

CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE: WORKING IN SOUTH KOREA AS  
AN ENGLISH TEACHER

THESIS

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## **Abstract**

Despite having the highest rates of suicide in the OECD and huge disparities in income, the recent recognition of South Korea as an advanced industrial country has been widely heralded as cementing proof of the success of globalization policies in the wake of Korea's division and destruction during the Korean War. Rising with South Korea's economic success has been a strong push to make English a major part of South Korea's educational curriculum. Exams testing for English proficiency are now required in order to apply for work or study at South Korean governmental agencies, companies, universities, and selective secondary schools. The numerous jobs generated by the proficiency exam-driven English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry attract English-speaking expatriates from around the globe. However, this lucrative endeavor is not without its issues. The roots of these problems appear to be largely systemic and intimately related to the political environment. This study seeks to explore and better understand the motives which impel expatriates from western countries to go to South Korea to teach English as well as the challenges they face when they arrive there, and how the phenomenon of the booming EFL industry is situated within the unresolved military conflict between the US/ROK and North Korea.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Background

Teaching English in South Korea is big business. South Korean citizens are required to provide scores from standardized English exams produced by the United States (US)'s Educational Testing Service (ETS) such as the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in order to apply to study or work at South Korean universities, companies, governmental agencies, and even certain secondary schools. South Koreans wishing to study abroad are also obligated to take the TOEFL. The numerous jobs generated by the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) industry attract English-speaking expatriates from around the globe. However, this lucrative endeavor is not without its problems. The roots of these issues appear to be largely systemic and intimately related to the political environment (Williams, 2004; H. Shin, H., 2006; Song, J. J., 2011; Yoon, 2014).

#### **The political environment.**

The most basic reality of postwar East Asian order has stayed remarkably fixed and enduring; namely, the American-led system of bilateral security ties with Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and countries to the South. This “hub-and-spoke” security order remains the single most important anchor for regional stability. Around it has grown a complex system of political and economic interdependencies. East Asian countries export goods to America and America exports security to the region. East Asian countries get protection, geopolitical predictability, and access to the American market and the United States gets front-line strategic partners,

geopolitical presence in the region, and (in recent years) capital to finance its deficits. This liberal hegemonic order has survived the end of the Cold War. (Ikenberry, 2004, p. 353)

It is a well-documented fact that the US maintains unequal power relations regarding the East Asian ‘spokes’ which revolve around it. Less investigated, or called into question, is whether truly democratic systems beneficial to the general populace were installed. Therefore, the question addressed in this study was, how the presence of American hegemony affects South Korean English education, and what role it plays in issues brought up by the teachers of English as a Foreign Language participating in this study. This study also aims to shed light on the socio-historical background of South Korean learners and therefore may be useful for discerning what teaching approaches may be considered most appropriate. While this study focuses on South Korea, there are striking similarities in how American hegemony gained entry into the educational systems of South Korea and Japan, providing a broader picture of how the US implemented their policies.

The weight of US hegemony in both Japan and South Korea was set down in a very unambiguous manner. Both countries were bombed by the US in armed conflict, occupied by a US military government, and have since been subject to considerable enforced influence down to the present day, both via activities conducted from the continued presence of numerous US military bases, as well as by governments whose administrative staff were initially handpicked and supported by US officials. In the case of Japan, class A war criminal Kishi Nobusuke was released from prison and became Prime Minister (Seagrave, & Seagrave, 2003), while in South Korea the same pro-

Japanese collaborators who had aided Japan in their brutal colonization of Korea (1910-1945) were reinstated into their positions of authority; this outraged Korean citizens and sparked the civil conflicts which led to the outbreak of the Korean War (Cumings, 1981, 1997). The US military trained the perpetrators and passively witnessed massacres of Korean citizens and did in fact participate in both the killing of citizens who were suspected of having leftist leanings as well as those who were not involved in any political activity (Cumings, 1981; Cumings & Haliday, 1988; Kim, D.C., 2004; Hanley & Kim, 2010; Tirman, 2011). The ratio of civilian to military deaths in the Korean War remains the highest of all the wars the US has been involved in (Tirman, 2011).

Having restored to power members of the pre-war establishment, the US government set their stamp upon both countries' educational systems. Japan's educational policies, which inculcated views consistent with conservative American interests, were implemented in order to secure US financial aid (Nishino, 2011). Similarly in South Korea, the "ultimate goal of the US planners was an education system fully staffed by Koreans but structured along American lines" (Armstrong, 2003, p. 75), which resulted in policies such as the adoption of American English as the only standard teaching model in secondary education (Ahn, 2013). This project was only part of a much larger intensive multimedia campaign to Americanize South Koreans and "was carried out by a wide range of actors, including the US government and its cultural agencies; Christian organizations...volunteer organizations such as the Boy Scouts...and private foundations, including Rockefeller, Ford, Carnegie, and the Asia Foundation" (Armstrong, 2003, pp. 95-6). In South Korea instances of pro-US conservative elements engaging in the censorship of opposing or dissenting views has included sending National Intelligence

Service (NIS; formerly the Korean Central Intelligence Agency, or KCIA) agents to the US to clamp down on those uncooperative to the activities of the pro-establishment ruling party, tampering with elections, mobilizing NIS agents against opposition politicians, and granting large sums of money to US universities in order to influence their scholarship for political purposes (Babcock, 1977; Cumings, 1996; Shin, K. Y., 2012; Jeong, 2013).

Tae-hern Jung (2001) concludes that the inevitable result of these events is that far from being a healthily functioning democracy, modern day South Korea has yet to establish itself as a truly independent nation-state due to the overwhelming hegemonic grip that the US has exercised on the peninsula since 1945. Owing to this, Jung views today's South Korea as a place where a "transplanted Western value system brought technical education, but led to a nihilistic and defeatist view of one's own culture and history. Even today, it forces us to accept the Western (Japanese) things as the objects to be imitated," where "the colonial modernity confronts us with important tasks such as...restoring one's own true cultural and historical identity" (pp. 207, 209). Kwang-yeong Shin (2012) finds that although the post-1988 political process technically can be labeled democratic, the reality is that the legacies of authoritarianism remain within the continued presence of civic organizations established by the previous military regime and are abetted by neoliberal economic reforms which have created worsening levels of poverty and inequality, "revealing that in Korea civil society has been far from democratic" (p. 293). Observing a country where anti-government postings on the internet are deleted by the state and its authors arrested, Dong Song (2012) is unequivocal in stating that "South Korean democracy has not been well established and has become diluted" as elite interests and political corruption "has continued to wield influence over

the political process” (p. 41). South Korea has become a country where pervasive bribery and corruption in the South Korean business, education, medical, legal and governing systems prevail (Babcock, 1977; Kang, D. C., 2002; Breen, 2004; Card, 2005; You, 2005; Bahk, 2013; Jeong, 2013; Jung, M., 2013; “Cheating on Standardized Tests Rampant,” 2013).

**South Korea’s English proficiency.** South Korea’s low level of English proficiency is in direct contrast to the exorbitant amounts of time and money which are allocated to its study (Jeon & Lee, 2006; Park, J., 2009; Song, J. J., 2011). Further, there are indications that students are dissatisfied with English immersion programs (Shin, H., 2007; Lee, J., 2010; Park, S. S., 2011) and harbor a deep resentment towards its enforced study (Baca, 2011). Part of the problem may be due to the fact that EFL methodology often is perceived as ignoring context (Bax, 2003; Kubota & Lin, 2009; O’hara-Davies, 2011) due to its active enforcement of western hegemonic power relationships (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1998), and a general lack of critical analysis of the situation on the part of instructors (Bax, 2003; Kubota & Lin, 2009; O’hara-Davies, 2011). Further, the EFL industry has been described as being very much driven by western governments’ foreign policy to enforce western hegemony throughout the globe (Phillipson, 1992; Canagarajah, 1999; Erling & Sergeant, 2013), as part of Churchill’s prophecy that “the empires of the future are the empires of the mind” (Pennycook, 1994, pp. 130-1).

Canagarajah (1999) noted how a lack of multiple perspectives has translated in the EFL classroom, stating that:

a debilitating monolingual/monocultural bias has revealed itself in the

insistence on ‘standard English’ as the norm, the refusal to grant an active role to the students’ first language in the learning and acquisition of English, the marginalization of ‘non-native’ English teachers, and the insensitive negativity shown by the pedagogies and discourses towards the indigenous cultural traditions. (p. 3)

Auerbach (1993) observed that instructor utilization of L1 (a student’s native language) allows learners to more freely express themselves as it imparts a sense of security and validates the learners’ lived experiences, while von Dietze (2007) added that a bilingual/bicultural teacher can enhance the learning process by utilizing a student’s mother tongue as a teaching resource which embodies culture, one that can expedite the progress of their students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research from a leading think-tank has shown that foreigners rank South Koreans the worst amongst twelve Asian countries for English communication (Samsung Economic Research Institute, 2006) despite the fact that South Koreans spend between \$13-17 billion on English education annually (Park, J., 2009; Lee, Wha Han, & McKerrow, 2010; Ramirez, 2013; Hadid, 2014). South Korea is said to have the highest outlay on English education per capita in the world (Jambor, 2010; Ramirez, 2013). Websites encouraging foreigners to come to South Korea, e.g., Iamnowhere (<http://alexreichert.com/earn/teach-english-abroad/>) and Transitions Abroad (<http://www.transitionsabroad.com/index.shtml>), note that one only need a four-year degree from a university in order to make a substantial amount of money without any prior training while one bides one’s time before deciding what one really want to do with

one's life. Yet, in my experience teaching in South Korea, I have encountered instructors who conscientiously dedicate themselves to a degree greater than necessary to maintain appearances and retain employment. Questions therefore arise regarding what factors influence expatriate instructors to either remain complacent or seek out strategies conducive to South Korean students becoming self-directed learners. More specifically:

- (1) What are some of the prime factors which motivate westerners to relocate to South Korea in order to teach English?
- (2) What are some teaching approaches which expatriate EFL instructors hold to be true when they initially arrive in South Korea?
- (3) What are some ways in which westerners' approach to teaching change over time while in South Korea?
- (4) What are some factors which contribute to these changes?
- (5) How does the structure of the English educational system in South Korea reflect or digress from the interests of the ruling elite (both local and global)?
- (6) How do the teaching approaches of expatriate EFL instructors reinforce or weaken the strength of hegemonic policies?

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this study was to conduct an inquiry into the impact that South Korean living and working conditions have on the teaching practices of expatriate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors. More specifically, this inquiry was concerned with how those conditions may help to foster or hinder the adoption of critically reflective teaching approaches. Vital to this is investigating the role that US hegemony and neoliberal globalist policies play in creating and determining the matrix

within which South Koreans study, live and work. The goal of this project was to gain more insight into how enabling South Korean students to become more fluent speakers of English through the assistance of expatriate ESL instructors could be enhanced. Ultimately such knowledge might provide greater insights into how expatriate EFL teachers can best support South Korean students learning English. For example, localizing English within a South Korean context (Han, 2013) could make English less of an impersonal barometer “to assess an individual’s status, power and success in order to maintain economic and social inequalities within Korean society” (Ahn, 2013, p. 2). Doing so could encourage the development of an English which functions as more of a genuinely South Korean multinational tool accessible to the general population, one that would enable South Korean learners to comfortably study English in an environment situated securely within their own cultural matrix, outside of the specter of an externally-imposed hegemony.

It is through the study of critical reflection in my adult education studies that I have become conscious of the hegemonic structures which exist throughout social systems and guide the neoliberal policies of globalist institutions. Becoming aware of the great changes and developments which have been initiated by the efforts of educators such as Paolo Freire and Myles Horton has impressed upon me the great possibilities which are inherent within education to effect positive transformations on both a personal and systemic level.

## **Overview**

Chapter Two explores literature which is related to adult education and the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) through critical reflection. In other

words, in addition to a section on EFL literature, I review literature on how various adult educators have viewed learning and teaching, look at various works concerned with critical reflection in adult education, examine critical theory, and also consider critical theory within the context of adult education. Issues related to EFL are considered through a 3-dimensional lens of adult education, critical theory, and critical EFL pedagogy.

Chapter Three includes two major sections, the (1) description of the study; and (2) findings of the study. The description of the study delineates the design of this project with an emphasis on a discussion of basic qualitative research methodology, data collection, and data analysis, which is followed by an autobiographical narrative and profiles of the study's participants. The thesis concludes with a table summarizing significant details of the participants. The findings of the study present data related to the themes which emerged from interviews with five expatriate English instructors. From this data, three major influences on the teaching approaches of the participants are identified

In Chapter Four a discussion of the findings is presented. The analyses and interpretations were produced through considering the data along with the literature as well as reflections upon my own teaching experiences. Chapter Four ends with an exploration into how principles of adult education may be applied to EFL pedagogy, recommendations for how they may be manifested in the classroom, and my conclusions for the topic of this study.

### **Definition of Terms**

**“Ch’aebol”:** A Korean word used to refer to the largest and most influential conglomerates in South Korea, such as Hyundai, Lotte and Samsung. Their role in South Korea is said to be more pervasive in the lives of ordinary citizens than in western

countries, as they not only have significant ties to the military and government but even compete in small markets such as the selling of fried chicken, where they aggressively use their superior capital and resources to undercut local and family-run operations; Lotte was famously banned from selling fried chicken after a public outcry. Ch'aebol department stores also enjoy discounted rates of tax on customer credit card purchases, while smaller operations are obligated by the credit card companies to pay higher rates on customer purchases.

**CLT: (Communicative Language Teaching):** The communicative language technique, also known as the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching which emphasizes learning to communicate through interaction in the target language, which in the ELT industry is commonly interpreted as a 100% only-English classroom environment. It has been criticized as ignoring the learner's cultural background and context within which learning takes place (Bax, 2003).

**Content class:** Classes which expatriate instructors sometimes teach which focus on content other than language acquisition, i.e. history, literature, or algebra.

**Critical pedagogy:** An approach to education which encourages the learner to question the validity of traditional power structures and take steps to proactively work for a more egalitarian environment. Instructors ask students to reflect on and then discuss problem-posing questions in order to encourage the formation of critical consciousness and independent thought processes (Brookfield, Freire, McLaren).

**ELT (English Language Teaching):** Refers to the teaching of English, specifically to students whose native language is not English.

**EPIK (English Program in (South) Korea):** A teacher recruitment program overseen by

the National Institute for International Education (NIIED), a division of the South Korean Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). EPIK provides recruitment and Guest English Teacher support for primary and secondary education from a central office in Seoul.

**ETS (Educational Testing Service):** A U.S. non-profit organization created in 1947 by three other nonprofit educational institutions: the American Council on Education (ACE), The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and The College Entrance Examination Board. Underwritten by the Rockefeller and Carnegie Foundations (Borman, 2011), it has been described as a “highly competitive business operation that is as much multinational monopoly as nonprofit institution” (Frantz & Nordheimer, 1997) which overlooks cheating on its exams (Zwick, 2002). The ETS does not report financial information to the Securities and Exchange Commission and is exempt from paying federal corporate income tax on many of its operations (Jo, S. C., 2007). It has been described as part of the logical outcome of the “educational efficiency binge of the 1920’s” which was underwritten by Rockefeller and Carnegie and resulted in the widespread application of “business methods” to secondary schools which resulted in educational bureaucrats and “experts” being brought in to determine curriculum and methods of evaluation and teaching (Borman, 2011).

**“Hagwon”/study academy:** “Hagwon” is a Korean word denoting an after school for-profit private institute, academy, or “cram school” providing supplementary education. Also known as and referred to in this study as study academy.

**KOTESOL:** The South Korean branch of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages); see TESOL.

**L1:** A learner's native language; L2 is the learner's target language, which in South Korea is often English. This is the standard term used in literature which debates the merits and demerits of allowing the presence of the learner's native language in class.

**Lucky 7:** The countries (US, UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa) whose citizens are allowed by the South Korean government to teach English without any formal teaching qualification.

**NEST (Native English-Speaking Teacher):** An expatriate English instructor from a western country whose first language is English.

**NIS (National Intelligence Service):** Formerly known as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA), this is South Korea's spy agency. It was formed in conjunction with US intelligence prior to the coup d'état which brought the current president's father, Park Chung-hee, to power (LaRouche, 1977) and is famous for kidnapping Noble Peace Prize recipient Kim Dae Jung when Kim was an oppositional candidate against Park (LaRouche; Tennant, 1996). It was also revealed that the NIS has engaged in activities such as sending agents to the US to silence Korean-American dissenters, work to sabotage the projects of opposition leaders who hold office, and have shown up at academic conferences in the US to disrupt presentations which discuss information related to the Korean War and post-war developments that is usually omitted from the mass media and school textbooks (Babcock, 1977; Cumings, 1996; Jeong, 2013; Tennant, 1996).

**Praxis:** An approach to teaching which focuses on helping the learner to realize the means of emancipation from hegemonic systems through "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2000, p. 51).

**SLA (Second-Language Acquisition):** Also known as L2 acquisition; the scientific discipline of how people learn a foreign language.

**TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language):** A term that refers to teacher training programs in EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

**TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages):** The US-based international association of teachers of English as a second or foreign language. This association issues a teaching certification which is recognized in South Korea, although the programs which issue TESOL certificates vary in the amount of hours and coursework required; some lack external validation/quality control by an accredited institution and may lack a practical teaching component.

**TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language):** An ETS-issued standardized exam developed to test the English language proficiency of non-native speakers. South Koreans wishing to study in a US university are obligated to take the TOEFL and submit their score as part of their application.

**TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication):** Another ETS standardized exam which South Korean undergraduates are currently required to take and attain a prescribed mark in order to graduate; South Korean companies also refer to TOEIC test scores in order to rank and evaluate job applicants. A TOEIC score is required to apply for work at South Korean governmental agencies, South Korean companies, several South Korean universities, and selective secondary schools. Unlike the TOEFL, TOEIC exam scores cannot be used by an applicant wishing to enter an American university.

