

Collaboratively Visualizing Possible Others

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In this collaborative, self-reflective research, we asked our students periodically over the course of one semester how they thought they could be helping each other learn English as a foreign language better, and what we teachers could do too for their learning. We think we ended up teaching better by seeing how we could collaborate better with our students, and in the process becoming better collaborators and learners ourselves. For the present study, we explain the socio-dynamic changes seeded by sharing each others' voices—students to each other, students to us teachers, and us teachers to each other. Data for this study were collected in our English communication oriented classes throughout one semester. First, surveys elicited students' responses to class activities and also their ways of participating in class. Then the students' responses were periodically looped back to them to reflect upon what they and their classmates were saying, and to add further data. Also, each of us four teachers kept a journal to reflect upon our own teaching and the students' classroom behaviors. These reflections were shared among the four of us, and sometimes parts were also shared with the students. Additionally, we shared voices in classroom discussions (for students and teachers) and research team discussions (for us teachers), which led us to co-construct affinity spaces for mutual learning and development. The findings are presented here in narrative form, with processes of the respective teacher-researcher's and their students' mutual transformation through the lessons and research described in detail.

内省を用いた協働の研究において、学生にある学期に渡って定期的に、どのようにすれば英語を外国語としてよりよく学ぶのを助け合えると思うか、また、教師の側も学生の学習を助けるには何をすればよいかを問うた。どのようにして学生と協働すればよいかを省察することにより、また我々自身がよりよい協働者そして学習者になる過程において、我々の教育も最終的に改善されたと考える。当研究に関しては、お互いの声を共有する（学生同士、学生から我々教師へ、我々教師同士）ことによって播種された、社会動学的変化を説明する。当研究のデータは、我々が担当した英語のコミュニケーションを重視したクラスで、一つの学期に渡って収集したものである。まず調査紙によって、授業の活動に対する学生の反応、およびどのように授業に参加しているかが明らかになった。次に学生の反応は定期的に学生自身に還元され、自分やクラスメートがどう答えたのかを省察し、さらにデータを収集した。また我々4名の教師もそれぞれが、自分自身の教育や学生の教室での行動を振り返るために、定期的な記述記録を保存した。これらの省察は我々4名の間で共有され、その一部は時に応じて学生とも共有された。それに加えて教室での議論の内容（学生と教師に向けて）や、研究グループでの議論（私たち教師に向けて）も共有し、我々が相互に学習や成長をするための親和空間を共同で構成することへとつながった。本稿では得られた知見を、それぞれの教師および研究者とその学生が相互に、詳細に記述される授業と研究を通して変容する過程を通して物語り形式で提示していく。

Keywords

ideal classmates, possible selves, affinity space, critical participatory looping, near peer role modelling

キーワード

理想的クラスメート像、可能性のある自己、親和空間、批判的参加循環、近似的ピア理想モデル

Yusuke and Aya were asked an interesting question by their teacher: "Please describe a group of classmates that you could learn English well with. What would you all do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably?" Aya said she wanted her classmates to speak more in English so she could learn more. Yusuke said he thought people should not laugh at other's mistakes. All the students' comments were collected and given back to the class in a handout. Both Aya and Yusuke saw their comments and were glad that others were reading them. But they were actually more moved by another classmate's comments a few weeks later when she was talking

about reading the whole class's comments. She said: "I could know what is an ideal person. Now I will try to be an ideal person. And I'll try to enjoy studying English, talk with my classmates in English more. I think that my motivation becomes high because of this survey." – (A recreated scenario of student interaction with a real student quote at the end.)

There are a variety of ways imagination can positively motivate language learners, which is particularly important for those who are struggling with the challenges inherent to language learning. Images of a possible self using the language well in the future can contribute to improving motivation (Murray, 2013). Focusing too much on the self, however, can actually foster a deterioration of positive psychological benefits (Robinson & Tamir, 2011). Placing at least some of the imaginative focus instead on others can bring a healthy, adaptive perspective in imagining, and therefore we have proposed imagining Ideal Classmates as one way of doing this (Murphey, Falout, Fukuda, & Fukuda, 2014). For the present study, we investigate the potential effects these imaginings might have on classroom interpersonal dynamics through exploratory action research (see Smith, 2015).

We will attempt to relate the shifting interrelationships and developing abilities of our students and us, the teacher-researchers, in visualizing how we all collaborate to learn and teach a second language (L2) together. We will also present some of the shifting perspectives between focus on self and others that are important to forming visualizations appropriate for inducing positive transformations in L2 learning.

