English Language & Literature Teaching, Vol. 18, No. 3 Autumn 2012

Raising Critical Awareness of Watching American TV Cartoons in an ESL Context

Young-Mee Suh[*]
(Ewha Womans University)
Yoosun Jung[**]
(Seoul National University High School)

Suh, Young-Mee & Jung, Yoosun. (2012). Raising critical awareness of watching American TV cartoons in an ESL context. *English Language & Literature Teaching, 18* (3), 223-242.

The study focused on exploring the ways that young ESL learners can cultivate media literacy by asking critical questions about the messages embedded in popular American TV cartoons. The participants in the study were five Korean children who came from three different families that had been living in a Midwestern college-town in the U. S. for less than two years. Research methods include analysis of interviews, video-taped sessions and photos of children's drawings. The children were asked about their American cartoon viewing habits as well as critical questions after watching two episodes of their favorite cartoons—Pokémon and SpongeBob. The analysis revealed that on one hand popular culture played an important role in helping children to adjust to a new culture and in motivating them to learn English. Further, the children believed that watching American cartoons was helping them improve their English skills. On the other hand, it appeared that they were not accustomed to being asked critical questions and thinking critically while watching American cartoons. Participation in the study increased the children's familiarity with critical questions and critical thinking to varying degrees. Pedagogical implications and suggestions for teachers are discussed.

[American cartoon watching/critical questions]

[*] First author
[**] Second author

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, English fluency has become an important kind of cultural capital in Korea. The functional value and pragmatic aspects of learning English have made Korea into a so-called "English fever" society. A fluent English speaker is guaranteed access to better jobs and social mobility in Korea. Consequently, Korean parents are eager to have their young children achieve high English proficiency with the belief that they will be able to attain a privileged position in society at a later stage in their lives. To accomplish this, many parents pay a lot of money to finance their children's English education. A large number of parents send their children to expensive English-immersion kindergartens and elementary schools. Some families decide to temporarily separate in order for children to acquire English proficiency in an English speaking country. Typically it is mothers who live abroad with their children while fathers, who are often referred to as "wild geese fathers", stay in Korea to work.

In addition, many Korean parents encourage their children to watch American television to enhance their English proficiency. Many Korean learning institutions and schools also use various materials such as CDs, videos, or tapes to help develop children's communicative competence in English. Interestingly, however, it seems that few schools and teachers incorporate American popular culture into their curriculum. Although there have been studies on using media in teaching English in general (Meurant, 2008, 2010; Suh, Kim, & Kim, 2010), it is hard to find literature documenting studies on whether schools and teachers teach children how best to approach watching American TV shows. There are very few studies on how Korean children perceive watching American TV programs and whether they are taught to critically assess the American TV that they watch (An & Lee, 2010; Lee, 2009).

Teaching critical thinking with respect to American TV is becoming an urgent issue for Korean children who study in the U. S. A recent report suggests that the average American child watches more than three hours of television a day (Jeffrey & Morrell, 2005). According to Lee and Kim (2010), Korean children who live in America spend an average of 1.5 hour watching American TV a day. Because of language barriers and different cultural values, most Korean children struggle to adapt to American schools and culture for a period of months after their arrival. Most of them feel uncomfortable directly interacting with American children at first, choosing instead to passively absorb their new English speaking environment by spending more time watching American TV, especially American TV cartoons, during the early months of their immigrant life in the U. S. In addition, during this period of adjustment, many Korean parents encourage their children to watch American TV as a means of improving their English with little guidance about how to interpret the messages of the media that they watch.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

In this sense, as Giroux and Simon (1989) maintained, popular cultural studies on how children interpret American TV are pedagogically important. To young children, as Kress (2003) notes, images are replacing writing as the dominant form of meaning extraction and the screen is becoming just as important as the page. Through popular cultural studies of young ESL learners, parents and educators can understand how their children or students are morally and socially affected in their everyday lives by the media and how they can help ESL children increase not only English proficiency and but also critical awareness of messages in the media.

