children than older children, and with larger classes more than with smaller classes.

Another classroom management technique is to have music playing when the children enter the classroom so as to settle the children down and encourage a positive atmosphere. You can then turn the music off or slowly turn down the volume. The end of the music indicates that the lesson is about to begin. The same kind of technique can be used to time activities during the lesson or to get the children's attention. The end of a song can indicate the end of an activity, or you can slowly turn down background music so as to get the children's attention.

Music can also be used to vary the energy level of a class. If the children seem sleepy or lethargic, they can sing an energetic song or have energetic background music to make the class more alive. On the other hand, if some children are stressed or hyperactive, you can use relaxing music to help calm them down.

Should We Have Background Music?

Background music can be used during games or other language activities, but it is best not to use it during activities that are cognitively demanding. Research seems to indicate that under some conditions, background music can improve performance, but in other situations, it makes it worse. It can often lift the children's mood and involvement in the lesson, but it can distract from tasks where the children are being challenged to learn.

In my case, almost all the activities in my lessons are cognitively demanding, so I don't use background music very often. The main exceptions are when I want to make an activity more exciting, especially a physically active activity, or when I deliberately want to make the learning more challenging. I also sometimes use background music for "advance listening" or to expose the children to language targets they are going to learn later in the lesson or in a future lesson.

Modifying Songs

When we use popular English songs, the temptation is to use them in their original form, but this may often do more harm than good. If the song contains too much language

> **Research seems to indicate that under some conditions, background music can improve performance, but in other situations, it makes it worse.**

that is beyond the children's understanding, the children may just parrot the language without understanding it, and the difficult language content may also negatively affect their confidence in their ability to learn English.

Take for example the song "If You're Happy and You Know." This song is good for learning and practicing feelings. "Happy" can be changed to other feelings, such as "angry,"

or "sad," or "tired," which is great. But if the children are learning feelings for the first time, there are other parts of the song that are too difficult.

If the children are learning words like "happy" or "sad," conditional tenses will be much too difficult for them. So, "If you're happy" is not appropriate. This needs to be changed to a sentence that is more appropriate for the children's level, such as "I am happy" or "Are you happy?"

Another problem with the song is "and you know it." This expression is much too difficult for a child who is learning basic feelings and is also pretty useless. In situations like this, we need to either rewrite the song or find an existing modified version.

Writing Songs

You can write your own songs. This is much easier than it seems. I think the easiest way to do it is to use a traditional tune and write new words. Many of the most popular songs for children use traditional tunes. "The ABC Song" uses "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The tune for "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" is from the traditional "There's a Tavern in the Town." If you plan to record songs, you need to be sure that the tunes are either original or in the public domain.

Dave The Ape

In my own case, I had no confidence at all the first time I wrote an ELT song for children. I only did it because a publisher told me I needed to add some songs to a book I had written for primary school children. I couldn't think how to go about it, so I adopted a very logical approach. The song needed to be for the basic sounds of the five vowels, so I drew up a list of many traditional tunes, and went through them systematically, ruling out any that wouldn't work with five distinct sounds. By a process of elimination, I arrived at a small number of traditional songs that might work, and decided on "Bingo." I just adapted it a bit, and by some miracle the song is still widely used over 30 years later.

Choosing Songs

So which songs are best to use? I think there are three main questions we need to ask when deciding on a song to sing in class.
1. *Will the children like the song*? The more the children enjoy the song, the more they are likely to learn.
2. *Can the song be integrated with the current language targets of the lesson or course*? Songs are not just an extra activity in a lesson. Singing songs can be a great way to learn and practice language targets. If we use songs without integrating the content, it is sending out the message that the children can come to the lesson and just parrot English, and it is not challenging them to reach their full potential in the time available. There are plenty of other songs that the children will enjoy but which contain relevant language content.
3. *Can the content of the song easily be changed*? The best songs are for learning English, not just practicing them in exactly the same way over and over again. In order for a song to be used for learning, we need to be able to vary the words of the song.

Evaluating Songs

Let's use these criteria to evaluate a couple of songs. One of the most common songs in the English classroom is "The ABC Song," where the alphabet is sung to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Let's evaluate the song:

Will the children like the song? There is a good chance that the children will like the song. The melody is catchy and has been popular with children for generations.

Can the song be integrated with the language targets of the lesson or course? For very young children who are learning the alphabet, it might be at the right level. However, the song is often used with children who already know their ABCs and even sometimes with children who learned the letters of the alphabet a long time in the past.

Can the content of the song easily be changed? "The ABC Song" has a fixed sequence, so it is very difficult to change the words to the song. It is possible to change some parts of the song, but it is not easy to do.

What about "The Vowel Song" (the a-e-i-o-u song)? As I mentioned, this was my first-ever song. It also has a catchy

melody and can be integrated with language targets, but it is much easier to change the language content than it is with "The ABC Song." The phonic sounds can be changed and so can the questions.

Using "The Vowel Song" to Learn New Language Targets

The children could sing the song a few times when they are learning the basic vowel sounds. Each time they sing the song, we stop the song before the children want to stop. This makes it more likely that they will be excited to sing it again. Then, some time later, when the children are about to learn phonic combinations, such as "ar" or "ee," we write the song on the board or on the screen. They sing the basic song, and when they are immersed in singing, we casually go to the board and write an extra E so that a-e-i-o-u becomes a-ee-i-o-u, then walk away innocently and wait for the *Huh*?

When the children are wondering how to read "ee," we pick up a flash card that has "ee" on one side and a picture of a tree on the other side, smile playfully, hold up the card so the children see the side with "ee" written on it, and then slowly turn it around so the children can see the picture of a tree on the other side. The children say "tree" because we made sure the children came across the word *tree* orally before doing this activity. We then turn the card around again, and the children will usually say "ee" because, by this stage, they are used to cards with a phonic sound on one side and an anchor word on the other side, such as "a – apple" or "c – cat."

If they don't say "ee," we can help by gradually showing pictures of other words from the same phonics family, such as "green," "bee," or "three," and letting the children notice what sound the words have in common.

The children have discovered something new and can now sing "The Vowel Song." We can now add other new sounds. Notice that there was no need to "teach" or "explain." The children reached out for new knowledge, thought about it, and understood successfully. This way of introducing sounds is very memorable for the children, and it is also likely to give the children a strong feeling of ownership of the new knowledge.

Passing a Bag

Instead of reading the song from the board or a screen, the children have a bag with cards in it. The first time the children play, we just use the five basic vowels. Each card has a letter on one side and a picture on the other. For example, "a – apple" or "e – elephant." The children pass the bag around and play a game. For example, they could draw a card from the bag whenever they throw a certain number on a die or whenever you stop some background music.

When they draw a card from the bag, they place it on the table, and the vowels will probably be in a different sequence from in the original song. They then sing the new version of the song. We then play again, but add new letters or letter combinations. So, some of the cards are familiar and some are new. When a child draws a new card from the bag and looks at it with the other children, they can usually guess how to pronounce the letter or letter combination from the familiar picture on the other side. If necessary, we can help in the same way as with the previous activity, by gradually showing pictures of other

words from the same phonics family. For example, for "ir," we might show pictures of a bird, then a shirt, then a skirt, and see if the children can notice the sound the words have in common.