With these goals in mind, we set the following research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: How do our students transform their class participation or engagement through their visualizations of Ideal Classmates?
- RQ2: How can we as teacher-researchers transform our ways of teaching our English classes in better ways through hearing and reflecting our students' voices in the present study?

Literature Review

Humans are cognitively adept (although not necessarily accurate) at predicting what might happen and how they might feel in the future to prepare themselves for avoiding adverse possibilities and attaining preferable possibilities (Gilbert & Wilson, 2007). Imagining a positive possible self that one would like to become can strongly influence the activation, continuation, and preservation of behaviors and strategies that lead to becoming that person (Markus & Nurius, 1986). This theory of motivated behavior, called possible selves theory, has inspired an influential theory in applied linguistics. It is called *the L2 motivational self system*, which posits that imagining a future self whose language abilities are superior to those of one's present self, can spur greater interest and commitment in the present toward achieving such goals (Dörnyei, 2009).

Qualitative and quantitative evidence from English classrooms in Japan (Fukada, Fukuda, Falout, & Murphey, 2011; Munezane, 2015; Nitta & Baba, 2015; Sampson 2012, 2016) and other countries (Chan, 2014; Mackay, 2014; Magid, 2014) has shown that envisioning positive future L2 selves can indeed engage individual student's positive psychological factors and self-reported efforts to learn a language. Much about these pedagogical treatments focused primarily on the self only, rather than directing some focus toward others as possible role models for the self.

Possible selves theory, however, emphasizes the primacy of social comparisons of self to others, because of the social influence that others have upon internalized values and self-be-

liefs. Also, images of one's positive and negative role models act as a means of creating and changing possible selves images (Markus & Nurius, 1986). It is important to focus on the self in pedagogical applications of possible selves theory, but not without forgetting to include relevant and necessary focus on others as models of ideal or possible selves. Results from one study (Lockwood & Kunda, 1999) caution that an over-focus on academic ideal selves can hinder the motivational development of learners because it prevents them from visualizing even better possible selves, as could be imagined if role models—the focus on others—were included in the visualization treatments. Focusing on negative role models informs people about what to avoid, and focusing on positive role models helps people to set their targets higher and work toward them (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002). In sum, possible selves are drawn from the examples of others (Markus & Nurius, 1986), or what some researchers refer to as near peer role models (Murphey & Arao, 2001; Ogawa, 2012; Singh, 2010).

With the Ideal Classmates activities, we believe we are encouraging the self-regulatory powers of retrospection, propection, and theory of mind. In asking our students to imagine how others can help them to learn English effectively and enjoyably, we believe students are drawing upon their own experiences with past classmates (retrospection); imaging what might work for them in learning (propection); and then reacting to others in the classroom from a heightened sensitivity and realizing that what they are wanting from others, they themselves may not be doing and thus should be doing, a process we call reciprocal idealizing (Murphey et al., 2014). As we concluded after using Ideal Classmates activities and research in our classrooms (Murphey et al., 2014):

Findings suggest that pedagogical applications of possible selves theory would do well to include active participation of imaginings within a lived experience, proximal peers and environments, past and present self guides, and possible others. (p. 242)

In the present study, we explore how students as well as teachers can develop themselves as better language learners and teachers by visualizing possible others together.

Methodology

Research participants

There are two sets of research participants for the present study: students who are taking our English courses and we ourselves, their teachers.

The student participants were undergraduate students from private universities in the Kanto region of Japan, taking English communication courses taught by two of us authors, Yoshi and Tetsuya. Yoshi focused on one class ($n = 6$), while Tetsuya focused on four classes in two universities ($n = 173$). The students' subject majors and English levels were varied. The stated objectives and contents of the English courses were also different, but the common point was that the students were encouraged to communicate in English through various tasks or activities (e.g., conversations, games, speeches, discussions, and presentations).

The other participants in this study were the teacher-researchers, not only Yoshi and Tetsuya themselves, but the whole research team, which includes two others, Tim and Joe. For several years the four of us have been collaborating as a research team, conducting studies into our classrooms together, yet also conducting our classes and studies separately, to support both our collaborative and individual pedagogical and research endeavors (see Murphey, Falout, Fukada, & Fukuda, 2015). Although we conducted this Ideal Classmates study in all of our respective classes, due to limited space only Yoshi's and Tetsuya's cases will be presented in this paper.

