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A METHOD OF RAPID CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHING
MA thesis

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Abstract

The principal problem the author has solved as a teacher is: how can educators help students with little to no English proficiency achieve high scores on standardized tests like the American College Test (ACT) within a year and a half? The author found that content is crucial, especially in cultures like China where students are generally passive learners. Yet, high quality content is difficult to procure and time consuming to create. Hence, L2 teachers often face the following dilemmas: (1) there is no curricula at all – especially no textbooks nor course materials, (2) the extant curriculum is substandard and/or irrelevant and thus counterproductive, (3) students in the same class have equivocal levels of L2 proficiency (from basic to advanced) or may have equivalent L2 proficiency but different, specific gaps in their knowledge, (4) class sizes range from one to one hundred students (private tutoring to small classrooms to lecture halls), (5) students don't come to every class or they join in the middle of the term yet expect each class to increase their L2 proficiency, (6) class times are highly variable (from two hours to four hours or more), spaced either days or weeks apart, (7) the school has limited resources such as digital devices. Often these problems are regarded as unsolvable, at least by teachers themselves, however, through both investigation of educational theory and reflective practice, the author has been able to detail a high-yield system (invention) that remedies all these concerns simultaneously, by relying parasitically on commercial multimedia in a highly methodical way.

Keywords: Educational Design, Curriculum Development, English as a Second Language (ESL), Oral English, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Edutainment

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1 Introduction

“Theory is when you know everything but nothing works. Practice is when everything works but no one knows why. In our lab, theory and practice are combined: nothing works and no one knows why.” – anonymous

Teaching is such a diverse profession worldwide that whatever works in one class might not transfer to another. Needless to say, more and more researchers are trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Recently, there has been an impetus toward the methods of autoethnography and reflective practice, the former of which has been growing in popularity as a bona fide qualitative research method since the 1970’s when UCLA anthropology professor Dr. Walter Goldschmidt first coined the term, and the latter of which was first promoted by MIT professor Donald Schön in his pivotal book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983). Basically, teachers share what they do and reflect on their work, to better inform those in charge of theory, whose work in turn better informs teachers.

I start this thesis by performing an autoethnography (section **2**), in which I chronicle what led me to become a teacher, why I plan to continue this work in the near future, and why I teach in an atypical fashion. Sacrilegiously, perhaps, it is written in literary style. Next, I informally describe my method of rapidly assembling academic products using 3rd party content, how I utilize the finished products in class, and how my teaching system ties into theories of psychology and education (section **3 Theoretical Background**). Then, in a more academician-like manner, I describe how I tested my product in section **4 Methods** and summarize the results in section **5 Results**. Finally, I reflect deeply on the meaningfulness of my work in section **6 Discussion & Conclusive Reflections**, again with liberal rhetoric.

2 Auto-Ethnography

As a child, I loved to make art; sketching comic books, animating cartoons, or better yet, claymations, sculpting my own action figures, sewing my own clothes, and so on. Most of my in-class notes from middle school are scribbled with medieval battle scenes, film noir detectives, or my stock character in a three-panel strip derivative of *Garfield*, *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Dilbert*, and my other Sunday newspaper favorites. My mother had been a graphic artist in the 90's and I had gotten a head start on using computers to create, particularly Adobe Photoshop, then later, Macromedia Flash, which I used to program interactive movies.

Since I was a natural, I found art classes enjoyable, but not especially educative, and thus I had no desire to attend art school for training purposes. Besides, my elders kept regurgitating the cliché that I would starve to death before making it as an artist. I half believed them at the time, and I definitely disagree with them in hindsight; after all, my college sweetheart landed a cushy job at Disney after graduating from SVA. Nevertheless, my larger concern was that I'm not interested in bringing someone else's characters to life – I want to create the cast. What attracts me to art is the ability to generate entire worlds from scratch.

Yet, becoming a shot-caller in the art world is a longshot, so I figured I could always keep art as a hobby while I focused on finding a day job. I figured what am I good at? What am I interested in? And better yet, is there any point at which the answers to those two questions intersect? In the post 90's economy, before the world recession in 2009 (my college graduation date no less!), the standard advice was that as long as you get a liberal arts degree in anything, you ought to be able to find a job doing something somewhere, so therefore, you might as well study something you like. If I could do it over again, I'm not sure I would have chosen to follow my dreams over something more practical – though I'm still undecided since I have witnessed the brambles of that trap as well; namely, my sister sacrificing her entire twenties to the rigors of studying medicine at Brown and Harvard. Regardless, academically speaking, I've always had a knack for writing and grammar, and I had recently picked up the hobby of home-studying exotic languages like Hawaiian (on a whim, after hearing Crosby's *Mele Kalikimaka* on Christmas, I had ordered a book and tape set). So, I went to study linguistics at Rutgers, which at the time was rated among the top ten schools for linguistics; most of my professors were from MIT and some

where even students of Noam Chomsky, including Dr. Mark C. Baker who agreed to supervise my senior project.

I was tickled to learn there is a huge movement in academia to document and revitalize endangered languages. However, at Rutgers I also learned of the rift between theoretical and applied linguistics, the former of which did not necessarily care about the language nor the people who speak it. Problematically, my interest in exotic languages is the same as my interest in art; it is, to coin an adjective from the names of two researchers who worked independently only to find their surnames hyphenated in reference to an observation commonly mislabeled as a “hypothesis”: Sapir-Whorfian. In other words, my interest is to see the world through another lens, which is probably safer than taking psychedelic drugs, though notwithstanding, I’ll still never look at rivers the same again since I learned the Cherokee word *yvwi gvnahita* essentially translates as “long man”. I’ve heard the Celts had something similar.

Everyone in academia was saying we need to save dying languages, but few people had reasons why, and even fewer had ideas on what to do. I did eventually end up networking with another professor at the University of Tennessee (Dr. Jeffery E. Davis) and doing fieldwork on Plains Indian Sign Language on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana. However, it was apparent that if I ever wanted to continue this kind of work as a career, I would need to become an academic. The only problem was, there were tons of students entering Ph.D. tracks every year, but very few job openings annually. Indeed, many of my peers who took this path and went to outstanding schools have been receiving rejection upon rejection email from the same jobs to which everyone else is applying.

So, I entered the workforce right out of college, and figured once again that I could keep my interest in indigenous languages as a hobby. Despite arriving at the eventuality that I probably should have matriculated to graduate school in something more marketable than linguistics, I found work intermittently in two large industries: technology, particularly language technology, and education. Technology jobs were usually not a good fit; they required either fluency in a second language, nay, native speaker fluency, or hardcore programming skills. Besides, I seemed more cut out for education anyway.

From a very early age, without any encouragement from teachers nor parents, I remember frequenting my grade school’s deserted library each week, checking out young reader textbooks on ocelots, minerals, small countries, and other unconventional topics purely to satiate my

curiosity. It seemed normal to me then, but looking back on it, that's not typical behavior for young boys at my school – I hadn't even been flagged as gifted. In high school I would continue to read highly eclectic books, which I could only find on Amazon.com and not from the local bookstore, and certainly not from the local library, write website tutorials for fun, and perform mock lectures on specialized topics to phantom crowds out of ennui.

Yet, when it came to finding a job, most of the openings were for teaching, and the notion that some people actually want to become teachers baffled me, which is, I suppose, why there were so many openings.¹ While I dreamed of working as a professor someday, I was very resistant to becoming a run-of-the-mill teacher for countless reasons. One, in contrast to countries like Finland or Korea, in America, “teacher” is generally regarded as a grueling yet underpaid profession for people that have failed to find a “real job” – they say: “those who cannot do, teach”. Paradoxically, some regard teaching as a slacker job for the very same reason, among others. Two, I am introverted, and if talking with one person for a few minutes drains me, I didn't relish standing up in front of an entire class of possibly testing students for hours on end (on my first day, I was indeed a stress basket). Three, and paramount, after going through the system I have long since been critical of modern day Western educational ideology and didn't want to perpetuate a belief system I feel dumbs people down under the pretense of smartening them up.

I, for one, have long since preferred traditional or classical education, dominated by teacher-talk in the form of lectures (ideally by a distinguished, bearded gentleman sporting a tweed jacket with leather elbow pads!). Even in the information age, when facts can be instantly summoned, I feel the focus of school in most classes should still be on fact acquisition and the transmission of wisdom – great for combatting limbic atrophy and spiritual emptiness symptomatic of social-media addiction. After all, knowledge is power. Yet, while plenty of people I read and talk to claim that this style is already the status quo, in desperate need of reform, my experience has been overwhelmingly the opposite. Virtually all my teachers have zealously favored student-centered, active learning, participation based approaches, with a fanatical emphasis on pair work.

¹ Growing up, very few of my peers have wanted to work as teachers, and over my four year career, so far only a couple of my students have wanted to become teachers, despite the fact I work at a teacher's college.

To be fair, a few of my former teachers employed collaborative teaching techniques brilliantly, and I still have a vendetta against my crotchety old pre-calculus teacher and her scratchy red pen, but unfortunately, I witnessed mostly the dark side of what I've come to regard as essentially "intellectual communism"; the lowest common denominator students move forward at the expense of the higher achieving students. By in large, I felt oppressed by the movement before I could even articulate what was wrong; not necessarily the design or the intent, mind you, but its misapplication, which arguably cycles back to a flaw in the dogma. All I knew at the time was, I was prohibited from reading because I was forced to "pay attention" to trivial class discussions where one or two students drone on and on like the foghorn in Charlie Brown. Ironically, in reading periods I sat in deep contemplation, yet was chastised for taking my eyes off the page; the notion that I was sitting there "thinking" was unthinkable! My rough drafts were not checked by experts, but rather, by my struggling peers who needed more help themselves than they could give me. And worst of all, in language classes, I was expected to practice speaking without any formal instruction as to vocabulary and grammar, because "there is no such thing as talking wrong". The bottom line is, the notion that teachers could, well, teach, was strictly taboo, and any infidel who confessed their complaints was smugly outcast. After all, research had "proven" these methods "effective" and "progressive", I lament, just like everything else involved in the decline of Western civilization.

Naturally, I was always more attracted to the "back-end": curriculum development. I felt I learn more from the textbooks, worksheets and software than from most teachers, who try to "teach without teaching". Unfortunately though, while I did find some jobs as an academic product developer, they were few and far between.² Most people, be it customers, students or bosses, don't distinguish *making* a class from *teaching* a class. If (or "once") employers do catch on to the fact that curriculum is valuable (in many cases more valuable than teachers), then they typically expect teachers to design their own courses in addition to fulfilling their teaching duties, then fork over the fruits of their labor to the school for posterity!³

² For example, I worked at Kaplan writing ESL placement test questions for a CAT (Computerized Adaptive Test). That's not "teaching"!

³ I have a lot of respect for people who create jobs. But as long as the demand for foreign teachers in China is so high, I've always rejected such 2-in-1 teach and design curriculum job offers (if they demanded full teaching hours) under the rationale: "Anyone who would accept such a terrible deal would be too foolish to design high quality curricula for you in the first place!"

From my own business perspective, this is far from ideal because I feel there are two kinds of teachers, corresponding to a polarization of personality types. One kind of teacher likes to be in the classroom socializing but dreads being nailed to a desk typing out worksheets. I find this type is usually better with children. Another kind of teacher is the more withdrawn type, who usually gravitates to higher education. Surely, in more professional settings, a bifurcation of job roles would maximize everyone's talents, and likely this is how things are done in more professional establishments. Nevertheless, I seldom found places like that, and in autumn of 2013 it was time to take the plunge into becoming a teacher.

In targeting teaching jobs, I sought out opportunities that were as collegiate as possible; positions where I could refine my public speaking and presentation skills – skills prized in other white-collar settings. Now, I rather dread becoming a suit in the cubicles of some corporate high rise, but at the time, working in an office seemed strive-worthy – most people my age are still desperate to find jobs like the very ones *The Office* satirizes. Regardless, I didn't want to be typecast in a role to which I felt I didn't belong: a glorified babysitter. I'm not a happy-go-lucky guy, and the prospect of teaching children terrified me at the time. I still don't relish the notion, even though people offer me jobs like that almost every day.⁴ *Kindergarten Cop* (1990) scared me off from grade school teaching worse than *Jaws* (1975) crushed my childhood aspirations of becoming a marine biologist. Thus, the first teaching gigs I accepted were with adults in TriBeCa. And it blew my mind...

People were paying loads of money for classes that they really didn't seem to need; \$150 dollars an hour, of which I received less than a fifth, yet that was double the going rate. Personally, I never buy classes unless I have to for bureaucratic reasons. One, I can't afford it, ironically, not even on my teacher's salary. Two, it's so easy to teach yourself things today using the internet or simply by reading books, which ordinarily I find more efficient, organized and informative anyway. If I ever did gamble on buying a class, I'd want to know exactly who the teacher is, what his or her style is, and how I can use his or her class to help me achieve my goals. In language classes, for example, I'd want to make sure the teacher wouldn't waste literally half the time making me practice conversing with other students who also don't speak

⁴ This, I feel, is another double standard regarding foreigners in China. In your own culture, would you solicit distinguished college professors to go and teach babies? Does that skillset even transfer? I, and others I know, have even had denizens stop their cars in the middle of the road and claim they want to hire me for their school (which they were "starting tomorrow"). I figured I'll soon just as well start my own little business.

the FL; I'd want to learn more grammar upfront. Taking the right class can be a remarkably valuable thing; it can save you a tremendous amount of time and frustration. You can learn things you didn't even know you needed to teach yourself.

But these consumers were completely sheep-like. It really caught me by surprise. People really just...buy classes? Why are they so rich if they're so dumb? Of course, not all rich people are dumb; some people become rich through brains or hard work, while others receive inheritance and only need to maintain a certain baseline of aptitude, in certain areas, to keep from squandering it. But these rich clients specifically were dumb and it baffled me. I suppose they can afford to be so, and the ones who can't aren't able to buy classes. Or, maybe "dumb" is too subjective; how about "helpless"? "Clueless"?⁵ "Dumb" is also a mean word, and it's not my intention to be mean. As I will later explain, I proved myself dumb for not being able to figure out how to teach them in time.