The purpose of this research is, therefore, to explore ways to raise young Korean ESL learners' critical awareness of the American TV media by asking critical questions. To be more specific, the research questions addressed in the study are as follows:

1. How do Korean children who have been in the U. S. for less than two years use American TV cartoons?
2. Do critical questions promote the children's critical awareness of the messages in the media?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Ideological Literacy and Critical Literacy

Contrary to the banking concept of education (Bell, 2001; Freire, 1970), which emphasizes transmitting knowledge in a one-sided way, the ideological literacy model (Gee, 1996; Heath, 1982; Street, 1984; Vygotsky, 1978) puts an emphasis on a socio-cultural perspective in literacy studies. It claims that the literacy development of young EFL/ESL learners is closely related to socio-cultural dimensions. More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) views literacy development as a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than as an individual-cognitive one. According to Heath (1982) and Street (1984), reading ability in ESL in the L2 environment is 'a way of taking' meaning from the environment, rather than a 'technical skill'. These 'ways' vary both across and within cultures due to differences in dominant ideology in general and specifically in relation to parent-child interactions and socialization patterns. In particular, Street's (1984) ideological model asserts that the social nature of literacy practices is more prominent in modern teaching than the banking model and that literacy practices should be studied as part of specific socio-cultural values and practices. Another representative socio-cultural approach to language and literacy was developed by Gee (1996) who offers that the socio-cultural context is important in questions of language and literacy acquisition. This study

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

incorporates the socio-cultural perspective concerning achievement of critical awareness of media messages in cooperation with peers into its framework.

Critical literacy is based on a socio-cultural perspective of literacy (Kress, 2000; Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2007; Luke, 1997; Morrell, 2002, 2004; Norton & Peirce, 1995). Morrell (2002) defines critical literacy as "the ability not only to read and write, but also to assess texts in order to understand the relationships between power and domination that underlie and inform those texts" (p. 78). According to Morrell (2004), critical literacy involves the use of print and new media texts by marginalized populations to expose power relations and promote individual freedom and expression. Lewison, Leland, and Harste (2007) assert that most teachers need to be aware of learners' cultural capital and virtual school bag which includes their language and culture. They also assert that teaching critical literacy should be learner-centered, interactive, and process-based. To effectively teach critical literacy, teachers must acknowledge that students possess funds of knowledge, have a positive reaction to students when they express conflicting opinions, and use controversial texts in the classroom. In fact, teachers can begin instructing critical literacy using minor issues that emerge in students' daily lives.[1] A review of the existing literature on critical literacy led this study to utilize the participants' favorite American TV cartoons at the time of this study. This study also adopted the ideas of process-based instruction to develop ESL learners' critical awareness of media literacy by asking questions continuously throughout the study.

2. Popular Culture of Young Children and Media Literacy[2]

In the past, traditional literacy education only considered written texts as authentic. Popular culture and media were regarded as low culture, and teachers seldom used examples from popular culture in their classrooms. However, given that literacy is constantly changing and is often linked to popular culture, and it is now time to avoid the dichotomy of high culture versus low culture. Popular culture has an enormous impact on our daily lives. Every day we watch TV, listen to music and search the Internet. People can express their ideas and opinions in various forms of art and popular culture in explicit and implicit ways. These daily activities have a great deal of influence on each

[1] In a similar vein, participatory-type literacy or an alternative model of literacy claims that teachers should encourage students to voice their opinions and bring their social and cultural experiences into the classroom (Cheah, 2001).

[2] The term 'popular culture' in relation to young children usually refers to those cultural texts, artifacts and practices which are attractive to large numbers of children and which are often mass produced on a global scale (Marsh, 2005).

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

person's life and identity, and it is also true that popular culture has a larger influence on young children than ever before.

In this view, media literacy is attractive since it extends the scope of literacy, to include art and media. According to Livingstone (2004), media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create messages across a variety of contexts. Quite a few studies were carried out on media literacy including critical teaching of popular culture (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Alvermann & Hong Xu, 2003; Dorothy & Singer; 1998; Dyson, 2001; Jeffrey & Morrell, 2005; Lewis & Jhally, 1998; Sholle & Denski, 1993; among others). For instance, Dyson (2001) offers a relevant ethnographic study relying on a socio-cultural theoretical framework. The study examines the successful implementation of appropriate figures and themes from popular media in school literacy programs. Jeffrey and Morrell (2005) claim that teaching popular culture develops not only academic literacy but also students' critical literacy. Moreover, incorporating popular culture into the traditional curricula can be an effective way of increasing the literacy development of low academic achievers. They also suggest that teachers and schools should embrace new media texts that students bring in, and critical classroom discussions about popular media texts such as films can be one way to implement critical media literacy in the classroom.

