

Title	The value and practice of dialogic teaching
Sub Title	
Author	Shea, David P.
Publisher	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要刊行委員会
Publication year	2020
Jtitle	慶應義塾大学日吉紀要. 英語英米文学 (The Keio University Hiyoshi review of English studies). Vol.73, No.2020 (9. ) ,p.1- 27
JaLC DOI	
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Notes	
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	<a href="https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10030060-20200930-0001">https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AN10030060-20200930-0001</a>

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# The Value and Practice of Dialogic Teaching

David P. Shea

**Abstract:** This paper presents a grounded analysis of student attitudes toward the dialogic instructional style used in an advanced, first-year university EFL classroom. During the two semesters of a year-long class that met weekly, I conducted 22 anonymous surveys of student opinion, which I analyzed qualitatively. Three general themes emerged. First, students shifted their view of the L2, adopting a more active and engaged stance toward language study. Second, students expressed positive endorsement for the teacher's interactional style, albeit with some reservations about overlap and interruption. Third, students seemed to appropriate a new sense of identity vis-à-vis English, with increased confidence and commitment. Findings suggest that the dialogic approach was grounded in a social orientation to the L2 in the third space of the FL classroom.

## Introduction

Dialogic teaching is a principled way to engage Japanese university students in the English FL classroom, to develop academic language skills and improve motivation and attitudes toward L2 study, while avoiding what Freire (1968) termed banking education, defined as putting information into student heads like depositing money into a bank account. Dialogic teaching aims for independence, engagement, and creativity, seeking to facilitate

participation through collaborative interaction and shared discourse. Many Japanese students enter the university EFL classroom with limited experience using the L2 on their own terms. In many cases, students have memorized the dictionary meaning of words on vocabulary lists, with few chances to address the words to an audience in a compelling, persuasive way. Similarly, not many students have had practice using English as an analytic tool of academic inquiry, explaining ideas, presenting evidence, and participating in constructive discussion. Students invariably begin language study on the tertiary level with little if any confidence to express opinions in situations that matter, and few seem to identify with English or have the sense that the L2 is a part of their orientation to the world. Some students successfully use the language in class activity, such as participating in small group discussion or reading English stories and textbooks, but on the whole, many students lack investment in the language. It is on this point, arguably, that dialogic teaching may contribute, because through critical and analytic engagement, students gain practice in real contexts of presenting ideas and developing interpretations.

### **Speaking Out**

I taught the first-year advanced English communication course for most of my 20 year tenure in the Faculty of Commerce at Keio. When students entered their first class, I would typically ask what they knew about the founder of the university. Many said that they knew Fukuzawa-sensei began Keio Gijuku as a school of Dutch studies in 1858, but many did not know that he quickly switched after visiting the port of Yokohama to practice his Dutch, only to find that everyone was speaking English. He began his study of “the universal language of the future” the next day (Fukuzawa, 1899, p. 103).

Most students know that Fukuzawa-sensei said that all people are created equal under heaven, and they also know that his face is on the 10,000 yen note – at least as long as the government keeps it there, but many students do not know that Yukichi Fukuzawa was an English teacher, someone who read the language and did translation and interpretation. Nor do they realize that English was such a big part of Keio University, and many are surprised to hear that, as YF wrote in his autobiography, “The chief subject of instruction in my school was English” (Fukuzawa, 1899, p. 228). Some students know that YF was on the first ship to leave the country, the *Kanrin Maru*, which sailed while Japan was still officially isolated from the West, no foreigners allowed in, no Japanese allowed out, but they do not know that he talked his way onto the manifest, using his connections and powers of persuasion rather than credentials or special qualifications because at the time, he had only an incipient knowledge of English. When he got to the US, Fukuzawa sneaked away from the delegation to talk to local people and learn how they thought and lived, though it was still technically against the law for Japanese to interact with foreigners. Reading the autobiography, it is easy to get the impression that YF was not one who blindly followed the rules.