Songs and Games Are for Learning

In a more traditional classroom, it is often assumed that new words or patterns should first be introduced in a clear and serious way, and songs should be used afterwards for practicing these new language items. Some teachers even go further and assume that most real learning takes place outside fun activities, and that songs are really there as a kind of light relief or as a reward for studying hard or for good behavior. The teacher may say something like, "If you study hard, we'll sing your favorite song."

I think this is missing the point of having songs and games in the first place and can often have more of a negative effect than a positive one. For many of the children, the serious parts of the lesson will seem less interesting than the fun parts, and the teacher may achieve the opposite of what she wants to achieve. The children may come to feel that learning English is what they have to get through in order to do the fun activities. The way to avoid this is to fully integrate singing and playing with learning.

If playing, singing, and learning are integrated into a total learning experience, the combination is very powerful.

5 Green Beetles

The Author

David Paul started a school in an apartment in Hiroshima in 1982 and it grew very rapidly. Over 27 years, his schools taught over 100,000 students in Hiroshima prefecture and became a center for professional development of English teachers in East Asia. There were also franchise schools in Korea and Thailand. He has an MA from Cambridge University and has written best-selling books.

Tracking English Achievement: The Influence of Private Tutoring in Korean Adolescents

By Jiseon Ryu and Byungmin Lee

Introduction

Due to the significance of English as a dominant language in the context of economic globalization, English proficiency is seen as essential for economic and social opportunities, prompting educational policies and efforts by families to enhance exposure both in and outside of formal education (Yung & Hajar, 2023). In Korea, the pursuit of English language skills, often referred to as "English fever," has become a widespread cultural phenomenon since the 1990s (Park, 2009). This intense desire to learn English is evident in the commitment of parents to their children's English education, which has been described by Park and Abelmann (2004) as an "inter-generational project" (p. 647).

The critical period hypothesis, which posits that there is a limited window of opportunity for language learning during childhood, has also fueled the demand for early English education in many EFL countries (Scovel, 2021). This belief that earlier exposure to English provides an advantage in language acquisition has led many parents to enroll their children in English-speaking kindergartens or even send them abroad for language immersion programs before formal schooling begins in Korea. While pursuit of English learning is often put into practice through private tutoring, Shin and Lee (2019) have criticized the social phenomena surrounding it, particularly in the context of the "English divide." This phenomenon represents the polarization of English abilities among primary and secondary school students across the socioeconomic spectrum: the "early study abroad" students who have had the opportunity to live in English-speaking countries for the sole purpose of learning English, and the "English abandoners" who have struggled to learn English and ultimately given up.

Although private tutoring is a widespread practice globally, it is particularly prominent in Korea (Lee & Jang, 2023). In the case of English language education, Statistics Korea (2022) reported that an average of 41% of students participated in English private education from 2017 to 2021, and they spent the highest amount of expenditure (i.e., 112,000 KRW) per month compared to other school subjects. It encompasses various formats, each catering to different needs and proficiency levels. The most common form is *hagwon*, where students attend after-school classes that focus on grammar, reading comprehension, test preparation, and conversational skills. Some hagwon specialize in intensive programs for exams like TOEFL, TOEIC, and the Korean SAT. Due to the unique characteristics of the Korean context, numerous studies have explored various aspects of English private education (Byun & Kim, 2010; Kim, 2013; Kim et al., 2012; Oh & Kim, 2011). For example, Kim et al. (2012) examined the factors influencing participation in English private education, and their findings indicated that family income, parental education background, students' school record, and the region in which the school was located all had an impact on the extent of participation and expenditure on private English tutoring. Oh and Kim (2011) also revealed that the significant variation in expenditure on private tutoring can be explained by residential areas and school levels, with expenditure being higher in urban metropolitan areas, than in rural or small- and medium-sized towns.

The effectiveness of private education has also been extensively examined in the academic literature. Byun and Kim (2010) conducted a study that found a significant relationship between the socioeconomic status (SES) of the family and a student's English achievement. This relationship was found to be mediated by private education, indicating that private education can play a critical role in enhancing a student's English achievement, particularly for students from higher SES families. Kim (2013) examined the impact of private tutoring on both mathematics and English achievement, using a longitudinal design. The study revealed that students who had received more private tutoring had higher scores in both mathematics and English than those who received less private tutoring. However, the study did not find any longitudinal effects of participating in private tutoring. In line with this result, another longitudinal study conducted by Kim (2015) showed that the expenditure on private education for English was related only to the initial state of Korean adolescents' English achievement and their levels of understanding in English class. This finding suggests that private education may be particularly effective for improving the initial state of English abilities and promoting a deeper understanding of lessons in English language classrooms. Conversely, the overarching impact of private English tutoring on language proficiency remains unclear. Lee and Jang (2023) critically reviewed the effectiveness of private English tutoring in South Korea, revealing mixed results, with some studies suggesting minimal or less significant effects compared to other factors, such as student self-efficacy and learning attitudes.

The study summary in this article examines the developmental trajectories of English achievement among young Korean EFL learners from Grade 4 to Grade 9, emphasizing initial proficiency levels and exposure to private tutoring in both urban and rural settings.

Summary of the Study

The study in this article sought to answer three key questions: (a) How do the English language achievement trajectories of Korean EFL young adolescents from Grade 4 through Grade 9 vary based on their initial English proficiency at Grade 4? (b) What relationship exists between the development of English language achievement in Korean EFL young adolescents and their exposure to private English tutoring from Grade 6 to Grade 9? (c) How does this relationship differ according to the student's residential areas, that is, urban versus rural-town areas?

The methodology of this study utilized panel data from the Gyeonggi Education Panel Study (GEPS). For the first research question, English scores from 2012 (Grade 4) to 2017 (Grade 9) were analyzed, covering 3,530 students across 85 schools, with a nearly even gender distribution (49.16% female, 50.82% male). The six-year time span was chosen to track English achievement through elementary and middle school years and because the English tests ended in 2018 due to curriculum changes. For the second and third research questions, data from Grades 6 to 9 were used, involving 2,740 students, excluding those without English test scores or tutoring data. Of these, 80.6% were from urban areas and 19.4% from rural towns, with a slight reduction in the rural

proportion after removing incomplete data. The final analysis included students from 85 schools in Gyeonggi Province.

Two outcome variables were used in this study. One was English scores (ES) measuring the students' English achievement and the other was the amount of private English tutoring (PT) outside school. Students' English achievement over either the six-year period or the four-year period was entered into the data analysis. Regarding the amount of English private tutoring, the participants answered an approximate number of minutes per week that they had received on the survey question (i.e., how much time do you spend on English private tutoring outside the school per week?). In addition, the participants were divided into two regional groups (i.e., urbanicity) for the multivariate latent growth modeling (LGM) analysis. Urbanicity was based on the criteria of the GEPS students' residential classification: city and rural-town.

