

Task-based supplementation: Achieving high school textbook goals through form-focused interaction

Andrew Finch

Kyungpook National University

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Despite various improvements in the 20th century, and in contrast to official educational goals, high school English teaching in Korea at the beginning of the 21st century remains test-driven. The College Scholastic Ability Test, the epitome of high-stakes testing, continues to focus on reading and listening comprehension, as measured by un-piloted, low-order-thinking, multiple choice questions. Consequently, high school English classes emphasize memory-based test-preparation, and skills-based textbooks contain lengthy reading passages, which are often studied to the exclusion of more performance-oriented sections. In this extrinsically motivated and highly competitive situation, students who cannot rote-learn huge amounts of lexis and grammar quickly fall behind and turn off from learning English.

This paper reports on a study which attempted to address this situation through a student-centered, interactive approach to textbook supplementation. The aim was to make the required curriculum content enjoyable, meaningful, and accessible for all students, by presenting it in an interactive context. This would show that language performance and education of the whole person can be promoted even in restrictive, test-driven situations, and that teachers can stimulate positive educational change from the bottom up. (183 words)

I. INTRODUCTION

The testing frenzy (Eason, 2005; Favato, Mathiso & Calalano, 2003; Gardner, 2000; Kohn, 2000; Nichols & Berliner, 2005; Sacks, 1999) that has recently swept the world of education is not new to Korea, where the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) controlled high school teaching for most of the second half of the 20th century. Third-

year high school students take it for granted that they must study (in preparation for the CSAT) more than 12 hours every day in school, to be followed up with further hours in the local reading room¹. Those whose parents can afford it supplement this excessive study with extra hours in private institutes, absorbing the huge amounts of information that form the basis of every section of the CSAT:

Middle and high school students attending after-school tutoring institutes soared 38 percent last year ... making up 62.2 percent of all students. But education officials said the figure is likely far higher than reported as most cram schools report a lower number of students than actual attendees in order to evade taxes. (Bae, 2005)

English lessons are not exempt from this test-driven mania, and students wishing to enter recognized universities must score well on the discrete-item, multiple-choice, reading-oriented English section. Because the CSAT has no performance component², test-driven high school English lessons focus almost exclusively on reading comprehension, to the exclusion of higher-order thinking and performance skills. Textbooks, which profess to be communicative, contain lengthy reading passages, to be translated word-for-word, as teachers endeavor to cover the required lexis and grammar. It is not surprising, in this highly competitive situation, that language learning is extrinsically motivated, that teachers and students are frustrated (Lee, 1991, p. 79), and that development of (non-tested) performance skills is of secondary importance.

The undesirability of this situation is recognized by the Ministry of Education and Human Resources (MEHR), which has announced plans to make the CSAT less important after 2008 (Lee, 2004), and has further stated that autonomy, creativity and problem-solving are important goals of education in Korea, along with 'Hongik-Ingan' - the development of thinking, caring members of society:

The Seventh Curriculum proposed the desired image of human beings, direction for curricular organization, and educational goals for different school levels, based upon which the textbooks have been developed with emphasis upon raising students' self-directed learning capacity and creativity as well as being fun, kind, and easy to use. (MEHR, 2004, p.43)

This paper is not directly concerned with the case against standardized testing - cf.

¹ Reading rooms in Korea are places in which students can study the books that they take there. Many also offer sleeping arrangements, so that students can go directly to school next day.

² The English section of the CSAT has five sections, dealing with Listening, Vocabulary and Grammar, Reading, Speaking, and Writing. However, the Speaking and Writing sections use the same multiple choice format as the others, asking testees to identify the most appropriate written items, rather than requiring them to perform or utilize the language.

Kohn (2000) and Sacks (1999) for excellent discussions of this topic - being about task-based textbook-supplementation. However, it is impossible for any discussion of EFL teaching at high-school level in Korea to ignore the overwhelming influence of the university entrance test (CSAT) on that teaching and upon the textbooks. It is also essential to acknowledge that high school textbooks and the traditional teaching methods which spring from them have little to do with “self-directed learning capacity and creativity,” let alone being “fun, kind, and easy to use” (MEHR, 2004, p.43).

High school teachers of English in Korea are thus required to prepare their students for summative, discrete-item, language-as-code, high stakes tests, despite the fact that high stakes testing has “failed wherever it has been tried” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 238), and that such tests cannot measure the very qualities proposed by the government as the goals of education:

Standardized tests can't measure initiative, creativity, imagination, conceptual thinking, curiosity, effort, irony, judgment, commitment, nuance, good will, ethical reflection, or a host of other valuable dispositions and attributes. What they can measure and count are isolated skills, specific facts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning. (Ayers, 1993, p. 116)

Teachers in Korea are thus ‘between a rock and a hard place.’ If they try to teach to the humanistic and socially desirable goals of the MEHR, then students and parents will (and do) complain, since for them any lesson content that is not covered by the CSAT is a waste of time, and is depriving students of their educational rights. If, on the other hand, teachers teach solely to the memory-based test, then rote-learning and grammar-translation become the order of the day, and students who are unable to memorize huge amounts of linguistic items quickly drop by the wayside. Proficiency levels become polarized, and there is little opportunity for the promotion of cognitive, affective and social growth.