With his increasing proficiency in English, Fukuzawa-sensei served as official interpreter on two more voyages before the Meiji era, first on an extended trip to the UK/Europe, and then to the east coast of the US. One of the most impressive discoveries made during his time abroad was the practice of making a speech, something that Fukuzawa-sensei saw as critical to the spread of democracy. One of the first moves made after returning to Japan was to build the *enzetsukan*, which was completed in 1875 (Meiji 7). Making a speech is a fundamental activity for Keio students, who should stand up, he said, and speak out, expressing their ideas about issues facing

the country.

I find the story about the *enzetsukan*, which is the oldest building on the Mita campus, particularly relevant to English language education in Japan today. To make a speech in the Edo period was a radically progressive idea, because it conceded nothing to traditional hierarchy and social authority. It was also dangerous. To express one's opinion publicly in front of a high-ranking samurai or *tonosama* lord risked getting one's head cut off for insubordination. While the expected recrimination today is not as immediately life threatening, speaking out is still risky, and students regularly report fear of expressing themselves in front of classmates. The *enzetsukan* remains a quiet testament to the founder's vision and a reminder that to be a student of Yukichi Fukuzawa means overcoming the traditional reluctance to express an opinion. In other words, studying English means standing up, expressing ideas, and debating a critical manner, with respect and consideration. When first-year students begin class at university, most would – without doubt – rather sit quietly and listen, but to follow Fukuzawa-sensei means that everyone speaks up and expresses ideas publicly to the world, as an exercise of democracy and independence, in a collegial and creative manner.

### **Collaborative Production**

While practical considerations may be foremost in student minds, two theoretical concepts underlie dialogic teaching: addressivity and scaffolding. I draw on the notion of addressivity developed by the literary theorist Bakhtin, as an issue of social perspective. Addressivity asserts that the words we speak are always inflected with the words of others, both those who have addressed us and those whom we address. This dialogicality of address works to shape what we say, as well as how we say it, because when

we speak to others, our words are imbued with voice and perspective: “From the very beginning, the utterance is constructed while taking into account possible responsive reactions for whose sake, in essence, it is actually created” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 87). Addressivity is typically brought up when discussing the interpretations of texts, but it is also fundamental when thinking of language development, since meaning is generated in an interpretive community that grounds individual understanding, as students construct ideas and develop interpretations with the voices and perspectives of others in a wider community of participation. This social orientation and, within its parameters, the coordinated attention and response, thus shapes the way students produce and understand the L2.

Vygotsky’s notion of shared cognition is widely accepted in first language learning contexts (Wells, 2015) as a way to define the assistance of the teacher, allowing learners to perform better with assistance than alone (Gibbons, 2009). A Vygotskian understanding of language development suggests that what is learned individually first appears in social interaction before being appropriated by the individual (Gibbons, 2003; Wells, 2015). That is, as learners participate in constructing new knowledge, they learn how to reason as well as talk, developing strategies which include such advanced skills as “how to adapt a position on an issue, support it with reasons and evidence, challenge the positions of others, and rebut counter arguments” (Gillies, 2016, p. 47). The construct of scaffolded assistance is thus a fundamental mechanism of dialogic teaching, even though developing a sense of collaboration is difficult when so much of language study in many if not most Japanese high schools is oriented to entrance exams (Kikuchi & Browne, 2009), which suggests that the first challenge of a dialogic approach on the university level is to reformulate the parameters of language study.

In my class, I introduce the issue of collaborative production (or positioning) by showing students an *akabeko* bobbing-head doll from Fukushima. Foreign language ability, I propose, is not an independent construct; rather, it is influenced by those whom we address, and if they listen with respect and attention, bobbing their heads like an *akabeko* doll, we are encouraged and become stronger speakers. If, however, the listener offers half-hearted attention – or worse, a dismissive attitude that ignores and belittles what the speaker is trying to say, confidence and engagement are inevitably affected and proficiency drops. In short, the social context in which an interlocutor speaks is a fundamental part of language pragmatics, coloring every aspect of interaction (Shea, 1994; Young, 2018).

