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Smuggling in Creativity: My process of creating spaces in the hierarchical school system of the Republic of Korea to stash the seeds of creative thinking

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Smuggling in Creativity:
My process of creating spaces in the hierarchical school system of the Republic of Korea to stash
the seeds of creative thinking

by

Ray Symonds

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SYNTHESIS
MASTER OF ARTS
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Abstract: I began the CCT program several years into a teaching career in South Korea. My goal at the time was to better understand creativity so as to better support my own students' creative development. This synthesis discusses some of the challenges I faced in bring CCT into my own classroom and some of the ways I tried to implement what I learned through the program in my own classes. My role as a Guest English Teacher is explored in how it enabled me to use my classroom as a testing ground for CCT concepts. The application of these CCT concepts is tracked through a number of changes at my school and the impact on my students is laid out through student testimony. The final arc of this synthesis covers the shift in my own focus from my own classroom to how I can impact the classrooms of my Korean colleagues using what I have learned in my class to re conceptualize creativity into an actionable form for Korean teachers who don't have in depth training in creativity. I break creativity down into: Agency, Association, and Process Focus and illustrate how these concepts can be integrated into other class structures to enhance Korean teachers' abilities to support their own student growth. The entirety of this synthesis covers my own trajectory as a teacher of CCT in a very specific educational environment. However, it is presented with the hope that the lessons I have learned and the insights I have gleaned can be applied, with some creativity, to other educational situations.*

* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.

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Prologue

I began the Critical and Creative Thinking (CCT) program three years into what has become an eight-year teaching stint in the Republic of Korea (hereafter referred to as South Korea). What will not surprise anyone who has any familiarity with the CCT program, is that my teaching has undergone radical changes under it. Being a high school teacher in South Korea while pursuing my studies has slanted the majority of my work in CCT towards my classroom. I was convinced early into the CCT program that my capabilities as an educator were expanding; I met every semester with excitement to see the manifestation of my job in my coursework and vice versa.

This synthesis project is, in my opinion, the logical conclusion to my studies in CCT. Around the halfway point of my time as a CCT student, I realized that while I had grown tremendously as a teacher through what I was learning, the impact was limited to my classroom. When I spoke with colleagues about what I was implementing in my classes, the most common response was: “I don’t think I could ever teach like that”. It was then that I knew roughly where my synthesis project would land: creating tools to bring some of what I had learned to other teachers and their classrooms.

The South Korean education system is not an easy thing to grasp for an outsider. Even after eight years here I still encounter facets that are new to me yet are considered ‘normal’ by students and teachers alike. Within this setting, I face various challenges that serve as a hindrance to achieving my goal of positively impacting the South Korean classroom.

While it is easy to look at raw numbers and results as well as to think positively of an education system that shows nominal student progress, this equally plays into one of my deepest criticisms of the education system in South Korea: it is a system designed to create positive looking numbers while students remain at a functional disadvantage outside the classroom. As there are various challenges to bringing my CCT based experiences to South Korean classrooms, this paper will explore the relevant challenges and how I attempted to overcome them. In addition to the challenges that are inherent within the South Korean education system, I will share some of the ways in which CCT has shaped my own teaching as well as the unique role I fill as a Guest English Teacher (GET).

While my classroom has thus far served as a testing ground for new ideas and approaches gleaned through my time in CCT, my ultimate goal is to spin the positive experiences in my

classroom into useable tools for my South Korean colleagues that they may positively impact their own classrooms. The toolset I set about developing is a reconceptualizing of creativity into three principles which, when fostered in students, will help support their creative growth. The principles are: Agency, Association, and Process Focus. This paper will lay out the nature of these principles with regard to how they aim to impact students' creative growth as well as how these principles can be applied in other classrooms with minimal disruption and without intensive training nor demanding increases to teacher workload. In discussing the development of these principles, I will illustrate how the nature of the South Korean education system influenced the parameters of this toolset.

Ultimately, the goal of this project is not simply to create an interesting product that could be useful, but rather to deliver that product specifically to those who will use it. In the final section of this paper I will layout plans for passing on these tools to South Korean teachers as well as future considerations for those plans.

Setting

Education in South Korea

As the setting of this project is ingrained in the development and eventual execution of this project, it is important to lay out the particulars of the setting first. This section represents a general overview of what I have learned about South Korean high schools in my eight years of teaching at Daejeon Foreign Language High School (DFLHS). South Korean high school students attend classes from 8am - 6pm with the additional hours of 7pm - 10pm consisting of a (not technically but in most cases functionally) mandatory period called *야자* (*night-study time*). As school system is centered around test taking, classes typically focus on preparing students to be tested on relevant subject material. The English Program in Korea (EPIK) states in their training manual for GETs:

A student's GPA consists of the scores of 4 written tests and a performance test.

Performance tests are a type of test that requires the student to perform a task. This can be done in various forms such as class participation, a speaking test, essay, etc. (Lee 96)

The performance test was instituted in 2011 and shows that while the majority of student assessment is still focused on written exams there is some openness within the Ministry of Education to other avenues of student scoring. Some of the challenges to utilizing that openness will be discussed later.

Interestingly, in South Korean schools, tests are scored relative to each other; there is not a letter grade attached to specific score benchmarks, rather the students' results are ranked into a bell curve of nine ranks. Students are therefore ranked according to where they are placed, not their score. Very few students are thus placed in Rank One (the top scores) and Rank Nine, while the largest rank number belongs to Rank Five and the surrounding rankings. For example, in the 2017 final exam for my class, a score of 95 would place a student in Rank Four while an 87 score would be placed in Rank Seven.