This situation, which forms the background of the research, can be compared to the one existing in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, when Wilhelm Viëtor (1850-1918) wrote his pamphlet *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!* (Language teaching must start afresh!), which marked the start of modern methods of language teaching in Europe. The characteristics of language teaching at that time bear reviewing at this point, since they closely parallel the current situation in Korean high schools:

Teaching was obsessed with the written language to the exclusion of speech, and concentrated all its attention on the rote-learning of grammatical rules and their application to isolated ... sentences. There were endless lists to memorize, giving new words, exceptions by the score, fussy minor rules, etc., etc. ... The children

had to do all the work, memorizing, preparing texts at home, doing their sentences and translations, and so on. All the teacher had to do was test and criticize. He did not even have to pronounce the language properly. (Howatt, 1982, pp. 264-265)

Language teaching in Europe has moved on in the last hundred years, and now places the learner at the center of the learning process. Because of this, autonomy, interaction, collaboration, classroom-based assessment, and promotion of positive attitude change, have all become recognized as indispensable factors in the language classroom. Changes are even taking place in terms of high-stakes testing. Not only are national-level language tests in Europe paying attention to performance testing, but even American icons of high-stakes testing such as Educational Testing Services (ETS) (responsible for the TOEFL test) are including language performance sections in their products (cf. the *TOEFL Academic Speaking Test* - TAST). The Council of Europe has gone even further down this road by initiating *The European Language Portfolio*: “a document in which those who are learning or have learned a language - whether at school or outside school - can record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences” (Council of Europe, 2000).

This study therefore took as its starting point a recognition that high school teachers in Korea are faced with the problem of ‘old wine in new bottles;’ a communicative (and humanistic) framework for language education and reform has been proposed and sponsored by governmental policy makers, but has been frustrated by a high-stakes testing system which remains rooted in its (Japanese and American) colonial origins.

The aims of the research were threefold: i) to show that contemporary theories of language learning are effective and can be applied even in a test-driven situation; ii) to show that task-based, student-centered, interactive supplementation of inadequate textbooks can facilitate the process in (i); and iii) to show that teachers can make positive contributions to educational reform by making their lessons task-based and interactive.

II. THE TASK-BASED APPROACH

As Willis (2004) points out, a number of crucial research findings changed the course of EFL language teaching pedagogy in the 20th century. These can be summarized as follows:

1. language learning, even in a classroom setting, seems to develop independently

of instruction;

2. learners acquire language according to their own inbuilt internal syllabus, regardless of the order in which they are exposed to particular structures and regardless of mother tongue influences;
3. teaching does not and cannot determine the way that the learner's language will develop (citing Skehan, 1996);
4. learners do not necessarily learn what teachers teach (citing Allwright, 1984);
5. learners do not first acquire language as a structural system and then learn how to use this system in communication, but rather actually discover the system itself in the process of learning how to communicate. (citing Ellis, 2003, p. 14) (Willis, 2004, pp. 5- 7)

The implications of such findings for the traditional teacher-centred classroom are no less than revolutionary, since they undermine the assumptions upon which the traditional “ppp”³ linear paradigm is based (c.f. Haberman, 2005, p. 50).

In addition to these findings, psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic research has shown that:

6. motivation is one of the key issues in language learning and that skills to motivate learners are crucial for language teachers (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 1);
7. collaboration is more effective than competition as a means of promoting effective learning (Kohn, 1992); and
8. learners learn more in groups than individually, since cooperative social interaction produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes that are unavailable to the organism working in isolation (Vygotsky, 1989, p. 61).

These and other related findings gave rise, in the latter half of the 20th century, to Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), a learner-centered approach, in which (in its strong form) students discover the target language through self-directed, task-based and project-based group investigations. According to this perspective, language learning is “a process that requires opportunities for learners to participate in communication, where making meaning is primary. ‘Task’ is a tool for engaging learning in meaning-making and thereby for creating the conditions for language acquisition” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319). Ellis points to “a clear psycholinguistic rationale (and substantial empirical support) for choosing ‘task’ as the basis for language pedagogy” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319), while Leaver and Kaplan (2004) state that the task-based approach has, in contrast to traditional

³ PPP: Presentation, Practice, Performance.

methods (Willis, 2004, p. 7), proved to be exceedingly effective:

It is a tribute to the efficacy of task-based instruction (TBI) that this method has become the one of choice in the best government programs. Since the 1980s, nearly all government institutions have used TBI in their foreign language programs. (Leaver & Kaplan, 2004, p. 47)

Interaction is a pivotal element of the task-based, student-centred approach, since “development is not so much a matter of the taking in and possessing of knowledge but rather of the taking part in social activity” (Ellis, 2003, p. 176). This two-way process of negotiation of meaning occurs between teachers, students, materials and tasks (Melrose, 1995, p. 95), and “determines what learning opportunities become available to be learned from. It may be that interaction ... produces linguistic development” (Allwright, 1984, p. 9). From this perspective, the learning of new linguistic forms and meanings arises out of the social linguistic events that learners engage in while they are performing a task, and tasks become tools for constructing collaborative acts.

Effective interaction is an approach in itself, and transcends restrictions of lesson-time and content:

Warm-hearted interaction between teachers and learners, as well as among learners themselves. ... is, in our opinion, the most essential factor in successful language learning. (Sano, Takahashi & Yoneyama, 1984, p. 171)

In the EFL situation, target-language interaction occurs almost exclusively inside the classroom. At the end of the lesson, students pass into an environment in which everyone speaks a language that is not English. Because of this, interaction must be a focal point of the EFL lesson; all the attention traditionally given to grammar instruction, vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, development of listening skills, pronunciation, etc., must occur within a framework of interaction, if performance skills are to be developed, and if learning is to be meaningful and long-lasting.

This is not to ignore form in favor of fluency. As Willis (2004) points out, “There is now quite a large body of research carried out with different ages and levels that suggests a focus on form at some point within a TBI or CBI course can help learners achieve greater levels of accuracy” (p. 12). Learners need to attend to and become aware of linguistic form (even in the process of making meaning), in order to prevent fossilization, and tasks are “the ideal tool for achieving a focus on form” (Ellis, 2003, p. 319), despite the “comparative lack of attention to tasks within language education in the context of educational systems” (Candlin, 2001, p. 230).