**World Englishes:** A recent development in ELT ideology which states that rather than

standard models of 'proper' English, each country holds the right to develop its own localized version of English.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The literature reviewed focusses on the current philosophy and pedagogy used in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and raises questions in terms of the practices of educational institutions in South Korea. In addition to adult education this review also includes a consideration of critical reflection, especially with regards to hegemony, critical theory, and teaching English as a Foreign Language. While some professionals in the field prefer the term Second Language Acquisition (SLA), in this review the term EFL will be used for consistency.

### **Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

It has been said that the teaching of English, far from delivering on its promises of providing the means for fundamental advancement for the average citizen, has merely created more of an elaborate mirage (Pennycook, 2007; Piller, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010; Park, J. S. Y., 2011; Song, J. J., 2011). Essentially, an image of English as a desirable commodity conducive to upward social and economic mobility has been marketed (Gray, 1998; Choi, I., 2008), with the white western instructor as the agent representing a better, more desirable, 'freer' culture and future (Pennycook, 2006; Yim, 2007). This has prompted South Korean households to allocate a large amount of their financial resources to the study of English (Yoo, O. K., 2005) which has not resulted, however, in adequate levels of proficiency (Kang, S. W., 2009; Park, J., 2009; DeMarco, 2011; Ramirez, 2013). As a consequence of a rising chorus of questions in the 1990's about the possibility of EFL being actively used to further the political and economic agenda of western countries (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994; Canagarajah, 1999), research within the field began to tackle questions related to context (Firth & Wagner,

1997; 2007; Kunnan, 2005; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Hawkins, 2011; Levine & Phipps, 2012). Signs of radical reassessments have begun to appear (O'Hara-Davies, 2011; Wang, 2011), with at least one case of dramatic improvement in classroom management, student development and satisfaction being directly attributed to a teaching approach heavily influenced by theories and writings often referenced in adult education (Wang, 2011). Citing Freire, Adorno and Horkheimer, Wang argues that a banking style of EFL education persists in Taiwan wherein the instructor behaves as an "oppressive master," and the student becomes a "passive slave" (p. 259). Further noting the work of Tisdell, Foucault, and hooks, she outlines her teaching approach as based on the idea that knowledge is socially-constructed and strives to cultivate an attitude of empowered critical thinking within the student through such familiar adult education principles as the utilization of self-reflection, fostering dialogue, and incorporating life experiences.

### **Adult Education**

It is through the lens of adult education that I began to deeply probe questions which had popped up time and again while teaching English in Japan and South Korea. For example, the big elephant in virtually every instructor's staff room that I have been in in Japan and South Korea is the obvious lack of progress for the majority of students (at least for those who have never had the privilege to study or live abroad) in terms of their spoken fluency; this made me feel more part of a sly business venture than a legitimate educational institution. While I had often discussed issues with colleagues and even students (who often brought matters of a problematic nature to our attention), there rarely seemed to be satisfactory solutions; more often than not, Japanese/ South Korean English teachers or the lack of proper effort on the part of students became a convenient

scapegoat. Adult education literature gave me a fresh perspective on teaching English in East Asia by enabling me to consider EFL as a part of a much broader field of education. Being located in the field of adult education also greatly aided in freeing me from the constraints and groupthink of standard, non-critical EFL ideology. Adult education focuses on the meaning of education as well as finding the means to enhance the learner's experience through emphasizing an investigation of oneself and one's environment. There have been several key figures and developments which have been instrumental in developing a practical framework to aid in realizing these objectives for researchers, instructors, and students. They are relevant to South Korean EFL as they sowed the seeds for utilizing education as a medium to push for social justice and critically confront questions of hegemony and privilege. These issues have come to the fore in recent years as central concerns of how South Korea elects to teach its citizens English.

#### **Adult educators' views on ways of learning and teaching.**

*Early 20th century.* Perhaps the most well-known producer of educational theory in the early part of the 20th century was John Dewey (Brookfield, 1986; Merriam & Cunningham, 1989; Elias & Merriam, 1995; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Merriam and Cunningham note that Dewey "made some of the most thoughtful observations about the connection between life experiences and learning" (p. 223). Elias and Merriam state that Dewey was a leading light for a theory of progressive education grounded in a pragmatism dedicated to social reform, adult democracy, and, in its earlier stages of formulation, a more child-centered approach. This later evolved into an approach which "called for an education that entailed the critical and controlled type of learning exemplified in science," in which "methods of criticism, full

public inspection, and testing became the moral principles,” and one which “makes the teacher more important than in the traditional education” (p. 50). Knowles et al. (1998) observe that Dewey emphasized the continuity of experience (Dewey, 1929, 1938), as well as the importance of the interaction between the external objective and internal conditions of the learner, while Brookfield (1986) further credits Dewey with a “notion of praxis as alternating and continuous engagements by teachers and learners in exploration, action, and reflection [which] is central to adult learning” (p. 15; see also Dewey, 1916, 1924, 1933, 1949). Another prominent early 20th century educator was Eduard Lindeman. Along with people like Edward Thorndike, whose 1928 publication on adult learning, “in a sense, was a pioneering effort to determine how and how much adults learn” (Smith, 2001, p. 86), Lindeman theorized and wrote specifically for adult education. Although Elias and Merriam define Lindeman as a Dewey-influenced progressive reformer, other scholars point out that Lindeman argued strenuously for a number of different causes dedicated to framing adult education as a process of individual and social change (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), including psychology, rural education, propaganda analysis, peace education, combatting fascism, race relations, industrial democracy, agricultural development, Danish folk schools, social change, democracy, and cross-cultural education (Brookfield, 1987).

Lindeman’s profound influence on Knowles and Myles Horton in demonstrating the value of work outside the structure of formal education has been recorded (Horton, 1989; Jarvis, 2001), and Imel (1989) states that Lindeman’s *The meaning of adult education* is regarded by many as “the book which laid the philosophical foundations for the field of adult education” (p. 136), a sentiment echoed by Brookfield (2001), who

documents how Lindeman introduced the concept of andragogy to the field and argues how Lindeman's futuristic, socially aware critical approach predates Freire and Mezirow through its emphasis on the adult learner "coming into conflict with untested conceptions and exploring oppositional viewpoints"(p. 100). Lindeman's "artistic stream of inquiry" (Knowles, 1990, p. 31), "which seeks to discover new knowledge through intuition and the analysis of experience, that was concerned with *how* adults learn" (p. 28), is similarly cited by Knowles as having identified "several of the key assumptions about adult learners that have been supported by later research and constitute the foundational stones of modern adult learning theory" (p. 31) such as (1) the view that adults are motivated to learn by their own needs and interests; (2) life situations rather than academic subjects are the proper units for organizing adult learning; (3) the analysis of experience constitutes the core methodology of adult education; (4) the instructor ought to become engaged in a process of joint inquiry with students rather than grade their conformity to a banking approach to learning in order to accommodate adult students' penchant for self-direction; (5) and, adult education must make it a priority to take into account individual differences among learners.

***Mid-late 20th century.*** Perhaps the most widely known figure in adult education throughout the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> century period is Malcolm Knowles (Jarvis, 2001). Although heavily influenced by the humanist psychological theories of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), Knowles sought to make adult education a distinct field of study and research through his nearly four decade quest to create a comprehensive theory of adult education (Pratt, 1993; Jarvis, 2001). Often associated with the theory of self-directed learning (Merriam, 2001), Knowles is presently best

known for his theory of andragogy, which he first proposed in 1968 and which he conceptualized as revolving around the humanist notion that the goal of education is to enable individual learners to develop themselves through optimizing Knowles' original four conceptions of the adult learner as having: (1) a sense of oneself as a self-directing being; (2) an ever-increasing body of life experience from which to learn; (3) learning needs related to fluctuating social roles; (4) and an inclination to apply knowledge to the task of realizing one's full potential and lead a more fulfilling life in the immediate future (Jarvis, 2001). Hugely influential throughout the field (Pratt, 1993) as it supplied "a rallying point for those trying to define the field of adult education" (Jarvis, 2001, p. 273), andragogy (Knowles, 1968, 1980) nevertheless came under increasing scrutiny for not thoroughly articulating an actual theory of how adult learners learn (Pratt, 1993); but, rather describing "what the adult learner *should* be like" (Hartree, 1984, p. 205). Merriam notes that many decried Knowles' assumptions of characteristics he felt were unique to adults, pointing out that depending on the situation, adults may become highly passive and dependent, while a child may exhibit very self-directed behavior (Merriam, 2001).

Grace (1996) goes further in stating that "Knowles has reduced the adult learner to a technically proficient droid, operating in a world where formulaic social planning and self-directed mantras are the order of the day" (p. 186), a comment which is explained more fully by Pratt's (1993) observation that "Knowles' andragogy has never offered a challenge to hierarchal or exploitative structures in society. Indeed, the freedom of learners from external control...is seen as contingent on the compatibility of learners' needs with the objectives of society" (pp. 20-21). Another point raised by many adult educators was that Knowles' andragogy did not take into account the socio-historical

context in which learning occurs (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The large amount of debate sparked by andragogy (Jarvis, 2001) resulted in the development of various competing theories, so much so that by 2007 Merriam states, “We have moved beyond centering andragogy at the heart of our adult learning theory” (p. 455), as andragogy is now openly referred to as being inadequate and unable to address a number of issues on its own (Taylor, 2007; Tisdell, 2008).

In stark contrast to the claims of many that Knowles ignored the social and historical context of the learner, Paulo Freire has been defined as someone for whom it was important to help learners become aware of their agency to alter the course of their material and social conditions. Freire is widely recognized as someone whose “legacy is unprecedented for an educator. None other has influenced practice in such a wide array of contexts and cultures, or helped to enable so many of the world’s disempowered turn education toward their dreams” (Glass, 2001, p. 15). Glass also observes that “Freire developed his conception of education from a critical reflection on various adult education projects,” and that Freire’s “theory was part of a praxis” (p. 16), that is, “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 2000, p. 51).

Weiler (1991), and McLaren and Leonard (1993), however, conclude that Freire’s philosophic logic in his ontological view of people is flawed as it fails to adequately question his concepts of liberation and the oppressed in terms of his own male experience, and Ellsworth similarly feels that Freire overgeneralizes about people’s experience of oppression (Ellsworth, 1989). Manke (1999) concludes that Freire’s choice of language and audience “promote the idea that the proper task of intellectuals is to inform people of what they do not know and to enlist government in the process of

improving their lives” (p. 12), a decision which Manke views as compromising the autonomy of non-elite groups and ultimately resulting in their needs not being met. Although there isn't much critical literature on the writings of Myles Horton (as he did not produce much written work), Horton played a major role in mobilizing people to improve their life situation through practical action informed by adult education. Horton is perhaps most noted for his school's prominent role in the civil rights' movement, as the Highlander Folk School's citizenship training program has been cited as “the base on which the whole civil rights movement was built” (Langston, 1990, p. 157). Another reason Horton is not cited within academic circles as much as someone like Freire is that Horton “deliberately avoided involvement with the academic world” as he believed that “the language of the academy was not effective in accomplishing the educational goals he had set for himself and the Highlander Folk School” (Manke, 1999 pp. 3-4). Horton instead preferred to speak plainly and, as a matter of policy, focused on creating the conditions for people to discuss and discover solutions for themselves. Manke views this approach, along with Horton's refusal to collaborate in any measure with the government (mirroring his avoidance of academia), as being the keys to his success in effecting real and lasting change for non-elite peoples.

*Late 20th-early21st century.* Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a major shift began to occur within the field of adult education, from Knowles' theory of andragogy to the theory of transformative learning, which is often attributed to Jack Mezirow (Taylor, 2008). Drawing from Habermas' communicative learning theory, Mezirow defines transformative learning as a transformed meaning perspective which is “a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference...one that is more (a) inclusive, (b)

differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). Where andragogy remained vague on the actual process of how adults learn, Mezirow’s discussions of transformative learning focus in detail on how “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162), through which previously unexamined beliefs are critically examined and “thereby become “more open, permeable, and better validated” (Cranton, 2005, p. 630). Concurrent with the rise of the theory of transformative learning was a larger recognition of the theory of critical reflection, also known as critical practice. Although Dewey wrote a fair amount on this approach (Dewey, 1933; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Miettinen, 2000; Felten, P., Gilchrist, & Darby, 2006;), Kolb and Schön brought it into sharper focus with their publications in the 1980’s (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1987). Kolb’s learning cycle conceived of critical reflection as emphasizing a cyclical and dialectic process made up of four stages: experience, observation and reflection, abstract reconceptualization, and experimentation (Kolb, 1984); it closely mirrors Mezirow’s conception of transformative learning and the two terms are often mentioned together in scholarly discourse. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Stephen Brookfield brought critical reflection squarely into the field of adult education, and has been its most prominent writer during this period. In the 1990’s Brookfield expanded his view of critical thinking beyond the Mezirowesque conception of it as a tool for primarily personal transformation to one decidedly Freireesque, and came to define critical reflection as a means to analyze popular ideas in education to the extent to which they perpetuate or address economic iniquity, deny or foster compassion, encourage a culture

of silence, and hinder adults from realizing a sense of connectedness (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

In 2007, Taylor observed that transformative learning “continues to be the most researched and discussed theory in the field of adult education” which is “framed within the seminal work on transformative learning theory by Mezirow” (p. 173). Yet prior to 2000 there had been various discussions in the field (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Lucas, 1994; Taylor, 1994; McDonald, Cervero, & Courtenay, 1999) about Mezirow’s view of transformative learning as being too based upon an analytical approach, while “ignoring the affective, emotional, and social context aspects of the learning process” (Baumgartner, 2001, p. 17).

In 1993 it was pointed out that the theory of transformative learning was not entirely Mezirow’s conception, and included at the very least major contributions from Freire, Daloz, and Boyd (Dirkx, 1998). When Mezirow admitted some of the shortcomings of his approach in 2000 (Baumgartner, 2001), there began to emerge a host of other approaches related to transformative learning and critical reflection. Writing in 2001, Taylor noted the presence of the “psychoanalytic, psychodevelopmental, and social emancipatory” versions of transformative learning, and then, some years later, observed that “four additional views of transformative learning (neurobiological, cultural-spiritual, race-centric, planetary) have lately emerged in the field” (Taylor, 2008, p. 8). These developments led to a variety of investigations into how intuition, spirituality, narrative, the body, and brain functions shape the learning process (Freiler, 2008; Merriam, 2008; Swartz, 2011; Lawrence, 2012) and also helped bring attention to the importance of emotion, imagination, art, multiculturalism, and intuition (Dirkx, 2008).

**Critical reflection in adult education.** In recent decades, issues regarding equity and power have been raised with increasing levels of intensity in adult education (Freire, 2000; Brookfield, 2005; Ramdeholl, Giordani, Heaney, & Yanow, 2010). This mirrors similar trends within the humanities as well as the field of EFL, although actual EFL classroom practices still inadequately address linguistic and cultural differences (Canagarajah, 2013; Holliday, 2014). It was critical reflection within adult education which opened my eyes to the great potential which exists to expand our notion of what education can do to counteract the negative outcomes generated by hegemonic structures which are often reproduced through bureaucratically-implemented educational policies (Brookfield, 2005). This entails first becoming acutely aware of the structures themselves, which become more visible once one reflects upon how members of the less economically-privileged classes, women, and racial/ethnic minorities are marginalized, and how students are cultivated to serve the interests of male government officials and affiliated economic elites.

***Race and culture.*** Flannery stated in 1994 that Anglo-Saxon male developmental models had led to the acceptance of such concepts as individualism and linear thinking being accepted as the proper and correct goals of adult education teaching pedagogy. These raised various concerns including those dealing with race which were addressed by Merriam and Caffarella (1999), who made it quite clear that discussions of the role of race were firmly on the table as a significant factor in adult education, as the “literature on multiculturalism has helped to bring the issues of race and cultural diversity to the attention of educators at all levels of education” (p. 343). Tisdell (1995) similarly wrote about the importance of inclusivity in a curriculum which calls for dealing with

differences among people based on factors of race and ethnicity, as has Ross-Gordon (1994), who formulated a teaching approach which prioritizes the culture of the student as a primary rather than a marginal concern. Baumgartner and Johnson-Bailey (2008) note however that, for the most part, where “Whites often fail to recognize their White privilege, they still have the benefit of seeing their cultural norms universally valued, while people of color routinely sit in classrooms where they are missing from the curriculum and texts,” all leading to a situation where the “traditional Western curriculum devalues the contributions and knowledge of others” (p. 46). Nesbit (2006) concurs that education is culpable of reinforcing the values which cement a hegemonic, class-like system, while Merriam & Kim (2008) address the fundamental assumptions of western educators by seeking to introduce non-Western systems of learning, stating that, “Many of these systems predate Western science by thousands of years, and even today they are held by the majority of the world’s peoples” (p. 71). Merriam (2007) further adds that the failure to comprehend multiple perspectives compromises other ways of knowing but a better understanding of multiple perspectives can lead to a more relevant, meaningful classroom experience.

