

Designing a Collaborative and Resourceful  
EFL Classroom  
at a Japanese Junior High School

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Designing a Collaborative and Resourceful  
EFL Classroom  
at a Japanese Junior High School

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by  
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## Abstract

A classroom is a little society in which students with unique personalities, abilities, preferences, backgrounds, and dreams unfold in a kaleidoscope of dramas. Sometimes these dramas include large casts of characters with multifarious features, and other times they include only the prominent players. Sometimes a classroom is a learning place with a collaborative atmosphere, and at other times, it becomes a place of intense competition, where students apparently feel a sense of superiority or inferiority.

According to Sfard (1998), the *acquisition metaphor* (AM), an epistemological view of learning as the acquisition of knowledge, brings competition to the classroom, since the knowledge in question is measurable and quantitatively comparable. In contrast to the AM, Sfard sets out the *participation metaphor* (PM) and contrasts the traditional view of learning and one that is more appropriate for present society.

The purpose of this thesis is (1) to make clear the principles of collaborative learning from literature review on *learning, collaborative learning, and resources*, (2) to design lessons on the principles, and (3) to analyze interactions among students and between students and teaching materials in collaborative learning, in order to explore a potential approach to EFL classrooms that is based on the PM so that every student can participate in meaningful learning activities.

Chapter 2 explains the sociocultural theory in which the PM has its foundation, focusing on *learning, collaborative learning, and resources*. These are the core concepts in my design of a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom.

From the sociocultural perspective, learning is a social process (Vygotsky, 1978), and collaborative learning has its theoretical background in the works of Vygotsky and

Dewey. The literature review reveals the following points:

- Learning is viewed as participation and/or contribution (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Grabois, 2008), and it is always part of and emerges from contexts and activities.
- Collaborative learning creates a context for students to participate in group activities.
- It constructs a zone of proximal development (ZPD) which means the distance between the levels of present development and the potential development that is achieved with the help from others or with peers (Vygotsky, 1978; Donato, 1994; Holzman, 2008; van Lier, 2008).
- It provides students with opportunities for social interaction, which prompts their cognitive, social, and existential learning (Akita, 2012; Ishiguro, 2004).
- Social interaction also matures students' citizenship, which is the foremost aim of education (Sato, 2006b; Akita, 2012).
- The availability of the resources in the classroom is constricted, but their accessibility and usability can be increased by the *setting* (Palfreyman, 2006).
- Effective teaching materials construct ZPDs and create rich contexts for learning (Järvinen, 2009).

When collaborative learning and teaching materials work successfully, the occurrence of the following learning is expected:

- Learning of the English language
- Learning of the contents of teaching materials
- Learning of social skills
- Learning of attitudes and values
- Existential learning

Chapter 3 explains the research design, based on this review. The elements of

my classroom design as a whole include the following:

- Collaborative learning to make full use of social resources
- Teaching materials to promote access to material resources and social resources
- Teachers as accessible facilitators

The research was conducted in two, eighth grade classrooms at a public junior high school in Okayama Prefecture on March 6, 19, and 20, 2014. All of the six lessons were videotaped and transcribed for conversation analysis in order to identify students' learning process through an examination of their verbal and nonverbal interactions with material resources and social resources. The data collected also included brief reflection sheets, completed by the students after the lessons.

Chapter 4 illustrates how the collaborative and resourceful classroom helped the students participate in the learning activities. In the first two sections, I focus on two scenes from the data, which I examine with conversation analysis. The analysis of Case 1 sheds light on the roles of one dictionary when a student used it as a material resource in a group activity. In Case 2, I examine how the uttering of a Japanese word by one student grew into a full English sentence during collaborative writing in a group that effectively functioned as a social resource. In the subsequent section, I analyze students' reflection sheets and cover the learning of other students.

I found that collaborative learning has the potential to increase students' participation by expanding the use of social resources when teaching materials create contexts for students to access resources. Both students with a high-level of English and with a low-level of English had a space for learning, and their learning involved not simply the knowledge of or skill in using English; social and existential learning also occurred.

In the last Chapter, I present the conclusions of this study, which suggest further



pedagogical implications in designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom focusing on collaborative learning. Though collaborative learning is sometimes said to be inefficient or time-consuming, it is worth implementing to guarantee every student's right to learn. I also recommend preferable teaching materials for collaborative learning. In addition, I suggest that students need to have opportunities to learn the manners of collaborative learning to ensure success.

If we want to identify possibilities for participation by all students in the classroom, if we hope to provide the rich and fruitful learning required for students to become sensible and mature citizens, and if we desire precious moments when students can share the pleasure of learning with their peers, I propose collaborative learning as a promising approach that can be implemented within the present situation.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

A classroom is a little society in which a large variety of students with their unique personalities, abilities, preferences, backgrounds, future dreams, and more unfold in a kaleidoscope of dramas. Sometimes the drama goes on with a large cast of characters of multifarious features, and other times it goes on with only prominent players. I often observe that in many English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, students with a high-level of English tend to be active, positive, and admired, whereas students with a low-level of English are apt to be treated as less admired and less positive, and sometimes they are left behind.

“I don’t want to be in a class with those incapable guys.” “We know we are troublesome and we’re dropping out.” These are typical of the statement I heard from students when a class division based on the degree of academic achievement, or ability grouping, was first introduced by an educational administration as one of the measures to improve students’ academic ability. The first statement was made by a student in an advanced class, and the latter, by a student in a basic class. The primary question here is, “Is this a sound education?” I can hardly accept the present educational situation, where teachers get students involved in an intense competition for point-scoring and the students apparently feel a sense of superiority or inferiority.

Despite the United Nations’ repetitive recommendations since 1998 to correct the competitive education system in Japan for fear of causing students’ character disorders among students (Erikawa, 2012), the reality of Japanese schools seems to be unchanged, or even worse. Powerful education administrations have simply required immediate outcomes that are expressed numerically, and teachers are driven to worry about students’ visible or measurable results of achievement. In such an atmosphere,

the paramount aims of education seem to easily fade away unless people—teachers, parents, administrators, and politicians—make efforts to keep them in mind. However, just what are the aims of education?

The aims of education are elucidated in Japan's Article 1 of the Basic Act on Education as follows: "Education shall aim for the full development of personality and strive to nurture the citizens, sound in mind and body, who are imbued with the qualities necessary for those who form a peaceful and democratic state and society" (MEXT, 2006). According to this statement, school teachers are responsible for developing students' personality and competence so that they can become full-fledged judicious citizens, but they should not develop students' sense of inferiority to make them timid citizens nor develop their sense of superiority to make them arrogant citizens looking down on less able people. The contradiction between the aims described in the Act and what school administrations actually impose on schools confuses us. We need to pursue a better educational system with a sense of mission. If the "competitive education system" causes unhappy classrooms, it is our responsibility to abandon this approach and seek alternative approaches that will lead in the opposite direction, toward happy classrooms. How can this be achieved?

A perspective underlying such educational competitions is an epistemology that views learning as acquiring knowledge, because that kind of knowledge can be measurable and quantitatively comparable (Sfard, 1998). During the era of industrialism, academic ability was for the most part synonymous with the amount of knowledge. However, in the current post-industrialism era, technology unavoidably provides a flood of information updated second by second on the global stage and the definition of academic ability is being questioned (Sato, 2004, 2006b; Sato, Sawano, & Kitamura, 2009). It is not enough to simply oppose ability grouping. Unless we

overcome the *acquisition metaphor* (Sfard, 1998) and take the proper approaches, the mixed-ability grouping is no less harmful than the ability grouping in that both drive students and teachers into energy-consuming competitions regarding knowledge accumulation.

In contrast with the *acquisition metaphor*, Sfard (1998) sets out the *participation metaphor* (which I will review in detail in the next chapter) and contrasts the traditional view of learning and a view that I contend is more appropriate for the present society. Many scholars use their own terms to express the transitions of the perspectives about learning; from “memory and retention” to “activity and interaction” (Sato, 1999), from “behaviourism” to “socioculturism” (Akita, 2012), from “having” to “doing” (Walsh, 2013), and so on. All of these terms presuppose that learners are no longer passive receivers of knowledge; rather, they are active agents in a social setting.

When I became familiar with collaborative learning through a series of studies done by Sato (1999, 2000, 2004, etc.), I agreed with his idea that schools should guarantee every student’s right to learn and to have access to the highest-quality and best ways of learning (Sato, 2005). He proposes *learning community* based on a philosophy that consists of three pillars: democracy, publicness, and academic pursuit (Sato, 2005). Sato (2014) declares that *learning community* is “not a recipe, a technique, or a model, but it is a vision, a philosophy, or a social system.” Collaborative learning, which is backed up with the philosophy of *learning community* based on an ideology that aims to achieve democratic societies (Sato, 2005, 2006a, 2014), seems to be a good fit for providing classrooms with the *participation metaphor*.

In fact, collaborative learning has been gradually spreading in schools in Japan

and other Asian countries as a grassroots movement. However, it is not certain whether the philosophy of collaborative learning is well understood by the teachers or school administrators who are involved in the movement. Sometimes they introduce collaborative learning simply as an effective method to boost scholastic scores and reduce problems such as school violence, bullying, or nonattendance. Other times, a board of education recommends collaborative learning along with ability grouping at the same time, as both are helpful. However, the philosophy of collaborative learning—which advocates the equality of every student’s right to learn—cannot be compatible with ability grouping, which many studies have proved to retard academic progress, reduce self-esteem, lower aspirations, and promote negative attitudes of students in average and below-average academic tracks (Oakes, 1986, 2008). How can students who are taught at schools in which individuals are legitimately segregated by their ability become supporters of a democratic society in the future?

