Explorations in Teacher Development

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EDITORIALS

Expanding Experience, Expanding Meaning

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Exploring teacher development often seems to entail taking seriously hard-won insights from our own and others' experiences, even and perhaps especially, when these still-radical insights have nearly become unreflective truisms. *People learn in and with their worlds. Languaging is a shared communicative act. Positionality matters to different ways of knowing. Action without thought, like thought without action, risks becoming meaningless, irrelevant if not harmful.* Indeed, if these insights themselves remain only at the level of thought, as bits of knowledge deposited without the mediation of communication and personal experience, they lose their power.

As I see it, one of the great values of the articles published in this journal is the (re)connection of insights to experiences. These articles are often less concerned about guaranteed replicability or direct transfer, and more concerned with a broadening of the range of experiences available for the learning and development of both writers and readers. As hooks (1994) observed, direct experience is qualitatively different from vicarious experience for knowing in different ways, but this does not mean experience provides exclusionary authority. The whole point of listening to others' experiences is to know differently along with them—not to reproduce their knowledge, but to let it change our thought and action. Others' experiences give us new possibilities for making meaning and acting meaningfully with our worlds.

As language teachers and researchers, we are often in the business of precisely this expansion of semiosis. Pennycook (2019) reminded us that language teaching should be fundamentally about facilitating the addition of meaning-making resources and enabling the traffic of meaning to flow in all directions. Again, this suggests a blended listening-reading-speaking-writing with both language and experience made common.

This autumn, among other texts on reading, education, and intellectual work, some students and I read Elbow's (2009) classic proposal that we play the believing game just as much as the doubting game in our academic lives and beyond. In short, Elbow argued that looking primarily for the weaknesses in others' ideas tends to rob us of opportunities to be moved by them and to let them transform our unquestioned assumptions. Playing the believing game means suspending our certainty in our own premises enough to play with the possibility that new conceptualizations also make sense on their own terms.

This text resonated with many students in unexpectedly paradoxical ways: students inducted into criticality-as-doubt found themselves playing the believing game with Elbow's argument, while students trained to trust scholarly authority found themselves playing the doubting game. That is, some students reflected that they realized that Elbow was right about their own reading and discussion habits, as they were closing themselves off from really engaging with ideas that challenged their current thinking. Other students, meanwhile, reflected that they critically questioned Elbow's argument that the doubting game had become too dominant, realizing instead—and against the grain of the text—that their own imbalance was that they often uncritically assumed that they were reading to accept the purportedly

more intelligent thinking of the expert texts. From these divergent responses to Elbow's text, a shared provisional idea about balance emerged among the classroom community, but it was clear that the precise actual and ideal balance between believing and doubting would remain under constant negotiation.

This reminded me that there is much to be gained by actively reading and really listening, challenging ourselves to briefly inhabit others' worlds (see Lugones, 1987), while also respectfully questioning from other standpoints. *Explorations in Teacher Development* invites readers to keep both their minds and the texts open to other potentials, with and against the grain. Each of the four articles in this issue provides an intelligent dialogue partner and extends an offer for transportation to their world.

In this issue

First, James Porcaro shares his valuable perspective on teaching when retirement is looming. His diverse experiences have led him to vital realizations, but they also raise concerns about further potential going unrealized. As some doors have closed and new opportunities have opened, new teaching contexts have kept his teaching practice fresh and exciting, though even in the same context, each year and each group is interestingly different. However, when teaching opportunities are finally closed to a teacher, questions of freshness and purpose arise.

Second, Denver Beirne offers his exploration into making reflection a communal practice, an act of commoning

and communication. We know that teacher reflection is valuable for us, but it is less clear how to foster reflection among our students. Beirne narrates his exploration with the scholarly literature and with the students in his university speaking and listening classes.

Third, Takaaki Hiratsuka and Atsushi Mizumoto report their research into facilitating exploratory talk among Japanese university EFL students, making reflection common in another way. Distinguished from disputational talk and cumulative talk, exploratory talk also balances the doubting and believing games for deeper collaboration and co-construction of knowledge. Their findings suggest that even a brief intervention before discussions can significantly increase exploratory talk.

Finally, Nate Olson shares his research into team teaching with soft CLIL, showing how teacher collaboration is often agonistic and is all the more transformative because of this dissensus. Even in the same context and within the same discipline, English language teachers can challenge their own and others' sedimented thoughts and practices, with benefits for both teachers and students. Thinking with the other articles in this issue, we might say that team teaching can become a practice of exploratory talk or shared reflection in action, a praxis that invites students into this and similar dialogue.

Call for Papers

We continue to invite submissions for upcoming issues. Please refer to our website (https://td.jalt.org/index.php/etdjournal/) for guidelines and past issues, and contact us via email at JALT.TED.ETE.editor@gmail.com.

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PERSPECTIVES

Teaching at 78: Facing a Fear

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Recently a former university colleague remarked in an email to me, "It's amazing and wonderful that you continue teaching at age 78." "Yes, it is," I replied, "but it comes with an ever-advancing fear." I told him that I was quite unsettled a few years ago when I read in *The Economist* (2019) an obituary for the famed French film-maker and photographer Agnès Varda who had died at 90. The writer said that she had never lost her sense of wonder. "All those memories and realisations that made up her life would fade away unless she kept voyaging through new landscapes, meeting new people, looking and listening and constantly rebuilding the world out of sheer curiosity." This assertion struck me sharply as it expressed a feeling that I had had for some time but which had not come forth with such clarity and impact. It made me wonder if all of my own memories and realizations from the classroom experiences over half a century that make up my professional and personal identity will fade away and be over when my days at the chalkface inevitably end. I recognized that it is this fear that in part keeps me from retiring from classroom teaching.

After compulsory retirement from my university professorship at age 65, I continued to teach at that institution and at other local universities as a part-timer. Those days too were terminated because of my age at 72, but still I was able to continue teaching as a part-timer at the high school affiliated (*fuzoku*) with the university at which I had been professor. Actually, I had started teaching students at the high school in 2001 while still at the university. Fortunately the high school officials look beyond the number that happens to be my age and value the unique brand of English language instruction that I bring to the students there. So, it is indeed amazing and wonderful that I am still teaching. I do it very well and enjoy it as much as I ever have. But it comes with that fear.

Realizations

The word "realization" has two meanings. One is understanding, the other is fulfillment. In both senses I fear that not only the memories but also the "realizations" acquired over my long career may dissolve once I leave the classroom.

Narrative reflection is an essential means for teachers to explore and to make sense of our teaching practice. The stories we relate about our teaching lives can lead us to realizations of what we do and who we are. They draw us to construct and affirm the meaning of our work and our professional and personal identity.

I have found that the insightful expression of those in other professions, crafts, and occupations of all sorts on the work they do can be a catalyst for this ongoing, career-long process. It enables us to step outside the classroom box which may confine our thinking. It can be helpful in directing our thoughts about our own work and illuminating further and more deeply what we do as teachers and who we are. Following is an example.

Anthony Sher was a fine actor born in South Africa who performed on the English stage. The writer of his obituary, again for *The Economist* (2021), tells that early in his career he learned an important lesson from theater director Alan Dossor, who once asked

him, "What do you want to say as an actor?" Sher was confused by the question and Dossor added, "You won't become a really good actor till you put yourself on the line, till the job's vital… it's got to mean something to you before it's going to mean anything to the audience. Otherwise just go be a plumber."

That certainly applies as well to teachers instructing their students. We cannot be really good at it if we merely convey to our classes, as Thornbury (2002) put it, "It doesn't really matter what you think, so long as you use the third conditional." The instruction has got to mean much more than that to us and to them.

As much for teachers as for anyone, the path to meaning is responsibility, as clinical psychologist Jordan Peterson (2018) tells us. In our work as teachers, meaning lies within the particular time, place and socio-cultural circumstances of our practice. In Uganda, for the early years of my career, I understood my responsibility to the newly independent nation to contribute to its widely expanded secondary education system and to help students achieve their goal of moving on from subsistence farming life. When I taught ESL in adult education in Los Angeles, I understood my responsibility to immigrants to facilitate their successful assimilation into American society and to contribute to their capacity to have a better life for themselves and provide for their children. For nearly 40 years in Japan, in a very different context, I take my responsibility not only to guide their academic achievement but also to "build on and affirm the cultural, linguistic, intellectual and personal identities that students bring to our classrooms" (Cummins, 2003, p. 5), and to promote their growth and development as mature young adults with the capacity to relate well with others and to think critically for themselves.

I believe that I have done well over the years to fulfill those responsibilities. But without the classroom environment, without new classes of students and the particular collective and individual features they bring, and without then having to continually work to maintain and reconstruct these realizations, surely they will diminish in my mind.