***The bureaucratic corporatization of education.*** The technological innovations and inventions which arose in the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave rise to the hope that technology would help channel people’s individual energy into realms of uncharted freedom (Marcuse, 1964). Marcuse noted however that, in the final analysis, hegemonic interest asserts itself via its control over the technical machine process, as “The government of advanced and advancing industrial societies can maintain and secure itself only when it succeeds in mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific,

and mechanical productivity available to industrial civilization” (p. 3). Cunningham (1989) observes that it was in the very same year that Marcuse (1964) made this analysis that the Commission of Professors of Adult Education published *Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of University Study*, in which Cunningham says adult education is defined as a “profession or a field seeking ‘scientific’ verification” with an overemphasis “on the means (the techniques)” rather than an endeavor which “might look beyond institutions to the popular social movements, grass roots education, voluntary associations, and communities producing and disseminating knowledge as a human activity” (pp. 33-34). Collins (1998) concurs, stating that from a critical standpoint “modern adult education practice, rather than fostering communicative competence and its possibilities for advancing the emancipatory interests of ordinary people, has become effectively commodified and given over largely to the ethos of bureaucratic control and corporate enterprise” (p. 56). The argument made is that this has occurred despite Mirth’s (2003) observation that shaped by the efforts of countless individuals, the practice of adult education in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was primarily a social movement, propelled by adults who sought to increase their awareness of their political and social rights. In somewhat stronger terms, Nesbit (2006) diagnoses the situation as being linked to capitalism, as:

capitalist ideas are so insidious and pervasive that they affect every aspect of our work. Capitalist societies commodify human activity by subjecting all aspects of people’s lives and social relations to market requirements. These relations are then normalized and made to seem natural. (p. 173)

From Nesbit's perspective, in a capitalist society one's value and prospect's for health care and education is determined by one's production of wealth. As wealth and resources are by definition distributed unequally in a capitalist society (Einstein, 1972; Muller, 2013) people are "stratified into classes, hierarchies of power and privilege related to the ownership and control of various forms of capital. Capitalist systems of structured inequality continue because society portrays them as normal or inevitable" (p. 173). Pro-capitalist educational systems are complicit in persuading people to regard themselves as responsible for their failure to be successful and thereby enable the elite to maintain a hegemonic hold on power without too great a struggle.

**Critical theory.** Critical theory refers to analyses of cultural criticism developed by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research. Established in 1923, researchers such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse sought to bring to light the underlying causes of economic, political and social inequity which led to a crushing economic depression in post-World War I Germany (Kincheloe, 2005) and the failure of the working class revolution in Western Europe. Great upheavals were occurring at this time in various parts of the world (Marks, 1986), leading to waves of revolution and unrest (Katz, 1997). Held (1980) views the Frankfurt School theorists as being influenced primarily by the writings of Marx and Hegel as well as antipositivist sociology, psychoanalysis, and existential philosophy in their efforts to discern an alternative path of social development outside of the confines of capitalism or Soviet socialism. In order to facilitate emancipation, the individual must employ a self-conscious social critique which uncovers the structures and agencies within society as well as oneself which function to legitimize or justify the domination of people by agencies of capital such as technology and

consumerism (Marcuse, 1991). In its aim to change the social environment and liberate people from all forms of tyranny, critical theory is opposed to ideology and all forms of positivism, and employs a dialectic method of inquiry to free the individual from “the historical character of the object perceived and...the historical character of the perceiving organ. Both are not simply natural; they are shaped by human activity” (Horkheimer, 1976, p. 213). To avoid becoming a calcified victim of its own ideology, critical theory is “last, but not least, critical of itself and of the social forces that make up its own basis” (Bronner & Kellner, 1989, p. 72). Honneth (1979) cites Habermas’ critique of Adorno to demonstrate how Habermas updated the outlook of the Frankfurt School to include linguistics and expanded its position beyond the parameters of Hegelian dialectics. Recognizing early on that individual identity is socially and culturally formed, the aim of critical theory has always been to transform society and the individual as a “reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation” (Geuss, 1981, p. 2).

**Critical theory in adult education.** Brookfield (2005) notes that, recently, a significant amount of attention has been given to activities related to formulating educational practices based upon critical theory. Derived explicitly from Marx, Gramsci, and Habermas, and assigned the term critical pedagogy, “In adult education the critical pedagogy discourse is one of the dominant discourses informing work around critical reflection and transformative learning” (Brookfield, p. 320). Lather (1992) summarizes critical pedagogy as a construct of the Frankfurt School critical theory, Freirean conscientization, and Gramscian counter-hegemonic practice, while Kincheloe (2005) also stresses cultural studies and critical hermeneutics as indispensable considerations for

the further evolution of the field. The vital role critical pedagogy plays in adult education is perhaps undervalued. In addition to the considerable impact that Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has had in setting the standard for the field (Cunningham, 1992, 2005; Leonardo, 2004), principles of critical pedagogy have informed the efforts of Horton (Horton & Freire, 1990; Horton, 2003), Moses Coady, and Jimmy Tompkins (Lotz & Welton, 1997; Welton, 2001; Lotz, 2005) to motivate underprivileged classes of people to recognize and actively resist the sources of oppression in their lives.

Kitchenham (2008) locates the formation of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning squarely within the domain of Freire's conception of *conscientization* as well as Habermas' theory of learning, which conceived of three basic types of learning: the technical, the practical, and the emancipator. Critical pedagogy forms the basis of a form of education which empowers students to critically evaluate their classroom experience/broader systemic issues and participate in meaningful ways to effect personal and social change (Shor, 1992; Giroux, 2011). This approach to teaching is a process through which "students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside of their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world, and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live" (McLaren, 1989, p. 186). Although the bulk of researchers who support a critical pedagogical approach devote copious amounts of discourse to analyzing what critical pedagogy is, there is relatively little said about how to translate the idea to actual classroom practice. Shor (1992) suggests a curriculum designed by the Adult Learning Project (ALP), which situates critical study in student culture and includes students as co-researchers and co-developers of programs "while democratically absorbing expert

knowledge as well” (p. 210). For Kincheloe (2005), this expert knowledge should include perspectives drawn from fields such as African American studies, feminist epistemologies, indigenous knowledges, phenomenology, semiotics, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and postcolonial studies. In stark contrast, Morrow and Torres (2002) settle upon a nondirective approach “explicitly based upon a rejection of teachers providing political direction; the learners themselves must construct their transformative practices” (pp. 124-125). These type of hands-off approaches to research and teaching result in scholars producing copious amounts of theory and precious little practical action (Carragee & Frey, 2012), thereby abetting the corporate takeover of higher education (Apple, 2013; Bowles & Gintis, 2011).

In his Foreword to Allman’s (2001) discussion of critical education, McLaren observes how Allman’s analyses raise a number of “uncomfortable truths” about how neo-liberal politics “is beginning to root itself in educational policy-making and camouflage itself under a radical leftist posturing” (p. xv). Today’s postmodernist stress upon the relativity of truth ends up supporting the reproduction of the dominant ideology. For Allman the only way that a critical pedagogy can relieve the inequities which exist in all spheres of a rapidly globalizing planet is when educators unambiguously prepare people to engage in a revolutionary social transformation. Such a critical/revolutionary praxis “begins when we critically grasp the dialectical, or internally related, nature of our material conditions and social relations and develops in full as we seek to abolish or transform these conditions and relations” (p. 7). Allman views current popular interpretations of Marx and Freire as mistaken, and the Left’s calls to support various social movements/emphasize the student’s individuality as dissipating the focus

necessary to overthrow the structures which subsume people's labor into capitalism's surplus value production process. She locates surplus value as the essence of capitalism and therefore the source for modern society's pervasive inequities; a revolutionary transformative consciousness can therefore only take root when educators clearly grasp the fallacy of a post-modern relativism, develop a coherent self which recognizes basic core truths, and then disseminate these realizations in the classroom, "to do everything we can to insert coherency into the radical agenda" (p. 236). Of equal import for Allman is the negation of capitalist material and social relations, as it would allow us to get beyond the illusion that a liberal democracy has the means to hold capital accountable and provide a real, practical foundation upon which to "create a socially and economically just society" (p. 7).

**Issues of cultural sensitivity in EFL.** The teaching of English, once popularly perceived as a politically neutral activity done purely for the sake of citizens who wished to increase their chances of reaping the benefits of aligning themselves with certain privileged and entitled western nations, is now understood to be a tool used by western governments to advance their political and economic interests as part of the neoliberal agenda currently sweeping the globe. In order to fight for social justice and help local citizens resist the encroachment of western-aligned elites, it is important to consider how hegemonic forces have been operating through the institution of EFL.

**Critical reflection in EFL.** There has been within the last 20 years a serious, in-depth consideration within EFL literature about how the expansion of western culture and language across the globe has been driven by deep-seated convictions. Phillipson (1992)

details the nature of powerful western/Centre-driven imperialism and the role that language plays in the process by observing that in,

present-day-colonialism, the elites are to a large extent indigenous, but most of them have strong links with the Centre. Many of them have been educated in Centre countries and/or through the medium of the Centre language, the old colonial language. (p. 52)

Through his research he has found that international organizations also play a key role working with and aligning the indigenous elite class to their agenda. These organizations include groups from the economic (private or governmental transnational organizations), military (various systems of alliance, treaties), communication (shipping and air companies, news agencies), and cultural (film companies, book publishers) spheres. To facilitate their interaction and further their objectives, inundating target countries with English is a key imperative. “Language is the primary means for communicating ideas. Therefore an increased linguistic penetration of the periphery is essential for...neo-colonialist control by means of ideas” (pp. 52-53).

Phillipson (1992) notes how this has translated in the EFL classroom as a monolingual/monocultural bias which insists upon ‘standard English’ as the norm, a refusal to allow an active role for the students’ first language in the study of English, the relegation to inferior status of ‘non-native’ English teachers, and an insensitive attitude on the part of pedagogies and discourses towards indigenous cultural traditions.

Phillipson supports his argument with researched documents which serve to reveal some of the driving mechanisms behind the scenes:

Government policy-makers have been well aware of the significance of English....The Chairman has drawn these threads together very neatly and explicitly (*British Council Annual Report 1983-1984*: 9): ‘Of course we do not have the power we once had to impose our will but Britain’s influence endures, out of all proportion to her economic and military resources. This is partly because the English language is the lingua franca of science, technology, and commerce...Our language is our greatest asset, greater than North Sea Oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remains highly sought after. I am glad to say that those who guide the fortunes of this country share my conviction in the need to invest in, and exploit to the full, this invisible, God-given asset. (pp. 144-145)

The ‘invisible’ aspect of how the teaching of English carries with it certain values which decidedly favor a “native speaker” discourse (also termed ‘native-speakerism’) from Centre countries and informs the work of influential organizations such as the US-based Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) is brought up by Holliday (2005, 2010), who discusses how ideology and ‘technologizing’ professional discourses are so thoroughly entrenched in everyday language that EFL instructors are not aware of the hegemonic influence these factors have over how they view and interact with people from non-Centre countries.

Holliday (2005) sees the hegemonic aspects in TESOL as entrenched to the point that any dissemination of educational principles invariably ends up perpetuating a western discourse via the Centre-biased ideological elements embedded within the core of TESOL. As a result of its unquestioned influence on English teaching professionals, learner-centeredness has become “*control-constructed* and fails to address the persons of students and teachers. By control-construction I mean the bureaucratization and technicalization of liberal democratic principles such as learner-centeredness by professional discourses so that they can be controlled and accounted for” (2005, p. 11). So complete is the bias in western views of a “demonized non-Western Other” (Holliday, 2010, p. 259) that radical measures are necessary to break free of ideologically-constructed false views of other cultures. Phillipson’s (1992) research of official government reports leaves little to the imagination regarding an ultimate purpose of promoting English language education in Asia from the Commonwealth perspective:

We need to build up our export trade and to protect our overseas investments, which are increasingly threatened by the extreme nationalism in many parts of the world. In our opinion the Information Services can help in this regard by...maintaining an atmosphere of goodwill...and by increasing the use of English as the common language in the East...In the long term we have no doubt that the work of the British Council, especially in regard to the teaching of English in Asia, will be highly beneficial to our overseas trade. (p. 146)

In a joint conference held in Cambridge in June 1961 entitled “Anglo-American Conference on English Teaching Abroad” put on by the British Council and infused with “a strong American presence,” the goal is even more ambitious, as the “teaching of English to non-native speakers may permanently transform the students’ whole world...If and when a new language becomes really operant...the students’ world becomes restructured” (Phillipson, 1992, p. 166). Although dated, these meetings that Phillipson discusses established conventions whose depth and scale of influence are still in the process of being brought to light. To cast his findings in even clearer terms, Phillipson states that, “What is at stake when English spreads is not merely the substitution or displacement of one language by another but the imposition of new ‘mental structures’ through English” (1992, p. 167).

Despite the awareness raised by these disclosures (Hawkins, 2011; Levine & Phipps, 2012) and the previously mentioned efforts of educators such as Wang (2011) to actively implement critical pedagogic practices, many ELT teacher training programs continue to operate on the assumption that preparing instructors to work for social justice can be adequately handled by having them sit in university classrooms and engage in reading and discussion (Zeichner, 2011). Perhaps due in part to the neoliberal wave which has swept over educational systems around the world (Clarke & Morgan, 2011), researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) interactional analysis have on the whole been reluctant to seriously engage with ideological forces which act upon classroom discourse (Brenner, 2012), even as consideration of sociocultural practices and relations of power have made their way into recent SLA research (Clarke & Morgan, 2011). The move to neoliberal policies have resulted in the hegemony of a human-capital

based positivist view which values student efficiency and performance over student needs, and sees language as “both tool and commodity in the service of a globalized economy” rather than as “an inherently social phenomenon that is constructive of...social relations and identities” (Clarke & Morgan, p. 66). Clarke and Morgan further assert that language education is especially susceptible to the epistemological, ontological and ethical assumptions of neoliberalism, and therefore “run[s] the risk of ‘simply adopt[ing] the label of social justice without challenging or changing existing practices’” (in McDonald & Zeichner, 2009, p. 606).

### **Conclusions Drawn from Adult Education, Critical Theory, and Critical EFL Literature**

The critical literature on EFL indicates that it is more than likely that the teaching of English in foreign countries has been intimately related with goals which are more weighted with the interests of Centre countries and their local elite affiliates rather than those of the local general population. Before I became familiar with the concerns expressed in critical EFL literature, I often encountered situations in Japan and South Korea where EFL was letting down its clientele- university students who were frustrated at their lack of progress despite large outlays of financial investment, company workers who despaired of ever being able to effectively negotiate with foreign colleagues, senior citizens who blamed themselves for never having gotten beyond the stage of basic phrases despite decades of instruction. Reviewed in conjunction with literature related to adult education and critical theory, it is not difficult to see how the South Korean obsession with western education lends itself to a situation in which EFL instructors are expected to comply with teaching situations conducive towards aiding the construction of

hierarchical, controlled systems driven more by the motive of financial profit for their privileged stewards and backers rather than concerns for creating learning environments sensitive to the needs of students.

### **Chapter Three: Description of the Study**

#### **Goals of the Study and Research Questions**

As noted in chapter one, teaching English in South Korea is a huge industry. South Korean governmental agencies, companies, universities, as well as selective secondary schools require South Korean citizens to provide scores from standardized English exams (TOEIC) produced by the US-based Educational Testing Service (ETS) in order to apply for work or study. South Koreans interested in studying abroad are also obligated to take the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language exam (TOEFL). In addition to the exam fee, students often attend test preparation courses to improve their score; those who can afford it pay large sums of money to attend schools which provide the actual test questions (“Cheating on Standardized Tests Rampant,” 2013; “Crammer Staff Indicted,” 2013). This study aimed to understand better (a) how living and working conditions in South Korea support or discourage critical pedagogy in the teaching approaches of expatriate instructors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) ; and (b) how English educational policies may reinforce or weaken the use of critical pedagogy. In order to shed light on these areas, this investigation was shaped by the following research questions:

- (1) What are some of the prime factors which motivate westerners to relocate to South Korea in order to teach English?
- (2) What are some teaching approaches which expatriate EFL instructors hold to be true

when they initially arrive in South Korea?

(3) What are some ways in which westerners' approach to teaching change over time while in South Korea?

(4) What are some factors which contribute to these changes?

(5) How does the structure of the English educational system in South Korea reflect or digress from the interests of the ruling elite (both local and global)?

(6) How do the teaching approaches of expatriate EFL instructors reinforce or weaken the strength of hegemonic policies?

### **Research Methodology**

As this study dealt with questions and issues which ultimately relate to how people construct and interpret their living and work situations, a basic qualitative study was deemed most appropriate. With its interest in context, interpretation and nuance, qualitative research is well suited to (1) facilitating an understanding of how we make sense of life experiences and the world we inhabit (Merriam, 2009); (2) investigate and discover underlying meanings and patterns of relationships. As qualitative research focuses an investigation into how individual people view their environment, it allows for the recognition of the existence of multiple socially-constructed realities. The construction of each of these realities is an extremely complex process involving human emotions, intelligences, and individual life experiences, which are subject to various environmental stresses, coercions, and streams of information which flow inward and outward, interacting with consciousness to help shape and reshape one's view of the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hurworth, 2008). Qualitative research has the capacity to “develop analytic perspectives that speak directly to the practical circumstances and

processes of everyday life” (Miller, 1997, p. 24) through its utilization of ‘thick’ data based on recordings of social interactions such as interviews as well as individually-generated narratives. A qualitative approach therefore allows for the acknowledgement of values and ethical issues (Midgley, 2004). This enables one to: (1) critically analyze data in order to reveal structures and discuss the policies in place which reproduce them (Santucci, 2010), and (2) introduce facets of one’s own relevant life experiences, which is why I also included the use of critical lens and autobiographical reflections in this study.

### **Data Collection Methods**

**Validity and trustworthiness.** Information for this study was sourced via semi-structured interviews. One is able to strengthen interpretations derived from participants’ responses if corroborating evidence can be located in the literature (Merriam, 2009).

**Interviews.** Qualitative research reflects the complex, dynamic nature of the topic and can be described as making sense out of social interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In order to get an intimate account of the phenomenon examined in this project, semi-structured interviews with expatriate EFL instructors who have taught in South Korea were selected. This was the most direct way to access information related to the first four research questions guiding this study and a good source of the ‘thick’ data which is the hallmark of qualitative research. As expatriate EFL instructors are highly impacted by the new environment they encounter when they travel abroad to teach (Vygotsky, 1978; Brown, 1994), giving them a platform to share narrative aspects of their teaching journey helps bring to light “the wide range of institutional and organizational settings, some more and some less coercive, that shape the selves we live by” (Chase, 2005, p. 659).