The approach taken by this research was, therefore, to use tasks to promote form-focused interaction. It was important to recognize, however, that students and parents expect reading-based, test-driven teaching, so it would have been unethical to impose teaching methods seen by them as ‘a waste of time.’ For this reason, a weak form of the task-based approach (Skehan, 1996) was adopted, and was implemented through the use of task-based, supplementary activities. These were based on the school textbooks and aimed to encourage meaningful, interactive use of the language.

III. METHOD

The research took place in a high school in Korea over three academic semesters, with eleven classes of male students (four classes at 1st grade [age = 16 years, n=120] five classes at 2nd grade [age = 17 years, n=141], and two classes at 3rd grade [age=18 years, n=55]). Research was carried out on 1st grade and 3rd grade students in the first two semesters. In the third semester, it was carried out on 2nd grade students (n=141), 59 of whom had been in the 1st grade research classes.

Task-based learning materials were designed by the researcher and two Korean teachers of English, to supplement the required textbooks. These materials presented the stipulated learning content in a student-centered, collaborative, interactive manner, using topics and formats which were meaningful and stimulating to the students. Sample lessons were recorded on videos, and feedback from teachers and students was collected in the form of learning journals, teacher journals, video interviews (in Korean) and student questionnaires (in Korean). Videos of the sample lessons and student interviews can viewed online at: www.finchpark.com/videos/research/.

It was not possible to teach the required learning content through a “strong” task-based approach, in which everything is subsidiary to the task as a unit of teaching (Skehan, 1996; Legutke & Thomas 1991), since this would have involved ignoring the notional/functional, skills-based, teacher-centred textbooks, and would have resulted in extreme pressure from students, parents and other teachers. Instead, supplementary activities were used in combination with the textbooks. In this “weak form” approach, the tasks were “a vital part of language instruction, but ... are embedded in a more complex pedagogic context” (Skehan 1996, p. 39; cf. Willis 1996). For this reason, English lessons consisted of twenty-five minutes of “normal” reading-oriented, textbook-based learning, followed by a similar period of form-focused, interactive language use, based on the same learning goals. This paper is mainly concerned with the second half of these lessons, in which supplementary tasks were used to promote affective learning goals (confidence, motivation, reduction of learning-stress),

sociolinguistic goals (team-work, cooperation, interpersonal responsibility) and cognitive goals (awareness of the learning process, learning strategies, etc.), in addition to the linguistic goals of the textbooks.

The textbooks used during the period of research were by Lee *et al.* (2001) (1st grade classes) and Lee *et al.* (2004) (2nd grade classes). 3rd grade students studied mainly from various test-preparation books published by the Educational Broadcasting Service (EBS). Each unit of the 1st and 2nd grade textbooks typically contained four notional goals (situational, functional or notional phrases), grammar goals, and vocabulary goals, and these were presented in the books with a minimum of opportunity for practice or review. Target vocabulary usually appeared in footnotes to lengthy reading passages, also without any backup activities. The ‘task’ of the task-designers (teachers and researcher) was to identify these learning goals and to design interactive, collaborative activities which would re-present the goals, making them more meaningful, and the learning more effective. This was done using the task-based *Tell Me More* (Finch & Hyun, 2000) as a source of templates. This book had been written according to principles of student-centered task-based materials design (Finch, 2000) and was culture-specific, in that it was aimed at Korean EFL students (heterogeneous learning groups) studying in Korea. In addition to identifying specific learning needs and styles for this audience, many of the activities aimed to help students to explore, understand and explain their own culture.

Supplementary activities for the 1st grade textbook can be viewed at .../hse,⁴ while those for chapters 1, 3 and 5 of the 2nd grade textbook can be viewed at .../hse1. The researcher carried out most of the design of the supplementation activities at first, but as they became familiar with the concepts involved, the teachers gradually took over this role, and produced their own textbook-based tasks.

Skehan’s definition of ‘task,’ with its four criteria, was adopted in the task-design process:

... a task is taken to be an activity in which: i) meaning is primary; ii) there is some sort of relationship to the real world; iii) task completion has some priority; and iv) the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome. (Skehan, 1996, p. 38)

Following these criteria, and based on core principles of TBLT, the supplementary activities aimed to: i) empower the students as autonomous learners; ii) promote self-esteem; iii) reduce affective filters; iv) develop personal and social responsibility; v) include linguistic goals; vi) include learning-for-life goals; and vii) encourage personal

⁴ From this point, “www.finchpark.com” is replaced by “.../”

reflection (self-assessment) on cognitive, affective and social achievements (cf. Finch, 2000).

As can be seen by viewing the online sample activities, the supplementary materials were directed at the students, and encouraged them to discover the language of the textbooks. Written instructions were given at the students' proficiency level, and required them to perform the activities using interaction and collaboration. Questionnaires, card games, board games, surveys and interviews were utilized, since they promoted meaningful interaction, and interactive crosswords provided motivational vocabulary study. Supplementary activities were structured for each chapter, starting from static, one-way information-gap activities, and gradually progressing to dynamic, two-way, self-directed tasks and projects. In this manner, students were able to study at their appropriate level, and to take as long as necessary on the tasks that were most appropriate for them (task completion).

Research data was collected from five sources: i) a pre/post-course questionnaire (Appendix A, .../videos/research/results-comparisons.xls); ii) teacher journals; iii) student group interviews in Korean (Appendix B, .../videos/research/index1.htm); iv) teacher interviews (in English) (.../videos/research/index1.htm); and v) videos of sample lessons (.../videos/research/).

