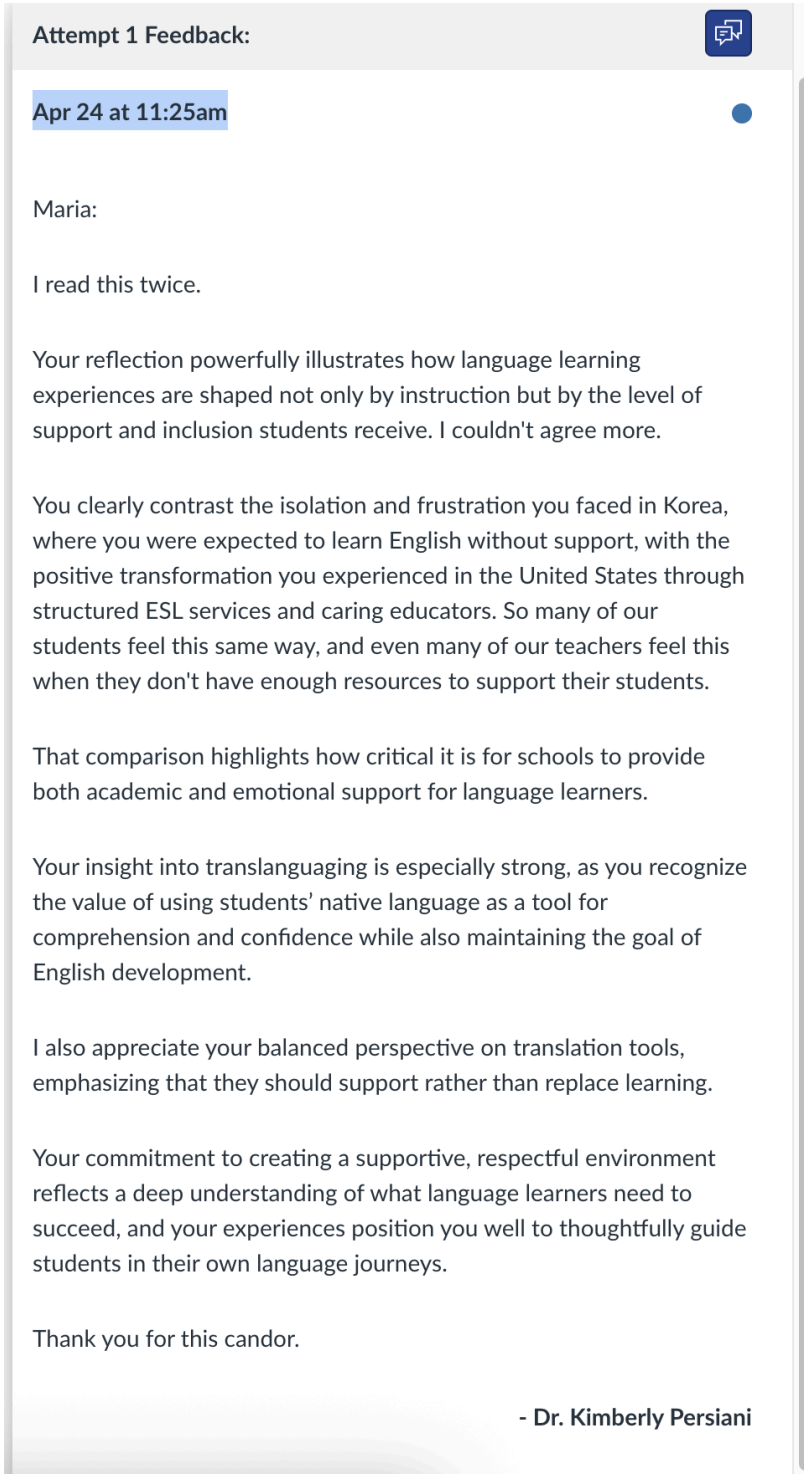
April 24, 2026:

I was eight-years old when my parents took me out of Korean school and enrolled me in an international school in Korea. Since I did not know any English, I had to start in first grade with six and seven year-olds. In addition to the language barrier, the difference in mentality with these classmates made school unbearable. There was no ESL program or English tutoring assistance at the school so I was supposed to "just pick it up". I had to make references based on the visuals the teacher used in class and take the handouts home to study on my own using a dictionary. Basically, I memorized the handouts and textbooks to pass the exams. Making friends was even more difficult. Since I couldn't understand or speak in English, the kids didn't choose me to be on their team in the gym or ask to play with them during recess. There were times when the teacher blamed me for things I didn't do because I couldn't speak up for myself.