In particular, Alvermann and Hong Xu (2003) note four approaches to using popular culture in the classroom: 1) considering pop culture as detrimental to children's development, 2) teaching children to critically analyze popular culture texts, 3) emphasizing the pleasure children take in various forms of media-produced text, and 4) developing their ability to be self-reflexive in their uses of popular culture. This study is related to the fourth approach, developing children's self-reflexivity through watching TV. The term, self-reflexivity, is closely connected to the 'affective reflexivity' of Sholle and Denski (1993)'s critical media literacy model:

> Critical media literacy must offer a practice of dialogue with students so that commitments, styles of consumption, and investments in the media can be fore-grounded, questioned, and understood. Students must question the text and what "they" do with the text. Teachers must take seriously students' commitments to and affective investments in various forms of popular culture in order to both critically interrogate self-production and to draw out student "activity" that opens up possibilities for counter-hegemonic practices. (p. 314)

According to these authors, through critical media literacy instruction, students are able to not only recognize their own voice and give the 'other' a voice, but also to recognize that their own perspectives are partial, not complete. In reality, to increase this

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

self-reflexivity or affective reflexivity, one important question for young students to ask is “Who am I when I see this?” It is particularly important for the teacher-researcher to recognize that critical ethnographic studies of popular culture and media are “broadening our understanding of how individuals are constituted as subjects outside educational institutions” (Anderson & Irvine, 1993, p. 87).

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Description of the Setting and Selection of the Participants

This research was designed to explore how Korean children use American cartoons, how they interpret the messages in the cartoons and how to improve their critical thinking skills by asking critical thinking questions related to the cartoons. To this end, using a convenience sampling technique (Martella, Nelson, & Marchand-Martella, 1999), we selected three Korean boys and two Korean girls, aged 8 to 10 from a Mid-west college town elementary school in the U. S. Three of them were second graders and the others were fourth graders at the time of this study. For the purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in place of the participants’ real names. Our rational for selecting students in the lower elementary school grades centered on the relative absence of studies concerning young ESL learners’ interactions with popular culture. Over the course of two months, participants met at the researcher’s home every Saturday for one and half hour sessions. At the time of the study, the participants had lived in the U. S. for periods ranging from 15 to 18 months. The children had studied English for less than one year before moving to the U. S. They were enrolled in a pull-out ESL class at the time of this study and had not joined the mainstream class. Though the five children came from three different families, all of the participants’ fathers were graduate students and the mothers were homemakers.[3] Most of the children watched American cartoons in English for 1-2 hours every day, and their favorite TV programs included Goosebumps, Naruto, Phantom of the Opera, Pokémon, and SpongeBob. The information is summarized in Table 1.

[3] Jongmin and Soyeon are siblings from one family, and Gunwoo and Jimin are siblings from a second family. Jaeseo is the only child of the third family.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

TABLE 1

Summary of Five Children Profiles

	Jongmin	Soyeon	Gunwoo	Jimin	Jaeseo
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Age	10	8	10	8	8
Length of stay in the US (month)	15	15	18	18	15
Hours of watching TV everyday	1-2	1	1-2	1	1-2
Favorite TV shows	Goosebumps/SpongeBob/ Naruto/Pokémon		Pokémon/Phantom of the Opera		Pokémon/ SpongeBob

2. Data Collection Strategies

Data were collected through videotapes, interviews, photographs, drawings and artifacts gathered from the participants. More specifically, the meetings with the children were videotaped and the pictures were taken with permission from their parents. While interviews were the main sources of data collection, videotapes and photographs were taken for the purpose of supplementing observation for microanalysis (Glesne, 2006). Our approach to the interview process reflected the belief that "interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually based results" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 702). Semi-structured interview questions containing open-ended questions were prepared before each meeting (Appendix A). In addition, the participants were asked to show the researcher their favorite artifacts related to TV cartoons and were asked to draw pictures of the cartoons. Visual images created by young children have the potential to reveal their unconscious thought processes and biases. Lewison et al. (2007) suggest "inviting students to respond to the story through the use of a different sign system such as art" (p. 67). Since the participants of this study were young children for whom English is a second language, their drawings offered good insight into their thought processes.

3. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in three phases. The rationale for the initial phase (the first meeting and the second meeting) was to allow the children to become more familiar with one another as well as with the researchers and also to gauge their levels of critical awareness while watching cartoons. To this end, rather than asking critical thinking questions directly, we focused on fostering an informal discussion by getting the children to draw and describe pictures of the cartoons they were watching. More

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

specifically, in order to break the ice, the researchers asked the children about the average amount of time they spent watching TV in addition to questions regarding their favorite cartoons. Following the ice breaker stage, the children presented their favorite cartoon themed books and cards which they were asked to bring with them to the meeting. The children were then interviewed about their favorite television shows and viewing habits. After the interview, they watched an episode of one of their favorite TV shows, Pokémon, which we recorded with the help of the participants' mothers prior to the meeting. In the last stage of the meeting, the children were asked to draw and discuss a picture of a scene or theme in the cartoon that they found the most impressive.

