

# From English for Evaluation to English for Communication

Walter Foreman

한국교원대학교, 원어민강사

## Introduction

This paper will be divided into three parts. The first section will include a brief account of the author's academic and professional background. This will be followed by a more detailed discussion of issues facing secondary school English teachers in Korea, especially when attempting to teach English through English. Finally, the paper will close with an in-depth look at ways to overcome these issues and to facilitate the use of English for communication. All the information presented in this paper, as well as supplementary materials and resources, can be accessed at: <http://walterforeman.com>. The author can be reached for questions or comment via email at: [walter@walterforeman.com](mailto:walter@walterforeman.com).

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Academic Background

In 1996 I graduated from the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan with a Bachelor of Secondary Education degree. My teaching areas were English and Human Geography (Social Studies). At the completion of my 16-week extended practicum, I was awarded the College of Education's Bates Award. This award is granted to "outstanding students who have demonstrated exceptional ability, performance, creativity, and personal commitment in both the classroom and the school during the Extended Practicum." In 2005 I graduated, with merit, from the Faculty of Arts (Department of English) at the University of Sydney with a Master of Professional Communication degree.

### 1.2 Professional Background

I first came to Korea in March of 1998 and taught at, and later served as Academic Supervisor for, YBM-SISA-ELS Daegu. In 2000 I was employed as

a full-time English instructor at Daegu University and was later named Outstanding Instructor. In 2002, I served as the International Liaison for the Institute of International Studies and Programs at Daegu University. Most recently, in March of 2005, I began teaching in the Intensive English Teacher Training Program (IETTP) at the Center for In-service Education at the Korea National University of Education.

## **2. Issues in the Classroom**

### **2.1 English for Evaluation**

Teaching in the IETTP has afforded me access to the honest and unfiltered opinions of secondary school English teachers in Korea.

During methodology classes with these teachers, I pose the question, "What are the biggest hurdles that you face when trying to teach English through English?" Without exception, the most frequent response is, "The discrepancy between the stated objectives of the national curriculum and the expectations of students and parents." It is this discrepancy that these teachers feel forces them to abandon communicative teaching methods in favor of focusing more on matters related to the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT). More to the point, it is the need to focus only on the prescriptive aspects of English, which is caused by the special focus on CSAT material that so many students, parents, and even some teachers expect, that prevents English in Korea from moving beyond its current status as an academic subject to be tested. Regrettably, the reform initiatives coming from the various levels of government in Korea do little to remedy this problem.

I refer specifically to comments made by a Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (MOE) Planning and Coordination Division representative at an Asia Education Foundation (AEF) Professional Development Workshop earlier this year. At this workshop it was reiterated that the MOE plans to start English education from the first grade of primary school as early as the latter half of this year and to place one L1 speaker of English (native speaker) in every middle school by 2010. Neither of these two initiatives addresses what is at the core of ensuring efficient successful English education in Korea; namely creating an environment where English is used not for evaluation but rather for communication. This is the challenge that faces all of

you here today; to create opportunities for your learners to use English as a communicative tool.

## **2.1 Other Issues**

In addition to the focus on English for evaluation only, trainees in the IETTP have also identified the following obstacles to teaching English through English (Lee 2003): a) a worry that learners may not understand what is said in class and that this will lead to an inefficient use of time; b) a perception that learners do not want or do not like English; c) fear of losing face and authority in the classroom by making mistakes; d) concern over their lack of English proficiency, especially in pronunciation; e) classes with learners of mixed level and ability.

While there are certainly more challenges facing teachers wanting to teach English through English, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore beyond just these five.

## **3. Practical Solutions**

### **3.1 Overall Solutions**

The one method that is common to overcoming all the hurdles and obstacles presented here today is to never stop seeking professional development. To this end, the MOE has reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing the professional capacity of teachers in Korea. Proposed measures to improve teacher cultivation and training systems in Korea include enforcing stricter standards for teacher qualification and offering 'tailor-made' training programs. Teaching, like language itself, is both a skill and a craft that must be practiced and honed constantly to be effective.

### **3.2 Specific Solutions**

In reference to the five other issues listed in 2.1, this section will offer practical solutions for each in turn.

#### **3.2.1 Learners may not understand what is said in class**

First, speak simple sentences. This suggestion refers to simplicity in terms of both structure and pace. Teacher talk must be natural but sensitive to the level of the learners; it must be neither too fast nor too slow. When you speak to your class it is important that you enunciate clearly, talk loudly enough, and emphasize important

words and structures. Instructors must also be cognizant of their use of reduced forms; while second nature for L1 speakers of English, to the L2 learner of English there is a world of difference between 'What did you have for lunch?' and "Whadja have fer lunch?"