Concerning the results of this study, Research Question 1 aimed to investigate the English language development of young adolescent students over a six-year period. To do this, the data was divided into two groups based on their initial Grade 4 English scores: lower-achievement group (LA) and higher-achievement group (HA). The results of the two unconditional univariate models show at Grade 4 a significant disparity in English achievement levels between the two groups. The LA group demonstrated an overall increase in English achievement over time. The positive linear slope (see Figure 1) indicates a general upward trend, while the small negative quadratic slope suggests a slight deceleration in the rate of increase. Therefore, although achievement continues to grow, the rate of growth shows a slight decrease over time, aligning closely with a linear growth pattern. In contrast, the HA group exhibited a more curvilinear trajectory: a steady linear increase during Grades 4 and 5, followed by an accelerated growth rate from Grade 6 onward, peaking in Grade 8, and then tapering off slightly in Grade 9.

A positive correlation between the starting level and the growth rate was found, suggesting that students with higher English abilities in Grade 4 tended to improve at a faster rate over time in both groups. It is also noteworthy that the initial gap between the HA and LA groups in Grade 4 was not reduced over the six-year period. By ninth grade, the LA group's average English achievement level was nearly equivalent to the HA group's initial level (i.e., Grade 4).

Figure 1. Trajectories of English Scores of the Two Achievement Groups (*n* = 3,530)
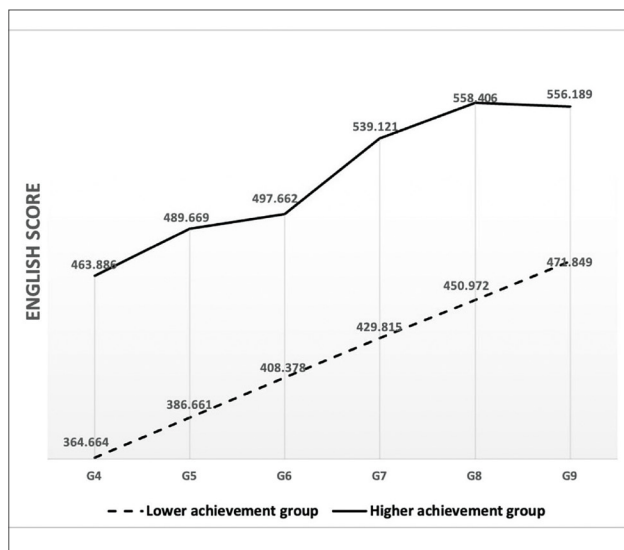
The results for the second research question showed that the starting level of PT was positively associated with the rate of ES improvement over time, meaning that higher initial PT levels indicated a greater rate of enhancement in ES for students. In addition, it was found that a higher initial PT level was associated with a slower deceleration in English proficiency growth over time. Overall, the results of the study suggest that initial PT levels have a lasting impact on the trajectory of ES development, both in terms of its rate of improvement and its eventual deceleration.

To compare the correlations between the urban and rural-town areas as outlined in the third research question, a two-group multivariate growth curve model was conducted. A correlation between English scores and private tutoring was particularly evident in urban student populations. For example, the correlation coefficients for both Grade 6 outcomes were notably more substantial for urban students in contrast to those in rural-town areas. Additionally, the correlation between the slopes of English achievement and the initial level of private tutoring proved to be statistically significant exclusively within urban areas. Conversely, a significant correlation among those parameters was not discerned within the rural-town student population. This implies that the enduring impact of the initial level of private tutoring on the progression of English achievement is specifically evident in urban areas.

Discussion
The findings of this study revealed that both higher- and lower-performing Korean EFL adolescent student groups demonstrated consistent improvement in their English proficiency from Grade 4 to Grade 9. Notably, this improvement featured a modest deceleration in the growth rate for the higher-performing students following a period of more accelerated growth by Grade 8. This curvilinear developmental trajectory is consistent with previous research (Little et al., 2021), which suggests that L2 language acquisition is a dynamic and non-linear process.

An intriguing finding of this study was the observed heterogeneity in the English achievement of fourth-grade elementary school students. The initial gap between the lower- and higher-achievement groups persisted over the next six years. This finding suggests that students who exhibit higher English achievement in the early stage of their formal English education are more likely to maintain this advantage over time, whereas those who start with lower levels of achievement may struggle to narrow the gap.

A salient discovery of this study is the significant inter-individual variance in English language skills among fourth-grade students, linked to differing levels of engagement in supplementary private English instruction. Participation in private tutoring is associated with initial proficiency and influences growth trajectories, with higher initial participation correlating with accelerated growth and slower deceleration in English achievement. This underscores the impact of private tutoring during early formal instruction. However, caution is needed in inferring its long-term effects, as the relationship between tutoring and proficiency suggests that increased exposure may not necessarily lead to sustained growth over time. Additionally, the finding shows that the link between English achievement and the amount of private English tutoring is more pronounced in urban regions than in rural-town localities. It suggests factors such as disparities in access to private educational resources, variations in parental education or occupation, and discrepancies in the accessibilities of social capital and resources may contribute to this urban–rural divide of English private tutoring and English proficiency (Miller & Vortruba-Drzal, 2015).

Implications for Teachers

Identifying the factors associated with students' learning trajectories is crucial in guiding educators to develop effective teaching strategies. The persistent gaps observed between the two achievement groups found in this study highlight the importance of remedial programs aimed at improving the English language proficiency of students with low levels of proficiency. In particular, supplementary English programs, such as diagnostic assessments of English language proficiency and tailored interventions in the initial stages of English language learning, might be essential for bridging the proficiency gap between the two groups. The implementation of diverse programs aimed at mitigating English underachievement, such as Pictorial Typography Phonics (Lee & Lee, 2022), English Literacy Instruction for English Underachievers (Jung & Kim, 2013), and the Basic Academic Assessment and Remediation Program offered by the offices of education in Korea holds promise for ameliorating the situation in the public education sector.

The regional differences in English proficiency found in this study underscore the need to provide additional support to students residing in rural areas. By gaining a comprehensive understanding of English language learning and exposure patterns to the language outside the classroom, instructors can design targeted interventions that facilitate their English proficiency.

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Communicative ESL Games for Young Learners

By OnTESOL

When are ESL games appropriate? ESL teachers need to consider whether the game is potentially effective at developing the language skills they are targeting in their lesson objectives. As language teachers, we often make the false assumption that the task (or game in this case) we plan will translate neatly into targeted language use and practice in the classroom. Second language classroom research shows that this is not usually the case – that the language actually used by the students during a task can be much different than the language that was anticipated by the teacher.

As well, ESL teachers need to weigh the costs and benefits of bringing games to the classroom. In intensive language programs, instructional time is at a premium. Games that require complex explanations or elaborate classroom preparation can quickly eat up valuable class time. On the other hand, in programs where learners are simply looking for exposure to language and conversational opportunities, ESL games can be an excellent way to motivate learners and keep them interested in the class.