While it has been hard for me to adapt to the kind of exam-centric and objective grading that South Korean schools expect, this is another area where my status as a GET shields me a bit from the struggles that South Korean teachers feel at exam times. The paperwork that must be submitted with their exams must include all the answers they will accept. If, after the exam, the teacher finds that student answers are not on the list they submitted but should still receive credit the teacher must re-submit the full paperwork. The increased workload is already a sizable problem but having to re-submit paperwork carries with it a loss of face, as if the teacher was not competent enough to anticipate all possible correct answers. This, however, is not as much a problem for math or science teachers, but for language teachers this adds stress to exam times. One of the unwritten roles of GETs is to check English teachers' exams and the student answers. This has put me in a position to disappoint teachers who are looking for any explanation as to why an unexpected answer should not be given credit, that they may avoid the embarrassment and bother or amending paperwork. The functional result of this situation is that exams feature a bulk of multiple choice questions while open-ended questions are made as narrow as possible.

Testing is further central to university acceptance. Every November (the South Korean school year begins in March), South Korea braces for the national college entrance exam, 수능[Su neung] (Korean SAT test). It is held on the third Thursday of the month. To illustrate how seriously this time is taken, flights are rerouted to not disturb students taking the eight-hour test and provisions will be made for the test to be administered in a hospital for students who are seriously ill. There is no make-up date and to miss the test or perform poorly means that student

will likely spend the following year preparing for the next 수능. A high enough score on 수능 grants entrance to South Korea's top schools, collectively known as SKY (Seoul National, Korea, and Yonsei). It is still possible to be accepted into a university without taking 수능. However, this is only available to students with excellent GPAs, which are still predominantly the result of testing.

In speaking with one of my students who was accepted to Yonsei before the date of 수능, her response to my suggestion that she take advantage of her good fortune and skip the exam was: "Of course I'm going to take it, I spent my entire high school life preparing for it" illustrated to me just how central testing is, even at a foreign language high school.

Daejeon Foreign Language High School

This project emerges from my experiences teaching in South Korea and while, to a large extent, many of the idiosyncrasies of this education system have become 'normal' to me, most readers of this project will find this state 'normal' to be quite alien. To further complicate things, not only do I teach in an educational setting that is unusual for non-Koreans, I also happen to teach at a school that is exceptional within that larger setting.

I, like all GETs, was hired by the English Program in Korea (EPIK). EPIK hires GETs and then distributes them to local offices of education who then place them in selected public schools for the purpose of teaching English. GETs are hired from countries where English is the primary language (United states, Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand being the primary countries where GETs originate). The qualifications, beyond being from an English-speaking country, are a Bachelor's degree (in any field) or the equivalent, as well as a clean criminal record. The mission of EPIK includes:

To foster primary and secondary students' English communication ability in the age of information and globalization; to provide English conversation training to public English teachers; to develop English textbooks and teaching materials and, to improve and expand English teaching methodologies.

(from <http://epik.kr/>).

I had the welcome fortune to be placed at the Daejeon Foreign Language High School(DFLHS). DFLHS is a special purpose high school, specifically a 외국어고등학교 (Foreign Language

High School). In South Korea has a system of special purpose high schools which, in addition to Foreign Language High Schools, features 과학고등학교 (Science High School), 예술고등학교 (Art High School), among others. While these schools have specific curricula, for example at DFLHS the students take a reduced number of science and math classes while expanding on language and culture course loads, they still operate within the universal set of parameters for South Korean high schools. Due to their stringent selection process, prospective students are required to apply to DFLHS and await selection. This means that relative to other South Korean high school students, they are high achieving students with an aptitude for languages.

Being a GET at DFLHS holds some substantial differences to the usual GET experience. There are multiple GETs assigned there, as opposed to most schools which generally only have one GET. In my time at DFLHS there have been as many as five GETs, however, we are currently only three. In addition to the greater number, DFLHS is assigned the top applicants to EPIK in the city of Daejeon. This means that while many GETs experience a lower status than South Korean teachers because of the comparatively lower requirements to become a GET, at DFLHS the GETs are regarded as professional and competent, though still below the status of the South Korean teachers.

At DFLHS, GETs are required to teach a class titled ‘English Conversation’ to students from one of three groups: 1st grade English Majors, 1st Grade non-English Majors, and 2nd Grade English Majors. South Korean schools have six years of elementary school, three years of middle school, and three years of high school. This makes high school 1st Graders in South Korea roughly the equivalent of Sophomores in American high schools, and 2nd Graders equivalent to Juniors. Even though DFLHS is a foreign language high school, senior year (3rd grade) has no language classes as the students are expected to dedicate their time to studying for 수능.

The 1st Grade English Conversation class is a collaboratively developed curriculum that is implemented universally. This means that every 1st Grade English Conversation class is taught the same material regardless of teacher. The 2nd Grade English Major class is likewise a conversation class, currently only taught by myself. I have been free to implement a curriculum of my own design. However, in my early years of teaching at DFLHS, the group was shared with another teacher with whom I collaborated on the curriculum. These details are important as they

exposed some of the difficulties this research project hoped to overcome. These will be discussed later.

I began teaching at DFLHS in 2011, at that time I had been teaching adult ESL students in Boston for two years, specializing in preparing students to take the TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and other standardized English Tests. When I joined the faculty, DFLHS was in a transition period in terms of its English classes as well as having just lost two long-term GETs. In my first semester there, the most veteran GET was a recent college graduate who had been at the school for only six months supported by three, myself included, first-time GETs. Another GET and myself were put in charge of teaching and developing the non-English Major curriculum, a responsibility we were informed of on the first day of classes. The English Major curriculums, 1st and 2nd Grades, were given to the teacher (the ‘veteran’) who had been there the previous semester and the other first time GET. This was surprising because that teacher had spent the vacation thoroughly preparing a complete curriculum for the non-English Majors, which were the students she had taught the year before. She was thus required to develop a new curriculum on the fly as she taught it. In my orientation for the EPIK program, I often heard the expression “Dynamic Korea”; as GETs we were expected to be ‘dynamic’. ‘Dynamic’ was seemingly used as a euphemism for ‘needed to be able to adjust to sudden and unplanned for changes’. My introduction to teaching at DFLHS lent credence to that reading of the word.