In collaborative learning, students are encouraged to develop their intellect and ethics through activities and interactions in a social environment. They are allowed to be *legitimate peripheral* participants (Lave & Wenger, 1991) even though they are novices in the community, and the process of experiencing and the transformation of their identities are considered learning. Becoming is more important than possession, and every student, or even an adult, is on the way to becoming all the time.

These concepts of learning seem quite appropriate for changing classroom settings in which struggling students are likely to get unnerved or demotivated, and sometimes give up or escape from learning. Then, how can teachers put the concepts into classroom practice to provide a more educational environment where all the students can learn collaboratively instead of competitively, respecting each



other as unique individuals instead of looking down at others or feeling downcast?

To test the philosophy of collaborative learning in the specific EFL classroom setting, I did research at a small public junior high school where I used to work. It is located in a mountainous agricultural district where the students have few opportunities to use English in their daily lives, which lowered the students' motivation to learn English except for their need to sit for the high school entrance examination.

In 2010, the school introduced a collaborative learning project, in which the students were often given opportunities to work collaboratively in many school subjects. While observing eighth graders in mixed-ability English classes, I found that the students showed good collaboration in pair work or group work when they were given rather mechanical tasks such as memorizing phrases, reading textbooks in turn, or playing a role in conversational texts. Even such mechanical tasks do lure students into collaboration, which is far more preferable than competition-oriented individual drilling. However, in light of the relevant studies, I felt that the collaborative learning must have had a more profound impact on the students' learning.

In a pursuit of more fruitful collaborative learning, I turned my attention to resources available for students' learning. If students are not to be simply receivers of knowledge or mechanical repeaters of monotonous drills, they need something that can induce their active involvement, something that can activate their curiosity and creativity, and something which worth learning to become mature citizens. I thought at that time that "The more resources I prepare in the classroom, the more opportunities for learning and the more productive learning will occur. Those resources should be adequate for a variety and all levels of students." I originally felt

that such resources were just materials such as handouts, dictionaries, pictures, whiteboards, etc. In time, however, I realized that the students themselves were also resources, human resources so to speak, because they could learn from each other utilizing their knowledge and experience, and that collaborative learning was a good way to use peers as resources. I kept on thinking, "It would be desirable to see students utilizing their respective characteristics and qualities as helpful resources. However, what if the students don't interact with each other? Even if they work in a group, they cannot always be resources. Even if I prepare dictionaries in the classroom, they could be just ornaments on the shelf unless they are used by students." So, the next thing I needed to consider was how I could create learning contexts in which the students tried to access resources.

This was the background that motivated me to design a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom.

The purpose of this thesis is (1) to make clear the principles of collaborative learning from literature review on *learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *resources*, (2) to design lessons on the principles, and (3) to analyze interactions among students and between students and teaching materials in collaborative learning, in order to explore a potential approach to EFL classrooms that is based on the PM so that every student can participate in meaningful learning activities.

In Chapter 2, I will review the theories and concepts that are relevant to my classroom design; they are *learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *resources*.

A review on learning will give an outlook for a concept of learning from a sociocultural framework, which I take as the foundation of this paper. A review on collaborative learning will provide its backdrop associated with sociocultural theory, especially how a zone of proximal development (ZPD) coined by a Russian

psychologist Vygotsky is constructed in collaborative learning and how its social nature is related to developing students' citizenship which is the foremost aim of education. Reviews on resources will explain how learning resources are interpreted in a sociocultural framework in designing a resourceful classroom and in looking at students' learning process.

Based on the review, I will extract beneficial conditions for designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom in which every student's learning is enhanced, and presuppose expected students' learning in such a classroom.

Chapter 3 will explain the research design.

Chapter 4 will provide my findings about the students' learning following conversation analysis of the students' interactions with resources in collaborative learning. I will document the minute process in which the students learn actively and interdependently when they are in a collaborative and resourceful classroom. The students' reflection sheets will also be analyzed to cover the students' learning.

In Chapter 5, I will explain my conclusion, which will suggest further pedagogical implications in designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom focusing on collaborative learning.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

In the previous chapter, it was pointed out that over the past three decades there has been a transition of the perspectives about learning from *acquisition metaphor* to *participation metaphor*, and yet the reality at Japanese schools has not thoroughly caught up with this transition. In the present chapter, I will review the extant literature that helps elucidate classroom practices based on the sociocultural theory, which is a new (not brand-new but still rather unfamiliar) view in the Japanese school contexts. I do so by focusing on *learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *resources*, which I assume are all inter-related in the classroom. I hope that these three concepts will also work as pivotal factors in designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom in which every student can participate in learning activities in ways that differ from those in the traditional classroom.

### 2.1. Learning

#### 2.1.1. Learning as a social process

The view that learning is a social process rather than a process internal to individual learners was presented by Vygotsky in the former part of the 20th century. He posited that an individual's cognitive system develops through social interaction. He also emphasized the importance of tools, especially language as a symbolic tool, to mediate the relationship between learners and the unknown world (Vygotsky, 1978). His theory has had an epoch-making influence on Western education in the early 1990's (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008), and many psychologists and educators began to think that learning occurs in the process of interaction between learners and others, and they have applied the theory in educational practice. This perspective on learning is

called sociocultural theory.

As for language learning, Atkinson (2011) argues that cognitivism, a “historically dominant” approach, is no longer acceptable for second language acquisition (SLA), because “SLA is an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon” (p. vi). His editing of the work *Alternative Approaches to Second Language Acquisition* collects six approaches vis-à-vis a cognitive approach, all of which imply a social turn in SLA. In that volume, Ortega (2011) sketches three dimensions of the difference between cognitivism and its alternatives: (1) psychologically versus socially oriented explanations, (2) abstractness versus situatedness, and (3) entities and objects versus actions and processes. In her explanation, the cognitive approach, which does not include social viewpoints, pursues abstractness by assuming that knowledge is separable from contexts, and regards learners or their abilities as fixed or static, whereas the alternative approaches regard them as dynamic and relational in actions and processes. These contrasts provide clear-cut distinctions between the traditional approach and alternative approaches.

Walsh (2013) also summarizes three main principles of Vygotskian theory as follows: (1) knowledge has a social nature, (2) learning takes place in a zone of proximal development (ZPD), and (3) learning is assisted by scaffolding. I will take up “ZPD” in a later section.

In order to provide a more concrete picture of learning as a social process, I will refer to three metaphors for learning in the next section.

### **2.1.2. Metaphors for learning**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the widely known metaphors for learning are the *acquisition metaphor* (AM) and the *participation metaphor* (PM) described by Sford

(1998). Prior to Sfard, Lave and Wenger (1991) studied several cases of apprenticeship of learning, and they identified the ways that novice workers gradually join the community in *legitimate peripheral participation*. Learners take part in the periphery of a community at first, then, they develop a relationship with one or more other participants; they gradually grow to be central participants, and the entire process is regarded as learning. The important point here is that whether they are peripheral or central, learners are acknowledged as legitimate in a community.

Sfard's PM stands on this idea, regarding learning as a process of becoming a member of a certain community through activities. On the other hand, in an AM, in Sfard's words, the human mind is just like "a container to be filled with certain materials" or "an owner of these materials" (p. 5). By contrasting the AM and PM, Sfard describes several educational issues. When acquired knowledge "is conceived as a commodity," "knowledge and material possessions are likely to play similar roles in establishing people's identities and in defining their social positions." Moreover, "[a]s in a society driven by a pursuit of material goods, so in the AM-based approach to learning, learners and scientists are likely to put forward competition," and "the metaphor of intellectual property is more likely to feed rivalry than collaboration" (p. 8).

Sfard, however, does not necessarily negate the AM, because learning inevitably entails individual enrichment, and *transfer* is premised on the idea of knowledge as property or possession of the individuals. Rather, she criticizes extreme PM adherents. As the title of her article "On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Just One" indicates, both are essential in her view. Since the AM has been incorrigibly prevalent, she emphasizes the importance of "bring[ing] social factors to the fore" (p. 11).

Grabois (2008) proposes another metaphor, the *contribution metaphor* (CM), to underline the social aspect of learning. In the CM, learners are considered “contributors to emergent communities of practice where their voices, life experiences and knowledge form an essential part of the learning dynamic” (p. 385). Both the PM and the CM are opposed to the AM, and the CM seems to be as a more advanced view than the PM.

In my research, I consider the classroom as a society of students and teachers, and the sociocultural framework and the three metaphors described above give me a vision of an ideal landscape in the classroom.

Ishiguro (2004) indicates that in sociocultural theory, learning always involves designing environments, and that a classroom should be a place for students to learn how to create social relations with other people such as peers and teachers as well as a place to gain knowledge, and it should be a setting in which students can develop their individual identities, which involves their entire persons. That is to say, classroom is a place where students’ cognitive, social, and existential learning is enhanced. In the next section, I review how collaborative learning, which has a sociocultural background, stimulates students’ cognitive, social, and existential learning.

## **2.2. Collaborative Learning**

### **2.2.1. Background of collaborative learning**

Collaborative learning has its foundation in epistemology and philosophy based on the sociocultural theory and social constructivism developed by Dewey, Vygotsky, and their followers (Oxford, 1997; Sato, 2005). There is a similar approach called “cooperative learning.” In both collaborative and cooperative learning, students work in pairs or small groups. Though they seem to have much in common, Oxford (1997)

describes distinctions between cooperative and collaborative learning: Cooperative learning “refers to a particular set of classroom techniques that foster learner interdependence as a route to cognitive and social development” (p. 443), whereas collaborative learning “has a ‘social constructivist’ philosophical base, which views learning as construction of knowledge within a social context and which therefore encourages acculturation of individuals into a learning community” (p.443). Actually, these terms are sometimes used loosely or interchangeably, or their explanations are sometimes mixed. In this thesis, I use “collaborative learning” in line with the definition by Oxford.