Another realization, again in both senses of the word, that is removed as time passes in retirement is that of the existential human relations that are the essence of the culture of the English language learning classroom. The intimate relations between teacher and students and among students themselves are often more genuine and significant than those many people experience outside the classroom. It is in fact a real world where close and personal interactions, relationships, commitments, responsibilities, and purposes are engaged. It is a place where students learn the critical value of respect, authority, discipline, morality, responsibility, integrity, and character. It is a place where there are rules, accountability, consequences, challenges, expectations, disappointments, and achievements.

Yet these realizations turn on themselves by their essentially ephemeral nature. Those understandings and fulfillments build up over time and feed off the ongoing input of new experiences. But in the end, after we leave the chalkface, they are gone as well and only memories may remain.

Conclusion

I was taken aback last year when a student told me that I was a legend. Perhaps that gives some reassurance that I have at least accomplished some good things as a teacher. I have had an amazing and wonderful run through seven decades in the classroom and will keep at it year by year as long as school officials allow me to stay at the high school.

I conclude this narrative reflection with the words of another artist, Tony Bennett, the legendary American singer and performer

who died earlier this year (2023) at age 96. One of his favorite songs was "When Joanna Loved Me" (Bennett, 1964). In fact, he gave that name to one of his daughters. His lyrics for the song follow and I must say that those feelings resonate with me in relation to my love of teaching. While the realizations that have made up that life at the chalkface are likely to fade, as Agnès Varda feared for her life, when I leave the last piece of chalk at the board, perhaps some memories will remain "for a while", as in the song for Joanna. And if you think this is the schmaltzy reverie of an aging teacher, please tell me first that you love teaching as much as I do and then hold off on that thought until you too are 78 and still cherishing the love you get from teaching students in a classroom while retirement looms nearby.

Today is just another day, tomorrow is a guess
But yesterday, oh, what I'd give for yesterday
To relive one yesterday and its happiness

When Joanna loved me
Every town was Paris
Every day was Sunday
Every month was May
When Joanna loved me
Every sound was music
Music made of laughter
Laughter that was bright and gay

But when Joanna left me
May became December
But, even in December, I remember
Her touch, her smile, and for a little while

She loves me
And once again it's Paris
Paris on a Sunday
And the month is May

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EXPLORATIONS

A Practical Exploration of Learner Reflections in Communicative English Classes

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Keywords: Student reflection, Student journals, Autonomy, action logs, Video reflections

My first practical encounter with student reflections came when I started working at a new university in 2016. This university prioritised both student autonomy and reflective practice. When I began teaching at the university, they informed me that students in many classes wrote learning journals. At first, this seemed like a good idea but something that would be time-consuming and impractical. However, as these activities were generally well-scheduled into the curriculum, I was excited to try something new. I found that, firstly, these reflections became an integral part of students' learning and were not only reflections on what they learned; students still needed to employ the grammar patterns they had assimilated and explore new vocabulary to express their ideas. In addition, learners became more adept at expressing their opinions in English. Finally, these reflections enabled students to generate their own ideas about how to employ learning strategies to improve their performance. Therefore, I was quickly sold on the process and made student reflections an integral part of my teaching. However, the practice was indeed time-consuming for me as the teacher, and this must also have been true for the students. Thus, one of the challenges became how to maintain the benefits of reflective practice while streamlining the process. As such, after reviewing some of the benefits of student reflections, the article will explore my experimentations in creating an effective and time-efficient method of using student reflections.

The Importance of High-Quality Student Reflection

Studies such as those of Alterio (2004) and Porto (2007) have argued that students do not naturally reflect on their learning, tending to focus on the ultimate outcome rather than the effectiveness of their learning strategies. Having students consider their learning experiences can help develop this insight. There are numerous ways to approach reflective practice, such as learning journals, student diaries, action logs or any combination of these approaches (Burton & Carroll, 2001; Hooper, 2022; Peachey, n.d.). There is a substantial overlap between these methods, and what they all have in common is that students reflect on some aspect of their lessons or learning activities. The reflection does not have to be written; it could be an audio or video, for example. The important point is that students examine and document their learning regularly, preferably with a teacher or mentor providing feedback on their ruminations.

Student reflections can improve students' ability to gauge their strengths and weaknesses, and thus, they are more effective at appraising, planning and targeting their efforts (Fedderholdt, 1998). According to Murphey (1993), this type of analysis can nudge students toward a more active learning style, leading to a better understanding of freshly acquired knowledge

and the learning process in general (p. 7). Moreover, the learning journals can give students some input into future lesson structure and class management, facilitating feelings of empowerment, involvement, and positivity toward the class. Matsumoto (1989) highlighted how this kind of positive attitude toward classmates, teachers and native speakers could improve learner outcomes through increased motivation (p. 187).

Furthermore, teachers can use student journals or reflections to help improve lessons and classroom activities. For example, Miyake-Warkentin et al. (2020) used a type of reflection called "action logging", where students evaluate classroom activities in notebooks, which are read later by the teacher (pp. 342–343). The study found that a focus on struggling students had led to dissatisfaction in the more able class members. As students felt empowered to express their opinions through the action logs, this issue could be quickly identified and rectified. Hooper (2022) found that action logs could raise awareness of "under the radar" issues (p. 1040); these are small points that students might not feel willing to raise in class, such as requesting more homework reviews, longer periods to complete in-class tasks or further examples of language points. This issue is illustrated in a more narrative style by Matsumoto (1989), who described how a Japanese student on a study abroad program in the United States kept a daily journal about her learning experiences (pp. 175–175). The student voiced some frustration with the more playful communicative language classes she attended, which starkly contrasted with the grammar-translation teaching she had experienced in Japan. In this example, the teacher would have the option to add more formal grammar instruction or to just monitor the situation and treat it as a challenging yet necessary transition for a learner adapting to a new teaching style. In either case, the journaling practice facilitates insight into the thoughts driving student affect and allows

the teacher to discuss the issue with the student if necessary.

As outlined above, the literature describes numerous benefits of student reflections. Yet, there is still a question about how to actually implement such a project with a class of students. I have explored this issue extensively since being convinced of the utility of student reflections. Therefore, this paper will now outline my experience of using the process over many years.

An Implementation of Weekly Reflections in University Speaking and Listening Classes

The following is a practical example of how I introduced and developed learner reflections in university classes of first-year English majors. Each class had between 15 to 24 members and met four times a week for 90 minutes. All the class members used electronic devices and had access to Wi-Fi. This access enabled students to complete their reflections electronically. The process could be managed on paper using a notebook, but I found the process to be smoother using electronic submission. Students submitted their reflections as a Google Doc using Google Classroom. Then, I was able to review, comment and return the reflections quickly and efficiently.

The learner reflection template

I gave students the learning reflection template in the first week of lessons. The document contained a number of questions about students' language learning. The questions guided students to reflect on their learning during the past week, focusing on things such as their high points, challenges and English use, as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1

Weekly learner reflection

Figure 2

Completed example weekly reflection

I developed the content from a template used at my university by rewriting the original questions and adding sections three and four. When I first introduced the reflection, students provided feedback on each lesson and then submitted it once a week. The comments on each lesson were valuable in understanding the effectiveness of specific activities and facilitating refinements. However, the daily reflections proved demanding for students and myself, as Miyake-Warkentin et al. (2020) also reported, so I switched to weekly reflections instead. I also gave students a completed example reflection to illustrate the tone and content previous students had used (Figure 2).

I distributed the template (Figure 1) at the end of the first lesson each week. Learners had to complete their reflection before the start of the following week. I wanted to ensure students completed the reflection, which is why I avoided time-consuming questions about grammar and focused on relationship-building and learning strategies. One key question for students, I believe, was for them to estimate the amount of English they used in class. This inclusion helped learners consider how their English use affected their speaking progress. The reflection also made students document evidence of their language learning accomplishments, which likely increased their motivation. Moreover, learners had to specify how they could improve their performance, highlighting potential gains and improving the outcomes of those motivated to make the necessary changes.

Upon reflection, I did want to add a more targeted language-learning element to the template, so I included the section for vocabulary. I informed the learners that this should be language they had discovered

outside of our class so that it would be new knowledge for their classmates. This language was collected, compiled, and studied together as a class using the vocabulary application Quizlet. Students learned a new list of words each week, using the games and features of the application, and then took a weekly quiz. This practice reinforced the principle of students learning from each other, which was an essential facet of these classes.

In the reflection, there was also space for students to ask me questions or to make general comments. Students often asked about my favourite things or past experiences, wrote about their plans/activities for the weekend, and asked for specific advice on language issues. This feature provided an excellent opportunity to get to know the students in a low-pressure, relaxed manner. The section often allowed students to find common connections with me as their teacher and regularly started conversations in the document that we could continue in the classroom. This feature gave students a natural way to interact in English on topics of interest to them.

