Inviting Student Voice

Tim Murphey
Kanda University of International Studies, Japan
Joseph Falout
Nihon University, Japan
James Elwood
Tsukuba University, Japan
Michael Hood
Nihon University, Japan

Bio Data:
Tim Murphey researches into sociocultural theory applications to language teaching. His co-author **Joseph Falout** researches into motivational variables of teachers and students in EFL contexts. **James Elwood** is interested in psychometrics in EFL/ESL and puppetry in the EFL classroom and **Michael Hood's** research interests include L2 writing and academic literacy acquisition.

Abstract
Inviting, including, and increasing student voice could transform and energize our activities, curricula, methods, and governance in English language teaching (ELT), and could engender a self-fulfilling prophecy of increased learning, student agency, and community consciousness. General education theory provides most of the examples for using student voice. However, we report how such practices can be applied in ELT with our own small streams of research through action logs, language learning histories, student petitions, and surveys. We look closely at 440 students' appraisals of their English classes in their secondary education in Japan, and propose how it might affect English teaching in Japan were it acted upon. More than surveying student attitudes, we are encouraging students themselves to participate in educational research, deliberations, and decision-making for proactive transformation of their own education. Including more student voices in ELT can increase the value of what we do professionally—teach and learn.

Keywords:
student voice, agency, participatory education, critical pedagogy, autonomy, critical thinking

Treat people as they could be, and you help them become as they can be.
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Introduction

Inviting student voice and participation in their own education is not new (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001; Dewey, 1913/1975, 1916/2004), but it seems to be underutilized in

the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL). In this paper we look at how including student voice might improve learning by first discussing critical pedagogy, then benefits within general education, and finally some of our own research in Japan that we think relevant to many Asian contexts. We end with some simple examples of how teachers could take advantage of the resource of student voice and improve learning in the classroom by doing it collaboratively with students.

Student Voice for Motivation and Agency

Through our research on student experiences and motivation in EFL (e.g. Carpenter, Falout, Fukuda, Trovela, & Murphey, in press; Falout, Elwood, Hood, in press; Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008; Murphey & Carpenter, 2008) we have learned that there is a dominant educational paradigm that stifles communication, forcing learners into silence in EFL classrooms across Japan. In this *one-size-fits-all education,* regardless of their interests, preferences, abilities, or learning goals, students are taken through their primary and secondary education with the same classroom cohort, teaching methods, textbooks, and tests. Teachers feel pressures from parents and school administrations to prove that their students have learned enough to pass entrance exams to get into reputable schools, and that they are competent educators based on students' scores on standardized tests. Consequently, teachers stick to the textbooks, lecturing on the finer points of grammar, involving little communication amongst the students for developing communicative competence (Pacek, 1997; Sakui, 2004; Shohamy, 2006; Taguchi, 2002, 2005). As Falout and Falout (2005) noted, students in Japan find this mono-methdical teaching to be demotivating, and they indicate a preference for more active classes (Hood, Elwood, Falout, in press). Moreover, this trend has been observed in several contexts in Asia: China (Littlewood, 2000; Liu & Littlewood, 1997), South Korea (Nam, 2005), Thailand (McDonaugh & Chaikitmongkol, 2007), and Vietnam (Trang & Baldauf, 2007). In this article we reflect on how we can increasingly incorporate student voice to develop their agency in the classroom (as exemplified recently in this journal by Sivakumar, 2009), and in ELT research.

Critical Pedagogy

As Freire (e.g., 2007) noted, one function of education is to cultivate conformity, and he took umbrage with the "banking" system in education—where students receive

deposits of knowledge from the teacher—the teacher is transmitter, producer, authority, and agent, and students must deny their independence and submit in order to be "successfully" educated. Students in this environment are not invited to speak, produce, or participate. In such a context, education certainly does not empower students. Friere admitted that teachers, although having good intentions, might not be cognizant of these counterproductive outcomes that are of little value beyond filling the learner with knowledge deposits. With no room for dialogue, student voices are silent and therefore powerless.

Freire and Giroux (2001) criticized education that prevents students from participating in the daily discourses that construct educational practices. They advocated a revolutionary pedagogy—a "critical pedagogy"—of shared critical reflection, with suppressed knowledge liberated through critical dialogues whereby teacher and students assume authority and agency in a process of mutual development. Since such a dialectical educational system is based on the knowledge of both students and the teacher, it *invites* student voice as well as that of the educator. van Lier (2004) believes, "Teachers can encourage students to develop their own 'voice' in the new language (and first-language learners need to do the same thing in the academic registers of their own language) by embedding language in meaningful activity" (p. 130).

Student Voice in General Education

While conscientious educators have always been concerned with student voice, we can trace some influence of development on the humanistic, learner-centered approach to Carl Rogers' (1965) *Client-Centered Therapy,* which focuses on listening to clients' voices. More recently, publications dealing with student voice from North America (Thiessan, 2006), the UK (Halsey, Murfield, Harland, & Lord, 2006), and Australia (*Student Voice*, 2007), are reporting very positive results. Fletcher (n.d.) has an overview of the research online from which we summarize several key points below. Studies have clearly shown that:

1. Students want to be involved in school planning, choosing curricula, hiring teachers, and deciding policy (Kaba, 2000; Marques, 1999; Patmor, 1998) and are most likely to be engaged in learning when they are active and given some choice and control over the learning process (Goodlad, 1984; Yair, 2000).

2. Meaningfully-involved students have more positive relationships with teachers (Houghton, 2001; Weiler, LaGoy, Crane, & Rovner, 1998) and individual youth development and organizational capacity building increase when students are engaged as researchers (Harvard Family Research Project, 2002).

3. Student voice in educational reform is critical to the successful implementation of academic programs and projects (Beresford, 2000; Cook-Sather, 2002; Ericson & Ellett, 2002; Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

4. Young people engaged in service to their school are more likely to be actively engaged in their communities throughout their lives (Constitutional Rights Foundation & Close-Up Foundation, 1995; Lesko & Tsouronis, 1998).

Fletcher concludes that research can further contribute to incorporating young people in the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives, schools, and communities. Harvard researcher Richard Light (2001) took student voice very seriously in his book *Making the Most of College: Students Speak Their Minds*: "Early on, my colleagues and I decided that to learn what works best for students, we should ask them. So we did. More than sixteen hundred undergraduates have been interviewed during this effort . . . [each] from one to three hours" (p. 6). While feeling involved and listened to is very important for their education—and for feeling respected—it is also true that students can learn a lot when they hear each others' views, ideas and strategies (Gafney & Varma-Nelson, 2008). The teacher benefits, too. For the teacher's classroom practice, insights gained from students' perspectives help in practical and immediate application (Benson & Nunan, 2005; Block, 1998; Thiessen, 2006). Investigating and incorporating students' values and interests promotes their commitment, success, satisfaction, and motivation in learning (Horwitz, 1988; Williams & Burden, 1997).