Interestingly, school life significantly improved when we moved to the United States a year later. There was ESL assistance in American public schools, so when I scored perfectly in math, I was bumped up to third grade. Being with kids my age made a big difference and having a personal English counselor helped me better communicate with my teachers. With warm support from the school, my English skills naturally improved which led to confidence. I joined the orchestra, track team, and even ran for student council. Classmates asked me to sit with them during lunch and I was invited to sleepovers. This was all possible because the school had an ESL program in place, even though there weren't many international students. I was blessed to have teachers that were excited to have a foreign student in their class. Since many of the students had never met someone from outside the US, the teachers led by example how to be considerate and courteous.

I want to provide that same kind of courtesy and support to ESL students. Although I have mainly trained corporate employees, attorneys, and students in higher education, I can use my experience to help intermediate level students. I am a firm believer in the effectiveness of translanguaging. There is nothing wrong with translating the listening material into the students' native language to check their comprehension. Similarly for output, using a translating tool to modify their writing from their native language to English saves time and builds confidence. I have seen too often how the outdated "English Only" policy drives students away. Older students who clearly have a more prominent language can think and comprehend better in their native language. It is draconian to force them to think in English when they don't have the proper foundation or sufficient vocabulary base. Thinking in English from the very beginning is only possible if you have been introduced to English and another language at a young age and it's natural to switch back and forth. For ESL students, the teacher must plan the lessons carefully so students are using translation tools to only check their

understanding and support their communication. The translation applications should never replace their English learning. That is why a teacher's role is so important. Finding a balance between "English only" and use of translation devices is only possible if the teacher is well prepared and knows the students' propensity and skills.



Attempt 1 Feedback:

Apr 24 at 11:25am

Maria:

I read this twice.

Your reflection powerfully illustrates how language learning experiences are shaped not only by instruction but by the level of support and inclusion students receive. I couldn't agree more.

You clearly contrast the isolation and frustration you faced in Korea, where you were expected to learn English without support, with the positive transformation you experienced in the United States through structured ESL services and caring educators. So many of our students feel this same way, and even many of our teachers feel this when they don't have enough resources to support their students.

That comparison highlights how critical it is for schools to provide both academic and emotional support for language learners.

Your insight into translanguaging is especially strong, as you recognize the value of using students' native language as a tool for comprehension and confidence while also maintaining the goal of English development.

I also appreciate your balanced perspective on translation tools, emphasizing that they should support rather than replace learning.

Your commitment to creating a supportive, respectful environment reflects a deep understanding of what language learners need to succeed, and your experiences position you well to thoughtfully guide students in their own language journeys.

Thank you for this candor.

- Dr. Kimberly Persiani

Feedback

Attempt 1 Feedback:

Apr 25 at 11:10am

Maria:

Thank you for this warm and insightful perspective on early language learning, especially from personal and family experiences.

The examples you share about your children learning sign language and growing up bilingual in English and Korean clearly illustrate how natural and effective language acquisition can be in early childhood.

Your reflections highlight not only cognitive benefits but also the confidence and communication skills that develop through early exposure.

In the second section, your practical advice to adult learners is especially valuable, emphasizing confidence, simplicity, and authenticity in communication.

You thoughtfully address the emotional challenges of language learning and offer an encouraging, realistic approach that supports persistence and growth. I connected with this in many ways.

I especially liked your closing, "There is no need to overthink what others think of my English level
because most people are too preoccupied with themselves or something else. That is why
whenever my students get frustrated, I tell them, “it’s okay; this is your second or third language” and remind them that their genuine interest in the conversation speaks louder than words." I fully agree.