Student Completion and Teacher Management of the Learner Reflection

As Peachey (n.d.) found when employing this kind of journaling, there was always a small minority of students who were less keen on this activity and only wrote the bare minimum or failed to submit the report entirely. This was the student's decision, as the activity had been created to enable students to help themselves. Yet, it was always crucial to attempt to incentivise as many learners as possible to complete any tasks with pedagogical merit. Formally grading submissions could have provided extrinsic motivation to complete tasks (Deci et al., 1999; Pulfrey et al., 2013), but I believed this would have been too time-consuming and unnecessarily rigid. Another issue affecting time efficiency was whether to correct students' writing. Initially,

I corrected the grammar mistakes to motivate students with the goal of improving their work. However, this was also time-consuming and risked students' prioritising grammatically correct sentences over honestly expressing their feelings.

Thus, I needed to find a way to streamline the process and keep students motivated to complete the task over the whole semester. I had already implemented a class points system where tasks I did not grade were awarded points that contributed to students' class participation grades. I found that awarding points helped incentivise more students to submit the reflections consistently. Finally, instead of correcting grammar, I focused on giving comments of encouragement and support. I told students that I would only write detailed advice when specifically requested. I tried to keep the comments as positive as possible because, as Matsumoto (1989) points out, positive feedback from the teacher can lead to improved student affect and self-motivation. Figure 3 shows an example of teacher feedback.

Figure 3

Weekly reflection with teacher comments
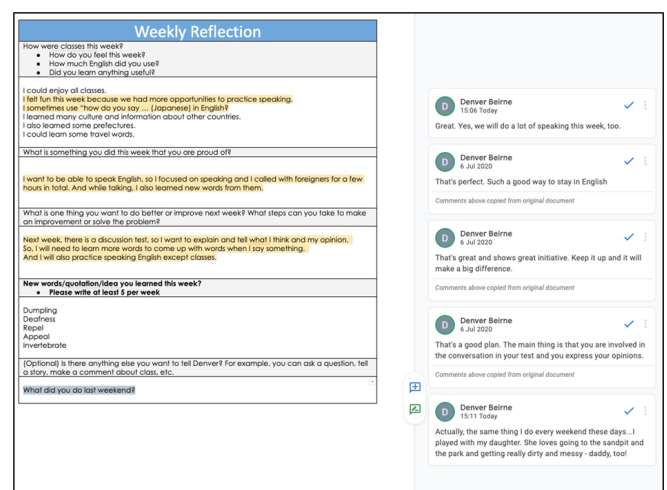
In practice, I usually reviewed the journals before classes on Monday mornings, which took between one and two hours. Then, the new templates were issued after

Monday's lesson. Even though I didn't correct the grammar, the process could still be time-consuming if not managed carefully. Therefore, I would quite strictly limit the review period to this slot before classes. Consequently, students knew they would routinely receive their reviewed reflections on Monday mornings.

Once again, due to time commitments, I concentrated on using the reflections with the classes most focused on communicative English skills, which were the Freshman English classes. Students on this course were new to the university and, for the first time in their language learning journey, were expected to speak 100% English in language lessons. Learners in this program needed a comfortable, supportive atmosphere and plenty of encouragement to challenge themselves continually to remain in English for 90-minute lessons. The reflections helped learners express these challenges, share their successes, and seek advice in a safe, supported environment.

## Introduction of speaking diaries/reflections

The written reflections were fostering student-teacher relationships and encouraging a comfortable learning environment as I understood more about my students through this process. However, these classes were focused on speaking and listening, so I believed the activity could be improved by having students reflect verbally on their learning. With all the other challenges facing first-year students, though, I thought it would have been too demanding for them to complete a weekly spoken learning reflection in English from the start of Semester 1. Therefore, I decided to have students do a written reflection in Semester 1 and a spoken video reflection in Semester 2. Before implementing the system, I trialled the video reflections with a cohort of first-year students by asking them to complete a video diary over the summer vacation. Students had often mentioned that their speaking ability atrophied over the

holiday period as they did not get opportunities to speak English; hence, this activity could also help students maintain some regular English output over the holidays.

All the students could complete the task without issue, so the weekly reflection activity was likely to be straightforward. Essentially, the weekly reflections were just transferred from the written form to the spoken form. Students recorded themselves using the video function on their smartphones or iPads, answering the questions from the weekly reflection template in around 1 minute. Students uploaded the video, following the same schedule used for written reflections. Learners added the new vocabulary items straight into a shared Google Doc. Figure 4 shows an example of the assignment.

Figure 4

Weekly speaking reflection assignment and shared vocabulary
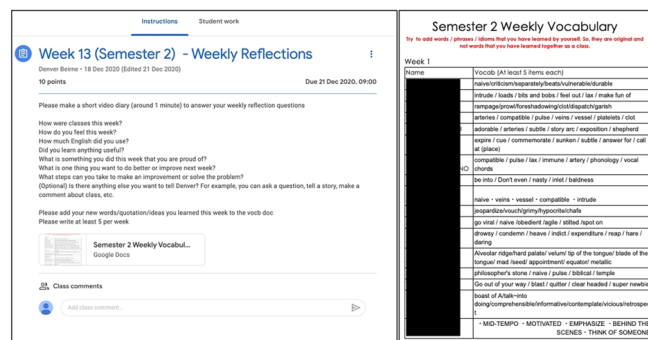
One disadvantage of the video reflection was that it was not possible for me to post comments directly on the relevant sections of the reflections. In addition, I still posted the comments as written text rather than video, which might have seemed at odds with the students' video submissions. I could have recorded a video responding to the students' reflections, and applications such as Flip could have simplified the process somewhat. However, I decided it was better to keep the activity contained within

Google Classroom as the students' central hub for materials. Thus, I used the comments section of Google Classroom, which could also facilitate quick replies to feedback, and this often generated student-teacher interactivity. Moreover, as Murphey (1993) points out, some students can articulate themselves more clearly in writing (p. 7), and the use of written comments kept this avenue open.

Overall, I believed the advantages of the video reflections outweighed the disadvantages; the students gained extra speaking practice, delivering short semi-prepared monologues; this is a skill they would otherwise not have had the opportunity to develop. In addition, learners also practised general speaking skills such as conveying opinions and using descriptive language. Moreover, students informed me that for many of them, creating the videos was less time-consuming than writing their reflections. Finally, for me, the review and feedback process was generally more time-effective for the video reflections. Therefore, after introducing this system, I continued using it across all my freshman English classes.

Conclusion

This paper explored how to practically implement weekly reflections in communicative university language classes. This method focused on building teacher–student relationships to foster an open learning environment to enable learners to practice English without embarrassment or fear. Overall, I gained a deeper understanding of my students. I learned about their language issues, but also their personalities and, in some cases, the emotional, circumstantial or environmental challenges that might be affecting their mood, behaviour or class performance. These were valuable insights into the issues influencing my students and, more generally, students learning English in Japanese universities. I believe this process also made many students more willing to seek help or ask questions as a result of this additional channel of communication.

The advantages of this kind of activity depend upon the focus of the reflection; for instance, in my exploration of learner reflections, the benefits were that I came to know and understand my students more deeply, as the questions were structured to investigate this area. Alternatively, I could have created questions that reviewed classroom activities or checked students' language understanding, and then the advantages would have been quite different. Reflections can be deployed in various alternative ways to suit different learning environments, instructors' goals, and students' needs. I have outlined one way teachers could apply this process; however, it might not be appropriate for all readers. Nonetheless, I hope the description of student reflections' benefits has been persuasive and might encourage some educators to explore how they can apply the practice in their own unique situations. Through my experience, though, I have come to believe that an effective implementation of student reflections will likely be a joint student–teacher exploration where the instructor is flexible enough to adapt to the journey as it unfolds.

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Exploratory-Talk Instruction on EFL Group Discussion

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This article reports on a study that investigated the effects of instruction emphasizing exploratory talk (Mercer, 2004) on student performance during group discussion activities in an EFL context. In exploratory talk, group members engage fully with each other's ideas and offer joint statements for mutual educational goals. Data were collected from 18 Japanese university students who formed 6 groups (3 control and 3 experimental) of 3 students. The methodology employed in this study to examine the data was sociocultural discourse analysis, a means that values the dynamic aspects of classroom talk. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis revealed that while the control groups did not show significant change in the use of expressions related to exploratory talk, the use of the expressions increased significantly in the experimental groups.