Communicative Low-Prep ESL Games for Young Learners

1. Definitions Vocabulary Game

Definitions is a fun ESL game for learners to review and recycle vocabulary. It is simple to set up, works great with large classes, can be adapted to suit different levels and exploited in numerous ways. This low-prep ESL game also allows learners to practice their speaking and listening skills, as it requires them to explain terms in English so that their team or partner can identify the vocabulary.

In this vocabulary game, it is essential that learners only use spoken English when explaining the term. They cannot act or draw the term because the main objective of this activity is to get learners to speak and listen. It is also important that ESL teachers ensure that turn-taking is happening so that each member has an opportunity to speak.

The first time learners do this activity, they will need the instructions explained or modeled. For beginner levels, you could take a term like *apple* and give them different ways to identify the term:
• It is a fruit.
• It is round and the size of your hand.
• It begins with a vowel.
• It has a stem and small seeds in the center.
• It is crispy and often in a pie.
• It is red or green.
• McDonald's has an _____ pie.
• It has the skin you eat.
• You do not eat the stem and seeds.
• An _____ a day keeps the doctor away.

This activity can be carried out with only a chalkboard and requires no preparation time. Arrange groups so that one member has their back to the board. The members facing the board must then take turns to explain the term until one person guesses it. With a little more preparation time, ESL teachers can create slips of paper with the terms written on them, enough for as many teams as necessary with no more than four or five students in order for a group to maximize participation. The teams can then compete to see which team can successfully identify all of the terms first.

2. Memory Pairs Game

Memory Pairs is usually played with a regular deck of cards. All of the cards are laid out in front of the players, and they take turns to turn over two cards to try to find a matching pair. Players keep the pairs they correctly identify, and the winner is the one with the most matching pairs once all the cards have been matched. This ESL game can be adapted and exploited in innumerable ways for different linguistic purposes. It can also be adapted for different levels with additional instructions.

> Second language classroom research shows that…
> the language actually used by the students during a task can be much different than the language that was anticipated by the teacher.

For beginner pronunciation class, players can find matching phonemes or homophones and rhyming words; for example, *bird–word* and *seat–heat*. For intermediate levels and above, players might work on syllable stress patterns in longer words. They might first work on two-syllable words and match the words that have stress on the same syllable: **o**pen–**pic**ture, de**lay**–re**fuse**.

Memory Pairs can be used for vocabulary practice such as identifying synonyms, antonyms, adjective–noun combinations, phrasal verbs, collocations, idioms, or matching sentence halves. The game can be adapted to different levels within a class, so they must not only match a pair but also use the vocabulary item in a sentence and with correct pronunciation to show they understand the meaning. Example: (*take off*) The boy took off his coat <u>when he went inside</u>. The plane took **off** <u>on time</u>.

Memory Pairs works well to review parts of speech or verb forms for beginner levels; for example, with parts of speech, learners might review different types of nouns and need to match common nouns, proper nouns, and abstract nouns: *table–eraser*, Mr. Smith–Australia, *information–beauty*. For verb forms, beginners can match base verb forms to simple past forms or have them turn over three cards to try to find base form, simple past, and past participle: *go–went–gone*, *try–tried–tried*, *see–saw–seen*. They might also review how the verb *be* conjugates; for example, they must match according to subject–verb agreement and the cards could be divided with a subject on one side and the verb form on the other side. They must agree: John – is playing, They – were at school.

For intermediate levels, learners might have to match a verb with either a gerund or infinitive: He likes – playing football/ to play football. Sally needs – to go home.

3. Tic-Tac-Toe is a fun ESL game for learning new vocabulary. The class can be split into two groups and students can score an X or an O on the spot where a particular word appears on the grid if they are able to provide the definition of the word and/or an example using the new word correctly.

4. Crossword puzzles are an all-time favorite game to review vocabulary. It is important to try and use examples, and not just definitions, in the "hints" section of the puzzle so that students can develop their knowledge of how to use the words as well as what they mean.

Backup ESL Games for Young Learners

If there's one thing to be learned in TESOL, it is that no matter how thoroughly you plan, the unexpected will always occur. In addition, it could be that the homeroom teacher asks for a last-minute lesson extension. Perhaps your boss forgot to mention the 8:00 a.m. kindergarten class. It could be that your planned lesson took half the time you expected. Or, you could've just forgotten your flashcards on your desk. Stressful as this is, it's much less so if you have a few ESL games in your back pocket to pull out at a moment's notice – no prep required.

1. Fruit Shoot
This ESL game is a more dynamic variation of Categories that works very well with young beginner ESL learners. It is easily scalable based on class level.

In a very young or very beginner class, use this game to drill individual vocabulary words. The teacher says the target language followed by the name of a student, for example,
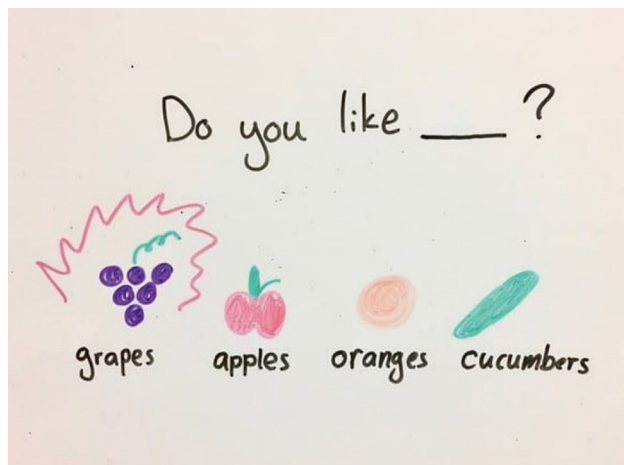

"*An apple* – Aria." Now, Aria must say the vocabulary word and point to a second student, "*An apple* – Riko." Once the student says the word and name, they sit down until all the students have had a turn. Students win the game if they are all sitting. If someone makes a mistake, students repeat the activity from the beginning.

For stronger classes, use this game as a plural/counting exercise: "**One apple** – Aria," "**Two apples** – Riko," "**Three apples** – Karen," "**Four apples** – Yuki," etc. And for older young students, the game can be played as a category variation, with students naming objects in a specific category. For example, "**Apple** – Aria," "**Banana** – Riko," "**Pear** – Karen," "**Peach** – Yuki." If a student falters or repeats, a new category is chosen.

2. Potato Bug
This is a sentence-building activity to drill longer grammatical structures. Students sit in a circle and take turns saying a single word of the target grammar. For instance, if the target language is "The cat is on the pumpkin," then the first student in the circle would start with "The." Then, the second student would say "cat," and the third student would say "is," and so on.
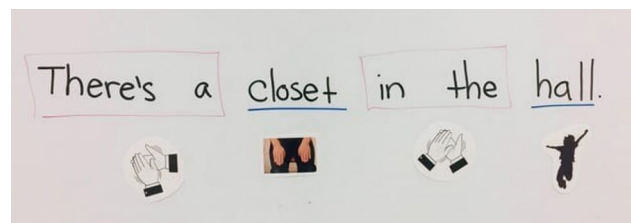
If any student falters or makes an error, all the students yell "potato bug!" and roll onto their backs, wiggling their arms and legs in the air like upturned woodlice. This activity is particularly good with grammar patterns that include many small function words.