Research techniques

We utilized three types of research techniques: (a) surveys, (b) Critical Participatory Looping (CPL; Murphey & Falout, 2010), and (c) teaching journals.

In the beginning of the semester we used surveys to ask two open-ended questions: first, the Ideal Classmates prompt (Q19), “Please describe a group of classmates that you could learn English well with. What would you all do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably?” and second, the Ideal Teacher prompt (Q20), “Please describe how you think your teachers can best help you develop your English skills or English learning skills. What exactly would they do to support you and help you learn effectively and enjoyably?”

In the middle of the semester, we asked a My Classmates prompt to encourage continuing visualizations of potential Ideal Classmates behaviors both quantitatively (Qs 1–6) (1 = Not at all; 6 = Yes, very much) and qualitatively (Q7):

- (Q1) My classmates are helping me to learn English.
- (Q2) I am helping my classmates to learn English.
- (Q3) My classmates are helping me to enjoy English.
- (Q4) I am helping my classmates to enjoy English.
- (Q5) I am learning English better by myself than with my classmates.
- (Q6) I am enjoying English better by myself than with my classmates.
- (Q7) In what new ways are your classmates helping you to learn and enjoy English in the last few weeks?

Lastly, at the end of the semester, Tetsuya used an extra prompt to promote his students’ further reflection of their classmates’ interpersonal behaviors during the semester: (Q22) When did you think your classmates were good classmates?

Critical Participatory Looping (CPL) is a process that involves collecting open-ended responses or quantitative data from the students, compiling it all together, and showing the responses in full, and anonymously, to the whole class. Sometimes these responses are also shown across different classrooms. For the present Ideal Classmates study, we mostly looped back students’ responses by printing them out and distributing them on paper. There are additional ways of looping. For example, in Joe’s classes, weeks after the paper copies were distributed, students’ compiled responses were projected onto a large classroom screen, and students took pictures of their looped ideas with smartphones. Tim, on the other hand, selected certain responses from students to include in classroom newsletters.

For the present study, each teacher-researcher wrote in his own respective teaching journal about the use of Ideal Classmates in his classes and how the students were responding to each other. We shared our reflections in a private online forum open only to our research team. We occasionally read each other’s reflections and wrote comments right into each other’s journals.

The social spaces in which we engaged ourselves in the present study can be perceived as affinity spaces (Gee, 2004), a kind of social space for situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Situated learning is a type of learning through engagement in social practice or interaction with others of different backgrounds but who share common goals. *Affinity space* can be understood as “a place or set of places where people can affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals, not shared race, class, culture, ethnicity, or gender” (p. 73). While the four of us have somewhat different national, cultural, and historical back-

grounds, our bonding as well as friendships were strengthened through the engagement of this collaborative study.

Presenting findings in a narrative form

We arrived at our findings, which we present here in a narrative form, by our collaborative reflection upon data triangulation: students' comments collected in different types of surveys, the writings of our journals, and students' comments or voices collected in the classroom. The narrative approach has been widely adopted in the field of TESOL (Barkhuizen, 2011; Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014) because it enables vivid descriptions of "language teaching and learning as lived experiences" (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014, p. 12). In the following section of the paper, we share two narratives based on Yoshi's and Tetsuya's classroom experiences as teacher-researchers, both of which were constructed by focusing on different class activities and students' responses—and both use first person singular perspectives, i.e., "I."

Findings

Recreated Narrative of Yoshi's Class

The goal of my [Yoshi's] English class was "to become able to complete different types of tasks in the medium of their target language (TL), English," and each of the lessons was structured as follows:

- 1. Warm-up (15 min.):**
 - Short English speech / conversation
- 2. Main activity (65 min.):**
 - Performing speeches for invitation of Tokyo Olympics / Discussion / Presentation
- 3. Reflection sheet (10 min.)**

After the 15-minute English warm-up for each class, the main activities included: performing English speeches as invitations to the Tokyo Olympic games; group discussions on a variety of topics (e.g., developing a special lunch menu for male students at a university; redesigning a lounge adjacent to the university's library; developing a travel plan for a group of international students studying in Japan); and group presentations of travel plans that students developed.

My 2016 English class was quite small, with 12 students in the first lesson and in the following lesson, there were only 6 students (Yoshi's journal, first and second lessons, April 11 and 18, 2016). I was a little bit disappointed but I realized later on that the small class size facilitated my ability to observe each of the students' performances, and I could also attend in more detail to their voices shared during activities in the classroom as well as from their reflection sheets and the surveys.