### **Dialogic Teaching**

Recently, autonomous, self-directed approaches to learning have grown in popularity, a *laissez-faire* approach that assumes students learn best when the lesson is turned over to them, whether the assignment is to exchange opinions in small groups or to read and respond to written texts. In contrast, a Vygotskian approach emphasizes the role of the teacher in shaping the way that language is taken up. Empirical analyses of classroom instruction from a sociocultural perspective (e.g., Johnson, 2006) seek to trace the character of scaffolded assistance, in order to help students explicitly express ideas as well as indirectly create a supportive atmosphere.

Barnes (2008) was an early proponent of dialogic teaching. He studied the effect of classroom discourse on cognition and pointed out that “exploratory talk” (p. 2) shaped the way pupils not only engaged with the topic at hand, but also conceptualized issues and developed knowledge. Barnes noted that talk is a “tool of thinking” (p. 7) so that what a teacher says in the classroom becomes a means to actively construct reasoning,

showing students how to think. Having students talk through a problem allows them to understand it, as they do things like predict what will happen, make connections with prior knowledge, and test memories, all depending on the way in which the teacher leads the students. Alexander (2008, 2017) has written extensively about dialogic teaching, cataloging a detailed checklist of strategies that probe thinking and encourage analysis and speculation. Particular emphasis is placed on open ended questions as well as follow-up answers that not only guide student understanding of subject matter, but also lay the groundwork for “dialogue as cultural and civic imperatives” (p. 26).

Dialogic teaching is often defined in terms of “inquiry” where the purpose is to engage students in “exploring and considering possibilities” of ideas (Chappell, 2014, p. 8). Of particular concern are the ways in which students are positioned through talk. Are questions framed with yes-no answers that generate teacher evaluation, such as IRF (“that’s right”) patterns, or are questions genuinely open-ended, “asking for justification, challenging, or prompting for evidence” (Reznitskaya, 2012, p. 447)? Do students talk horizontally to each other, responding to classmates and building interpretations together, with words, perspectives, and ideas drawn from those around them? O’Connor, Michaels and Chapin (2015) build on the notion of “academically productive talk” as a tool of thinking. They focus on teacher-talk moves that seek explanation and “get students to work with one another’s ideas” (p. 119). Mercer and colleagues (Mercer, 2016; Mercer & Littleton, 2007) have looked at the development of collaborative thinking when teachers elicit explanations and seek to create in the classroom a “climate for talk” (Mercer & Howe, 2012, p. 18).

In Asia, there has recently been a shift toward incorporating dialogic interaction in second language contexts, especially Singapore, with



recognition that interpretive talk is more effective than “descriptive” lecture in creating meaning (Teo, 2016, 2019). Lee (2016) argued that “co-constructing knowledge and communicating ideas” (p. 2) involves recognition that knowledge is tied to “examining ideas and considering alternative viewpoints” (p. 11). In my own classroom, I have looked at the quality of instruction, trying to measure how closely teacher-fronted discourse approached the ideal of effective engagement and accountable talk (Shea, 2019). In particular, I found that it is not easy to be completely responsive to students, given the exigencies of organizing a classroom of 20–25 individuals. I also found that efforts to employ light-hearted humor while trying to make a personal connection with students often generated unintended mistakes and unhelpful behavior.

I have reported on a classroom activity I call “standup” that seeks to compel students to participate actively in class (Shea, 2017a). Although somewhat “shy” and reluctant to express ideas in front of classmates, students generally responded well to being “pushed” to speak, the desire to improve English greater than the culturally situated reticence to avoid speaking. In other words, it is possible to say that when left to their own devices, many Japanese students are indeed notoriously silent in the FL classroom (King, 2013), but it is also possible to say that the trait is malleable and changes through practice. In fact, many students welcome the push as needed external encouragement.