本論ではexploratory talk （探索的会話）（Mercer, 2004）を取り入れたが教授法が、EFL環境下で学ぶ英語学習者のパフォーマンスにどのような影響を与えるかを検証した。Exploratory talkとは、会話の参加者全員が共通の教育目標を達成するためお互いの考えに深く関わりを持ち、協同しながら発言や提案を精査する活動である。実験参加者（18名）を6つのグループ（それぞれ3名ずつ）に分け、3つを実験群、3つを統制群として分析を行った。本研究では、ダイナミックな教室インタアクションを適切に理解、分析するために社会文化的談話分析方法が採用さ

れた。結果、実験群ではexploratory talk特有の表現の使用に有意な変化が見られたが、統制群では見られなかった。

The empirical spotlight has long been on the ways to improve the quality of students' talk in the classroom. Both in the field of general education and language education, a substantial body of studies have examined teacher–student and student–student interactions, using an array of methods in a wide range of contexts (e.g., Cazden, 2001; Hiratsuka, 2021; Hiratsuka & Malcolm, 2011; Hsiao et al., 2021; Li & Zhu, 2017; Storch, 2002). Among this previous work, Mercer's (2004) development of sociocultural discourse analysis seems especially illuminating. In an attempt to probe the types of talk that can maximize the learning of children, Mercer (2004) analyzed a vast amount of classroom discourse data and determined three archetypical forms of children's talk in classroom group activities. The first type is *disputational talk*, in which children tend to disagree with others in the group and make decisions on their own rather than collaboratively. The second is *cumulative talk*, in which children build on what the other group members have said via the use of repetitions, confirmations, and detailed accounts—but oftentimes without critical analysis. The last type is *exploratory talk*, in which children are involved with one another's ideas, critically and constructively, by seeking reasoning and suggestions from all the group members for joint

decision-making. Mercer (2004) makes a compelling case for the use of exploratory talk in students' talk because it allows them to engage successfully in tasks that require concerted effort and collaborative construction of knowledge in the classroom. This article suggests that Mercer's analytical framework and findings offer promising insights beyond his original contexts, and it demonstrates that the sociocultural discourse analysis methodology he developed with this framework can be fruitfully extended to examine an English as a foreign language (EFL) context such as a Japanese university classroom. We further argue that exploratory talk was similarly generative of knowledge construction in this context and that this form of discourse can be fostered by EFL teachers.

Sociocultural discourse analysis

The emergence of a sociocultural perspective which treats human mental action as related processes mediated by tools, means, or socioculturally constructed artifacts (most notably in the forms of speaking and writing) has revolutionized the ways to view the cognitive development of teachers and learners, both in general and language education. The transmission mode of teaching and learning has been gradually supplanted by diverse forms of dialogic and collaborative (transformative) practices that upheave the boundaries of teachers' and learners' potentials (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). The perspective derives from concepts created by the Russian psychologist and educator Lev Vygotsky. He challenged the prevalent research at his time that attempted to provide mere descriptions of the static products of human learning. What he attended to instead was the developmental learning process and a dynamic explanation for higher psychological functions (see Hiratsuka, 2019; Hiratsuka & Barkhuizen, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978). Several sociocultural researchers (e.g., O'Connor & Michaels, 1996) have recognized the considerable

explanatory power of the Vygotskian perspective and have investigated how two or more people employ language as a tool for teaching-and-learning ventures and combine their respective intellectual resources to complete a common task (Mercer, 2004). The consideration given to how the shared knowledge is both caused and constructed in the act of communication thus became the centrepiece for the development of sociocultural discourse analysis (Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Mercer, 2004).

For Mercer (2004), the term *sociocultural discourse analysis* does not just refer to one particular method in a technical sense but to the methodology as a whole in a theoretical sense, involving several methods—both qualitative and quantitative—as in the case of the present study. He argued that while sociocultural discourse analysis shares similarities with other approaches like discourse analysis and conversation analysis, it possesses distinct characteristics. Sociocultural discourse analysis is characterized by its emphasis on language functions in facilitating collective intellectual activities. Moreover, it incorporates cognitive processes and considers the social and cultural context of communication during analysis. Most germane to the present study, his sociocultural discourse analysis is not only concerned with the process of cognitive engagement (e.g., how students interact) but also with learning outcomes (e.g., what English words they use) (Johnson & Golombek, 2016; Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Mercer, 2004). Mercer's sociocultural discourse analysis thus provides a methodology for a fresh understanding of both the process and the outcome of collective thinking through English in an EFL setting. Moreover, this under-utilized methodology in the field of English language teaching enables us to examine the effects of instructional designs on students' performance during group discussion

activities and present new and valuable findings. The present study was hence guided by the following research question: To what extent does exploratory-talk instruction affect the quality of Japanese university students' interaction in English during group activities?

Methodology

Participants

In recruiting participants, the first author invited his first-year Japanese university students from his three English language courses that were designed for Education, Engineering, and Mathematics majors. At the end of his final lessons in the courses, he explained in Japanese the purpose of the research as well as the extent of their participation and emphasized that their participation was strictly on a voluntary basis and would not affect their grade in any way. Among those who showed interest and submitted consent forms, he randomly chose 6 students from each course—hence 18 students in total. Each cohort was then separated into experimental and control groups evenly. In other words, there were three experimental groups, each consisting of three Education, Engineering, and Mathematics majors, as well as three control groups, each consisting of the three respective majors. The range of their TOEFL scores was around 470–520.

Procedure

On three different days, the first author played the role of instructor for each control group while his three teaching assistants were in charge of the Education, Engineering, and Mathematics-major experimental groups, respectively. In a classroom at the university, thus, the first author asked three students in each control group to engage in a group discussion in English following a prompt: "If you were stranded on a deserted island and could bring only three items as a group, what would they be?" The students then had a

discussion about it freely for eight minutes. After the first group discussion, there was an intervention phase in which he asked the students to talk more in English about the same topic and (a) agree on the three items they would like to bring to a deserted island as a group or (b) if they had already agreed during the first discussion, decide three alternative items in place of those they agreed. The intervention continued for five minutes. After the intervention, he asked the students to engage in another group discussion following a new prompt: "If you, as a group, could travel to only three foreign countries for the remainder of your lifetime, where would they be?" The students participated in the second group discussion for eight minutes.

Simultaneously, in a different classroom at the university each experimental group took part in the research with one of the teaching assistants. Each assistant first asked the three students in their experimental group to engage in the first group discussion in English for eight minutes with the same first prompt. During the intervention phase, however, the assistant gave a mini-lecture in English whereby the idea of exploratory talk was introduced and explained, and the students were encouraged to become cognizant of how they can collaboratively work and effectively communicate as a group. Specifically, the assistant presented the following *ground rules*:

1. Members of groups should seek agreement from everyone before making decisions (e.g., "Do you agree?" and "Does it sound reasonable?").
2. Group members should ask each other for their ideas and opinions (e.g., "What do you think?" and "How about you?").
3. Group members should give reasons for their views and be asked for them if appropriate (e.g., "Why do you think so?" and "What are the reasons?"). (Adapted from Mercer, 2004, p.152)

The intervention, consisting of the mini-lecture, lasted for five minutes and, afterward, the experimental-group students were also asked to engage in the second group discussion for eight minutes with the same second prompt.

Analysis

All the discussions and instructions were recorded and transcribed in full. By referring to previous studies (e.g., Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Mercer 2004; Mercer et al, 1999) and immersing ourselves in the data, we determined key words and phrases which seemed to be closely associated with exploratory talk. They were *because*; *so*; *I agree*; *Me, too*; *I think*; *What do you think?*; and *How about you?* Subsequently, we quantitatively analyzed the discussion data by counting the relative incidence of the key words and phrases. We made sure that the key words and phrases were indeed used as part of exploratory talk by carefully examining the incidence of all the words and phrases in the context in which they appeared (Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Mercer et al., 1999). Concurrently, for qualitative analysis we searched for a series of sequences that served as evidence of exploratory talk in the transcript data.

Findings

Quantitative Data

The quantitative results of the analysis are shown in Table 1, which illustrates the total number of incidences of key features (*because*; *so*; *I agree*; *Me, too*; *I think*; *What do you think?*; and *How about you?*) in both the control and experimental groups. What Table 1 highlights is the various extents to which the increase of incidences of key features occurred in each cohort. Interesting to note is that although the total number of incidences of key features in the first and second discussions in the control group remained approximately the same (i.e., 36 and 39, $\chi^2(1) = 0.12$, p = .73, Cramer's V [95%CI] = 0.04 [-0.19, 0.26]), the total

number of incidences in the experimental groups almost doubled from the first discussion to the second (i.e., from 33 to 62, $\chi^2(1) = 8.85$, p = .003, Cramer's V [95%CI] = 0.31 [0.11, 0.48]). In other words, only the experimental groups exhibited statistically significant differences in the number of key features between the two discussions.

Table 1

Total incidence of key features in the discussion

Key Feature	Control		Experimental	
	first	second	first	second
Because	1	6	5	9
So	10	11	9	25
I agree	1	1	1	1
Me, too	2	2	0	3
I think	18	10	14	15
What do you think?	4	8	2	5
How about you?	0	1	2	4
Total	36	39	33	62
p	.73 (not significant)		.003 (significant)	

Qualitative Data

In order to exemplify, qualitatively, the impact of the intervention on the students' performance, we concentrated our discourse analysis on the discussions of Education-major students. The students recorded the largest quantitative increase in the incidences of key features before and after the intervention (i.e., from 8 to 24) (see Table 1), and therefore their discussions were presumably filled with salient characteristics of exploratory talk. Below, the first and second discussion transcripts of the three Education majors, Students A, B, and C, are presented.