Most people buying classes had apparently forgotten their schooling and were suckered in by marketing gimmicks – though they didn't seem to feel burned in the end. Or, they simply purchased classes for non-educational reasons. Some bought classes to make friends, to kill their boredom, as a bragging right, or as insurance for accomplishing their goals; at least they had enough self-discipline to commit to something that would force them to study. Some bought classes to make themselves feel smarter; like how buying a diet cookbook makes you feel thinner, even if you never cook from it. Some bought classes for others as presents; some of the clients weren't in fact rich, but their spouses, parents, or children were. Regardless, by in large, people were throwing their money away – big money!

Unfortunately, the TriBeCa job didn't work out in the end, at least the teaching aspect of it (I continued working there as an academic product developer). My boss had given me the role seemingly absent-mindedly once I told him a different school had offered me a teaching stint, at which point he realized there was a private sector for ESL in Manhattan. It took a long time, but eventually the rather dim clientele lit up to the fact I wasn't a very good teacher. But no wonder; I had no teacher training whatsoever. I was nice and I tried, but I had no experience. Teaching adults was not necessarily easier than teaching adolescents; typically, they're at the same level as

⁵ One adult ESL student of mine, a hotel manager in her early thirties who scored high on her English tests in college, but forgot all but a few hundred English words, literally checked with me: "If I want to speak English, I must know many English words?" Technically, no, but if you want to talk about the weather, it helps to know words like "cloud", "rain", etc.

children, only far more indignant. They don't know what their expectations are, but they complain when their expectations are not being met. Figuring out how to be a good teacher of multiple things to students of multiple levels was a long and arduous process, and understandably, businesses don't usually want to let you practice on them. Like others, I hadn't yet come to the realization that teaching is a "skill".

However, despite lacking this skill, I would soon find myself diving into teaching yet again, in a foreign country to boot. At this point, teaching English abroad is a "thing"; almost everybody knows if you're out of a job you can always go teach English in Asia, and that China is relatively safe, modern, and pays well compared to other destinations. I had always liked what I knew of Chinese culture – I was nimble with chopsticks, I liked watching Jackie Chan movies, and I was just as much an avid reader of Lao Tzu as I was of Sun Tzu. Yet, I had been enduringly resistant to teaching English in China for several reasons. Of course, traveling to a foreign country is scary for anyone, nonetheless one so famously polluted, and I had heard horror stories about foreigners being abused by their despotic Chinese bosses; work-horsed, not paid, fired on a whim.⁶ But moreover, there are stigmas about becoming an ESL teacher in China.

To be fair, when I tell people I'm a teacher in China, many are taken aback – "Wow! That's so cool." Some people figure I just want to see the world. Perhaps some speculate I have an Asian fetish, and wonder if I'm gaga about anime and martial arts. But the element that I'm most leery about is that China is known for fake things, and Western employers won't think my job is legitimate, making it impossible to return. After all, aside from those poor souls with doctorates in Chinese who resort to teaching English because they cannot find more suitable opportunities, most English teachers in China have no background in applied linguistics; all you need is an undergraduate degree from a Western country in anything, and even that requirement can be circumvented. Worst of all, though, people think teaching English in China is for losers who couldn't make it in their homelands. Another spin is that, if you're not a loser by the time you leave home, working in China for too long will turn you into one. Some Americans would label me as a defector, or, as someone who wants a low-pressure job so I can drink and party all the time; worming out of paying my dues to the system. It took me a long time to wake up to the fact that actually, many Chinese regard being a "foreigner teacher" in China as a good job.

⁶ One cheeky 2015 Vice article reads *How English Teachers in China are Lied to and Exploited*.

Worse yet, while I was aware that some Chinese are jealous that it's easy to find teaching work in China as a foreigner, it's even worse that a lot of young Westerners, and now many young Chinese, regard ESL teaching in China as a magnet for posers and sexpats. Some people have heard the rumor that foreigners are treated like celebrities or rock stars in East Asian countries, but this is rarely the case. In my city for instance, if the locals aren't kind enough to leave you alone or merely stare at you, they taunt you, gossip about you, or even try to pick fights with you. Thus, in a nutshell, the thought of becoming an expat didn't do wonders for my self-esteem, and in fact, for the first two years I was indeed locked in a mindset of hating my place in the world. I don't know what expectations most foreigners have before they sign up to work in China, but I resisted marginalization for as long as I could.

However, in the summer of 2014 the planets aligned. Kaplan had terminated its BAs and replaced them with assessment experts. Fortunately, I was still employed at the Linguistic Data Consortium through UPenn, but only on a part-time, telecommute basis. Thus, I was free of ties, but still in search of more stable, full-time employment. More importantly, however, I had met randomly met a girl on Facebook from China, who became my girlfriend, and is now my wife. She found me a job at a local high school in her city, as a teacher of course, because there isn't much else a foreigner can do in China for a work visa. I was wary about becoming a teacher again, after I had failed miserably, that is, failed because teaching made me miserable. But, the fact that education in China is reputedly more traditional attracted me; I could teach how I preferred by lecturing and showing PowerPoints! I pictured the students as respectful and obedient.

My prediction came true! The only problem was, as a Western teacher I'm mildly expected to teach in the Western way. The same double standard applies to meeting people. Typically, I am quite reserved, as are many Chinese, especially when meeting one another for the first time, but when they meet *laowai* (foreigners) they expect loquaciousness. "What is wrong with you?", "Why aren't you talking my ear off like most foreigners?", "Why aren't you smiling? Do you not like me?" A stereotype of Americans that I had not fully realized before I left the US is that they are blabbermouths. Not to talk and smile much is considered rude, apparently, even if the person you're speaking to has limited English and doesn't know what the heck you're saying! Putting a foreign teacher in a class is not so much envisioned as an injection of education, inasmuch as an injection of charisma. When people ask me what I think about

Chinese students, it catches them off guard when they learn I appreciate their meekness, rather than seeing it as a flaw in need of reform.

From there, the problems multiplied. In contrast to many of the tricked-out schools I've seen in European catalogues, with their arcade-like computer labs and dust-collecting smartboards, the setup in many cities in China is still primeval no matter where you go (excluding Shanghai and some other metropolitan cities): put a foreigner in a classroom with a powdery blackboard, a few wooden desks, and as many blank, staring bobbleheads as you can convince to buy tickets. Most often, schools expect teachers to work with outdated, insufficient resources. You know, like a thirty-year-old textbook featuring a dialogue about a missing Walkman, suggesting phrases like "I'll ring you back," or "Would you fancy some tea and crumpets?" But you're lucky if they give you any curricula at all, much less, preparation time or at least a moment's notice. For small businesses especially, the game is about fast cash, not about abstract investments that will raise profits exponentially in the long term, such as an indispensable CURRICULUM. It seemed that lack of intelligence was the limiting factor in the complementary distribution of wealth and brains.

My teacher frustrations did not relent when I found that employers blame any parent⁷ or student dissatisfaction on the teachers, after baiting pupils for negative feedback no less – dissatisfactions arising from unrealistic demands and unfair expectations such as "this class is too hard", "this class is too easy", "this class is too boring", "this class is fun but I'm not learning," "I'm lost because I joined in the middle of the course or only attend every other class", and so forth. Most parents don't seem to know how classes are supposed to work, nor that not all teachers are created equal. If parents aren't under the impression that foreign teachers are overrated conmen, they're thinking that they're miracle workers who can magically imbue their children with native-like speaking ability telepathically.

Like the Manhattanites, consumers in China patronize schools for enigmatic, groupthink reasons: out of a community-service-like sense of duty, out of blind reverence for big brand names, or, by some primitive, fuzzy notion that "more classes equals more smart". They figure buying classes has a one-up on sending their kids to daycare – in fact, I don't think daycares that

⁷ Actually, the language barrier between foreign teachers and Chinese parents usually allows bosses or office assistants to mislead the parents into thinking their requests are being honored and their complaints are being dealt with.

don't emphasize education even exist in China. They figure everyone else with money is buying classes from foreign teachers so they might as well too. As a status symbol, there's a noticeable trickle-down effect; if you can't afford to hire the former C.E.O. with an Ivy League pedigree (who probably wants to live in a cosmopolitan area), there's always a poor man's option, right down to the barely literate Afghan with counterfeit credentials (who is often confined to the boonies).

For me, it was a big problem that while I had been trained in linguistics and dreamt of working as a professor, I faced an overarching cultural attitude that the often stringent Chinese teachers are best suited for drilling students in the likes of grammar, vocabulary, test-prep, and so on, whereas the notoriously boisterous foreign teachers should get the students using whatever English they already know.⁸ At the very least there is an attitude that foreign teachers have a slouch's job where they can roll in to a classroom, have a conversation, and collect a paycheck⁹ – a bit of an exaggeration in my opinion as Chinese students are typically reluctant to speak. But at most, there is the fantasy that every class will be like a party, and by playing games the students will somehow “learn without learning”.

Much of this attitude is based on the classic ignorance that just because someone is a native speaker they can also *teach* their language, and further, that students, particularly younger students, will osmotically acquire English simply if they are “immersed” with a native speaker for a few hours a week – a common misconception that companies like *Rosetta Stone* love to play up. Research on bilingualism, such as that featured in Suzanne Romaine's *Bilingualism* (1989), suggests that language classes in non-immersion environments are not effective at creating bilingual students; only full immersion schools can create fully bilingual students, whereas half-immersion schools create semi-bilingual students. Furthermore, it has been established that while children learn an L1 better than adults, they are worse than adult at learning an L2 through conscious study (see *Becoming Fluent* (2015): chapter 1).

⁸ Of course, there are caveats. Many Chinese teachers are indeed outgoing and employ innovative educational methods. Likewise, many foreign teachers do specialize in teaching SAT, ACT, and AP subjects, mainly to students headed abroad in the “college boom” (I became one of them). There's even non-native speaker teachers who campaign that they're superior to native teachers. I guess they're unaware of the concept of a native speaker linguist.

⁹ Another infamous Vice article is titled *Lazy and White? Teach English in China*, though I think after criticism they changed it to *White People with No Skill Sets Wanted in China*.

Other parents simply have bad memories of their overly rigid schooling and fall for any alternative. Ironically, while many citizens of East Asian countries resent their pressure cooker systems, a growing body of evidence suggests that pedagogics is not to blame. The fact that East Asians actually benefit more from their traditional systems (when instituted properly) is not only in my opinion self-evident, it can be found in all kinds of sources; from pop education books like Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* (2009), which correlates East Asian work ethic to the tradition of rice farming (I'm not convinced, but still), to articles in major newspapers like *The Washington Post* (see Donnelly, 2014), to articles in prestigious peer-reviewed research journals (see Qingyang, 2005). Many Chinese students aren't opposed to lecturing per se; the real culprit is that school days are too long or the teacher doesn't make an effort to be interesting, but Chinese students don't usually split the difference.

The bigger picture, is that the Chinese have a reputation for appropriating aspects of other cultures that evolved under completely different circumstances. Probably the best and most literally "outlandish" example is my students from wealthy, erudite families who dress, walk, breakdance, rap and even try to talk like they're straight out of Compton. Western teaching methods that evolved in diverse classroom settings do not necessarily translate as superior in East Asian contexts. Just because Germany has a reputation for engineering, doesn't mean installing an Audi engine in your junk boat will make it sail faster. Congruously, while the Chinese I meet are typically aware of the "brainwashing" that goes on in their own schools, they are largely unaware that whitewashing and indoctrination also exists in "the land of the free."

So at this point, imagine you are in a classroom full of quiet teenagers and the clock is slowly ticking. You're expected to make them speak English but they do not want to talk. You're expected to make them learn English – a highly irregular, idiomatic, and global language with tens of thousands of words – in as few class time hours as possible (or in as many!). You are too overworked to prepare enough materials, yet, most students don't understand much of what you say. Even if you can speak some of their language, you're not supposed to use it with them. They want results, but class also needs to be fun. Better yet, what if you're like me: despite being a foreigner, shy, and intent on being a serious language *teacher* rather than a *coach*? Worst of all, you simply cannot get into to the spirit of making them do groupwork because it violates the inverse of the golden rule; don't inflict on others that which you would not on yourself. How do most foreign teachers adapt?

The simple answer is that many don't. Some get fired, chase after other professions, or simply don't move beyond either lecturing and bookwork or interactive work.

When designing critical-input experiences, teachers should provide new information. Of course there are a number of mediums that might be employed.

These include the following:

- Lecture
- Materials students read
- Physical demonstrations
- Video or DVD presentations
- Field trips

It is probably safe to say that teachers most commonly rely on the first two, lectures and materials that students are asked to read. Although there is nothing wrong with these practices, it is also safe to say that teachers should seek variety in the mediums used for input experiences. (Marzano, 2007)

Again, we find the assertion that most teachers lecture and assign bookwork, which has not been my experience, even before projectors became widespread. But, there you have it: many teachers quickly figure out that they can use film.¹⁰ It dawns on them that movies give students a way to practice listening while they see meaning and context acted out before them. Besides, many teachers are movie buffs, even if they're otherwise underqualified. Some universities even have classes called "audiovisual English".

To be fair, showing videos in class is not just a lazy means of passing the time in circumstances where students are essentially forced to sit in a classroom somewhere. A teacher can direct students to commit easier words to memory before harder ones, caution students against memorizing obscure words, etc. Furthermore, many students are not accustomed to literary analysis, and the teacher can dissect the characters and narrative themes. However, in my experience few teachers move far beyond a projectionist's capacity. They know they can't get away with only showing movies, so teachers may show a movie or part of a movie in class, or assign a movie outside of class, and then use class time for discussion and/or activities. Both of my colleagues are quite proud that after much confabulation, they "invented" this technique (independent from one another) and one hasn't changed it for over twenty years. Indeed, it seems

¹⁰ One of the first inklings of this project was probably my grade school Spanish teacher using the cartoon series *Muzzy*, which was originally designed in 1986 to teach ESL.

that most teachers, and even businesses, that use film for education don't seem to carry the torch very far.