In the second meeting, the children were introduced to some preliminary critical thinking questions. At this point, the children were once more asked to bring cartoon related items, either the same items as they had previously brought or different items, and to discuss among themselves why they liked these items. In addition, they were shown an episode of SpongeBob which was determined to be popular among group members at the initial meeting. As in the first meeting, the children were asked to draw the most impressive scene from the cartoon. They were then asked general questions about the cartoon as well as some preliminary critical thinking questions such as 'how' and 'why' type questions.

In the meetings that followed, more data for the study was collected as the children were shown two more cartoon episodes—one episode from Pokémon titled "That's No Lady" and one from SpongeBob titled "All Fired Up".[4] More specifically, in the second phase of the study (from the third meeting to the fifth meeting), the children watched the cartoon from Pokémon and were asked general questions and critical questions about the episode they watched. They also were asked to draw the most impressive scene from the episode. In the third phase (from the sixth meeting to the eighth meeting), they watched the episode from SpongeBob. They were also asked general questions and critical questions about the episode in addition to drawing pictures relating to the episode.

4. Data Management and Analysis Procedures

In meetings, the children were asked about: 1) their viewing habits of the American TV cartoons, 2) their perceptions of gender roles while watching the American TV cartoons, and 3) critical questions to promote critical awareness after watching the selected episodes of their favorite cartoons. The interviews were conducted either in

[4] Both of these episodes contained latent messages about gender, and we selected the episodes since we believed that helping the children of their age have critical awareness of gender issue is important.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

English or in Korean depending on the child. Children's responses were video-taped, transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed according to the themes and issues which emerged over the course of the interview process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to triangulate the analysis of our data, the interview data were studied in conjunction with the children's drawings, photographs, and artifacts with the goal of getting a better understanding of the children's thoughts about the cartoons that they watched. In addition, field notes recorded over the course of the observation and interview stages of the study were analyzed in order to delineate the challenges, emerging questions, and dilemmas that the researchers confronted.

Finally, to enhance the validity of the analysis, we discussed any disagreements while analyzing the data. Our research team also recruited the help of a local native speaker and teacher of English who had majored in qualitative study for help with checking the interview transcripts as well as coding and sorting quotes that related to the research questions.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. The Children's Use of the Media

The interview results reveal that the children believed American TV shows to be helpful in improving their English language skills. The children unanimously reported that cartoons more than any other TV programs helped them with their English. Specifically, cartoons improved their pronunciation and expanded their vocabulary. Jaeseo (eight-year-old boy) reported:

> I did not understand any cartoons in English when I first came here. I was happy to watch Pokémon here because I know some of the characters and story lines. I have learned many new vocabulary words while watching cartoons like Pokémon. [at the first meeting]

In addition, the children seemed to use Pokémon characters as a tool to help adjust to the new culture in which they found themselves. The children felt a connection to the show and to the characters as they had watched Pokémon in Korea prior to moving to the U. S. As Norton (2005) claims, television shows tend to influence the identity formation of minority children, and in this case, the cartoon seemed to help them to form a positive identity as English learners. Jongmin (ten-year-old boy) self-reported:

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

> (When I first came here,) I felt like I was dumb because I did not speak English well. But, when I watched Pokémons on TV, I felt happy. I felt like they were my old friends. Because of them, I liked watching American TV and learning in English. [at the second meeting]

Further, the children's interest in the content of the books related to their favorite cartoons seemed to help them develop language skills. All of the children used the table of contents and indices in their Pokémon handbooks to better understand the characters in the books (Appendix B). The books that were brought in by Jaeseo and Jongmin contained vocabulary words that were for the most part much more advanced than their current level of English comprehension. Despite this, the two were able to deduce the meaning of difficult words such as 'ferocious' using context as well as their background knowledge of the cartoon. The following excerpt demonstrated the way Jongmin inferred the meaning of new vocabulary words while trying to figure out the power gauge among the Pokémon characters.

> Yes, I know the words (indicating the word 'ferocious' in the Pokémon handbook). I just know what it means. I do not know the exact meaning in Korean, but I know what it means. I just happened to learn the meaning of word while trying to figure out which character has the greater power. [at the second meeting]

It seemed that he compensated for lack of direct access to the Korean equivalent of the word by using context and that this skill helped him to develop a better understanding of English in other situations. As Green (2001) claimed, they used "literacy in ways that relate to their interests and needs" (p. 12).