2011 was a challenging year of teaching but DFLHS English Department settled into a period of stability following that year. Three of the four teachers remained and we were able to argue that the school would benefit from a more planned out allocation of teachers to classes. I went into the vacation time knowing that I would be sharing the 2nd Grade English Majors with another teacher and that all four of us would be collaborating on the 1st Grade non-English Majors. Class sizes were set at 12-13 students; the year before they had been 12-13 students for some classes and 25 or so for others. The lessons were refined from what had worked the year before with no major changes or developments. This was the easiest time of my career at DFLHS and it lasted until the end of 2013.

I still shared the 2nd Grade English Major class with another teacher when I started with the CCT program in 2014. I was eager to begin implementation of the concepts I was studying; my fellow teacher shared my enthusiasm. As I shared these ideas with him, his enthusiasm

waned as his expectations of what creative lessons would be like did not match the lesson plans I had produced. Furthermore, he felt uncomfortable and unqualified to act as the instructor of my lessons.

In 2015 DFLHS reduced its English teaching staff to the present number of three GETs. This required classes to be reorganized. The prevalent result here is that the 2nd Grade English Majors went from being taught by two teachers in classes of 12, to being taught exclusively by one teacher (myself) in classes of 24. This shift in teaching arrangements coincided with my attendance in the CRCRTH688 Reflective Practices class, wherein I made the development and execution of a new class curriculum the subject of my final project that semester. This marked the first time I had directly linked my studies in CCT with my teaching at DFLHS and the growth I experienced as both a teacher and a reflective practitioner in that process manifests in the conversations and experiences I share with my students.

That semester (Spring 2015) can be considered the genesis of this synthesis project; my class curriculum took shape in this period and I began to see that changes to a single class can have profound effects on my students' education.

Because I am the sole instructor for the 2nd Grade English Majors, I have the unique opportunity to integrate CCT concepts into my class structure. As one of the collaborators in the non-English major curriculum at DFLHS, I am able to sneak in CCT judiciously. Having taught my CCT-infused English Major curriculum for several years now, I am better able to present critical thinking, creative thinking, and reflection in ways that my fellow teachers can implement without needing in depth training.

English Conversation Class

GETs are hired for the specific role of teaching English Conversation Class (ECC). This class is separate from English Reading Class (ERC) and English Writing Class (EWC), both of which are taught by Korean-English teachers. At DFLHS, like most South Korean High schools, these classes are tested with exams that feature only objectively right or wrong answers, and the 'Performance Test', which is typically a presentation or an essay written after reading an approved English text (sometimes the teacher assigns one, for example, Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*, or Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow*)

ECC, operates a little differently as it is taught by 외국인 (*waygookin* or foreigners). In some schools there are no tests and no grades attached to ECC while in many other schools the score is based on a quarterly ‘Conversation Exam’. DFLHS is one of the schools that uses a Conversation Exam to score the students and I have been fortunate to have had some direct influence on the nature of the test. When I first arrived at DFLHS, Conversation Exams were conducted as follows: Teachers distributed a list of 10-12 questions about a week before the exam date; students wrote out responses to each of the questions and memorized them; on the exam date the student would randomly be given one of the questions and, after a three minute period for preparation, enter the examination room and answer their assigned question for three minutes while two teachers recorded the ‘conversation’, scoring it according to four categories (Grammar/Vocabulary, Intonation/Pronunciation, Fluency, and Content).

At DFLHS, GETs have been fortunate to have some input to change the nature of the exam in several important ways. The number of questions is down to six and the questions are no longer provided in advance. The test has been lengthened to four minutes, with two minutes dedicated to the assigned question with the remaining two minutes allowing for follow-up questions from the teacher. The scoring is now also broken into five categories, the added one being ‘Class Participation’, which covers daily participation in class, journal writing, and project scores. Class Participation is given a value of 36/100 while each of the other categories are each given a value of 16/100. The primary motivation for making these changes was to move the exam away from a memorized recitation of English, something which is common in most other schools’ versions of Conversation Exams, and more towards an authentic production of spoken English.

Plot

The CCT-ing of DFLHS 2nd Grade English Major Class

One of the biggest challenges in a project like this is the underlying question of its feasibility within the South Korean classroom setting. The environment of South Korean education and the impact that those structures have on the students certainly represent major obstacles to any attempt to inject creativity into the processes of education. This challenge may be difficult, but it also serves as a reminder of how vital it is that some headway be made within

the scope of creativity. In this section I will use my own class to demonstrate how the students are willing and able to accept a class structure built on various concepts found within CCT.

Having to collaborate on the English major curriculum complicated my early attempts at integrating CCT concepts into my teaching. My second year of teaching the 2nd Grade English Major represented a pivotal shift: DFLHS had cut down the number of GETs employed from five to three. This affected the structure of classes for the 2nd Grade English Majors. They had been classes of about 12 students, who would switch teachers at the semester break, but with the changes they switched to classes of around 24 students under the same teacher for the entire year. As I was enrolled in CRCRTH688 Reflective Practices at this time, I developed a class structure and a series of supports to help me deal with the changes to my 2nd Grade English Major class for my project in 'Reflective Practices'. This was the birth of my current curriculum and my first full attempt at bringing CCT concepts into my classroom. I will start by summarizing the major concepts implemented at that time, the thinking behind them, as well as my observations for how it impacted the class.