Second, include visual aids and gestures to assist in comprehension. When talking to learners, point to objects and make appropriate gestures and facial expressions. Good actors make good teachers and especially good language teachers. In addition, show pictures and talk about them, bring in real objects, make sketches or drawings. Doing these things will not only help to make input comprehensible, but it will make your class more fun and interesting. An excellent Internet image search service is Picsearch [<http://picsearch.com>]. Picsearch is an English-language image search engine that provides quick access to a wide range of high-quality images. Another excellent service is Canon's Creative Park [<http://cp.c-ij.com>]. This free service offers literally thousands of high-resolution images as well as 3-D paper crafts, clip art, scrapbook templates, and lots more; updated weekly.

Third, develop learning routines early so that learners will know what is expected of them on any given day. These routines can be varied at certain times throughout the school year to avoid monotony for both learners and the teacher alike.

### **3.2.2 A perception that learners do not want or do not like English**

First, create a comfortable learning environment where learners feel accepted, confident, and secure. Beyond this, try to make the classroom a place to which learners *want to* come, not one to which they feel that they *have to* come; there is a world of difference between the two! There are many ways to do this and different teachers will do this differently. One method with which I have had success is to have learners create nametags that I later post in the classroom. This procedure is an extension of the traditional first-day-of-class partner interview activity. But, by creating nametags based on their interviews, learners can see the fruits of their labor while also creating a sense of community in the class. These nametags also help the teacher to remember each learner's name. Remembering and using learners' names in the classroom can help to create the type of environment that will make the learners enjoy English. In addition, when learners see their English names (or Korean names written in English) posted in the classroom, it helps to reinforce their English identity, which in turn adds to

the sense of community, or social presence, of the group.

Second, find ways to help learners understand the importance of learning English. This can be done by planning a lesson or unit that focuses on the amount of English information available on the Internet; by having a representative from one of the standardized English testing services (TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS, TEPS, etc) come to the class to talk to the learners about the importance of English; by arranging a field trip to an authentic or semi-authentic English-speaking environment in Korea such as: international and/or foreign language schools, tours of foreign multinational companies in Korea, visits to foreign embassies and/or consulates, foreign military installations, and the like.

### **3.2.3 Fear of losing face and authority because of making mistakes**

First, admit and accept that teachers are human and that all humans are fallible. Doing so will not only help to relieve the stress and pressure on the teacher to be perfect, but should also help the learners themselves to overcome their fears of making mistakes. This in turn will help to create the desired classroom environment discussed in 3.2.2. In addition, if learners see the teacher making mistakes but learning from them, it should serve to motivate the learners to be more active learners. The best way to lead is always by example.

Second, use the resources that you have at hand. The teacher is not the only source of information or input in the classroom. Take the time to consult books, computers, the Internet, other teachers, even other students. This is an especially useful technique for those teachers who may have L1 English team-teachers assigned to them.

### **3.2.4 Concern over low English proficiency, especially pronunciation**

Here again, use resources other than the L2 teacher's voice. These resources can include prerecorded materials, multimedia files, and L1 speakers. The latter either as a guest speaker or a team-teacher. In addition, L2 English-speaking teachers can prerecord their voices before lessons. This can be done at home or in the office; anyplace where teachers can relax, focus more closely on what they want to say, focus on how to say it, and can repeat themselves frequently.

Second, impart to learners the fact that in today's world English has several voices; the L2 speaker's voice is just one of the many voices that make up modern 'world' English. It is well-documented that there are more L2 speakers of English in the world

than L1 speakers of English.

### **3.2.5 Classes with learners of mixed level and ability**

First, reevaluate the classroom seating plan. Ensure that the seating plan reflects the level and needs of learners.

Second, provide study guides and outlines to learners *and* their parents in advance of lessons. Doing so will help learners to prepare for upcoming lessons and will ensure that parents are aware of what is required of their children at school.

Third, ask higher-level learners to paraphrase their understanding of assignments, tasks, and/or instructions so that other learners can hear details more than once, in different ways, and from different people.

Fourth, when creating handouts always make them double sided. Adjust one side of the handout to one level of learner and adjust the other side to a different level of learner. This will give lower-level learners some autonomy in their learning as they will have material that is appropriate to their level but they may choose, from time to time, to work on the higher-level tasks. In addition, higher-level learners will still be challenged by the material because their side of the handout will be tailored specifically to them.

## **3.3 English for Communication**

One sign of an increasing need for English for communication in Korea comes from an MOE plan to create English immersion education programs in Korea's free economic zones and Jeju Free International City. These programs would seem, at least on paper, to have the ability to create real English communicative situations in Korea.

But until such time that there is a real and complete need for English as a communicative tool in Korea, Korean teachers of English will face many difficult challenges in trying to prepare secondary school students for the CSAT while at the same time providing and teaching practical real-world communicative language skills. As a stopgap measure, the concept of social presence is an important one to consider.