2. Challenges of Promoting Children's Critical Awareness of the Messages Promoted by the Media

1) The First Phase: Resistance

As previously mentioned, throughout the meetings, the children were asked critical questions related to the episodes from SpongeBob and Pokémon. As the children were not familiar with critical thinking questions, for the first two weeks of the research, the children often resisted answering these types of questions. Often they would offer short responses or say "I don't know" or "I have not thought about it." On the whole, it was difficult to lead them to expand on the questions they were asked. The following

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

interview demonstrated that they seldom watched the cartoons critically.

Researcher: (After watching Pokémon) What does this cartoon teach us about boys and girls?
Soyeon (eight-year-old girl): I do not know. (Silence)
Researcher: Anything you want to say about boys and girls in the cartoon?
Soyeon: Well, no. (Silence) [at the first meeting]

Researcher: Does the cartoon teach you to do anything bad?
Jimin (eight-year-old girl): Anything bad? I don't know. I just watched it.
Gunwoo (ten-year-old boy): It was interesting. [at the second meeting]

2) The Second Phase: Boys are Strong and Girls are Cute

In the following three weeks of the study, our goal was to get a better understanding of how and to what degree the children internalize messages imbedded in the cartoons they watched. To this end, in addition to watching the Pokémon cartoon, we asked the children to categorize the Pokémon characters according to gender. Interestingly enough, throughout the study, the children demonstrated an adherence to a gender bias when discussing gender roles and physical attributes such as strength.

More specifically, before watching the Pokémon episode titled "All Fired Up", in which Pokémon monsters are fighting, the boys and the girls were asked to divide Pokémon cards into two categories. Interestingly, they categorized 'cute' image cards as female characters whereas 'strong' image cards were categorized as male characters (Appendix C). The interview analysis revealed that they sorted the cards because they looked 'boyish' or 'girlish'. However, Pokémon characters were not seen as inherently gendered by the children. The following dialogue showed their contradictory perceptions about the gender of the Pokémon characters.

Researcher: (After showing Pokémon cards to the children) Do you like Pokémon characters?
All students: (With excited voices) Yes.
Researcher: What do you think, are Pokémon characters male or female?
Soyeon: (thinking for a while) I do not know.
Gunwoo: Not a boy. Not a girl.
Jimin: They are not boys or girls.
Researcher: Are you sure? Aren't they boys or girls?
Jongmin: We do not know.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

Gunwoo: Yeah. They are not boys or girls.
Researcher: OK. Then why did you think some of them are boys or girls?
Jaeseo: Because they are strong.
Jimin: And they are cute. Cute qualities belong to girls.
Gunwoo: Men are strong.
All students: (laugh) [at the third meeting]

After watching the aforementioned Pokémon episode, the participants were again interviewed about the characters' gender. The interview analysis also revealed that children believed that Pokémon characters that possessed 'powerful' or 'strong' characteristics were males and Pokémon characters who they characterized as being more 'cute' were females. In other words, even though the children perceived Pokémon characters to be essentially non-gendered, they still tended to passively accept the messages from the dominant culture: boys are strong and girls are cute. In addition, the children seemed to be more interested in watching the fight scenes in the Pokémon episode, and they failed to provide reasons for why they thought strong characters would be males and cute characters would be females. Their reasons were limited to "Men are stronger than women," "They have power," or "Because they are cute."

3) The Third Phase: Varying Degrees of Awareness of Critical Thinking

For the last three weeks of the study, the children watched an episode of SpongeBob titled "That's No Lady" in which SpongeBob is disguised as a female. The episode showcases the difference in the ways that others treat SpongeBob when they believe him to be a female and when it is revealed that he is a male. The episode supports the idea that, in general, women are physically and economically less powerful than men. After watching the cartoon, the children were asked critical thinking questions about whether females can be wealthy.