Typically, for copyright concerns, language publishing companies rely on their own videos made in house; for example, Cambridge University Press' well-known Interchange curriculum – sloganized as “the world's most successful English series for adult and young adult learners” – features company made videos. *Disney English* relies solely on Disney films for their curriculum. Some clever startups like *Fluent U* have managed to repurpose real commercials for language learning, but I haven't seen any company nor teacher manipulate a full range of third-party content, aside from myself. In a nutshell, what I have done over the course of about three years, from 2015 to the present, is designed an intricate system geared toward older learners whereby students use commercial media *in a smart way* to attain fluency in an L2. I found my niche. And, after accepting a very open-ended job role that was seemingly askew from my ambitions, rather than imposing my will or kowtowing to the will of others, through creativity, I have finagled my dream of becoming a linguistics professor.

It all started with my first job at a private high school called Vantage Academy located in the Taiyuan University of Technology. There I taught academic English to high school seniors under the national GAC (Global Assessment Certificate) pre-college preparatory program, which was purchased by the ACT company. In addition, I taught ACT and TOEFL test-prep; in other words, I was very busy. Furthermore, the school had a pipeline of younger students (age 16-17) who either had very weak or very good English ability, attending class with me for three hour stretches each Sunday. The goal was, how can I get students who speak virtually no English to reach the point of achieving high scores on the ACT and TOEFL, such that they will gain acceptance into respectable universities in the West – in some cases, Ivy League universities – within the span of a year and a half? Meanwhile, how can I keep the students who are nearly fluent (some of which had lived abroad) satisfied, while not marginalizing the ones who were too cool for school and only along for the ride, nor the ones who fell asleep because they only knew words like “cake” or “monkey” and resisted learning more.

Additionally, in 2016 I became an “Oral English” teacher at Taiyuan Normal University in the nearby city of Jinzhong (Yuci), also teaching dissertation writing and general college writing. The college students, who were not much older than my previous students, came in two ilks: bad English, and good English. Also similarly, they were concerned about passing their

standardized tests, the CET-4 and CET-6 (which unlike the SAT and ACT, feature English that is not so authentic) and sometimes IELTS. One major difference is they are markedly less motivated, but with just a little tweaking, I could adjust my system to fulfill their needs as well.

To be fair, I am not the only teacher who prepares students for these tests every year; at both schools, students have many other teachers and resources at their disposal. But I was surprised at how rapidly their English levels started to climb once I started teaching the way I do now. And, probably because people tend to like things that they're good at, I was surprised how my attitude toward teaching did a complete 360°. I have remained fixated on the role of curriculum in teaching, but I have gained a deeper understanding of it, and my views on teaching have matured and distilled into three perspectives, for which I will use a religious metaphor:

- Teacher as an apostle: The teacher is all important. The curriculum is either supportive or irrelevant to the teacher as an indispensable individual that directs the semiotic processes of learning.
- Teacher as a clergyman: The name of the school, and/or the name of the curriculum, is all important. The teacher simply facilitates students' learning of the curriculum. Any teacher who is good enough will suffice.
- Teacher a prophet: teacher and curriculum are both important, and complement each other. As a shaman uses the drum, movement and symbols to heal, so does the teacher employ music, gestures, and pictures to teach.

I'm an advocate for the third. Less orthodoxly, instead of the teacher representing him or herself alone, or worse yet, serving as a pawn in a vehicle of mass control, the teacher amplifies his or her own voice by introducing media that has been socially constructed by others, not necessarily the gospel truth, but rather, media that he or she handpicks. Under the method I've developed, any naturally occurring overlap in content between two teachers merely reveals the underlying culture of the creators, or similarities in their personalities, but it doesn't push either on others. The standards that comprise the method are merely meant to improve the consistency and organization of the media presented, which ensure a level of quality control, which benefits the employer. Of benefit to both teacher and employer, I would wager that teachers who use my rather streamlined method of language teaching naturally develop "with-it-ness" very quickly.

Often when I'm teaching, I feel like I'm on autopilot, but not in a way that mind-numbs the classroom – perhaps a more appropriate euphemism is “cruise control”.

I believe only the third perspective can restore the chaotic imbalance of money spent vs. quality of teaching received, which is a bane to the consumer, teacher, and even the employer. While some dishonest folks are making a mint ripping off the tiger moms who race around in this minefield of education as we know it today, bastardizing the concept of “duty” to their staff just to browbeat their subordinates into working for peanuts, greater recognition that certain employers have the best teachers and that the teachers want to work there because they are paid most fairly, would profit those employers more. I could recirculate the well-known fact that U.S. schools pale in comparison to those of other developed nations despite receiving more funding, but this is an autoethnography, so I will give a more personal example.

I often ask my students why they want to attend a top university. Of course, there's little incentive to attend a lower-ranked school, and my would-be answer is often the same as theirs: to get a good job...and the follow up answer: to make more money. But once I got a seemingly more simplistic response, idealistic perhaps, that is possibly the most profound of all: “because I want to become more smart”. Yet, while profound as it is to value learning in the most naturalistic sense, the same mind fell victim to the fallacy that “the top schools are where the smartest people work.” Of course, top institutions offer priceless resources and synergy, yet plenty of smart people don't work in academia. Take award-winning journalists who reveal hidden truths from the depths of obscurity. Take successful entrepreneurs who make fortunes pursuing their interests, unbogged by teaching duties and research responsibilities. At the same time, a lot of very deserving people are never given a chance to shine; you have to be smart enough to work at a good university, but that's just a condition. The world is not a meritocracy.

In my city, I am considered a good teacher. At my workplace, I got the highest ratings on a student opinions survey of all the teaching staff. Yet, a colleague may teach half as good as me and be paid the same. The students usually don't have any frame of reference, and cannot evaluate the quality of education they are receiving. The parents of the students usually assume that if the school's reputation is good, through either word of mouth or mass advertising, they must have the best teachers. As long as the parents assume this, there is no motivation for the school owners to reward their employees for overachieving, especially while people see them as interchangeable, or, expendable. In fact, for a brief period in Beijing, I worked at a school that

was selling my classes to super rich parents for 10x what they were sold for in Taiyuan; thousands of dollars per class! My course was exactly the same; the quality of education was the same, and my hourly wage was the same. Moreover, the very reason those super rich parents came to me was because despite the fact their children attended the “finest” schools money could buy, they couldn’t pass their tests. Often, schools use their good names as an excuse to pay their employees less, and teachers neglect their students more. Most people in the teaching world understand there are hidden gems wherever you go.

Ironically, if the customer were more educated, this would be less of a problem, but it’s more than that. Oddly enough, many of the same ideas of the lessons I teach are freely exchanged in conversing with friends. In one context my ideas are golden, in another, tis gratis. Perhaps the same ideas can also be found in some book or online forum. In fact, the same ideas might be proven wrong according to someone who is wiser than me. The point is, there seems to be little correlation between what you pay and the quality of education you receive, and what the teacher is paid for the quality of education he or she gives. This disorder sweeps unevenly yet tenaciously across the board, from public to private institutions. Surely, there is a more equitable exchange rate for the monetization of ideas!

I can’t stop contemplating the bigger picture of it all – the chain of command in our quickly restructuring and exponentially complex world. I’m essentially using movies, which are probably less informationally dense than books, less interactive than games, but more entertaining than lecturing, as cheap substitute for field trips and time machines? If it were not for my skillful extraction of choice movie moments, Hollywood would be the ultimate authority, but now, it’s almost I’ve got them working for me. And speaking of which, as a teacher, I am expected to be something between a parent and a drill instructor, yet in the process I have essentially become a video editor, transcriber, game designer, book publisher, photographer and so on – a polymath. I am in a position of reorientation, where the meaning of everything external becomes nativized; all perspectives converge at a central horizon point. All possibilities dissolve in the neutrality and ubiquity of the trade, on which people project their incoherent dreams.

As I tell my students: if I can get you more confused than you were before, then my job is done.

3 Theoretical Background

In this section, I give an account of my teaching practice in conjunction with my own academic product I created under my method, of which I know no equivalent.¹¹ Since this is a case study of an unconventional teaching system, I primarily consult canonical works and handbooks for reference. Ideally, I would dive more deeply into cognitive science, language acquisition, and other fields, to find justifications for how my method helps students learn language. However, anyone expert in those fields can immediately identify my method's implications. My primary goal is to articulate myself using proper scholastic jargon, and I pinpoint this study as educational design research. According to the chapter "Educational Design Research" by Susan McKenney and Thomas C. Reeves in the *Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology*:

...educational design research is a genre of research in which the iterative development of solutions (e.g., educational products, processes, programs or policies) to practical and complex educational problems, provides the setting for scientific inquiry, and yields new knowledge that can inform the work of others. Working systematically and simultaneously toward these dual goals may be considered the most defining feature of educational design research. Educational design research is not a methodology. It uses quantitative, qualitative and—probably most often—mixed methods to answer research questions...In addition to the knowledge generated, the value of educational design research is measured in terms of its ability to improved educational practice (Design-Based Research Collective, 2003). (2013)

To recap, I formulated this teaching/study system through common sense – from common knowledge of language, Chinese culture, and so forth. After creating the prototype curriculum, I refined it through trial-and-error over the course of four years teaching. Thus, it can be said that while I have not had the advantages (nor disadvantages) of working in an official team under ideal research conditions, my process has undergone numerous, informal iterations. Only afterwards did I begin this Master's program in Educational Technology to determine formally why it works, and how it may be improved further.

¹¹ I recently stumbled upon "sheltered instruction" and the theories of Dr. Stephen Krashen, University of Southern California in my research. Perhaps this would be my schtick's closest coincidental equivalent I am aware of so far.

3.1 Ten Steps

The following is not a precise recipe for how to clone my academic product, but rather, a list of ingredients you could use to reverse-engineer it, or to cook up your own. Ten steps to pedagogical sobriety! Let's work the steps.

3.1.1. Step 1: Choosing a “foundation” show

The teacher selects one season of a television show to serve as the foundation of the course. Numerous considerations go into selecting which show, such as the plotlines, medium (cartoon, live action, etc.), popularity, whether or not the students have likely watched the show before either in their native language or in the L2, and so forth. Such considerations are beyond the scope of this dissertation to entertain, but after much consideration I chose the show *Doug* (1991-1994),¹² the first season of which consists of one 20 minute episode, and twelve subsequent episodes which are divided into two separate, 10 minute stories. Thus, there are twenty-six classes worth of episodes, which is suitable for one semester of two classes per week, or two semesters of one class per week, in which case classes are anywhere from two to four hours permitting breaks, depending on how much the teacher expands on the material.

No single most study fully vindicates the efficacy of incorporating videos in language teaching, but there is a plethora of studies on doing so, including studies localized to ESL teaching in China; for example: *Designing Video Narratives to Contextualize Content for ESL Learners: A Design Process Case Study* (2008) published in *Interactive Learning Environments*. There are in-depth studies on the effects of subtitling with or without sound vs. not subtitling; studies on types of videos such as full length films, cartoons, news broadcasts, and so forth; and more generally, studies on using narrative formats to enhance recall as opposed to context-free alternatives. I would state the down-to-earth consummation of such studies as such: unlike books, you can hear the language while you read, unlike tapes or the radio, you can see the meaning of the language enacted as you listen and read, and furthermore, most students find videos more entertaining than a person talking.

¹² Copyright concerns are addressed in section 3.4.

It is convenient that each episode has a theme, as most FL language teachers center their classes around various common conversational topics like “superstition”, “sports”, etc. The first semester of my course follows the themes of 1) “travel”, 2) “golf”, and separately, “dance”, 3) “crime”, 4) “romance”, 5) “beauty”, 6) “nature” i.e. camping, 7) “music”, 8) “drama”, 9) “law”, 10) “government”, 11) “talent”, and 12) “fashion”, and separately, “basketball”. An obvious suggestion is to use “previewing” before introducing the episode.

Many of my students have said they appreciate the opportunity to learn about these topics irrespective of the language component. After all, many of my students have a poor educational background, China has a very restricted internet, and so on.

3.1.2. Step 2: Transcribing the script

The teacher must either find a copy of or transcribe the script of the episodes. Prior to attending class, students examine the script, trying to memorize whatever words they do not already know, and scrutinizing the grammatical constructions and cultural themes. They attempt to visualize the story in their head by reading. In electronic format such as .pdf, they can use an instantaneous electronic dictionary (such as youdao) to save time. The teacher may request that the students formulate questions to ask during class time. Additionally, I include reading comprehension questions in my workbook (see step 8).

The repetition of open-class words may be cross-referenced as a measure of their frequency and importance. For example, in my script the word “loser” appears as “loser” in episode one, “loser^{E01}” in episode three, “loser^{E01/E03}” in episode four, and as “loser^{E01/E03/E04}” in episode six. The superscripts signify that this word is indeed frequent in conversational English, and thus more important to learn foremost. Also, notes in the script may correlate to sections in the workbook (see step 8) and powerpoint (see steps 4 and 6).

Many experts don’t disagree that translating documents, rote-memorization of vocabulary, and other traditional methods of learning languages are highly *effective* means of *learning*, especially for Chinese students. However, in general they are not considered *viable* means of *instruction*, at least in Western culture, and are deemed ineffective for that reason. As my favorite Chinese language teacher puts it: “Rote learning, very highly prized in traditional and even modern China, and highly valued at other times in our own past, is no longer generally

considered a beneficial educational method in the West,” (Wheatley, 2010). Therefore, I recommend this work be done outside of class time, flipped classroom style.