The Importance of Teacher Voice

Dudley-Marling and Searle (1995) have rightly noted, "[Teachers] who have little control may find it difficult to share control with students" (p. vii). Therefore, while we are advocating student voice, we need to also advocate the freedom of language teachers to act, which Rivers (1976) championed in her call for teachers to follow student interests. She asserted that students' interests were teachers' raw resources for boosting and directing motivation for learning a new language. She believed in

adapting, innovating, and improvising to involve students actively in their own education. She also noted that "the efficiency of the individual teacher increases with the amount of his personal stake and personal contribution to the instructional processes" (p. 97). The opportunity for teachers and students to contribute together makes them collaborators and increases their stake in learning and building a classroom community.

Research specifically in Language Education

Ethnographic case studies in language education (e.g., Day, 2002; Kanno, 2003; Norton, 2000) vividly display what students think and believe about their learning situations. Berlin (2001) reports doing fifteen to twenty minute interviews with forty-seven ESL students in the state of Illinois, USA, to generate a model of effective instruction. Critical pedagogy (e.g., Freire, 2007) and participatory education (Campbell & Burnaby, 2001) promote such student participation and have inspired many language teachers to democratize their classrooms and schools and elicit more student voice. In the following section, we look at our own research eliciting student voice in Japan.

Survey Study: Japanese University Students' Evaluations of Secondary English Education

Students in Japan are often described as silent, passive, disengaged. This disposition seems to be the biggest concern of EFL teachers in Japan as it can demotivate them in their professional practices (Falout, Stillwell, & Murphey, in press).

   Perhaps the main reason for lack of involvement is that students have seldom been expected to participate in their English education. Teacher-centered, lecture-based classrooms dominate throughout their educational period, and with little expectation or encouragement, students simply remain mentally, emotionally, and physically disengaged (Gorsuch, 2000; McVeigh, 2002; O'Donnell, 2005; Taguchi, 2005). A sense of experiential education, involving students in the educational process, democratizes education, providing teachers with suggestions for change (Dewey, 1916/2004). We assert that student voice can be invited and incorporated into ELT practices to improve education, and we will illustrate with a discussion of our current research and classroom practices.

Replication Study Background

Our recent study (Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008) replicated and extended an earlier study (Murphey, 2002) in which students were asked to write open-ended letters of advice to junior high school (JHS) and high school (HS) teachers. In Murphey's original study in 2002, comments were grouped into categories of positive and negative experiences in secondary education, plus a "wants" category. The results showed a large proportion of negative comments about experiences in EFL classrooms, particularly toward the heavy focus on grammar in HS. The letters strongly requested "more practical, interactive, and communicative pedagogy" (p. 2). The replication study in 2008 included more participants from a wider demographic background. We find it important to note that the participants from the original study (Murphey, 2002) were educated under a 1994 Course of Study—a national education policy promoting communicative competence, for the first time—while most of the participants in the replication study were educated under a later 2002 Course of Study with a more explicit focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) (see Table 1: all tables from Falout et al, 2008).

Table 1. *Comparison of Administrations of Original and Present Studies*

Original study, 2002	Recent study, 2008
Administered Fall 2000	Administered Spring 2007
1 university	4 universities
Aichi Prefecture, Japan	Greater Tokyo Area, Japan
100 participants	440 participants
Freshmen	Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors
English majors	20 majors
83% female	44% female

Methods

In the replication study, the unique element was a two stage approach to collecting and analyzing student data—the second stage involved giving the Stage 1 results back to the students for further deliberation. In Stage 1, students were surveyed at the beginning of the school year. After experiencing a full semester of peer-interactive oral communication English lessons to form a contrastive frame of reference (see Murphey, 2002), students were asked to participate in Stage 2, collaboratively

analyzing their own data tables. A more detailed report of these procedures follows.

Procedure, Stage 1

The first stage was an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix 1) distributed on the first day of classes in April 2007, taken home for completion, and returned the following week. The participants were told that the data would be presented to JHS and HS teachers. By knowing there would be a real teacher audience hearing their opinions, students responded more honestly, we believe, than without such a real purpose. Students were also told that results of the study would be shared with them for analysis later.

The questionnaire prompt asked, in the context of their JHS and HS English classes, what they liked and did not like, what helped or did not help, and what suggestions they had for teachers. The questionnaire had two separate sections to clearly differentiate comments about JHS and HS experiences. Demographic information was also recorded.

Data analysis

Comments were first separated into three major categories: positive experiences, negative experiences, and wants. Comments were re-read to allow for subcategories to emerge emically and were then quantified by items within these subcategories.

Procedure, Stage 2

The results from stage 1 were then presented to the student-participants during class shortly after beginning the second semester. They were encouraged to discuss the tables amongst themselves, and asked to give further comments about what surprised them or what they found meaningful about these data in relation to their learning experiences.

Results

Despite learning under different Course of Study guidelines, students in both studies wrote fewer positive comments and more negative statements from JHS to HS, and both groups voiced a "plea for more practical, interactive, and communicative pedagogy" (Murphey, 2002, p. 2) (see table 2).

Table 2

Comparison of Results of Original and Present Studies

Original data collection (2000)	Present study's data collection (2007)
Decrease in the number of positive comments (14 to 2) and increase in negatives (19 to 36) from JHS to HS	Decrease in the number of positive comments (618 to 402) and increase in negatives (399 to 487) from JHS to HS
More total negative (55) than positive (16) comments	More total positive (1,020) than negative (886) comments
Top overall positive: Enjoyable activities (games, songs)	Top overall positive: Communication
Top overall negative: Grammar	Top overall negative: Teachers (Japanese)
Top overall request: more communication	Top overall request: more communication

Note. Data for Murphey (2002) were collected in 2000.

The three salient positive categories in JHS were *chances to communicate* (particularly with peers), *general enjoyment in their classes*, and *the opportunity to communicate with an assistant language teacher (ALT)* who is a native speaker. For HS, the three most positive factors were *grammar, communication*, and *teacher* (see Table 3).

Table 3

Positive Experiences ("liked or were helpful") in Secondary School by Item Count

	JHS items ($k = 618$)	HS items ($k = 402$)
1. Communication	17%	13%
2. Grammar	5%	16%
3. ALTs / Native Speaker Teachers	12%	8%
4. Enjoyable	13%	3%
5. Song and Music	10%	3%
6. Teacher (Japanese), Teaching Style	7%	10%
7. Reading	3%	8%
8. Games	7%	1%
9. Vocabulary	3%	3%

10. Listening	3%	2%
Total % accounted for in positive category	80%	67%

The three salient negative categories in both JHS and HS were *teachers*, *grammar-translation*, and *lack of oral communication* (see Table 4). The *teachers* factor relates to *lack of enthusiasm, lack of ability in English* (particularly pronunciation), and *lack of ability to present the material in an enjoyable way.*

Table 4

Negative Experiences (disliked or were unhelpful") in Secondary School by Item Count

	JHS items ($k = 399$)	HS items ($k = 487$)
1. Teachers (Japanese)	20%	19%
2. Grammar-translation	16%	17%
3. Lack of Communication / Speaking	13%	17%
4. Exams, Exams Study	3%	15%
5. Hard / Difficult / Too Fast	8%	9%
6. Dislike, Not Fun, Yuck	12%	—
7. Reading, Too Much Reading	5%	7%
8. Memorize, Repetition	7%	—
9. Too much Vocabulary	6%	1%
10. Level Mismatch	4%	—
Total % accounted for in negative category	94%	83%

The three salient "wants" categories, offering suggestions to both JHS and HS teachers, were *more chances for oral communication, an increase of enjoyment in learning activities*, and *more inclusion of native speaking ALTs in the classroom* (see Table 5).