### **Ethos of Dialog**

One of the more interesting shifts in the literature on dialogic teaching involves the distinction between epistemological and ontological perspectives on classroom interaction (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019). That is, there is a theoretical difference between interactional form as a way of

knowing and social engagement as a way of being. While most teachers encourage an orientation of “shared critical inquiry” (Kim & Wilkinson, 2019, p. 76), some emphasize community membership. For example, drawing on Rommetveit’s (1992) notion of intersubjectivity to describe how students build on classmates’ ideas, Wegerif (2008) points to the “interanimation of different perspectives” (p. 284) in a shared space for creative reflection. Specifically, the focus of dialogic teaching shifts from instructional talk as a “sequence of moves” (Kim & Wilkinson, p. 73) to the instantiation of a perspective that “requires participants listen to and respect each other” (p. 71). To paraphrase Wegerif’s point: dialogic teaching is developed through language but is not limited to language forms.

The argument suggests that when looking at dialogic teaching, it is important to recognize not simply the teacher’s interactional strategies, or even the ways in which students respond to instructional invitations, but the intersubjectivity that is created in the classroom. From the teacher’s point of view, the issue relates to understanding constructed in activity and suggests that this social orientation mediates the character of learning. In other words, the class atmosphere provides the contextual grounding that makes dialogic response possible.

## **Methods**

### *Characteristics of the Class*

The class upon which this study is based was an advanced first-year English communication course which carried graduation credit. Students were assigned based upon results on the institutional version of the TOEIC exam, with scores falling in the top range of the exam. Although there were a number of returnees who had lived in English-speaking countries for a significant amount of time (1 year or longer), most students had never lived

abroad and were simply talented and hardworking. I have written on the motivations and proficiencies present in this class and what they suggest about FL education in Japan (see Shea, 2017b).

The class itself was structured as a year-long content-based seminar (Shea, 2020). There were two sections, comparable in terms of number of students, proficiencies, assignments, *etc.* Class activities addressed contemporary business and social issues, and students participated in weekly discussion, presentation, and writing activities for two consecutive terms. Students were assigned to watch one movie per week and to read one critical review online (such as written by Roger Ebert). Students also wrote 4–5 short summary response essays per semester, approximately one essay every other week. Each class began with a stand-up oral quiz followed by small-group and whole-class discussion (Shea, 2017b) based on open-ended questions prepared beforehand. Typically, students discussed tentative answers in the small groups before addressing the class, proposing answers, presenting interpretations, and offering ideas. During whole-class discussion, I moderated individual presentations in as interactive a manner as possible, writing key phrases on the board, monitoring other students, and engaging with the presenter. I attempted to summarize, clarify, and extend presenter comments by asking follow-up questions, offering encouragement, and adding further interpretation in ways that seemed appropriate to support the speaker and focus the class on the discussion at hand. Throughout the year, I consciously employed discursive strategies that were noted in the Accountable Talk Chart (Appendix A), making a special effort to ask for reasons behind an opinion (“Could you explain that idea?”) and to solicit further comments from other members of the class (“Does anyone have a different perspective or something to add?”).

*Data Collection and Analysis*

In previous research (Shea, 2019), I looked at the character of teacher talk in my classroom, trying to determine whether dialogic strategies were implemented successfully. The analysis produced, on the whole, favorable results, but the question of what *students* thought about dialogic instruction was left largely unaddressed. As a result, I seek in this paper to focus on learner perspectives, trying to record what students thought about dialogic teaching and the way they responded to instruction. I adopt the perspective of practitioner research, which affirms “small-scale, localised, context specific” inquiry in “ordinary classrooms” (Walsh, 2011, p, 142) and “positions teachers as legitimate ... creators of knowledge” (Johnson & Golombek, 2011, p. 488). Many SLA theorists endorse small group work to take advantage of increased interactional opportunities, given the “preponderance of the recitation script” and a clear tendency to assert control of the classroom with “factual answers and known information,” attempting to produce “qualitatively superior talk” (Chappell, 2014, p. 2), but I seek to place greater emphasis on teacher guided interaction, in part because of the limitations of small group work (Mercer & Littleton, 2007; Shea, 2018), in part because I want to affirm the primacy of dialogic interaction in promoting L2 development.