3.1.3. Step 3: Playing the episodes

Students should watch an episode before, and perhaps after, dissecting the L2 content (steps 4-9). My students rarely protest when I screen an episode in class, but playing the video before going over it again in the PowerPoint (step 4) is quite a spoiler alert. Thus, alternatively students may procure the episodes to watch at home.

The teacher asks students to record how much they understand each time in the form of a percentage. Note that teachers should distinguish “how much of the video do you understand” from “how much of the language of the video do you understand”, since students typically feel they can comprehend the story without understanding much of the English. This serves as a formative assessment, as opposed to a summative one; if the student studies enough then the percentage will increase. However, note that if this percentage decreases in the short term, it can be a sign of increased awareness; learning to appreciate how much significance they had overlooked prior to the teacher’s explanations (step 4) and assumed was not there.

Some of my colleagues recommend that students watch a video several times to improve their listening comprehension. Anecdotally, they claim this “trains the students’ ears” and “alleviates word parsing issues”. Additionally, some students I’ve met have mentioned they use this technique as recommended by their Chinese English teachers.

3.1.4. Step 4: Chunking the show into video clips on PowerPoint slides

The teacher splices the episode into a series of video clips (for me, it’s about 40-50 clips per 10-minute episode), then puts one clip on each slide of a PowerPoint with the transcript for reference, as in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Two contiguous slides from story 6.

This is one of the most time consuming and boring procedures of the method, however, it is not particularly time consuming in of itself, averaging me about one hour per episode. Splice points are fairly intuitive and depend on whatever the teacher wishes to focus on as a point of inquiry or explanation. I use Windows Movie Maker due to its simplicity and the fact it is free.

This work could be done in teams, say, by delegating certain episodes to certain people. However, prior to splicing, teachers would need to review the script to establish which words are important to emphasize incrementally. Otherwise, two different teachers might end up teaching the same words in different lessons!

Location of the items on the PowerPoints is a concern that requires additional research. Issues range from the size of the video clips, the position of the clips (right, center, left), the size of the text, the font, the placement of the text, the placement of the images accompanying vocabulary (see step 5), and so forth. Luckily, in testing (see section **5 Results**) students did not indicate this is a major concern as is.

When presenting to the class, the video clip on each slide plays automatically, and after the teacher can move on to the next slide. However, the teacher is free to stop the clip at a certain moment or replay it. At the very least if the students are not cooperative, it gives the teacher a way of passing the time that is slightly more educationally-oriented than showing a movie. At most, however, the teacher can:

- Explain the definitions of certain words, e.g. “smart” vs. “clever”.
- Comment on grammatical features, e.g. “me and Skeeter” vs. “Skeeter and I”.
- Tell stories or give anecdotes, e.g. “let me tell you about the time I almost got arrested...”
- Elaborate on elements of the storyline or character development.

- Field questions from students at relevant intervals.
- Reveal underlying cultural significances, e.g. “suede shoes” and Elvis.
- Etc.

Participation may consist of asking students questions, reciprocal teaching, using props to engage the students, and so forth. For example, in one class where I teach the expression “to turn lemons into lemonade,” I take out a lemon and ask the students if they know the word in English. Then I throw the lemon to a student and ask the catcher “Do you want to eat this?” and then “Why not?” The student throws the lemon back to me and then I demonstrate how to make lemonade. Finally, (switching the lemonade I concocted haphazardly with a commercial brand) I give the bottle of lemonade to a student and ask the student if he or she wants to drink it. This conveys how one might attempt to figure out expressions on one’s own rather than simply memorizing the translation.

While the sheer amount of language in one of these PowerPoints may seem overwhelming for low-level students, remember that students are already expected to have reviewed the content before class. Thus, they are able to focus specifically on unknown elements and their own general inadequacies become apparent to them, such as low vocabulary, weak grammar, etc. In this way, the teacher can effectively fill different gaps in students’ L2 knowledge and consolidate students’ understanding of the L2 content as a group. For example, some students know the word “journal”, but not “diary”, others vice versa, and while others know both words, others know neither. Yet, if students learn everything from the script and PowerPoint, they will all know both synonyms.



Figure 2: Two non-contiguous slides from different lessons. In story 1, the word “journal” is taught. In story 2, the word “diary” is used.

Many L2 teachers are either negligent of their fluent speech and use difficult words that the students obviously do not understand, or they attempt to modify their speech by using simple words. At first, monolingual teachers may feel self-conscious that their students might not understand their speech and directions. Yet, after the teacher gets used to which terms he or she specifically teaches, the teacher grows more confident using such language with the students.

As time goes on, if students recognize more and more of the words in future lessons, it is a self-vindicating sign that their English is improving. Within the context of oral English teaching in China, in which students have all types of English classes every day, this kind of course may be regarded as a series of *assessments* rather than a series of classes meant to increase students' knowledge or improve their skills. In other words, if students find that as time goes on they can understand the language of the stories better, it is a sign that their studying is paying off in general, and if not, it is feedback that they need to study more in general.

Analyzing the episode chunk-by-chunk is thought to reduce students' cognitive overload, or at least this format enables the teacher to manage it. The teacher can easily alternate his or her flow by resonating on a certain moment, skipping through certain moments, taking a break from the material, etc. as needed. Furthermore, reviewing the same content in class that students were expected to have studied beforehand in script and video form gives students yet another, slightly different exposure to the content. More technically put, schema-wise – using Piaget's (1896-1910) definitions – whereas step 2 and 3 involve “assimilating” information, step 4 entails “accommodating” it.

At the end of the day, I find the reason why many so many students' English is bad, is simply because they need to bite the bullet and well...study English. Language mastery requires a disciplined mind with a long attention span; it necessitates learning to walk before you can run. Some students will do whatever it takes to cheat or weasel their way out of this immutable fact. While having an international, well-deserved reputation for being assiduous, the Chinese also have a reputation for finding the path of least resistance – take the nationwide ACT shutdowns over mass cheating for example. To be fair, a lot of this behavior arises from impossible expectations; many students work all day and don't have time to study at point blank range. This kind of class, of course, affords them that time, but moreover, it stands as a methodological role-model for how to study language efficiently using videos in a strategic, organized way. In fact, it potentially “trains language students how to teach language”. After all, Chinese students are not

known for their independent study habits. As one researcher puts it in an article about self-regulation among Chinese college students studying English:

The dominant English classroom instruction pedagogy in China is still teacher-centered where students are not encouraged to develop their own strategies, but instead to follow teacher's words. This way of pedagogy might be beneficial for students to gain knowledge and have good performance on English examinations which focus on content knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure); however, it is not good for students to discover the freedom they might have in developing their own ways of learning. This could also explain the small effect sizes of the relationships between participants' use of SRL strategies and their performance on English exams... There was such a strong focus on passing CET-4 in college English curriculum that most teachers only teach students knowledge and skills to do well in this test and ignore the practical use of English as a communication tool. (Wang, 2004)

I'm not sure I concur with the author's later suggestion "...have more group work instead of lectures since small group collaboration and a social constructivist's learning environment enhance students' use of SRL strategies (Boekaerts & Cascallar, 2006)," but certainly we wouldn't want to detract from students' test performance. In fact, I would argue my method imbues them with practical English while bolstering their test performance, by sticking with a teacher-centered pedagogical method called "direct instruction": a multifaceted style of teaching that basically boils down to telling people to learn what they need to know.

Direct instruction, and teaching methods like it, have faced a significant resistance as opposed to less didactic approaches like "inquiry learning", "problem-based learning", etc. – which I often characterize as "teachers outsourcing their work to their students". Unfortunately, Chinese scholars tend to copy Western doctrines that traditional teaching is outmoded. As one Chinese researcher so eloquently put it:

Compared with the dumb English classes before, oral English classes improve students' enthusiasm and interest in learning English. They can also improve students' impression of oral English. However, it is still great far away from the tasks established. Generally speaking, the following mistakes exist in modern oral English teaching. First, the English classes are organized in a dumb way. Because some of the English teachers are relatively old or they have been teaching English in a dumb way for a long time, their oral teaching still focuses on explaining grammars, idioms, memorizing, and reciting. Some of the teachers adopt the methods of reading and writing, spending more time on input. Some even play a monodrama so that students have less time to exercise. Although some teachers

have realized that oral teaching should be student-centered, their teaching effects are still not ideal due to the reason that they have not found their right role. Therefore, the oral English of students has not improved obviously. (Liu, 2013)

Yet, even education research bigwigs like Robert Marzano or John Hattie, who wrote *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of over 800 Meta-analyses Relating to Achievement*, cannot deny the supremacy of direct instruction, as proven by massive meta-analyses.

Every year I present lectures to teacher education students and find that they are already indoctrinated with the mantra “constructivism is good, direct instruction bad.” When I show them the results of these meta-analyses, they are stunned, and they often become angry at having been given an agreed set of truths and commandments against direct instruction...Direct instruction has a bad name for the wrong reasons, especially when it is confused with didactic teaching, as the underlying principles of Direct Instruction place it among the most successful outcomes. (2009)

In fact, many researchers believe that direct instruction benefits East Asian students in particular. In her recent book, *Little Soldiers*, journalist Amy Chu cites several experts who endorse this fact, including the famous Andreas Schleicher in reference to the well-known PISA test.

This Western approach comes out of the idea that memorization and direct instruction are negative, Schleicher says, but in fact knowledge delivered this way can be a very useful tool. “The Chinese memorize what needs memorizing and use the rest of the time to go very deep in conceptual understanding. Then we are surprised that our (Western) students don’t develop deep conceptual understanding that students in Shanghai do.”

Yang Xiaowei arrived at the same conclusion. An education professor at East China Normal University, he recently visited eighteen schools in the United States and concluded that the American teaching approach is “good in theory, but doesn’t work in reality.” There’s too much focus on making kids “interested” in math and on project-based and experiential learning, Yang told me. “Too little focus on directly teaching math.”

The student-centered approach that Yang witnessed helps kids engage more meaningfully with subjects and better understand classroom content, its supporters say. Kids can also travel at their own pace. (Yet, while this type of instruction can be very effective, it also requires training and preparation to deploy it successfully.)

In fact, the “direct instruction” favored by the Chinese is better for early learning in many disciplines, especially those with “multistep procedures that students are unlikely to discover on their own, such as geometry, algebra, and computer programming,” wrote two professors in a Psychological Science article. In early science education, especially, “many more children learned from direct

instruction than from self-discovery.” A 2015 OECD report found that teacher-directed instruction is actually associated with higher scores in science (and inquiry-based instruction with lower scores). Kids in countries with more teacher-directed instruction were also more likely to express interest in pursuing a science-related career. I most enjoyed the stark takedown of a group of education researchers who wrote in the *Educational Psychologist* that “the past half-century of empirical research” provides “overwhelming and unambiguous evidence” that minimally guided instruction is essentially a failure. (2017)

3.1.5. Step 5: Teaching vocabulary

Most of my students learn words by memorizing lists with no rhyme nor reason, though sometimes organized alphabetically at least. Their strategy for learning English is essentially to memorize the dictionary from cover to cover. Of course, they find themselves losing heart and forgetting the first words they learned by the time they near the end of the queue. Parallely, a lot of my Chinese colleagues scribble neologisms from their advanced reading books on the board that I’ve never even heard of, like “glowsticking” or “squad goal”, in juxtaposition to terms as basic as “raw” or “broom” – I can’t even guess what that particular story was about! Some parents, teachers, and students just equate “good English” with knowing some very impressive vocabulary like “motherboard” or “cinematography”. It is more effective to group words by semantic domain, or at least make learning outcomes scalable; learning easy, more frequent words before more difficult and rare words.

Professor Alan Maley, who has worked in eight countries including PR China, India and Singapore, said in 1986, “Chinese student and foreign teacher rarely share the same views on the nature of the teaching process. Even now the most widely accepted view of learning in China is that it is memory-based. The teacher, or the textbook, has the knowledge. In order to acquire it, it is sufficient for the student to commit it to memory. This inevitably condemns both teachers and students to the use of non-meaningful approaches, in which grammatical form (usually devoid of contextual meaning) takes precedence over meaningful communication.” The following metaphorical expression used to be and even now is very popular: the Chinese “students demonstrate their ability to work hard at digging a hole. But all too often, it is dug in the wrong place. (Maley, 1986)” (Gui, 2005)

Whenever the dialogue uses difficult and/or subject-specific words that students probably do not know, the teacher can focus on them. Fluent speakers can intuitively identify “hard words”; for one, easier, more frequent words tend to be shorter. Regardless, one can always test the words’

reading level, such as their Flesch-Kincaid grade level, using a free online calculator. I make important words in a different color font, orange, and if they are repeated later, brown.¹³ When students see a word in orange, it means they should learn it now because they will see it again later in the episode. When students see a word in brown it means they should recognize it, and if they don't, they had better memorize it now because they had failed to do so before.

The teacher represents the meaning of each word with an image. Of course, teachers can target creative commons licensed works, but I would encourage them to take their own photos at the students' school or around their city. Not only does this raise students' interest in the content, it reinforces the fact that the teacher has made the content ideally to teach his or her own students, and is not lazily relying on someone else's materials. Students tend to respect and appreciate this effort, especially if their other teachers are bumming off materials that are not personalized to their students.

With literal terms, finding an image is usually easy, but choosing the best one is not; there are intricate guidelines to follow that are beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss. However, clip art usually suffices. A search targeting .png files usually results in images with transparent backgrounds (often the background is distracting, or you may want to combine several smaller pictures to make your own image). Otherwise, the background can be deleted in Photoshop and saved as a .png or .gif.



to pitch (a tent) (v.)



trophy (n.)



embarrassing (adj.)

Figure 3: Images used to represent tangible vocabulary of different parts of speech, from story 6, 9 and 8 respectively. Some verbs are probably best represented using animated gifs.