The first step in creating the new curriculum was to review what had worked for this class in the past. In the previous year, my colleague and I had focused the class around various group projects with the intention of placing students into collaborative situations and insisting that the group work entirely in English throughout the project. We held the perception that this would improve their English speaking and listening capacities. Feedback from the students indicated that this was a class structure they liked and found useful. However, a concerning thread wound its way through the feedback. The students understood why we wanted them to use only English in preparing their projects but, because grades were based on the final product, the students also understood that if they wanted the best grade possible they should try their best to get away with doing as much of it in their native language as possible. They were aware of how this would ultimately undermine the learning opportunity each project presented. Yet, considering they would be assessed by their scores and not by what they have learned, they were, strategically speaking, making the right choice.

The issue of grading is equally a constant problem in ECCs. The school wants objective grading standards, which - while possible with lower level language learners - is almost impossible when dealing with students as advanced as DFLHS's 2nd Grade English Majors. Aside from the obvious problem of creating completely objective grading standards for high level communicative abilities, the students know that the most worthwhile objective, in terms of tangible effect on their lives, is to maximize points earned, even at the cost of actual learning. In the early stages of developing the curriculum, the problem of grading projects kept me in a tight orbit. The projects I intended to keep in the curriculum covered various topics of interest to the students (advertising, news broadcasting, and diplomacy) but when I thought about grading the final product of any of these products, I realized I was not grading the students' English growth.

While I did not go gradeless, I settled on the concept of not grading the projects themselves but rather basing the grade on a Reflection Paper they would write after the completion of the project. My intention was to make students look back on the steps they took and decisions they made so that they could more properly evaluate their own progress. I was especially interested in shifting student perceptions on the value of 'failures'. If I were to grade the final product of any project, 'failures' would always be connected to the points lost, but I wanted to highlight the importance of these 'failures' to the learning process.

While the Reflection Papers are what get graded rather than the projects themselves, under the advice of the English Department Head, my official paperwork lists the grades as project grades. Explaining my thought process for not grading projects to one of my school's administrators, likely through a translator, will invite a lot more scrutiny and direct management of the GETs from administrators. These administrators are the same people who proudly display a banner with names of the most prestigious schools in South Korea and the number of DFLHS graduates from the previous year who were accepted to each. The numbers are, however, deceptive; a student who gets into three separate elite universities will be represented on the banner for each. It may be personal cynicism, but I suspect those administrators and I have different goals in terms of how my class might impact the students of DFLHS, so I would therefore like to avoid their attention where possible.

The first semester in which I implemented the policy of only grading the Reflection Papers, I quickly realized that the students would need support if they were to actively engage in reflecting on what they had learned. I envisioned, albeit naïvely, well written Reflection Papers answering the questions “How?”, “Why?” and “So What?”. Most of the submitted papers consisted almost entirely of answers to the question “What?”. “How?” represents the ways and methods a student used to achieve their goals with any specific assignment; “Why?” gives the students a chance to explore their decision-making processes as they highlight the reasons they thought of when making specific choices. “So What?” pushes them to not only state what they learned but to justify how this learning will impact them going forward from the project. All of this was totally alien to my students. That semester was thus spent coming up with activities to guide students towards a more productive style of reflection. It was a slow process, but it helped me to realize the extent to which the constant focus on results and getting the right answer had conditioned the students to disregard attention to process in favor of producing the expected results.

The Reflection Papers and the needed instruction to make them work was only a single branch of my curriculum development. I also had to adapt the class to suit its now doubled size. Some concerns I had about the increase in student numbers were the decrease in speaking opportunities in class for each student, especially the less confident English-speakers. The reduction of personal attention I could give to each student was also a cause for concern. Here I took inspiration from some common features of CCT courses that I found to be helpful for me as a student. I assigned each student a ‘Mentor’ and a ‘Mentee’ from among their classmates. They were expected to meet with outside of class and have a conversation in English for five to ten minutes. In these conversations, the Mentee’s role is to provide a topic of conversation: something they are thinking about, a question they have, an extension of some other discussion, and so forth. The Mentor’s role was to help the Mentee explore that topic by providing perspective, asking questions, listening, and responding. Other methods were also encouraged. I attempted to clarify that the Mentor is not expected to ‘teach’ the Mentee, but rather act as a guide in the Mentee’s learning.

In addition to Mentor/Mentee roles, which are similar to the various classmate groupings that are a frequent component of CCT courses, I also required students to schedule face-to-face

meetings with me. We would meet for fifteen minutes, focusing on strengthening communication between myself and each student. Many of these meetings would serve as ‘ice-breaking moments’ between myself and my students as well as opportunities for less confident students to express something without the pressure of doing so in a classroom full of classmates arose. Sometimes the meetings became counseling sessions where I was able to give individualized advice to a student for a problem they were facing. To facilitate scheduling of so many meetings I have had to rely on information technology more and more. I use an appointment scheduling website and communicate largely with students through email. This brings forth the added challenge that students don’t always have ready access to the internet; in an attempt to protect them from themselves, the school limits student internet access and students have to turn in their smartphones at the beginning of every school day.

The feedback I have received over the years from students indicates that these two CCT imports have had a powerful effect of helping the students to realize that my classroom placed emphasis on their ideas and perspectives rather than merely finding the answer deemed as correct by the teacher or curriculum.

A personally defining moment in the development of this course came 2012, in the year I shared the 2nd Grade English Major class with my colleague. That year my school had a new principal who, since early on, had been quite critical of the teaching methods displayed by the GETs. Word came to the GETs via the Head of the English Department that we needed to make our lessons ‘more teacher-focused’ the concern was that the teachers were not teaching; they were just overseeing.