In order to capture the students’ point of view, I carried out a series of short, open-ended surveys throughout the academic year, which students wrote at the end of class. My goal was not only to discern what students thought about teacher-led discussion, but also to see how students were orienting to the social context in which class discussion was set, what Boyd and Markarian (2011) call a discourse space “for exploration” (p. 515). I hoped to describe what worked, what did not, and how students changed their attitude toward English as a result. In particular, I wanted to trace the

way in which the development of language proficiency is “embedded” in “social relationships” (Barnes, 2008, p. 9).

In addition to eighteen single question surveys, I collected four term-final class questionnaires. I also included two term-final evaluations from the previous year’s classes, which were broadly similar with respect to number of students, activities, tone of discussion, *etc.* In total, I collected more than 400 reflective comments on both surveys and evaluations (see Appendix B). Students granted oral and written permission to collect, analyze, and discuss the data on the condition that anonymity be maintained. Students also requested that I edit comments for grammar as long as the content of the comment was not changed.

To analyze the data, I followed principles of interpretive inquiry (Patton, 2015). I first read the data set recursively, seeking to identify key categories based on commonality and salience. I then reviewed the preliminary themes that emerged, trying to make connections until axial groupings emerged and saturation was reached (by which I mean all comments were catalogued). Throughout the analysis, I sought to generate a grounded interpretation that explained student comments in a consistent manner. In the next section, I present the central elements that emerged from the analysis.

## **Findings**

Three findings stood out. First, views of English shifted noticeably over the year-long course of the class, as students constructed a more active image of what language study entailed. Second, students affirmed the proactive role of the teacher, signaling approval for scaffolding discourse that supported and extended student talk. The endorsement, however, was not unconditional and it points to the difficulty of balancing conflicting and sometimes incompatible expectations. Third, the way that students oriented

to English changed as their identification with the language also shifted. Students cited growing confidence and fluency associated with a deepening membership in the surrounding community of learners. In sum, the FL classroom served as the nexus of growth and increasing engagement with the world, harking back to Yukichi Fukuzawa's practical injunction to speak out, while anticipating new associations and identities gained in the L2.

*Shifting Views of Language Study*

Through their participation in the dialogic classroom, students began to see English less as a subject of study, especially as expressed in traditional teacher-fronted lecture, and more as a means of engagement and critical thinking:

*The way I think about English changed... from grammar and vocabulary... to how to make an argument in English. (CEL4/14)*

Students became more active and willing to take up an issue. Some contrasted the seminar style discussion of English class with lecture format courses, where the active engagement of English stood in noticeable contrast:

*Nearly every other class is one-way lecture. I listen and don't say my opinion. It's just putting information in your mind. (RQ4/15)*

*We only listen to what the teachers say and have no place to output our ideas. (RQ5/4)*

*Education in Japan is very passive and we don't argue or debate ideas. (RS4/1)*

Student comments suggested that the exchange of ideas and opinions in language class heightened the awareness of productive expression, as well as strengthened expectations that the instructor would frame learning as the construction of knowledge.

On the whole, students responded positively to the discussion-based structure of the class, demonstrating an openness and willingness to use the L2 to engage with content. For some, however, the change was gradual and it took more time to adjust than it took others:

*It's the first time in my life to discuss in English. (A5–15)*

*I had no discussion in high school. Every class was lecture style. (A4–12)*

*This class is unique in that students have to keep standing until they answer. Although it took some time to get used to this style, I eventually started to like it. (CEL4/17)*

The unfamiliarity did not, however, preclude accommodation. That is, students did not reject the dialogic approach because it was unfamiliar. In fact, most responded with enthusiasm as they talked about their interpretation. What is more, students seemed to realize that discussion in English was not limited to confrontation, but involved complementarity and the inter-animation of voice:

*In my speaking class in high school, we did a lot of debate, so it was almost always thinking about disagreement, but in this class, I got to agree with others but still from a different perspective. (CEL4/18)*