Depicting figurative concepts like “time” or “sophisticated” is less intuitive, but achievable through semiotics. Utilize iconicity, indexicality and symbolism. Perhaps use gesturing in presenting the image. At the very least, you can just provide the translation as a footnote under the transcript portion.

¹³ I chose orange because the color theme of the PowerPoints is orange, since the show is from Nickelodeon, which has an orange logo. Besides, it is vibrant (unlike brown) but not as aggressive as highlighting.



to accumulate (v.)



volunteer (n.)



random (adj.)

Figure 4: Images used to represent intangible vocabulary of different parts of speech, from story 1, 6 and 10 respectively.

I have witnessed some truly ghastly mistakes when it comes to teaching words with images. One company I worked for, QTalk, reused a picture of a mouth for “mouth” and “to speak”, and showed a picture of a vacuum cleaner for “to clean”. This confused the students, as they were tempted to say things like “I mouth (language)” rather than “I speak (language)”.

More commonly, many products try to cut corners by reusing stock photos. For example, in teaching the word “pour”, a product might reuse an image of two people sitting at a restaurant with a waiter pouring their drinks, then reuse it for “dining”, “to order”, etc. A better alternative would be to alter the picture such that it is focused on the action of pouring, as through cropping, centering or blurring out areas.



Figure 5: A stock photo that could be irresponsible reused for “to eat out”, “waiter, and “to pour”, cropped and recentered for an ideal representation of “waiter”, then for “to pour”.

Representing “anonymity” or “general vs. specific” presents an immediate roadblock, but one that can be rectified through creative means; you don’t necessarily need a massive corpus of images.

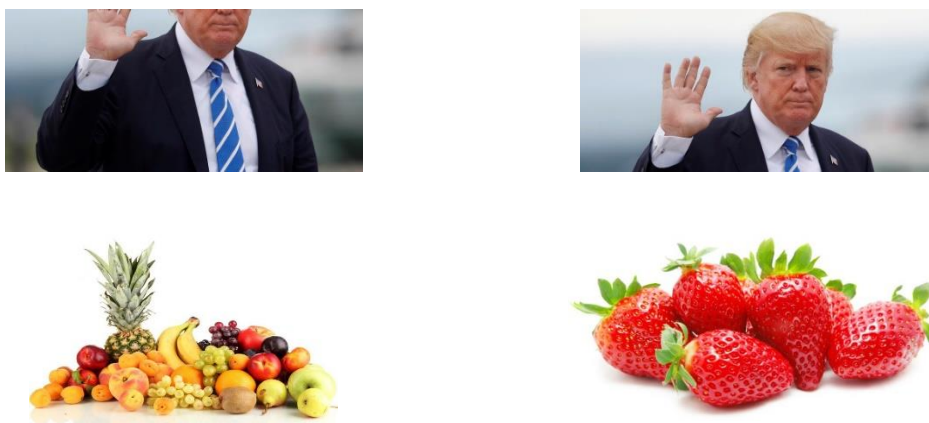


Figure 6: Ways of representing anonymity visually: “somebody” (generic) vs. “Donald Trump” (specific) and ways of representing generality vs. specificity: “fruit” vs. “strawberries”, * “fruit”.

The teacher can put the IPA of the word underneath, copying from a dictionary like dictionary.com. The teacher can also choose to include a translation of the word, which can help him or her learn the students’ L1. I find it helps to translate certain vocabulary words on the spot while lecturing, so the students with weak L2 ability can better comprehend what you’re saying. The teacher can use an automatic translation program, then have the students check it, as most translation programs to date are not very reliable.

Images provide students with non-linguistic representation of words; colloquially put, they are good for “visual learners”. The visual format also allows students to check their understanding of vocabulary instantaneously. Often, students accidentally memorize incorrect translations, for example, in looking up the word “kiwi” (fruit) they might accidentally memorize the translation as *Apteryx* (the flightless bird).

I’m surprised at how organically the number of context-specific, intermediate-advanced vocabulary words levels out in each lesson. Despite the fact some words learned in previous episodes resurface in later episodes, the number of new vocabulary items in each episode averages pretty cleanly to around twenty five. Thus, if students learn the words from each lesson, they will hear those words repeated in subsequent lessons, and, they can increase their vocabulary incrementally. In education, this is called “scaffolding”.

The number of new words does taper off slightly toward the end, but this is good since the workload naturally conforms to the dwindling energy supply of the students. In university English teaching in particular, by the end of class students are typically preoccupied by passing their tests.

Often, TV shows establish recurring themes which serve as a natural form of review. For example, in the first season of *Doug* there are multiple episodes about superheroes, as well as baseball, spaced reasonably apart.

3.1.6. Step 6: Showing video clips

Intermittently, teacher exposes students to video clips that expand on the vocabulary, grammar, cultural themes, etc. of the episode. I edit my own clips from electronic video files, but in many cases, pre-cut video clips can be downloaded from YouTube or other such websites. I use the open-source program Aegisub to subtitle videos and the free software AVIREComp to add a black letterbox under the videos on which the subtitles are burned.¹⁴ AVIREComp also allows you to standardize the video's size; ultra-widescreen movies appear quite small on the projector. Since AVIREComp only works with .avi files, if you have an .mp4, .mkv or other format you can use a converter like Freemake.

If students cannot read the subtitles and watch at the same time then they are free to ignore them. Mostly, they are included for reference; in case I want to pause the video and focus on the words that were uttered. However, most of my students report they can follow the subtitles, and prefer them since video dialogue is typically harder to discern than live speech.

The assemblage of a video clip database is perhaps best done in teams for two reasons: one, it is time consuming, and two, team members may draw off their own distinct, eclectic tastes in media. In fact, Other media can suffice in place of video clips from movies and TV shows, such as trailers, commercials, music videos, songs with lyrics (karaoke style), and so forth.

Pervasively, teachers should make an effort to acquire media that is especially humorous, exciting, profound, and so forth. Such media:

- Provides non-sequiturs from the monotony of the lesson.
- Communicates the expanse of the teacher's knowledge, similar to quoting from a wide variety of sources in a scholarly paper.

¹⁴ If you play the videos independently the subtitles don't need to be burned, but otherwise you cannot insert them in the PowerPoint. I find it better to burn subtitles on the letterbox, because sometimes it is hard to read them if the video's background is the same color. Additionally, sometimes the video already features subtitles, in which case my subtitles overlap.

- Acts as a form of “citational proof” that verify the teacher’s seemingly subjective claims regarding his or her culture to members of the foreign culture.
- Gives students additional practice. By tracking how much content is familiar vs, foreign to them, students self-assess their own progress.
- Demonstrates that the English they are learning is useful for understanding movies without subtitles, and by proxy, real-world situations.
- Motivates students to study more; if some students laugh at a funny video for example, but other students do not get the joke, they get the feeling they are missing out.

The choice of video clips is intuitive among members of the same culture of the same generation; in conversations with other teachers as to how to teach certain words or concepts the same movie moments come to mind, analogous to meme trends. Let’s do a little test:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1) “Inconceivable!” | a) <i>Forrest Gump</i> (1994) |
| 2) “Show me the money.” | b) <i>The Princess Bride</i> (1987) |
| 3) “Life is like a box of chocolates.” | c) <i>Jerry Maguire</i> (1996) |

Multiple, optional videos can be embedded in the PowerPoint, which allows the teacher to expand or contract the length of the class. Furthermore, a diversity of video clips can be utilized to customize the class according to the specific interests of the student(s). Both of these features are particularly beneficial for one-on-one tutoring. Also, in my experience sometimes students from a morning class would attend an evening class (the same class), and in this case the teacher can show them something other than what they were already exposed to.

3.1.7. Step 7: Creating explanatory slides

When needed, teachers make slides that contain visual aids, descriptions, little puzzles or riddles, famous quotes, and so forth. Personally, I focus a lot on etymology, as in figure 7. Before break, I display a slide containing a trivia question related to the topic, and after break I give the answer.

Graphics on a slide can be presented in step-by-step fashion, utilizing the “animations” feature of PowerPoint. For entertainment value, I use a remote clicker and pretend I am physically pushing the images that fly on the screen, or by snapping my fingers as a magician, making the images appear out of thin air. It’s memorizing.

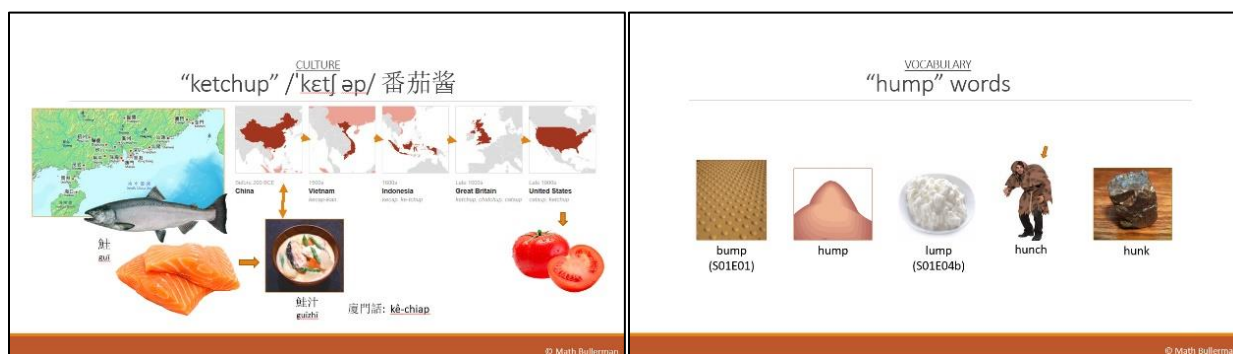


Figure 7: Explaining the etymology of “ketchup” from story 1, and associating words by phonaesthetics from story 9.

3.1.8. Step 8: Writing an accompanying workbook

To encourage deep learning, teachers may write an accompanying workbook with exercises that correspond to features of the script/PowerPoint transcription. At my university, teachers are free to print and sell their books – inexpensive printshops can be found in every institution.

Likely, native discourse will be too difficult and intimidating for students with a low English level to read, in which case the teacher may have the text translated. As an alternative, I write my books in simplistic English with some L2 glosses. This takes practice, but is not difficult to get used to. If you prefer, many people have created official guidelines for writing controlled English varieties meant to serve as international auxiliary languages, such as Ogden’s “basic English”.

Whenever a student sees a footnote number above an underlined word or phrase in the script and PowerPoint – such as 1.5, 2.7, or whatever – that means such information correlates to a section of the book. The section of the book may simply consist of reading or exercises. Sometimes the section of the book can reiterate what the teacher says in class i.e. lecture notes, in case students did not understand by listening or do not remember. Otherwise, it gives the teacher the opportunity to express more than what class time allows. Here is an excerpt from one of my chapters of one of my books (Bullerman, 2016):

1.22 The Adjectival -y Suffix

The adjectival -y suffix, not to be confused with the diminutive -y suffix (See 1.18) or various other suffixes that end in -y, turns nouns into adjectives (e.g. “sleep” (n.) vs. “sleepy” (adj.)). As you can see from the examples of “snappy” and “hearty”, sometimes the change in meaning is not obvious. Try to guess the meaning of the following words, given the meaning of their root forms. Guessing new vocabulary is an essential skill for an ESL student, and these words appear in future lessons.

brain (n.) (头脑)	1. brainy (adj.)	a. curious (好奇)
hand (n.) (手)	2. handy (adj.)	b. sentimental (感伤)
louse (n.) (虱子)	3. lousy (adj.)	c. smart (聪明)
nose (n.) (鼻子)	4. nosy (adj.)	d. useful (有用的)
sap (n.) (树液)	5. sappy (adj.)	e. worthless (毫无价值的)

Rather than putting the answers at the end of the book, I copy and paste the content on a PowerPoint and reveal the answers slide by slide. It really helps to fill up class time, and motivates students to attend class to get the answers.

3.1.9. Step 9: Designing activities

The product provides knowledge-based content on which teachers can default. It takes the pressure off the teacher by doing some of the work for him or her. If the teacher is not feeling well, he or she may choose to let more of the product do the work. In fact, this characteristic enables me to freelance for many more hours than other teachers feel capable of working. Moreover, in many settings, students are unmotivated and unwilling to participate, and at certain times, the teacher may not know what to do to run out the clock.

However, the existence of the product does not overrule the teacher’s freedom to teach as he or she sees fit. The teacher does not have to use the product, especially for the entire duration of the class. In fact, a range of skill-based activities meshes well with the content. In my experience, within the span of two hours, most students find they need a break from intense concentration and would prefer to learn by doing. Here is a short list of activities I employ in conjunction with certain episodes:

- Story 1 (travel): After learning the term “hay bale” and the teacher introducing students to the concept of using hay bales to build mazes, one student must find a path through a maze on paper without seeing the maze, by following a list of directions read by another student (“make a quick left”, “go straight for quite a while”, etc.). The line drawn should

represent the maze's solution. As a primer I play the scene from *The Matrix* (1999) where Morpheus directs Neo on a cell phone to a back office.

- Story 3 (crime): Students draw a picture of a criminal from a list of fifteen descriptions. The illustrations should look identical by the end. As a primer, I play part of an episode of *Cops*.
- Story 4 (romance): In the middle of the episode, the high school nurse uses the interjection “bingo”. At this point I break from the PowerPoint and students play bingo, only instead of having cards with different numbers, there are different minimal pairs that Chinese students have notorious trouble distinguishing or mixing up, which I read randomly: “picture” vs. “pitcher”, “récord” vs. “record”, “tomato” vs. “potato” and so forth.
- Story 6 (nature): Students go through a desert island survival role play game that I found as a website and downloaded. Whenever they make a choice, such as “go into the jungle or climb the hill” students are asked to explain their rationale. As this lesson pertains to wildlife, I also do an activity where I demonstrate various animal signs in ASL and have students guess the meaning.
- Story 7 (music): After the episode features a trivia contest, students play a faux Jeopardy tournament (PowerPoint templates for this can be found online).