I set out to recruit five instructors for this study. Individuals had to be expatriate EFL instructors with at least four years of experience living and working at a university in South Korea. Using a combination of snowball and purposive sampling, instructors who were willing to discuss their teaching approaches and working experience in South Korea were invited to participate. Invitations to participate were presented to South Korean university teaching associates and were also posted on websites related to teaching English in South Korea. Additionally, invitations to participate were embedded in a private message and sent via email to members of websites related to teaching English in South Korea. In total, seven instructors responded to my invitations to participate. Of the seven, five expatriate university instructors agreed to doing an interview, while two prospective participants ceased to communicate with me before learning about the details of this project. Of the five instructors who became participants in the study, two were former associates, one was a member of a website related to teaching English in South Korea who responded to an invitation to participate embedded in a private message, and one who responded to an invitation posted on a website, in turn, introduced a fifth participant. The three participants who were not former associates of mine had no previous contact or interaction with me prior to the study. The group consisted of four males and one female. The four males are of Caucasian descent, and the female participant is South Korean-American. Four of the five are US citizens, and one is Canadian. No native South Korean professors agreed to join the project.

The participants were interviewed over the internet from a location of their choosing. Although the original intention was to conduct one interview, three of the participants required more than one interview due to various unexpected interruptions

(one participant who did not need more than one session corresponded with me for three hours, while the other one typed back responses for six consecutive hours). This inadvertently allowed the participants and interviewer to reflect upon what they had said in the first encounter and may have contributed to the production of rich, detailed insights (Markham, 1998; Kivits, 2005). The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with open ended questions framed by nine pre-determined questions. Assuring each participant that an alias would be used in the published report was a major factor in helping them feel secure. As the participants were then extremely eager to comment in a spontaneous manner on a number of topics, as well as the fact that multiple sessions took place, the interviews ranged in time from three to six hours and were recorded on secure and confidential social media platforms (Google and Facebook had greatly increased security in the wake of hacking concerns; Skype had more recent unresolved issues with hackers and had caused my laptop to crash on more than one occasion, but was used subsequent to the interviews to ensure participant identity).

The decision to conduct the interviews via social media not only ensured the accuracy of the recorded data, it also enabled the researcher and participants to confirm and clarify statements during the interview as they scrolled back to review what they had written (Markham, 1998). Additionally, as a direct result of the automatic display of one's basic personal information which occurs when people agree to communicate online, utilizing social media enabled me to confirm the identities of the participants with whom I had no previous contact with in a clear matter-of-fact manner to a degree not possible by phone; subsequent follow-up contact via Skype ensured there had been no error in this regard. Time of the interviews was mutually agreed upon. All of the interviews were

completed within a four week time frame. As each interview was simultaneously recorded on the participant's social media account, each participant received a full copy of their interview.

There has been much anxiety expressed about the use of information secured from online interactions for research purposes (Hine, 2005; Markham & Baym, 2009; Markham, 2013). In particular the terms *real* and *virtual* have been used to distinguish between “nature vs. technology, referent vs. sign, science vs. fraud, genuine vs. reproduction, authentic vs. fake, human vs. machine, and so forth” (Markham, 1998, p. 119). Markham's conclusion that any phenomenon that is experienced qualifies as real and that labels such as *real*, *hyperreal*, *not real* and *virtual* are invalid “because our experiences are not easily separated into these binary oppositions” (1998, p. 120) has been validated by calls for online research to be brought more centrally into field of qualitative research (Denzin, 2004). In terms of conducting interviews online, concerns for the lack of visual cues such as body language and facial expression for relationship building and putting the participant at ease (Salmon, 2012) have been countered by findings that the anonymity of the internet actually tends to encourage more openness and disclosure (Williams & Robson, 2004; Joinson, 2005) and increase kinship through the “perceived homogeneity of the group” (Joinson, p. 23).

It was my experience that interviewing online without a video feed of my participants' appearance produced data far beyond expectations both in terms of volume and depth, as well as complexity. Issues which are often left simmering in teachers' rooms and curriculum meetings exploded onto my computer screen in such abundance that I had difficulty in sifting through the typed exchanges. Freed of the need to nod

knowingly and constrain any expressions of contradiction, I was able to focus exclusively on the content of the exchanges as well as the intent of the participants' utterances, which was also noted by researchers (Joinson, 2005). Being able to scroll back during interviews allowed me to formulate better follow-up questions/allowed the participants to review and rephrase their responses, and the anonymity/assurance of confidentiality definitely played a major role in my view, as similar conversations that I have had in cafes and public spaces (face-to-face interviews may take place at a venue of the participant's choosing) were often cut short by concerns that someone influential might be nearby eavesdropping; with conversations in private spaces (such as at an instructor's residence), I have found that the topics covered in my online exchanges were often somehow too big or intense to handle in a face-to-face situation. This may be tied to Markham's assertion (1998) that people are able to express more online because they are able to assume different identities separate from their embodied physical appearance online, which in the case of the participants allowed them to become whistleblowers at times and give voice to generally suppressed observations and assessments about the ELT industry. Although it is now widely known that no internet exchange is entirely secure, research has shown that as the risk/sensitivity level of the topic under discussion increased, people consistently chose using email over face-to-face exchanges (Joinson, 2005).

Using the internet also enabled me to logistically conduct the interviews, as the participants were living in various locations in South Korea and the United States. A final consideration is that not having visual cues may have played a key role in the sense that neither the participants nor I were able to see how fatigued we were during the interview

process. Had any of them seen how tired I was at some stages, they may well have cut short their explanations, or may have chosen to summarize more generally points which they ended up explaining in great detail.

The questions were formulated to elicit the participants' reasons for coming to South Korea, their rationale for adopting the teaching approaches they utilize, the participants' experience of living and working in South Korea, their perceptions of EFL institutional influence, and their views on the presence or absence of hegemonic factors at play in the South Korean educational system. Upon completion of each interview, the recorded data was copied from my social media account to secure electronic folders on my laptop, a USB memory stick, and at a data storage website called Dropbox.

Responses to a question sent by email to all participants regarding the use of the learner's native language in class were also copied and secured in the manner described above.

Care was taken during the interview to clarify text which could be viewed as ambiguous, and member checks were carried out by email to confirm the interpretation of key statements.

**Autobiographical reflections.** An autobiographical narrative account of my own teaching journey was utilized in order to locate my positionality and supplement the data derived from the narratives of the expatriate EFL instructors whom I interviewed. Ellis (1991) observes that one's own lived experiences are valid objects of investigation and bases for building theory. I created my narrative by mnemonically going back in time to examine my life, which thereby enabled me to access cumulative layers of text which are said to reside within ourselves (Brady, 1990; Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Riessman, 2008), and in particular called up episodes related specifically to my educational

biography/journey of learning as an EFL instructor in South Korea (Dominice, 2000).

### **Ethics**

The approval of the St. Francis Xavier University Research Ethics Board was received before recruitment of participants began (Appendix A). Each participant was fully informed about the study's purpose, the terms of involvement, and their rights as participants through the Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix B) and submitted a signed copy of the Consent Form (Appendix C) before the commencement of any data collection. Pseudonyms were provided in this study to safeguard the participants' confidentiality.

### **Data Analysis**

Drawing upon the view that a qualitative inquiry recognizes that reality is socially constructed through an interpretive process embedded within social contexts and interaction (Holstein & Gubruim, 2000), I therefore engaged with both inductive coding, allowing the data to speak for itself, as well as deductive coding relating the data to larger concepts and questions which framed the study. I read through the transcripts a number of times. The main concern was to keep focused on the data and to “to look for data rather than at data” (Robrecht, 1995, p. 171), in order to more fully discern the structures and intent underlying the immediately apparent and observable (Layder, 1993). As Corbin and Strauss (2008) point out, analysis “should be relaxed, flexible, and driven by insight gained by interaction with the data rather than being structured and based on procedures” (p. 12).

Once the individuality of each participant's particular experience began to emerge, I found that with further re-readings certain responses and passages began to

stand out as insights or “questions of meaning and social significance” (Clandenin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) and also were relevant to the research questions (Boeije, 2002). I then began to formulate categories. Re-reading each transcript served to further illuminate experiences and dilemmas shared by participants and at times myself, as well as marking out those which were distinctly different. From the initial readings to the several re-readings, analyses and emergence/groupings/re-groupings of clustered comments, underlying themes emerged. In this way I progressed from open to axial and then to selective coding (Charmaz, 2006).

In the interests of clarity, I then grouped the selected material under thematic headings and interpreted the data through a critical lens informed by the literature. After all the material which belonged to a given theme was put together, it became possible to discern the relevant characteristics of emerging concepts. I also identified significant differences. The different themes were determined by clusters/combinations of coded patterns, as discussed by Layder:

When all the coded segments that belong to a given code are put together, it becomes possible to discover all the relevant characteristics of this concept in a substantial field and to describe the concept. The researcher then goes about identifying the criteria on which some interviews differ from others. Together these criteria constitute the dimensions on which a typology can be constructed. These different dimensions are mostly governed by patterns or combinations of codes. These combinations form profiles, clusters or types. (1993, p. 137)

Additionally, as stated earlier I constructed an autobiographical account of my EFL teaching journey in order to clarify my position as the researcher. It provides additional

material for contrast and comparison, and may serve as an aid for visualizing the teaching context in richer detail.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

The participants were bounded by the parameters of their work as university instructors within the South Korean educational system. Each instructor worked in a similar environment overseen by the rules and regulations of a South Korean university. Each participant had their own story of what led them to come to South Korea and eventually work as an English instructor at a university. The study was limited to five participants, all of whom had been involved in EFL for eight or more years. Four participants had the bulk of their experience in South Korea and four had taught English for over a decade. Data collection took place during a period of one month. Interviewing online via a chat platform meant that the participants and I could not respond to visual cues.

### **The Researcher: A Narrative**

**Cultural sensitivity.** As a Korean-American with almost 20 years of teaching experience abroad (four at South Korean universities), I have seen my share of dedicated and less than stellar expatriate instructors, and am also well-acquainted with the quandary of teaching in trying circumstances. Prior to teaching in South Korea I was employed in Japan for 14 years at various institutions ranging from kindergarten to university, with the majority of my time spent working at public high schools, Japanese companies, and community centers, where members of local neighborhoods would congregate for lessons. Being both Asian and western at the same time has allowed me to consider both the perspective of expatriate instructors as well as that of the students and administration.

The following narrative therefore allows me to share elements of my teaching experience which are intimately related to the themes explored in this paper and also helps to clarify my positionality as a researcher.

When I first started out teaching English in Japan, I considered myself firmly on the expatriates' "team." This was followed later by a shift to reflecting upon how much overall merit and value our efforts had for the learners and their families. At the time of conducting the research for this report I was most interested in ferreting out structures and influences which were hampering both the capacity of expatriate instructors to teach effectively as well as their students' capacity to learn. Having learned in detail about seldom disclosed aspects of the Korean War, as well as being raised in a family deeply impacted by the conflict, my basic assumption going into the research was that the teaching approaches of expatriate instructors would not show evidence of having been significantly influenced by effects related to that historical event.

My first encounter with the EFL industry abroad occurred when I was visiting relatives in Seoul for the summer. Interested to secure a part-time job, I sat in on a class in-progress. An American instructor was attempting to teach university-age students how to decline an offer. Visibly frustrated by the lack of a response, and perhaps flustered that I was witness to this state of affairs, he decided to bring up a topic guaranteed to catch everyone's attention: he said that after work he was often accosted on the street and had to decline propositions from prostitutes. He proceeded to ask each student whether their friend, sister, or mother was in this line of work in a friendly, joking tone of voice, attempted to role play a scenario with different students in which he pretended to be a prostitute, and then asked the students to role play the situation, with one student as a

prostitute and the other as a potential customer.

The initial reaction from the students was one of confusion; was this really happening? As the instructor continued to explain what he wanted the students to do in a joking tone, the students attempted to confirm the situation by conferring with each other in Korean. The instructor loudly reminded the class that only English was allowed in class, and again reiterated what he wanted the class to do, using the occasion to further explain the term “prostitute,” teach related slang, and throw in jokes which he considered to be amusing. Some students attempted to lessen the tension in the air by playing along with the ‘crazy’ foreigner (which the instructor appeared to take pleasure in and prompted more ‘jokes’), other students stumbled through the role play nervously, and then there were those who just sat with down-cast eyes in stunned silence, barely managing to mumble something when the instructor cheerfully asked them if they understood.

**Teaching English as a business endeavor and panacea.** My first prolonged and significant experience as an expatriate instructor in Asia occurred when I went to Japan after graduating from university. Despite having no formal qualification, I secured a position in a large conversation school, and quickly learned that a primary consideration was how much the students liked the instructor, as quarterly evaluations written up by the students determined one’s salary, work schedule, and future employment. Keeping and attracting new students was what kept a conversation school afloat in a very competitive business. Seeing how the instructors generally focused on being liked more than seriously improving the level of the students’ English in this environment, I made my way out of the conversation school business into teaching high schools, corporate classes, and eventually universities in South Korea. What I found was that in situations involving a

staff of expatriate instructors, the same general rule of evaluations favoring those who were most charismatic and ‘fun’ greatly impacted teaching methodology as well as hiring practices. This made sense within the context of the heavy burden hanging over students’ heads regarding standardized testing, which plays a prominent role in determining university and job placement (Park, 2009); the students were often relieved to engage in light-hearted games and exercises, and they came to expect such games and exercises to be incorporated as a prominent part of the curriculum. In addition to witnessing an educational system which emphasized an almost drone-like adherence to studying for standardized tests rather than developing the capacity for independent, critical thought processes, I also observed that there were high rates of cheating on exams and suicide amongst students in South Korea who were not able to attain desired marks (Card, 2005; May, 2008; Jung, M., 2013; Oh, 2013). The rampant cheating and ‘results at all costs’ mentality (Jung & Son, 2012; Jung, M., 2013; “Cheating on Standardized Tests Rampant,” 2013) seemed to reflect a deeply-rooted corruption throughout South Korean society (Kang, D. C., 2002; Kim, D. H., 2010; Harlan & Seo, 2012; Jeong, 2013).

**The role of L1.** The basic tenant drilled into all expatriate instructors at every conversation school I have ever worked for is that the instructor must use English at all times, regardless of the students’ level of fluency or any difficulty they may be encountering in the class. The first turning point for me regarding this policy occurred when I started to work at a South Korean high school in Tokyo. I entered the school in the middle of the term, as the previous expatriate instructor had suddenly been let go when it was found out that he had forged his university diploma. Searching to discover why the students expected high marks for minimal effort, I interviewed students and honed in on

the primary factor: both the previous instructor and I had rudimentary Korean language skills, and were therefore unable to negotiate very effective classroom relationships. Whenever it was to their convenience the students simply pretended to not understand, and the previous instructor had awarded all the students with good grades so long as they praised him as an effective teacher in their evaluations. In this environment the hallowed English-only policy led nowhere.

The solution I came up with was (1) speaking with the administration to get a Korean-speaking assistant; (2) making attendance and active participation mandatory prerequisites for a passing grade. With these measures in place, we managed to turn the English program around. It was obvious that being able to communicate with the students through the rough times was a huge factor, as well as allowing the students to use Korean in class as they collaborated on various exercises and projects. Rather than a foreigner whom they could barely communicate with passing them through on the barest of requirements, together with the students we created an atmosphere where active participation was set into motion because each and every student understood what we were saying in real time and felt included in the class activities on an equal level, rather than having to wait to be instructed by elite students whose understanding of English was superior to theirs. The students also very often vigorously interacted with my Korean-speaking assistant to resolve misunderstandings regarding my American perspective. I began to see how the injunction that all students be required to strive to become fluent in a westernized version of English (Kachru, 1985, 1992; Kramsch, 1993; White, 1997) can appear as a dehumanizing force, something that discourages students from situating themselves in their own sociocultural history and traditions as they help each other learn

a foreign language. These background experiences led me to formulate questions about the aims and objectives of standard, non-critical EFL methodology.

### **The Participants**

In creating the narratives of the five instructors, I selected information which characterizes each instructor's teaching journey and basic teaching approach. I also chose to quote passages from the interviews which expressed some urgent concern or illuminated an aspect of an instructor's teaching journey and approach. All participants were given pseudonyms. Brief descriptions of each participant will now follow.

**Josh.** Josh arrived in South Korea in 1997, and has been employed as a university instructor since 1999. Although he is a holder of an MA in anthropology, he does not have any formal teaching qualifications but does draw on a wealth of teaching experience in the classroom, where his students are predominantly undergraduates. His basic approach emphasizes technique and an English-only policy. Josh was the first participant I interviewed. As with many expatriates, teaching English in Asia was recommended to him by acquaintances who were expatriate instructors; it was not a career choice carefully planned through formal university study. Torn between Indonesia and South Korea ("it all sounded wonderfully exotic"), he arranged for a consultation with a deck of tarot cards before finally deciding on South Korea after seeing an ad which promised more financial remuneration. Josh taught children and working adults in "hagwons" (study academies, which are distinct from language schools) as an English conversation teacher for two years before landing a job at a university, a position he has held from 1999 to the present day (2015). He stated that his approach to teaching has changed significantly over the course of his learning journey. Although he initially focused on conversation and

interaction, he now focuses on doing more role plays, fill-in the gap exercises, and communication activities which force the students to use the lessons' vocabulary and grammar. He also utilizes about 10 or so stock games that he can pull out at a moment's notice. Josh adhered to "a strict English-only policy" as he teaches mostly advanced students. Although it had been a while since he taught beginners, he felt that "you should not teach anything that is so complicated that it cannot be explained in L2. The problem is that native English speaking teachers (NESTs) teach content that is too difficult for their students." He concluded that although he knew that many students preferred a Korean teacher who could explain the intricacies of English in L1, he believed this was so because South Korean students were either frightened of learning in English, did not believe they could learn in English, or had trust issues with NESTS.