In other words, students were beginning to move beyond the exam-orientation brought from high school. Proficiency was seen less in terms of structure and skills, and more in terms of point of view and getting an idea across, which involved a whole range of integrated practices. Students were not just “listening.” They were orienting to others, appropriating expressions, borrowing perspectives, and building ideas to make them clear, as others in the class were doing, too. The development of fluency and increased confidence generated by this engagement was surprising to many:

*In high school, it was grammar, grammar, grammar .... I never thought that having discussion in class and explaining my own ideas would develop my writing and speaking ability. (CEL5/1)*

The change was not unexpected for everyone, however. A few saw active discussion as familiar and ordinary, similar to the way they had always approached language study:

*The way I think about English did not change because of this class. It's always been important. (CEL4/9)*

In addition, there were two or three students per class who responded on term final evaluations that they felt their English proficiency did not develop. Consequently, it is not possible to say that students were unanimously supportive of a dialogic approach, though most were positive, and it is fair to say that there was clear preference for engaging with ideas and content, emphasizing critical interpretation and analysis, in teacher-fronted dialog with classmates.



*Role of the Teacher*

Students were for the most part positive about the teacher's proactive engagement in whole-class discussion, trying to solicit student talk, seeking to clarify, connect, and extend ideas that were expressed in response to discussion questions. Students seemed to recognize the goal of the strategy as well as its effect, which nearly everyone saw as helpful. Teacher comments were particularly appreciated when students were stuck and unsure about what to say, or found it difficult to clarify ideas and expand abbreviated explanations. One student noted, for example:

*I have difficulty saying what I want to say but when the teacher gives me some keywords or something that supports me to speak, I feel glad about it. (T5/13)*

Like many in the class, the student clearly endorsed the strategy of collaboratively constructed discourse, aiming for shared talk within the zone of proximal development, following the proposition that learners can say with assistance what is beyond their ability to say individually. In general, students reported that they were able to try out more complex ideas that they would otherwise likely not have attempted to express because of this assistance:

*[The teacher's] comment after we speak makes me understand better what I said myself. (CEF 5/18)*

Some students phrased this interactional stance in general terms of support while others saw more sustained instruction in the teacher's position, not limited to linguistic features but extending to analysis and interpretation. As

one student wrote:

*The teacher helps me to think more. (H4/1b)*

Students felt that, overall, the shared discussion stimulated their thinking. Most were glad to get help and encouragement, with the result that they were able to speak more accurately with more insight because of the guided response offered as part of whole-class discussion.

The students, however, were not unanimously positive about teacher assistance. There was a small amount of frustration and even resentment evident in the comments. Some students felt that, at times, their opportunity to speak was not expanded but limited by the teacher's feedback:

*Most of the time, the comments you give us ...gather my thoughts, but it would help if you could just let us finish what we are saying. (T4/3)*

*Sometimes the professor speaks too much and I have to stop. (J5-9)*

*I loved how the teacher gave us questions to expand our ideas, but I would appreciate it if he didn't speak while we are still explaining... (CEL5/18)*

Certainly, the obstruction was not intentional.

From the teacher's perspective, my feeling is that mistakes are inevitable when trying to deal simultaneously with 20-plus students in the classroom, all of whom seem to require immediate and complete attention. The teacher does not have the ability to observe classroom dynamics from the distance of a researcher in the back of the room, but must face the real-

time requirements of running a class for all participants, not just the one speaker. Even students themselves recognized the complex tensions involved when the effort to validate one person's response conflicted with the commitment to sustaining a high level of excitement in the class:

*I generally like your way to teach, but sometimes I don't like you because you make people laugh at me. At the same time I enjoy it, so keep going please. (T4/9)*

In other words, the scaffolding strategy was fraught with both possibility and ambiguity, for students *and* the teacher. Scaffolding has the potential to support, but it also has the possibility to intimidate, and at times cause confusion. A dialogic stance is not automatically implemented successfully or necessarily well received. Further, it takes time to get used to, and the committed teacher is left with the conviction that students who are not at first convinced will eventually recognize what is going on.