3.1.10. Step 10: Verifying the method's efficacy to the students

This is a unique method of teaching/learning language. Often, students need proof that this method works. In fact, belief that the method does not work can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy: students will fail due to a preliminary lack of faith.

The teacher shows the students a popular movie, and whenever the movie uses a word that is also found in the teacher's curriculum, the corresponding slide is inserted. I simply published several slides pulled from my various PowerPoints as an .mp4, in which case slides are displayed for two or three seconds as a video, then in Movie Maker, I spliced the movie with my slides.

For example, I used *Back to the Future II* (1989). In one of my early lessons, a bully uses the phrase “don't chicken out”, and I teach the students what it means in English to be “a

chicken” – a coward. In *Back to the Future II*, when the bully accuses the main character of being a chicken, I include that slide from my course to remind the students we went over it. Other vocabulary items that happened to correspond include “loser”, “wimp”, “to kid”, etc. Thus, it is proven to students that the product can help them understand movies if they study from it, and if they can understand movies in the L2 that means they are learning. It is a kind of intrinsic reward.

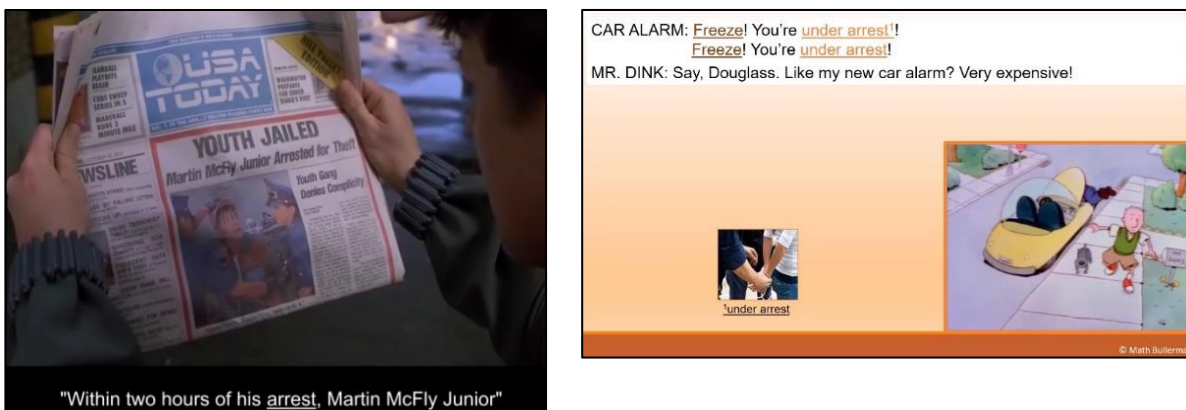


Figure 8: Evidence that the word “arrest”, which appears in story 3, is also used in *Back to the Future II* (1989).

3.2 Is a Live Teacher Needed?

When people have seen my method in action, they often question whether or not the teacher is an essential component. Some common questions I have received include: “Did you automate yourself out of your own job?” Indeed, there are reports of unsupervised teachers showing documentaries or running through edutainment programs rather than teaching. Moreover, fears that machines will replace teachers, as technology has supplanted manpower in many other professions, circulate widely. On the same accord I am asked: “Can’t the students just be given the PowerPoints to study outside of class?” In fact, I do give .pdf versions of the PowerPoints out for students to review, but neither the .pdf or .pptx include my explanations, stories, etc. Basically, I don’t think class should be only about activities. I’ve also gotten the reaction: “Is this product for online teaching?” Just because it’s a software does not mean it is meant for online use, although it could be, and would likely be way more interesting than watching a guy on a headset. Most booming online ESL businesses like 51Talk, VIPKid, DadaABC, QKids, Sprout, etc. have largely neglected the curriculum aspect of their businesses.

The answer to all these questions is, a live teacher is *required*, but is not *essential*. One could present the PowerPoints as a MOOC, especially if the teacher was recorded explaining the material. However, there are many more benefits to having a live teacher run the product:

- While the famous 1966 Coleman report argued that teachers have a negligible effect on student learning, other big names in education have more recently concluded that teachers greatly affect student learning, and some have indicated the teacher is the most important factor, after having conducted large scale studies. Content and curriculum is just one of several essential components.
- The teacher is needed for interaction; conversation can be a wild card and any two classes with the same aim can end up radically different from one another. As my advisor once said, referring to physics, whatever happens in the classroom is like a field. Less erratically though, the teacher is needed to provide feedback, correct misunderstandings, and so forth. For activities, it also helps to have fellow students; especially in an ESL setting where more competent students often explain or translate to weaker students. While the critical-input experience can be made customizable rather than static through offering a wide variety of video clips or spin-off explanatory slides – much like a choose-your-own adventure novel – overall the product as it is now does not have the ability to interact with students alone.
- Several studies have found that the teacher's enthusiasm significantly enhances students' interest and motivation, as does the teacher's relationship with the students. Skype didn't replace telephones, and neither did it replace face-to-face meetings. Rather, it filled a sociological niche between people who want to talk without being seen and people who prefer live interaction but have to settle for distance communication due to time and cost.

Note, however, that one benefit of this approach is that lessons are highly regimented and the dialogue of a teacher can even be scripted. Thus, any teacher, regardless of talent, could fill the dummy role. At the same time, many teachers prefer autonomy, and would not be happy being forced to teach someone else's class. Thus, again, this method remains potentially lock-able and personalize-able, which leads us to the next section.

3.3 Teachers Create Their Own Products

“...in China, there exists such a contradictory situation in English teaching: People who are good at multimedia have no idea about English teaching while some English teachers know little about multimedia,” (Zhen, 2016). Although many of my students regard the ability to create PowerPoints as some arcane skill, this method spills out a way of making tutorials using widely available, user-friendly programs.

I considered calling my method “The Snowflake Method” – as a wordsmith naturally under pressure to ideate ingenious brand names, I am avoidant of the usual cheesy acronym that spells out a real word, sly misspelling (e.g. Rype), or wonky phonesthetic (e.g. Mango Languages) strategies, and above all, the dreaded “lang” or “ling” mashup (e.g. Duolingo, Lingualy, Lingumi, need I go on?). At first I figured, under my method, no matter how one makes one’s product, there is an element of uniqueness that does not violate the consistency of the principles, just like a snowflake. Yet another spin: the educated portion of my generation, millennials, are often deemed “snowflakes” because many feel they are entitled to be paid for little more than projecting their narcissism and championing political agendas, as they had been trained to do in school, whenever they’re not busy watching nostalgic movies or YouTube all day. Well, if you’re willing to sacrifice a bit of preparation time, your job can become basically that.

The catch is, it may seem relatively simple to recreate your own product based on the ten steps I have outlined, however, often things are more difficult than they seem. Do-it-yourself manuals are way more involved than descriptions. For example, once a colleague saw me subtitling a video clip from a well-known movie, and smirkingly suggested: “you know you can download subtitles online, right?” Yet, this conveyed a greater deal of ignorance than he realized. Indeed, transcription is very tedious work – it is a booming industry in fact. When people first start doing this work they are amazed at how much they tend to overlook when watching film, and many portions of a film are inaudible, forcing me to consult a free script online. But in reference to his recommended shortcut, myriad concerns come with using third-party transcriptions.

- Downloaded subtitles are not always in sync with the particular movie file you have.

- Downloaded subtitles are prone to contain errors like spelling mistakes, malapropisms, etc.
- Downloaded subtitles often inadequately transcribe speech. For example, instead of transcribing a song, the transcription is “[singing]” rather than the lyrics.
- Downloaded subtitles often abbreviate speech, e.g. “That’s the one that belongs to me!” as “That belongs to me!”
- Downloaded subtitles often use different words than speech, especially if they are intended for the Deaf or hearing impaired, e.g. “That’s the one that belongs to me!” as “That’s mine!”. Because for the Deaf, English is a second language, they often have low reading levels.
- Downloaded subtitles use different methods of breaking up the subtitles such that few words are shown at a time, or several. In general, few words at a time, centered, keeps the viewer’s eyes focused on the middle, however, this makes syntax harder to examine. Furthermore, consider the way punctuation is used; inconsistent use of punctuation can confuse the student who is studying writing.

One minute miscomprehension of methodology is like an Achille’s heel that can result in hundreds of hours of corrections (imaging having to re-subtitle an entire video database!). I myself have worked out all the kinks, painstakingly, however, creating a fully detailed manual that others can use is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

3.4 Copyright Concerns

My paranoid American friends often raise the issue of copyright. Most teachers probably won’t rely on materials that remain seventy years after the death of the author. Having worked at a social-media startup next to Tumblr., I am familiar with some of the laws and loopholes.

Regarding images, to avoid potential copyright concerns one can either pay dues, ask artists for reuse permission, or target Creative Commons licensed material – many search engines give you that option. Better yet though, as I mentioned previously, teachers can make their own images or solicit images from students. Regarding video clips, showing a variety of short video clips is pretty much in line with “academic fair use”, as would be citing passages from a variety of

readings in a paper. Using materials that other people have uploaded on social media from copyrighted sources is quite a gray area, as is modifying commercially available media. The lawyer at my former company advised the founders that the more they inquire about copyright, the more they potentially incriminated themselves!

Use of the “foundation” show is questionable under intellectual property, especially if the teacher decides to show the entire episode in class from start to finish in step 4, and chooses one episode from the same show for each class in the course. In general, this was not a problem for me in China, a country notorious for disregarding copyright laws. There is already a chain in my city called Sesame Street English, and I doubt they have dealings with PBS. For large scale operations, one would have to seek consent from the creator. I imagine someone like Jim Davis would take interest in the notion of expanding Garfield (already popular in China) deeper into the ESL market. I’ve always wanted to work for Paws Inc! Look up the history of “Garfield minus Garfield”.

3.5 Updating

Once a library of video clips has been amassed, new clips can replace former clips with minimal effort. This can be conceived as an evolutionary process – an initial population increase results in a natural selection of the choicest moments from a surfeit videos of different time periods. I’ve found that this practice allows me to discern otherwise unobvious patterns; repeated ideas, unexpected correlations, etc. In working with videos from the ‘90s, I’ve come to understand more deeply what my childhood decade was all about.

If part of teaching is to consist of the transmission of wisdom, one definition of “wisdom” is truth that has withstood the test of time. It is present in multiple contexts across multiple sources. Or perhaps, an impending devolution will be exposed...

And I thought about books. And for the first time I realized that a man was behind each one of the books. A man had to think them up. A man had to take a long time to put them down on paper...Picture it. Nineteenth-century man with his horses, dogs, carts, slow motion. Then, in the twentieth century, speed up your camera. Books cut shorter. Condensations. Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending. (Bradbury, 1953)

3.6 “Hacking” Other Shows

Once an individual or team has created a series of tutorials from one foundation show, it is much quicker and easier to make another series from a completely different foundation show. Many of the images, video clips and explanatory slides should carry over. “Intermediate ESL” is its own milieu.

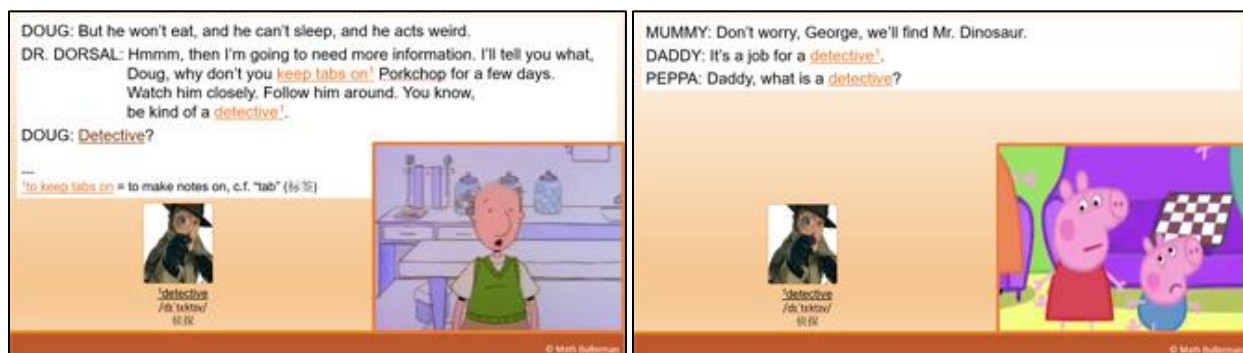


Figure 9: “Hacking” *Peppa Pig*, now popular in China. The transcript coincidentally corresponded to a slide in the curriculum previously built around *Doug* (story 4).

4 Methods

Although Chinese people have a reputation for giving frank criticism, especially negative feedback, my fears were that my teaching product has several flaws that students failed to bring to my attention out of politeness, impassivity, or any number of qualities. There is a cultural taboo against openly criticizing one's teacher, though it's slightly waived in passive aggressive settings. Indeed, one major, simple suggestion that students failed to bring to my attention directly, but indicated to me in writing, is to reduce the volume of the videos I play. At one point a student meekly demonstrated how the volume knob on the school's speaker works, without revealing what he was hinting at. Likely this had to do with giving me "face".

Thus, the evaluation method I chose is written, unstructured questionnaire with fixed, open-ended questions, which in line with my ambitions, is epistemologically similar to a business collecting marketing reviews after launching an academic product. Just as well, obstacles beyond my control, such as the poor speaking ability of the students, made alternative methods of evaluation, such as verbal interviews or focus groups, less desirable.