Since I have already covered Vygotsky’s work roughly previously (2.1.1.), I will review Dewey’s contribution to collaborative learning here. Oxford (1997) introduces Dewey’s pragmatic approach to epistemology as follows: “In Dewey’s view, learners do not learn in isolation; the individual learns by being part of the surrounding community and the world as a whole” (p. 447). Sato (2005) mentions, “[A]ccording to Dewey, learning is social experience as well as cognitive experience, a process of building relationships between subject and environment” (p. 112). These explanations indicate that Dewey’s approach as a philosopher and a pedagogist is quite similar to Vygotsky’s work as a psychologist. Sato (2005) itemizes three features common to Dewey and Vygotsky: (1) the purposeful and active features, (2) the social and communal features, and (3) the intellectual and ethical features.

These are the background of collaborative learning.

Donato (2004) states that collaborative learning is a unique way not only to acquire knowledge but also to encourage learners to participate and contribute in the communities where they live. He emphasizes the importance of contexts and activities for learning and development, and he proposes that when students work



collaboratively, a zone of proximal development (ZPD) is created in parallel with learning and development. This “ZPD” is one of the central notions of the sociocultural approach, and in the next section I explain the term in detail.

### **2.2.2. A zone of proximal development (ZPD)**

Vygotsky explained the ZPD as the distance between the level of present development and the level of potential development achieved with the help from others (Vygotsky, 1978). In other words, a ZPD is a space for learning to be created socially, and collaborative learning provides a context to create it with the aid of peers toward new knowledge which is difficult to reach without collaboration (Donato, 1994).

In collaborative learning, every student can be a resource mutually to create the ZPD. Donato (1994) refers to this phenomenon as “collective scaffolding.” Van Lier (2008) states, “Scaffolding can occur not only in an expert-novice context, but also among equal peers” (p. 62). Holzman (2008) first considered how to construct a ZPD collectively, and she turned back to Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the importance of interacting with people and cooperating with peers. She conceives that “what is key to the zpd is that people are doing something together” (p. 28), and concludes that “the zpd is a dialectical, tool-and-result activity, simultaneously the creating of the zone (environment) and what is created (learning-leading-development)” (p. 29).

All of the researchers cited above questioned the widely accepted idea of a ZPD, which assumes that a novice is supported by a more capable individual, who is usually an adult. Instead, they contended that peers can create a ZPD when they are provided with appropriate contexts and activity. These ideas reinforce the appropriateness of collaborative learning to make an environment full of possibilities of learning.

Brown (1994) calls collectively constructed ZPDs “multiple zones of proximal development” (p. 7), and asserts that a ZPD is constructed in the community where “individual differences [are] recognized and valued” (p. 9) and that “[m]embers of the community are critically dependent on each other” (p. 10). This means that students cannot always construct a ZPD collectively even though they are given a group activity. A ZPD is constructed when students respect their diversity, trust mutually, and create a collaborative atmosphere and relationships. I discuss this matter further in the next section, which deals with the relationship between collaborative learning and citizenship.

### **2.2.3. Citizenship**

The previous sections described learning as a social process, and it was noted that collaborative learning is a suitable way to provide students with contexts of experiencing the social process. In this section, I review some studies relevant to citizenship to illustrate how collaborative learning in the classroom contributes to the development of the citizenship that students are required to mature for their future in society.

Citizenship has been defined as the characteristics required for citizens at three levels: local, national, and global (Minei, 2007). The local level refers to the various communities to which people belong that are smaller units than their country; for example, their city, workplace, residents’ association, and school/university groups.

Ishimori (2013) examined the qualifications and abilities of global citizens extracted from various types of related studies such as those produced by UNESCO, Oxfam, and DeSeCo (Definition and Selection of Competencies) program, and she grouped them into three domains: (1) knowledge and understanding, (2) skills, and (3)

attitudes and values. The first domain, knowledge and understanding, includes various issues in global society and the measures that are used to cope with the issues. The second domain, skills, includes communication, collaboration, information processing, and more. The third domain, attitudes and values, includes generosity, responsibility, honesty, courtesy among others, and more. Ishimori contends that these abilities are necessary to realize a fair global society where all human beings and creatures will coexist peacefully. Considering that we are in a so-called global society, those domains can be applied to any level of citizens.

Akita (2012) proposes that public education has a responsibility to raise all children to become citizens equipped with fundamental knowledge, skill, morality, and ethics so that they can find a satisfying career and shape their identity. Griffin (2014) states that children should understand through collaboration that living in the multifaceted global society is to live as an active and responsible global citizen.

In collaborative learning, students are encouraged to interact with others, and the interaction involves cognitive, social, and existential aspects (Akita, 2012). These three aspects correspond to what Ishiguro (2004) mentions about the classroom; it is a place where students' cognitive, social, and existential learning is enhanced. Collaborative learning provides opportunities to learn to become citizens with appropriate social skills and attitudes through interaction with others.

Sato (2006b) proclaims that a teacher's mission is to contribute to the realization and development of a democratic society by providing all of her or his students with equal opportunities to learn, and by guaranteeing education for citizenship, so that students will be able to take part in activities of politics, economy, and culture as responsible citizens in the future. His idea is completely in alignment with the aims of education stated in the Japan's Basic Act on Education mentioned in the first

chapter. If his idea sounds novel, it indicates that the aims in the Act have been ignored while other priorities have been pursued.

Akita (2012) indicates that “collaborative learning in the classroom is an opportunity to learn basic manners of democracy” (p. 148). More specifically, students are required to learn how to create an atmosphere and relationships in which they can ask for help when in trouble. They are encouraged to ask questions when they do not understand something (an important ability for any individual to have in life), they are trained to respond cordially when asked a question or for a help, and they are required to give thoughtful attention to their relationships with others to be equitable all the time. These manners are important in the creation of a better society, in particular with respect to diversity and mutual support.

At this point, I turn back to Brown’s mention in the previous section that multiple ZPDs are constructed in a community in which differences and interdependence are valued. At the same time, however, these attitudes are nurtured through working together, as Akita mentions above. There is an organic relation among ZPDs, collaborative learning, and the development of citizenship; collaborative learning provides contexts to develop citizenship, which promotes further collaborative learning with the creation of multiple ZPDs.

I have reviewed ideas regarding how collaborative learning contributes to students’ cognitive, social, and existential development, the notion of ZPDs and social interaction, and the relationship between collaborative learning and citizenship, an essential factor of education related to its goals.

Next, in the last section of this chapter, I deal with resources including teaching materials. Resources are not only teaching materials; as noted earlier, members of the group can also be resources. The section explains how resources are interpreted in

the sociocultural framework, which will be a key concept in my concept of an EFL classroom. Such a classroom is designed to attract every student into interactions with resources.

## **2.3. Resources**

### **2.3.1. Resources in a social context**

Palfreyman (2006) divides language learning resources into two categories, *material resources* and *social resources*, and relates them to an ecological concept in a social context vis-à-vis the usual resource-based learning which “refers to learners’ independent interaction with learning materials” (p. 352). According to his division, social resources are human networks in the community both inside and outside of school, from which students get knowledge, support, or even influence. As for material resources, he includes the abstract sense of resources such as funds, examination systems (Tudor, 2001), and authority or power (van Lier, 2001), in addition to common ideas such as authentic materials, teaching materials, and equipment in the classroom.

In explaining how these resources are related to social factors, Palfreyman introduces the ideas of *arena* and *setting* (Lave, 1988). The *arena* is “a given social event or collection of events” (Palfreyman, 2006, p. 355) and the *setting* is “the context as experienced by a participant or set of participants with reference to a social context” (Palfreyman, 2006, p. 355). Both material resources and social resources are described in terms of *arena* and *setting*.

In the usual EFL classroom at a school, the material resources are textbooks, blackboards, dictionaries, CD players, etc., and the social resources are students, teachers, and sometimes assistant language teachers (ALTs). These material

resources and social resources constitute the *arena* for learning. They may not be used in the same way by all of the students; how students perceive the resources and what resources they choose vary depending on the ways in which the *setting* is established.

These views about resources are helpful in amplifying the usefulness of the resources available in the classroom. Both material resources and social resources are physically constrained by the *arena* on account of administrative rules or budgets, but there is yet room for increasing their accessibility and usability in different *settings*. I propose that collaborative learning is one of the ways to expand the accessibility and usability of social resources. Students who only study individually in a classroom facing a teacher and a blackboard at the front of the room are unlikely to be resources to each other. If they are situated in a context in which they work together toward a particular goal, the members jointly working in the group can become mutual resources.

Kasper (2011) indicates, “[w]hether in classrooms or elsewhere in social life, the interactional competence to make activities mutually intelligible moment-by-moment provides resources for participants” (p. 119). Collaborative learning, which promotes interactions, provides a suitable method to increase resources.

Moreover, Akita (2012) points out that collaborative learning can save reluctant students. This can be interpreted as implying that peers are social resources who can provide emotional support, and Palfreyman (2006) comments that such function of social resources influences learners’ motivation seriously.

There are some more delicate factors concerning a *setting*. In collaborative learning, students’ desks are usually placed in small groups, and that increases physical accessibility. However, if there is a tense atmosphere in a group, the physical

closeness does not work to increase mutual accessibility.

Teachers also can become social resources in the classroom, but if the teacher is domineering, authoritative, or frowning much of the time, it would be difficult for students to access the teacher as a learning resource. In fact, the aura that teachers radiate in the classroom is of importance to classroom climate (Pike & Selby, 1997). Teachers can be accessible and reliable resources when they behave in a democratic manner with respect for each student as a whole person, and when they work as facilitators with trust in the potential of each student. At the same time, such a stance by a teacher creates an impartial and supportive atmosphere in the classroom.