3. Rhythm Drilling
This is a very simple repetitive drill that is particularly useful for very beginner or very young learners who lack confidence in speaking. However, you can use this activity to help stronger students develop a sense of the language rhythm, syllables, and stress.

Think of a few rhythmic motions that fit into the grammar pattern. For example, in the sentence "There's a cockroach in the kitchen," You can slap your thighs for *there's a* and *in the*, clap your hands for *cockroach*, and tap your shoulders for *kitchen*. By adding an element of complex movement into the sentence, the students will be more engaged and focused on the activity. In addition, they are more willing to continue repeating until they have mastered both the movements and the words. You can then speed it up, to give students practice producing language at a more natural speed. And, as you move into substitutions, you can keep certain elements of the physical motions as prompts for the students.

Task-Based Learning Activities with Young Learners

Task-based learning (TBL) is one of the common approaches for teaching English to children. Young students like fun task-based activities because it's a time for them to be active and creative, making your ESL lesson more memorable. Below are examples of six fun task-based activities for children at different levels.

1. Story–Comic Compare

Give your students a story with a character and an occurrence. Tell them that they have a number of minutes to finish the story. Have them work in groups to practice listening to others, evaluating, responding, and compromising. Once the allotted time frame has finished, have each group present their story to the class. Exploit as many skills as you can in your ESL lesson with collaborative and fun task-based activities to increase student engagement and communication. Asking groups to act out the end of the story or write comic strips are a favorite way for groups to present and compare the ending of their stories.

2. In My Room–In My House

This is a great information gap task. It requires students to listen to another, make sense of what they've heard, and demonstrate their understanding through drawing. In addition to serving as an information gap task, this ESL activity enables students to practice comparing and contrasting as well.

Split the class into pairs, with each student receiving a sheet of paper. One partner will be the speaker while the other is the drawer. The speaker will describe his/her bedroom or the entire house to the drawer, who will then create it. The drawer is free to ask questions to clarify where things are. Once the drawing is complete, the students switch roles. In the end, they will both possess a drawing of their own bedroom or house created by their classmate. As a class, you can then discuss the differences and similarities in the drawings. For example, "I have a toy box in my bedroom. Timmy does, too!" "My house has two bedrooms, but Jane's has three," "Mary has three soccer balls and dolls in her toy box, I have my legos and hot rods."

3. Tracing

Tracing is a favorite, low-prep English activity for children in lower-level classes. Using large cut-outs of the letters or words, or even with examples written in chalk, have students trace letters or words with different parts of their bodies. According to the teacher's instruction, they can trace with their fingers, their toes, their heads, their elbows – any body part will do. This will help cement the shape and mechanics of a letter, even without writing the letter on paper. It provides a mental template that they can then apply later.
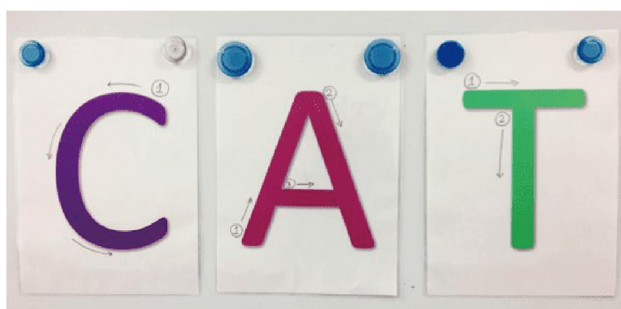
4. Walking

If space permits, make your English activities for children as kinesthetic as possible. Walking can be done as an extension to the tracing activity if there is access to an outdoor space. Students can be encouraged to walk the shape of a letter or word, the way their pencil would. The walking activity can be done with guidelines on the ground or in small groups, by following the teacher with an example of the letter or word available for the students' reference. This TBL activity can even be expanded past walking to hopping, skipping,

> **Young students like fun task-based activities because it's a time for them to be active and creative, making your ESL lesson more memorable.**

"swimming," and jumping. Kinesthetic activities will help your students retain interest and focus!

5. Writing on the Walls

Similar to tracing, students write letters and words with their fingers, toes, elbows. This time, instead of using a template, they write from memory. In this activity, they are writing the letters or words in different parts of the classroom – the floor, the walls, or even their fellow students' hands – as instructed by the teacher. This is a particularly fun and silly way to practice mechanics and recall, and is especially effective for teaching spelling to young children.

6. Building a Letter

Using any material that is at hand – glass beads, woodblocks, leaves – have your ESL students "build" letters and words by placing these materials in the shape of a letter, both with and without a template. This is particularly effective if they are using a material associated with the material: *rocks* spelled in rocks, or *flower* spelled in flowers. This task-based activity for young learners slows down student engagement with a word or letter. Instead of the purely mechanical act of writing and rewriting, they have a visual image that they can remember.

This article was reprinted from the *How to Teach English* blog (Are you using ESL games with a communicative purpose? https://ontesol.com/blog/how-to-teach-english/activities/creative-back-up-esl-games/, Using Task-Based Learning Activities to Teach English with Young Learners, https://ontesol.com/blog/how-to-teach-english/teyl/task-based-learning-5-activities-for-teaching-english-to-young-learners/) with permission from OnTESOL.

The Contributor

OnTESOL is a Toronto-based ESL teacher training institute recognized and accredited by the leading organizations from North America. OnTESOL is institutionally accredited by ACCET to offer quality online TESOL/TEFL certification courses and practicum options. U.S. teachers planning to maintain their license and meet employment requirements can earn CEUs with OnTESOL. Furthermore, the online TESOL/TEFL courses and practicum options are recognized by TESL Canada for their Professional Standard 1 certification. Website: https://ontesol.com/tesol-courses/

A Review of *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching*

Reviewed by Christopher Miller

"Most textbooks are written as scripts to be followed rather than as resources to be exploited." — Brian Tomlinson (p. 9)

"How...teachers...*added*, *deleted*, *modified*, and *reordered* materials." — Nigel Harwood (p. 141)

"Every teacher a materials developer" — Naeema Hann (p. 342)

These quotes all appear in *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching*. These statements implicitly implore educators to recognize the degree of agency they possess and to cultivate awareness of the principles and practices involved in materials development, production, and implementation. Containing 34 articles, the aforementioned volume can help educators gain that deeper awareness.