Our lesson plans at the time featured many activities that involved students talking to other students, a common element in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes. For example, my class met in a circle of chairs, with the desks pushed up against the walls. The principal’s demands stood in contrast to what I had learned in my training as an EFL instructor as well as to my observations of the students at DFLHS. I did not think transforming my class into yet another situation where the students sat in rows and accepted the knowledge I chose to disseminate was something I could do. I opted to do the opposite: we had space in our class plans for the 2nd Grade English Majors to add a project. I designed a workshop based on the concept of putting the students in control.

The Habits of Mind workshop, in short, put students into groups. Each group was assigned at random four of Arthur Costa's *Sixteen Habits of Mind*. (Costa 80-86)

Each group had to create a 15-minute workshop based on a random selection of four *Habits of Mind* in which they would create activities that would teach the assigned *Sixteen Habits of Mind* to an audience consisting of other students. My colleague's class would be the audience for my students' workshops and vice versa.

The workshop activities included having students blindfolded and listening to instructions from partners, describing the texture of an unseen object while a partner tried to identify its picture, using punchlines from jokes to solve riddles to gain clues about a murder mystery they needed to solve, as well as several other activities. As their English teacher it was important to see them conceptualize, develop, and execute these workshops in the target language. While that was my goal it did not come naturally to the students. When I was asked for help I had to balance providing clarity without giving an example for them to copy. I do not know how many times I told them that they were free to use their imagination, and yes, I really meant that. In the end it was worth the effort it took. I learned that bringing creativity to my classroom was not enough; I had to be prepared to also demonstrate to my students that what I had brought to them was safe and that they could fully engage with it. At the conclusion of the first Habits of Mind workshop, my colleague and I marveled at the way English had changed from being the subject students were learning to the medium with which they explored topics and communicated their ideas.

Going against my principal's direct order was a risk, but it was a risk I was in a unique position to take. As a GET, I am, by definition, a foreigner and thus I am somewhat insulated from consequences arising from such a brazen rejection of authority. South Korean teachers are not as safe. In my mind, the risk had been worth it, the results of the Habits of Mind workshop had been spectacular. Having "gotten away with it", I made plans for how the next year I could expand the project and encourage other teachers to follow suit. In the following years, the students performed their workshops not just for their classmates, but for observing teachers as well. The teachers' remarks consistently expressed surprise at how creative the students could be, as well as regret that they, as teachers, could never do anything like that in their own classes. I did not share in their pessimism, but I acknowledged that I was operating from a position of

relative safety. Addressing the South Korean teachers' concern began at this time to occupy some of my thinking.

The Habits of Mind workshop represents not only the point at which I dedicated myself to using my unique position to take risks to make the best class possible for my own students, but also the where I began to realize that in order to maximize the value of those risks, I had to begin exploring ways to affect students beyond my classroom.

Reconceptualizing Creativity

Building on the experience of inviting my South Korean colleagues to see my students' creative works in execution, I have made it my goal to reach out to the South Korean teachers in the English Department, as well as South Korean teachers in other departments who have a good command of English, inviting them to see the results of my students' work. Through sharing these methods with my fellow teachers, I consistently receive feedback about the projects being great and creative, but impossible to do in their classes. Bridging this gap is the next step I see in my process of impacting and improving student experiences in South Korea.

At first, I attempted to construct an informal survey to get a sense of what the biggest obstacles were for the South Korean teachers to support their students' creative growth. From the responses to the survey I could see that the South Korean teachers think it is very important to support their students' creative growth (78% rated this at a 5 or 6 out of 6). However, they do not feel confident in their ability to do so (78% rated this a 4 or lower out of 6). When asked to highlight the top three concerns they had about supporting their students' creative growth, 90% cited both the amount of extra work it would require as well as their own lack of capability to do so. These two factors played heavily into shaping the course of my next steps.

I recognized at that I needed to make a break-down of how I conduct my class in terms of supporting creative growth. I would need to simplify my methodology so that it would not require in-depth training nor specific skill-sets to be implemented in the other classes. Making it possible for the teachers to include my program into their classes was a foundational concern, but I also wanted to address the concerns of the students who have lived through the South Korean education system. Therefore, I similarly made an informal survey to gather some information on students' experiences in the classes of the same teachers I had surveyed.

In terms of how important they felt it was for their teachers to support creative growth, 75% rated this a 5 or 6 out of 6. When asked how well the average South Korean class supported their creative growth 80% answered 3 or lower out of 6; none gave a rating higher than 4. When identifying the factors that prevented their teachers from supporting the students' creative growth, the top two concerns had to do with measures of assessment: "The emphasis on objectively right or wrong exam questions" and "The de-prioritizing of student creativity in assessments" were marked in 83% and 67% respectively of the surveys when asked to identify the top three obstacles to supporting Student creative growth. The third and fourth most common answers were: "A cultural hostility to the idea of equipping students with the tools to think differently than previous generations of Koreans" and "The high workloads expected of both teachers and students" show that the students are aware of the systemic challenges inherent in the endeavor of improving teachers' capabilities to support student creative growth.

Once I felt I had a good grasp of the challenges faced by both parties - by taking into account what teachers and students had to say as well as adding that to my own perceptions from eight years of teaching in South Korea - my next step was to establish what my goals were.

One of the enduring lessons from my first class in CCT, CRCRTH602 Creativity, was the idea that for something to truly be a creative endeavor, there needs to be a result. I wanted to create this result. I had seen several initiatives initiated at my school where a new administrator had the noble goal of increasing creativity, but in the end all that was increased was the workload of the teachers who were tasked with carrying this goal out. The problems faced often centered around ill-defined concepts of how creativity would manifest in the classrooms, as well as an added load of paperwork as teachers documented their attempts to meet unclear expectations. The real-world effect was that paperwork was filled out but classrooms moved on as before, except on 'Open Class Days' when the administrator, whose idea it was, would come and observe the class.