This knowledge of resources in a social context, especially the ideas of *arena* and *setting*, will be beneficial in designing a resourceful classroom. Lastly, I will review the previous research on teaching materials as resources, which are “an integral part of second language classroom” (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 779).

### **2.3.2. Teaching materials**

Teaching materials are “considered to be essential to the enterprise of language learning” (Tarone, 2014, p. 652), and it is often the case that “[t]extbooks in particular play a major role in classroom life” (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 799). Though the EFL textbooks for junior high school students in Japan are edited based on a grammatical syllabus, their topics are carefully chosen and laid out in a variety according to the Course of Study issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Sports (MEXT), which states:

(A) Materials should be useful in enhancing the understanding of various ways of viewing and thinking, fostering the ability to make impartial judgments and cultivating a rich sensibility.

(B) Materials should be useful in deepening the understanding of the ways of life and cultures of foreign countries and Japan, raising interest in language and culture and developing respectful attitudes toward these.

(C) Materials should be useful in deepening the international understanding from a broad perspective, heightening students' awareness of being Japanese citizens living in a global community and cultivating a spirit of international cooperation (MEXT, 2008, p. 8).

Junior high school EFL textbooks contain a wide variety of topics and contexts to draw students' interests. For example, the textbooks I used for the present research include topics such as "breakfast around the world" and "greetings around the world" for the seventh graders, "guide dogs" and "Maoris" for the eighth graders, and "volunteer activities" and "atomic bombs" for the ninth graders. It is thus not fair to blame only grammar-based textbooks for grammar-centered teaching. Even in "a traditional grammar-based and teacher fronted class," mentions van Lier (2008), "We must however bear in mind" that "learners might move around the subject matter mentally, and that language itself can construct its own panoramic space (through stories, examples, anecdotes, and so on)" (p. 54).

Garton and Graves (2014) also suggest, "The content of materials surely plays a significant role in the affordances for language learning" (p. 654). In this respect, content language integrated learning (CLIL) is the ideal approach, which creates a rich context for the subject matter itself (Järvinen, 2009). Saeki (1995) points out that students should be exposed to worthwhile teaching materials that are rich in authentic culture and of high quality, and that this is a particularly essential and important phase of education that will help students pursue a fruitful life.

Another aspect to be considered about teaching materials is how they contribute



to the creation of ZPDs. Akita (2012) suggests some techniques to invigorate active discussion, one of which is to ask authentic questions for which no one knows the answer. In a familiar scene of a traditional classroom, the teacher asks a question, the students who know the answer raise their hands and answer, the teacher moves to the next question, and the class thus proceeds (Sato, 2004). Students who know the answer have no ZPDs. Students who sit passively listening or pretending to listen to the teacher and the answering students without understanding them have no ZPDs either. A ZPD is created when the students are asked a question which requires their struggling, which causes collaboration. This idea is applicable to tasks in the English classroom. When students grapple with tasks, preferably authentic ones, at a level above their knowledge and skill, a ZPD is expected to be created.

In sum, teaching materials can be effective resources when the content is meaningful to students' lives and the way they are proposed is adequate to create contexts for learning.

#### **2.4. Summary**

The theoretical background and concepts related to *learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *resources* reviewed above can be summarized as follows:

##### **Learning**

- Learning is viewed as participation and/or contribution.
- It is always embedded and emerges in contexts and activities.

##### **Collaborative learning**

- Collaborative learning creates a context for students to participate in group activities.
- It constructs a ZPD by having peers to support mutually.

- It provides students with the opportunities for social interaction, which prompts their cognitive, social, and existential development.
- Social interaction also supports students' maturing the citizenship, which is the foremost aim of education.

#### Resources

- The availability of the resources in the classroom is constricted, but their accessibility and usability can be increased by the *setting*.
- Effective teaching materials construct ZPDs and create rich contexts for learning.

#### Expected students' learning

As we saw in this chapter, a classroom is a place where cognitive, social, and existential learning occurs through interactions in a sociocultural milieu. Cognitive learning in a language classroom can be divided into two subcategories; learning of the language itself and learning of the contents of teaching materials. Social learning can be subcategorized into the learning of "skills" and "attitudes and values" according to the domains of the education of citizenship. Depending on teaching materials, the contents are sometimes related to social learning or existential learning. On the premise that it is difficult to draw a sharp line, combining the education of citizenship with the sociocultural theory of language learning, I would expect the following learning to take place among the students in the classroom:

##### 1) Learning of the English language

Grammar, vocabulary, differences between Japanese and English, pronunciation, writing, listening, reading, speaking, and more

##### 2) Learning of the contents of teaching materials

##### 3) Learning of social skills

Collaborating, listening to others, asking a question, expressing opinions, collecting and processing information, and more

4) Learning of attitudes and values

Respecting diversity, consideration for others, concern about social issues, generosity, open-mindedness, sense and responsibility as a citizen, and more

5) Existential learning

Finding a place for oneself in a community, developing self-esteem, transformation of identity, and more

In this thesis, I use these five subcategories when necessary, and other times I basically use three terms; cognitive, social, and existential.

In this chapter, I have reviewed the existing literature, which helps us deepen our understanding of the sociocultural perspective on learning by focusing on *learning*, *collaborative learning*, and *resources*. The review also works in designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom in which every student's learning is enhanced.

In the next chapter, I explain my research design based on this view.

## Chapter 3 Study

### 3.1. School Contexts and Participants

The data presented in this research were collected from eighth graders' EFL lessons at a public junior high school in the northern area of Okayama Prefecture, Japan. It is a relatively small school with about 160 seventh- to ninth-grade students. It is located in a rural area surrounded by mountains and fields of rice and vegetables, and the public transportation system is not well developed. This rural circumstance seems to affect the students' motivation to learn English to some extent, because they have few occasions to hear or practice English outside of the school. The several lessons in every term taught by an ALT are the sole opportunity for most of the students to see and talk with an English-speaking person from abroad. Thus, for most of the students, English has been perceived as just a subject for the entrance examination, and they have hardly had an opportunity to experience why English is important or necessary for their lives. One of the students once said to me, "Why do we have English lessons? I have never seen my mother and father use English." Interestingly, however, English slogans such as "Never Give Up!" or "We Are Invincible!" are frequently used for the school's sports day and festival banners, displayed around the school. Somehow English apparently appeals to students as a "cool" language.

Forty-seven eighth graders (24 in Class 2-1 and 23 in Class 2-2) participated in the study. During the previous school year, they were asked to respond to a questionnaire that examined their attitudes toward learning English at school. The questionnaire was designed by the author and consisted of four items (see Appendix A and B). For the question "Did you like learning in Foreign Language Activities when

you were an elementary school student?" 21 of the 47 students (45%) answered positively, nine students (20%) did not, and the rest answered "I don't know." The students who negatively responded to the question above added their own comments such as "I didn't understand why I had to learn English" and "I couldn't understand what the ALT said, almost at all."

The school introduced collaborative learning as part of its school curriculum in 2010 as mentioned in Chapter 1. At first, the teachers needed to become familiar with what collaborative learning is and how to put it into practice; they did so by reading books, visiting other schools where collaborative learning was experimentally implemented, and inviting a practitioner who had been promoting collaborative learning in another prefecture once or twice a year as an advisor. According to the practitioner's advice, the teachers decided to give the students at least one group activity in each class of all their school subjects.

Some teachers felt it was too much of a challenge to change their teaching styles, and they were reluctant to follow the decision; they implemented a group activity only when they were required to demonstrate their class to other teachers. Some teachers were afraid that, since teachers are likely to loosen their control in a group activity, it might risk their classroom management and consequently the class might become chaotic, while other teachers struggled to challenge the new style. In the early days, some teachers who were watching other teachers' open classes could not resist a temptation to teach the students there, and this was often pointed out in the subsequent discussion. It was really challenging for the teachers to convert from teaching to having students engaged in learning.

The students also have had to train themselves in a new way of learning. They were encouraged to listen to others carefully, to say "I don't understand" when they

did not understand, and to respond cordially when asked for help. In the record of lesson studies, the participants in the present study were observed to be more awkward at working together in a group when they were seventh graders. Both the students and teachers grew accustomed to the new style, but usually the classes were arranged as group activities under the *acquisition metaphor* (Sfard, 1998) and seldom as dynamic scenes in which the students were devoted to exploring the unknown world.

Since I had been away from the school for about eight months when the present research was conducted, I took part in the Class 2-1 English classes three times and the Class 2-2 four times from December 2, 2013 to February 21, 2014 for the purpose of observing the students and renewing my relationship with them. I then taught English in both classes on March 6, 19, and 20 in 2014.

### **3.2. Lesson Plans**

Lesson plans were designed in line with the theories reviewed in Chapter 2 so that every student could learn by increasing accessibility and usability of resources as much as possible. The essential elements of the design as a whole were:

- Collaborative learning to make full use of social resources
- Teaching materials to promote access to material resources and social resources
- Teachers as accessible facilitators

As the school had already experimented with collaborative learning, and thus I found what I needed for teaching materials which would:

- have content that is authentic, worth pursuing, and meaningful to help students to become mature citizens
- be based on textbooks, not a special project, to be practical for everyday attempts
- include tasks requiring students' active involvement with their overall knowledge,

skill, and experience

- construct ZPDs for both struggling students and advanced students and create contexts in which group members would collaborate in meaningful ways

The following are the details of the three lesson plans (A, B, and C) with the principles mentioned above.