**Stan.** Stan was the lone Canadian in the study. He has been in Korea since 1999, and started teaching at a university in 2002. He also got his start without any formal teaching background, but did acquire a TESOL certificate in 2001. Stan's approach is English-only in classes of up to 12 (mostly first year) students. In addition, since 2001 he has been recruiting expatriate EFL instructors for Korean language schools and private agencies. Stan was an English Language and Literature major in university and initially intended to teach English in Asia for a year in order to increase his chances of landing a teaching job in Canada. He perused local newspaper ads for positions in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea before deciding on a South Korean company because they offered "the best package," which entailed paying for return airfare upfront and housing. He said his main reason for continuing to teach at South Korean universities was that the job conditions were favorable, pointing out that at his current position expatriate instructors

work 18-24 hours a week, of which 10-16 are devoted to in-class teaching and 8 are office hours. He works 32 weeks of the year while enjoying year-round paid national holidays and vacations. Stan characterized his conception of teaching when he initially arrived as “no conception” and entered his first class in South Korea “without a clue of what I needed to do,” a disclosure which highlights the fact that many English conversation schools in South Korea require no prior classroom experience or background in education. Stan stated that he keeps a strict English-only approach when a class size of less than 12 students allows him to adequately monitor the students. He also said that he never speaks Korean to his students in or outside of class other than the rare Korean word “used for comical value rather than communication. If they say anything to me in Korean, including questions, I will pretend I do not understand. I have to force them to communicate in English.”

**Sibylle.** Sibylle is distinct from the other participants in that she is the only woman and the only Korean-American, having emigrated to the US with her parents when she was a child. Unlike Josh and Stan, she was a qualified instructor with an MA TESOL and almost a decade of classroom experience prior to her arrival in South Korea in 2009, at which time she immediately started teaching at a university. Like Ivan and Mark, two other participants to be introduced shortly, Sibylle has communicative Korean ability. Her classes are composed mainly of new students and sophomores, are teacher-centered, and allow for a limited use of L1 in the class. Sibylle had a transformative experience when she went to Kenya on a church mission after graduating from college. Based on her experiences, she acquired an MA in TESOL in order to help advance economic opportunities for various people of color and taught immigrants and people of

color at community-based (including Adult Ed) programs in California for nine years. After government funding for these programs was cut, she decided to relocate to South Korea, which she perceived as having the best market for EFL instructors. Sibylle came to South Korea with the conception that she would teach “English on an academic level- i.e. grammar, writing, vocabulary,” and “a lot of proper, high-level English, as opposed to survival level.” Her expectations were confounded when she found her “students lack the skills and motivation, and really want to learn test-taking skills.” Although she “really wanted a student-based environment where they would take ownership of their learning,” she said, “here, I found the teacher-centered learning...because my students’ level is so low, I cannot teach real academic level.” For Sibylle the students’ attitude to learning profoundly affected the teaching approaches of instructors. As student evaluations play a large role in determining whether a teacher’s contract is renewed, she felt instructors were compelled to opt for the path of least resistance by enlivening lessons with games while “dumbing down” the content and giving a passing grade to unmotivated students who are coerced to study by virtue of the demands of South Korea’s ultra-competitive society. She noted that very few South Korean people actually needed to use English for their job or daily lives, and concluded that the EFL industry in South Korea is just “a money-making business as far as I’m concerned.”

**Ivan.** Similar to Josh and Stan, Ivan acquired his classroom management skills on the job for 3.5 years before landing a position at a South Korean university in 2010, where he became an instructor/hiring manager for foreign teachers and taught mostly sophomores and juniors until 2012 before returning to the US. From 2010-2012 he availed himself of the opportunity to concurrently enroll in his South Korean university’s

MA TESOL program and concluded writing his thesis in 2013. His approach to teaching is based on a co-production of knowledge which incorporates context of the learners' culture and stresses the quality of the classroom environment over technique, and allows for the bilateral use of L1. Ivan was an English Composition major in university, and when asked by a friend who worked at a study academy in South Korea to go over and teach, decided to do so for the "adventure" and because one could "sell it to oneself as an extended vacation you work for during the time there." When he arrived in South Korea he was a "little nervous" as he had had no teaching experience, though he had "heard that not much talent was needed, and it wasn't too hard." He soon learned that it was actually very challenging work to do well but discovered that he was able to learn quickly once he applied himself. Noting the importance of a "trial by fire" for the dedicated instructor he also said South Korea was an attractive place for expatriates unable to find decent work in their home country as many hagwons and language schools simply desire a white western face to attract customers. After starting work on his MA, he was exposed to critical theory in a meaningful way and underwent a transformation whereby he became acutely aware of the hegemonic influence of expatriate EFL instructors and viewed them as unconsciously neocolonial in their mindset. He felt it was important for expatriate instructors to become conscious of this and develop a "Korean identity." As for L1, he pointed out that an English-only policy rarely works and that he is "opposed to the dichotomy it sets up." He uses Korean in the classroom "when it is clear that it is the most effective and efficient means of communicating" because, "In reality, when we communicate, we will use a mix of language as we acquire languages."

**Mark.** Mark began to familiarize himself with teaching as he majored in English

Education. He had two stints working in South Korea (2003-2007, 2009-2013), during which time he earned an MA TESOL (2007) as well as a PhD in Language and Literacy Education (2013). While employed at South Korean universities he taught both undergraduate (2005-2007) and graduate (2009-2013) students, and characterizes his teaching as steeped in praxis. He allows and uses L1 in the class. Mark initially taught English in Japan after hearing about it from a friend. He had high expectations about “making a difference,” only to be disappointed with the reality of playing the role of a “cultural prototype for paying customers” in the largest English conversation school chain in Japan. His disillusionment led him to leave Japan after a year to engage in deep reflection while hiking 1000 miles of the Appalachian Trail, after which he decided to work for a small private school in South Korea in 2003, and then at a South Korean public secondary school through the English Program In Korea (EPIK) program. Through a personal contact he found employment in a university for two years while earning his MA in TESOL (2005-2007). He then returned to the US after being accepted into a doctorate program in education and came back to South Korea from 2009-2011 to work at a university while simultaneously carrying out research for his dissertation. As a doctoral candidate he taught tertiary courses to graduate students, and is the only participant to have done so. He is now a university professor in the US. On the topic of a pivotal event in his learning journey Mark spoke of experiencing a transformation while traveling in India,

where I faced the most raw and direct expression of my privilege as a White, American, male. Seeing people suffering from leprosy, seeing people respond to me as a (relatively) wealthy person, and experiencing

a broader scope of the world economy (and my place within it) really made me question a lot of things

This led to a shift of perspective in which he began to recognize the political and social nature of language and education, and came to recognize language not so much as an object, structure, or product to be ‘learned’ but as an endless variety of socially relevant activities in which one participates. In addition to his trip to India, he cited his enrollment in an MA TESOL program led by an extremely gifted and progressive-minded educator as a primary factor leading to his new way of viewing the classroom. His mentor helped him develop a more sophisticated language through which to discuss his observations and questions about language and education, which aided Mark in his goal “to have students produce their own knowledge.” In terms of his policy regarding L1, he was unequivocal in his support for its use and characterized it as an invaluable resource not only for clarifying linguistic or sociolinguistic points, but also for developing relationships and creating an atmosphere where even those who are not fluent in the target language have an opportunity to participate fully.

**Figure 1: Table Summary of Participants**

<b>Name &amp; Gender</b>	<b>Nation &amp; Ed. Level</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Pre-South Korea Teaching Certification</b>	<b>Post-Arrival Teaching Certification</b>	<b>Teaching Approach in South Korea</b>
Josh (male)	US Anthropology (MA)	Caucasian	_____	_____	*Technical/CLT *English only
Stan (male)	Canada English Lit (BA)	Caucasian	_____	TESOL	*Technical/CLT *English only
Sibylle (female)	US TESOL (MA)	Korean -American	MA TESOL	_____	*Teacher-centered/ Technical *Limited use of L1 allowed
Ivan (male)	US TESOL (MA)	Caucasian	_____	MA TESOL	*Co-production of knowledge *L1 allowed
Mark (male)	US Language & Literacy Education (PhD)	Caucasian	English Ed. (BA)	MA TESOL PhD Language & Literacy Ed	*Critical Pedagogy *L1 allowed

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

Three major themes emerged from the participants' responses: the basic assumption that simply being a native English speaker and the holder of a bachelor's degree is enough to teach English adequately in South Korea; an awareness of hegemonic influence exerted by the EFL industry; and the impact of institutionally-mandated requirements placed upon South Korean students regarding the learning of English. These themes featured prominently as primary factors which shaped and impacted each participant's personal journey and teaching approach as an instructor of English in South Korea.

### **Credentials Required to Teach English in South Korea**

As part of the "English fever" phenomenon which caught fire in South Korea in the 1990's (Park, J. K., 2009), the South Korean government mandated the implementation of massive English language programs with instruction from native speakers of English, which therefore necessitated the rapid employment of a large number of expatriate instructors. The current policy allows any citizen who is a native speaker of English from a so-called "Lucky 7" country (US, UK, UK-affiliated [Canada, Australia, New Zealand], Ireland, or South Africa) and is the holder of a bachelor's degree in any field to teach English in South Korea with no background in education required. This description characterizes how three (Josh, Stan, and Ivan) of the five participants initially started their teaching journey in South Korea. Of the three, Stan (TESOL certificate) and Ivan (MA TESOL program) opted to gain formal teaching qualifications after they had started to live and work in South Korea.

All five participants were asked if they believed the current requirements for

teaching English in South Korea ought to be changed. This question seemed to strike a nerve and became the catalyst for a number of heated responses. There were three themes which emerged from their responses: the importance of qualifications and experience; discrimination and preference for a white Anglo instructor; and the lack of basic social competence/respect for the responsibilities inherent in a teaching position. Of these three, there was a marked difference of opinion about the importance of qualifications and experience, a general consensus regarding discrimination and preference in South Korea for a white instructor, and a pretty strong agreement on the lack of basic social competence/respect for the responsibilities inherent in a teaching position exhibited by expatriate instructors.

**Importance of qualifications and experience.** The difference of opinion amongst the participants regarding the criteria that need to be met in order for an expatriate to be eligible to teach English in South Korea ranged from extreme criticism of the current requirements to strong support for the opportunity such a system provided for expatriates. Three of the five participants stated that a formal qualification (either a certification such as a TESOL or a higher degree such as a Master of Arts) should be made mandatory, and one instructor even went so far as to state that “the best thing for [South] Korea would be to get rid of all foreign professors other than those with Master’s or Doctorate degrees who are qualified” (Stan). Other reasons were provided to suggest that the current hiring policy propped up certain political interests and did not accurately represent the broad spectrum of English used around the world. As Mark noted:

It’s a terrible policy that stems from and propagates a link between contemporary English education and its colonial past...I believe that

more people from countries other than “The Lucky Seven” should be actively recruited because they offer students a much broader and more accurate representation of who actually uses English around the world. It would also offer a target or model for Korean English speakers that goes beyond the tired white, middle class, American representations that still dominate English language education around the world...So of course, no...people who are not qualified to teach should not be hired to teach English in [South] Korea.

One instructor who felt the current requirements were adequate harbored doubts about the efficacy of teaching qualifications. Explaining his position, Josh noted, “I think training in TESOL can be a hindrance. I see some teachers who hide behind procedure...you have to reach your students and engage them. But, the teacher is so preoccupied with following certain procedures they end up actually failing to teach.” Josh also felt that formal qualifications could deceive administrators and were not clear indicators of qualities such as a willingness to work hard, working well with others, and respecting the job: “A lot of these places are degree mills that let anyone in who has cash. They end up barely educating the person but some school will hire them because they have some credential.”

Ivan, the other instructor who felt the requirements for initial entry into South Korea’s EFL industry should not be changed, put forth the rationale that the current situation allows people who have no previous experience to discover if they have a talent and passion for teaching. Ivan felt that every expatriate instructor ought to initially work for a year or two in study academies in order to directly grapple with the realities of teaching South Korean students, a view which Josh seconded in his estimation that the

“sink or swim teacher who succeeds has learned how to swim in this new environment and is often more open to experimentation and has more intuition about what works and what doesn’t work in this new environment.” Where Ivan diverged from Josh was in his stipulation that if instructors wanted to teach beyond a certain length of time they ought to deepen their knowledge and awareness through a formalized program of study: “Some of the best teachers I hired knew nothing about teaching abroad in advance...But...I would like to see a requirement that foreign EFL teachers who are going to teach for more than a year or two be required to obtain a Master’s in TEFL” (Ivan).

**Discrimination and preference for a white Anglo instructor.** In the course of discussing the requirements to teach English in South Korea, a topic which almost invariably found its way to the surface, was the strong bias amongst South Koreans in favor of a white Anglo native English speaker. There was a consensus amongst the participants that there was a systemic institutionalized discrimination against non-white people in favor of white native English speakers. Four out of the five participants specifically noted that white native English speakers were given preferential treatment in securing a teaching position or were favored by students due to their appearance and were therefore favored by employers. Sibylle observed that, “I just see all around me that English equals white foreigner, from the UK, US, New Zealand, Canada.” Impressions ranged from students being disappointed if one’s skin was “not peach enough” (Josh) to study academies actively seeking out “a white western face to attract customers” (Ivan), and even extended to first-hand knowledge of universities which exercise a “kind of blatant discrimination in hiring practices [which] can certainly be seen as evidence of larger cultural problems in the field” (Mark). Although awareness of these factors

definitely seemed to have influenced Ivan and Mark to adopt critical teaching approaches, participants suggested that the strong bias for white native speakers can also exert an institutional force that may result in one feeling the need to compromise one's teaching approach. Sibylle, for example, expressed dismay at the fact that although she felt coerced to pass students who did not attend class with nothing lower than a "C" due to the threat of losing her job over negative student evaluations, she heard of "other foreign teachers handing out D's and F's, if justly due, and still receive good evaluations. To them [South Koreans], foreigners, especially whites, are a true representation of global English." Josh also affirmed that South Korean students exhibited a sense of hesitation and unease at times because although he is Caucasian, he does not "look like an Anglo...by Anglo I mean ethnically British or Anglo-American...some students find it 'disappointing' or 'not as interesting.'"

#### **Lack of Basic Competence/Respect for a Teacher's Responsibilities.**

Another topic that came up concerning the basic requirements needed to teach in South Korea was the impression that westerners who lack a very basic level of social or civil competence by any standard are allowed to work as teachers in South Korean language schools and universities. This should not be interpreted to mean that the participants felt all expatriates who come to work as an English teacher fall into this category, but rather that they noted this phenomenon as part of their experience. Instances of anecdotal or first-hand observation were reported by four of the five participants. Examples ranged from "there are a few weirdoes that come to [university] class[es] drunk, make inappropriate remarks and gestures to female students" (Sibylle) to "I have met some nutters...I had a roommate (and fellow university instructor) who thought the

Thai mafia were trying to kill him in [South ] Korea. He would never take the subway because he assumed they were waiting for him there” (Josh). Josh also disclosed that an expatriate he had worked with at a South Korean university was arrested and let go for using drugs. The two instructors (Stan and Ivan) who had experience recruiting expatriate instructors had perhaps the most in-depth perspective on this issue. Stan was unambiguous when he stated that, “I have participated in recruiting teachers for various English jobs in South Korea since 2001 and found that a lot of teachers are incompetent... after getting endless complaints from clients and school owners.” Stan’s observation may be explained in part by Ivan’s explanation:

All you really need is native English ability to have a decent paying job with good healthcare and room and board. That’s a pretty sweet deal. There were lots of foreigners I met who seemed okay to Koreans, but I doubt they were capable of getting decent work in their home countries. Korea is definitely a compelling place if you can’t get work where you are...I hate to press the point, but to some degree Korea seems to be the refuge of people who can’t make it socially or economically in their home countries.

The notion that South Koreans are to some degree unable to accurately evaluate the basic qualities of expatriate instructors was echoed by Josh: “Many Koreans just don’t know how to judge experience and performance because of limited language skills and cultural understanding...There is a tendency...to judge by appearance.” In conjunction with the perceived ease with which expatriates are able to become English instructors in South Korea is the lack of long-term job security. Perhaps not surprisingly the general terms of

employment presented in contracts tend to be for a 1-year hire. This may feed into weakening a sense of obligation to commit oneself fully to carrying out the responsibilities of a teacher. As Stan observed,

Well, to be honest, since we know our jobs are temporary, we may not have much loyalty to the school and our students. We are just there a short time, so there is no reason to invest time and effort into developing better English programs... There is a need, but it would take a year or two to properly get the program started and sponsored by the college. I may be gone by then, so my motivation is low to even start.

Sibylle pointed out that in her view diligently developing one's teaching capability counted for less when it came down to the considerations that had a direct bearing on teaching strategies that expatriate instructors end up adopting, as student evaluations are based on "how well the teacher is liked and not really about teaching ability. Because the student evaluations are the main driving factor in our rehire... It's more about being an entertainer." In her view this causes expatriate instructors to make English "easy" and give passing grades to "otherwise failing students in order to get them to give '4' or '5'" on evaluations.

### **Hegemony of the EFL Industry**

In addition to factors related to expatriates gaining employment in South Korea's EFL industry, another element which appeared to have a significant impact on the participants' teaching approach was the presence (or absence) of a clearly articulated awareness of hegemonic forces influencing their teaching choices. The participants were asked how their teaching approach changed after they began working in South Korea, and

what factors influenced those changes. From a discussion of these questions three themes emerged: teaching as a technical enterprise; teaching as a response to perceived students' needs; and teaching as an exercise in praxis.

**Teaching as a technical enterprise.** The practice of EFL may be interpreted as facilitating the acquisition of English communication skills. Towards that end three of the participants (Josh, Stan, and Sibylle) identified changes in their teaching approach as being focused on refining techniques designed to enhance the students' grammar, vocabulary, speaking ability, and/or test taking prowess. With a view to improving the efficacy of these techniques, Josh and Stan stressed the importance of an English-only policy in the classroom whenever possible; Stan indicated he had adopted a policy of feigning ignorance of L1 even outside the classroom in order to "force them to communicate in English." Sibylle however felt the use of L1 by students was acceptable prior to and after designated English-speaking activities, and herself occasionally used L1 to help students understand. Josh identified certain writing exercises, communicative activities, and games collectively as skillful means "which force the students to use the lessons' vocabulary and grammar." The need to cajole the students into speaking and utilizing a lesson's content may stem in part from the perception that there is a general unwillingness amongst South Korean students to put forth much effort into class, an impression which I also encountered while working at South Korean universities and confirmed in discussions with students and South Korean professors. There seemed to exist the concept that the amount of assignments or even class time could be bargained for. On more than one occasion a fellow expatriate instructor related how students were let go early if they demonstrated some enthusiasm for a grammar point or recited a phrase

which the instructor had written on the board. Yet the tendency to disengage from expatriate instructor instruction may also be related to how well expatriate instructors align their expectations with their students.