I used survey prompts to conduct one activity for Ideal Classmates (Q19. *Please describe a group of classmates that you could learn English well with. What would you all do to help each other learn better and more enjoyably?*) and another for Ideal Teacher (Q20. *Please describe how you think your teachers can best help you develop your English skills or English learning skills. What exactly would they do to support you and help you learn effectively and enjoyably?*). Below are descriptions from my journal:

I asked my students to respond to the Ideal Classmates and Ideal Teacher prompts on large drawing papers and to share their responses with the whole class. This means that in addition to conducting classroom activities and imagination-based interventions, I was able to collect the data and loop it back to the students at the same time. I decided to try the activity during the lesson, because prior to it only 2 students out of the 6 answered the survey in their free time at home [I confirmed before conducting the activity their willingness of answering the survey questions. They mentioned that they did not answer the online survey just because they rarely check e-mails, including my e-mail notification for the online survey.] From their responses, the students shared images of their Ideal Classmates as follows (names are pseudonyms and all students' quotes are translated except where noted.):

- Actively speak English (Naoki)
 - Actively speak English, without being afraid of making mistakes (Hideki)
 - Actively speak to promote mutual communication (Ken)
 - Attend to other students' talk / communicate in English (Kanao)
 - Have clear goals (Kenji)
 - Have about the same level of English skills (Yuta)
- (Yoshi's journal, third lesson, April 25, 2016)

Their Ideal Classmates were found to be active students with compassion and clear goals. These all corresponded to characteristics included in the 16 descriptors of Ideal Classmates derived from the responses of 449 students taking our English communication courses previously (Murphey et al., 2014), such as: (3) *Show passion and enthusiasm in learning English: get excited and don't give up*, and (10) *Interact with classmates who have similar English abilities, and can be near peer role models*.

Their Ideal Teacher images, on the other hand, were as follows:

- Talk in English (Kanao)
 - Speak English confidently (Ken)
 - Keep the ball rolling in conversations with students (Naoki)
 - Provide Students with many opportunities for English communication in class, and speak in English here and there (Hideki)
 - Present ways to learn English (Yuki)
 - Suggest ways to use English skills for strengthening motivation to learn (Kenji)
- (Yoshi's journal, third lesson, April 25, 2016)

Hearing the students' Ideal Teacher images shared in the classroom, I found that they expect English teachers to speak actively and with confidence, and promote students' conversations, and suggest to them how to improve and to utilize their TL skills.

Inconsistent with their Ideal Classmates images, students were quiet and passive in 30-second short English speeches offered as warm-up in the beginning of the semester, although they were relatively active in the following main activity (Yoshi's journal, first lesson, April 11, 2016; Yoshi's journal second lesson, April 18, 2016). However, reading their comments written in the reflection sheets, I realized that being quiet and passive does not necessarily mean that

the students had no English-learning motivation:

... I felt that small talk [Q&A following a short English speech] is really important. I would like to ask more questions in English spontaneously. (Kanako, April 18, 2016)

I tried continuing the conversation [during Q&A following a short English speech] by actively asking questions in English. (Yuta, April 18, 2016)

Both Kanako and Yuta showed their willingness of asking more questions during the Q&A following the other students' speeches, although their attempts were not taken up by the other students. The other students themselves commented about this in their reflection sheets, giving reasons why they became so passive during the Q&A.

... I sometimes forget how I should ask questions [during Q&A after the other students made a short speech] ... (Kenji, April 18, 2016)

I become nervous during the speech, feeling strange that Japanese students were communicating in English. (Naoki, April 18, 2016)

While Kenji did not know how he could ask questions in English to the other students about their speeches, for Naoki, his nervousness came from speaking English in front of other Japanese students and it prevented him from making his speech self-assertively. My research teammate, Tetsuya, posted a comment later in my journal after reading the above and other students' comments:

I understand all the comments made by Yoshi's students. They feel awkward in having English conversations among Japanese students only, and also they find it difficult to express themselves in speaking English. Those feelings are shared with a lot of speakers of English as a second language, including me! [May 7, 2016]

Reading my students' and Tetsuya's comments, I decided to adjust my ways of teaching, starting with the warm-up activity itself, to promote their class engagement. First, referring to the students' Ideal Teacher images, suggestions such as "talk in English (Kanako)," "speak English confidently (Ken)," and "keep the ball rolling in conversations with students (Naoki)" were elicited from my students. Thereafter, I started joining in the short speech activities, making my own short speeches in English in front of them (Yoshi's journal, third lesson, April 25, 2016). I had hoped they could see that their feedback had affected me. I also tried creating an atmosphere where the students could speak English in comfort by sitting in a circle during the activity. Actually, this was advice from another research teammate, Joe, who wrote in my journal: "... last year I had a class of 7 students in a big room, and every week they pushed away desks and made a circle of chairs" (Joe's comment, April 24, 2016). I felt that it would help make their participation in activities more interactive and help create an atmosphere where they could speak openly in comfort.