IV. RESULTS

1. Pre/post-course Questionnaire

A pre/post-course questionnaire in English and Korean (Appendix A) was designed and used as a source of data, despite possible problems (lack of student sincerity, students supplying "acceptable" responses, incomplete submissions, misunderstandings regarding the meaning of the questions, etc.). It was expected that this would provide a benchmark for triangulation with the more open and qualitative data (interviews, teacher journals, videos), though an additional problem did arise when post-course questionnaires for 1st grade students were lost during a classroom change-over. Luckily, half of these students (n = 59) continued into 2nd grade research classes ("PRE (A)" and "POST (A)" columns, Table 1), and their 2nd grade pre-course questionnaires could be compared with the overall 1st grade pre-course results (Table 1).

The "PRE (B)" and "POST (B)" columns in Table 1 refer to students (n = 82) who had not experienced task-based supplementary materials and performance-based learning before. All students completed the questionnaires at the same time.

Table 1
Pre/post-course questionnaire, selected results⁵

Q#	Sept 2004			March 2005			March 2005			March 2005			March 2005		
	1st year			2nd year			2nd year			2nd year			2nd year		
	PRE (%)			PRE (A) (%)			PRE (B) (%)			POST (A)%			(POST (B))%		
	Yes	M*	No	Yes	M	No	Yes	M	No	Y	M	No	Y	M	No
1	0.8	62.6	36.6	1.5	64.6	34	0	27.5	72.5	3.4	68	29	0	48	52
4	30.9	58.5	10.6	34.8	60.6	4.5	8.7	65.2	26.1	42	58	0	22	68	10
12	48	48.8	3.3	43.3	55.2	1.5	52	42.7	5.3	42	56	1.7	51	46	4
17	27.6	66.7	5.7	38.8	61.2	0	40	54.7	5.3	24	73	3.4	38	62	0
18	32.8	61.5	5.7	40.3	59.7	0	48	42.7	9.3	32	66	1.7	36	63	1
23	53.7	39.8	6.5	86.4	12.1	1.5	61.1	22.2	16.7	97	3.4	0	94	6	0
27	70.7	28.5	0.8	42.4	54.5	3	37	57.5	5.5	51	49	0	54	46	0
29	26	58.5	15.4	39.4	50	11	13.7	69.9	16.4	36	54	10	22	67	11
33	43.9	43.9	12.2	66.7	30.3	3	35.6	53.4	11	71	27	1.7	66	32	2
34	25.2	54.5	20.3	24.2	50	26	23.6	43.1	33.3	31	53	17	28	65	7
36	31.7	40.7	27.6	36.4	50	14	15.1	52.1	32.9	56	37	6.8	37	49	14
39	25.2	54.5	20.3	33.8	47.7	19	20.5	50.7	28.8	20	54	25	20	53	27
42	19.5	49.6	30.9	22.7	51.5	26	12.3	47.9	39.7	19	61	20	11	68	21
43	13.8	36.6	49.6	16.7	48.5	35	4.1	46.6	49.3	25	41	34	7	50	43
44	39	47.2	13.8	36.5	55.6	7.9	4.1	60.3	35.6	49	44	6.8	15	65	20
46	6.5	20.3	73.2	1.6	30.6	68	34.2	35.6	30.1	8.5	22	69	16	33	51
55				55.6	39.7	4.8	43.1	48.6	8.3	56	32	12	55	35	10
56				58.7	30.2	11	43.8	47.9	8.2	61	29	10	61	34	5

*M = Maybe.

When looking at these results (Table 1), there is evidence of attitude change, even over the short time span of the research. PRE (A) students arriving in the 2nd grade from the 1st grade research group perceive themselves as “speaking English in class” (Q1; “Yes-Maybe” 66.1%), they see their teacher as respecting them (Q23; “Yes” 86.4%), and they see the textbook as “OK for my level” (Q44; “Yes-Maybe” 92.1%). In contrast, PRE (B) 2nd grade students arriving from different 1st grade (non-research) classes do not

⁵ For the sake of space, results for the third year students are not included in Table 1. However, the results can be viewed in full at .../videos/research/results-comparisons.xls. The questions relating to “Q#” can be seen in Appendix A.

see themselves “speaking English in class” (Q1; “No” 72.5%), and see the textbook level as doubtful (Q44; “Yes” 4.1%, “Maybe” 60.3%, “No” 35.6%). It is interesting to observe here that the use of task-based supplementation in the first year has already made the textbooks more meaningful to the research students.

Results for the 2nd grade Post-course questionnaire show a general upward trend in terms of becoming familiar with, enjoying and valuing the supplementary activities. This trend differs only slightly with regard to the different types of students (those who had participated in the research before and those who hadn’t), and with regard to the Pre-course results. However, there are some notable exceptions, which might be seen as symptoms of significant change. Firstly, perceptions of the appropriateness of the textbook are strikingly different between the two groups. PRE (A) students, who had used task-based supplementary materials before, scored “Yes-Maybe” 92.1% for Q44 (“The textbook is OK for my level”), in contrast to the “Yes-Maybe” 64.4% scored by the PRE (B) students, who had no experience of task-based materials. By the end of the semester, responses of the PRE (B) students had jumped to “Yes-Maybe” 80% (POST(B)). Secondly, the number of students from both groups answering “Yes” to Q28 (“The teacher shows us our successes”) jumped from Pre-scores of 54.5% and 42.5% to Post-scores of 78% and 71%. Thirdly, “Yes” responses to Q36 (“The English lessons help me to understand other cultures”) jumped by 20%, from 36.4% and 15.1% to 56% and 37%.