When it came to designing questions and anticipating responses, my fears were myriad. I know students think my class is entertaining, but do they feel it actually helps their English? Can they really follow the text at the top of the screen, listen, and watch the video in the bottom right corner at the same time? Can they follow the subtitles as they listen and see video clips featuring rapid, fluent speakers flash before their eyes? Are some students lost even though they seem to pay attention, and do the ones who act bored think the class is too easy or too hard? After all, the college I teach at is considered one of the low-ranking, "lazy" ones, in contrast to China's notoriously demanding high schools, test prep mills, and top-notch universities like Peking University, Tsinghua University, etc. Surely the cartoon I use is a bit boring and dated, and several of the videos are outdated as well – is this a major problem? Yet, of course I did not want to hint at these problems in the interview questions. I figured I would make a list of a few, nonchalant questions and see if they indicated my anxieties. Basically, I just wanted to know what they think of my class, specifically the academic product versus the teacher presenting it.

I collected responses from two morning, mid-week classes; one earlier in the week, one later in the week.

- On April 23rd, 2018, I collected 52 interviews from “class 12”, which consists of sophomore English majors that had been meeting each Tuesday from 8:00 – 10:00 AM, since March 5th. Thus, students were present for 7 classes.
- On April 26th, 2018, I collected 26 interviews from “class 34”, which consists of sophomore translation majors that had been meeting each Thursday from 8:00 – 10:00 AM, since March 1st, with one day off for Memorial Day (April 5). Thus, students were present for 7 classes.

Data was uploaded into the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software QDAMiner and meticulously coded. I will refer to Tuesday’s class as Class A and Thursday’s class as Class B. Examples of the codes are in the appendix.

5 Results

Overall, class B had exactly half as many students as class A, but indicated similar responses in very similar percentages. In general, some students confirmed my preliminary fears, saying things like: “the text is too small”, “*Doug* is boring”, “the videos you show are too outdated”, etc., but, thankfully such responses were in the slim minority. The vast majority of students confirmed my presumptions: most students enjoyed the videos and learned the most from the academic product. There were a few surprises, however, such as the fact most students found videos more educational than I would have guessed. Most of the suggestions for improvement concerned increasing aspects of the course they favored the most, such as the videos, activities, teacher-student and/or student-student interaction, and so forth. What is most meaningful to me as a teacher is that a huge number of students reported that in contrast to their other courses, this course is highly unique and improved their interest in English. What follows is a more in-depth analysis of each question’s responses:

1. How is this reading/listening course similar to and different from your other reading/listening courses?

Responses to this question did not garner much negative feedback regarding my course, as opposed to other courses. In general, students described their other courses as having a strict atmosphere – consisting of bookwork, didactic lecturing about advanced grammar and vocabulary – and a paucity of both visual aids and student-teacher interaction, which is consistent with the stereotype of the traditional Chinese foreign language learning classroom, and its general characterization in the literature. As one student put it: “We need to listen different dialogue or news to answer the question set in the textbook. It’s very mechanized”. Another student writes: “Other teachers are almost teach us unilaterally. All we can do are listening and writing, so it’s kind of boring”.

On the contrary, while 31 of 52 students in class A (59.6%) and 16 of 26 (61.5%) in class B pointed out both similarities and differences between other classes and my class – albeit many of the similarities identified were as fundamental as “both classes teach English words and grammar” or “both teachers use PPTs” (17/52 of students – 32.7% in class A) – 21/52 students

(40.4%) in class A and 9/26 (34.6%) students in class B perceived my class as markedly different from their other classes.

More excitingly, 17/52 students (32.6%) in class A and 20/26 (76.9%) of students in class B specifically indicated that my class is “interesting” or “more interesting than other classes”, with 11/52 students (21.2%) in class A and 3/26 (11.5%) in class B complaining that their other classes are specifically boring. In addition, in contrast to their other classes, 9/52 students (17.3%) in class A and 8/26 (30.8%) in class B indicated my class is “relaxed” and/or “lower pressure”, and 8/52 other students (15.3%) in class A described it as “happy”. Several students reported the ability to maintain constant interest throughout my lessons as opposed to other teachers’ lessons, which some deemed “active listening”. 20/52 (38.4%) class A students described the course or various components of it as “funny”, with only 5 of the students indicating the teacher is funny irrespective of the product. Similarly, 8/26 (30.8%) students in class B regarded the course as “funny”, with 3 indicating that the teacher is funny.

Further of note, many students appreciated the utility of learning conversational words in contextualized form, which many described as “authentic”, as opposed to highly marginalized, scholarly words (that are often not used in movies) in a context-free environment. As one student put it: “In other classes, I learnt much more topics about economy and policy. Compared with other reading/listening class, the words and expressions I have learnt may be a good assistance to my daily communication.” Several students indicated having an easier time understanding English movies without Chinese subtitles, as well as communicating with foreigners.

Several students supposed that the positive qualities of my method are a product of superior Western teaching ideology in general, and some mentioned if they had to teach language they would prefer to use this method. One writes: “All in all, this class is suit for me because I think this is a good way to learn English by watching movies. Maybe this is the difference between Chinese and American”. Ironically, my method is closer to traditional Chinese methods, i.e. knowledge-based, teacher centric, etc.

No matter the teaching style nor the product, many students indicated they appreciated having a foreign teacher for reasons such as having a perfect accent increased use of idioms and slang compared with Chinese teachers that use English, superior knowledge of Western culture, etc. In particularly, students in class A indicating liking me as their teacher in contrast to other teachers because I am “lively” or “dramatic” (3/52), “cute” and/or “handsome” (5/52), I can

draw pictures (4/52), and I use gesturing and/or body language (6/52). Results in class B were similar.

From this I conclude my method is quite unique, but not aberrant, and in general, more interesting than that of my colleagues. Some of the popularity can be attributed to the foreignness and native speaker status of the teacher, as well as the teacher's talent, looks and other attributes. This is in fact, consistent with studies like He & Miller (2011), Zhou & Zhang (2013) and others. However, much of the popularity pertains to the product itself. All in all, reviewing the course conjured positive adjectives from students like “fun”, “happy”, “relax” etc.

2. How has this class improved your English?

Overwhelmingly, 51/52 students (98%) in class A indicated that the course has improved their English thus far, from subtle to drastic, with 1 student indicating no effect, and only two students in Class B indicated only marginal improvement, thus 24/26 (92.3%) indicated significant improvement. Overall, this is a 96% success rate.

Often, students attributed their own study habits for either rapid improvement or lack of improvement. For example, one student boasts: “After class, I will review the words that are taught in this class. Review every three days. And I will re-watch the cartoon and the script to find some new words that I haven't learnt. As for some beneficial usage, I had better use them in my diary writing.”

If you walk around my campus, you'll see students nose-deep in stacks of books studying all over the place. Yet, how effective are these books at increasing their knowledge? If you fan through them, you'll find them to be chock full of language, yet equally bland. Yet, a third of students (30.8%) in class A and almost two thirds of students in class B (61.5%) generically indicated that my course improved their vocabulary through presenting new words, explaining the definitions and connotations of words in various creative ways, correcting misunderstandings, etc. About a fifth (19.2%) of students in class A, and 7/26 (26.9%) in class B indicated that this course helps them remember words better via the images on the PowerPoint, use of video clips featuring the words, etc. Specifically, 8/52 (15.4%) class A students and 5/26 (19.2%) class B students indicated their listening has improved. At least 5/52 (9.6%) class A students indicated their oral English and/or communicative ability improved, and one class A student indicated his or her reading improved.

The major conclusion is that only one or two students claimed my method did not work for them, and other students specified it helped them in certain ways such as retaining vocabulary, sharpening their listening, etc.

3. Does this class match your English level?

Considering that students are typically vastly different levels despite belonging to the same year, and that there is generally a gap between English majors and translation majors (whose English is generally stronger) it is amazing that the vast majority of students indicated that the level of English was more or less appropriate for their level, rather than being too easy or too hard.

In class A, 42/52 students (79.2%), indicated that the class matches their English level, in that the English content they do not already know and thus are expected to learn lies within an acceptable range, due to the fact they already know much of the English content that happens to appear in the lessons. In addition, 4/52 (7.5%) did not explicitly indicate whether or not the class matched their level, but identified difficult aspects alongside easy aspects for them. Only 3/52 students (5.7%) indicated that the class is above their English level, whereas 5/52 (9.6%) indicated the class is too easy.

In the case of class B, 18/26 students (69.2%) indicated that the class matched their English level, with 5 using the adjective “perfect”. 3/26 (11.5%) indicated the class’s difficulty is under their level, whereas 2/26 (7.7%) called it a little hard. Two students said that the difficulty of English is not hard, but they had trouble with the listening aspect.

Thus, only a handful over performing or under performing students felt this course did not match their level within a reasonable threshold.

4. What parts of this class are most fun?

The majority of students in class A, 38/52 (73%), indicated that the videos are the most fun part of class, with 24 students (23.1%) indicating the video alone. The remainder indicated the video along with or in conjunction with another aspect such as “video and drawing pictures” 6/52 (5.8%); “video and teacher’s teaching ways” 2/52 (1.9%); “videos and teacher’s explanations” 2/52 (1.9%); “videos and PPT” 2/52 (1.9%); and at 1/52 (1%): “videos and expressiveness of the

teacher” and “videos and activities”. Several students used highly affirmative language like “of course”, “no doubt”, or “I think most of us will choose” in wording their responses.

Common alternatives were “student-teacher interactions” 3/52; “teacher drawing” 2/52, and “student drawing with teacher” 1/52; “PPTs” 2/52; “teacher’s anecdotes” 1/52; “teacher’s explanations of definitions” 1/52; and “pictures (whether shown or drawn)” 1/52.

Outcomes for class B were very similar to class A; half of students indicated videos are most fun, with 5/26 (19.2%) indicating videos alone, and the remainder videos alongside another aspect such as videos and PowerPoints 3/26 (11.5%), videos and games, videos and pictures 3/26 (7.7%), and videos and the teacher drawing pictures 3/26. These figures do not include the four students (15.4%) who remarked “everything”. 6/26 (23%) students indicated the PowerPoints or the PowerPoints in conjunction with another aspect.

Thus in conclusion, videos are the most popular fun element of the class, and were also regarded as highly educational, next to a few other aspects. Being a Bob Ross fan, I’m not surprised that “teacher drawing pictures” was a runner up.

5. What parts of this class do you learn the most from?

Half of students, 26/52 (50%), indicated they learn the most from the PowerPoints, with most students emphasizing the informational or content aspect of the PowerPoints (new vocabulary, new expressions, etc.) – in fact three students not included in this statistic indicated content generally. 3/52 (5.8%) of those who indicated learning the most from the PowerPoints specifically indicated the video clips aspect of the PowerPoints, and 11/52 students (21.1%) indicated they learn the most from videos alone or in conjunction with teacher’s explanations. Thus, the main takeaway is that students who learned most either from the PowerPoints or videos or both represent around 70% of the class, with more indicating PowerPoints than video.

The second most common response pertained specifically to vocabulary expansion – 6/52 students (11.5%) – either learning new words or learning new meanings or extensions of words they already know. Otherwise, students indicated imagery (2/52 – 3.8%), or the teacher and teaching methods in general 4/52 (7.7%)

Results from class B show practically the same ranking: 14/26 (53.8%) students indicated PowerPoints, with 4 indicating PowerPoints along with videos. In second place, videos; 3/26 (11.5%) of students. While in total, 3/26 (11.5%) students indicated the show *Doug* is boring,

two students indicated this specific cartoon helps them learn English. One writes: “I think this cartoon about a dog and a person gives me more impression. Actually, this cartoon is not too difficult, but it has more useful words and funny stories.”

Thus, the academic product was regarded by the community as the most educational aspect of the course.

6. How can this class be improved?

Responses to this question were highly varied. Many responses were statistically insignificant. Worse yet, many were highly aberrant; for example, some students wanted class outside, or wanted to concentrate on irrelevant topics like history or Greek and Roman fairy tales. Responses that are heavily outside of this class’s learning goals were ignored.

Practical advice included reducing the volume of the videos, 11/78 students (14.1%), and recommending outside study materials 4/52 (7.7%). While 9/52 (17.3%) students indicated the course in itself is either good enough or they do not see any reason for improvement – 2 of which described the course as “perfect” – the majority of responses called for more of what students favored most. The majority of suggestions (24/52 students (46.1%)) called for an increase in student-teacher interaction either generally or by mentioning specifics such as playing games, doing activities, prescribing exercises, asking students to answer questions, and so forth. Regarding student-student interaction, however, only one student recommended groupwork. Otherwise, 8/52 students (15.4%) desired to be taught even more culture, 4/52 students (7.5%) wanted to study even more from music, and 3/52 (5.8%) craved more teacher anecdotes. Note that such responses do not necessarily indicate a flaw in the product’s design, but rather, affirm the role of the teacher as an essential component. Such feedback allows me to recalibrate my curriculum’s parameters.

In general, students in class B did not give many suggestions for improvement, or reacted that there was no need for improvement (that the class was ok” or “almost perfect”) or they had no idea how it could be improved. Of those who gave suggestions, suggestions were varied and rarely repeated, including: show “more interesting videos” (4/26), assign more homework (2/26), recommend more outside materials (2/26), interact more with students (2/26), play videos multiple times (1/26), do more tests (1/26), do more games (1/26), include recitation of vocabulary (1/26), explain more (1/26), and translate more (1/26).

In sum, by in large, students did not protest many elements of the course, they simply want more of whatever elements they liked the most, yet such preferences are highly individualized.

7. How can the PPTs be improved?

Feedback on the academic product was not particularly fruitful, but perhaps beneficently so. Two students in class A and two in class B reported that the text was too small, with one student in class B reporting the text is too large. Flaws like these are not necessarily a flaw in the method or product, but a side-effect of large class sizes. Random suggestions include adding more Chinese translations (1/26), or changing the aesthetic style (1/52, 1/26). Otherwise, in terms of validation, 33/52 (63.4%) class A students indicated the PowerPoints have no need for improvement, with 15/52 (28.8%) students explicitly describing the PowerPoints as “perfect”. Students in class B generally also indicated there was no need for improvement, with several describing it as “perfect”.