Contrary to the previous phases, the data analysis of the children's responses in the last phase of the study revealed that their thoughts began to reflect a more balanced or neutral perspective on the link between gender and wealth. However, there were varying degrees of presenting their critical awareness of the issue. More specifically, as students became more familiar with one another and the researchers and as they repeatedly confronted similar types of questions, they tended to be more verbal about what they watched and even began to demonstrate some degree of critical perspective. They watched the same episode repeatedly every week for three weeks, and some of them began to respond to the questions they were asked. It seemed that some of the participants had begun to think a little critically about the subject matter of the cartoon.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

For instance, Jimin (eight-year-old girl), who seldom responded to the questions posed in the sixth meeting, became more active in expressing herself in the eighth meeting as the following excerpts illustrated:

Researcher: (After watching the episode "That's No Lady" from SpongeBob) Does the cartoon teach you to do anything good or bad?
Jimin: I don't know.
Researcher: What did you like or not like about the cartoon?
Jimin: I don't like the scene that people make fun of SpongeBob.
Researcher: Why?
Jimin: I don't know. (silence) [at the sixth meeting]

Researcher: (After watching the episode "That's No Lady" from SpongeBob) Does the cartoon teach you to do anything good or bad?
Jimin: Um...I think it is bad to tease people. (Silence for three seconds.) You know...they made fun of SpongeBob... because he wore a funny dress. I felt bad when friends teased me because I ate a lot. I like eating. I felt bad when I heard I am like a pig. It is not good to tease a person. [at the eighth meeting]

Watching the SpongeBob episode repeatedly while being asked critical questions by the researchers seemed to help her think about the issues deeply connected to her own experience. This supports the idea of self-reflectivity or affective reflexivity by Alvermann and Hong Xu (2003) and Sholle and Denski (1993). Jimin demonstrated self-reflexive by connecting the message in the cartoon to her own lived experience.

Interestingly, the older participants who were ten year olds at the time of the study, Gunwoo and Jongmin, seemed to make more progress in acquiring critical perspectives on the presentation of gender in the American cartoon. For instance, the following excerpt exemplifies the children's newfound willingness to critically engage with the issue of gender and economic power.

Researcher: What do you think about the scene where the girl dressed up nicely and looked rich?
Gunwoo: It was interesting because I thought men are richer usually. You know. Daddy is working and earning money for us. He is richer than my Mom.
Researcher: Then do you think girls can't be richer than men?
Gunwoo: Maybe.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

Researcher: OK.. Jongmin, do you also think girls can't be rich?

Jongmin: Well, many women are working too and making money. Every girl is different and girls can be rich. The scene described girls can be pretty but should not be rich.

Researcher: Gunwoo, what do you think of what Jongmin said?

Gunwoo: Um...(silence) You may be right. If a woman has a job and is smart, she can be rich. Beauty and making money are not always connected. [at the seventh meeting]

Further interviews with Gunwoo and Jongmin revealed that their views on the link between gender and economic power reflected the way discussions about finances were framed in the context of their families. The children's willingness to challenge the belief that female gender and economic power were mutually exclusive depended on the way they perceived their mothers' role in the family. Once again, the children's lived experience shaped their thoughts about the issue and in turn informed their answers to the critical questions posed by the researcher. This finding supports the ideas of sociocultural literacy theorists (Morrell, 2002, 2004; Lewison, et al., 2007) concerning the importance of interaction between family members and children on their literacy development, that is, critical awareness of media literacy. More specifically, Gunwoo often heard that his daddy is working and his family was economically dependent on his income. On the other hand, as the following excerpt shows, Jongmin internalized the idea that boys and girls and by extension men and women are basically equal. This was due to the fact that his mother often verbalized this idea in her interactions with him. Jongmin's responses to the critical thinking questions supported the idea that children often apply the messages they glean from their families to society as a whole. In Jongmin's case, his mother's ideas about gender equality between Jongmin and his sister seem to shape his opinion about the relationship between gender and economic power.

Researcher: I see. Why do you think girls can be rich, Jongmin?

Jongmin: Well, my dad is making money for us, but my mom said men and women are the same basically. She said my sister, Soyeon, and I are both the same even though she is a girl and I am a boy. [at the eighth meeting]

Soyeon and Jaeseo, who were eight years old at the time of this study, changed little in terms of their critical awareness over the course of the study even though they were shown the same cartoon repeatedly. On the whole, the younger children did not seem to identify the theme in the cartoon. Their responses to the question of "What do you think

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

about his or her dress?" tended to focus on surface characteristics. This is demonstrated by responses such as: "I liked her flower-printed dress. I also have one." Their responses to the question "Can a girl be rich?" were also simple and consistent throughout the study. Most responses were yes or no type answers with little or no relevant elaboration. The younger children were not able to justify their answers logically opting to say "I don't know" or "Because I want to be rich in the future."

V. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how Korean elementary ESL students approached watching American cartoons in the U. S. and to suggest ways to help ESL students to watch American TV shows from a critical perspective. The ultimate goal of this study would be to set up guidelines to help make viewing American cartoons more useful for children who are enrolled in ESL programs.

This study found that while popular culture often disseminates many problematic ideologies, the consumption of the products of popular culture, such as cartoons, are integral in helping Korean newcomers to adjust to their host culture. This study supports the idea that watching American TV cartoons may help ESL children to increase their self-esteem with regards to learning English. In addition, this study revealed that watching American TV cartoons may help elementary school ESL students to improve their literacy skills. Despite these benefits, this study also points to the fact that as children watch popular cartoons, they tend to passively accept messages from the dominant culture that are often embedded in these shows. Data analysis revealed that the children often accepted latent messages in the cartoons that they viewed. It also appeared that children were not used to asking critical questions and thinking critically while watching American cartoons. One positive sign, however, was that as they became more familiar with the various types of critical thinking questions over the course of the research, they showed some progress in approaching the subject matter presented in cartoon with a critical eye. This is more true for the older children than the younger children in the study. It appeared that older students are more cognitively ready to acquire the skill set of critical inquiry through asking and answering such questions.

The findings of this study may be of use to parents and educators who may wish to increase their involvement in developing children's critical competence with regards to American TV media. As Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) claim the ideal classroom would "create activity systems that facilitated learning through active critical engagement with popular media" (p. 294), English educators in particular may wish to start creating ways of engaging students in critical thinking practices as they watch

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

American TV. Younger ESL students who lack a high level of English proficiency are often reliant upon images rather than dialogue to follow the plot lines of their favorite shows. This renders them vulnerable to directly absorbing explicit and implicit messages while watching American TV. To address this situation, English language educators should start helping students to critically analyze American TV. One way of doing this is to incorporate American TV into literacy classes as Jeffrey and Morrell (2005) suggest. Another way of achieving this would be for educators to ask children critical thinking questions upon viewing American TV shows as shown in this study. As claimed by Lewison et al. (2007), "to be relevant to students' interests and knowledge, we build curriculum by creating connections between the classroom and life outside of school" (p. 30). To this end, future studies are needed to fully explore how English teachers can use popular culture in their literacy classes. Finally, some limitations of the study include the small number of participants and the fact that it relied heavily on the use of interview data. Therefore, future studies dealing with the critical consumption of television media should include larger participant pools and present triangulated data which should include the researcher's field notes as well as parental interviews.

REFERENCES

Alvermann, D. E., & Hagood, M. C. (2010). Critical media literacy: Research, theory, and practice in "new times". *The Journal of Educational Research, 93*(3), 193-205.

Alvermann, D. E., & Hong Xu, S. (2003). Children's everyday literacies: Intersections of popular culture and language arts instruction. *Language Arts, 81*(2), 145-154.

An, S. K., & Lee, D. (2010). An integrated model of parental mediation: The effect of family communication on children's perception of television reality and negative viewing effects. *Asian Journal of Communication, 20*(4), 389-403.

Anderson, G. L., & Irvine, P. (1993). Informing critical literacy with ethnography. In C. Lankshear & P. L. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern* (pp. 81-104). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Bell, J. W. (2001). Building bridges/making meanings: Texts of popular culture and critical pedagogy in theory and practice. In B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Negotiating critical literacies in classrooms* (pp. 229-244). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Cheah, Y. M. (2001). From prescription to participation: Moving from functional to critical

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

literacy in Singapore. In B. Comber & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Negotiating critical literacies in classrooms* (pp. 69-81). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The sage handbook of qualitative research*. (3rd ed.). Thousands Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Singer, D. G., & Singer, J. L. (1998). Developing critical viewing skills and media literacy in children. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 557*(1), 164-179.

Duncan-Andrade, J., & Morrell, E. (2005). Turn up that radio, teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century. *Journal of School Leadership, 15*, 284-304.

Dyson, A. H. (2001). Couch Bombay's kids learn to write: Children's appropriate of media material for school literacy. In E. Cushman, E. R. Kintgen, B. M. Kroll, & M. Rose (Eds.), *Literacy a critical sourcebook*. (pp. 325-357). New York: Bedford/St. Martins.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.

Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourse*. New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Giroux, H. A., & Simon, R. (1989). *Popular culture: Schooling and everyday life*. New York: Bergin & Garvey.

Glensne, C. (2006). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Green, P. (2001). Critical literacy revisited. In H. Fehring & P. Green (Eds.), *Critical literacy: A collection of articles from the Australian literacy educators' association* (pp. 7-14). Newark: International Reading Association.