South Korea's education system remains an easy environment to grow cynical in, but one thing that has helped fight off that impulse has been the acknowledgement that the audience for this project are, for the most part, the product of the education system that I am aiming to

change. The toxic-to-creativity environment in which they operate is the one in which they were educated; their models and mentors were likely unsupportive of their creative growth.

Rising Action

Zeroing in on the target

The above factors collectively served to make the target I was aiming for smaller and smaller. I wanted to create a toolset for South Korean teachers that:

- a. helped them support students' creative growth,
- b. did not interfere with the normal operations of their classes,
- c. did not add a substantial amount to teachers' workloads,
- d. was simple enough that it did not require specific training,
- e. was clear enough to be enacted by teachers who likely lacked confidence in their own capacity to support students' creative growth.

One of the first major considerations I undertook was that of assessing creativity. The Korean education system places so much emphasis on testing, that four times a year a day of classes will be canceled so that all high school students nationwide can take a practice version of 수능 (Korean SAT test). I did not like the idea of installing a test of creativity into the toolset I was creating, but it seemed like it could be helpful to create some measure of assessment to help students and teachers track growth. In researching the variety of creativity tests in use currently, I found that the majority of the tests I encountered assessed the end result only. In practice, this felt like it would be akin to testing the students' ability to do Trigonometry while trying to teach them basic Algebra. Creative results are important, but my goal is to equip teachers to promote skills; results will follow. At this point I felt that adding any kind of testing or measuring component would violate points a.), c.), and d.) above and did not offer enough tangible benefit. This toolset was, in some ways, born of my own class curriculum. I therefore considered borrowing the measurement system I had already used: I do not measure the students' creativity explicitly, I rather measure the extent to which they reflect on their process of reaching a result. In reviewing my syllabus and other documents about my class it struck me that I never used the word 'creativity'. In discussing the surprising absence of the word 'creativity' with a classmate in CRCRTH692, he advocated maintaining that absence. As a musician himself, he pointed out

that he does not think about ‘creativity’ as a goal and when he talks with other creative people, nobody mentions ‘creativity’ explicitly.

I knew at this juncture that the project would work better if I distanced the word ‘creativity’ from it. ‘Creativity’ as a term comes with a lot of baggage with differing interpretations as to what it is. For teachers educated in South Korea it is also a hard concept to feel confident in. The idea of offering an alternative to ‘creativity’ offered promise as there are not as many preconceptions and established apprehensions about teaching a concept that is new.

I often tell my students that I constructed my class not as a place where I teach them information, but rather I envision it as a space where learning can happen. I think of my class as a garden that I have curated for the students to harvest from, thereby placing students in an active role in their education as well as a non-subordinate one.

I reached out to some of my ex-students to find out where they felt my class helped their creativity, the following quotes from that conversation guided me in my next steps. One student said: “I liked the workshop project I think. I think that way people got a chance to participate on their own terms” as well as “Working with what you've learned and experimenting I think results in being more creative and a better understanding of what you've learned through text”. A third quote reads: “Self-reflection! when we write reflection paper we can think about every single part of the process and then complement what we want to improve so we can improve ourselves next time.” These quotes became the seeds from which my reconfigured concept of creativity would grow.

The first quote brought my thinking back to the *Sixteen Habits of Mind*, which are essentially a breakdown of good critical thinking skills divided into sixteen specific thinking habits. This presented a viable model to base my reconceptualization of creativity on, allowing me to break it down into more manageable chunks. Sixteen was too high a number, but if I could break it down into three concepts of creativity any teacher included one of these concepts is bringing a good percentage of what ‘creativity’ is into their class.

The first quote also illustrates students valuing how having a sense of autonomy about the final nature of a project gave them space to be creative. That project held enough structure to keep things moving in the direction that I wanted: a 15-minute workshop that teaches

participants four of the *Sixteen Habits of Mind* as well as allowing students enough freedom, so that even after five years of doing that project I am still amazed at the new ideas and methods students come up with.

Giving students control over their own projects remains a basic aspect of my class. In my Public Speaking unit, students are required to give three speeches. One 'To Inform', one 'To Persuade', and one 'To Inspire'. Other than those broad categories, students are free to define their topics. The Advertisement and News Broadcasting projects in my class function similarly.

Students being allowed to and learning how to follow their own ideas to completion is an essential aspect of learning creativity. It is hard to imagine calling someone 'a creative person' if they lack the ability to extend their own vision onto whatever it is they are working on. This idea became the foundation for my first concept of creativity: 'Agency'.

The second quote illustrates a more of how students retain what they have learned. One of the problems I had observed when talking to my students about what they studied in their other classes was that once the exams were completed, students mostly forgot whatever material they had learned. I suspected this was because once they have received a grade on the material, they need to make space to memorize some new information. In designing my curriculum this was a problem I specifically wanted to avoid. I therefore chose projects and topics in a way that connections could be drawn between all of them by the students.

This second quote further shows that my impulse had more value than expected: while I had wanted to keep material relevant throughout the class, students found that that relevance served to reinforce the original material. Drawing connections between subjects is a basic concept of creativity but the added benefit hammering home previously learned material makes it easier to demonstrate the value of including these creativity concepts in any class. This process of making connections is at the heart of my second creative concept: 'Association'.

The third quote discusses the Reflection Papers. In my class, the decision to not grade each project's final result is almost unanimously cited by students as an aspect of their experience with me that helped them develop their creativity. The problem with eliminating project grades was that it put more pressure on their exam performance; that was the opposite of what I wanted to do. My solution was to require the students to write a 'Reflection Paper', a short written

assignment wherein they reflected on the process of engaging in whatever project they had just completed (see *Plot*). The specifics of these papers have evolved over the years but the initial idea, one that anyone familiar with CCT has come across repeatedly, focusing on the process.