Table 5

Wants in Secondary School by Item Count

	JHS items ($k = 299$)	HS items ($k = 257$)
1. More Communication	24%	34%
2. More Joy	16%	9%
3. More ALTs / Native Speaker Teachers	8%	6%
4. Improved Teachers	5%	5%
5. More Reading Strategies	3%	5%
6. More Listening	2%	4%
7. More Grammar	6%	—
8. More Pronunciation	2%	3%
9. Stream Students	2%	2%
10. More Vocabulary	3%	—
Total % accounted for in want category	71%	68%

Grammar-related comments ranked into the top three categories in both positive and negative sections, which intrigued us. Therefore, we further analyzed all comments about grammar. We discovered that students believed the grammar instruction is helpful *only* for passing the entrance exams of high school and college (see Table 6).

Table 6

Attitudes toward Grammar from 192 Comments from 440 Students

	JHS Count (%)	HS Count (%)
Negative Affect / Dislike Grammar	55 (13%)	46 (10%)
Useful for Exams / Conditional Support	41(9%)	26 (6%)
Positive Affect / Like Grammar	6 (1%)	18 (4%)
Total Count mentioning grammar	102 (23%)	90 (20%)

Student Data Analysis

These data were analyzed collaboratively in Stage 2 by students in small groups. Students recommended three things: more communication, better teaching, and greater consistency across classrooms and across levels of education. Below we place students' comments first as data illustrating their points.

More communication, less grammar

I think "More Communication" and "More Enjoyable" have a connection because to communicate by talking is enjoyable. When I was a high school student, I liked communication class the best. I enjoyed class through games and talking. (translated from Japanese)

What students want in English classes shows that many students enjoy communication classes. I can tell from my experience also. My classmates were having good motivation in communication classes in high school. (original English)

–anonymous participants analyzing the data tables

Student beliefs are investigated in EFL research because it is widely recognized that their belief systems influence their approaches and behaviors toward learning. Barcelos (2006) concluded that such research "must involve (a) students' experiences and actions, (b) students' interpretation of their experiences, and (c) the social context and how it shapes students' interpretation of their experiences" (p. 29). Students often uncritically believe what their parents and teachers say. They become externally regulated through hearing others' voices until appropriating these values. As a result, students in Japan come to say they need repetitious fill-in-the blank grammar drills, grammar-translation exercises, and rote memorization of grammar rules as the main learning objectives for English. This exemplifies within the educational contexts of Japan the "theories of reproduction"—the ways in which dominant values are transmitted and reproduced, and widely and uncritically accepted as having positive influences (Giroux, 2001). In Stage 1 of our study, students commented that grammar was useful *only* to pass exams. They also wanted more communication in JHS and HS for skills development. Then after experiencing a variety of learning styles and gaining a contrast frame of mind (Murphey, 2002), with critical reflection in Stage 2 they recognized that the curriculum should have offered more communicative skills practice *to use social interaction to increase motivation and interest for learning.*

A washback effect on English education that marginalizes communicative language practice in schools while creating a lucrative commodity of grammar instruction has resulted from the high-stakes entrance exam system. Fees garnered from exam

applicants provide a major source of revenue at all levels of schooling in Japan, where a few days of exams can give an above average university about seven million US dollars (Murphey, 2004, p. 707). The cram schools profit because regular schools are seen to inadequately prepare students to pass the exams. Thus, they prey on these realistic fears of parents and students, training students explicitly for entrance exams. Then conversation schools later profit, ironically, from adults who had not learned to speak English after ten years of EFL classes but would still like to learn to speak it.

Shohamy (2006) warned of the powerful negative impact of high-stakes testing. Socioculturally it depersonalizes people within educational systems, grants test scores an economic value, and creates a competitive system dependent upon the continual creation and subsequent rejection of losers. For individuals, it promotes memorization without critical reflection. English knowledge in Japan is commonly accreted this way and called "exam English" (Law, 1995). The new educational policy issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) in 2002, called "The action plan to cultivate Japanese who can use English" (MEXT, 2002), reflects the failures of "exam English" practices to provide students with the skills to use English productively, meaningfully, and appropriately. The predominant request in this study for more communication shows that students want a different kind of schooling (see also Hood, Elwood, & Falout, in press).

Better teaching

The classes where students only sit and listen to teachers' lectures are boring. I'm sure teachers hate it, too. (translated from Japanese)

In order for students to enjoy English classes, learning from good teachers is necessary. In order to improve students' academic performance, teachers need to improve first. (translated from Japanese)

–anonymous participants analyzing the data tables

A wide range of studies show how positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students are crucial for student learning (see den Brok, Levy, Brekelmans, & Wubbles, 2005, for an overview). Students who like their teachers are

more likely to find the teaching effective, be more motivated, and learn better (Chesebro & McCrosky, 2002). On the other hand, excessive control by teachers can drive students away from their studies, away from healthy intra- and inter-personal behavior, and student dissatisfaction and frustration with learning environments can even lead to violence (Yoneyama, 1999). We note that Japanese class size averages are about 30% larger than those for other developed countries and that this may push teachers toward a more autocratic mode of classroom management. Reducing class size may allow more personal attention to individual students and their voices (Yoneyama & Murphey, 2007). Teachers need to be as approachable as possible to increase teacher immediacy (Christophel & Gorham, 1995). It is likely that the students' perceptions of their teachers are being negatively influenced most commonly through their mono-methodic use of grammar-translation (Falout, Elwood, Hood, in press). It is not the grammar itself but the one-size-fits-all *way* it is taught— "one-way" teacher-centered lectures focused on grammar rules abstracted from context and personalized language use, without incorporating other teaching methods or social interaction. When teachers continue professional development throughout their careers, they can improve their professional skills and stay abreast of the latest practices in education. The more experience and knowledge they gain, the more adept teachers become using a variety of methods and selecting the ones most suited for the learning objectives related to context and students' needs (Liu, 2007).

