



HAWAI'I TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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Hawai'i TESOL, the local affiliate of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.), is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a community of professionals teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the state of Hawai'i.

For the latest information about HITESOL events throughout the year, please check our website:

www.hawaiiitesol.org

Teacher Reflection: Failure is Often the Best Teacher By David Terada

Advice given to me years ago from a veteran teacher:

"Don't get too overconfident over a gleaming class evaluation or too upset over a negative one. In actuality, your real teaching assessment is somewhere in the middle. It also helps to read your evaluations over a beer or two."

This class just did not feel right for some reason:

It was a particularly difficult class to teach which left me feeling exhausted and somewhat frustrated in trying to come up with creative and stimulating methods of teaching the assigned subject matter. Each class meeting involved a lot of energy in trying to motivate and to get through to this class of 22 adult learners at a local community college. As the semester drew to a close, I had an unfulfilled feeling about this particular class. There was a disconnect between myself and the students, in spite of my attempts to initiate dialog and my constant invitations to them to come and

speak with me outside of class. I also sensed that something was amiss based on the quiet disposition of many of the students, stone faced expressions, the lack of questions being asked in class, no real spontaneity in classroom tasks, the lack of language output and effort, and an overall feeling that there was little enjoyment from my lessons. This assessment applied to about two-thirds of the class. The other third of the class was basically carrying the class and to their credit did make an effort to participate, were enthusiastic, prepared for every class, and paid attention to corrections and feedback to the numerous writing and related homework assignments.

Then, about a week and a half before the end of the classes, I got called in by the program director who was very troubled. The timing could not have been worse. According to him, 15 dissatisfied students from my class went to his office to complain about me. I maintained my

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Case Study: 21st Century Public System of Education, South Korea: Issues and Aspects of a Flawed System and Recommendations for Improvement By Matthew Lakin

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the contemporary issues and aspects of the public education system administered by the Ministry of Education of South Korea. This paper will address the issues in the following components; acclamations, criticisms and recommendations for improvement.

The objective of criticism is not to harangue the current education system but to point to shortcomings which we have learned to identify throughout this course as being detrimental to a proper learning environment. This work seeks to use learning methods we have studied throughout the course as a point of reference. The author has taught English

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Teacher Reflection . . . (cont.)

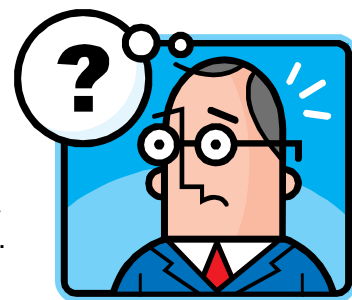
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composure and quietly listened to the program director go over the list of complaints. A few of the complaints had merit, but a majority of them were really off base and were points of contention with me. The complaints painted a very negative portrayal of my teaching ability, a very gloomy learning environment, a lack of concern on my part, and ultimately questioned my level of competence as a second language instructor. The complaints included the following:

- His class is confusing and served no purpose.
- He was not prepared for class.
- The teacher didn't understand the subject matter.
- The teacher's assignments were not useful.
- His approach to teaching has no meaning.
- The teacher's grading was unfair.
- He did not encourage us.
- He did not promptly return homework and writing assignments.
- I lost confidence in studying and my English ability.
- He is unapproachable and intimidating.
- He was not preparing us for success.
- His class is a waste of my time and money.

Before I had a chance to answer and reply to the accusations, I was instructed by the program director to throw aside all of my current lesson plans and to simply finish up the remaining classes by working solely from the textbook. The program director's main goal was to finish out the remaining five classes of the semester "without incident" and to reduce the high level of tension in my class. He had a group of very unhappy students on his hands because of my perceived shortcomings as a teacher. I left his office feeling a multitude of emotions.... a lot of anger, shock, confusion, betrayal, a bruised and deflated ego, and even questioning my ability as a teacher. Perhaps I had been doing this for too many years and had lost the magic I once had as a teacher who could inspire and motivate students. Maybe I was burned out and it was time for me to get out of teaching. As I walked down the hallway I also realized that as an adjunct lecturer at the community college level, my chances of being rehired for the following semester and any future employment there all but disappeared with this career setback.

So what went wrong? What did I do differently or not do



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Case Study . . . (cont.)

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Language Learners at middle ranked South Korean public institutions for three years.

The South Korean system of education is a work in progress and many improvements in quality and equality have been made in recent years; however, there exist heavy societal pressures and demands on today's student. Modern teaching strategies still focus on rote memorization and teaching to the test as the primary means of education due to a high stress environment of success at all cost. According to a 2003 survey conducted by the Hong Kong-based Political and Economic Risk Consultancy, despite being one of the countries in Asia that spends the most money on English-language education, South Korea ranks the lowest among 12 Asian countries in English ability. This surprising fact will be addressed further into the paper.