Reflection helps the students look back at what they did and reflect on how the steps they took along the way all contributed to the end result. In most of their classes, the final step is the only one that is graded, thus students learn to place the most emphasis on that step. The Reflection Papers aim to put the emphasis on the process, as a whole. This is the basis for my third concept of creativity: 'Process Focus'. While there are various overlapping principals between my Concept of Process Focus, and the established concept of 'metacognition', I have found that 'metacognition', as a concept, carries with it some baggage much like 'creativity' does, thus explaining why I opted for a simpler sounding phrase, 'Process Focus'.

Climax

Concepts of Creativity

This section will lay out each of the 'Concepts of Creativity' I developed. The Concepts of Creativity are Agency, Association, and Process Focus. Each concept will be discussed in its own section and these sections will include notes and observations about how and why these specific concepts are important in the South Korean classroom. Some tips and suggestions for how to include these Concepts of Creativity in any class are also provided. The goal of these concepts is to be universal: any teacher, regardless subject or setting, may begin including these concepts in their teaching.

Agency

The concept of 'Agency' can be described as that sense of personal will that pushes forward a project or idea based on the vision of a person or group. The connection to creativity comes in when the given the opportunity to exercise the concept of Agency; persons or groups utilize their own sense of conceptual vision to produce an idea or product.

Agency is an essential concept of creativity. As a student develops their capacity for Agency, they realize that they are in a position to make decisions and control their own paths through education and whichever subject it is that they wish to creatively engage with. Agency

is further an especially important skill for South Korean students to have the chance to improve upon. This is due to the school system ingraining in students that the teacher has expectations of what students will do and the students' grades are based on how well they match those expectations. This results in students doing only what the teachers wants them to do, in which case the maximum grade for creativity is determined by the teacher. Even if that teacher is exceptionally creative themselves, there are still hard limits on what the students can creatively do. Students can, however, use Agency effectively within these limitations of their classroom environment as they are able to creatively approach tasks which are adapted to the expectations of the class in question.

Curating a sense of Agency, however, in students is not an easy task. This is especially true in the South Korean education system. Cultural norms play a central role in the underdevelopment of students' sense of Agency because the Confucian influence on South Korean culture emphasizes deference to elders and people in higher positions. Thus, students somewhat habitually try and do only what the teacher wants them to do. Even attempts to give students freedom to take control may prove as unsettling as the students may feel uncomfortable being in control or they may even feel as though the appearance of choice is actually a trap; there is only a right or wrong choice to be made.

Teachers in South Korea who wish to support the development of their students' sense of Agency should plan on introducing it slowly. Some ways to engage students in the concept of Agency include the following options:

- Allowing the class, as a whole, to vote on options that affect the whole class, such as group sizes, the order of activities in a class, due dates of assignments (if the teacher can be flexible), and the format of a project (paper, presentation, or media)
- Giving students the freedom to choose the topics of their assignments from a broad pool of options
- When including a stricter range of options include an option like 'Student Proposal Option' where students can propose a new format for the project to take that falls outside of the options given but remains appropriate for the project/assignment. For example, if a project has a presentation element to it, a student may suggest doing the presentation part as a staged interview.

It will be important for the teacher to establish the sense that these options are real and there is not one choice which is better or worse than the others. If the teacher includes avenues like, but certainly not limited to, the suggestions above, students should begin using their own vision which will potentially be seen as part of their learning in that teacher's class.

The concept of Agency is not an easy one to grade objectively and attempts to do so will likely entail more work to the teacher than the teaching benefit they will add. If the teacher plans to use the students' execution of their own Agency as a part of their score, it is probably safest to keep the impact small and more in the area of 'bonus points' or 'extra credit'. In my experience, when 'creativity' is included in scoring rubrics, it refers to the uniqueness or novelty of the final execution and that aligns with what the concept of Agency is derived from. Also, from my experience, when 'creativity' is included on rubrics, that is where teachers have the widest range of scores.

Association

"Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while" – Steve Jobs

When my students cite famous people whose creativity they admire, Steve Jobs is one of the most common examples. While the above quote is a bit simplistic with regard to creativity, simplifying is what I am trying to do. The Concept of Association is an extension of what Jobs is talking about: creative people are often skilled at finding connections that might be otherwise unnoticed. Helping students to develop their ability to see connections is a creative concept that is readily insertable in any class, regardless of content. Connections can be a theme presented in two or more separate topics or ideas. People, places, times, and subjects can all form the basis of a connection. It is important to make students aware that 'connection' does not imply 'identical relationship'. Identifying connections that consist of different types of relationships can be helpful to broaden a student's understanding of the complexities of the subject being studied.

While Problem Based Learning (PBL) is not used widely in South Korean schools, and is not likely to be adopted anytime soon, the Concept of Association incorporates some of the

benefits of PBL. Teachers designing lessons to promote the Concept of Association will aide their students to see the interconnectedness of topics and ideas within the realm of the course. For example, a teacher in a History course could present an incident from the past and have the students identify what they think are the factors that impacted that event. This would thereby require the students to connect to material previously learned and see how it fits together with the current topic. This has the added benefit of reducing the students' focus on simply memorizing facts, which is a challenge in a test focused education system such as South Korea's. As students become familiar with using Association, the goal is to foster the habit of looking for connections whenever they are in a situation where creative thinking would be desired.

Association is a concept that teachers can encourage to habitually engage in by reminding students that connections exist between the concepts and topics covered in class. Some ways to add this to the teacher's practices may include the following:

- Asking directly what connections the students see between topics A and B
- Providing more options than just two and asking for students to identify the connections they see between the set of options
- Asking more open-ended questions, for example: "What have we studied that seems connected to C?"
- Especially before exams, while reviewing material, challenge students to connect everything that has been studied

Association is a concept that benefits from students realizing that there aren't limits to finding connections. One of the most important limits teachers need to address if they really want to help their students develop their Concept of Association are the arbitrary borders placed around classes. A teacher who can help students to find connections between Algebra and History, or Biology and Poetry (or all four of them) is going to open broad paths for their students to explore, both in the classroom and beyond.