### Lesson Plan A

All textbooks for the seventh, eighth, and ninth graders include “Showing the Way” as a speaking activity. It’s a popular topic of English conversation in which the students memorize expressions such as “Turn left at the second traffic light” from the textbook. However, they have very few opportunities to use such phrases in their daily lives (see the school context above). In making a plan, I thought it would be more pedagogically significant for the students to experience a feeling and an action they should take when they see people in trouble on the street, rather than just learn the expressions of directing people.

This lesson plan is based on a story I heard from one of the ALTs with whom I had worked. According to him, when he asked the directions to local places on his trip, Japanese people ran away saying, “No, no,” or said nothing despite his effort to speak Japanese. Another scene I remembered in making this plan was that a man with an exotic features (it turned out later that he came from Bangladesh) stood motionless in Kyoto Station with his suitcase, staring at a railroad route map written completely in Japanese; nobody would help him until I went up to him. I felt that these two scenes could become vivid materials illustrating “Showing the Way” because they were authentic, and the students might actually encounter similar scenes in their real life. It would be meaningful to think how to behave as a sensible citizen when

they were put in the same situation. Here are the details of the lesson plan that I prepared based on these scenarios:

Material: "Showing the Way" (based on "*Michi-anna*" in "New Horizon English Course 1&2," Tokyo Shoseki, publisher)

Time: 1st period for Class 2-1, 6th period for Class 2-2, March 6, 2014

Objectives:

- 1) To review expressions to show the way
- 2) To review grammatical rules and increase vocabulary through group writing tasks
- 3) To be able to perform a skit in front of other groups
- 4) To cultivate a positive and considerate attitude toward people in trouble

Preparation: textbooks, a DVD, mini-whiteboards, dictionaries, photographs

Procedure:

- 1) Role-play (an American asks the way in Japanese and the Japanese people who are asked run away without saying anything.) – pair work
- 2) Describe the feelings of the American and the Japanese in this scenario – group activity
- 3) Review expressions to show the ways – whole class
- 4) Make a short skit in which a Japanese student talks to a man who seems to be from overseas and at a loss in front of a signboard written in Japanese at a station; perform the skit – group activity

### Lesson Plan B

The ninth graders' textbook deals with fair trade. Although the term "fair trade" has been spreading in Japan, very few stores in the school district carry fair trade



products, and the notion of fair trade was not familiar to many of the residents of the area. For example, people usually buy and eat chocolate from the market with little information about its manufacturing process. In fact, 80% of cacao beans consumed in Japan are imported from Ghana, where exploitation and child labor is still prevalent. To make it easier for students to understand the content of the textbook, I planned a preparatory lesson about fair trade using a newspaper article, photographs which were taken in Ghana by a non-governmental organization called ACE (Action against Child Exploitation), catalogues of fair trade companies in Japan that show various fair-trade products along with introductions of their actions in developing countries and the principles of fair trade, and real fair trade chocolate. The students actually tasted fair trade chocolate in the lesson with a special permission from the school principal.

Material: “Fair Trade Chocolate” (based on “Fair Trade Chocolate” in “New Horizon English Course 3,” Tokyo Shoseki)

Time: 1st period for Class 2-2, 2nd period for Class 2-1, March 19, 2014

Objectives:

- 1) To review numbers and comparison
- 2) To review grammatical rules and increase vocabulary through group writing tasks
- 3) To have knowledge of fair trade
- 4) To be interested in world issues such as global economy and child labor

Preparation: a world map, fair-trade chocolate, common chocolate, photographs of a village in Ghana, newspaper, catalogues of fair-trade companies, mini-whiteboards, dictionaries

Procedure:

- 1) Compare the price of common chocolate and fair trade chocolate – whole

class

- 2) Get information about the ingredients of chocolate and the location of Ghana, the main producing country of cacao beans – whole class
- 3) Describe the photographs of a village where farmers grow cacao beans in Ghana – group activity
- 4) Get knowledge about fair trade and think about ways to stop child labor (in Japanese) – whole class

### Lesson plan C

Lesson Plan C is based on a brief essay about the earth titled “Over the Horizon” as a reading material in the seventh graders’ textbook. It is full of beautiful expressions like “The Earth looks like one peaceful planet,” and “Let’s live together as members of a family.” However, the expressions sounded a little too idealized and I was afraid that the story would not resonate with the students’ experiences in the real world. I thus contrived to use the singer Bette Midler’s well known song “From a Distance” and issues of the magazines “Days Japan” to help the students think about the realities of conflicts, poverty, discrimination, and more. The lyrics of the song and the photographs from the magazines seemed helpful to turn the students’ eyes to what was happening around the world. These issues should be of interest to students as global citizens, and students their age should realize that the issues are related to our everyday life. At the time when the lesson was conducted, the students were scheduled to go on a future school excursion to Nagasaki, where an atomic bomb was dropped, and they were just preparing for holding a meeting in front of the Peace Memorial Statue. It was thus timely to deal with these topics.

Material: “From a Distance” (based on “Let’s Read ‘Over the Horizon’” in “New

Horizon English Course 1,” Tokyo Shoseki)

Time: 2nd period for Class 2-2, 5th period for Class 2-1, March 20th, 2014

Objectives:

- 1) To have knowledge about vocabulary such as the plural and multiple meanings
- 2) To understand the meaning of the lyrics of the song “From a Distance”
- 3) To be able to find a favorite expression in the song and show it to peers
- 4) To be able to write a peace message
- 5) To broaden a view of the world issues and get interested in making a peaceful society

Preparation: textbooks, a CD and a CD player, lyrics sheets, magazines, dictionaries

Procedure:

- 1) Fill in seven blanks of the lyrics sheets (four English words and three Japanese words) – individual work with desks gathered as a group
- 2) Understand the meaning of the song – whole class
- 3) Sing the song – whole class
- 4) Choose a favorite expression in the lyrics and share it in a group – group activity
- 5) Write a peace message – individual work with desks gathered as a group

### **3.3. Data Collection**

All six lessons were taught by the author and they were videotaped by the teacher who usually teaches English in those classes. Since the teachers at the school regularly videotaped lessons for their collaborative learning project, the students were

accustomed to being videotaped and thus the camera had little effect on the lessons. I would also add that students were accustomed to having other teachers coming in and out of their classroom freely during the classes, because as a policy of the project, every teacher was obliged to open her or his class at any time, and some teachers who did not have classes at the time frequently visited classrooms to see other teachers' classes and students.

The data collected also included brief reflection sheets (see Appendix C and D) that were completed by the students at the end of each lesson. The sheet was also used for the students to note what they had learned and at the same time for the teachers examine what the students had retained. For a practical reason, the reflection sheet was designed so that the students could finish them within a short time. I copied them for analysis before I returned them to the students with brief comments.

### **3.4. Methods of Analysis**

The main argument of this thesis is that all students can benefit from participating in a collaborative and resourceful classroom. However, students' learning is invisible (Matsushita, 2007). How is it possible to describe students' learning? As we discussed in Chapter 2, learning is viewed as participation from a sociocultural view, and participation has been regarded as taking part in the environment of a community (Sfard, 1998).

Van Lier (2004) shows how learners engage with the environment by explaining the relationships among perception, interpretation, and action. Before taking action, learners perceive some particular feature in the environment and interpret its meaning (van Lier, 2004). Thus, an action that emerges implies a preceding perception and interpretation of the environment. Perception and interpretation are possible through

interaction with the environment. When resources are available, accessible, and meaningful, they can be useful features in the environment. That is to say, the students' learning process can be traced by looking at their interaction with resources, which is visible. In addition, there are two types of interaction: verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal interaction includes eye movements, pointing, the position of the body, body movements, facial expression, etc., and they have a tight connection with cognition, emotion, and the world environment (Atkinson, 2007).

In sum, in order to ensure students' learning, I would like to focus on the following aspects of the students' interaction and investigate how collaborative learning enables all students to participate in language activities.

- Use of material resources such as dictionaries and whiteboards
- Verbal interactions with peers
- Nonverbal interactions with peers

Verbal interactions recorded on the videotape were transcribed and used for the conversation analysis along with the nonverbal interactions observed on the videotape. Conversation analysis is a way to "relocates cognition from its traditional habitat in the privacy of people's minds to the arena of social interaction" (Kasper, 2011, p. 120). The learning process is complex and dynamic with each participant's action combining to create some kind of meaning, which directs the subsequent action or interaction (Isomura, 2007). A conversation analysis enables the evaluation of minute movements of interaction from moment to moment in parallel to local contexts (Yoshii, et al., 1999), which is an essential element of sociocultural perspective.

Reflection sheets were analyzed according to the five subcategories of learning mentioned previously (2.4.) in order to see students' learning which I could not cover in the scenes I used for the conversation analysis.

## **Chapter 4 Analyses of the Lessons**

In this chapter, I will illustrate how the collaborative and resourceful classroom helped the students participate in the learning activities. In the following two sections, I will focus on two scenes from the data and examine them using conversation analysis. The analysis of Case 1 sheds light on what roles one dictionary had when a student used it in a group activity. In Case 2, I examine how the uttering of a Japanese word by one student grew into a full English sentence during a task of collaborative writing in a group that effectively functioned as a social resource. These cases are chosen and discussed because they highlight three students who might not normally be spotlighted in a classroom with a traditional teaching style because of their low achievement or bashfulness, and at the same time, the cases also show how students of a high-level of English have a space for learning while doing the same task. In the subsequent section, I will analyze students' reflection sheets as well to cover other students' learning to supplement the two short scenes in the first two sections.