### *Shifting Identity*

A third finding of the study was that, over the year-long course of the class, students began to reconceptualize a new sense of identity vis-à-vis English, as they became more engaged with the language, demonstrating increased fluency, confidence, and commitment. Before entering the class, students appeared to relate to English primarily as an exam subject which fulfilled the traditional gate-keeping function associated with university entrance. While some felt positive about this approach, others felt dislike, because English was imposed from the outside, unrelated to a personal sense of identity. As students began to engage with ideas and participate in discussion, however, English increasingly became a way to orient to

classmates and think about issues being introduced. One student wrote, for example:

*This class changed my English identity. Before, I thought English was just baggage, but now, English has become my mother language.*  
(O5/12)

While others were less enthusiastic, many concurred:

*I realized that English is for using, not just studying.* (O4/15)

*My brain is changing from Japanese to English.* (5/11)

*I feel closer to English now.* (CEL5/7)

Although a number of students began to realize that things were different, they did not always recognize what motivated the change. One student wrote, for example:

*Before this class, English was just a language to connect with foreigners, but I learned that English isn't just a tool, it's something different. It has more meaning. I can't explain it. I wish we could discuss this issue in class.* (CEL5/3)

As the teacher, my intuition is that this student, like others in the class, began to sense a different orientation to the language, shifting away from the traditional conception of English as a tool of conversation to talk to native speakers, generally limited to foreign visitors, and toward an understanding

of English as an expression of identity and thought.

At the heart of this shift was the dialogic environment of the classroom, and the positionings associated with discursive interaction. There seemed to be a growing sense of membership that stretched beyond mastery of vocabulary and linguistic structure. Students turned to speak to those around them, and listened in turn, constructing a social enactment of linguistic fluency. It was because students oriented to this shared address that they were able to build ideas and develop interpretations, sometimes contrastively, sometimes jointly:

*After taking this class, I realize that I pay less attention to other's grammar and pronunciation mistakes, but I have more interest in the content of their talk and their ideas. (O5/3)*

*The social environment really affects how I learn English and how I behave during class. (S5/11)*

Clarity and articulation grew from the intention to make oneself understood. Orienting to classmates gave students the incentive to speak, to be understood, and to understand others. One student captured this point, stating:

*Explaining to other people makes your idea clear. (RQ4/15)*

As a result, students deepened their identification with the language, shifting from framing English as something out there, apart from themselves, to a way to understand and relate to people around them:

*We're doing class in English, not learning English itself. (C4/17)*

*To me, this class wasn't an English class. It was critical thinking in English. (CEL5/3)*

In essence, the data point to a deeper, more pragmatic identification with English, rooted in using the language as an instrument of social positioning and a tool for critical analysis.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have presented a grounded analysis of student attitudes and opinions generated in a first-year English class, where the intention was to introduce and build on dialogic, teacher-fronted discussion. Findings suggest that student attitudes shifted noticeably, both in terms of how language was viewed and how personal identity was enacted. Students were decidedly positive about active engagement with English, using the L2 as a means to express opinions and develop ideas. Students also endorsed, for the most part, the proactive role of the teacher to promote accountable talk and expand reasoning and explanation, although there was some frustration about miscues and flawed enactment of support. Finally, students seemed to become more confident about using the L2, as many noted a deeper identification with English and improved fluency in the language. In short, there was a noticeably closer and more personal connection with the L2.

It is, without doubt, important to stress that not all students felt positive about dialogic instruction, either about the class as a whole or about the individual's position in it, especially in the early stages of the semester. There were one or two (possibly three) students in each class who stated that they did not feel positive about dialogic classroom activities, whether

because they did not feel comfortable speaking to their peers, or because they preferred a more independent, less coordinated discussion style. The clear majority of students, however, spoke in enthusiastic support of dialogic interaction. First, the feeling during class itself was genuinely positive, and the atmosphere in the room was reliably energetic. Second, the anonymous nature of the surveys made it impossible to determine who wrote what opinion. More importantly, it was always clear that student attitudes were shifting, and indeed, as a number of comments noted, many students started out skeptical and slowly began to change as the class progressed over the two semesters. Finally, as Abraham Lincoln noted, it is not possible to please all the people all the time. There will always be students who, for whatever reason, refuse to join other students in the class. The teacher simply cannot organize a classroom on the basis of reluctance. At the same time, there is a need to foster an attitude of openness and receptivity to student comments, while adopting a reflective sensitivity. Simply put, “Dialogic teaching is difficult” (Sedova, Salamounova, & Svaricek, 2014, p. 282). However attractive in theory, it is not easy to enact in practice, especially balancing support for all students with help for one speaker (Sedova, Salamounova, & Svaricek, 2014).