Heath, S. B. (1994). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. In Maybin, J. (Ed.), *Language and literacy in social practice: A reader* (pp. 73-95). Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Jeffrey, M. R., & Morrell, D. A. E. (2005). Turn up that radio, teacher: Popular cultural pedagogy in new century. *Journal of School Leadership, 15*, 284-304.

Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In B. Cope & M. Kalantzis (Eds.), *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 182-202). London: Routledge.

Kress, G. (2003). *Literacy in the new media age*. London: New York: Routledge.

Lee, L. (2009). Young American immigrant children's interpretations of popular culture: A case study of Korean girls' perspectives on royalty in Disney films. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 7*(2), 200-215.

Lee, H., & Kim, K. H. (2010). Relationships between bilingualism and adaptive creative style, innovative creative style, and creative strengths among Korean American students. *Creativity Research Journal, 22*(4), 402-7.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

Lewis, J., & Jhally, S. (2006). The struggle over media literacy. *Journal of Communication, 48*(1), 109-120.

Lewison, M., Leland, C., & Harste, J. C. (2007). *Creating critical classrooms: K-8 reading and writing with an edge*. New York: Taylor & Francis (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Imprint).

Livingstone, S. (2004). Media literacy and the challenge of new information and communication technologies. *The Communication Review, 7*(1), 3-14.

Luke, A. (1997). Critical approaches to literacy. In V. Edwards & D. Corson (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education, Vol. 2: Literacy* (pp. 143-52). Amsterdam: Kluwer Academic.

Marsh, J. (2005). *Popular culture, new media and digital literacy in early childhood*. New York: Routledge-Falmer.

Martella, R. C., Nelson, R., & Marchand-Martella, N. E. (1999). *Research methods: Learning to become a critical research consumer*. Boston: Allen and Bacon.

Meurant, R. C. (2008). The key importance of L2 digital literacy to Korean EFL pedagogy. *International Journal of Hybrid Information Technology, 1*(1), 65-72.

Meurant, R. C. (2010). How computer-based internet-hosted learning management systems such as moodle can help develop L2 digital literacy. *International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering, 5*(2), 19-26.

Morrell, E. (2002). Toward a critical pedagogy of popular culture: Literacy development among urban youth. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46*, 72–77.

Morrell, E. (2004). *Linking literacy and popular culture: Finding connections for lifelong learning.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change.* Harlow, England: Pearson Education.

Norton, B., & Stein, P. (1995). Why the "Monkeys Passage" bombed: Tests, genres, and teaching. *Harvard Educational Review, 65*(1), 50-65.

Sholle, D., & Denski, S. (1993). Reading and writing the media: Critical media literacy and postmodernism. In C. Lankshear & P. L. McLaren (Eds.), *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern* (pp. 297- 321). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Street, B. V. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Suh, S., Kim, S. W., & Kim, N. J. (2010). Effectiveness of MMORPG-based instruction in elementary English education in Korea. *Journal of computer assisted learning, 26*(5), 370-378.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions on American Cartoons
("That's No Lady" from SpongeBob and "All Fired Up" from Pokémon)

1. General questions
   1) What did you like or not like about the cartoon?
   2) Do you talk about the cartoon in school or with friends?
   3) Do you trade Pokémon cards with friends?
   4) Do you read the information in the books you bring with?

2. Critical questions
   1) What does this cartoon teach us about boys and girls?
   2) Does the cartoon teach you to do anything bad?
   3) Does the cartoon teach you to do anything good?
   4) What do you think about his or her dress up?
   5) Are Pokémon male or female?
   6) Which Pokémon do you think are male and female and why?
   7) Do you think girls can be rich? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

Samples of Tables and Index in the Pokémon Handbooks





교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre

APPENDIX C

Gender of Pokémon Characters by the Children



Strong image cards as male characters



Cute image cards as female characters

Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Levels: Elementary/Secondary

Young-Mee Suh
Department of English Education
Ewha Womans University
52, Ewhayoedae-gil, Seodaemun-gu
Seoul, 120-750, Korea
Tel: (02) 3285-8972
E-mail: ymsuh012@naver.com

Yoosun Jung
Seoul National University High School
Jongam-dong, Sungbuk-gu
Seoul, 136-090, Korea
Tel: (02) 583-8280
E-mail: yoursun86@hotmail.com

Received in July, 2012
Reviewed in August, 2012
Revised version received in September, 2012

교보문고 KYOBO Book Centre