- Dr. Kimberly Persiani

April 18, 2026:

1. The main difference between an ally, advocate, and co-conspirator is the degree of liability imposed on the assumption of a particular risk. And advocate bears the least amount of liability if the supporter doesn't have personal divestment in the representation. Similarly, an ally may share the same goal but if there is nothing to lose, then there is no liability. A co-conspirator, on the other hand, is held equally liable for an outcome regardless of whether an "act" occurred. The reason is due to a "meeting of the minds" in assuming a risk together. Whereas an ally and advocate may merely support a cause, a co-conspirator is willing to share the responsibility for any consequences arising from supporting a cause.

2. A teacher's role is to observe, strategize, and guide the students to fulfill their learning potential. To do so, the teacher should be a co-conspirator and assume the liability of that role. The teacher should be personally invested in the student's learning instead of being a bystanding supporter. For example, I have witnessed the negative ramifications of cultural and language misunderstanding in the corporate world. From termination of a contract to loss of a client, miscommunication can cost jobs and even result in business closure. As a business and legal English instructor of a company, I have a fiduciary duty and interest in making sure my colleagues are fully prepared to communicate in English during a meeting with an overseas counterpart or RFQ with a customer. On a personal level, I experienced first hand the frustration of being unable to speak my mind at a critical moment and the opportunity cost that resulted. That is why I know exactly how my colleagues feel in the cultural and language challenges they face. However, it is not enough to be able to "relate" to them. As an instructor with experience and skills, I need to take initiative and find ways that can best help them in a short amount of time. By being personally invested, I learn from my colleagues their personal story; what and why they're experiencing difficulty with English, and create a lesson plan that is specially tailored for them. In addition, I follow up with them on a periodic basis to see if the methods worked and discuss what we can do differently for the next project. I am willing to share their burden and take on joint responsibility for the result of their English presentation or project.

April 10, 2026

Being an only child, I did not have anyone to argue with or fight for my parents' attention. So when I became a parent to our son and daughter, only a year apart, I learned the importance of the saying, "there is always two sides to every story". And being an attorney, I had a duty to discover the complete story to identify the strength

and weakness of the case to properly advocate for my client. Whether it's at home, court, or at school, knowing the whole story is an important aspect of our daily life and our existence. Chimamanda Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story" beautifully articulates why we shouldn't accept any one-sided story and search for "a balance of stories".

1. It is important to look beyond the "single story" that Chimamanda Adichie describes because a single story robs us of dignity; it emphasizes differences rather than similarities. For example, there are stereotypes and biases among Asians. As early as I could remember, the historical Chinese imperialism and Japanese occupation of Korea were embedded into my head by Korean society. There was never ending media coverage of the comfort women issue, fight over Dokdo island, and Chinese cultural appropriation. History books, dramas, and movies only portrayed the negative events that occurred between Korea, Japan and China. Even today, the relationship between these three countries is still very complex as there is both admiration and animosity over which country is "better" than the other. I found it interesting that in the American movie, "Crazy Rich Asians", there was a scene where Asians were trying to identify each other and Koreans were labeled as being identifiable through plastic surgery. However, having worked with Chinese and Japanese companies, I discovered more similarities than differences in culture and admirable qualities that I wanted to adopt.

2. Knowing the students' background, identity, and culture help us design a culturally responsive curriculum because it fosters a positive learning environment where students can feel free to share their thoughts and experiences. I wholeheartedly agree with Chimamanda Adichie that "stories matter". Everyone has a story and sharing it through a "balance of stories" empowers and humanizes us. Instead of focusing on the differences, I believe learning the students' culture and exploring together how their cultural practice can relate to the present and the AI future, can connect the class.

3. Two tangible tasks or activities that can be incorporated into the lesson plan are:
a) Having the students share with the class a family tradition by bringing in food, traditional clothes, photos, or items that are used to celebrate and honor their culture.
b) Research and present to the class a major event in history or current issue concerning the student's family or nation.

Depending on whether they are students in a classroom or trainees in a corporation, the activities will have variations. The common goal, however, is to practice presentation skills in English. We would start with using visual aid (slides or short video clips) for warm up discussion then I would provide them with a general template with instructions on what information and structure are expected in the presentation. To make them feel at ease, I will share with the class a traditional Korean dish (prepared during the Lunar

New Year celebration) and discuss the cultural significance as well as how it's become a recent top selling popular K-food.