### **4.1. Case 1**

#### **4.1.1. Members of Group 1 in Class 2-1**

This lesson was conducted in Class 2-1 on March 20, 2014. The group in question consisted of four members, but one student was in the nurse's room during the lesson. According to an advisor who visited the school once or twice a year, the seats and group members were decided by students' drawing lots every fixed period, five weeks in this case, so that they could learn to get along with all of the other students, and these groups were used in the classes of all school subjects. There was

not a leader in the group because—and this was also advice from the advisor—each member should have equal footing as a protagonist of learning. In the following cases, pseudonyms will be used when referring to particular students in the data.

Masato, one of the group members, was a slow learner and was always ranked the lowest in the regular examinations. His scores in the listening comprehension tests were also below average in the class. However, he mastered how to find a word in a dictionary when he was in the seventh grade, and he was often observed voluntarily consulting a dictionary. Yumi and Rika, other students in the group, were both quiet and hardly attracted attention from other students in the class. Yumi was ranked at the middle and Rika was ranked the second highest in regular examinations.

#### **4.1.2. A scene around “yama” and “yamayama”**

This lesson was conducted based on Lesson Plan C. The students were required to fill in the blanks on a lyrics sheet first before listening to the song. They could guess the answers by translating Japanese equivalent words and phrases into English ones and vice versa. In this activity, the students did not necessarily have to work together, but some of the students began to discuss answers with each other because their desks were joined as a group in case they needed to help one another. The first part of the lyrics was as follows (see Appendix E for the whole lyrics sheet with the Japanese translation).

From a distance, the (                    ) looks blue and green,  
and the snow capped (                    ) white.

Yumi and Rika began to work collaboratively from the outset because they were

close friends, but Masato did not join them because he thought he was able to find the right words by using a dictionary. He suspected that the word for the first blank would be “*sekai*” by referring to the Japanese translation. He left his seat to fetch one of the Japanese-English dictionaries in the classroom library. Actually, the students had learned the word “world” by the date of this lesson, and so Yumi and Rika wrote it in an instant and they began to work on the word for the second blank.

Masato came back with three Japanese-English dictionaries, and put two of them on the desks of Yumi and Rika respectively without saying anything. He then began to look for the page with “*sekai*”. He could have asked his group peers, which might have been easier, but he did not and chose to use a dictionary. Although he was weak in English, he knew that a dictionary could provide vocabulary knowledge. Judging from the fact that he brought dictionaries to Yumi and Rika, he was conscious of group peers, but he did not have to depend on them. When he found the word “world” for “*sekai*” in the dictionary, he copied that word on his sheet. Since he was so poor at memorizing English spelling, he had to look in the dictionary twice while copying five letters. The following excerpt begins at the moment Masato finished writing it.

**Excerpt 1** (see Appendix F for transcription conventions)

*Yumi and Rika have been discussing which word should fit the second blank, while Masato has been working singly and has just filled in the first blank.*

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<p>1. Masato: <i>de?</i> (3) <i>yama</i></p> <p>2. Yumi: (To Rika) <i>yamayama ja nain.</i></p> <p>3. Rika: (To Yumi) <i>yamayama?</i> (Masato looks up to give a glimpse to Rika for a second.)</p> <p>4. Yumi: (To Rika) <i>shiraberu?</i> = (Rika picks up a dictionary.)</p>	<p>1. Masato: now what? (3) <i>yama</i></p> <p>2. Yumi: (To Rika) isn't <i>yamayama</i> for the blank.</p> <p>3. Rika: (To Yumi) <i>yamayama?</i> (Masato looks up to give a glimpse to Rika for a second.)</p> <p>4. Yumi: (To Rika) shall we consult a dictionary? = (Rika picks up a dictionary.)</p>
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<p>5. Masato: = <i>yama</i> (He begins to open a dictionary.) <i>shirabete ageyo.</i></p> <p>6. Rika: (With a dictionary kept closed, to Yumi) mountain? (1) <i>yamayamatte nante iin.</i></p> <p>7. Yumi: (1) <i>saa.</i></p> <p>8. Masato: <i>ATTOO</i> (Masato looks up and gives a straight gaze at Rika.)</p> <p>9. Masato: mountain mountain. (Yumi has a glimpse at Rika anxiously.)</p> <p>10. Yumi: (To Masato) <i>yamayama de?</i>  (Yumi looks into Masato's dictionary.)</p>	<p>5. Masato: = <i>yama</i> (He begins to open a dictionary.) I'll look it up for you.</p> <p>6. Rika: (With a dictionary kept closed, to Yumi) mountain? (1) what's the English word for <i>yamayama</i>.</p> <p>7. Yumi: (1) I don't know.</p> <p>8. Masato: HERE (Masato looks up and gives a straight gaze at Rika.)</p> <p>9. Masato: mountain mountain. (Yumi has a glimpse at Rika anxiously.)</p> <p>10. Yumi: (To Masato) I'm afraid it's not <i>yamayama?</i>  (Yumi looks into Masato's dictionary.)</p>
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(Translation mine)

After saying, “*de?*” (“now what?”) (turn 1), which signaled he was ready to move onto the next blank, Masato pointed at the second blank. Yumi and Rika were working together without looking at Masato at all, but the recorded videotape shows a moment of their unconscious coincidence of physical movement; all three members pointed at the second blank with their forefingers at the same time. About three seconds after saying “*de?*” Masato mumbled “*yama,*” which indicated that he was able to infer that the word for the next blank would be an English word for “*yama*” in Japanese, and he moved his eyes from the English lyrics to the Japanese translation again to make sure his inference. Probably Yumi heard Masato’s mumbling and it became her resource to suggest to Rika that “*yamayama*” in the Japanese translation would be appropriate for the second blank (turn 2).

At this point, Masato’s mumbling apparently contributed to Yumi’s work on a subconscious level. Masato became a social resource for Yumi, and this was possible because of the physical closeness of their desks; conversely the setting increased a social resource for Yumi here. Masato was devoted to his own work, but at the

moment Rika reacted to Yumi uttering “*yamayama?*” in rising intonation (turn 3), Masato gave a quick glance at Rika, because it was just the word he was about to look for (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Group work by Masato, Rika, and Yumi

His glance at Rika indicated that he began to be conscious of what Yumi and Rika were doing. The word “*yama*” mumbled by Masato was perceived by Yumi, relayed to Rika, and then returned to Masato. At this point, Masato, Yumi, and Rika joined in the same activity through the word “*yama*”.

While Masato picked up a dictionary and opened it, he said “*yama*” again (turn 5), not mumbling but clearly articulating the word this time, and added, “I’ll look it up for you,” toward Rika. Considering that Rika and Yumi were working together and Masato knew this—though his eyes were directed to only Rika, because she was in front of him—it was possible that he was verbally interacting with both Rika and Yumi. His utterance “I’ll look it up for you” sounded that he was happy or proud of himself for being of help to Yumi and Rika, because struggling students rarely have opportunities to say such words to students whose scores in the examination are always much higher.

While Masato was consulting a dictionary, Rika had stopped opening a dictionary in her hands and said “*mountain?*” to Yumi (turn 6). She knew that “*yama*”



is “mountain” in English, but what she wanted to know what “*yamayama*” should be translated as. As for Masato, however, since “*yamayama*” is twice the word “*yama*” in Japanese, he thought that the same rule would be applied to English. When he found “mountain” in the dictionary, he burst out with a joyful interjection (turn 8), straightened his back up (Fig.2-(1)), and decisively declared “mountain mountain” (turn 9), looking straight ahead at Rika who was in front of him (Fig. 2-(2)).

Yumi felt that the wording “mountain mountain” sounded a bit strange, so she looked at Rika with an anxious look on her face and then looked into Masato’s dictionary, only to fail in finding a correct answer (turn 10). Masato, who did not understand why Yumi and Rika persisted with “*yamayama*” turned the dictionary toward Yumi and Rika so they could see it easily, and began writing “mountain mountain” on his sheet with one hand keeping the dictionary from closing. In this scenario, he showed his consideration for others by turning the dictionary toward Rika and Yumi.

#### 4.1.3. Roles of a dictionary in this case

This case indicated that a dictionary, one material resource, had multiple roles when it was used in collaborative learning. First, it worked as a tool to provide Masato with English words equivalent to Japanese words, in this scene, “world” and

“mountain.” This was related to his cognitive learning.

Second, the dictionary brought out his positive action. He tried to find target words using a dictionary of his own accord and on his own account instead of depending on his group peers. This was related to his existential learning.

Third, the dictionary expressed his gentle personality. He fetched two more dictionaries for his peers and turned his opened dictionary toward his peers so that they could see it easily. The dictionary happened to play these particular roles in this case, and at other times, other materials may have the same roles. Whatever the materials, Masato’s gentle personality would not have been revealed if it were not for a context and peers to show it. This was related to his social learning.

Fourth, the dictionary connected Masato to Yumi and Rika. The dictionary gave him a chance to join other peers when he wanted to contribute to their search for the word. This was also relate to his social learning.

Last, related to the fourth point, the dictionary brought Masato a degree of self-esteem and pleasure. It seemed to make him happy that he could be of some help to others in an English class, and this probably gave him some confidence judging from his manner of speaking and attitude. This was related to his existential learning.

If Masato had been working alone, the dictionary would have had only the first two roles. Since he had peers to play catch with the words “*yama*” and “*yamayama*,” the dictionary had more roles. Probably Masato himself was not aware of these roles the dictionary played. However, considering common cases in which the students at the bottom of the academic hierarchy are apt to be buffeted by a sense of inferiority, lose their motivation or self-respect, and sometimes drop out of school, Masato’s proudly pronounced “mountain mountain” is smile-provoking. A dictionary is just a bound pile of paper when it is on a shelf. When Masato accessed it, and when it was

used in collaborative learning, it became a meaningful resource offering him fruitful learning and an ontologically precious moment.