3rd grade students represent a special case in Korea, since their lessons consist entirely of test-preparation in most high schools. Textbooks are specified on the curriculum, but are often not used in class, since the CSAT is based on EBS (Educational Broadcasting Service) test-preparation books. Supplementation of 3rd grade classes in this study could therefore take place only when students were exhausted with the usual round of grammar, vocabulary, and reading-based multiple-choice selection:

I never expected the 3rd graders’ situation [to be so] awful. ... they easily fall asleep because they are so tired. Plus the lessons are so boring [with] the same type of questions. ... It’s so difficult to motivate them. ... Even students who are trying to stay awake are so depressed all the time. (Teacher journal, 3rd grade, 2004)

In this case, interactive tasks were used to bring some measure of enjoyment and motivation into a barren learning environment, and some attitude changes were noted. Students reported themselves in the post-course questionnaire as “speaking English in class” (Q1; “Yes” 69%, in contrast to the pre-course “No” 67%), and they became less worried about listening activities (Q12). They felt that the interactive activities helped

them to learn (Q59) and enjoy English (Q60), and they saw improvement in speaking skills (Q61) and confidence (Q62).

As with all questionnaires, however, it was important to triangulate these results with more qualitative data, since the tendencies identified in Table 1 could be caused by various factors, including different teaching styles, and there was no way of telling what results would have appeared if the supplementary activities had not been used.⁶ For this reason, teacher journals and student/teacher interviews were also employed.

2. Teacher journals

The two teachers involved were asked to keep journals of their observations and opinions over the course of the research period. These were not intended to be “objective” (quantitative) measurements, but professional accounts of events and trends identified by them as significant, given their experience with similar groups of students in the past. These journals detail initial reactions from students who expect teacher explanations, rather than trying to comprehend task instructions by themselves, and who function “like studying machines. They keep taking in useless information and memorizing it” (Teacher journal, 3rd grade, 2004). As Gardner (1993) mentions, “*rote, ritualistic, or conventional performances ... occur when students simply respond, in the desired symbol system, by spewing back the particular facts, concepts, or problem sets they have been taught*” and “educators have ordinarily sought and accepted such performances” (p. 9). It is evident from the teacher journals that students are keen to succeed in this ritual, regardless of efficacy or utility. Initial entries thus show students (particularly those at the top of the class) questioning the use of interactive tasks, and demanding test-preparation.

At 1st grade level, teacher journals show a development from unfamiliarity with task-based concepts and practices, but they also contain comments about students enjoying the activities, becoming more cooperative, and also more relaxed. However, there is evidence that students at the top of the class perceived the activities as a waste of time, and three even asked to transfer to a more “controlled” class, so that they could learn things “directly connected with the exam” (Teacher journal, 1st grade, 2004). Other teachers also questioned the research-teacher’s methodology, because the noise of students interacting was disturbing their own silent lessons.

It is evident from the journals that both teachers received negative input from students and colleagues, due to their attempts to use communicative teaching methods within a

⁶ Even the use of control groups would have been dependent on teaching styles and a host of affective and psychological factors.

restrictive, grammar-translation environment. However, it is also worth noting that when the 1st grade teacher stopped using the activities for a while (at the request of the “top” students), other students (the majority) did not work harder at their test-preparation, but simply returned to a listless, disinterested state. The teacher therefore returned to using supplementary activities, and students began giving more positive feedback: “At the end of the class some students came up to me and said they enjoyed my fun class” (Teacher journal, 1st grade, 2004). The fact that students (and parents) are ready to subscribe to the testing frenzy in secondary education, despite the depression it induces, and the detrimental effect it has on socially desirable attributes such as creativity, problem-solving and collaboration (Haberman, 2005, p. 101) does not mean that they see it as valuable, however. As Lee (1991) has shown, high school students generally perceive their English proficiency as very poor, and agree that their long-term *wants* have been contradicted by their short-term *needs* (Lee, 1991, p. 79). Such students commonly leave school with very little in the way of usable language, and “Only the gifted learners achieve impressive levels of proficiency” (Willis, 2004, p. 7).

3. Student interviews

Student interviews took place at the end of each academic semester, and were recorded on videos, which can be viewed in full at [.../videos/research/index1](#). Students were given the questions (in Korean and English) (Appendix B - English version) some weeks prior to the interviews, and had time to discuss them in class. Interviews followed a group format in order to reduce stress, and students were allowed to respond in Korean or English. When analyzing these interviews, attention was paid to categories of response, and those appearing most frequently were noted down (see the “Summaries” at [.../videos/research/index1](#)). As can be seen from these summaries, types of responses were similar for all the grades, becoming more explicit in the 3rd grade, as students approached the university entrance test and began looking back on their schooling.

Representative responses for the questions (covering all three years) are presented in Appendix C. Looking at the responses, it is noticeable that answers to Question 1 stress the extrinsic nature of English learning at high school level, and acknowledge that the main reason for studying English is to pass the college entrance exam (CSAT). Responses to Question 2 take this even further by criticizing the textbooks for being “neither practical nor helpful for the Suneung test,” in addition to being “Dull, repetitive and boring. Useless.” 3rd grade students are particularly strong in voicing these points, since for them, the life-determining CSAT is approaching, and the textbook is little help: “Hakwon classes are better in that respect.” This is a telling indictment of the test-driven system from the victims of that system. Not only has their language learning been

reduced to a means of getting into university, but the very books which are designed for that purpose are seen by the students as inadequate and boring. The researcher was impressed by the honesty and frankness of the students in the interviews, since it was apparent that they had not been consulted on their educational needs and preferences before, and their views were in direct opposition to the current educational reality with which they were faced. Responses in Appendix C are not a “weeding out” of relevant expressions, but a condensation of a consensus of opinion.

In contrast to the problems outlined in the teacher journals, responses concerning the supplementary materials (Qs 3, 4, & 5, Appendix B) are generally very positive (responses to Qs 4, 5 & 6 have been combined in Appendix C, since they largely replicate each other). 1st and 2nd grade students focus on improved comprehension, interest and cooperation, and speak of the activities being helpful, while 3rd grade students make the point that this was the first time they had tried such an approach, and: “We should have done this earlier. It would have been great to have this style of teaching from the first grade.” It is also telling to note that, although helpful “for learning new words and phrases,” these tasks were of little use in preparing for the multiple-choice, language-as-code CSAT.