Although I made these adjustments, the classroom atmosphere during the warm-up did not change much. One of the students, Kanako, who is outgoing and frank, and Kenji, who is introverted but reflective, wrote the following comment in their reflection sheets after the lesson.

You are all gloomy and taciturn. We should communicate more! ... (Kanako, April 25, 2016)

As I was actively speaking, I hesitated to make my next utterance because other students were quiet. (Kenji, April 25, 2016)

Kanako also made a similar type of comment during the warm-up activity within the classroom in the next lesson (Lesson 4).

Why is everyone in a dismal mood? (Yoshi's journal, fourth lesson, May 9, 2016)

As some students commented in the reflection sheets and also during the lesson, overall my students were still quiet in third and fourth lessons. However, I started to see some change in their thinking by reading their comments in reflection sheets collected during the lessons. I found that while they were quiet, they analyzed in detail their own English performance on a meta-cognitive level:

We do a short speech today, but probably I can't eye contact. I try to eye contact next speech. [sic, original English] (Naoki, April 25, 2016)

Although I tried speaking actively, the lack of English vocabulary and ability of paraphrasing words made it difficult to continue my conversation, and then I gradually became passive, creating an awkward atmosphere. (Kenji, April 25, 2016)

It is important to speak clearly and briskly while making eye contact. I might make mistakes in pronouncing some words, but I felt that I needed to speak while looking at the audience. I would like to expand my vocabulary and to relearn English grammar to be able to transmit my message to the audience clearly, even if it were done in only a simple manner. (Hideki, May 9, 2016)

The students seemed to realize through the analysis of their own performance what prevented them from performing well or what kinds of skills they need to acquire to perform in better ways in the warm-up activity.

Seeing a glimmer of hope in the students' comments in reflection sheets, I made further adjustments in the fifth lesson (May 16, 2016). To make the warm-up activity more interactive and to create a more relaxing atmosphere, I changed the activity to a short, 5-minute English conversation. Students now conversed three times, each time in different pairs, and each time I also joined in one of the groups (Yoshi's journal, fifth lesson, May 16, 2016). Additionally, I played music (relaxing but not too slow) to promote their casual conversations. I also encouraged them, asking them all to stand up so that they could more easily make gestures and body movements during the conversations.

After these adjustments, I started recognizing the students' positive reactions in the lesson.

... At every rotation, all pairs were able to continue their conversations for five minutes, actively asking questions to each other. I could also readily see everyone smiling during the conversations. (Yoshi's journal, fifth lesson, May 16, 2016)

The students' positive reactions also started being reflected in their reflection sheets in fifth and the following lessons.

I think that I was able to speak English actively and take the lead in English conversations ... (Kenji, May 16, 2016)

I was able to ask questions to my conversation partners to continue our conversation ... (Yuta, May 30, 2016)

While I wasn't able to speak well during small talk, I gradually became able to talk longer in the three conversations!! ... I will do my best next time, too!! (Kanako, May 30, 2016)

Shortly thereafter, I was able to recognize positive comments in the second My Classmates survey conducted in the following week (Lesson 13, July 11, 2016).

My classmates' attitudes show they are listening to my talks. (Yuta, second My Classmates survey, July 11, 2016)

Although the students' English proficiency levels are varied, I felt that everyone was eager to talk. Because of that, I was able to enjoy the small talk [short English conversations] in every lesson. When my classmates wanted to say something but couldn't express it well, I learned how I should respond to them. (Kanao, second My Classmates survey, July 11)

These comments imply that not some but all of the students were eager to speak English (while they still have some difficulty in expressing their thoughts in the TL). Kanao, who used to make negative comments in reflection sheets and within the classroom in the beginning of the semester, wrote this positive comment regarding the warm-up activity. The attitudes or behaviors described in the above comments were now more consistent with their Ideal Classmates images than when shared before with the whole class at the beginning of the semester.