This work is coherently organized. It is divided into nine sections: changes and developments in language teaching materials, controversial issues in materials development, research and materials development, materials for language learning and skills development, materials evaluation and adaptation, materials for specific contexts, materials development and technology, developing materials for production, and finally, professional development and materials writing. Most articles are formatted in a consistent manner, including sections for challenges, critical issues, implications, recommendations, and future directions. A majority of the scholarly contributions, those focused on specific aspects of language learning pedagogy, provide an excellent historical overview of developments in the subfield. To cite one stand-out example, Burton offers a detailed depiction of the rationale for selection of the lexical and grammatical elements in influential ELT materials starting from the 1920s (78).

This volume includes a variety of perspectives: editors, materials writers, teacher trainers, and scholars. Scholarly contributions focus on grammar, vocabulary, authenticity in materials, spoken discourse, digital and technological developments in language teaching, critical theory, materials development, learner autonomy, adapting materials, reading, writing, textbook production, global Englishes, and cultural representation. There are illustrations of common practices or commentaries related to use of corpora, producing a textbook, creating materials for EAP, ESOL (traditionally called ESL), EME (English as a medium of education – as it occurs in many African countries), and ESE (English speaking environments). Regionally, two case studies about Turkey appear, language instruction in Spain is addressed three times, Africa is represented in issues related to EME, and Great Britain features in discourse about ESOL. Well-known contributors include Scott Thornbury, Penny Ur, David Nunan, Michael McCarthy, and Brian Tomlinson.

This volume has a series of recurring themes. First, local is often superior to global. Pinard is perhaps strongest in doubting the value of the global coursebook (385). Afitska and Clegg highlight the absurdity and mismatch of materials lacking essential L1 support in many African countries (347). There are strong critiques of neoliberal orientations influencing the direction of language learning materials. Pau Bori critiques materialistic assumptions (123). Littlejohn openly worries about "the pressures of neoliberalist thinking" (273) on materials evaluation and analysis, and that the cultivation of market-related skills will eclipse other reasons for studying an L2.

Contributors with editing or publishing experience implicitly critique creeping neoliberalism in materials production. MacKenzie and Baker, among others, note that authors for published materials are often paid a standard fee, a change from previous decades in which royalties were standard (461), management structures in major publishing companies are being "delayered" (460). There is increased pressure on time, project, scope, and budget as well as a growing belief that expertise in ELT is no longer essential to being an editor for ELT materials (461). Mackenzie and Baker openly muse near the end of their article: "If commercial pressures do indeed bring about a diminution in quality, to what extent does this matter? At what point will end users start noticing it?" (468).

The reader will obtain a sobering view on the constraints impacting published materials. From costs, to multiple stakeholders, to the avoidance of PARSNIP (politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, pork), and publisher aversion to risk, it begins to feel like a marvel that anything of value for end users gets published. There are frequent mentions of the gap between theory and published materials, such as limited influence of corpora in published materials (172), and grouping of vocabulary thematically (i.e., learning terms such as *hot* and *cold* together), which can lead to interference and slow down the rate of vocabulary acquisition (213).

Nevertheless, multiple contributors insist that core skills and pedagogical principles are still, and will likely be, the foundation of quality materials. Spiro claims, "The best materials writer of the future may look...like the best...of the past: informed, critical, bridging the classroom and the publishing industry..." (485); elsewhere, Mishan claims, "With principled approaches to using technology, the future-proofing is in the pedagogy" (26).

Despite some disheartening views on materials in language education, this collection of writings is chock full of value. As I am a mere classroom teacher lacking serious research experience or "professional" materials writing credentials, I will focus exclusively on the beneficial features of this compilation for a classroom practitioner. First, these articles may beneficially alter a teacher's view of materials and by extension classroom practice. As alluded to previously, this book implores the teacher to see themself as an adapter of materials. The book has a variety of frameworks and "mini-taxonomies" culled from the relevant professional literature to promote an adapter "consciousness." For instance, Hann distinguishes between learner-, publisher-, and teacher-generated materials (335). Masuhara distinguishes between teachers who are curriculum transmitters (little adaptation from a curriculum or textbook), curriculum developers (some degree of modification), and curriculum makers (those educators making large-scale adaptations of institutionally mandated materials, 281). Hughes draws demarcations between educators and materials producers who adopt a craft model (learn from those who came before you), an applied science model, and a reflective model (513), while acknowledging the value of using an eclectic approach.

This collection provides detailed guidance for producing and adapting materials. The reader will obtain clear frameworks for developing materials pertaining to autonomous learning (436), authenticity in materials (73), appreciating the affordances of mobile devices compared to face-to-face learning (422), as well as designing research-informed vocabulary activities (212). Hughes provides 20 categories with 121 subpoints of possible activity types and other relevant guidelines for producing materials (516–517). Additionally, there are guidelines for delivering written corrective feedback (249), resources for using and selecting an appropriate text analyzer and vocabulary profiler (241, 521), frameworks for simplifying texts (445), and a variety of guidelines for adapting at both the level of curriculum and materials (278, 285).

Closer to Planet Earth for many classroom teachers, there are several activities interspersed throughout this text that a teacher might utilize in their classroom. For instance, Thornbury provides clear examples of activities for helping raise learner consciousness about the unique features of spoken discourse (225). Saraceni, while discussing reading-focused materials, provides a list of activities for considering how the use of active and passive voice can alter the meaning of a text (241). Hadley and Hadley report Johns' guidelines for helping learners make use of concordance lines: identify, classify, generalize (161).

While clearly a highly useful text, this handbook does have a number of shortcomings. Surprisingly, there is no dedicated chapter for pronunciation, nor listening (though Timmis alludes to listening, 35). Also, arguably a greater focus should have been provided on questioning techniques. Materials have been defined by Tomlinson, a seminal figure in the field of materials development, as "anything which can be used to facilitate the learning of a language" (439). This is a curious omission. Craft in forming questions likely has an outsized impact on the amount of learner output. A taxonomy and discussion of question types would have been suitable in this collection, such as the difference between open vs. closed questions (Folse, 2006) or avoiding the pitfalls of excessive IRF (initiate, respond, feedback) question sequences (see Ellis, 2003).

There wasn't much input from a variety of stakeholders in language education. Many commentators note that students' views on materials are largely absent in the research literature. Classroom teachers in this volume are only represented through reporting from previous research (i.e., Norton & Buchanan, 53) or as survey respondents (see Hughes' article, 488). Perhaps a focus group interview of teachers sharing personal views on published materials or their experience adapting them might have enriched this volume. We hear about the specter of ministries of education and the influence of school administrators on language education (see Harwood, 145), but their perspectives are essentially absent in these pages. Though education ministries are alluded to in their impact on textbook writers' choices for materials (see Harwood, 145), and Choi and Nunan mention the need to persuade and assuage school officials (438). A submission reflecting those stakeholders' priorities when selecting coursebooks or attitudes about teachers adapting materials would have been suitable for this handbook.

For myself, one primary criterion for evaluating the worth of professional literature is how many "aha" moments of greater clarity and awareness I derive from reading the work. Recently, I looked at a worksheet with a list of partial dications produced by a colleague and went "why isn't this numbered?" (see Hughes, 518). Earlier in this semester, I looked at a lesson I produced focused on lexical chunks and a series of speech acts and realized students would likely benefit if the materials incorporated more bottom-up processing opportunities (see Timmis, 35). Careful reading of *The Routledge Handbook of Materials Development for Language Teaching* will reward the reader with similar experiences.