The students make some very significant observations in Appendix C, one category of which concerns ease of learning. In response to Q3 (“How do you feel about the non-textbook activities that you did this semester?”) many students remarked that “They are helpful for understanding the textbook better and more easily. They are also helpful for memorizing new words.” In other words, the supplementary activities were successful in helping students to acquire the textbook goals more effectively. It is also noticeable, however, that affective variables were positively influenced, since students speak of improved confidence and motivation: “I gained confidence and more friendship with classmates through helping each other. I don’t have to feel like I’m preparing for an exam all the time.”⁷

Student responses to Q3 also raise another point. It was fortunate for the research (though unplanned) that the 2nd grade students had two English teachers, one of whom used a traditional grammar-translation approach. This teacher thus represented a ‘control teacher’ of sorts, since the students could compare two different teaching styles. It is significant that many of their comments refer to the two styles, and identify the task-based lessons as more helpful, effective, longer-lasting, enjoyable, and meaningful:

⁷ It is not possible to interview every teacher in every high school in Korea about the degree of test-preparation that goes on in that school. However, the author, as a teacher-trainer, has never met any teachers who do not teach to the test. Rather, he has heard numerous instances of teachers being reprimanded for attempting to diverge from test-preparation in their classes. It was not easy, therefore, to find two teachers ready to participate in this study.

One activity is better than reading the textbook 100 times. It looked like just a game but actually the group work made us more concentrate on the lesson. This helps us learn English without us realizing (Appendix C).

If we get 70% from a traditional class, we get 100% from this type of class. It remains in our memory longer than we thought (Appendix C).

Question 6 (Appendices B & C) allowed students to offer input on topics of their own choice, and responses at this stage were overwhelmingly positive, though poignant: “If we don’t have the Suneung test, this type of class will be wonderful for us;” “I didn’t like English up to middle school, but I hope this type of class will be continued.” Students thus had a positive impression of the task-based supplementary materials, and were aware that these would be effective in preparing them for globalized use of English. They were also aware that the CSAT would not perform this educational function, even though it determined everything that happened in their English classes.

4. Teacher interviews

Problems identified by the student interviews included the amount of noise in the classroom when performing supplementary activities, and general class management. These themes were developed by the teachers in recorded interviews (.../videos/research/index1.htm) based on the same questions (Appendix B) (Q1 omitted). In contrast to their journals, which recorded immediate impressions and specific events, these interviews gave the teachers a chance to reflect on the entire academic year. Both teachers identified improved student attitudes (confidence, motivation, cooperation) as a result of using the task-based supplementary activities, and pointed to increased on-task behavior, even in “normal” (i.e. textbook-based) classes, by students at all levels. This point was made a number of times, since a feature of test-based teaching in multi-level classes is that students very quickly become polarized, with those ‘below the bar’ having little chance to catch up.

The first grade teacher mentioned that she had also used the supplementary tasks with lower level students in the summer school that year, and that the initial student reaction had been “Why are we doing this, if it’s not in the (CSAT) test?” However, once the students were familiar with the format and procedures involved, they became more motivated, and started enjoying their studies. Both teachers agreed that their lessons had been radically changed by this research, and that their students were now more eager to learn, and often excited, in contrast to the previous depression, off-task behavior, and

lack of motivation. Other teachers did not share this perception, however, and the research-teachers cited examples of having their classes interrupted by angry colleagues.

Finally, the research-teachers noted that standards had been maintained over the academic year, and that their students had learned at least as much as those in other classes, with the important difference that they were more motivated, and were enjoying the experience of task-based language learning (...videos/research/task_based_activities.wmv).⁸ It was the teachers' opinion that EFL learners can be prepared for the Suneung test more effectively through the interactive use of tasks, and that this learning is more meaningful and longer-lasting.

5. Videos of sample lessons

"We've never done this before" was a comment frequently made by students in response to the interview questions (Appendix B). The lessons containing interactive, form-focused tasks therefore represented (for most students) the first experience of actual target-language use. As can be seen from the sample online videos (.../videos/research/), however, they adapted to this new approach very quickly, and had no qualms about moving round the classroom in order to access information from each other (questionnaires, surveys, jigsaw activities, etc.). As one of the teachers mentioned in the interview session, students had been accustomed to total teacher control up to that time, and it was not surprising that freedom from that control produced an initial upsurge in the noise level. Once they were familiar with the new approach to language learning, however, students got used to interacting with peers when performing tasks, and were less noisy. The videos thus show students of all levels working in groups, interviewing each other in pair-work activities, and generally participating in language learning. Even when using Korean, it is noticeable that students are 'on-task.'

V. CONCLUSION

"Results" in language learning have historically been defined and demanded in terms of quantifiable language improvement, as measured by "objective" language tests. Testing which continues to concentrate on the "target-like appearance of forms" (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 155), however, ignores the fact that "we have no mechanism for deciding which of the phenomena described or reported to be carried out by the learner

⁸ There is no space in this paper to provide a transcription of the interviews. Interested readers are therefore referred to the online videos and summaries at .../videos/research/index1.htm.

are in fact those that lead to language acquisition” (Seliger, 1984, p. 37), as well as the fact that the learner’s internal grammar is not steady, and often goes down when internalizing new content. Even if it were possible to identify and measure all of the factors in second language acquisition, complexity theory (Waldrop, 1992) tells us that “we would still be unable to predict the outcome of their combination” (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 157). In other words, high-stakes, multiple-choice, “objective” tests cannot claim to measure language use accurately.