Summarizing in Yoshi's affinity space

RQ1: How do our students transform their class participation or engagement through their visualizations of Ideal Classmates?

RQ2: How can we as teacher-researchers transform our ways of teaching our English classes in better ways through hearing and reflecting our students' voices in the present study?

Conducting this case study in focusing on my English course, I came to certain realizations regarding the research questions. About RQ1, I found that, through visualization of Ideal Classmates, the transformation of students' class performance and engagement could occur at two stages: First, at the psychological level, and second, at the physical or performance level. It seemed to take some time for their psychological transformation to be reflected in their actual class performance. Regarding RQ2, I was able to acquire new perspectives as a language teacher, which helped me to realize two things: First, there is a risk of judging how much TL-learning motivation students have by making an assumption based only on their performance or apparent attitudes during class activities. My students often remained passive and silent throughout what I thought would be easy warm-up activities. However, I noticed by attending to their inner voices shared in reflection sheets and surveys, as well as what they said during the lessons, that they were struggling to participate actively. Second, I realized that their images of Ideal Classmates could more likely become manifested in the students themselves when their teacher adjusts or scaffolds toward what they are imagining. This can effectively promote increases in the frequency and quality of class engagements and create better learning atmospheres within the classrooms. Through my own adjustments and scaffolding afforded to me, the teacher, by simply asking students what they would like to see more of in themselves and in their teacher, the students became able to act more like each other's Ideal Classmates, and I myself was able to grow as a teacher, possibly more oriented towards the students' Ideal Teacher images.

Recreated Narrative of Tetsuya's Classes

I [Tetsuya] would like to start my section with my first comment in the research journal. I felt excited about this project, in which I expected to see interactions among students and also I could collaborate with my students.

This is the very first entry of Tetsuya's journal, and I would like to begin my journal with a comment I found in a book this morning. This book chapter (Toohey & Waterstone, 2004) is about collaborative research among researchers from different places. They say, "Teacher and researcher collaboration, for example, have been seen as promoting more complete and nuanced descriptions of classroom events and the perspectives of both teachers and classroom outsiders are available for analysis." (Toohey & Waterstone, 2004, p. 292) As members of a research group ourselves, we believe we can bring different events and perspectives from different settings. I feel lucky to be in this group and learn from my research friends. — (Tetsuya's journal, first lesson, March 31, 2016)

2016 Spring Semester		June 15, 2016	
My Classmates Survey Simple Report			
<p>Below are the mean scores from University A and University B. Students chose one number from 1 to 6 to indicate how much they agree with the statements. 1 (Not at all), 2 (Not really), 3 (Not very much), 4 (Yes, a little), 5 (Yes, pretty much), 6 (Yes, very much)</p>			
Statement	Univ. A	Univ. B	
1 My classmates are helping me to learn English.	4.92	4.09	
2 I am helping my classmates to learn English.	4.03	3.47	
3 My classmates are helping me to enjoy English.	4.47	4.02	
4 I am helping my classmates to enjoy English.	3.86	3.55	
5 I am learning English better by myself than with my classmates.	3.27	3.13	
6 I am enjoying English better by myself than with my classmates.	2.83	2.62	
<p>What do you think of the results? How can we help each other more and how can we enjoy learning English together more?</p>			

Figure 1. My Classmates Survey Handout.

Soon after I made this comment in my journal, another researcher in the current research team, Tim, contributed a different quote in my journal, which was also about the importance of collaboration in learning. I was very excited about finding another quote, but more excited that my voice was heard by another person, and that I was learning from him. This entry was a powerful motivator for me to start our current research and also to encourage my students to help each other as we do.

After giving Ideal Classmates and Ideal Teacher prompts (Qs 19 & 20) in the beginning of the semester, in June, (the eighth lesson of one English communication course offered at University A), I conducted the My Classmates prompts (Qs1-7), in which we asked students

how much they were helping each other. After downloading the data and calculating the mean scores quickly, I made a handout (Figure. 1). In my research journal I wrote:

Today, I downloaded the data file of the My Classmates survey [Qs1–7] from both universities [where I teach my English communication courses], and made a simple handout. Tomorrow, I will have a short discussion at one university about the data. I believe it [the My Classmates Survey Handout] is also CPL [Critical Participatory Looping]. — (Tetsuya’s journal, eighth lesson, June 15, 2016)

CPL should not be confined to the qualitative data, i.e., reactions to open-ended questions or freely written life stories, such as language learning histories. Even after collecting data through Likert-scale question items, we can quickly make a simple table or a graph, and return the data to students and ask them to think about it. In addition, we can also ask them to write their reactions to the handout. In my own classes, students generally enjoyed finding their own results. It might be because the classes I mentioned here are in the faculty of science and engineering, and the students tend to be accustomed to finding evidence in figures in tables and graphs. The students also seemed to be interested in differences between universities. They understood that different universities have different cultures, and group dynamics are involved in every class at every university. The tables in the handout seemed to be helpful for their understanding of how diverse students, classes, and universities can be. In my journal I wrote comments about this class activity as follows.