Transcript 1. *Education-major students' first discussion (00:00 – 4:18)*

B: The match to make fire? (5)
C: But they are not enough.
B: Ahh.
A: <u>I think</u> drinking is very important to me. // Water?
B: Water?
C: First I drink a water. I want to drink more water. //
B: But there is no more water we can drink. (8) *Nanda (How can I say?)*. Sea water? // We/ catch? / If there are sea water. (6)
A: We can convert to drink water.
B: Yes. Yes.
C: I want to / catch fish. (13)
B: If we (6) Cut? It // the cutted stone can / cut the fish. *Nanka (you know)* // E? Fish? Food? (20) In deserted island, people can't live. Human /// can't live.
A: The sunlight is very hard, <u>I think, so</u> / we can shut out the sunlight. (9) The strong sunlight. (11)
B: Bring yacht. // And we / take it and // go to the sea. (5) <u>So</u> catch fish and water. /// Ships. (6)
C: I want to bring items to make a smoke.

Transcript 2. *Education-major students' second discussion (00:00 – 4:11)*

B: I want to go to country /// which is far. <u>Because</u> I want to go many places.
C: Yeah // if you want. (8)
B: <u>How about you?</u> /
C: <u>I think</u> if the country we want to is /// far, /// it takes too much money. (6) It takes many times to go to the place, to go to the place. (5)
B: I see.
A: Oh yeah.
C: I have to (11) *Nandarou (How can I say?)*. I have to. (10)
B: Oh the country (6) which has the low price of, is lower Japan, we can go there. // We can, we can /// we can work for Japanese company in there, so we can get (5) a lot of money to have // low life. Low life? (7) Highlife of country! (8)
A: Low price. <u>Me, too</u>. Yes. Yes.
C: It doesn't cost so much money, /// <u>so</u> it's good. (5)
B: In the country, we can (6). We can be rich, <u>so</u> /// we can go any places and I think /// it is fun.
C: Mmm. I understand. (6)
A: <u>I think</u> so (5) Oh! What is your second language?
C: Chinese.

B: Chinese.
A: Oh you are both Chinese? I, I, I studied Spanish, so we can go to China and Spain, Spain /// to use second language. I think /// it is a good idea. (4) We can touch second language // with going there.

It is immediately apparent that the first discussion did not include many exploratory-talk features, but rather the students often disagreed with one another, provided no follow-ups for the comments made by other group members, and were involved in seemingly unproductive exchanges where individual students made separate remarks that did not lead them to the goal of the activity at hand—deciding what three items to bring to the deserted island as a group. For instance, when Student B began the discussion by mentioning matches as an option to bring to the island, Student C dismissed the suggestion without offering a particular reason ("But they are not enough"). Student A then ignored the exchange between Students B and C and moved on by prioritizing his independent idea which was to bring water. We can also see in the transcript that while Student A thought it a good idea to bring something to protect them from strong sun exposure, Student B expressed the desire to bring a yacht and Student C put forth a wish to bring something that can make fire. As the students appear to have provided their ideas at random without paying any attention to what was being said by other group members, the first discussion can be characterized by repeated attempts of sporadic decision-making and a lack of the mutual acceptance of ideas. In other words, they seem to engage mostly in disputational talk in which group members make decisions on their own and also, to some extent, in cumulative talk where group members lack critical evaluation of presented ideas (Mercer, 2004).

In contrast, the transcript of the second discussion includes several features of exploratory talk. The students often

attempted to elicit ideas from other group members, responded to what others said first before they offered their suggestions, and provided opinions after taking into consideration other group members' experiences. For example, although neither the key phrase *How about you?* nor *What do you think?* was used during the first group discussion, Student A used one (*How about you?*) right off the bat in the second discussion, showcasing that he welcomes other members' ideas. We can also see that even though Student C rarely followed up about other members' comments during the first discussion, the student quickly acknowledged another student's comment ("Yeah if you want"), expressed agreement ("I understand"), and critically but constructively commented on another's idea for shared consideration ("I think if the country we want to is far, it takes too much money"). The transcript also demonstrates that Student A put forward an idea, after asking everyone a question ("What is your second language?"), that they should go to countries where all the group members can use their second foreign languages. This could be a testament that the students came to value their collective experiences and avoided imposing their own ideas on others. Compared with the first discussion, therefore, the students were engaged more with exploratory talk in which each group member exhibited more active participation, articulated careful reasoning to others, and consolidated both their knowledge and use of collaborative expressions (Mercer, 2004).

Discussion

Partially corroborating the findings of previous studies conducted with children and adults (e.g., Johnson & Mercer, 2019; Mercer et al., 1999), the most crucial finding in this study, obtained from a combination of quantitative and qualitative data, is that the explicit instruction on exploratory talk which included *ground rules* helped the

participants to increase the amount of exploratory-talk features and improve the quality of their cooperation during group discussions. With the participants of this study being Japanese university students who were studying English as a foreign language, furthermore, this study adds unique evidence that exploratory talk can be cultivated not only among children in the case of their first language and adults in a professional setting but also among learners of English at a Japanese university. This also demonstrates that a sociocultural perspective, which pays assiduous attention to both the process and product of human learning and to its contextualized social nature, serves as a crucial theoretical basis for explicating, at least partly, complicated educational practices of university students in an EFL context.

While the observed changes in the experimental-group participants' use of exploratory talk were significant, one issue to consider is the miscellaneous factors that might have come into play in the implementation stage of this research procedure. We are not exactly sure in what way and to what degree the topics of the discussions, the number of participants in each group, the relationships among the group members, the personalities of individual participants, the lengths of the discussions and instructions, the contents of the instructions and the characteristics of the instructors, as well as other factors of which we are not aware, might have affected the participants' performance. It could prove useful to conduct further studies that involve different participants, procedures, and other conditions. Our hope is that this type of research and the practice of exploratory talk will prevail, especially in EFL contexts, as the examples have been surprisingly scant thus far (however, see Coultas & Booth, 2019).

Another issue to consider is that, in this study, the control-group participants engaged in an output activity during the intervention phase in which they spoke

English based on the topic from the first discussion, rather than *no* intervention as is often the case with experimental design research. Given the common belief that output opportunity aids learners in developing their language proficiencies, it might be illuminating to conduct a comparative study which delves into the effects of diverse interventions (e.g., allowing output opportunity vs. providing no opportunity) and assesses the participants' improvement (or lack thereof) of their English proficiencies from the points of, for example, fluency, complexity, and accuracy. The data analysis procedure in future studies could involve counting the number of uttered words, individually and/or collectively, as well as how conversation turns are distributed and how long each member holds the floor in the discussions so that the findings of this type of study might provide us with more precise information about how much each member is engaged in and contributes to the jointly-constructed intellectual activity. The findings could then be used as a baseline from which to evaluate the level of collaboration among the participants for advancing our understanding about the nature of each discussion.

Conclusion

In this study, instruction on exploratory talk had a significant effect on the use of exploratory-talk expressions during group discussions among Japanese university learners of English. Quantitatively, the experimental group displayed a statistically significant increase in the use of exploratory talk over the course of two discussions, while the control group showed no conspicuous difference. Qualitatively, we presented an illustrative example whereby three Education-major students became more actively and cooperatively engaged in the second discussion, in comparison to the first, and gave reasons for their opinions, sought others' input, and expressed their agreements with others. We thus conclude that explicit instruction on exploratory talk can be an effective way to promote EFL university students' performance during group discussions. We encourage English language teachers to introduce the concept and the benefits of exploratory talk during their lessons, particularly before their students' group activities. In addition, our wish is that teachers will embark upon a personal exploration into how to best provide instruction on exploratory talk in their own contexts, for instance, by videotaping their teaching practices in order to analyze their discourse and moves in the classroom as well as by collecting questionnaires from their students to learn their viewpoints on their instruction on exploratory talk (see also Hiratsuka, 2014; Hiratsuka & Malcolm, 2011).

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RESEARCH ARTICLES

Team Teaching at the University Level: Differing Views on a Soft CLIL Approach

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This study examines the experiences of two university teachers who attempted team teaching at the university level for the first time. Team teaching was conducted on a voluntary basis for two classes of first-year students (N=32) at a private university. Using a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, the goal of the team-taught portion of the course was for students to improve their English communication and academic writing skills through learning content related to gene editing and autonomous warfare over a 5-week period. Both teachers had advanced degrees in TESOL and worked together in a way that was appropriate for a Soft CLIL approach. Classroom observations and interviews with the teachers revealed challenges including disagreements over teacher roles, content selection, and content instruction. Through reflective practice, the teachers became aware of the benefits of team teaching for professional learning in terms of acquiring new content areas and CLIL techniques such as translanguaging and scaffolding. These findings may have practical implications for other university language teachers who are considering a team-based Soft CLIL approach.