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The Reviewer

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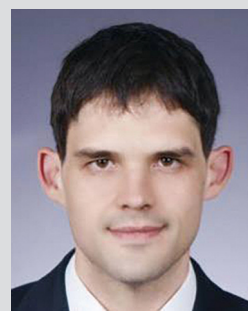
How and Why I've Stayed Teaching

By Bill Snyder

I have hit that age where retirement is staring me in the face. In just over two years, I will be deemed too old for full-time employment. In particular, barring some special intervention, I will no longer be allowed to teach courses in the graduate program in teacher education where I work, though I will still be eligible to teach undergraduate language courses part-time. I don't really object to having to retire due to age. There are administrative duties that I will not miss. Faculty meetings, fare thee well! I will enjoy having more time for interests outside of teaching. My garden could use some more attention. More importantly, I believe that spaces have to be created for younger scholars to prosper in a system that is facing reduced possibilities. I have done well in my career and don't fear that my future will be one of penury. I would still like to teach future teachers; I feel like I can continue to contribute to teacher education, but if undergraduate English classes are all that I will be allowed to do, I will embrace that. I enjoy those classes when I teach them now.

> **Haukås shows how these teachers found support for their basic psychological needs, as posited by SDT (autonomy, competence, relatedness), in their work...**

I have been thinking about this topic because of the number of friends slightly older than me that I have seen reach retirement age in recent years. Talking with them or seeing their posts on social media make it clear how much they still love teaching. The positive emotions that they felt in their work through their careers have continued with them. What has also struck me is that we all have had long careers in teaching. I have been at this over 40 years now. Many of my friends have had careers as long, or if they came to teaching later, nonetheless, they decided to stay with it until retirement. From what I know from reading the literature, this is a bit unusual. The standard line is that most people who enter teaching leave within five years. What makes people like my friends and I stay in the field?

A recent article by Åsta Haukås (2024) explores this question through interviews with three retired teachers of German in Norway. These teachers were marked for their engagement in their work. They were not simply working for the paycheck. Using self-determination theory (SDT) as an analytical framework, Haukås shows how these teachers found support for their basic psychological needs, as posited by SDT (autonomy, competence, relatedness), in their work, and how this helped them stay motivated to teach over their long careers.

These teachers each felt a high degree of autonomy in designing and managing their classes. They could reflect their individual personalities and preferences in how they taught, and each achieved high levels of success with their students, perhaps reflecting Prabhu's (1990) argument that good teaching is not so much a matter of method but of the teacher believing that what they do leads to learning. These teachers also saw themselves as competent masters of their subject, not just the details of the language itself, but also its connections to culture and to its place in the world today. Finally, these teachers all reported having good relationships with students, which included support for students who were struggling with the subject matter or other problems in their lives. They stressed making the classroom an enjoyable place for all students to learn in. Achieving all of this made for demanding work that could impact their lives outside of school and led them to see their work lives and personal lives as interconnected.

I can relate to all of these points. I am grateful for the freedom I have had over the years to make my classes my own, to plan lessons and assignments that I see as helping my students learn. In my early days as a language teacher, I had the good fortune to work at schools that set standards for success but left open how to reach them. Today, working mostly in teacher education, I try to consider and locate what I do within the overall goals of our program, but I know that I teach my classes differently than my colleagues would.

I have also felt competent in my mastery of the subjects I teach, whether a communicative English class or a graduate course in second language acquisition for teachers. At the same time, I know that my knowledge is incomplete and can always be improved, which is why I continue to engage in a variety of professional development activities. Lastly, more than anything else, it is my relationships with my students and my colleagues that have sustained me most of all. More than anything, I treasure meeting students long after my class with them is over and being remembered by them. I have just received an email from a former student now studying abroad in Bulgaria, expressing her appreciation for my class and for introducing her to a Bulgarian colleague who talked with her about life in Bulgaria and made introductions so that she would have contacts waiting for her when she arrived. I can confirm that my teaching career has been one I've loved and will be sorry to leave because of how teaching has met my basic needs.

Self-determination theory (SDT)
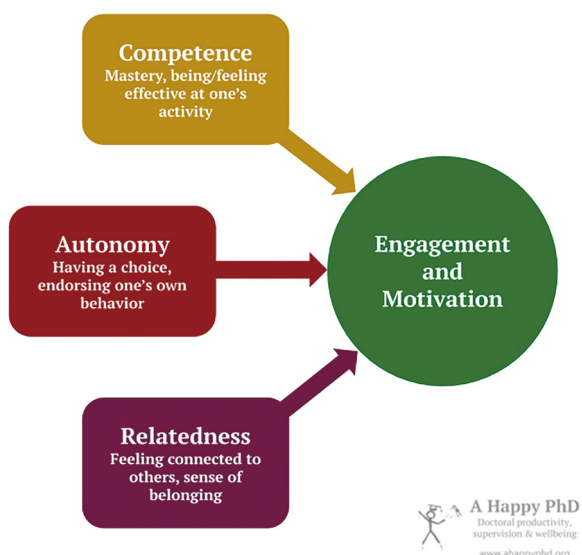
But what does any of this mean for those of you reading this, especially for newer teachers who may not have the degree of freedom I've had in my work, who may not yet feel that they are masters of either the language or of teaching, and who may not yet have had the opportunities to build sustained relationships with students and colleagues? My immediate answer is to say that you can have these things, and that I want you to have them, if you see teaching as the career for you. In Haukås' article, she asked the teachers she interviewed what advice they would have for new teachers in order for them "to thrive in the profession for several decades" (p. 439). The answers aligned with what they felt had allowed them to thrive: "know your subject well," "love your subject," "be engaged," "be well prepared," "develop a good relationship with your students," and "have high expectations for your students' learning" (p. 440) were mentioned by all the teachers. I endorse all of these ideas,

Two years out from retirement and I am still doing it.

but these are all rather general admonitions. How do you learn about English and teaching? How do you build good relationships with students? The devil is in those details.

Interestingly, only one of the teachers in Haukås' study mentioned pursuing professional development as a source of support over the course of her career. I suspect, though, that all of them engaged in professional development, perhaps in different ways. Maybe the two who did not mention it simply saw it as part of being a teacher. For example, all three teachers spoke of their interactions with other teachers as an important part of what kept them going in teaching. I'm certain that many of those discussions were about teaching and helped these teachers learn.