So what are South Koreans doing right educationally? Education among South Koreans has become the highest goal for their youth as many feel their nation is small, sur-



rounded by superpowers and vulnerable from a myriad of international factors which they consider may be overcome through becoming the brightest innovators on the global

scene. As a result, from birth education is taken extremely serious and a child can expect to be enrolled in a high tuition English only kindergarten (or similar) and be afforded constant after school tutoring until university age. Students can expect the full range of usual subjects throughout grade school and high school in addition to mandatory Chinese and English classes.

Due to the importance of education, the overseeing ministry has spared little expense importing native English speaking university graduates to improve students' conversation skills, listening ability and overall comfort in being around foreigners, which one day they may be working alongside while representing South Korea. Alongside importing foreign teachers, each public schools' funding for English language learning is increased so the school may construct a state of the art language lab equipped with the latest computers, touch screen televisions, audio stations

Case Study . . . (cont.)

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and visually stimulating accouchements. Government expenditure on education has been generous. In 1975, it was 220 billion won,^[2] the equivalent of 2.2 percent of the gross national product, or 13.9 percent of total government expenditure. By 1986, education expenditure had reached 3.76 trillion won, or 4.5 percent of the GNP, and 27.3 percent of government budget allocations.

In addition to an ample government budget allocation, South Korean communities are heavily involved in ensuring an education first mentality. During the period known as "examination hell", where twice a year students cram day and night, businesses will open later than usual to accommodate parents who must care for their children. Students seeking to skip school will be quickly routed by a community watchful for those who would dare not attend. Interestingly, high school unlike middle school is not mandatory. However, according to a 2005 study of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries, some 97% of South Korea's young adults do complete high school. This was the highest percentage recorded in any country.^[1]

The English learning environment in a public school classroom consists mainly of rote memorization of vocabulary, grammar usages and word recognition with the hope of

getting the answer correct. The Korean English teacher most often does not speak in English but is more of a study overseer. The nature of the classroom is dull and impending as students who answer incorrectly are subject to harsh criticisms from their peers and teacher. The idea of lowering the affective filter is quite foreign. The notion of trial by error concerning English learning is practically non-existent and the atmosphere usually tense.

Why does it need to be this way? Students are under extreme familial pressures to succeed in the final hurdle of a long and time consuming race which has cost tens of thousands of dollars (equivalent). Teachers are under pressure to produce the highest test scores possible according to the known rank of the school (schools are ranked from middle school level) and for this reason they teach to the only deciding factor, the university entrance exam. There are concerns about the severe lack of community spirit among South Korean students that comes from examinations as the main educational direction and from an analysis according to Dr. Lee Mi-na from Seoul National University Sociology: "harsh competition-oriented and success-oriented parenting among the parents".⁽⁴⁾

The entrance exam consists of regurgitating the hours spent memorizing vocabulary and grammar yet fails to test

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Teacher Reflection . . . (cont.)

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compared to past classes? Did I over prepare or not prepare enough? Did I misjudge the students and perhaps asked too much of them? Were my learning tasks too demanding or too creative to facilitate learning? Why was there, as my program director said, so much tension in the class? Did I really come across as being intimidating and unapproachable by my students? How could these problems have been avoided?

This was my second semester at the community college and I had previously received favorable course evaluations teaching a similar level class in my first semester. What worked well in my first semester's class obviously was not the case in the second semester, nor did it have the same learning outcome.

Things that were within my control and could have been implemented:

After taking some time to calm down, it was time for some serious reflection in getting to the root causes of what could best be described as a disastrous class and semester of failed teaching. I decided to address what I felt were fixable problems in dealing with the complaints and dissatisfaction with my teaching.

Spend more time explaining and demonstrating the goals



and intent of the course, the teaching methods to be used, along with the desired learning outcomes to the students. I believe that in order for teaching to be effective and learning to take place, learners need to understand and be shown the reason why they are being asked to do a particular language task. I did do this, but obviously not to the extent that all of my students were fully convinced or understood why I was asking them to perform the various tasks and assignments. It also would have been beneficial to spend more time going over my own expectations of the students. There seemed to be a problem with some of the students as far as what the teacher wanted from them in order to excel in the class.

"What we have here is a failure to communicate." This famous movie line is probably very applicable to my own classroom teaching experience. This is related to the previously discussed point. From this experience I have learned not to assume that what I am trying to get across to my students has been noted and understood by students based on simply them saying so. One needs to check, recheck, and check again that what you want your students to learn, grasp, comprehend, and understand has actually taken place. This can be done by

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Teacher Reflection . . . (cont.)

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having the students demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter to the teacher in a clear and undeniable method. Do not simply take a student's word that they understand whatever you are trying to teach them.