Nonetheless, I would contend that dialogic interaction offers a way to view the L2 classroom as a transformative third space (Kramsch, 2009; Lin, 2010), transcending the cultural perspectives and practices of both the L1 and L2 to create a unique synthesis. It is sometimes asserted by critics that English is not needed in Japan, except perhaps to communicate with foreigners. The findings from this study make it clear, however, that not only do students speak to each other meaningfully, they build a new sense of identity together in the shared dialogic space created by the L2. With a dialogic approach, students move beyond the concern for test scores, while

they locate language study as an expression of shared social engagement. This process is not an issue of grammar, but a matter of fluency, argumentation, and pragmatic relevance that involves borrowing words, sharing insights, and adopting new perspectives.

The implications of this social orientation are broad, and fundamentally inform the reason to study English. For first-year students who have struggled with the gatekeeping pressure of entrance exams, the dialogic classroom offers a chance to make English their own, to use the language as a tool of inquiry and cognitive exploration in meaningful exchange with other learners, developing a focus that transcends nationality and touches upon addressing the world. As students express their ideas and understandings, they learn with their classmates an ethos of shared inquiry in the dialogic construction of what they are about.

### **Acknowledgments**

I am enormously grateful to Bernard Susser, Adam Komisarof, and Mikako Takeuchi for reading earlier drafts of this manuscript and suggesting corrections that made the paper far better than it would have been on its own. I am also indebted to students in the English film class, both fourth and fifth periods, for their cooperation and agreement to participate in this research project.

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## Appendix A

<b>Accountable Talk Chart</b>	
<b>Re-voicing</b> so you’re saying...? do you mean...?	<b>Adding On</b> someone add to that? another comment?
<b>Repeating</b> can you restate...? would you explain further?	<b>Reasoning</b> do you agree or disagree? can you explain why?
<b>Waiting</b> take your time... we can wait...	<b>Turn and Talk</b> ask your classmate see what they think

**Appendix B**

## Anonymous Open-ended Surveys &amp; Class Evaluations

#	ID Code	Number of Students	Date	Topic
1	M4	1~19	5/15/19	writing essays
2	M5	1~20	5/15/19	“
3	Di4	1~19	6/5/19	discussing to understand film
4	Di5	1~22	6/5/19	“
5	Con4	1~20	6/19/19	whether confidence is improving
6	Con5	1~20	6/19/19	“
7	T4	1~18	6/26/19	the role of teacher in class discussion
8	T5	1~21	6/26/19	“
9	I4	1~18	7/10/19	using content to study English
10	I5	1~19	7/10/19	“
(1)	CEL4	1~18	1/16/19	teaching style, activities, <i>etc.</i>
(2)	CEL5	1~22	1/16/19	“
(3)	CES4	1~20	7/17/19	activities, student expectations, <i>etc.</i>
(4)	CES5	1~21	7/17/19	“
11	O4	1~19	10/16/19	way students think about English
12	O5	1~17	10/16/19	“
13	H4	1~16	12/11/19	how talking helps writing
14	H5	1~18	12/11/19	“
15	RQ4	1~17	12/18/19	how the atmosphere influences class
16	RQ5	1~19	12/18/19	“
17	RS4	1~20	1/8/20	approach in this class
18	RS5	1~20	1/8/20	“
(5)	CEF4	1~19	1/15/20	way students think about English , <i>etc.</i>
(6)	CEF5	1~21	1/15/20	“