May 7, 2026:

I interviewed one of my former trainees because I remember he and his family are devout Buddhists. I am Catholic and I have heard that Catholicism and Buddhism share many similar practices so this was a good opportunity for me to explore this inquiry.

1) Question: Are you a Buddhist by choice? **Answer:** Yes. My parents are fifth generation Buddhists but they let me choose. **Opinion:** My family also allowed me to choose so I was excited to learn how he made his decision and how it has impacted his life. I was actually nervous before the interview that he would respond being forced to be a Buddhist. Since it was by choice, I had additional questions from those I had prepared.

2) Question: Why did you choose Buddhism? **Answer:** When I was young, I just followed my family in Buddhist practices. As a teenager, I was too busy with my studies and I was also lazy so I just did the basic things I had to do a couple times a year. I really didn't give much thought to religion until I started working. My colleagues talked about their weekend which included going to church or to the temple with their family. Maybe I grew up but I started noticing the different family rituals and why we were doing them. And I found it healing so I started taking it more seriously. **Opinion:** I realized there doesn't have to be an "aha!" moment in religion. I had always thought faith entered you like a bolt of lightning. However, there are many ways to have faith and it can be pragmatic like my interviewee.

3) Question: Didn't you want to explore other religions before choosing Buddhism? **Answer:** Not really. Like I said, I'm pretty lazy. I grew up in a Buddhist family so going to the temple or family rituals were natural for me. I also found it emotionally helpful when my mom would go to the temple to light the lantern for me to wish me luck on the college entrance exam. It was comforting. **Opinion:** I totally agreed with this rationale because we find comfort in having faith. The act of praying in any religion is a form of meditation. Through prayer, we reflect on ourselves and ask for support, which are all comforting. For example, in my junior year of college, I studied at the UN and attended mass in French. Since the procedures during the mass are the same in any country and language, I was able to follow along and it gave me a sense of belonging which was comforting.

4) Question: Your mom lighting the lantern for you is similar to my mom lighting the candle after mass. Do you also perform these religious practices? **Answer:** Yes.

Without thinking about it I realize I do many "Buddhist" things. But I don't know how much of this is part of my daily life. For example, my mom would yell at me for keeping my basketball shoes under the bed because it brought evil spirits. It seemed like she related everything to evil spirits. So I do things and don't do things from the way she trained me with threats of the evil spirits. **Opinion:** We laughed for a long time after his response because my grandmother was like that too. There were so many "don't" rules because the consequences for not following them would be inviting evil spirits and bad luck. There were many things that we couldn't do at night like whistling, cutting our nails, or sleeping with our head/ feet facing the door. It's a miracle that we weren't traumatized growing up in this superstitious culture. However it's interesting that as a Korean American, I tell my kids the same things I dreaded hearing from my grandmother.

5) Question: Then do you think Buddhism is a religion or culture? **Answer:** I think it's both. I pray to Buddha and make offerings. It's for things I want for my family. I am careful not to do things because I don't want bad luck. Without getting too deep into it, I just don't do things Buddhists say not to do because I think there must me a reason for it. **Opinion:** There was truth to what he said because even though I'm Catholic, I follow Buddhist practices which are interwoven into the Korean culture. It's true that Korean culture is devised from Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, and folklore, which we learn from childhood. And I realized how much of the superstition derived from these are subconsciously incorporated into society like some buildings don't have a fourth floor sinch four is a number representing death.

6) Question: So then why do you think Buddhism is considered to be a religion? **Answer:** Honestly, I never thought about this. But I think it's a religion because we pray to Buddha. We ask for things out of our control which means there is a higher being. Buddha was able to achieve things that normal people can't so we pray for help to have those virtues. **Opinion:** His response made me remember the religion course I took in college. I received Jesuit education and one of the graduation requirements was taking religion for a year. I chose to take atheism because our school believed learning from atheists would lead to true faith. The Jesuits believed that questioning our faith prevents "blind faith". Theories like Schopenhauer's "metaphysics for the people", Nietzsche's Ubermensch, and Marx's view of religion as "opium of the masses", were truly eye opening. I became self critical and careful not to pray for things but to transcend beyond worldly concerns. This is where I believe the essence of belief is similar for all religions.