Conducting more frequent in-class surveys about my class in gaining a better and clearer understanding of how the students feel and their own perceptions of their progress or lack of it. In addition, spending more one to one time with students throughout the semester discussing their progress and performance in the class, along with providing an outlet for more dialog between teacher and student. Of course in a class of 20-plus students, some creative lesson planning will be required to meet individually with each student.

Better planning and time management with regards to assigning, correcting, and promptly returning written homework. I will admit that this is one area that could have been done better on my part. There were a few instances where it took more time to correct and provide feedback to the 5 major essays and numerous shorter writing assignments during this course. My own return policy was something along the lines of returning major essays (of 5-pages or more) within a 72 hour time period. In retrospect, this was not very realistic and contributed to my undoing and negative evaluations when this was not achieved.

Write down on the board, post online, or hand out an outline of every class lecture. This would reduce confusion and present a clear picture of the goals, skills, and desired learning outcomes of each class meeting.

To have requested an observation (both peer and from my supervisor) during the course of my two semesters at the community college. Unfortunately, for reasons never explained to me, I was never observed by the program director during my time at this program. Whether or not being observed and receiving constructive feedback on my teaching would have averted the negative class evaluation is subject to debate. However, it would not have hurt and this is something that I should have been more diligent in requesting.

Things that were out of my control:

Of course, there are always factors that are beyond a teacher's control that may contribute to having a bad class and receiving unfavorable evaluations from students.

1. Certain students will have a strong dislike or bias towards a particular instructor for whatever reasons. Under such circumstances there is nothing that the unfortunate instructor can do that will change a negative perception on the student's part.
2. The majority of the class seemed to be more concerned with simply being promoted instead of putting in the necessary effort in satisfying the course requirements. Unfortunately, these students did not see the connection between demonstrating improvement in their language skills and promotion.
3. This was an oddity. Sadly, there were repeated telephone calls to the program director about my class lessons from four American husbands on behalf of four disgruntled students. The program director was negatively influenced and stressed out by these telephone calls, some of them almost on a daily basis for a period of time.

Not being provided the opportunity by the program director to respond to and address the accusations and complaints from the students regarding my teaching. This gave the impression that my supervisor was siding with the disgruntled students and anything I had to say was of little significance.

Reflection

I have always welcomed constructive feedback regarding my teaching, be it from my peers, supervisors, and even students. Regardless of how long I have been teaching English as a Second Language, I believe that there is always room for improvement in one's teaching methods. When teachers start to believe that they know it all, disregard class evaluations from their students, or have no interest in keeping abreast of the latest teaching methods and approaches, it is time to retire or leave teaching, in my humble opinion. In many respects, positive teaching evaluations have a downside in that it may foster a false sense of confidence, complacency, and resistance to change. Failure in the form of a negative teaching evaluation from a supervisor or class is never a pleasant experience, but it can serve to encourage reflection, and highlight the need for change in addressing a perceived problem area. Many of the problems that teachers have in the classroom are fixable if they are willing to take a step back, be honest, objective, and not defensive in nature. It also helps to have a supportive supervisor or teaching mentor in such cases. Unfortunately, a negative class evaluation can be a bitter pill to swallow despite being a potentially positive learning and teaching experience in the long run.

About the Author: David Terada (MA TEFL/TESL) taught EFL for ten years in Japan at a variety of learning institutions – public high schools, corporate English classes, universities, and at an interpreter training school. He also has an additional ten years of teaching ESL at a technical college in Seattle, and at a university IEP and a community college here in Honolulu.



Case Study . . . (cont.)

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for fluency, continuity of conversation or inference in reading. As one comes to understand, the schools' curriculum is based around teaching to the test for the reason that the consequences are too great and most teachers are not prepared to break the pattern. The result is a high school graduate who has been studying his or her entire life yet is unable to hold an uncomplicated conversation in English (absolutely there exist exceptions to the rule, usually from students who attend specific conversation classes in the private sector after school hours).

In addition to public school instruction the majority of students attend after school academies to further their studies. Many of these academies act much like the school system so there is little alternate learning style or relief from the norm. It is not uncommon for students to return home after midnight five to six days a week. When a student is falling behind or receiving low grades the stress can be overwhelming and many give-up trying to learn, citing past failures and a seemingly insurmountable process to succeed under the expectations of parents and society. OECD ranked South Korean elementary, middle, and high school students the lowest in terms of happiness compared to other OECD countries. This survey also echoes sim-

ilar results to students in Seoul according to SMOE (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education).^[5]

In addition to the long hours and high stress of the education environment school officials and parents fail to see the relationship between healthy brain activity (enabling learning) and being physically active throughout a child's formative years. South Korean schools have a strong tendency to neglect physical education due to the over-competitive nature of classroom-based education.^[3] Exercise and sports participation are seen as frivolous and are often traded for computer games or sleep during any free time which may be found.