Greater consistency and integration
I see a tendency that they hate patterned classes with grammar lessons which are prevalent at JHS and HS and that they like stimulating communication-centered classes which are offered rarely. (translated from Japanese)

Motivation toward English study at JHS is higher and motivation decreases at HS. HS students want to study grammar which is useful for exams rather than singing songs and playing games. (translated from Japanese)

–anonymous participants analyzing the data tables

Dewey (1997/1938), in the principle of continuity, recognized that past experiences

modify the quality of future experiences, that past experiences continually construct and reconstruct future experiences, and therefore learning environments would do well to incorporate continuously integrating systems that promote positive experiences. Data from our replication study indicate that the system of EFL learning in Japan could use more consistency and integration to satisfy the students' needs in the principle of continuity. The drop in positive comments and increase in negative comments from JHS to HS shows a drop in motivation for learning English. Their EFL education starts with intrinsically motivating language activities, but changes to "exam English" that focuses on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar rules in depersonalized language use that cannot hold student interest. Dewey (1913/1975) believed that making connections between education and student interests was imperative for academic interests, thoughts, and endeavors to be sustained: "It is not enough to *catch* attention; it must be *held*" (p. 91; italics in original). Currently there appears to be a lack of effective and consistent practices across JHS and HS English education. Instead of being caught and held, student interest is excluded from education as antithetical to learning (Hood et al, in press; Hu 2002). When student interest is dropped, negative experiences are incurred, including loss of self-confidence and motivation, that further influence future learning experiences for the worse (Carpenter et al, in press). Therefore, we and our students believe that greater consistency and integration in EFL education would promote the quality and continuity of learning.

The importance of consistency and integration in education seems to be recognized by MEXT. Trying to accommodate parents' requests, MEXT started a new program for public schools in 1999 which coordinates JHS and HS curricula and other systems, reportedly providing a variety of programs with vertical integration in quality education. Although there were only 152 such schools as of 2004, they tout small-sized classes with students streamed by ability, supported by tutoring services, offering a variety of elective courses, and involving innovative language education (MEXT, 2004). Such schools break the mold of the one-size-fits-all paradigm and attempt to serve the learning needs for specific individual differences in students that continually change as they grow.

Ways of Engaging More Student Voice in ELT

In the following sections, we describe four practical ways that teachers can draw out

student voice and collaborate in curriculum planning and daily teaching: language learning histories, action logs, surveys, and student petitions. These are also ways for teachers to do action research on their teaching and bring student voice more authenticity.

Language Learning Histories LLHs

Listening to student voice can start with students telling teachers what experiences they have had with learning English in their past. When teachers ask students to write their LLHs, they can read them and quickly become informed about what students have done, liked, learned, and believe (Murphey, 1999). When students can read peers' LLHs, they learn about each other and model each others' effective strategies and beliefs. These are usually 400 to 1000 word histories explaining students' contact with English in their own voice and what worked and did not work for them in their previous classes (Benson & Nunan, 2005; Chou, Lau, Yang, & Murphey, 2007; Menezes, n.d.; Murphey & Carpenter, 2008; Murphey, Chen, & Chen, 2005; Yamaura, 2008). Vera Menezes' website (http://www.veramenezes.com/amfale.htm) offers several hundred such histories, and the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University also offers a rich collection of oral histories of immigrants learning English in New York City (http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/).

Action Logs and Newsletters

With action logs, students regularly list and evaluate activities done in the class in terms of their usefulness for their learning. When teachers read them they are able to understand what students like and don't like. Students feel more responsible for their education when they see teachers changing and incorporating their feedback (Murphey, 1993). Learning can be intensified when teachers take comments from the action logs and place them on class newsletters to redistribute to students. In addition to giving students voice, action logging and newsletters feed easily into a teacher's action research.

Surveys

Schools are increasingly inviting student voice to inform their educational practices and to attract prospective students from Japan and overseas (Japan Student Service Organization, 2007). Such improvements are critical for their business strategies, as

40% of all universities in Japan as of 2007 could not attain their minimum recruitment goals due to the decline in population of university-age students (The Promotion and Mutual Aid Corporation for Private Schools of Japan, 2007). 47% of all the universities in Japan can meet these challenges by systematically incorporating student evaluations into their institutional reforms (MEXT, 2002). Colleges can earn further financial and status gains by receiving Good Practices (GP) and Global Center of Excellence (GCOE) grants from MEXT by developing innovative educational programs (MEXT, 2003). To prepare programs and applications for these grants, colleges are polling their former students who are now working in their respective industries, asking them how their education could have better prepared them. Cropping up now through these MEXT grants are writing centers and resource centers integrated across the curriculum. These centers help students develop English abilities required in their future.

Student Petitions

Inviting students to express their views publicly can have many positive results for both the institution and the students. Groups of students learn to think about their own learning futures by simply asking for changes in the present. For example, students at Dokkyo University in Japan asked peers to sign petitions asking that (a) university student services offices be open at lunch time so more students could visit them conveniently, and (b) Asian Englishes become a curriculum component since English would most likely be used to interact in Asian contexts. The signed petitions were sent to the dean and president who responded that they appreciated the student feedback and would look into it—and they did! Two years hence student services were open at lunch time, and an Asian Englishes course had become part of the first-year curriculum (Murphey, 2006).

Conclusions and Implications for ELT

EFL teachers are concerned about student silence. Ironically, what many students want in the classroom is to communicate. Students want to be active in the English classroom, they want to use English, and they want to communicate with each other and their teachers. These desires emerged as the consensus of student voices from our study. Their voices revealed a match between student desires and the government educational policy, and a divide between student desires and classroom practice.

While some students may never have the opportunity to express their views, others may express themselves and simply not be heard (Cook-Sather, 2006). Teachers' voices and practices that are aligned with their students' beliefs about EFL education may also be stifled as teachers feel compelled by administrators and colleagues to "teach to the tests." McCombs and Miller (2009) warn that high-stakes-driven educational systems enforce teacher-centered "tests teaching" instruction and rote-memorization. When only the numerical figures of test results determine the quality of students, their social, emotional, and personal needs suffer. Tests can influence students beliefs about their ability to learn (Dweck 2000) and are "mechanisms of control" that grant passage through gates to social and economic access (Shohamy, 2006). In such contexts, the one-size-fits-all paradigm turns out to be exclusionary. As rapid changes in language policies in Asian countries are taking place (Adamson, 2004; Liu, 2007; Imura, 2003; Nam, 2005), listening to student voice is an increasingly imperative issue.

Our study shows students are not just a passive mass of bodies without capacity for autonomy or critical thinking, as often perceived by their teachers. On the contrary, these students are exceptionally adept in analytical skills with the prowess to critique the powers that govern them. Through this study, we could hear the energetic, brave, and powerful voices of students. JHS and HS teachers might be amazed that by simply using English more in their institutions (Murphey & Sasaki, 1998) they can improve communication and invite student participation (i.e., voices). They could become near peer role models (Murphey & Arao, 2001), modeling for their students the desire to learn more themselves (Murphey, 2003). In addition, actually speaking the target language to communicate with teachers and classmates can create a meaningful goal for studying. Language as a subject becomes language as a tool for interaction with a purpose and at the same time a source of emerging agency. It can also become a tool for resisting linguistic, ideological, and pedagogical imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999). With more control, students will have higher positive affect, higher motivation, better psychological health, and better learning outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Seligman, 1975). Furthermore, inviting the voices of students places the onus on teachers to listen and reflect upon their own practices in the classroom and then take intelligent action by making changes as needed. Learning occurs in a social context, and when teachers become co-learners with their students, the classroom becomes a supportive community where teachers and students continually collaborate

to learn from each other.