7) Question: If you consider Buddhism to be a religion what do you think is the most important part of your belief? **Answer:** For me the most important thing is letting go of my obsessions. I don't think I can ever achieve nirvana; only by death can we be free of emotions. So the best I can do is not be too greedy, ambitious, or envious. **Opinion:** Again we laughed for a long time when he said that "only by death can we be free of

emotions". I agree that emotions make us human and it's nearly impossible to be void of feeling. That is why the best we can do is follow Aristotle's "happy medium" and try to achieve a balance between extremely overt and deficient actions and emotions.

8) Question: How has being a Buddhist helped you in life? **Answer:** It helped me to be less anxious. When work is really stressful, I go to the temple and just being there helps me to relax. If I can't make it to the temple then I put on my airpod and listen to the chants. It's different from listening to jazz or classical music because the chants have meaning for me. It also feels like the monks are chasing away bad luck whenever I listen to them. **Opinion:** Again, I couldn't help laughing because I could totally relate. Between his mother and my grandmother, we had too many war stories to trade. Just as listening to chants have special meaning for him, the Latin hymns during mass also resonated with me. Kneeling to pray with the angelic voice of the boys' choir above and the smell of incense throughout the church, I was always transcended to a holy place. I always believed that moment was when I experienced true faith.

9) Question: Would you marry someone who is not a Buddhist? **Answer:** Yes because Buddhism is my personal choice. Like my parents, I don't want to force religion on someone. I think marriage is based on mutual respect, not religious preference. **Opinion:** I agree with this statement having been married twenty eight years. My husband is agnostic and the only time he mentioned "God" was the day our children were born. However, he accompanied me to mass on special occasions and respected prayer during dinner with my parents. Decisions on how to raise our children, where to live, and how to handle our finances, were more pressing matters for us than which religion to practice. The only regret is not having our marriage recognized by the Catholic church but I believe this is more of an institutional rule that doesn't define God's love for all of us on earth.

10) Question: How would you raise your children? **Answer:** My mom will probably scare them with the same superstitions like she did with me. What can we do, right? It's part of our culture. As long as it isn't too extreme, I will let it pass. I'm open to my children learning about other religions because having some form of belief is important. There will be a critical moment where they need support and I'm not there for them. I want my kids to have someone or something they can turn to. **Opinion:** I couldn't agree more. This is the same expectation I have for my children. I was relieved when my son turned to God when faced with challenges. My daughter on the other hand is very scientific so she is agnostic like her dad. I worry for her because without faith, she only relies on herself which is too big of a burden to bear on her own. Since they're teenagers, our role as parents is still very important, especially for our daughter.

Conclusion: I learned from this interview that there are more similarities than differences between religions. As educators, if we can identify these similarities and see how they are incorporated into the cultures, we can create an inclusive learning environment. Instead of focusing on differences which can lead to isolationism, I think using the similarities can foster a bond between the students. Even where there are distinct differences, they can be viewed in a positive light if the students are comfortable with each other.

Feedback: May 7 at 9:02am

Maria:

Wow! I was really impressed by what your former trainee was willing to share. You will notice as the week unfolds that some interviews are really in depth and others have a more challenging time culling information from their interviewee.

You were able to not only gather quite a bit of information but you also did a great job presenting this interview in detail, but you were also thoughtful in both your questions and your reflections as your writing really captures an authentic dialogue filled with both humor and meaningful insight.

I especially appreciate how you built connections between your interviewee's experiences and your own, which helped highlight both cultural overlap and religious nuance in a very natural way.

Your reflections on comfort, ritual, and the role of family traditions were particularly strong, and your conclusion effectively emphasizes the importance of finding common ground across belief systems.

Whenever I do these types of interviews, I find myself needing to sometimes step back from personal agreement and consider alternative perspectives or broader implications, especially when discussing ideas like faith, science, or how children develop belief systems further strengthen my role as a reflective practitioner.I find that I can easily get caught up in their stories and want to make connections I might not have felt before, without giving myself time to marinate on their responses. But I love finding those similarities and making those connections.

Thank you again for another wonderful response paper as your work demonstrates strong engagement, thoughtful comparison, and a clear commitment to fostering inclusive and respectful learning environments. **- Dr. Kimberly Persiani**