Keywords: team teaching, Soft CLIL, reflective practice, post-secondary, tertiary level

Team teaching is a collaborative teaching approach that involves two or more teachers working together to deliver instruction to students. While team teaching is a common practice in Japan's secondary education, its implementation at the post-secondary level is not as widespread. This raises the question of what motivates university teachers to collaborate for class instruction. In the European context, the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been a compelling reason for team teaching, as it may require both a content expert and a language expert to effectively teach subject courses in a foreign language (Lasagabaster, 2018). However, what happens when both teachers are language instructors? This paper aims to address this question by exploring the experiences of two university English language teachers attempting a team-taught CLIL approach for the first time. To begin, I review the literature on team teaching at the post-secondary level and provide a brief overview of the principles of a "Soft" CLIL approach. After introducing the methodologies for this study which includes thematic analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews, I present the contrasting experiences of two language teachers and highlight the challenges and opportunities that resulted from their team-teaching collaboration. By examining their differing views, this research aims to shed light on the complexities of collaboration and Soft CLIL implementation in higher education. It also seeks to illustrate how the teachers' professional growth and positive outcomes for their students appeared to result from their collaboration,

while also drawing attention to conflicts that can arise between co-teachers when attempting to balance personal connections with professional responsibilities.

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Literature Review

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Team Teaching in Higher Education

Team teaching, as the term is commonly used, denotes two teachers teaching in the same classroom at the same time. In the context of CLIL and EMI (English Medium Instruction) at the post-secondary level, team teaching usually refers to collaborations between a content lecturer and a language lecturer in which the abilities of the team members complement each other so that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 401). This style of team teaching is sometimes called *collaborative interdisciplinary team teaching* (CITT). Lessons conducted in a CITT style are typically content-driven, part of the subject curriculum, and tailored to the particular academic majors of the students (Gladman, 2015). Collaboration in CITT is also said to be easier than team teaching in purely language classes, as each teacher possesses their own expertise in either the content or the language, reducing the perceived threat of an additional authoritative figure in the classroom. In some cases, the language teacher may use their knowledge of communication to act as intermediaries between the content teacher and the students, helping them to understand the content teacher's arguments (Kondo et al., 2020). Additionally, allowing students to see two instructors exchange opinions can serve as a positive model for learning; it highlights that it is acceptable to have differences in perspectives and even proficiencies on a given subject (Ikegashira, 2021).

In this way, team teaching has been identified as a valuable approach not only to improve students' understanding of the course content but also to foster critical thinking and collaborative skills. The lower student–teacher ratio, in addition to providing students with more one-on-one time with teachers, can also help address students' varied abilities and preferred learning styles (Gladman, 2015). For instructors, team teaching has been shown to have a positive effect on ongoing professional development (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Tisdell & Eisen, 2000), both in terms of developing and improving teaching methods (Gorsuch, 2002) and for creativity (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). The team-teaching situation can also provide participating members with a supportive environment or "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Olson, 2021) that helps teachers to overcome academic isolation and continually develop as professional educators (Baeten & Simons, 2014). From a socio-constructivist perspective, one of the main tenets of team teaching is to share experiences and encourage dialogue that leads to greater reflection and improved learning outcomes (Lasagabaster, 2018). When this reflection is systematically carried out through regular debriefing sessions, it evolves into reflective practice—a deliberate, organized, and action-driven process focused on refining professional practice (Schön, 1987).

However, teacher collaboration is not without several challenges. These include the time required for effective collaboration, teacher positioning, increased workloads, and inadequate or non-existent administrative support (DelliCarpini, 2021). One of the primary challenges lies in the unclear delineation of roles to be played by each member of the team (Baeten & Simons, 2014). In many cases, teachers' differing interpretations of their roles can lead to conflicts and tensions that negatively impact the learning environment. In any given team-teaching partnership, teachers also need to settle differences in opinions regarding lesson planning and preparations, content selection and instruction, and grading and assessment, to name just a few.

Although CLIL itself may function as a guideline for some of these issues, such as in CITT, collaboration between two TESOL professionals requires deliberation over how to handle content while not necessarily having a degree or claim to expertise in a given academic subject (DelliCarpini, 2021).

The present research is therefore a unique opportunity to examine how two language teachers collaborated in a university language course. The fact that the course was explicitly designated as a Soft CLIL course and that the two teachers are foreigners in a Japanese context also adds a unique dimension to the study. Before moving on, however, it is important to differentiate and define Soft CLIL as an educational approach.

Differentiating and Defining Soft CLIL

One simple way to differentiate the alphabet soup of educational approaches (EMI, CBI, and CLIL, among others) is to ask *who* is teaching the content, and in *what* context. In EMI, it is usually the academic subject teacher who is teaching a subject (other than English itself) in a country where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English (Macaro, 2018). For example, a Turkish mathematics teacher teaching mathematics in English to students in Turkey. Here, the focus is primarily on learning the content. In Content-Based Instruction (CBI), it is usually the language teacher who is teaching the content, and the majority of the population of the country in question speak English as their L1. For example, a native English-speaking language teacher teaching content in English to migrant students in the United States. The focus here is primarily on learning the language. CLIL, by contrast, is defined as "a dual-focused educational approach in which *an additional language* [English] is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1; emphasis in original). "Hard" CLIL follows its original European model where academic

subjects are taught in English by non-native content teachers and give little or no language support (similar to EMI), while "Soft" CLIL is taught by native or non-native language teachers with more focus on language learning (similar to CBI) (Ikeda, 2013).

Although there have been reports of Hard CLIL implementation in Japan in recent years (e.g., Takasago, 2021), it may still be too ambitious for many Japanese subject teachers to teach through the target language due to a lack of language proficiency or systematically employed language-teaching assistants (Izumi, 2022; Ikeda, 2013). This has resulted in Soft CLIL becoming the de facto norm in Japan (Ikeda, 2019) as it can be implemented relatively easily (Tsuchiya & Pérez Murillo, 2019; Ikeda, 2019). And while there is no one prescriptive model of CLIL to be strictly followed, there are some general guidelines that researchers and practitioners apply in implementing the approach.

Soft CLIL, in simple terms, is content-based language teaching on the principles of the "4Cs" (Ikeda, 2022). The aim is for learners to engage in thought (Cognition) about a given subject matter (Content) while learning and using the target language (Communication). There is an emphasis on developing intercultural understanding and gaining an awareness of self and social other (Culture) through the study of the content (Coyle et al., 2010). The approach also embraces multimodal input which encompasses not only text but also a variety of other forms of media, such as audio, video, apps, maps, and data, to create a diverse learning environment that caters to different learning styles and fosters a deeper understanding of alternative perspectives (Ikeda, 2019, 2022). In this way, the approach is said to provide intellectually interesting topics, cognitively engaging activities, and contextually authentic situations to use language, including the flexible use of students' first and second languages in the

classroom (often referred to as "translanguaging"; see, e.g., Lin & He, 2017).

The broader aims of a CLIL approach include developing students' pluriliteracies and 21st-century global competencies (Ikeda, 2019). Competencies here refer to generic skills that students can apply in the real world (e.g., problem-solving skills, collaboration skills, global citizenship responsibilities) and supposedly need in response to the demands of globalization. For these reasons, Soft CLIL has been claimed to be a pedagogy capable of transforming the educational landscape (Tsuchiya & Pérez Murillo, 2019), with Ikeda (2022) going so far as to say it is "the only approach in language education that prepares younger generations for the new era" (p. 22). As Izumi and Pinner (2022) assert, however, "much more research and support at all levels is still needed if Soft CLIL is truly to help unify Japan's educational needs with the actual practice of teaching and learning" (p. 175). As such, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions.

What are the opportunities and challenges of two university language teachers attempting to team teach a Soft CLIL approach for the first time? And if any, what are the benefits for their students?

Method

Participants and Educational Setting

The participants of this study were James and Minh (pseudonyms). James was in his late thirties and a native of the UK. He had several years of experience teaching at the university level and held an MA in TESOL. Minh was in her late twenties and a native of Vietnam. She also held an MA in TESOL but had not previously taught university students. The study was conducted at a private university in the Kantō region of Japan. James and Minh team taught a compulsory first-year English class on the theme of Media and Propaganda, and students were expected to learn about these

issues and engage in debates about the content. The target class was specified by the university as a CLIL course, and its specific aim was to improve the students' communication skills and academic writing ability. The content topics chosen for their team-teaching collaboration were Gene Editing and Autonomous Warfare. The teachers delivered the same lesson to two separate classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, twice per week. Each class was attended by 16 students (N=32), and the students' level was estimated by the researcher and teachers to be around B1 or B2 on the CEFR scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained through teacher interviews and field notes from class observations. During the class, the researcher was a non-participant observer but occasionally interviewed the teachers during student work time to gain a better understanding of the lesson objectives and incidental episodes. Outside of class, teacher interviews were semi-structured and focused on the teachers' views of team teaching and Soft CLIL implementation. The interview guide was flexible, allowing for adjustments and exploration of emergent themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews were also designed as an opportunity for teachers to take part in reflective practice. Reflective practice is a valuable tool for educators to engage in ongoing self-reflection and improvement (Schön, 1987; Farrell, 2007). Through reflective practice, teachers can refine their teaching practices by identifying what worked well and what could be improved, and consider what adjustments can be made to enhance student outcomes (Farrell, 2018). Additionally, the interviews outside of class were conducted individually so that teachers could speak freely about issues they may have identified in the collaboration and may not have felt comfortable admitting in front of their teaching partner. The interviews took place in

person at the teachers' scheduling convenience, were audio recorded, and ranged in length approximately 30–60 minutes. The data from the field notes and interviews were then transcribed for thematic analysis.