Even when qualitative teaching and assessment methods are employed, however, the basic assumption is that improvement in terms of SLA is to be evaluated before all other considerations. This is understandable in a profession that sets out to teach English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). However, recent investigations (e.g. Haberman, 2005; Siccone & López, 2000) and not-so-recent ones (Moskowitz, 1978; Pine & Boy, 1977; Rogers, 1951) have strongly highlighted the educational responsibility of all teachers:

Education becomes a meaningless endeavour unless the education acquired has some impact on the human condition. (Pine & Boy, 1977, p. 237)

Before we can make workers, we must first make people. (Haberman, 2005, p. 58)

Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war. (Montessori, cited in McCarthy, 2001, p. 35)

Research shows that linguistic improvement can most effectively be achieved by attending to personal, affective (Stern, 1993) and social development, and that task-based instruction (TBI) is extremely effective in this context. Ellis (2003) raises the point, however, that TBLT represents a perceptual innovation “for many Japanese high school teachers of English” (p. 321), and challenges their existing preconceptions. This is also true of Korean high school teachers, for whom the task-based paradigm can constitute a threat, in terms of: “(1) the sociocultural context of the innovation; (2) the personality and skills of the individual teachers; (3) the method of implementation; and (4) the attributes of the proposals themselves” (Ellis, 2003, p. 321). The traditional sociocultural context in Korea is one of age-dominated hierarchy and group-oriented mores, and this can make innovation very difficult to introduce. It could even be claimed that TBLT is a western import, being based upon western, individual-oriented concepts and values, and that it is not necessarily appropriate in the Asian setting. However, the culture of Korea is changing exceedingly quickly, and succeeding generations of school children are

becoming more and more influenced by western-style TV commercials and (resulting) consumerism. Korea is also in the forefront of modern technological advances, in which age-based superiority plays no role. In this context, education is recognized at ministerial level as an important tool in producing responsible, creative, informed citizen, who are needed in order to compete in the global economy.

In addition to the factors mentioned in the previous paragraph, it is universally acknowledged in Korea that teachers and students are deeply unhappy with the present test-driven situation, and that they want it to change (Lee, 1991, p. 79). The research undertaken in this study confirmed this discontent, showing high school students aware of the catch-22 situation in which they found themselves – forced to study and compete all day, every day, for a test which had no meaning to them and was based on outmoded teaching and testing practices. However, the research also showed that meaningful learning could occur, and could be perceived (by the students) to occur, even in this restrictive environment. Thanks to the interactive format of the task-based supplementary activities, students became involved in the learning process, and benefited from an improved awareness of what they were learning and why they were learning it. The two high school English Teachers involved also became more motivated and fulfilled as they saw students enjoying the learning process and acquiring syllabus content willingly and effectively.

It is crucial that the current test-driven situation change if Korea is to survive in a global meritocracy. Rather than continuing to subscribe to a system which destroys creativity in favor of producing inert ‘memory machines,’ the MEHR must follow the European Community and educational institutes in the U.S.A., in terms of promoting performance assessment and student-centered, task-based, self-directed learning. Such educational reform would involve major teacher-retraining programs, but would result in meaningful, enjoyable learning for the students, who must be the prime factor in every educational decision.

If such reform were undertaken, factors at the heart of the Suneung-race (e.g. the restricted number of university places and good jobs) would not change, but the approach to satisfying them would be different and pedagogically sound. Administrators would no longer be able to allocate applicants based on impersonal ‘number-crunching,’ and students would not succeed simply because of their lower-order thinking skills. Instead, language performance could be assessed through the use of task-based interaction, participation, portfolios, projects, and teacher-reports. These would focus on education of the whole person, in contrast to the present “education from the neck-up” (Rogers, 1951) system, in which even those who are most successful are unable to apply their knowledge outside of the classroom (Gardner, 1993, p. 3).

TBLT offers a bridge from reading-based grammar-translation to a sound alternative,

in which language is learned in the most effective, meaningful and long-lasting manner possible. If Korea wants creative, critical-thinking problem-solvers in order to succeed in the global economy, then it follows that the education system must teach and assess these skills. Task-based teaching and learning is a step along that path.

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Appendix A

Pre/post-course questionnaire (originally in English and Korean)

Pre/Post-Course Questionnaire

This is a Pre-Course Questionnaire. It is also a post-Course Questionnaire.

You will fill in this questionnaire at the beginning and end of this semester.

Check (✓) the boxes that you agree with.

- Your opinion is important. This is not a test.
- You do not have to write your name. There are no correct or incorrect answers.

SECTION A: My contribution in class	Yes	Maybe	No
1. I speak in English in class.			
2. I give ideas to my group.			
3. I participate in the activities.			
4. I ask the teacher for help when I need it.			
5. I ask classmates for help when I need it.			
6. I help my classmates when they ask me.			
7. I come to class on time.			
8. I do the homework.			
9. I visit the teacher's office.			
10. I send emails to the teacher.			
SECTION B: Do we need more of anything?	More	OK	Less
11. Speaking activities			
12. Listening activities			
13. Reading activities			
14. Writing activities			
15. Language games			
16. Group activities			
17. Help from the teacher			
18. Correction by the teacher			
19. Teaching about grammar			
20. Homework			
SECTION C: The Teacher	Yes	Maybe	No
21. The teacher works hard to help us speak English.			
22. The teacher knows our learning needs.			
23. The teacher respects us as people.			
24. The teacher makes interesting classes for us.			
25. The teacher wants us to study hard.			
26. The teacher emphasizes punctuality.			
27. The teacher shows us our mistakes.			
28. The teacher shows us our successes.			
29. The teacher talks to us out of class.			
30. The teacher shows us how to be good learners.			
31. I can understand everything the teacher says in English.			
32. My teacher makes it easy for me to learn English.			
33. I am satisfied with my teacher.			
SECTION D: The English Lessons	Yes	Maybe	No

34.help me speak English.
35.help me for my future life (career, study abroad).
36. ... help me to understand other cultures.
37.give me confidence to use English.
38.help me to talk to foreigners.
39.help me study English by myself.
40.help me think about my learning goals.
41.help me become a good learner.
42.make me want to continue studying English.
43.help me in my other studies.