Process Focus

Definitions of creative thinking almost always include some variation on original thought. This dovetails with the observation that creative thinkers are often experimenting with new ideas. If experimentation is essential to creative thinking, then there needs to be a mechanism for prospective creative thinkers to assess and build upon their experiments. This is how the Concept of Process Focus impacts creative development.

Using Process Focus means paying attention to the steps one took in any given result. When the result is assessed, students who have focused on their process are better equipped to build upon successes and rectify disappointments. Without a sufficient focus on process it becomes a challenge to replicate or correct the results of any attempt to try something new.

Process Focus can be introduced in any course subject simply by having the teacher impress upon the students the need for creating a detailed process. This may seem simple enough but may be quite challenging for cultural reasons. The so called “빨리 빨리” (*bali bali*, or ‘quickly quickly’) cultural phenomenon gives preference to expediency even over efficacy. Taking the time to pay attention to process is time consuming; it is almost always faster, at first, to lump steps together and act upon assumptions.

Process Focus is intended to produce repeatable, higher quality results at the expense of speed, at least at first. While the 빨리 빨리 culture of businesses is sometimes a necessary byproduct of the competitive marketplaces, schools – if they wish to adequately equip their students with well-developed creative skills – should emphasize the quality of the final product over rapidity.

Some specific ways teachers can bring Process Focus into their teaching methods could be:

- When introducing a new topic to the students, present some of the basic information and ask the students what needs to be done next; challenge them to break down their answers further
- Asking students to identify the steps they took in completing a task and further assessing the value of each of those steps and how they contributed to the success or failure of the task
- As a teacher, be transparent about the reasoning behind the structure and process of the class, this is a great chance to also include the Concept of Association

Resistance to Process Focus often comes early because paying such close attention to the process is something that the students have been implicitly discouraged from doing. This discouragement comes in the form of the pressure for deadlines and the substantial workload given to students. Because Process Focus is a slowing down of the parts of an assignment that do not get graded, it may be frustrating for students to try and see the value in Process Focus. The solution I affected in own my class was to make the process the grade. That may not work for all teachers, but it may be necessary to include some percentage of the grade to the students' ability to demonstrate their process. When I have my students write their Reflection Papers, I ensure they know that I am most interested in and will be grading based on their answers to the questions "Why?" "How?" and "So What?". Without making a point to emphasize those questions, I find that most students just answer the question "What?" in terms of explaining their process. This further illustrates the need to slowly introduce the Concepts Creativity as well as to remain understanding of the fact this method may be a difficult adaptation for students to undertake. In order to fully understand the significance of their process, students need to be incentivized to pay attention to their actions and the thinking behind their actions.

Falling action

Next steps

Now that I have reconceptualized creativity into a form I believe offers some value to teachers in South Korea, the challenge remains: How to spread these concepts to teachers who may be interested?

The most immediate avenue for such an endeavor is to run a workshop at DFLHS for the teachers I work with. This is an obvious first step considering what an incredible help my colleagues have been and because we have a good working relationship, I can get feedback on the concepts as they currently exist and making adjustments before taking this to a broader audience.

Spreading beyond my school will likely go through the local office of education, where I have some contacts who may be interested in providing professional development for Korean-English teachers. The core challenge I face as I attempt to spread this concept-based view of creativity is one of language. At this point my prospective audience is limited to teachers who

have a good grasp of English. The best hope for translating this work to reach a broader audience will be to team up with one of the English-speaking Korean teachers either at DFLHS or through the Office of Education.

This project was conducted with South Korea's educational needs and restrictions in mind, but there is a large degree of overlap with the Korean Education Model and other education models. A further goal may therefore be to make an approach toward integrating creativity in classes available beyond South Korea. Formats like YouTube, Udemy, or even self-publishing a manual all seem likely vehicles to expand the scope of this project.

Resolution

This project is, simply, not enough. My goal from the start was to create something that may potentially be used in the current South Korean education environment. That being the case, even if this project were to achieve widespread implementation, the fact remains that what South Korea, and many other education systems, needs is a major overhaul in how education is conducted. The crisis of creativity in education is not a new nor a unique problem. Educators and outside individuals have long been aware that a struggle exists in education (especially here in South Korea) to make classes and teaching practices as objective as possible. There are intricate networks of factors that play into this impulse and, while some of them are being dealt with, more should be done to give this generation of students the chance to develop their creative selves. If we can do that and a portion this generation of students becomes the next generation of teachers, they will be better equipped to push forward the development of creativity.

It is important to keep in mind that this project is not a "cure-all" and was never intended to be the solution itself. This project is born out of the unique circumstances of the South Korean education system. There are cultural and historical forces at play here that go beyond the scope of this project, though their impacts are certainly felt. The teachers currently working in the South Korean education system are, for the most part, products of the South Korean education system. Their formative years also lacked the opportunity for creative growth. If this project can help the next generation of teachers to have the opportunity for creative growth when they are students, then this project is helping to lay the groundwork for the real changes that are needed.

From the onset of this project I have been aiming for it to have realistically achievable goals for South Korean educators. I am convinced that the ideas and concepts present here are not limited strictly to the South Korean educational environment, even though that is where they were tailored for. With a little creativity, adaptations could be made to enable other teachers to better support their students' creative growth. This project has given me the chance to illuminate the path behind me and reflect on the processes I undertook, the connections I made and the vision that I eventually embraced. It is the end of my time in CCT but it is only the beginning of my path as a supporter of creativity.

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