Following Braun and Clarke (2021), reflexive thematic analysis consists of a six-step process: 1) reading and re-reading the data and recording initial ideas; 2) coding salient features of the data across the entire data set; 3) matching the codes to candidate themes and gathering all data associated with each candidate; 4) reviewing the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the data set as a whole; 5) refining, defining, and naming the themes; and 6) making a final selection and analysis of vivid examples and relating them back to the research question and the literature. Based on this process, the eight themes selected were: initial stances, negotiating roles and responsibilities, planning and preparations, teacher talk, lingering frustrations, benefits for teachers, benefits for students, and the boundary between professional and personal. Each of these themes is presented and discussed below.

Findings and Discussion

Initial Stances

The team-teaching collaboration took place over five weeks of classes in the middle of the semester. James was the primary teacher for the course and had already taught several classes on content related to the U.S. and Middle East earlier in the term. Minh joined as a secondary teacher, with no official approval from the department, and the collaboration was done on a voluntary basis. The main motivation for the team-teaching arrangement was Minh's interest in conducting a pilot study for her PhD project on global citizenship and competency-based education. As part of her research, Minh wanted to observe students' project- and task-based work on the content she provided, analyze their competencies,

and develop effective strategies to coach students on their competency development. James, on the other hand, primarily agreed to the collaboration as a favor to Minh. In addition to helping her with her research, however, James also believed he could learn new content for teaching a sustainable development undergraduate course the following year.

Before starting their collaboration, the teachers decided that James would primarily focus on the Language and scaffold for difficult vocabulary and grammar, while Minh would primarily focus on the Content and provide the concepts for the new topics, as per the CLIL framework of the course. However, James was initially apprehensive about the students' response to their collaboration, stating:

> I didn't want it to come off as team teaching.... You can never know how the students will react to a new teacher, because they expected to take my class. I tried to justify it by telling the students that Minh is an assistant to them. "She is here to help you."

Shortly after beginning team teaching, it became clear that James was not comfortable sharing the lead in instruction with Minh. James saw himself as the primary teacher, and Minh as an assistant who he "used to shed light on a topic from another point of view." Minh was aware of this and commented, "I tried to step down every time I felt he (James) tried to claim his territory."

James admitted that his prior experiences as a junior high school ALT played a significant role in shaping his perception of team teaching. Specifically, he remembered feeling like he was just a tool for delivering the content provided by the JTE, with no opportunity to showcase his own ideas or creativity, elaborating:

> Memorizing textbooks, standing at the front just waiting to be called upon... It put me off of language education. It felt very inauthentic... I was a tape recorder, not myself.

This phenomenon of ALTs feeling disenfranchised in their teacher identities and capabilities as educators is not uncommon in Japan (see, e.g., Borg, 2020; Hiratsuka, 2022). James' negative experiences nonetheless contributed to his initial hesitancy to fully embrace the concept of team teaching while working with Minh.

Negotiating Roles and Responsibilities

Given their initial stances, the negotiation of roles and responsibilities between James and Minh was a complex process that evolved over time. At the outset of their collaboration, James perceived himself as the language teacher, decision-maker, and classroom manager; Minh viewed herself as the planner, content provider, and assistant. Early on, she commented on her difficulty negotiating a more equal partnership with James:

> It's a little bit confusing and I'm trying to navigate that. At first, I expected that I would be able to do a little bit of teaching but... probably because I didn't make it super clear with James...

Minh expected to have a more active role in the class, but due to a lack of clear communication with James, her role remained limited to that of an assistant. Minh's contributions were only recognized when James did not know the answers, and, during the first few classes, she said she only felt comfortable taking over when James "looked tired."

As a novice teacher, and the instructor in charge of providing the content, Minh was passionate about the subject and wanted to spend more of the lesson time relaying information that she felt James had missed or glossed over. James disagreed with her approach, however, stating:

> I know the students, and she doesn't. It's a compulsory class and their attention spans are limited. They will lose focus. They can get annoyed if you repeat the same thing.

Minh worked hard to prove her worth as a teacher, but James was quick to assume control of the class. As a result, the team-teaching relationship often fluctuated, and their roles and responsibilities remained ill-defined.

Planning and Preparations

Planning proved to be another major hurdle for their team-teaching dynamic. Minh preferred a highly detail-oriented approach in her preparation process, showing her desire for meticulous lesson planning and strategizing. James, by contrast, was much more relaxed in his approach to planning and sometimes did not make time to go through the content provided by Minh before class. James explained, "I normally plan the content and I have tasks for them, so I don't like to have too much structure; I like it to be more on-the-fly." James confessed that he "almost had a panic attack" when Minh sent him several classes' worth of content for him at the beginning of their collaboration to not only check but also understand well enough to teach.

Early on, the difference in approaches was particularly evident in the morning class, where James sometimes felt lost and unprepared. According to Minh, he would occasionally tell her: "You do it first, I'll see how it goes, and I'll do it in the next period." In effect, this led to role reversals between classes, with Minh taking the lead and James assisting in the morning class, and James leading and Minh falling back to her assistant role in the afternoon. Although previous research suggests that role fluidity can help develop deeper collaboration in the classroom (Tisdell & Eisen, 2000), this role-switching seemed to threaten James' authority in the morning class, while also marginalizing Minh as the content provider in the afternoon.

To address these challenges, the teachers sometimes held impromptu "meetings" either during the morning class or immediately afterward. These meetings

were kept brief and focused on promptly addressing necessary changes. One example of the changes made between classes was in a lesson on autonomous driving. In the morning class, the students were confused about a stage called "conditional autonomous driving" in a video shown by Minh. Minh admitted, "It's not clear from the video what that means, so (in the afternoon class) he (James) would throw the question to me so that I can elaborate for the students." This scenario somewhat improved as the teachers continued to work together and learn from each other. James and Minh were beginning to form a friendly relationship and James reported that he wanted to keep the information exchange comfortable and easy. He admitted, "While students were prepping in class, we would go through it (the lesson plan) very quickly." At this point, James apparently believed it would be strange to sit down and plan out a lesson, and eventually, Minh agreed that James' improvised approach was more natural.

Teacher Talk

In any classroom setting, teacher talk can play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the class and establishing a classroom culture (Walsh, 2011). Similar to their initial disagreements over roles and planning, James and Minh had conflicting views on teacher talk. For example, James enjoyed engaging in small talk with students before and during class, while Minh considered it a "waste of time." During a class where James was leading class instruction, Minh felt that there were too many digressions into small talk and personal stories, and that it distracted the students' understanding of the content. She wanted to use teacher talk more formally and strategically to introduce new concepts in the lesson. In response, James said that Minh was overthinking the classroom dynamic, reflecting:

She (Minh) was like, step-by-step, say this... For me personally, it feels like I'm not authentic if I have to say a conversation that's planned ... It feels like acting.

In this way, the authenticity of the lessons was compromised for James by Minh's formal planning style, and the effectiveness of the lessons was undermined for Minh by James' relaxed and affable approach to the content.

These differences in opinion regarding teacher talk highlight the importance of finding a balance between authenticity and well-planned lessons when working under a CLIL framework. While spontaneity can lead to a more authentic classroom experience (Pinner, 2021), careful lesson planning ensures that the learning objectives are met and that language and content are appropriately integrated, enhancing learning outcomes (Coyle et al., 2010). James provided an example of how they were eventually able to achieve this balance. He described a lesson in which he was responsible for the content instruction and asked Minh about how the Vietnam War was taught in her country. According to James, at first, Minh's response for the morning class was "too much information." He continued, "It may be authentic and natural, but it may have overwhelmed students, doing more harm than good." In the afternoon class, James changed the lesson to focus on more specific questions: "How were you taught about the Gulf of Tonkin incident? Who was responsible?" James explained that he posed these questions to the students first and then had them ask Minh. Minh was able to prepare more concise answers and James scaffolded for difficult language items. Ultimately, the two teachers agreed that the afternoon class adhered more closely to CLIL principles and was better executed than the morning class.

Lingering Frustrations

Despite striking a good balance for a Soft CLIL approach in some instances, James and Minh continued to disagree about

content instruction and their roles in the classroom. As mentioned above, James initially told Minh that she would take on more of a teaching role, but eventually James did the majority of the teaching and Minh became more of a spectator. Minh said that she felt hurried whenever she stepped into the spotlight in class, commenting: "He (James) was always reluctant to let me take center stage, telling students 'she is just here to observe.'" Minh worried that James would get angry with her if she took too long to explain concepts; even after more than three weeks of team teaching together, Minh reported her frustration, saying: "I provide the materials but I haven't gone through it with him. There are a lot of points I want to emphasize but he will go through it very quickly." Despite working through some of their issues, in the end, Minh felt that James rushes, and James felt that Minh spends too much time on a given topic.