In our opinion, student voice has received too little attention, especially in Asia, apart from strands of critical pedagogy. Instead of being told to quiet down, instead of being coerced into conformity, students deserve to be listened to and encouraged to speak and develop their agency. We think it is time that student voice became mainstream in ELT and part of our everyday educational culture.

References

Adamson, B. (2004). *China's English: A history of English in Chinese education.* Hong Kong SAR, China: University of Hong Kong Press.

Barcelos, A. M. F. (2007). Researching beliefs about SLA: A critical review. In P. Kalaja and A. M. F. Barcelos (Eds.) *Beliefs about SLA: New research approaches* (pp. 7-33). New York: Springer.

Benson P., & Nunan, D. (Eds.) (2005). *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Beresford, J. (2000). *Student perspectives on school improvement.* Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Conference, Cardiff University, September, 2000. Retrieved September 18, 2002, from http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00001529.htm

Berlin, L. (2001). Effective ESL instruction: Common themes from the voices of students. *Effective ESL Instruction 4*, 1-21.

Block, D. (1998). Tale of a language learner. *Language Teaching Research, 2*(2), 148-176.

Campbell, P. & Burnaby, B. (2001). *Participatory practices in adult education.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Canagarajah, S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carpenter, C., Falout, J., Fukuda, T., Trovela, M., & Murphey, T. (in press). Helping students repack for remotivation and agency. In *JALT 2008 Conference Proceedings.* Tokyo: JALT.

Chesebro, J. L., & McCrosky, J. C. (Eds.) (2002). *Communication for teachers.* Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Chou, H. Y., Lau, S. H., Yang, H. C., & Murphey, T. (2007). Students as textbook authors. *The English Teaching Forum, 3,* 18-23.

Constitutional Rights Foundation and the Close-Up Foundation (1995). *Active citizenship today field guide.* Los Angeles, CA: Constitutional Rights Foundation.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Toward trust, dialogue, and change in education. *Educational Researcher, 31*(4), 3-14.

Cook-Sather, A. (2006). Sound, presence, and power: "Student voice" in educational research and reform. *Curriculum Inquiry, 36*(4), 359-390.

Christophel, D. M., & Gorham, J. (1995). A test-retest analysis of student motivation, teacher immediacy, and perceived sources of motivation and demotivation in college classes. *Communication Education, 44*, 292-306.

Day, E. (2002). *Identity and the young English language learner.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (Eds.) (2002). *The handbook of self-determination research.* Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

den Brok, P., Levy, J., Brekelmans, M., & Wubbles, T. (2005). The effect of teacher interpersonal behavior on students' subject-specific motivation. *Journal of Classroom Interaction, 40*(2), 20-33.

Dewey, J. (1975). *Interest and effort in education*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press. (Original work published 1913)

Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience and education.* New York: Simon and Schuster. (original work published in 1938)

Dewey, J. (2004). *Democracy and education: 30th anniversary edition*. New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1916)

Dudley-Marling, C., & Searle, D. (1995). *Who owns learning?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Dweck, C. (2000).*Self-theories: Their role in motivation, personality, and development.* New York: Psychology Press Taylor & Francis Group.

Ericson, D. P., & Ellett, F. S. (2002, July 2). The question of the student in educational reform. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *10*(31). Retrieved September 18, 2002, from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n31/

Falout, J., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (in press). Demotivation: Affective states and learning outcomes. *System, 37*(3).

Falout, J., & Falout, M. (2005). The other side of motivation: Learner demotivation. In K. Bradford-Watts, C. Ikeguchi, & M. Swanson (Eds.) *JALT2004 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 280-289). Tokyo: JALT.

Falout, J., Murphey, T., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2008). Learner voices: Reflections on secondary education. In K. Bradford-Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 232-243). Tokyo: JALT.

Falout, J., Stillwell, C., & Murphey, T. (in press). Avoiding burnout by lighting fires: Three contexts of change. In C. Coombe, L. England, & J. Schmidt (Eds.), *Reigniting, retooling and retiring in English language teaching.* Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press.

Fletcher, A. (n.d.). Unleashing student voice: Research supporting meaningful student involvement. Retrieved December 31, 2007, from http://www.soundout.org/article.103.html

Freire, P. (2007). *Pedagogy of the oppressed.* New York: Continuum (Original work published in 1970)

Gafney, L., & Varma-Nelson, P. (2008). *Peer-led team learning: Evaluation, dissemination, and institutionalization of a college level initiative.* New York: Springer.

Giroux, H. A. (2001). *Theory and resistance in education: Towards a pedagogy for the opposition.* Westport, CN: Bergin and Garvey.

Goodlad, J. (1984). *A place called school.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Gorsuch, G. (2000). EFL educational policies and educational cultures: Influences on teachers' approval of communicative activities. *TESOL Quarterly, 34*(4), 675-710.

Halsey, K., Murfield, J., Harland, J. & Lord, P. (2006). *The voice of young people: An engine for improvement? Scoping the evidence.* Slough, Berkshire, England: National Foundation for Educational Research Northern Office.

Harvard Family Research Project. (2002). Youth Involvement in Evaluation & Research*, Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation*, *1.* Boston: Author.

Hood, M., Elwood, J. & Falout, J. (in press). Student attitudes toward task-based language teaching at Japanese colleges. In J. Newton & R. Adams (Eds.), *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching 2009: Task-based language teaching in Asia: Innovation in research and practice*. Hong Kong SAR, China: Chinese University Press.

Horwitz, E. (1988). The beliefs about language learning of beginning university foreign language students. *Modern Language Journal, 72*(3), 283-294.

Houghton, P. (2001). Finding allies: Sustaining teachers' health and well-being. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 706-712.

Hu, G. (2002) Recent important developments in secondary English-language teaching in the People's Republic of China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 15*(1), 30-49.

Imura, M. (2003). *Nihon no eigo kyoiku 200 nen* [200 years of English education in Japan]. Tokyo: Taishukan.

Japan Student Service Organization (2007). Gakusei no iken yobou oyobi gakusei no seikatsujittai no choshu chousa ni tsuite. [Interview and investigation of students' opinions and requests about their school life]. Retrieved January 25, 2008 from http://www.g-shiendb.jasso.go.jp/ gsdb/main/tmp/contents/file/ab0014112.pdf

Kaba, M. (2000). They listen to me but they don't act on it: Contradictory consciousness in decision-making. *High School Journal, (84)*2, 21-35.

Kanno, Y. (2003). *Negotiating bilingual and bicultural identities: Japanese returnees betwixt two worlds.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Law, G. (1995). Ideologies of English language teaching in Japan. *JALT Journal, 17*(2), 213-23.

Lesko, W., & Tsouronis, E. (1998). *Youth! The 26% solution.* Kensington, MD: Information USA, Inc.

Light, R. (2001). *Making the most of college: Students speak their minds.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Littlewood, W (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal, 54*(1), 31-36.

Liu, J. (Ed.) (2007). *English language teaching in China: New approached, perspectives and standards*. London: Continuum.

Liu, N. F., & Littlewood, W. (1997). Why do many students appear reluctant to participate in classroom learning discourse? *System, 25*(3), 371-384.