**Teaching as a response to needs.** A second factor acknowledged by the participants as influencing their teaching approach after starting work in South Korea was the needs of South Korean students. How the instructors perceived and came to define those needs varied. As noted above Josh and Stan viewed them as existing squarely within the realm of knowledge and skills that could only be voiced in English, and, therefore, needed to be transferred from the instructor to the students in a one-way transaction via activities and instruction set up by the instructor. Stan recalled, “I altered my teaching because I realized that my value was because I am fluent in English. I focus on teaching them slang, idioms, and improving their pronunciation.” Sibylle also identified her South Korean students’ needs as requiring a teacher-centered approach. She came to South Korea with the intention of setting up a student-centered environment, but abandoned that plan when she found she “cannot teach real academic level” because her students lack motivation and basic communicative skills in the target language. Another factor she cited was the students’ desire to focus on test-taking skills for exams such as the TOEIC rather than cultivating their fluency. Ivan and Mark came to view students’ needs as extending beyond those that could be fulfilled by a technical approach whose objective was to facilitate teacher-directed student learning. In addressing issues related to the consideration of a learner’s socio-historical background, they expressed the belief that “the quality of life in the language classroom is much more important than instructional efficiency” (Ivan), and saw “language not so much as an object, structure, or

product to be ‘learned’ but as an endless variety of socially relevant activities in which one participates” (Mark). Students needed to be able to use L1 both with one another and the instructor in order to fully participate and become a producer of knowledge where instructors “learn as much from their students as they from us” (Ivan).

**Teaching as an exercise in praxis.** Ivan and Mark came to view teaching as necessarily an exercise in praxis due to transformative experiences which they underwent after arriving in South Korea. Both participants characterized their transformations as taking years, involving events and processes that occurred both in the classroom and in their private lives. In Ivan’s case, prior to entering his MA program, he became a technically-proficient instructor attuned to his students’ culture through working in study academies and getting married to a South Korean and interacting with her family. He emphasized that until he took courses related to critical theory he was largely resistant to the initial components of his MA program, as they focused on TESOL theory, methods, and techniques. According to Ivan this was because, through his 3.5 year “trial by fire” experience teaching in South Korean hagwons prior to entering graduate school, he had learned what teaching approaches were plausible in a South Korean classroom and which ones were merely theoretical in TESOL’s generalized one-size-fits-all global approach to instruction. It was not until he encountered critical theory in graduate school that his “whole world changed,” and formed the view that “most westerners are not consciously but sort of systemically hegemonic due to historical factors and that they bring this sort of unconscious neocolonial mindset or set of habits to their teaching abroad.” Mark also went through a multitude of experiences before encountering a line of reasoning which put all that he went through into perspective. He spoke of going through intense periods

of reflection, first while hiking 1000 miles of the Appalachian Trail “thinking about my teaching future” after working in Japan for a year, then again while traveling in India for a month after teaching in South Korea for the first time, when he “faced the most raw and direct expression of my privilege as a White, American, Male.”

He said that one of the things he noticed that bothered him for a long time was how the fields of second-language acquisition, linguistics, and English Language Teaching (ELT) were dominated by western-based paradigms. Reflecting back on the transformation of his perspective, he said,

I slowly began to recognize the political and social nature of education...Though that shift in perspective is very easy to write about now, it was a very slow process...As far as factors that led to this shift...well, the most obvious is that I enrolled in an MA TESOL program led by an extremely gifted and progressive-minded educator.

Ivan and Mark’s transitions to a teaching approach based on praxis were engendered in part by encounters they had with critical theory in MA TESOL programs which discussed the political and social facets of education. Yet, although Sibylle also expressed views of the South Korean EFL industry which demonstrated critical thinking, she did not adopt praxis as the basis for her classroom approach. This may be due to Ivan and Mark having had very different experiences with their MA TESOL courses; although they made very clear references to critical theory and teachers who inspired them, Sibylle in contrast only mentioned her MA TESOL degree in the context of how it enabled her to teach at the tertiary level. Mark also talked about how there was a very marked divide in his MA TESOL program between expatriate instructors who adopted a critical view of the EFL

industry and those who actively resisted the implications of critical theory. Gender may have also played a prominent role, as Ivan and Mark both spoke much more frequently with forceful awareness about white male privilege.

### **English as a Mandatory Requirement**

A final major factor which the participants cited as playing a significant role in the classroom and impacting their teaching approach was the cumulative effect of the English language requirements that South Koreans are under duress to meet. As also noted previously, an enormous amount of resources are allocated to the study of English, with minimal levels of fluency to show for it. Out of the participants' responses related to this situation three themes emerged: (1) a lack of student motivation to cultivate communicative fluency; (2) the low value attributed to expatriate instructors; and (3) the precedence that business and government take over the welfare of students and expatriate instructors.

**Lack of student motivation to cultivate fluency.** Josh, Sibylle and Ivan saw the heavy emphasis on standardized exams and the resultant fierce competition amongst students as connected to a low level of enthusiasm to improve their communicative skills. Josh specifically cited “the endless series of competitions and tests which the student never wins” as dampening South Korean students' general affinity for English. He stated that he would like to see a pass/fail criteria replace the grading curve system currently in use at his university in order to encourage learning and lessen the huge significance attached to grades. In his view, in the South Korean educational system all things “are just related to competition.” Ivan similarly felt that English in South Korea is viewed more as a function of societal convention and measuring stick than a subject of intrinsic

interest, and is used in South Korea “to filter out college applicants and job applicants...Being able to say that you had English instruction like everybody else is more important than actually having to use it.” Sibylle pointed out that since few jobs in South Korea actually require fluency in English, students do not want to learn communicative skills and instead are interested in improving their test taking proficiency: “Koreans only want to learn how to take a test...Again, it’s all about grammar and taking a test.” Overall the consensus concerning this topic was one which pointed towards English being perceived as a technical subject meant to be studied for the express purpose of achieving a respectable test score and better job prospects/social status rather than for its own sake, i.e. communication with other people.

**Low value attributed to expatriate instructors.** Another consequence of the heavy emphasis on standardized exams was the perception amongst the participants that their services are to some degree trivialized. Whereas at universities Korean instructors are held in high regard “because most of them have doctorates, tenure, and are generally respected by students” (Sibylle), expatriate instructors “pretty much never teach grammar, and almost always are put in front of conversation classes, where they are supposed to...make up for the deficiencies of the standardized testing scenario” and “are simply supposed to provide authentic speaking opportunities to students” (Ivan). As the ability to actually communicate in English is not of actual significance for the majority of South Koreans, “The Ministry of Education has stated in writing that the ability or tenure of foreign English teachers is unimportant. We are there only to provide authentic speaking opportunities to students, but we are not important to the system” (Ivan). Taking things a step further was the view put forth that expatriate instructors were in reality not

even valued so much for their role in providing an authentic speaking opportunity as much as for bolstering the image of a study academy or university. Speaking of study academy owners, Stan stated he felt they “are willing to overlook incompetence for a friendly and attractive speaker,” an impression reinforced by Ivan’s analysis that,

Image is 90% of the time at any level in Korea. I was lucky to teach at a few hagwons that cared about quality, but they HAD to have foreign teachers or they couldn’t exist. Image was hugely important for the university, including the image of master’s degreed teachers.

As a doctoral student, Mark was put in charge of mostly graduate students and enjoyed a large degree of autonomy; however, in Josh, Stan and Ivan’s experience, the expatriate instructor’s opinion or input into classroom policy was severely curtailed. Interestingly, Ivan viewed this in a positive light, as it served to “inhibit hegemony,” helped to transform him, and encouraged him to adopt a new approach based on understanding the underlying cultural context of the South Korean way of doing things:

Because of this crazy system, I had this amazing mid-life transformation to a new way of seeing things. I now understand how this system works. I also know how to operate within and around it in a satisfying way. Once you understand the system, there is much you can do, actually. This is unlike the American system, which is almost impossible to master or work around.

It should be noted, however, that part of “working with the system,” in Ivan’s words, entails practices such as changing students’ final grades at the end of the semester when they complain and “explain to the office about why they were unable to do all the HW

[homework] or study for the tests or attend class,” as “an English grade rarely matters in the grand scheme of things...once you learn that the result that is respected just has to look good, but the content doesn’t really matter, then that [working with the system] gets easier.” For Josh and Stan, however, there were serious misgivings about having little input into their working environment, and a resulting sense of alienation, powerlessness, and not being appreciated. The reality for them of having “no say in the style of classes or even the books we use” (Stan) constitutes a situation where expatriate instructors are decidedly excluded from engaging effectively with the educational process. In Josh’s view, this,

total lack of effort, interest, or even lip service to integrating NESTs into the decision making process significantly [and] negatively impacts the quality of experience for the NESTs, their ability to educate and the quality of the education students receive.

**Precedence of the interests of business and government.** The obsession with standardized testing reflects a technocratic approach to education, where standardized exam scores form the core criteria for consideration across South Korea. Whereas in the west admission policies may vary widely from school to school, it is the case that in South Korea the government has direct control over both the public and private sectors of education with heavy involvement and direct investment from huge conglomerates (“ch’aebol”) like Samsung and Hyundai (Kim, T., 2013). Study academies which incorporate or have as their sole aim the professed goal of enabling students to become conversant in English and score well on the English language component of the college entrance exam, as well as on assorted ETS-produced exams such as the TOEIC, TOEFL,

SAT, GRE, and GMAT, have proliferated. These tests generate huge revenue and profits. All participants in this study remarked upon how the dictates of big business/government and the business of catering to a technocratic system impact the classroom, students, and their teaching outlook. Sibylle asserted that South Korea's educational system disenfranchises the majority of its people by serving the interests of wealthy and upper middle-class families who have the financial resources to send their children to more privileged study academies; these institutions advertise and have proven themselves to have the ability to provide the actual test questions prior to the exam sitting (Jung, M., 2013). Ivan pointed out that not only do the standardized exams fail to test communicative ability, he often found they tested for erroneous grammar concepts, with the resultant outcome that "students are sometimes forced to learn and repeat incorrect information." The huge business of English in South Korea (Kang, S. W., 2009; Ramirez, 2013) and the numerous exams they are propped up by can create a scenario whereby "English can appear to be this monolith of impossibility" (Josh), an unscalable mountain of a subject which the expatriate instructor is unfortunately unable to do much about due to the sentiment that "Although I do my best for my students, I know that I am not being used efficiently, nor will I ever be" (Stan). Mark sees South Korea's English education policy as a product of the government and corporate world's complicit agreement with the push by transnational organizations to engage "in a process of reorganizing education on a global scale, forcing national systems to become more compatible and more standardized." He views this phenomenon as a policy which has its roots in "larger economic and social trends that go far beyond Korea" as part of the tidal wave of neoliberalism and globalization that is engulfing the world and sweeping aside the

impetus to localize education within the culture and contexts of South Korean students and their families. Mark made it clear that he has an unambiguous view of standardized exams:

Whether one is talking about a test aimed at grammatical knowledge or communicative competence...I feel like the root problem is continually overlooked...that language use is a local and contextual phenomenon completely at odds with the various tests that are used to rate and rank learners.

Whether one considers the challenge of engaging students who may be more interested in entertainment, the TESOL policy of a one-size-fits-all teaching approach, or the South Korean government's backing of an English educational system which emphasizes the results of standardized testing, it is apparent that the number of factors that an EFL expatriate instructor has to negotiate with in the South Korean classroom can be both numerous and formidable.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings**

The various factors which the participants in this study cited as influencing their choices in the classroom resonate with situations I have come across in my own experience. These factors have introduced perspectives which broadened how I view the expatriate instructors and the EFL industry in South Korea. Examining how our teaching journeys confirm or contradict the literature may serve to further illuminate aspects of the root causes and elements which give rise to the environment in which expatriate instructors find themselves when they go to South Korea to teach English.

### **Instructor Qualifications**

Two participants said that not requiring any formal teaching experience or qualification to apply for a teaching job in South Korea constituted a desirable state of affairs. They felt a “sink or swim” situation was a useful way for expatriates to determine how serious they were about teaching in South Korea and served to make those who had managed to “swim” adept at teaching. The position of 1 of these participants was actually not entirely clear-cut, as Ivan stated that many expatriates in South Korea were unfit to be instructors and also expressed the view that any expatriate who intended to work for more than two years should be required to obtain a master’s degree in TEFL. On the whole the responses of four of the five participants support reservations expressed in the literature about unqualified expatriate instructors teaching English abroad. The various concerns voiced by the participants echoed the view that the recent rash of “English fever” (Park, J. K., 2009) requiring the employment of large numbers of expatriate English instructors has been mishandled at a very basic level (Jambor, 2010; Jeon, 2009; Nam, 2010). The call for fundamental adjustments (Carless, 2004; Choi, Y., 2001; Kwon, O., 2000) bears

striking similarities to the situation currently unfolding in China (Chen, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2002; Qiang & Wolff, 2003; Jin, J., 2005). The basic issue revolves around the inability to locate expatriate instructors who are formally qualified and sufficiently culturally prepared to teach within a South Korean context. More specifically, issues raised by the participants which were found in the literature include: (1) unqualified expatriates setting a low standard of teaching; (2) an overwhelming sense of fraud palpable to both South Koreans and expatriates; (3) cultural insensitivity to South Korean learners; (4) the hiring of instructors who would be considered unfit for employment in their native countries.

**Unqualified expatriates setting a low standard.** It has been mentioned that South Korea's English proficiency is actually quite poor, especially in light of the amount of resources invested into South Korea's EFL industry. Jambor (2009) also discusses how poorly South Korean universities fare in world rankings, and how this is indicative of their inability to attract highly qualified foreign instructors in any field, although South Korea has in fact made great strides in the area of research and development (Kim & Cho, 2014). Clark and Park (2013) point out that the Times Higher Education's Ranking puts just six South Korean universities in its top 400, while the 2012 ranking issued by Shanghai Jiao Tung estimates South Korea's best university to be among the world's top 100-150, and places just ten South Korean universities amongst its top 500. Seth (2005) and Yoon (2014) relate the large exodus of South Korean students to the US as an indication of the lack of confidence amongst the South Korean people themselves in their own education system. This lack of confidence may in part be interpreted as the result of the intensive US effort to Americanize the South Korean people (Armstrong, 2003;

Williams, 2004; Ahn, 2013; Yoon, 2014), as American influence extended deeply into all facets of Korean society from 1945 (Williams, 2004) and played a central role in determining the shape of South Korea's education system (Bailey, 1996; Armstrong, 2003; Ahn, 2013; Yoon, 2014). In exploring the issue further, Jambor (2010) cites South Korea's whole EFL sector as being deficient in capable expatriate English teachers due to substandard hiring policies:

Koreans must start to see that at least part of the blame should be placed on themselves as they are the ones encouragingly inviting the unqualified foreign teacher. That is to say, it is unfair to hire a non-qualified teacher and expect him/her to perform and act professionally especially if both the school and government have opted to stipulate that little professional training and background is needed to become an English teacher in Korea. Aside from a university degree, only a TESOL/TEFL Certification is needed, though a Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults is preferred. Often times, Korean schools hire so called teachers with a wide range of majors, many of which are unrelated to education, straight out of university. (p. 1)

By his tone Jambor indicates how inadequate TESOL/TEFL programs often are, a point which was made by Josh and other EFL observers in South Korea (Finch, 2008; Ramirez, 2013). Jambor's statement is also confirmed by Stan and Ivan's observation that South Korea's EFL industry has a tendency to hire unqualified expatriate teachers who do not exhibit professional behavior. Assuming that the industry attempts to secure the services of competent individuals, Jambor's appraisal is in line with Stan, Ivan, and Josh's

assertion that South Korean employers are unable to accurately evaluate the basic qualities of expatriate instructors.

My own experience coincides with Ivan's view that "Image is 90%" of the equation. One instance which comes to mind is how the president of a South Korean university which I worked for gave a teaching position to an expatriate who had posed for pictures taken for a brochure. This instructor subsequently skipped meetings due to modeling assignments, routinely adjourned his classes 10-20 minutes early after spending the whole period playing games, and openly discussed details of his amorous entanglements with students. In a related study of South Korean students' perceptions of South Korean English instructors vs. foreign English instructors, Han (2005) cites a survey of 69 US EFL teachers, all of whom turned out to have no teaching qualifications, to illustrate how "'cheap' teachers can result in 'cheap' outcomes" (p. 4). In examining how the large number of unqualified expatriate teachers resulted in "a subsequent drop in quality of EFL teachers" (p. 4), Han further discusses the NEST's "self-satisfaction with security in their native language, assuming that everybody wants to speak English and [that] they do not need to learn other languages or even other cultures" (p. 4).

**Overwhelming sense of fraud.** In an article detailing the program set up in Seoul (EPIK) to implement the use of foreign instructors in public secondary education, Jeon (2009) quotes an expatriate instructor explaining her feeling that she and her compatriots have little to offer for the high hourly rate of pay they receive:

Why are we hired? I don't know. They pay me \$2000 a month . . . But we're here as 'performing monkeys,' like what we do is we stand there, we do a dog and bunny show for 45 minutes. Everybody laughs and

giggles, having a good time. We sit around in front of a computer. That works for me. Two grand for that? You're kidding. I have my job. It's brilliant. It could be done differently. I am not here to fix the problems. It's not my country. I'm not here to change the world. I love my job. It's a nice, great country. Love it. (p. 238)

The sentiment that it is less about developing an effective curriculum and more about appearances was echoed by Sibylle's experience that South Korean university students wrote evaluations of instructors based on skin color and general entertainment value, thereby influencing instructors to scale down teaching approaches from challenging to easily accommodating.