This is a professional development column. I want to make the case from my own experience that ongoing pursuit of professional development has been a very important factor in how I have stayed in teaching for the years that I have. I have built my knowledge of English and the skills in using it through membership in various professional special interest groups that have focused on vocabulary, reading, listening, and grammar. Through them, I have met colleagues who were more expert than me and took knowledge from them. I have attended professional conferences to learn from colleagues in their presentations, informal coffee break talks, and from their responses to my presentations. I read both academic journals and more practically oriented magazines about language teaching for ideas that I can adapt into my teaching. I read popularizations of research in various other fields to discover things that might be of interest to students and to get some lay knowledge that I might use in my classes. I've listened to my students about what works for them and taken their views seriously. Mostly, I have never felt that I know enough to stop learning about myself and what I do as a teacher. I acknowledge my ignorance, take pride in my curiosity, and feel satisfaction when I learn a bit more that can help me teach better. Two years out from retirement and I am still doing it.

So, my wish for all of you who want teaching to be your career is that you pursue professional development in whatever ways best suit you to support your love of teaching through learning more about your subject, how to build relationships with students, and developing confidence in your own abilities. I wish you 40 years as happy as mine have been doing what I love.

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The Columnist
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Preschool Teachers Can Save the World

By Dr. Curtis Kelly

I did not make this title. I borrowed it from an NPR *Planet Money* podcast by economists, titled *Why Preschool Can Save the World*.

Economists? Preschool? Save the World? Trust me, it all connects. It also had a huge effect on me. Repeated listens set me on a path of researching this intriguing claim and exploring the cognitive development of early learners. I dove into reading about the all-important executive functions centered in the prefrontal cortex and how they become the foundation stones for all the skills we need in life, especially those related to character, such as honesty, cleanliness, tolerance. Teachers at every level have an impact on the development of executive functions, but as those economists and I will show you, it is the preschool and elementary school teachers who have the greatest impact. So let's start with two questions: How important is character for success, and to what degree can we teach character skills to our learners?

> ...it is that ability to take on a responsibility and stick to it that determines whether a young person will succeed in college, or do well at a job.

Here is where the first economist comes in, the amazing Nobel laureate, James Heckman. He points his research engines at interesting questions, such as how well IQ predicts college success; important things that IQ tests do not measure, such as soft skills; and whether universal pre-K education is worth spending money on (It is!). Heckman has convincing evidence from his studies that it is the soft skills that determine success in school and life, not IQ or even parental income levels. Soft skills are connected to the Big Five personality traits, and of the five, there is one that stands out in relation to success: conscientiousness.

Conscientiousness is almost synonymous with "grit," a term popularized by Angela Duckworth's TED Talk. Whichever term you prefer, as Heckman shows us, it is that ability to take on a responsibility and stick to it that determines whether a young person will succeed in college, or do well at a job. So, character matters. Intelligence pales in comparison.

But can this conscientiousness be taught? We tend to believe that whether someone is diligent and dependable or not is pretty much permanent, and there is not much you can do about it. And that is probably right for adults, as Heckman's GED study found. Smart kids who had dropped out of high school were given another chance to get a diploma through the US GED test and go to college. But they tended to drop out of college as well! They had higher IQs than other high school dropouts, but a lack of discipline. And worse: Those same GED recipients were less likely to stay with a job, stay with a spouse, and far less likely to stay out of prison (Heckman & Kautz, 2012):

"Inadvertently, a test has been created that separates out bright but nonpersistent and undisciplined dropouts from other dropouts. It is, then, no surprise that GED recipients are the ones who drop out of school, fail to complete college … GED's are 'wiseguys,' who lack the abilities to think ahead, to persist in tasks, or to adapt to their environments." (p. 146)

A friend of mine always says, "People don't change, and it is foolish to think they will," which reflects the sentiment that character cannot much be taught … at least to adults. But what about to children? The evidence is strong that it can be. And who was one of the people who made this discovery? James Heckman!

Heckman also studied the Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Program, where disadvantaged 3- to 4-year-old African American children were given an early education. That short experience alone had effects that lasted into adulthood, including better outcomes in education, employment, earnings, marriage, participation in healthy behaviors, and reduced participation in crime.

This means that traits are not fixed. Heckman came to that conclusion too. In regard to soft skills, he wrote: "Personality traits can be changed by intervention, and interventions that target personality are promising" (Heckman, 2012, p. 1).

Another project, the Abecedarian Early Intervention Project in North Carolina, showed much the same. In the 1970s, 54 infants born to poor families were given care from infancy to age five, mainly playing educational games. The researchers measured a jump in IQ compared to the control group, but to their surprise, other changes (more in tune with modern thinking than IQ scores) showed up much later. Follow-up studies showed that at age 21, the treated group had higher reading and math scores; at 30, they were more likely to have a college degree; and at age 35, better overall health: less obesity, heart disease, and hypertension. And the good news goes on. Just two weeks ago, another study came out, in which MRI brain scans showed that those in the treatment group, especially the males, "had increased size of the whole brain, including the cortex" and better development in the areas related to language and cognitive control (Farah et al., 2021, p. 1). All this, *50 years later*, and probably because of a couple years of preschool!

> **Nurturing executive functions is not a matter of "teaching" them as much as setting up an environment and activities that let children develop them on their own.**

Let me quote Alex Blumberg (also an economist), who neatly sums up what this means in another Planet Money podcast, *Preschool: The Best Job-Training Program* (again based on Heckman's work). Watching toddlers playing with blocks and interacting with caregivers, he notes:

"If they learn these [soft] skills now, they'll have them for the rest of their lives. But research shows if they don't form these skills now, it becomes harder and harder the older they get. By the time they're in a job training program in their 20s, it's often too late."

So that's it, my friends. Character *can* be taught, but it must be instilled at an early age. And that is why preschool teachers are the most important. They truly have the potential to reduce crime, illness, and substance abuse in our world. So how odd that our topsy-turvy educational hierarchy, in terms of status and salary, has them at the bottom!

Executive Functions
So, preschool has a big effect, but you might be wondering why. The answer lies in looking at the development of executive functions in the brain. These are skills that are laid down in early childhood and become the foundation for almost every other mental skill that comes later, including

reasoning, discipline, and emotional intelligence. If they are not properly established in children, then, as Blumberg said, they become harder and harder to develop later.

Adele Diamond runs the Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience Lab at the University of British Columbia, and she has done a lot of work defining executive functions. I spent weeks rummaging through the many interesting and varied studies on her website (for further reading, search "DCN Adele Diamond"), but my favorites are the ones on executive functions and her stirring TED Talk on that topic.

How to Nurture Executive Functions
Nurturing executive functions is not a matter of "teaching" them as much as setting up an environment and activities that let children develop them on their own. Children are preprogrammed to learn these skills if given the right conditions. In fact, children are predisposed to seek out experiences that meet their developmental needs.

For more organized curricula that impact specific executive functions, see Diamond and Ling's: *Conclusions About Interventions, Programs, and Approaches for Improving Executive Functions That Appear Justified and Those That, Despite Much Hype, Do Not* (2016), also available on Diamond's site.

For teachers of adolescents, I also highly recommend Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (2014). Or look at Spacey's list of character-building experiences for learners (2020). After all, early education teachers might be the ones who get the ball rolling, but the rest of us play a role in saving the world, too.

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The Columnist
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