Additionally, James had disagreements regarding Minh's content choices. Early on, for example, Minh showed a TED Talk on the topic of gene editing that James felt was beyond the students' comprehension level. And after one of their later classes on the topic of autonomous warfare, James reported that Minh spent about 20 minutes lecturing on how humans are instinctively violent, which he disagreed with due to his background studying psychology in university. James elaborated,

> As a teacher, you don't want to teach a student something you feel is factually incorrect. The compromise ended up being "let's be brief."

In response, Minh said, "James thinks war is always bad, so students will also think war is always bad." It seems that Minh intended to delve deeper into the complexities of the matter and start a discussion, while James aimed to present the material in the most straightforward manner possible for the students. For successful CLIL implementation, it is important to balance

providing students with comprehensible input and allowing them to develop their higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), such as analyzing and evaluating social issues that do not necessarily have a "correct" answer (Ikeda, 2022). HOTS tasks encourage students to engage in critical thinking and deeper learning, but also require careful scaffolding (Coyle et al., 2010) that was not often incorporated into the lessons.

Overall, the primary frustrations among teachers appeared to stem from inadequate planning and a lingering sense of being unfulfilled in their initial roles as "content expert" and "language expert" under the CLIL framework. Nonetheless, after five weeks of team teaching, there were some positive outcomes.

Benefits for Teachers

Professional learning was a significant benefit for both James and Minh. Despite occasional disagreements about the content, James admitted that he learned a new topic that he could incorporate into a unit for his upcoming sustainable development course. Furthermore, Minh was more technologically savvy than James, using a variety of apps, interactive slides, and other ICT tools in the classroom that he had not used before. James learned how to incorporate these alternative forms of input and make his classes more multimodal, in line with the CLIL approach (Coyle et al., 2010). For Minh, participating in team teaching was an opportunity to develop her skills as a novice university teacher. She learned a variety of CLIL techniques, including how to scaffold for task-based learning and how to adapt authentic articles to fit her students' language levels.

Additionally, compared to their individual teaching practices, their team-teaching approach provided more opportunities for reflective practice. As noted above, reflective practice involves critically analyzing and evaluating one's own teaching methods and strategies. By reflecting on

what works well and what needs improvement, teachers can continually develop their skills and knowledge in their field (Farrell, 2018). According to James and Minh, reflecting on their experiences through interviews was beneficial, but their collaboration itself was a key driver behind their growth as teachers. This suggests the potential of team teaching as a vehicle for professional development, providing opportunities for teachers to learn new skills, gain exposure to different teaching styles, and engage in reflective practice as a team.

Benefits for Students

The team-teaching approach also appeared to benefit students in several ways. Generally speaking, by having two teachers in the classroom, students are able to receive a more well-rounded education, as the teachers' individual strengths and areas of expertise can complement each other to provide a more comprehensive learning experience (Gladman, 2015). James reported that the students expressed feeling more supported in their task-based activities and group work in their reflection papers, which had a positive impact on their ability to grasp the class material. With two teachers available, students received more personalized attention tailored to their specific needs and learning styles. In particular, they were appreciative of Minh's individual coaching sessions, where she met with students outside of class to guide them in thinking through issues and forming arguments for class debates.

The students also had two types of support for their language learning needs. In line with translanguaging practices, James sometimes used Japanese in class for encouragement or praise, and occasionally for examining vocabulary. On the topic of gene editing, for example, James asked the students: "Should autism be edited out of the human genome? Some say that it's not a disability." He then asked students what the word for autism is in Japanese, and they

answered: "*jiheishō*" (自閉症). After writing it on the board, James pointed out that the kanji literally mean "close (off) oneself disease," which may have negative connotations that are not present in the English word. Conversely, Minh, as an absolute beginner in Japanese, provided a different type of support in the classroom: The students were forced to use their English with her (sometimes called "pushed output"; see Swain, 1985), which likely had added benefits in terms of language immersion and fluency development.

James and Minh's complementary approaches may have been particularly beneficial to students in the learning process, as well. James had a "soft touch" when it came to helping struggling students, as he would readily engage in small talk and offer support in a non-threatening way. This approach aligns with research that suggests that building positive teacher–student relationships can have a significant impact on student learning outcomes (Roorda et al., 2011). James' approach may have created a safe environment wherein students felt comfortable to express their thoughts, ask questions, and seek assistance. Minh's more challenging approach, on the other hand, encouraged students to step out of their comfort zones and develop their critical thinking skills, which are important for academic success and beyond (McPeck, 1981). By presenting students with intellectually demanding tasks, Minh's approach may have fostered the development of higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and intellectual autonomy, helping to prepare them for the rigors of academic life and future professional challenges. Consequently, this combination of support and challenge or "*ame to muchi*" (飴と鞭, literally "candy and whip" in Japanese) has been shown to lead to increased student motivation and engagement (Stipek, 2002).

Finally, the occasional fluidity of the teachers' roles was a departure from the

traditional "sage on the stage" model (King, 1993). James, for example, not only lectured but also acted as a "guide on the side," facilitating class debates and asking Minh questions about the content. Minh also demonstrated a willingness to admit when she did not know the answer, which, in turn, allowed students to not know and encouraged them to take ownership of their learning. Minh furthermore encouraged students to critically engage with the content by presenting opposing views to the information James presented to students. This willingness to challenge each other and offer different perspectives likely reinforced in the students the idea that learning is a collaborative process. Their team-teaching dynamic, in this way, seemed to create a model learning environment; this approach, consistent with CLIL principles (Coyle et al., 2010), appeared to not only encourage students to think critically, but also to take responsibility for their own learning and develop the skills necessary for future academic and professional success.

Professional or Personal?

James and Minh were acquaintances and had a working relationship when they first began team teaching. Over time, their interaction deepened and eventually developed into a friendship. While this allowed them to develop a closer relationship and strengthened their educational partnership in some respects, it also created challenges in terms of maintaining a level of accountability in their collaborative work. Minh admitted that the informal nature of the friendship made it difficult for her to make formal demands of James, especially regarding her research. Similarly, formal changes in their teaching methods may have been difficult because the teachers had fallen into comfortable routines. This problem is not limited to James and Minh's experience and has been discussed elsewhere in the literature on team teaching (e.g., Pearce & Oyama, 2019). It therefore

seems crucial for those considering team teaching to attempt to strike a balance between professionalism and building personal relationships. By establishing clear expectations and boundaries, teachers can ensure that their collaboration remains productive and effective, while also maintaining a positive and supportive relationship outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of two university teachers who attempted team teaching a Soft CLIL approach for the first time. Based on reflexive thematic analysis conducted on data from teacher interviews and field notes, the findings showed that both teachers faced problems due to a lack of flexibility, conflicting expectations, and disagreements regarding content selection and instruction. James, the lead teacher, was often unwilling to relinquish control and allowed Minh to co-teach only as a gesture of goodwill towards her research project. James was initially opposed to team teaching because of his past experiences as an assistant language teacher. Additionally, the study found differing views on class preparation, as James did not like to over-plan, while Minh preferred to plan in meticulous detail. Moreover, in class, both teachers felt that the presentation and discussion of the content were one-sided, with one teacher taking the spotlight and the other feeling left out. This led to competition at times, and the agreed-upon roles of the teachers were sometimes reversed. These challenges made it difficult to effectively co-teach the course and often caused tension and dissatisfaction on both sides.

Despite lingering frustrations, however, James and Minh were able to find benefits in terms of professional learning. Minh, as a novice university teacher, learned a variety of CLIL techniques from James and gained confidence in her teaching skills. Similarly, James learned new content areas and how to incorporate other forms of input

to make future classes more multimodal and aligned with a CLIL approach. In the end, their team teaching seemed to provide a good balance of support and challenge for students and a more well-rounded learning experience than perhaps possible in a solo-taught course. The teachers also developed a close friendship through their collaboration, but this presented challenges in maintaining accountability and making formal changes to their approach. These findings underscore the importance of striking a balance between professionalism and personal relationships to ensure team teaching is effective.

The present study was exploratory and preliminary in nature and was limited by the lack of data collected directly from students. The findings and conclusions should therefore be taken with caution. The voluntary nature of the team-teaching arrangement and the fact that both teachers were non-Japanese in a Japanese context may also add a unique dimension to this study, but also limit its generalizability. It is nevertheless hoped that the findings and practical implications of the study may serve as a basis for future research and suggest some of the benefits and challenges that team-taught Soft CLIL has for university language classes. Despite the differing views and attitudes of the two teachers, their partnership seemed to result in a more comprehensive educational experience for their students, with added benefits for their own professional development. By engaging in team teaching and reflective practice, teachers can better understand their students' learning needs and adjust their teaching approaches to optimize student success.

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