Stan and Ivan also mentioned how securing a teaching position in South Korea was more about the image one projected rather than one's actual competence as an instructor. Mark found this issue to be part of a larger malaise which extended to allowing a white male expatriate with only a BA in psychology to teach psychology in English at the tertiary level solely because he was a native English speaker. Other informed insiders have chronicled how "young, inexperienced, and cheap teachers" have been pursued as a matter of policy by public schools (Ramirez, 2013) and another instructor stated that she "wouldn't say that we were perceived as useful for much more than boosting the image of the school we were at" after being put in charge of a class without any training or prior experience (Ramirez, 2013). This corroborates the observation made by a South Korean professor that "Many school administrators, teachers, parents and students still tend to think that native teachers of English should match their stereotype of a 'native speaker' of English- people only from certain ethnic backgrounds" (Ramirez, 2013).

**Cultural insensitivity.** Investigations into the impact that NESTs have on South Korean learners have noted issues of cultural insensitivity. Shin and Crookes (2005) cite various sources in the literature that discuss how a general Western ethnocentric attitude towards Asians “rooted in the discourse of ‘Orientalism’” and cultivated in contemporary western classrooms have deeply-set roots going back to “colonial discourse, which constantly tried to discover ‘differences’ between the superior Western Self and the illogical... and inferior Other” (p. 6). Although recent shifts in TESOL ideology have admitted the discourse of World Englishes (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013), the reality is that “the material conditions of the structure (and hence, institutionalized practices) have not,” despite “the common discourse of celebrating (cultural) diversity as norm, some (cultural) differences are constantly constructed as deficit” in an industry where “a particular kind of English is continually being privileged discursively and institutionally in global ELT” (Shin, H., 2006, p. 151); “the colonized is constructed as a primitive being without language or culture...Yet, ‘English’ and ‘culture’ is, in fact, a particular kind of English and culture: that of native English speakers” (p. 155).

The result of these circumstances is that South Korean adult learners in Han’s (2005) case study found that NESTs “lacked an understanding of Korean culture, language, educational context and learners’ needs, interests and preferences” as they “appeared unable or unwilling to develop interpersonal relationships with learners, and lacked the qualities of a good teacher, including sincerity, enthusiasm and responsibility” (p. 10). Part of the dilemma may reside in colonialist attitudes which persist in academia. In response to the findings of Han and other reports from China and Bangladesh, McKenzie (2008) characterizes the claims of Han and others as obstacles in her article

titled “Roadblocks to Teaching English as a Foreign Language;” she makes it clear that she views indigenous educational practices as “cultural impediments” (p. 89). She goes on to comment that “Jealousy and envy among local peers directed toward the NESTs...apparently stemmed from the elevated status that comes with being, or even hiring, a native speaker” (p. 88), and concludes that NESTs need to contend with “cultural biases” when going abroad to teach, while local native English teachers “should work with (and perhaps learn from)” NESTs (p. 90). Taken together, these comments not only support Ivan and Mark’s statements that a neo-colonial outlook informed by an attitude of white privilege still applies to expatriate English instructors, they justify its continued presence and empowerment.

**Instructors unfit for employment in their native countries.** One would be hard-pressed to turn up descriptions in the academic literature which overtly frames NESTs as unfit for employment in their native countries; the general preference is to say many are ‘unqualified’ to teach in South Korea. However, as discussed previously regarding whether the current qualifications for a teaching position in South Korea ought to be changed, four out of the five participants reported anecdotal evidence of NESTs who exhibited behavior quite below the level of what is generally termed professionally acceptable for a teacher. Stan’s view that “a lot of [foreign] teachers are incompetent” and Ivan’s experience that “Korea seems to be the refuge of people who can’t make it socially or economically in their home countries” are reflected in Sibylle’s contact with NESTs who come to class drunk and make inappropriate gestures and comments to female students, as well as Josh’s description of a colleague who refused to ride the subway due to suspicions that the Thai mafia were lying in wait to ambush him there. Stan and Ivan

both worked as recruiters of expatriate instructors, and therefore met and evaluated a variety of candidates. Instances of expatriate instructors stirring up outcries amongst South Korean civilians in cases involving alcohol, illicit drugs, and sexual harassment forced the South Korean government to recognize the implications in Stan and Ivan's assessment of expatriates who come to South Korea, which led to the South Korean government's decision to tighten visa regulations for NEST's in 2007 (Jin, H. J., 2005; Bae, 2007). The confirmed presence of a pedophile amongst NESTs resulted in a further tightening of regulations related to checks on expatriates' criminal history in 2010 ("U.S. Pedophile Suspect Arrested," 2013). South Koreans were again alerted to this issue last year when it was found that a NEST who worked in Seoul until 2012 was recently arrested in Cambodia on charges of pedophilia; prior to his arrest there had been alleged instances of the expatriate in question having inappropriate contact with South Korean children (Power, 2014; Redmond, 2014).

Along with numerous authors previously cited (Jin, H. J., 2005; Bae, 2007; Jeon, 2009; Jambor, 2010; Ramirez, 2013; Power, 2014; Redmond, 2014) responses of the five participants in this study may indicate that South Korea has in a sense become a haven for some foreign misfits due to South Korean employers' and students' inability to discern the basic competence and sincerity of expatriate instructors (student evaluations have considerable bearing on what type of teachers are hired and kept on). It stands to reason that unscrupulous people exist at all times and places. The argument here is that South Korea is still viewed as a relatively easy option by expatriates, and has traditionally been viewed in the way Wharton discussed:

It is possible to teach in Korea even without a university degree. Certainly, the old sheepskin helps land the plum jobs and will certainly make the government look more favourably on your work visa application, but there are hundreds of people working legally (often on a student visa while studying some aspect of the culture) and not-so-legally. Even with more foreigners going over to teach these days, I would still recommend even non-grads give it a try. Even if nothing pans out with any of Seoul's 300-plus schools (hard to imagine), there's always Pusan, Taegu, Inchon, Kwangju, Taejon, Kyonggu, Chollanamdo, Kyungsanbukdo and Kyungsanamdo—all cities of over one million with dozens of English schools each. (1992, p. 71)

This study provides some insights which shed light on how hiring unqualified expatriate teachers may affect teaching approaches to English as a Foreign Language in South Korea. In lieu of formal qualifications, there appears to be an active practice of hiring based on appearance, with a bias for a white appearance. As unqualified instructors lack a background in teaching, they may rely on practices designed to get their students to like them, such as awarding high marks for minimal effort and giving passing grades to negligent students. Sweets and permission to leave class early may even be offered to university students as rewards for minimal engagement. In an environment where student evaluations are heavily weighted, this lowering of the bar sends reverberations throughout teacher staff rooms and helps to account for reports that instructors who may be qualified feel obligated to become entertainers (Jeon, 2009; Sybille; Stan). It can lead to expatriate EFL instructors not being utilized properly (Jeon, M., 2009; Sybille; Josh;

Stan) or not being valued by administrative authorities (Jambor, 2009; Sybille; Josh; Stan). As contracts for unqualified instructors are usually for one year and financial incentive to attempt to settle down in South Korea are comparatively low (Jambor, 2010), motivation for instructors to engage in serious pedagogical practice is further minimized. Responses from participants in this study indicate that a bias for white Anglo instructors (Sybille; Ivan; Josh; Stan; Mark) can also play a role in influencing non-white instructors to lower their standards in order to secure positive student evaluations (Sybille).

### **Awareness of Hegemony**

The participants in this study were basically split in their selection of teaching approaches between those that focus on technique and those that recognize the political and social aspects of education. This division reflects the two major streams of thought in EFL literature which is represented on the one hand by researchers who perpetuate the traditional focus on the technical aspects of instruction, existing within “decontextualized contexts” (Pennycook, 2001, p. 5), and countered on the other by the rising tide of scholars who are active in delineating how the EFL industry structurally privileges certain groups at the expense of others (Phillipson, 1992; Pennycook, 1994, 1995; Widdowson, 1997; Vavrus, 2002). Strong arguments utilizing official documents have been put forth delineating how the US and UK in conjunction with multinational organizations utilize both implicit and explicit methods in their promotion of the spread of English to reproduce western hegemonic structures under the banner of globalization (Tollefson, 1988, 1991; Canagarajah, 1999; Pennycook, 1998; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This use of English to perpetuate neo-colonialism through linguistic imperialism is discounted by some as a form of paranoid conspiracy theory

(Davies, 1996; Alatis & Straele, 1997; Crystal, 2000; Brut-Griffler, 2002). Some of the researchers in this camp instead assert that the deliberate promotion of English is an “immensely democratizing institution” (Crystal, 2003, p. 172) that will help nations “progress towards the kind of peaceful and tolerant society which most people dream about” (p. xiv).

Two of the participants’ responses showed a preference for teaching choices that were preoccupied with advancing their student’s proficiency through speaking and mnemonic-based exercises in environments which were ideally devoid of the learner’s native language. Completely omitting the learner’s L1 and requiring the use of English through coercion was viewed as encouraging fluency. One participant admitted a limited use of L1 but still adhered to teaching technical skills based on the perception that this approach met the students’ needs and addressed the apparent lack of interest and basic fluency to engage in learner-centered activities. The remaining two participants reported a shift in their perception of learners’ needs from an emphasis on skills to a deeper-seated desire for personal affirmation and emancipation. Key to this transformation in outlook were meaningful encounters with critical theory in post-graduate studies, in particular discussions of readings with other instructors which gave rise to reflections that expatriate teaching practices promoting hegemony arose from both conscious and unconscious neocolonial tendencies, a key tenet of Phillipson’s (1992) work. Allowing L1 in the classroom therefore became a necessary condition conducive to an active encouragement of the co-production of knowledge in an environment that fully admitted the learners’ cultural identity. Although it was acknowledged that an Americanized version of English is highly emphasized in South Korea, none of the participants cited the

concern brought up by Lee (2011) that the hegemony of American English in South Korean textbooks embed attitudes of racism and discrimination against people of color within South Korean students. Another critique of the hegemony of English found in the literature but not significantly recognized in this study was the assertion that English is now actively packaged and sold as a commodity but overall fails to improve the emotional and social well-being of its learners (Piller, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010; Park, S. S., 2011).

### **The Impact of Institutionally-Mandated Requirements**

The responses in this study support findings in the literature which identify mandated requirements set up by the South Korean government as lying at the root of deficiencies in South Korean learners' speaking fluency and attitudes to learning communicative English (Choi, I. C., 2008; Jeon, 2009). They resonate with studies that suggest that high-stakes language testing produce numerous negative consequences (Cheng, Watanabe, & Curtis, 2004; Wall, 2005; Xie, 2008). Most pertinent to this study are the findings which directly cite standardized testing as negatively impacting the teaching approaches of instructors (Abrams, Pedulla & Madaus, 2003) and in particular those of EFL instructors (Cheng & Curtis, 2004; Wall, 2005; Choi, I. C., 2008). Rather than cultivate a fluency in English which meshes with the learner's cultural history, the target language is taught within the framework of test-taking techniques as well as phrases and structures unique to the world of Educational Testing Services. From this perspective, the study of English within a system that affixes high value to standardized examination scores is bereft of any significant inherent meaning for the language itself. It is merely a subject in which all that matters is the ability to demonstrate a semblance of

proficiency by replicating formal standardized western patterns of English. This stands in sharp contrast to the latest research which demonstrates that effective and useful language acquisition occurs when the target language is localized and situated within the learner's social and cultural background (Shin, H.; 2007; Kubota & Lin, 2009; O'Hara-Davies, 2011; Erling & Seargeant, 2013). Both the literature and the participants correlated the high value associated with attaining optimal test scores with a low motivation to learn productive language skills, as South Koreans actually rarely use English in their daily lives (Choi, W. H., 2011; Song, J. J., 2011). The observation voiced by participants that English functions mainly as a tool for educational and job assessment was also cited by researchers in the field (Park, J. S. Y., 2011), as was the sentiment that expatriate instructors are not valued or utilized very efficiently (Jeon, 2009).

The impact of South Korean institutional educational policy also makes its presence felt in another significant way. Participants stated their teaching practices are often affected by being excluded from the process of deciding curriculum and course policies. This sense of being herded towards certain teaching choices by virtue of having to adapt to externally-mandated measures becomes more credible when the facts documenting the high degree of control the South Korean government has over education are laid bare (Kim, T., 2013). In her article, Kim details how global trends toward neo-liberal policies such as privatization and a 'lean' state have led to the current South Korean government's political reasoning to restructure higher education along the trends generated by globalization. The South Korean government has been able to implement measures which result in a strong adherence to conformity to a technical/functional approach to education due to the fact that the Ministry of Education has direct control

over both the public and private educational sectors (Kim, T., 2013). Kim details how conformity and lack of diversification (except for Seoul National University, no public university has its own charter) has led to limited educational choices, and how this in turn has led to, (1) an increase in South Korean students going abroad to study in search of a better education; and (2) a high proportion of western, especially US-educated academic faculty members being hired to work in South Korean universities. In recent years there has in fact been an aggressive campaign by South Korean university EFL departments to only hire expatriate instructors who have an MA. Having said that, in one of the universities I worked at it became known that one of our expatriate co-workers had simply listed an MA credential on his CV, submitted a copy of a counterfeited degree, and was hired without any background check; this was relayed to me with an air of humor by an expatriate who had recommended this teacher to our department head and was subsequently chosen to be the head instructor.

Regardless of the academic background of faculty members, within the academic environment regulated by the South Korean government the emphasis in the classroom ends up being on rote memorization rather than creativity (Seth, 2005) and policies aimed at quantitative expansion rather than quality (Yoon, 2014). The predilection to dictate the course of South Korean education from a central controlling base of power has been traced to economic pressures originating outside of the peninsula in policies set by such organizations as the IMF (Piller & Cho, 2013) and was identified in this study by Mark as the major factor influencing a systemic standardization of education in the mold of global neoliberal policies. The other participants however did not cite awareness of this issue as impacting their approach to teaching.

### **Effects of Hegemonic American/Lucky Seven English**

Researchers have reported a litany of negative consequences in South Korea related to the spread of English. The current model of American or Lucky Seven English has become a tool that reproduces structures supporting a deeply-entrenched, established social order, as opposed to a new social order engendered by globalization. English functions as a mechanism that sustains inequality in South Korea (Song, J. J., 2011) via an educational system which remains tightly controlled by the government (Jeon, 2009; Kim, T., 2008, 2013; Lee, Wha Han, & McKerrow, 2010). Compelling evidence suggests that the elite carry on a policy of Americanization through English (Lee, I., 2011) as a symptom of a colonized nation instilled with a doctrine of survival-of-the-fittest social Darwinism (Lee, Wha Han, & McKerrow, 2010). The desperate struggle to keep one's head above water (Park, J. K., 2009) has given rise to a wide array of social ills amongst the sectors of society which cannot afford to send their children abroad or to domestic high-end language schools (Sorenson, 1994; Lee & Brinton, 1996; Seth, 2002; Song, J. J., 2011; Yoon, 2014). The spread and systemic insistence on the primacy of English also serves to repress critical inquiry into the high costs incurred through the adoption of neoliberal language policies (Piller & Cho, 2013). These findings were reflected in Sibylle's remark that South Korea's educational system serves the interests of wealthy families who "have the money to pay for private tutoring and afterschool programs." Ivan also observed that a "there's a bit of a 'keeping up with the Joneses' to English mania...it is frustrating for those who really want to learn to have to deal with the system as it is" as "They [the Korean government] use it [standardized English testing] to filter out college applicants and job applicants." Mark concurred that South Korea has succumbed to

globalist neoliberal policies enacted by transnational organizations who “are in a process of reorganizing education on a global scale, forcing national systems to become more compatible and more standardized...I feel like a lot of official policy came straight from the US.”

### **Applying Principles of Adult Education and Recommendations**

A critical inquiry into the root causes of the challenges encountered by the participating EFL instructors in this study reveals an educational environment very heavily driven by forces related to the US’s hegemony and their relationship with the elite class in South Korea, an elite class that actively collaborates with and sanctions Americanization as a means to maintaining power. Viewing the English-teaching profession through this larger lens may lead instructors to confront oppositional views that reveal important issues of conscience and prompt a shift in perspective. In the case of some of the participants in this study, an introduction to critical theory did indeed lead to new teaching approaches which sought to address the inequities and disenfranchising effects of English education in South Korea.

In addition to encouraging a practice of critical reflection as part of a process of transformative learning, adult education includes traditions of organizing and informing people to actively engage in actions leading to the recognition of and liberation from oppressive structures. In terms of EFL instruction in South Korea, if teaching approaches incorporated the fact that the majority (80%) of English communicative exchanges are in countries outside of the Lucky Seven with non-native speakers (Ahn, 2013), the instruction of English as an *international* language (Kachru, 2005; Chang, 2010) rather than an exclusively western one would be greatly facilitated. Citizens from Singapore and

Germany apply their own peculiar accent and constructs when using English, yet are able to communicate with each other. As stated in Chapter 1, teaching English as a subject localized within a South Korean context would encourage its use as a multinational tool more readily familiar to and shaped by South Korean sensibilities, and would therefore become more accessible in the classroom to South Korean students.

That such changes in policy could produce a healthier outcome for the South Korean people is supported by a number of studies. In addition to its value regarding issues of classroom management and effective learning strategies, Meyer (2008) notes the importance of L1 for what is termed code switching, which occurs when learners feel free to switch between L1 (native language) and L2 (the target language). Cook (1992) feels code switching may encourage “intercultural communicative competence,” or the “ability to stand between two cultures, seeing both L1 and L2 cultures in a new light” rather than falling into the trap of becoming “an imitation native speaker” (pp. 583-584). Guy (1999) finds that consciously teaching in a manner which is intimately aware and affirmative of the learner’s culture can be an effective antidote to the ethnocentric approach often unconsciously utilized by western instructors. As Podeschi (1990) points out in his work with Hmong immigrants, values which are taken for granted in western education such as individualism are at variance with the cultural code of peoples who value a collective approach to learning, and may lead to a complete breakdown in classroom morale; it is not difficult to imagine how the assumptions that an expatriate may bring to the South Korean classroom could be a source of alienation considering how the students are socialized by other courses with South Korean instructors (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000).