6 Discussion & Conclusive Reflections

At the end of the day, this has been an investigation into just one of my many projects for a certain kind of class. The academic product is probably ideal for tutoring individual students. Nevertheless, as a teacher, establishing my own curriculum carries many practical advantages. When I design activities, I can customize the language to reinforce either things I have taught students recently, or things I plan to teach them later. Not only does this help students retain language through repetition, it confirms to them that the more they study from my course, the more they will understand. Now that my curriculum is set, whenever I run across video or related content that compliments it, I can nab and curate it for future use. In this way, the curriculum becomes the lifelong eventuality of hundreds of hours of production by others, thematized around whatever quintessence I feel needs dissemination.

Yet, in this section I prefer to share more about the deeper meaning of what I have found myself doing and developing naturally as a teacher. After all, no one coached me on teaching or making curriculum, and I had no incentive to do so other than saving time, plus it's fun. For me, developing content is for all intents and purposes, instinctual, but why?

I often ask my students the age-old question: “would you rather learn a lot about one thing, or a little about many different things?” If you're like me, you tend to find everything interesting, but don't have unlimited time, thus certain subjects become more interesting than others through priority. First priorities: under normal circumstances, health, fitness, nutrition, and the like – especially if you don't have access to decent medical care. This can include psychological health, like deepening one's worth to society, building social support, finding purpose, and so forth. Second priorities: skills that correlate to making money, which is essential in the modern world but cannot buy everything in priority one. These priorities may sound obvious, but aside from those who are not blessed with opportunities to become stronger, I constantly encounter people who lack interest in the first place, and their apathy carries over to neglect of their physical and mental states. Or worse yet, people whose hearts have turned black with greed and harbor de-constructivist mentalities.

God knows what skills reap wealth, or perhaps Satan is more of an expert, but certainly math ability, science ability, and other STEM areas are widely applicable and well respected. Or, are they? After all, studying something extremely abstract isn't immediately practical, and in my

view scientific and technological progress is actually subordinate to sociocultural progress (or regress pitched as “progress”), even though the powerful must claim the opposite – and it has been this way for most of history. Under this spin, is one actually better off studying the humanities?

Life’s changes are like a moving river, and who can know for sure whether one’s priorities are really in order. It is often the case that studying something random coincidentally proves useful; how often do you reflect that you wish you had known something back in time that you know now? Also, sometimes studying something seemingly irrelevant makes it relevant because you studied it in the first place. Studying rare birds may seem like a useless hobby, that is, until you find employment as an ornithologist. I suppose it makes sense why so many students would prefer to watch soap operas rather than pay attention to a chemistry class meant to prepare them for a career that they have no intention of chasing; it is more practical instead to scrutinize life narratives and interpersonal interactions. Having connections is the key to success; the world is full of wasted talent.

Probably for historical economic reasons, the school system in China is more focused on specialization, and America, on diversification – a descriptor many of my former teachers threw around is “well-rounded”. Furthermore, while students in both countries are usually too preoccupied by studying things other people feel they should learn, often misguidedly so, the same question applies to adults, who in their working lives, don’t necessarily have the privilege of learning something even if it is largely irrelevant. But, what if I told you while you learn a lot about one thing (language/linguistics) you could simultaneously learn a lot about many different things – the ultimate cross-disciplinary field? And not just the students, but the teacher as well. What if I told you that you could streamline your work tasks without automating yourself out of it, in a way that students actually delight?

I don’t think I am making a leap by assuming that intellectuals tend to prefer jobs that increase their learning, defining learning as both a mental process and as an increase in knowledge. Working a menial job or performing a stimulating job in a menial way, such as gutting fish in a factory for forty or more hours a week, is to me a bona fide means of brain damage – Wittgenstein could attest to this. If you can accept the metaphor of the body being similar to the brain, in which case exercise is equivalent to studying, then working as a trucker is

sure to curtail the athleticism of a marathon runner through displacement of available time needed for training.

Typically teaching jobs are under forty hours a week, and twenty hours is standard for an ESL contract around the world, presumably because it is draining work that requires much preparation and perhaps marking time, and most businesses can flourish just by selling classes on a part-time basis. Through the temporarily time-consuming action of creating this yet non-malleable yet highly adaptable academic product, one invests in the long-term goal of reducing one's preparation time. Not only can teachers make use of their free time to likely pursue reading, travel, exploration or other activities to increase their value, but creating the product itself can be intellectually stimulating.

Since the creation of my product, I have been prompted to investigate several matters that would not have otherwise crossed my mind. There is a moment in lesson four when the main character Doug considers choosing a pet lobster over a dog; an opportunity to see if the students know how to translate 龙虾. What do lobsters eat? Why do lobsters turn red when you cook them? Lobsters certainly are expensive, and usually expensive food is valuable for its taste or nutritional content, which usually goes hand in hand, thus, are lobsters healthy? In reading, *The Secret Life of Lobsters* (2004) by Trevor Corson, I learned that formerly inmates complained when they were given lobsters more than three times a week as an inexpensive and punitive meal. But, after learning that most commercially sold lobsters are wild caught, subsisting on an omega-3 rich diet of wild herring, and that they are a good source of natural astaxanthin, a carotenoid that turns their shells red when cooked (the same pigment present in wild salmon that is added synthetically to farmed salmon whose flesh is normally gray) linked albeit tenuously with eye health, I have indeed concluded for the moment that lobsters are indeed a healthy food, though I am undecided whether I feel people should be eating them. Yet, I am not a lobster aficionado anymore so than I am a yodeling enthusiast, beet connoisseur, nor baseball fanatic, all of which were themes of this particular show; all of which I was inspired to learn so much more about. And, it is fun to play genius; having all the answers to exoteric matters you have no business knowing about.

My main principles as a teacher are as follows: minimalism and accuracy; learning just enough to achieve a certain goal without learning too much, which by my definition, displaces one's ability to retain enough. This a much neglected aspect of teaching no doubt makes

education one of the final frontiers of academia. Secondly and relatedly, which is likely the product of my own upbringing and education in a politically tumultuous country – The United States of America – how does someone truly build the academic capital of all students without robbing others, or better yet, robbing them through intellectual stagnation via intellectual inflation?

As you can tell by now, I’ve come to view education as a microcosm of the economy, or the government which is meant to regulate the economy. Aren’t most teachers forced to choose whether they want to run their classrooms as a dictatorship or democracy? I’m starting to wonder whether being socially consigned to teaching is part of a cosmic rehabilitation program. But more than that, while education is designed to train workers to draw currency, money is not the only source of wealth: intelligence, knowledgeability, youth, attractiveness, fitness, health, and so forth. There is a currency of ideas.

This is, no doubt, encapsulated metalinguistically in the very language we are using now to communicate, and probably all natural languages. When you understand something, what do you literally say, if not “I *got* it,” and when you understand someone, “I *got* you.” When someone believes something, you literally say “he *bought* it.” We have “to *pay* attention”, “to *spend* time”, “to *give* me a break”. Due to age, an individual through time is never the same physically or mentally at any moment, in the Xeno’s paradox sense of the word. His or her mass and functionality – as a collection of cells, which are a collection of molecules, which are a collection of who knows what fully and why they all come together as a system as they do – is affected by the environment, which is affected by other humans among other entities. By this logic, the individual is also inseparable from the environment to some degree. Yet somewhere, between predetermination and determination, there is something we call consciousness and the ability to lead others makes one more powerful than the ability to lead oneself. Thus, it is the clinging together of matter, and the clinging of abstractions behind that which governs the flow of matter, in one manifestation, human thought, that define power.

Thus, my worldview in teaching and in life has since centralized to the notion of integrity, not in the moral sense, but in the primordial sense, the same way it would be used to describe the state of dilapidation of buildings. The only way to accurately perceive something is to view it from all perspectives, providing that the entity pushes back (or “feeds back”) as much as you push against it.

Concordia, Integritas, Industria (Harmony, Integrity, Industry) – Rothchild motto

So often, though, collaboration is purported to grow the intellectual capital of all students, but in practice, can intellectually impoverish studious students by rewarding lazy students, which motivates them to remain so. In other words, without concern for level, it diminishes the intellectual middle class, a very abstract principle that is common in multiple aspects of the reshaping modern world – extremism. Intellectual impoverishment negatively affect actions that manipulate the environment, which in turn affects the perceptions and actions of others. On an overarching societal level, the butter effects of such duplicity multiply into a socially engineered nightmare.

Thus the question becomes, how do I teach in a way that minimizes oppression of my students, minimizes oppression of myself, and fails to oppress through stalemate? In other words, how to teach in a way that builds both teacher and student, rather than taking from one and giving to the other? More so, how can I amplify my powers of expression far beyond the specific people in my classroom? By far do I consider this my novel idea, as one of my advisor's favorite books on education states:

When our initiatives meet resistance, our first response might be one of irritation in the face of the encounter with something that frustrates or blocks our initiatives, or at least limits our ability to execute our initiatives. We might “blame” that which offers resistance for this, and might try to enforce our intentions – we could also say: enforce our will – upon that which offers resistance. This is partly what needs to be done in order for our initiatives to become real, to arrive in the world, but if we go too far in enforcing our will upon the world, we reach a point where our own force becomes so strong that it destroys the (integrity of the) very “entity” that offers resistance. (Biesta, 2017)

The way I conceive of this method is as a way of enhancing one's communication potential, the same way news channels utilize imagery, sound and videos to propagandize. If students want to learn they can, if they don't, they don't, but the brilliance of this method naturally draws them in. Those who know how to increase interest don't need to teach by pushing students into submission; it is a more humane means of enforcing standards. So often we think of medicines as naturally tasting awful, as good tasting treats sinfully tasting delicious. Under my worldview, pain is a sign that something is not working ideally.

“Smart (adj.) Late Old English *smeart* “painful, severe, stinging; causing a sharp pain...meaning ‘quick, active, clever’ is attested from c. 1300”

– etymonline.com/word/smart

7 Conclusion

According to two separate classes of the author's students at a university in northern China, the author's system consisting of products which he created under his own methodology, in conjunction with his teaching style, were regarded as highly unique and very effective at arousing student interest in studying English as well as improving their levels after just twelve hours of class time over six weeks. Proportions of certain responses were remarkably consistent between the classes, which is unsurprising given the consistency of the author's teaching system met with the fact Chinese students, at least or especially those in most second-tier cities, have a reputation for cultural homogeny. Students reported learning the most from the author's methodically designed PowerPoint tutorials and assortment of subtitled video clips, the latter of which most enjoyed more.

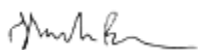
Several aspects of the author's content and instructional methods require further scrutiny in a more controlled research setting. One could build another curriculum under the same methodology using different source materials, test it in an identical way, and see if the results are replicated. Furthermore, one could analyze the effects of omitting various certain elements of the curriculum. It would also be interesting to observe the effect of having a Chinese teacher use this system with Chinese students. Nevertheless, students indicated few flaws yet several suggestions for improvement. Most suggestions were for increasing elements students favored the most, such as showing videos, incorporating music, teaching about culture, telling anecdotes, drawing pictures, showing images, and increasing teacher-student interaction through playing games, doing activities and asking questions.

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9 Author's declaration

I hereby declare that I have written this thesis independently and that all contributions of other authors and supporters have been referenced. The thesis has been written in accordance with the requirements for graduation thesis of the Institute of Education of the University of Tartu and is in compliance with good academic practices.



06.06.2018

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Appendix: Examples of Codes

1. How is this reading/listening course similar to and different from your other reading/listening courses?

Code	Sample Responses
Teaching method is different	“In my opinion, this class makes me feel that the teacher’s method different from Chinese teachers.” “Similarities: none”
The class is interesting	“The reading and listening class is very interesting.” “Our class is very interesting by using videos which make me to take more attention to.”
The class is more interesting than others	“What’s more, your class is interesting than another.” “Differences: this class is interesting and relaxed.”

2. How has this class improved your English?

Code	Sample Responses
Increased vocabulary	“And I can accumulate vocabulary” “What’s more, the class helps me expand the vocabulary”
Helped memory of words	“Some words appear many times, which makes them deepen in my memory.” “We can remember some difficult words”
No effect	“To be honest, I’m not sure that of the class prompt my English level”

3. Does this class match your English level?

Code	Sample Responses
Class matches English level	“In my opinion, this class is perfect” “I think the match is okay”
Class is above English level	“This class is above my English level” “I think the class is above my English level”
Class is below English level	“I think this class is a little not difficult” “Actually, I think the class is a little easy for me, generally”

4. What parts of this class are most fun?

Code	Sample Responses
Videos are most fun	“I’d love to watch video. So video part is the most fun.” “The most fun part is video.”
Videos and PPT are most fun	“The most fun is the PPT teaching with video.” “I think PPT and videos are most funny.”
PPT is most fun	“What interest me most is the design of PPT.” “The design of PPT is the most fun.”

5. What parts of this class do you learn the most from?

Code	Sample Responses
PPT (in general)	“I learn the most from the PPT part.” “PPT.”
PPT (discourse)	“I learn the most from the conversations in PPT.” “The dialogues on the PPT.”
Images	“I know a lot of different meanings of many words. Because teacher use vivid pictures to express the different meanings of a word to students.” “I learn the most from the pictures.”

6. How can this class be improved?

Code	Sample Responses
No ideas for improvement	“I think this class is good enough.” “I don’t know.”
Recommend materials	“Recommend some good movies.” “And there is a suggestion: can you give us the latest movies? Or talking shows?”
Play more games	“We can learn by a game.” “I think the class can add some interesting games.”

7. How can the PPTs be improved?

Code	Sample Responses
No suggestions	“There is no suggestions.” “Good enough.”
Perfect	“The PPT is perfect.” “It is perfect.”
Text is too small	“Some words on the PPT are too small and students behind the classroom may be unable to see them clearly.” “About PPT, one thing is the words or sentences are a bit small.”

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