Social presence is a very dynamic quality and will differ depending on the choice of materials, the activities used to engage learners, and depending on the very learners themselves. For the purpose of this paper however, social presence will be defined as: "The dynamic sense of community characterized by the occurrence of familiarity and closeness between participants in a system." To obtain effective social presence in the classroom, all participants in the system must share in the responsibility of creating

social presence. Having said this however, the role of the instructor is more demanding than that of other participants and carries with it higher levels of responsibility for establishing and maintaining the discourse that creates and sustains social presence (Rourke, et. al., 2001). The key words to remember here are *establishing* and *maintaining*. The instructor must play the role of facilitator in helping to achieve and then preserve social presence, but must never dominate the system.

If we consider that social interaction is a basic human need and a contributing factor to successful leaning outcomes, then the importance of social presence in the classroom becomes clear. To ensure effective learning, learners must be made to feel as though they 'belong' in the classroom. Further, social presence is essential because it has been proven that without this feeling of 'belonging' in the classroom, learners are reluctant to take the necessary risks involved with learning. In their 2002 paper, Kreijns et. al. point out that learners need to feel a sense of community before they are willing to open up and express ideas, evaluate peers, and put themselves at risk of being evaluated by their peers. Lastly, as social presence sets the stage for greater interaction among learners, it also is related to greater course satisfaction for both learners *and* teachers. (Picciano, 2002)

There are many ways that social presence can be incorporated into English classes in Korea. One very effective way is to make learners aware of the importance of social presence. To do this, include a discussion and/or reading on the importance of community building in learning (Brown, 2001). If you really want to build social presence in your classroom, you must first teach the concept to your learners. Other effective methods to create social presence in the classroom include creating areas in the classroom (and/or online) for learners to post pictures and biographies of themselves and of the instructor, choosing activities that are purely social as opposed to purely academic and that allow learners to use English in a setting that is familiar and comfortable, and having learners create and more importantly present weekly reflections on what and how they have contributed to the classroom community.

Essentially, social presence is the sense of togetherness created in the classroom by both the instructor and the learners. Social presence can help to achieve better results in the classroom because it makes everyone feel more comfortable. If learners feel more comfortable in the classroom then they are more likely to achieve lesson objectives, take chances, and be active learners. Teachers can facilitate social presence in many ways, including making learners aware of social presence, creating spaces for learners to

express themselves in English, choosing activities that encourage English conversation in non-threatening environments and situations, and by having learners reflect on exactly what they have done to contribute to the group.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this paper, I have used the words, 'community', 'facilitate' (or facilitator), and 'personalize' several times. The reason that I have used these words so often is that I believe strongly that these are areas that must be carefully considered in order to ensure effective teaching and effective learning.

I encourage you to build a community in your classroom. Do your utmost to make your students feel warm, welcome, and wanted. Do not forget to do the same for yourself. Open up to your students and they will do the same to you in return. The free exchange of thoughts and ideas is a fundamental part of learning and the English classroom in Korea should be no exception to this rule.

Facilitate English learning in the classroom by acting as a guide rather than a boss. Be prepared to relinquish some of the control in the classroom and *together* with your students arrive at your destination that destination being the attainment of lesson objectives. Give your students chances to use what you have taught them. Give your students chances to use what they may have learned from outside sources. Give your students chances to make mistakes. Give your students chances to have a say in their academic development. While I am not advocating that students be given complete control over what happens in the classroom, I am suggesting that through careful planning and consideration you *do* give students more opportunities to actively participate in both the processes of learning *and* teaching. Students are capable of both! Let them try!

Personalize the learning experience for your students. Find out what interests them and teach towards that. Evaluate your materials and references to make sure that they are congruent with what modern students expect and indeed *need* in order to learn.

In closing, I am reminded of what one of my educational psychology professors used to tell me when I was studying for my education degree, "Reach each you teach!" I hope that I have sent that same message to you through this paper and I also hope that I have provided you with the tools to help you do so.

## References

- Brown, R. E. (2001). The process of community-building in distance learning classes. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 5(2), 18-35.
- College of Education *Bates Award*  
<http://www.usask.ca/education/csbe/Regs/bates.htm> [accessed May 19, 2006]
- Kreijns, C., P. Kirschner, and W. Jochems (2002). The sociability of computer-supported collaborative learning environments. *Educational Technology and Society* 5(1).
- Lee, S.J. (2003). Teaching English Through English: Justified? *The English Connection*, 7(5), 1, 6-7, 27.
- Ministry of Education *Korean Educational Policies and Current Issues*  
[http://www.moe.go.kr/include/download.html?up\\_path=Eng&filen=200604171145229026.doc&filen2=Koreaneducationalpoliciesandcurrentissues4-16-06.doc](http://www.moe.go.kr/include/download.html?up_path=Eng&filen=200604171145229026.doc&filen2=Koreaneducationalpoliciesandcurrentissues4-16-06.doc)  
[accessed May 19, 2006]
- Picciano, A. (2002). Beyond student perceptions: Issues of interaction, presence and performance in an online course. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 6(1), 21-40.
- Rourke, L., Anderson, T., Garrison, D.R., & Archer, W. (2001). Methodological issues in the content analysis of computer conferencing transcripts. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 12, 1-18.