Marques, E. (1999). Youth involvement in policy-making: Lessons from Ontario school boards. *Institute on Governance, Policy Brief* (5). Retrieved September 18, 2002 from http://www.iog.ca/publications/ policybrief5.pdf

McCombs, B. L., & Miller, L. (2009). *The school leader's guide to learner-centered education: From complexity to simplicity.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

McDonaugh, K., & Shaikitmongkol, W. (2007). Teachers' and learners' reactions to a task-based EFL course in Thailand. *TESOL Quarterly, 41*(1), 107-132.

McVeigh, B. J. (2002). *Japanese higher education as myth*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Menezes, V. (n.d.). Learning with language learning histories: LLHs. Retrieved June 1, 2008, from http://www.veramenezes.com/narrativas.htm

MEXT (2002). Developing a strategic plant to cultivate "Japanese with English abilities." Press release issued on July 12, 2002. Retrieved February 14, 2008 from http://www.mext.go.jp/english/news/ 2002/07/020901.htm

MEXT (2003). Fiscal year 2003 white paper on education, culture, sports, science and technology. Retrieved February 29, 2009, from http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpac200301/ hpac200301_2_034.html

MEXT (2004). Chu kou ikkan kyoiku [Continuous education from junior high school to high school]. Retrieved on Februrary 28, 2009 from http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/shotou/ikkan/2/gaiyou.htm

Murphey, T. (1993). Why don't teachers learn what learners learn? Taking the guesswork out with action logging. *English Teaching Forum 31*(1), 6-10.

Murphey, T. (1999). Publishing students' language learning histories: For them, their peers, and their teachers. *Between the Keys* (newsletter of the JALT Materials Writers JALT SIG), *7*(2), 8-11, 14.

Murphey, T. (2002). From the horse's mouth: Advice from second-semester Japanese university students to JHS/HS English teachers in Japan. *Learning Learning, 9*(1), 2-10.

Murphey, T. (2003). NNS primary school teachers learning English with their students. *TESOL Matters 13* (4), 1, 6. Retrieved November 10, 2007, from http://www.tesol.org/pubs/articles/2003/tm13-4-02.html

Murphey, T. (2004). Participation, (dis-)identification, and Japanese university entrance exams. *TESOL Quarterly, 38*(4), 700-710.

Murphey, T. (2006). The petition process works. *Languaging, 7,* 36.

Murphey, T., & Arao, H. (2001). Changing reported beliefs through near peer role modeling. *TESL-EJ*, *5*(3), 1-15. Retrieved April 4, 2006, from http://tesl-ej.org/ej19/a1.html

Murphey, T., & Carpenter, C. (2008). The seeds of agency in language learning histories. In A. Barcelos, P. Kalaja, & V. Menezes, (Eds.), *Narratives of learning and teaching EFL* (pp. 17-34). New York: Palgrave.

Murphey, T., Chen, J., & Chen, L. C. (2005). Learners' constructions of identities and imagined communities. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning* (pp. 83-100). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Murphey, T., & Sasaki, T. (1998). Japanese English teachers' increasing use of English. *The Language Teacher, 22*(10), 21-24.

Nam, J. M. (2005). Perceptions of Korean college students and teachers about communication-based English instruction: Evaluation of a college EFL curriculum in South Korea. Unpublished dissertation. Ohio State University.

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

O'Donnell, K. (2005). Japanese secondary English teachers: Negotiation of educational roles in the face of curricular reform. *Language, Culture and Curriculum, 18*(3), 300-315.

Pacek, D. (1997). Lessons to be learnt from negative evaluation. *ELT Journal, 50*(4), 335-343.

Patmor, G. L. (1998). *Student and school council member views of student involvement in decision-making in Kentucky high schools*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

Rivers, W. (1976). *Speaking in many tongues: Essays in foreign language teaching*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Rogers, C. (1965). *Client-centered therapy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company

Sakui, K. (2004). Wearing two pairs of shoes: Language teaching in Japan. *ELT Journal, 58*(2), 155-163.

Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness: On depression, development, and death.* San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Shohamy, E. (2006). *Language policy: Hidden agendas and new approaches.* New York: Routledge.

Sivakumar, S. (2009). Issues and insights for promoting agency, voice, and subjecthood in reading and assessment. *Asian EFL Journal, 11*(1), 8-38. Retrieved February 28, 2009, from http://www.asian-efl-journal.com/March_09_ss.php

Student Voice: A historical perspective and new directions. (2007, April 10). Melbourne, Australia: Research and Innovation Division, Office of Learning and

Teaching, Victoria Department of Education. Downloaded December 4, 2007 from:

http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/publ/research/publ/Student_Voice_report.pdf

Taguchi, N. (2002). Implementing oral communication classes in upper secondary schools: A case study. *The Language Teacher, 26*(12), 3-8.

Taguchi, N. (2005). The communicative approach in Japanese secondary schools: Teachers' perceptions and practice. *The Language Teacher, 29*(3), 3-12.

The Promotion and Mutual Aide Corporation for Private Schools of Japan (2007). *Gakko houjin kasseika saisei kenkyukai saishu houkoku.* [Final report by the committee to revitalize and reclaim school financial management]. Issued August 1, 2007. Retrieved February 14, 2008, from

http://www.shigaku.go.jp/s_home.htm

Thiessan, D. (Ed.) (2006). Student voice [special issue]. *Curriculum Inquiry, 36*(4).

Trang, T. T. T., & Baldauf, R. B. (2007). Demotivation: Understanding resistance to English language learning: The case of Vietnamese students. *The Journal of Asia TEFL, 4*(1), 79-105.

van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective.* New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Weiler, D., LaGoy, A., Crane, E., & Rovner, A. (1998). *An evaluation of K-12 service-learning in California: Phase II final report.* Emeryville, CA: RPP International with the Search Institute. Retrieved September 18, 2002, from

http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/lsp/rppexec.htm

Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, B., & Corbett, H. D. (2001). *Listening to urban kids: School reform and the teachers they want.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Yair, G. (2000). Reforming motivation: How the structure of instruction affects students' learning experiences. *British Educational Journal, 26*(2), 191-120.

Yamaura, N. (2008). *Identity, investment, and environmental engineering in foreign language learning.* Unpublished master's thesis, Dokkyo University, Saitama, Japan.

Yoneyama, S. (1999). *The Japanese high school: Silence and resistance.* London: Routledge

Yoneyama, S., & Murphey, T. (2007). The tipping point of class size: When caring communications and relationships become possible. *JALT Hokkaido Journal, 11*, 1-28.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire prompt

Dear Students: I will be talking to JHS and HS English teachers soon and I would like to tell them what students thought of their English classes in JHS and HS. Please tell me WHAT YOU *LIKED* and DID *NOT LIKE* and WHAT *HELPED YOU* and DID *NOT HELP YOU LEARNING ENGLISH*. And WHAT *SUGGESTIONS* YOU HAVE FOR THE TEACHERS—how would you like them to change. Please separate your comments for JHS teachers and HS teachers. Try to write in English mostly but Japanese is OK when you do not know the English. Your ideas and opinions are the most important. Your name will be kept private and all comments given anonymously. Thank you.