#### **4.1.4. A task creating ZPDs**

Many other groups also had a difficulty in reaching the correct answer “mountains” in this task. Some groups skipped the blank because they could not find “*yamayama*” in the Japanese-English dictionary. Other groups tried to look up “*sanmyaku* (mountain range)” in the dictionary—admirable flexibility.

Since they had learned how to make plural words in the seventh grade, most students could have got “mountains” if they were simply asked to write the plural form of “mountain.” Most of them reached “mountains” eventually with a hint by a teacher, which means that this task had the ZPD for them and could provide a space for learning even for the students who were good at English.

The task was rather simple and mechanical (filling in the blanks), and yet the ZPD created by the difference in the plural form between English and Japanese made a context for the three students to interact in Masato’s group. This is highlighted by the fact that when they were working on the first blank, no interactions occurred between Masato and the other two students.

In short, a task which challenges applicability of students’ knowledge has a chance to create ZPDs, and that kind of task is likely to provide various levels of students with a space for learning and a context to collaborate.

## **4.2. Case 2**

### **4.2.1. Members of Group 4 of Class 2-1**

This lesson was conducted in the same class as the Case 1 on the previous day

based on Lesson Plan B.

Kenta was a somewhat mischievous student, and he liked to make other people laugh by engaging in funny speech and behavior. He sometimes went too far and got a scolding from teachers, but he was sensitive at heart and helped his sick grandmother do house chores at home. He was not very good at English. His scores in regular examinations were below the grade average by about 15 points. He was the first student who proclaimed when entering junior high school that he did not like English at elementary school. However, he was basically very positive and sociable, and so he often grabbed a whiteboard voluntarily in a group work declaring, "I will write."

Takao was a generous student with strong intellectual curiosity, and his nickname was "*Otosan* (Daddy)." His scores in regular examinations were over 90 three times out of five times, with 85 as the lowest score.

Sayaka was another curious student. She enjoyed everything and was willing to take on challenges. She looked lively and joyful all the time, and liked to make her friends laugh by imitating *Doraemon*, a cartoon robot that looks like a cat. Her scores in regular examinations were over 90 twice out of five times, with 83 as the lowest score.

In contrast, Kayo was a very quiet girl. Her scores in regular examinations were 9 to 15 points above the grade average, but she did not like to stand out. She always smiled silently, but had a strong sense of responsibility. She sincerely tried to gather her courage when she had to engage in some kind of performance in front of other students. I have described these students' characteristics somewhat specifically, because those characteristics matter in the following sections.

#### **4.2.2. A scene from "*dromizu*" to "muddy water"**

The students were instructed to describe in English what they saw in photographs taken in a village in Ghana. This was a group task. Each group was given one photograph at random and one mini-whiteboard. In cases in which the students could not think of any ideas regarding how to begin a sentence, I put four samples on an electric display at the front of the class and reviewed them with the students in advance. The samples were, “We see,” “There is,” “There are,” and “A woman is -ing.” A photograph Group 4 received showed a well in the village, some bowls of water, and two people near the well.

### Excerpt 2A

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1. Takao: <i>doromizu</i>	1. Takao: <i>doromizu</i>
2. Kenta: (5) <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu	2. Kenta: (5) <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu
3. Sayaka: <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu =	3. Sayaka: <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu =
4. Kenta: = <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu	4. Kenta: = <i>doro</i> ↑ <i>MI</i> :::zu
5. Sayaka: <i>nantoka</i> water <i>daro</i> =	5. Sayaka: it should be so-and-so water =
6. Kenta: = <i>nani</i> water?	6. Kenta: = what water?
7. Sayaka: <i>nantoka</i> water (.) <i>doro</i> water	7. Sayaka: so-and-so water (.) <i>doro</i> water
8. Takao: <i>doro wa naa</i> (.) <i>eigo de naa</i>	8. Takao: what is <i>doro</i> (.) in English
9. Kenta: we see (.) we see (.) we see (.) <i>naa naa</i> , <i>saishono dedashi wa nande ikun.</i>	9. Kenta: we see (.) we see (.) we see (.) hey hey, what word shall we use to begin with.
10. Sayaka: there.	10. Sayaka: there.
11. Takao: is.	11. Takao: is.

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(Translation mine)

Takao muttered “*doromizu*” looking at the water in bowls (turn 1). During the subsequent 5-second silence, the group members might have tried to translate “*doromizu*” into English, but the rather long silence of 5 seconds meant that nobody succeeded. Sayaka and Kenta were comparatively good at English, but the textbooks did not include such a word. Suddenly, Kenta interrupted the silence, pronouncing “*doromizu*” like an English pronunciation, with strong stress on the syllable “*mi*” (turn

2). This was Kenta's wit as a joker. His cheerful character worked as a social resource to break the silence. Sayaka imitated it using the same intonation in a playful mood (turn 3), and Kenta repeated after her, enjoying the resonance (turn 4).

At that point Sayaka realized that she knew that "mizu" was "water" in English, so she changed "doromizu" into "nantoka (so-and-so) water" (turn 5). Kenta asked her to make sure what she said or wanted to know how to say "nantoka" in English (turn 6). Sayaka repeated the same thing first but then quickly changed "nantoka" to "doro" (turn 7). Now that "doromiz" developed to "doro water," Takao realized that he could look up "doro" in a Japanese-English dictionary (turn 8).

While Takao was consulting a dictionary, Kenta was trying to write the beginning of a sentence on the whiteboard. He looked at the display and repeated the first example three times aloud (turn 9). Upon his asking his group peers what example to use to begin with, Sayaka answered "there" (turn 10). That quick response implied that she might have had an idea of using "There is" or "There are" from the start, but judging from the fact that she said just "there," she might not have been able to discern which be-verb to use. Takao added "is" reflectively (turn 11). While Kenta was writing "There" on the whiteboard glancing at the spelling on the display, Takao found "mud" for "doro." Kenta contributed with his character, and Sayaka and Takao contributed with their knowledge and flexible thinking.

### Excerpt 2B

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<p>1. Takao: mud water. (Kenta finishes writing 'There is a' on the whiteboard.)</p> <p>2. Takao: (like mumbling) is <i>janoute</i> there are <i>nanjanen</i>. =</p> <p>3. Kenta: = <i>naa, ma - sono</i> (.) mud water <i>tte</i></p>	<p>1. Takao: mud water. (Kenta finishes writing 'There is a' on the whiteboard.)</p> <p>2. Takao: (like mumbling) I think it's not 'is' but 'there are'. =</p> <p>3. Kenta: = hey, mu - that (.) mud water should</p>
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<i>oomojide kakanto ikenno? komoji de ee?</i>	be written in capital letters? are lowercase letters OK?
4. Takao: THERE ARE <i>janen.</i> =	4. Takao: I think it's 'THERE ARE'. =
5. Sayaka: <i>kore</i> xx (points to the photograph)	5. Sayaka: this xx (points to the photograph)
6. Takao: <i>ichi, ni, san, shi</i> (counts the number of bowls in the photograph pointing one by one)	6. Takao: one, two, three, four (counts the number of bowls in the photograph pointing one by one)
7. Kenta: <i>shikkari shi↑teyo otoosan.</i>	7. Kenta: be de↑pendable daddy.
8. Sayaka: there	8. Sayaka: there
9. Takao: are (.) <i>mizu</i> (tries to count the bowls again)	9. Takao: are (.) water (tries to count the bowls again)
10. Takao: AA (.) ↑ <i>SOuka</i> (3) there is <i>ka.</i> (.) <i>mizu wa kazoerenken</i>	10. Takao: OH (.) I↑GOt it (3) we should use 'there is'. (.) because water is uncountable

(Translation mine)

Takao suggested that “*doromizu*” should have been “mud water” (turn 1), though this was corrected later. When Kenta finished writing “There is a” on the whiteboard, Takao mumbled that the be-verb for the beginning of the sentence should have been “are” instead of “is” (turn 2), but Kenta did not hear his mumbling. Takao repeated the same thing clearly this time (turn 4) without responding to Kenta’s question asking whether he should write “mud water” in capital letters or in lowercase letters (turn 3). Induced by Sayaka’s pointing to the photograph (turn 5), Takao began to count the number of bowls in the photograph (turn 6).

Sayaka’s pointing to the photograph might have functioned as a nonverbal interaction to invite Takao to look at it again. Takao thought it strange to use “is” and “a” for plural bowls. That was why he said “are” (turn 9) after Sayaka muttered “there” again without a be-verb (turn 8). However, at the moment Takao tried to count the bowls again, he suddenly remembered that water was an uncountable noun (turn 10).

After this scene, a teacher who walked by the group advised them to look up an

adjective of “mud” in the dictionary, and the group then completed a full sentence, “There is some muddy water.” Now they were practicing reading the sentence aloud.