Conclusion / Recommendations for Improvement

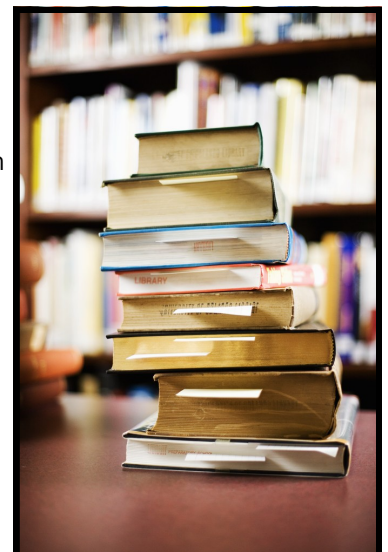
The result of the English learning system until present is the vast majority of students will graduate high school with excellent reading and grammar skills competent of passing a test geared to such knowledge. However, the lack of oral fluency both reading aloud and in conversation has suffered due to a crushing focus on teaching to the test and rote memorization running counterintuitive to the majority of learning concepts necessary for second language fluency.

In an effort to enable learners to become fluent in English, Korean teachers must design and implement a curriculum friendly to trial and error, creative in nature, outwardly vocal and social in design. Students must be encouraged to learn conversation skills under a system which will reward their effort for oral fluency, creativity in writing and speaking, reading comprehension and proficiency in writing diverse content. Above all, a low stress classroom environment must be employed enabling students to learn without reprisal.

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About the Author: Matthew Lakin is a student at the University of Hawaii and can be reached at <lakin19@hotmail.com>.



Hawaii TESOL Executive Committee June 2010 to June 2011

Elected Positions:		
President	Your Name	serve@htesol.now
Vice President	Volunteer Today	helpout@htesol.rightnow
Membership Secretary	Sun-Mi Park	psunmi@go.byuh.edu
Treasurer	Mark Wolfersberger	maw44@byuh.edu
Program Committee	Reggie Gentry	reginaldcjgentryjr@gmail.com
	Ivan Lui	ilui@els.edu
	Jihu Ju	jj598@go.byuh.edu
Socio-Political Action Chair	Shawn Ford	sford@hawaii.edu
The Word Newsletter Committee	Elise Fader	fadere@byuh.edu
	Ashwin Pandit	apand940@hotmail.com
	Lisa Kawai	Kawail793@aol.com
Members at Large	Priscilla Faucette	faucette@hawaii.edu
	Rebecca Haymore	rebecca.haymore@gmail.com
Past President		
Board Appointed Positions:		
Conference Chair	Seleena Harkness	sharkness@tokai.edu
HITESOL / TESOL Ukraine Liaison	Jean Kirschenmann	jkirschenmann@hpu.edu
Webmaster	Perry Christensen	christep@byuh.edu



Hawaii TESOL Calendar of Events 2011-2012

- Practical Workshops for ESL Teachers (through interactive video)
Date: TBA
Broadcast sites: KCC, BYUH, (potential other sites include UH Hilo and Maui CC)
Theme: TBA
- Hawaii TESOL Conference
Date: Saturday, February 11, 2012 from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Location: Hawaii Tokai International College.
Plenary Speaker: TBA

NOTE: 46th Annual TESOL Convention in Philadelphia March 28-31, 2012.

- Language Experience & Highlights from TESOL
Date: TBA
Location: TBA
Remember what it is like to be a language student. In recent years we have learned: Swedish, Vietnamese, Arabic, American Sign language, and French

Other Great Things About Hawaii TESOL

Travel Grants

Travel grants are offered for members to attend the Hawai'i TESOL Conference and a TESOL conference outside of Hawai'i. The travel grants are funded entirely by membership fees, member donations, and proceeds from grant fundraising ventures, such as the Travel Grant Raffle. Travel grant winners are announced at the Hawai'i TESOL Conference.

New Travel Grant Applications will become available starting January 2012.

Sister Affiliate

About Our Sister Affiliate:

TESOL Ukraine was formed in June 1995 and received International Affiliate status in October 1996. The membership includes over 500 educators involved in secondary and higher education.

TESOL Ukraine has special interest groups in ESP, methodology, research, linguistics, testing, teacher training, CALL, and young learners. The organization sponsors many regional conferences as well as the annual national conference which takes place in January. Members of TESOL Ukraine receive four TESOL Ukraine Newsletters annually. More information about our sister affiliate can be found at

<http://tesol-ukraine.at.ua>

In April 2001 Hawai'i TESOL took the first step to establish a sister relationship with TESOL Ukraine when the Executive Board agreed to the proposal. The official Partnership Agreement was signed by representatives of both affiliates during the TESOL 2002 Convention in Salt Lake City.

Also feel free to drop by the TESOLers in Ukraine collaborative web Blog at <http://tesol-ua.blogspot.com/> and leave some comments or notes to our friends in the Ukraine.