N.B. This article draws on our JALT2007 convention presentation and proceedings paper: Falout, J., Murphey, T., Elwood, J., & Hood, M. (2008). Learner voices: Reflections on secondary education. In K. Bradford-Watts, T. Muller, & M. Swanson (Eds.), *JALT2007 Conference Proceedings* (pp. 232-243). Tokyo: JALT.

Organization for Engagement: Train Tracks for Heterogeneous, Oversized, Under-Resourced EFL Classes

Adrian Smith and Shelley Price-Jones
Kyung Hee University, Korea

Bio Data:
Adrian M. Smith has an M.Ed. in TESOL from the University of South Australia. He has taught in Korea since 2001 and is actively involved in the area of sociocultural theory, and EFL curriculum development.

K. Shelley Price-Jones holds an M.A. from Queen's University, Canada. She has over eleven years teaching experience in Korean universities and has developed a range of highly successful teaching methods for EFL classes, specializing in activity designs for ZPD classrooms.

Both authors are accredited high school teachers, currently developing a new sociocultural teaching system at Kyung Hee University, Seoul campus, in the Department of General Education.

Key Words: Group work, ZPD, Sociocultural, Methodology, Artifacts, Mediation, Material Design

Abstract

In acknowledging the recently expressed need of some EFL teachers by Zappa-Hollman (2007), for more effective teaching methodologies and better materials for large classes, at all grade levels with mixed language level abilities, this paper offers teachers a quick, inexpensive, and highly effective speaking-interaction method, called "Train Tracks." It has been tested in a Korean university setting. The method and material design are based on a sociocultural approach and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This classroom-speaking set-up can be used in different kinds of spaces and with different class types; moreover, it readily becomes a student-interaction platform around which you can build further lessons. Teacher–created artifacts are used by students to help generate language, and these in turn can meta-morph into student-generated artifacts. We have adapted and operationalized a number of the key points of the sociocultural and Ecological approaches and will show what can be done with them in classroom situations, then use these theories to explain what we have experienced first-hand. The technique and materials (Artifacts) can be used on their own, or as part of a total curriculum and assessment approach. "Train Tracks" are also effective for organizing many students quickly, and can be easily adapted to difficult classroom spaces, and time constraints. Follow-up class and assessment possibilities will also be covered.

Background

In this 'input' dominated teaching era where significant class time is spent on

listening or reading activities as the main source of method and materials, speaking

has often been portrayed as the least important teachable skill. However, the emergence of new theoretical perspectives that draw on the works of Lev Vygotsky (1978 translation) has provided new ways of describing previously ignored phenomena. Vygotsky's works have inspired sociocultural and ecological approaches, which have been given relevance and voice with the recent works of Lantolf & Thorne (2006) and Van Lier (2004). The sociocultural approach pays significant attention to what actually transpires in classrooms. As teacher–researchers we can corroborate Vygotsky's view that learning must first transpire on the social plane and this involves dialogue.

Theoretical Background

Vygotsky (1978) noted the importance of peer interaction and the vital role that it plays in learning. He developed the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that directs teaching effort to the learner's potential for learning, during that lesson, or at that particular time. According to Vygotsky (1978, p. 57), learning happens first socially and then is internalized. Social learning processes have to be situated somewhere, and the usual location for teachers is in a classroom. Hence we need to consider the dynamic interactions with classroom space as part of the process for developing student language. Classroom size and layout are very important considerations in order for learning to happen. Lantolf & Thorne (2006) refer to these as "peer interaction environments" (p. 264). Van Lier (2004) also views spatial arrangements in the classroom as being important: "Breaking away from seeing the classroom configured as rows of desks with receiving heads oriented towards an elevated talking head at the front we can envision a differently configured learning space" (p. 156).

  "Train Tracks" illustrates how to be innovative and combine the use of space with methodology, materials and learning. It is part of a developing Sociocultural system for Asian EFL classes that we have created and call 'A Curious Dialogue', (ACD) (Smith & Price-Jones, 2008.) The system is an alternative to Task Based Learning and content-based teaching. Those approaches are usually too text based and hence not always appropriate for those schools, and classes that lack access to the necessary technology, or libraries. ACD derives content from the students' lives and the culture they are situated in. In addition to the basic group turns we have also developed other communicative moves and it is one of these that we have named "Train Tracks."

"Train Tracks" is comprised of both artifacts and moves/action. The two must be used in tandem for maximum effect. We are working from the principle that language develops in social settings and that re-cycling language re-enforces what students learn. By way of example the variation of "Train Tracks" that we will present is one that sets up the ZPD both spatially and socially. It also satisfies the need to help students in a fast-paced, yet highly structured "mingling-type" conversation that allows them to personalize their language, and share with peers. Communication is, after all, a social process.

Setting up Train Tracks: Artifacts and Basic Moves

Prior to class the first part of what will become the student-generated artifact needs to be created by the teacher. An artifact is something that is produced by people within the culture that can instigate, and stimulate conversation. In other words, a rock is not an artifact, but a statue cut out of that rock would have cultural significance. We use both cultural and classroom artifacts. Harry Daniels (2007) reminds us that "pedagogic provision may be thought of in terms of material things as well as persons" (p.308). For further discussion of artifacts and their role in the classroom see Lantolf & Thorne (2006), Van Lier (2004) and Del Rio, P. & Alvarez, A. (2007).

We use several types of classroom artifacts. This particular version is an example of our standard Train Tracks artifact template. For the purpose of explanation it is inclusive of sample questions, for a Korean intermediate class, related to discussing the grammar point, adverbs of frequency. (**See Appendix A**) While the questions change as need and student level dictates, the template always remains the same. It can be used for all levels. When making the questions link them to either a common theme, or grammar point, to avoid confusion. Moreover, make the questions

interesting. For example, "How often do you floss?" is rather mundane. "How often do you cry when watching movies?" is engaging.

Train Track artifacts allow students to ask, and be asked for their opinions/for personal information that will be noted on the artifact by the questioners. While the pre-set questions are not of student-origin the variety of answers that they receive are. It is important that the questions are the same for all students. Variety, at the initial stage of setting up Train Tracks can cause problems and take longer to run. We use a speaking set-up that works on developing fluency and increasing confidence. Each new interlocutor offers new possibilities, yet there is also the stability of the "known". Following the activity the artifact will have developed into one that can be further drawn upon giving students more opportunities to use information they have been given, and further personalize their English.

As with most zones that we create in the classroom there are numerous ways Train Tracks can be used. Dependent upon the number of students in your class, and the free space you are able to utilize, you can have either one, or two sets of tracks. For the purpose of this explanation we will describe using one at the front of the class, as this is usually where there is most room.

(1) Before moving the students into Train Track formation explain the artifact, including any vocabulary that they may not know, along with what they are to do by way of asking for, giving, and noting answers. Answers should be given in complete sentences. High-level students may expand upon their answers as long

as this does not interfere with movement of the track. Full-length conversations are not desirable in this activity. They can come later.