SECTION E: The Textbook	Yes	Maybe	No
44. The textbook is OK for my level.			
45. The textbook is too easy for me.			
46. The textbook is too difficult for me.			
47. The textbook is very interesting.			
48. The reading passages are interesting.			
49. The listening activities are interesting.			
50. The textbook makes grammar and vocabulary interesting.			
51. The textbook makes learning English interesting.			
52. I like using this textbook.			
53. The textbook activities are always the same.			
54. The textbook activities motivate me to study harder.			

SECTION F: Supplementary activities and general issues (This section should be completed at the end of the semester.)	Yes	Maybe	No
55. I like doing extra interactive activities (activities not in the textbook).			
56. I like group activities.			
57. I like pair activities.			
58. I like working by myself in class.			
59. The extra interactive activities helped me to learn English.			
60. The extra interactive activities helped me to enjoy English.			
61. I have improved my English speaking skills this semester.			
62. I am more confident about speaking English now.			
63. I enjoy English more now.			

Appendix B: Student interview questions

Groups of 3 or 4 students.

- Thank you for taking part in this research.
- The interviewer will ask you the questions on this sheet.
- Answer naturally, comfortably and in your own time.
- Don't be afraid to say what you think.
- This is not a test. There are no correct or incorrect answers.

Question 1: How do you feel about learning English?

Question 2: How do you feel about the textbook used in your English lessons?

Question 3: How do you feel about the non-textbook activities you did this semester?

Question 4: Did the non-textbook activities help you to learn English? (How?)

Question 5 (1st grade, 2nd grade): Did the non-textbook activities help you become confident in using English? (How?)

Question 5 (3rd grade): Did the activities help you prepare for the Suneung test?

Question 6: Is there anything you want to say about the English lessons this semester?

Thank you again for taking part in this research.

Appendix C

Representative student responses (1st, 2nd and 3rd grade students) to the questions in Appendix B (The full texts can be viewed at .../videos/research/index1.htm)

Question 1: How do you feel about learning English?

- It's required for the college entrance exam. I study English for that purpose rather than having fun.
- It was difficult at first, but it's getting easier and more interesting. We have two English teachers. Mr. L's class is task-based and we remember new words longer than other traditional teacher's class which focuses on grammar and lots of homework.
- At first I thought we had to learn English because America is the world power. But now I think it could be interesting subject if we are motivated to learn.
- We have no choice but to study English for the college entrance exam, however, with Mr. L's class, we enjoy learning English with activities. Grammar learning is boring.

Question 2: How do you feel about the textbook used in your English lessons?

- Dull, repetitive and boring. Useless.
- The school textbook is neither practical nor helpful for the Suneung Test.

- I have studied English over 9 years, but my textbooks have been almost the same. With no fresh ideas, they are mere repetition, which makes me bored with the textbook.
- The main text is too long and the topics lack variety.
- It does not even help us prepare for the Suneung. Hakwon classes are better in that respect.
- The main text is way too long. We get tired while reading it and eventually give it up.
- It's a translation and grammar-based textbook, and we forget very what we learned very easily.

Question 3: How do you feel about the non-textbook activities that you did this semester?

- We should have done this earlier. It would have been great to have this style of teaching from the first grade.
- They are helpful for understanding the textbook better and more easily. They are also helpful for memorizing new words.
- I like this new style of class. Textbook-oriented classes used to be boring, but talking with friends in class is fun. I like this free environment. Students discuss with each other, and I like that.
- Certainly useful. My conversation skill improved and we help each other. We don't feel too much difference between good and poor students. I like that.
- Much more interesting than the textbook. Not boring and we learned practical expressions.
- I like communicating in English with my classmates. I can use it if I go abroad.
- First time to have this kind of class, and I liked it.
- We have two teachers, and their styles are literally opposite. Mr. L is student-centered, and it's helpful. On the contrary, the other teacher is one-way style and we never get a chance to participate voluntarily.
- I gained confidence and more friendship with classmates through helping each other. I don't have to feel like I'm preparing for an exam all the time.
- One activity is better than reading the textbook 100 times. It looked like just a game but actually the group work made us more concentrate on the lesson. This helps us learn English without us realizing.
- Group activities are meaningful, and it's much better looking at my friends' faces than at the textbook all the time. It creates interest among students.
- If we get 70% from a traditional class, we get 100% from this type of class. It remains in our memory longer than we thought.
- It looks like we are playing all the time without studying, but as a matter of fact,

we learn more by playing.

Questions 4, 5, & 6: Is there anything you want to say about the English lessons you had this semester?

- I am satisfied with everything. Absolutely!
- I didn't like English up to middle school, but I hope this type of class will be continued.
- The other teacher is merely interested in teaching grammar. But Mr. L teaches grammar more easily.
- It will be nice to designate one class a week for activities, including pop songs, conversations with classmates, and English related experiences outside school.
- If we don't have Suneung Test, this type of class will be wonderful for all of us.
- I have learned from 4 different English teachers so far, and this is my favorite class. I concentrate better, and it's a lot of fun, and I think we should continue this type of class.

Applicable levels: Beginner, false beginner, pre-intermediate (secondary, tertiary, adult)

Keywords: Interaction, task-based learning, textbook supplementation

Andrew Finch

Teachers' College, Department of English Education

Kyungpook National University

1370 Sankyuk-dong, Buk-gu

Daegu 702-701, Korea

Tel: (053) 950-5832

Fax: (053) 950-5832

Email: af@mail.knu.ac.kr

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