At [University A], we had a short group discussion about the data. Students seemed to enjoy the discussions especially about the differences between [University A] and [University B]. For example, about Statement 1, “My classmates are helping me to learn English,” the average response among [University B] students was 4.92, while the average among [University A] students was 4.09. It means [University B] students think they are supported by their classmates significantly more than [University A] students. It makes sense to me, because students have much more opportunity to have group work at [University B]. In the discussion, one [University A] student said that they should have help each other more. I hope this discussion session was a good chance for [University A] students to think about their learning style. — (Tetsuya’s journal, eighth lesson, June 16, 2016)

Then at the end of the semester, I asked my students an open-ended question within the My Classmates survey, Q22: When did you think your classmates were good classmates? In contrast to the Ideal Classmates prompt at the beginning of the semester, in which we attempted to elicit students’ images of Ideal Classmates, Q22 asked students to describe what they actually did for each other. 74.17% ($n = 89$) of the students responded, and of those students, a few made neutral comments (e.g., I have no idea) or negative comments (e.g., I didn’t think so), but 95.51% ($n = 85$) made positive comments with real examples. I coded these comments according to the 16 descriptors of Ideal Classmates that the research team had derived from our action research with other students previously (Murphey et al., 2014).

The 16 descriptors show the images of Ideal Classmates that our past students had, and the comments analyzed for the present research were what my current students reported doing during the semester. Quite naturally, after coding the comments of Q22 in terms of the 16 descriptors, not all 16 were matched by my current students. In contrast, as many as 43.82% ($n = 39$) of the comments were categorized into descriptor # 12 (Help each other in class to learn: teach vocabulary, explain how to say something in English, etc.). For example, one student commented, “When I don’t understand the question, my classmate helped me hard [sic]. I think my classmates were good classmates.” Another descriptor that many students’ com-

ments matched was # 6 (Actively talk to lots of partners in English in class), into which 12.36% ($n = 11$) of the students' comments were categorized.

After collecting, analyzing, and returning the data of my students back to them, I also found changes inside of myself as a teacher-researcher. Even before conducting this study, I had believed that engaging in group work and visualizing ideal selves, as a learner and as a classmate, could generally enhance students' motivation to study English. At the same time, it was true that I thought there would be a significant number of students who might be reluctant to participate in these Ideal Classmates activities and also in follow-up discussions. In fact, one teacher-researcher outside of our research team had told me she was considering this idea for her classes. She said that although she really wanted to incorporate Ideal Classmates into her lessons, she also worried about the possibility that some of her students might think that writing about images of their Ideal Classmates and talking about common ideas among classmates were a "waste of time." It turned out, however, that almost all my students took the question seriously. They also seemed to be enjoying themselves while discussing the common ideas about helping each other and the differences among universities. Through these experiences, I found myself much more firmly believing that my students would benefit greatly from answering questions and discussing the reactions, and thus feeling much more comfortable that these activities could fit into my tight schedule.

Summarizing in Tetsuya's affinity space

RQ1: How do our students transform their class participation or engagement through their visualizations of Ideal Classmates?

RQ2: How can we as teacher-researchers transform our ways of teaching our English classes in better ways through hearing and reflecting our students' voices in the present study?

To sum up, in terms of RQ1, during the semester my students had strengthened their sense of belonging to their class. One phenomenon that became apparent is that when I randomly assigned pairs at the beginning of class each week, I detected more and more greetings and smiles among them, although it is quite difficult to judge whether the change in the students' attitude or behaviors is solely attributable to our Ideal Classmates procedures. In terms of RQ2, I felt increasingly comfortable in giving them greater amounts of pair tasks. The Ideal Classmates activities may have affected how students perceived their classmates and themselves, leading to more active learning. I also found this action research changing me in how I gave tasks in class, which in turn seemed to have led to more enjoyable group work.