Mark pointed out that an important turning point for him occurred when he

started to become attuned to South Korean culture and develop “a Korean insider identity.” Josh similarly found that, “Trust is often an intercultural issue. Before there is trust...students can ‘appear’ lazy...But, sometimes, it is just a trust issue.” How well an expatriate instructor can become aware of student cultural sensibilities can play a vital role in determining whether students feel coerced or participate of their own accord in a meaningful manner. A common assumption around which western instructors shape their teaching approaches and evaluation of students is the axiom that a student who speaks a lot exhibits an active mind. H. Shin (2006) argues that western instructors often mistake a calm reserved attitude amongst East Asian students as a lack of independence or incompetence and posits that South Korean students distinguish between “speaking to the point” and “speaking a lot” (p. 158). Aside from the fact that it is often considered poor form in East Asia to speak out forcefully in front of people one is not very well acquainted with, which may invite social repercussions outside of the classroom, Shin recounts how her American/Canadian colleagues told her they spoke up at the beginning of class because “they only read the first chapter of the reading material” or would be “selective in what they say because they wanted to get a Graduate Assistantship or admission to the Ph. D. program” (p. 157). The various ways in which silence is utilized between words is important as “East Asian philosophy...conceives of silence as the most sophisticated form of communication while the West often understands silence in the classroom as an inability or unwillingness to participate” (p. 157). Researchers who have investigated this phenomenon have found that silence in the East Asian context can constitute a form of linguistic practice or learning (Yum, 1987; Cheung, 1993; Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Pon, Goldstein & Schecter, 2003; Shin & Crookes, 2005). As East Asian

cultures have rapidly altered in response to recent social change, the result is that young people in the region are not as reserved as in the past. Still, although “East Asian students are actually active and independent...the way this independence manifests is different from that of Western students” (Shin & Crookes, 2005, p. 101). In order to create the conditions for relevant and meaningful classroom experiences, situating “the culture of the student in a central rather than a marginal position” (Merriam & Cafarella, 1999, p. 344) is important and may need to move beyond theorizing to a stage of active implementation. Allowing the full presence of the student’s culture in the classroom enables the learner to more skillfully connect and engage with their affective, intuitive, and somatic faculties (Dirkx, 1997; Freiler, 2008; Lawrence, 2012). Making learning a multidimensional experience increases sites of reference for reflection and dialogue and, by encouraging the activation of the learner’s physiological and spiritual being, opens up the learner to an experience of wholeness (Merriam, 2008; Tisdell, 2008; Swartz, 2011).

Finally, in a globalized, media-saturated age where pop-idol inspired plastic surgery reigns supreme as a real factor in social and career success (Holliday & Elfvig-Hwang, 2012; Dunne, 2013) for citizens whose children’s school textbooks may again come under the exclusive control of conservative authorities (Kim, T. H., 2013), it could be said that there exists a real need in the classroom to respectfully challenge facets of a South Korean culture which is riddled with alarming rates of inequality (Chi & Kwon, 2012; Ryu, 2012; Kuo, 2013), the highest rate of suicide in the OECD (“Korea’s Suicide Rate,” 2012; Cabla, 2013; Yoo, A., 2013), and the reproduction of structures favorable to the ruling class (Kim, B. G., 2013). The issue of right-wing officials overseeing the content of school texts is particularly important, as they are seeking to edit out

documented events (Kim, T. H., 2013) conducive to raising questions and discussions about current neoliberal globalist policies. All instructors play a significant role in either facilitating the “integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity,” or making education a “practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world” (Freire, 2000, p. 34).

### **Conclusion**

In today’s South Korea, citizens struggle to keep pace with rampant calls to become ‘globalized’ citizens while their government pushes for further privatization and deregulation in order to accommodate western business interests (Baca, 2011; Park, J. S. Y., 2011; “Denouncement of Regulations,” 2014). Yet it has been pointed out that the fevered pitch at which English is pursued in South Korea as though it were a national religion (Lee, J. S., 2011) is out of all proportion to what is necessary in order to compete economically with other nations in an efficient manner, and in fact makes bad economic sense for all of the exorbitant amounts of time and money which are invested into it (Song, J. J., 2011). So exaggerated and misplaced is the obsessive quest for English (Park, J. K., 2009; Song, J. J., 2011), especially American English, that arguments have been made that English is used to indoctrinate South Korean citizens in order to “propel a vast political economy related to English” (Baca, 2011, p. 16) and “conserve the hierarchy of power relations already established in Korean society” (Song, J. J., 2011, p. 35). Indeed, if one takes seriously the argument that in order to create a counterhegemonic space one needs to explicate current colonial discourses (Shin, H., 2006), then it becomes necessary to consider how the discourse of English in South

Korea is related to Korea's political history. As H. Shin points out, English in South Korea plays a role similar to the one it enacts in former colonies of English-speaking countries. In the context of the Korean peninsula, we see the military tension between Pyongyang and Seoul, which only continues to legitimize the hegemonic hold that the US has on South Korea's cultural, economic, and political life. Therefore, any criticism of the continued US military presence in the South, including criticism of its role in trafficking young South Korean women to US massage parlors (Hughes, Chon, & Ellerman, 2007), can be construed by conservatives as a threat to national security, while the keen desire to become fluent in English as reflected in the large numbers of South Koreans who endure separation from their family for years in order to go abroad to study English in western countries (Yoon, 2014) "is related to the neo-colonial role of the US in Korean history and not just to the status of English as a global language" (Shin, H., 2006, p. 153).

Although this view may appear to exaggerate the scope of the conservative agenda in South Korea, my experience of growing up the son of South Korean parents, interacting with South Koreans for over 30 years, and living in a suburb of Seoul for four years leads me to feel Shin's statements are in fact understated. As an example, I can relate an incident which occurred while I was living near Seoul. As part of a group registered in an international amateur film festival, I attended a meeting where all the participants gathered to discuss the details of creating our short films. Although the level and scale of the festival can at a stretch be described as modest, we were told by the Seoul organizers that the South Korean government was strictly banning any content related to the South Korean president, for fear of tarnishing his image. Although this announcement was not in itself of any lasting significance (as far as I know no one had

planned to ridicule the South Korean president), taken within the context of the numerous cases of false imprisonment and execution, torture leading to lifelong disability, and industrial scale massacres which were enacted upon South Korean citizens by the US-trained South Korean military starting in 1945 (Cumings, 1981, 1997; Hanley & Kim, 2010; Wolman, 2013; Hanley, 2014; Kim, H. J., 2014), the warning carried with it a slight twinge of disconcertment. Anyone who conducts a serious, objective investigation into the political climate following the start of the US military's occupation of South Korea in 1945 will find that there has been an intensive campaign to utilize education to indoctrinate South Korean citizens into a pro-capitalist/anti-communist American/Globalist ideology (Armstrong, 2003; Williams, 2004; Shin, H., 2006; Park, J. S. Y, 2011; Yoon, 2014).

Merely perusing newspaper articles and a few research articles reveals the alarming extent to which measures are taken to perpetuate conservative control of the country as well as anti-communist "education." The main agency which has been actively cementing the position of the conservative pro-US ruling party is the National Intelligence Service, the spy agency formerly known as the Korean CIA, which was found engaged in activities to manipulate the outcome of the last presidential election (Doucette & Koo, 2014). Evidence has also surfaced that the NIS has been aggressively funding and directing missionaries to convince North Koreans to stir up discontent ("Missionary Held in N. Korea Apologizes," 2014; "S. Korean Missionary Arrested in North Makes Confession," 2014). It was discovered that the NIS fabricated an official Chinese judicial document as part of an effort to discredit a Chinese citizen who revealed that he posed as a North Korean defector in order to be paid for stories about the North

(Harlan & Seo, 2012; “Incompetent and Immoral,” 2014; “South Korean Intelligence: Red-Handed,” 2014;). Additionally, it was proven by a team of independent academic researchers that the UN-approved version of events which blames the sinking of a South Korean ship on the North actually implicates the South’s involvement (Kim, D. H., 2010; Kwon, T. H., 2010; Lee & Suh, 2010). Recent UN accusations based on reports from defectors (“North Korea’s Atrocities,” 2014) calling for action against Kim Jong-un, the leader of North Korea, make it plaintively clear that the same globalist institutions which fabricated claims against Iran (Deghan & Norton-Taylor, 2013), Vietnam (Ellsberg, 2011) and Iraq (Fisher, 2003) are again seeking to conduct a regime change in order to gain access to the North’s tremendous mineral resources and proximity to China and Russia (Jin & Jin, 2008; Bruce, 2012; Lee, Y., 2013; Keck, 2014) using the testimonies of prominent defectors who have been debunked as less than trustworthy (Jolley, 2014; Park, J., 2014).

Further, western media routinely circulate stories which are unfounded and often patently misleading (Lankov, 2014; Talmadge, 2014), including blaming the cyber hacking of Sony on the government of Kim Jong-un (Faughnder & Hamedy, 2014) which led the Obama administration to level harsh economic sanctions against North Korea (Nguyen, 2015). These developments are significant as it is within the midst of these massive propaganda-powered engines that the equally strong push to spread a ‘proper’ North American version of English functions along with other ‘regime of truth’ forms of media and indoctrination such as Hollywood movies and right-wing aligned Christian mega churches to drown out South Korean citizens’ right to view or imagine South Korea as anything but a platform for the interests of US-aligned and enabled elite South

Koreans (Lee, Wha Han, & McKerrow, 2010). It is argued here that within this scenario, expatriate English instructors in South Korea do not merely exist as neutral cut-outs of exotic scenery, but are thoroughly embedded in the ongoing ideological war which still rages on the Korean peninsula.

Westerners are enticed into this environment through stories of easy employment and entitlement amongst natives who have been indoctrinated to view them as representatives of the good life of wealth and freedom (Kubota, 1998; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Piller, Takahashi, & Watanabe, 2010; Lee, Wha han, & McKerrow, 2010). What expatriate EFL instructors often find is that they are utilized as a cog in a hugely lucrative industry which generally offers little relative financial gain (Jambor, 2009) or say in the curriculum. Caught up in the midst of a system structured by a “pre-modern, ruling class” who “sustained their power after the liberation as they pledged their loyalty to ‘Americanism’ and ‘anti-communism’” (Lee, Wha han, & McKerrow, 2010, p. 347), expatriate instructors themselves encounter formidable issues, which challenge them to assess how to respond to the needs of their students.

The results of this study suggest that critical reflection upon the hegemonic forces at work in South Korea’s EFL industry may help both South Korean learners and expatriate instructors build a social narrative which addresses South Korea’s level of English proficiency while tending to its citizens’ deepest emotional wounds and dissatisfaction with its hyper-competitive society (Fouser, 2012; Pesek, 2012; “Korea Ranks Amongst the World’s Lowest,” 2012). This healing then could provide a broader and more holistic foundation from which both parties could derive the strength to mutually counteract the intrusive, damaging effects of Western hegemony. As things

stand now, the legacy of hegemony and the effects of the war which installed it remain and echo throughout South Korean society, and are reflected in an article which discusses the plight of South Korean citizens whose parents and relatives were systematically murdered by a US-enabled South Korean regime:

Survivors have never reconciled themselves to what happened to their loved ones a half-century ago. Many...fatherless or orphaned, were reared in poverty and, because of “leftist” family links, denied good education and jobs by the authoritarian regimes that ruled South Korea into the 1980’s. (Hanley & Kim, 2010)

Hanley and Kim report the words of Chung Hae-yeol, a woman who was a teenager during the Korean War and lost her parents when they were executed separately, months apart, as alleged [North Korean] collaborators; in her own words, “her face stricken, her hands fingering a paper cup” she said,

The remains of my parents have never been found ...I am 77, and I’ve lived to this age crying. I dream of my parents and I wake up crying. I miss them so. But I want to emphasize: This is not just a personal matter for me, but a matter of our national history. (In Hanley & Kim, 2010)

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## Appendix A

### Research Ethics Board Official Approval



### St. Francis Xavier University Research Ethics Board Ethics Approval for Research with Human Subjects

June 27, 2013

Mr. Peter Joun  
Adult Education Student  
St. Francis Xavier University  
Antigonish, NS

Dear Peter,

Re: Romeo # 21909

***“Expatriates Teaching English in Korea: How Critical Pedagogy is Impacted by the Working Environment and Political Environment”*** Supervisor: Dr. C Roy

The Research Ethics Board (REB) has cleared the above cited proposed research project for ethics compliance with the TriCouncil Guidelines (TCPS) and St. Francis Xavier University's ethics policies. In accordance with the Tri-Council Guidelines, your project has been cleared for one year. At the end of each year, the REB will ask if your project has been completed and if not, what changes have occurred or will occur in the next year. It is necessary to submit a signed copy of the final version of your application.

Approval Date: June 27, 2013

Renewal/Anniversary Date: June 27, 2014

You are reminded of your obligation to advise the REB of any adverse event(s) that occur during this one year period. An adverse event includes, but is not limited to, a complaint, a change or unexpected event that alters the level of risk for the researcher or participants or situation that requires a substantial change in approach to a participant(s).

You are also reminded that all changes that might affect human participants must be cleared by the REB. For example, you must report changes in study procedures or

implementations of new aspects in the study procedures. These changes must be sent to the undersigned prior to implementation.

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I wish you continued success in your research.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Leona English". The signature is written in a cursive style with a blue underline beneath it.

Leona English, PhD  
Professor and Chair  
Research Ethics Board

## Appendix B

### Invitation to Participate Letter

Date:

An Invitation to Participate

Name of the Study: Expatriates teaching English in Korea: How critical pedagogy is impacted by working conditions and the political climate

Conducted by: Peter Joun, graduate student with the Department of Adult Education at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada

Dear potential participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project. I am conducting this study in partial fulfillment of my Masters of Adult Education degree. The details of the study are contained below. If you agree to participate, please sign the attached consent form.

What is the study about? This research project aims to understand the impact working conditions and the political climate have on expatriate English instructors and their teaching approaches.

What will I be expected to do and how much time will it take? You will be asked to participate in one interview about your teaching approach and how you believe it has been influenced by working conditions and the political environment.

The interview will take approximately 1 1/2 to two hours and will be audio-recorded.

Will anyone know what I said? Participation in this research project is voluntary. Your decision to participate or not will be kept confidential.

If you decide to participate, the security and confidentiality of the recordings and the transcriptions of the recordings will be kept under lock and key. Your name will not appear in the transcripts of the interviews or in any report. I will give you a pseudonym. No identifying information will be printed in any document resulting from this study.

Each interview will be recorded by my laptop and stored on an audio file in my computer, which is password protected. The audio files and corresponding transcriptions will be destroyed two years after the completion of this research project.

What will happen if I change my mind and don't want to participate? You have the right to refuse to answer any question without having to terminate your participation in the study. You may request at any time that I pause or stop the audio-recording device. You may withdraw from the study at any time and can communicate the desire to do so in

person, over the phone, or via email. If you do not a request to destroy the material recorded, information collected up to the point of withdrawal will be retained.

What are the potential benefits of participating in the study? You will have the opportunity to reflect on your journey of teaching in South Korea and perhaps come to some deeper understanding of what can be done to create more optimal conditions for both students and instructors. You will also be given a transcription of the interview for your own records.

What are the potential downsides of participating in this project? In the interest of research, topics which may be considered sensitive will be brought up. This may lead to emotional unease. However, every effort will be made to ensure your comfort during the interviews.

What can I do if I have questions? If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, you can reach me Monday to Friday between 10:00am and 6:00pm MST at (720) 474-9518 or via email at [x2010mvx@stfx.ca](mailto:x2010mvx@stfx.ca). Alternatively, you may post a letter to me at:

Peter Joun  
2038 S Fork Dr  
Lafayette, CO  
80026-3137  
USA

You may also reach my advisor Monday to Friday between 9:00am and 5:00pm EST at (902) 867-5567 or via email at [croy@stfx.ca](mailto:croy@stfx.ca). You may reach her by mail at:

Dr. Carole Roy  
Department of Adult Education  
St Francis Xavier University  
4545 Alumni Crescent  
Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada  
B2G 2W5

Sincerely,

Peter Joun

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

Having received the Invitation to Participate for the research project titled Expatriates teaching English in Korea: How critical pedagogy is impacted by working conditions and the political climate, I have read the information provided therein (or had it explained to me) and have had all my questions answered.

I agree to participate in this research project with the full understanding that I am doing so voluntarily, that confidentiality will be maintained, and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any point using the means outlined in the Invitation to Participate.

Name of participant (please print)	Signature	Date
Peter Joun Researcher	Signature	Date

I am interested in receiving this study's final research report      Yes       No

If yes, please print the email address that you would like the report to be sent to:

## Appendix D

### Draft of Interview Questions

Why did you initially decide to come to Korea?

Please describe your conception of how best to teach Korean students when you initially arrived in Korea.

How did your teaching approach change after you began working in Korea?

What factors do you think influenced changes to your approach?

- a. Can you name at least three?

What are the working conditions for you in Korea?

- a. Have there been any surprises or challenges in your working environment?
- b. How do you think working conditions in Korea have affected your teaching approach?

What do you think about the political system/cultural environment in Korea?

- a. Have you been surprised by anything regarding Korea's political system or cultural environment?
- b. How do you think Korea's political system has affected your teaching approach?

What would improve your working conditions?

What education policies would you like to see change?

Do you think requirements for foreigners to teach in Korea should be changed?

- a. If so how?
- b. If not, why not?

What is your view of students using their native language in the classroom? Do/Did you

allow your students to communicate with each other in Korean in class, and have you ever used Korean in class to make a point or clarify something? Or do you keep a firm “Only English” policy in the classroom? Why or why not?

Has a Korean student ever asked you a question in class in Korean? How did you handle it? What was your rationale for how you handled it?