Before asking questions students ask for names. Addressing a person by name personalizes the questions, focuses the listener, and allows students to get to know more about each other. Students need not write down what they hear verbatim and can make notes. The reasoning behind taking notes is two-fold. It requires that students pay attention to who is speaking, and allows them to glean new vocabulary and provides the means to remember it. It is in recycling language where we have seen the greatest leaps in overall confidence and language proficiency.

(2) Have students come up to the front of the classroom, or the aisle, and form two parallel lines. One track faces the other. Each person should now have a partner. In the case of one extra student put them at the end of the line of students that have their backs to the wall. This student will work with the pair next to him/her.

(3) Depending upon the type of questions asked the time per partners usually takes from two to three minutes. Questions should not be those that require significant detail, or introspection.

(4) As soon as the first set of questions is completed (short answers with names of interviewed people) the student at the beginning of the outside track moves to the far end and everyone else in the outside track moves along one person. The track that is nearest the wall remains stationary. Students now have new partners.

(5) Repeat the questions and short note-taking process. When the second set of partners is finished repeat the process in number four and run through the entire process again. Repeat until the students have spoken with between five to ten classmates. The numbers of students interviewed depends upon what the teacher wishes to do with the student-generated artifact following the speaking part of the activity.

Following speaking the students possess an artifact that is full of information about other people that can be used in several ways. You may think that students will get bored asking others students the same questions repeatedly but we have found that exactly the opposite happens. Students' interest and curiosity increases the more students they talk to. The students are rarely bored. If any student appears to not be participating it is very easy to go and stand near them and give them the means to keep going, or to put some tough love pressure on them to get involved. No student can hide, or pretend to participate, in this process.

(6) After students have interviewed the required number of people you have many options. You can follow up with seated group work that examines what they discovered during the Train Tracks. In particular, in class or for homework, you can:

a) Have the students compare and contrast how they answered the questions with those answers that other students gave them.

b) After you have ten runs of the track you can use the artifact for percentages. The percentages can be part of a write-up that the students submit for assessment, along with their opinions about what they were told, and whether or not they were surprised, or not, with the results. We have noticed a relatively high number of students accusing other students of not telling them the truth. They were quite chagrined about this and that, in and of itself, led to more areas to explore in English.

c) You can have students write about their opinions regarding the answers that they received. These opinions could be submitted as homework, or if you are worried that your students may receive too much "help" carrying out the assignment they can do their writing during class.

d) You can have students think of further questions that they would like to ask people based upon the information they received. These questions could then be submitted for grading and grammar checks.

Large Classes and Students of Mixed Abilities Train Track Variations:

The modeled example works well where the classes are approximately the same level, and if the class is under 25 students. However, should your class size be larger, or if you have mixed ability levels, Train Tracks can still be used. In large classes you would make two Train Tracks, one at the front of the class and one at the back, or side. If you find that your students are flagging a bit you can always have the moving line of the front and the back switch places. This movement seems to heighten anticipation and students like it.

   If you have mixed ability levels in your class there are several things that you can do. We usually have Train Tracks following another classroom activity. Higher-level students usually finish the preceding work first. Instead of having them sitting and waiting for the rest of the class, have them start the first Train Track. When the rest of the class is finished put them in another Train Track and then, for some mixing, after a few interviews, have the moving line of the first train track switch places with the back track. Students of all ability levels really like this as there is no pressure to finish, no ostracism because you are not at the same level as other students who have had to "wait for you", and you still have chances to speak with people from both groups. The students whose ability is not as high also benefit from working with each other for a few interviews so as to build up more confidence.

Research and Conclusion:

We qualitatively surveyed 87 Kyung Hee University students from two classes following the activity. The classes were selected randomly from the ten that we taught. There was no streaming of students by the university. The students were undergraduates of mixed abilities ranging from very low beginner to upper intermediate. The activity was part of their curriculum and based on the same principles we use in all our classes. The activities went for approximately 20 minutes each. The underlying purpose was a short, lively language and confidence building activity. Students transformed the artifact we gave them into something of their own that was built upon in other lessons.

94%	Found it fun and interesting
91%	Learned something about other people 39% - small amount

	52% - medium amount
91%	Learned new vocabulary including that on the artifact 18% - a lot
100%	Learned new grammar points 39.3% - 1 – 2 49.4 % - a lot 10.3% - very large amount
84%	Improvement in confidence.
64%	Increase in speaking speed. Assessment of others was more generous. 80% believed others' speed increased.
74%	Ability to understand increased.

Students of all levels gained vocabulary and grammar knowledge even though these items were not specifically pre-taught. It is unlikely from the evidence that students had complete prior knowledge of the words or grammar points. It suggests acquisition of these points came from peer mediation/from the artifact, or both. The artifact could certainly have provided words and grammar, but they had to be used in conversational contexts in relation to their lives. Additionally, students had not been given time prior to the activity to study the artifact, so it would not be enough to say that the learning occurred simply because of input. The fact that 91% of students said they learned something about other people suggests that the process of peer mediation, mediated by the artifact, was working and this could be where learning takes place. More research in this area is needed.

The grades of students who said they learnt 'no new words' were examined in one class.

	Grade
Learned no words (7)	1- C level; 4 B- level; 1 B+
Learned a lot of words (4)	2 – B level; 1 B+ level; 1 A level

This small sample suggests we cannot make assumptions about what students will get from the activity solely based on their levels and it could indicate a working ZPD.

Train Tracks usage results in some important achievements. For example, Van Lier (2004) speaks highly of the need for "linguistic exploration through play"(p 222). In this highly structured process that we have presented here, students build upon their confidence and language proficiency levels in a non-confrontational manner. The

language used is personal, and they are in social settings learning about other students. We have discovered a jump in students taking chances in order to best express themselves within a very short time following starting our speaking set-ups. Moreover, the artifacts' costs are minimal, the classroom space is utilized, large groups can be accommodated, and Train Tracks are versatile enough to fit into any class, no matter what their age/level may be.

At workshops given in Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand, teachers were very receptive. Moreover, a professor on our faculty also recently tried the method, after having classes in which his Korean freshmen students simply would not talk much. After his class he had an ecstatic look on his face that we had not seen before. As we have further discovered, in a world where the alienation felt by people is rising, Train Tracks can be beneficial for educators and students alike.

References

Daniels, H. (2007). Pedagogy. In H. Daniels, M. Cole & James W. Wertsch (Eds.), (2007). *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky* (pp. 307-331). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Del Rio, P. & Alvarez, A. Inside and outside the Zone of Proximal Development (2007). In H. Daniels, M. Cole & James W. Wertsch, (Eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky* (pp. 276-376). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lantolf, J. P. & Thorne, S. L. (2006). *Sociocultural theory and the genesis of second language development.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, A.M. & Price-Jones, K.S. (2008). Group work for large classes: Creating dialogue. *The English Teacher*, *2*(1), 22-32.

Van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning: A sociocultural perspective*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academis Publishers.

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

Zappa-Hollman, S. (2007). EFL in Argentina's schools: Teachers perspectives on policy changes and instruction. *TESOL Quarterly*, *41*(3), 618-625.