Limitations

Collaboratively visualizing learner and teacher development in affinity spaces seldom happens by accident and often does not happen even with great care. The authors do not see Ideal Classmates procedures as a Pollyanna practice (something that will solve all our problems), but modestly as a procedure that invites students and teachers to question and question again at appropriately spaced intervals their identities, their agency, and their impact on each other. Simply visualizing something once does not mean that it automatically changes one's thoughts and behaviors instantly or permanently. However, each reflection and visualization can contribute to shaping the synaptic structures in our brains, link by link. And with more revisits to these imaginings, the links become stronger.

We see these reflections and visualizations as openings of educational minds and the shaping of affinity spaces in our classes and out of them. Our data here are not intended to irre-

futably present these procedures as pure panacea to the problems of student silence (King, 2013). Rather, we have attempted to present qualitative data, which seems to be supporting these emerging critical reflections of re-shaping identities, collaborations, classroom atmospheres, student agency, and the general socialization of our classes. We cannot isolate and identify the Ideal Classmates procedures as a primary cause of the changes that students made toward behaving in more helpful and active ways in engaging each other in learning English. We think that our students changed in better ways through the influence of multiple factors: not only our Ideal Classmates activities, but also their socializing with other students as well as us, their teachers, English activities we offered, their getting used to the classroom environments, and perhaps even more influences that we do not recognize. It would be invalid to attribute our students' change solely to the Ideal Classmates activities. However, we believe from our own subjective reflections that these procedures at least partly helped our students and ourselves become more socially-sensitive toward each other, especially because we related to and cared about mutually learning in our affinity spaces.

Discussion and Conclusion

To summarize Yoshi's and Tetsuya's narratives of their uses with Ideal Classmates procedures, they both strove to engage their students in community building through challenges, acceptance, and collaborations. They challenged their students with what they saw as acceptable tasks, and yet they were flexible enough to allow the students to adjust the conditions to enhance their own learning and create English-learning affinity spaces among themselves and their teachers. The teachers' acceptance of their students as key developing practitioners (Allwright & Hanks, 2009) in the present study could send a message that "this is your space and your learning," such that students can invest themselves in the challenge of improving their English. Both teachers were open to negotiating the aspects of their classrooms in order to help students learn. We have come to understand that when people work well together on building common understandings of each other, they mutually affirm each other and form affinity spaces of shared activities, interests, and goals. In the cases presented in this study, these affinity spaces helped both students and teachers to bond together through shared English activities, interests in English, and goals of learning effectively together.

In the present study, regular feedback received from our students and looped back to them not only critically informed us teacher-researchers about what our next steps might be, it created affinity spaces for both the students and us to develop classroom relationships and skills. The affinity spaces co-constructed among students as well as between students and teachers were expanded across our research team via sharing classroom narratives written in our teaching journals. Hearing our students' voices embedded in each of our narratives helped us visualize and discuss how we could develop our relationships with our students, and how we could further improve our ways of teaching. We realized through the present study that both students and teachers cannot visualize their ideal or better selves and then realize these visualizations in a vacuum. But when each of us mutually participates actively in our ecological systems, each of us can visualize and grow further in our relations with one another. In these processes we think we are expanding our reciprocal idealizing (Murphey et al., 2014) into reciprocal development. By looping our ideas among ourselves and our students, and by looping these narratives beyond to other teachers (i.e., you, the readers of this paper), we are looping these explanations forward to an even wider ecology (Falout, Murphey, Fukuda, & Fukuda, 2016).

To conclude, when teachers ask students to imagine helpful classmates, valuable images of helpful classmates can appear in students' minds. With further focus upon these images,

students then begin to identify with what they have seen as something that is possible for themselves as instead something possible for others—thus becoming their own Ideal Classmates. Also, reflecting on and discussing what students visualize as Ideal Classmates could also positively influence teachers' own visualizations and behaviors to reach for better ways to teach as Ideal Teachers. Teacher-researchers observing themselves within their own respective classes can learn well enough, but by expanding their perspectives by collaboration in research groups, they can go more deeply with their observations and reflections so that they can see the wider picture. By sharing our visualizations of how we—students, teachers, and readers of this paper—can help each other toward mutually identified common goals, and by observing our own impact upon each other, we all can collaborate to imagine and achieve more.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to our reviewers for helping us visualize revisions for this paper.

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Review Process

This paper was open-reviewed by the following members of the Learner Development Journal Review Network: Dexter Da Silva and Katherine Thornton. (*Contributors have the option of open or blind review.*)

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