### Excerpt 2C

1. Kenta: there is some (.) a - <i>nante yomu?</i> (.) mud (.) water =	1. Kenta: there is some (.) a - how should I pronounce this? (.) mud (.) water =
2. Takao: = muddy water.	2. Takao: = muddy water.
3. Sayaka: muddy?	3. Sayaka: muddy?
4. Kenta: muddy. =	4. Kenta: muddy. =
5. Takao: = muddy water. =	5. Takao: = muddy water. =
6. Sayaka: = <i>dotchi?</i> =	6. Sayaka: = which? =
7. Kenta: = <i>nante hatsuon surun.</i> (Kenta looks into a dictionary in Kayo's hands)	7. Kenta: = what's the pronunciation. (Kenta looks into a dictionary in Kayo's hands)
8. Takao: muddy (.) muddy water.	8. Takao: muddy (.) muddy water.
9. Kenta: ma - ma - muddy. muddy. [(.) MUddy. (.) MUddy.] MUddy.	9. Kenta: mu - mu - muddy. muddy. [(.) MUddy. (.) MUddy.] MUddy.
10. Takao: [muddy. (.) muddy.]	10. Takao: [muddy. (.) muddy.]
11. Kenta: <i>MA:tsuyoku</i> MUddy.	11. Kenta: MU: should be strong MUddy.
12. All: <b>(laughing)</b>	12. All: <b>(laughing)</b>

(Translation mine)

Kenta tried to read the sentence, but he didn't know how to read “muddy,” and so he asked his group peers how to read it (turn 1). Since this group found “mud” first and then changed it into “muddy” later, Kenta, who was not good at connecting sounds and spelling, was confused about the sounds [mʌd] and [mʌdi]. Not only Kenta but Sayaka was also confused (turn 3). Takao told them the correct pronunciation (turns 2 and 5), but Sayaka and Kenta seemed to be skeptical of it (turns 6 and 7). Kenta abruptly leaned toward Kayo in order to look into the dictionary in her hands, which had the English pronunciation in *katakana* (the angular form of Japanese syllabic writing) to check the pronunciation by himself, and he found that [mʌdi] was correct.

Kenta then faced Takao and repeated “muddy” like a teacher so that Takao

repeated after him like a student (turns 8-10). Takao also enjoyed repeating after him hilariously. When Kenta pronounced “muddy” with an exaggerated stress in a clownish way (turn 11), all of the other group members including Kayo burst into laughter (turn 12).

It took about three minutes for this group to reach this laughing from Takao’s first muttering “*doromizu*.” Continuing such comical interaction, this group made up three sentences below within the designated 15 minutes, and time ran out when they were thinking of a fourth sentence to describe rubbles on the ground.

- There is some muddy water.
- The woman on the earth. (A verb was not added.)
- A daughter is drawing water from a well. (“A girl” was better.)

During the feedback time, each group introduced the sentences they made in front of other groups in turn and mistakes were corrected there. The whole class shared all of the six photographs, reviewed grammatical rules, and enriched vocabulary. At the same time, they learned where chocolate is produced, who produce it, and how those people live in a village. The students’ notes in their reflection sheets (shown in 4.3.) indicate that this teaching material aroused their cognitive, social, and existential learning.

#### **4.2.3. Functions of verbal interaction**

The interaction in this group is characterized by the following four points. First, the students freely voiced anything they thought of. Second, they listened to each other carefully on the whole and latched their utterances smoothly. One utterance became a resource for the next utterance, and a full sentence was shaped gradually from “*doromizu*.” Third, there were many interrogative sentences in their

interaction. Kenta particularly asked about what he didn't know, without hesitation, and he was not treated the worse for doing so. Takao and Sayaka were comparatively good at English, but they also presented questions frankly. When a question was presented, there occurred a context for the members to learn cognitively to answer it. Every time they spoke out questions, they created a space for learning among themselves. Lastly, the students' interaction sounded light-hearted and enjoyable. As resources sometimes exist in "less palpable" forms (van Lier, 2001) or involve "mental factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural expectations brought by participants" (Tudor, 2001), Kenta's sense of humor and comedic character worked a lot as social resources for the group's learning. His "*doroMI:::zu*" (turn 2 in Excerpt 2A) with an English-like accent sounded like a desperate or attention-grabbing joke, but his wit consequently evolved into a full sentence. Takao's generosity and Sayaka's hilarious character also contributed to creation of a warm-hearted and pleasant atmosphere. For example, Sayaka enjoyed uttering the cheery sound of "*doroMI:::zu*" with Kenta (turn 3 in Excerpt 2A), and Takao enjoyed playing the role of Kenta's student (turn 9 in Excerpt 2C). These playful behaviors contributed to a warm and supportive atmosphere in which the students enjoyed learning and became creative. They looked cheerful, but their relay of words was always coherent to the task.

The verbal interaction observed in this group exactly covered the three aspects that Akita (2012) mentions; cognitive, social, and existential. The students made English sentences by reviewing the grammar they had learned and increasing their vocabulary with the help of a dictionary, practiced reading, and got an image of a cacao village. These are related to cognitive learning. They listened to each other well with one exception (turn 3 in Excerpt 2B), latched utterances, and asked questions

of each other. They enjoyed the interaction respecting each other's character and creating a warmer relationship, free from embarrassment or humiliation for making mistakes or poor understanding. These are related to social learning. They spoke freely, apparently feeling that they are accepted as they are. This is related to existential learning. Their verbal interaction involved these three aspects and promoted their learning.

#### **4.2.4. A task creating ZPDs**

Sayaka and Takao were two of the most competent students in English at the school. Even these students had a difficulty in deciding a be-verb in this task of free describing. The number of the bowls puzzled them first (turn 5 and 6 in Excerpt 2B), but it turned out to be irrelevant. In this case, the task had a ZPD, and they could manage to reach the correct be-verb through collaboration.

There was another ZPD created in this scene. At first, they thought "*doromizu*" in Japanese was "mud water" in English because "*doro*" was "mud" and "*mizu*" was "water." A teacher who walked by the group advised them to find an adjective of "mud." The teacher did not teach the answer directly but created a ZPD by giving a hint.

This task of free describing could create a lot of ZPDs, which provided all levels of students with a space for learning according to their own context. Kenta wrote in his reflection sheet, "I learned the spelling of some words," whereas Takao wrote that he reviewed how to use the pronoun "they." Their notes indicate that each student created her or his own ZPD though they were engaging in the same task.

#### **4.2.5. Silent participation**

So far I have focused on just three members' interactions in this group, but there was one more member in this group, Kayo. She was listening to the other three members, and had kept open the page about "muddy" since Takao had passed her a dictionary. The recorded video shows that she faced the other members all the time, and while Kenta was writing on the whiteboard, she frequently looked at him and the whiteboard so that she could show the dictionary to Kenta whenever he needed it. She didn't contribute to the verbal interactions, but her nonverbal interaction showed that she also participated in the group activity and learning.

There was a point at which Kenta leaned to Kayo suddenly (Fig. 3) to look into the dictionary in her hands, asking, "What's the pronunciation?" (turn 7 in Excerpt 2C). He knew that she had kept open the page with "muddy." When Kenta exaggerated the pronunciation of "muddy," Kayo was laughing with other members (Fig. 4).



*Figure 3.* "What's the pronunciation?"



*Figure 4.* "Muddy" and everybody's laughing

Akita (2012) mentions that some students participate in learning and deepen their understanding just by listening to peers when a group shares a feeling of fellowship. Brown (1998) also argues that it is possible to learn by listening to peers' discussion because discussion is an externalized form of the group members' thinking. In this case, in addition, a mini-whiteboard was used to externalize the group members' thinking in a visible way and could invite Kayo into the other peers' interaction more

easily. Kayo wrote in her reflection sheet, “It was hard to think about the construction of sentences.” This note indicates that she thought of English sentences together with her peers in her own manner, even though she didn’t utter a word. It was peripheral but good participation.

Group activity is likely to promote accessing peers as social resources, but some students still have difficulty interacting with their peers. The physical conditions of group activity are apt to encourage such students more to participate in learning compared to a whole-class activity. For example, the shorter distances between peers and more opportunities to share material resources such as a dictionary or a whiteboard made it easier for shy or quiet students to participate in the group activity. The material resources have social function, too.

Kenta wrote in his reflection sheet that he learned the importance of equitable relationships among people. Since the content of this class was fair trade, his comment was probably about the relationship on the global stage, but his comment should be respected in smaller communities, like a classroom. The members of this group were learning to create equal and generous relationships, in which Kayo could laugh happily with the other students while saying nothing. This illustrates the group’s precious social and existential learning in parallel with their cognitive learning.

#### **4.3. An Analysis of the Reflection Sheets**

In this section, I present an analysis of students’ learning, based on their notes from their reflection sheets. This analysis is presented according to the five subcategories of learning indicated previously (2.4.). The capital letter in the parentheses indicates Lessons A, B, and C.

#### **4.3.1. Learning of the English language**

- (1) I understood that the meaning of a word varies according to the way it is pronounced (A).
- (2) It took us a long time to decide which tense to use, past or present (A).
- (3) I reviewed how to use “there are” and I learned some new words (B).
- (4) I remembered that any noun after “many” should be used in its plural form (B).
- (5) I remembered how to use “of” (C).
- (6) I learned that the meaning of a word changes depending on the combination with other words. For example, the meaning of “look” is different in “look at” and “look like” (C).
- (7) I learned two new words from a dictionary: “frightened” and “scary” (A).
- (8) I learned that the plural form of “woman” is “women” (B).
- (9) I learned that “well” has many meanings (B).
- (10) I was surprised and found it interesting to know that the word “ocean” has something to do with “Oceania,” which I learned in the geography class (C).

In the above reflection notes, points (1) to (6) mention what the students had already learned. For example, despite having learned how to use the preposition “of,” some of them said, “Oh, ‘of’ is used in this way!” as if they had learned that for the first time. This indicates that the context in which they need to use their knowledge reinforce their consciousness about how to use it.

Points (7) to (10) indicate that some students learned what they were yet to learn in the textbook. The student who wrote Point (7) was not very good at English, but he referred to a dictionary to identify words he wanted to express. Neither “frightened” nor “scary” appeared in the textbook used at the school, even for the ninth



graders. Therefore, I suppose he was happy to find those “difficult” words, judging from the fact that he mentioned this in his reflection sheet. The context created by the teaching material drew his positive attitude, and as in Masato’s case (4.1.), his cognitive learning involved his existential learning.

All students do not necessarily learn the same thing from the same resource. Rather, these notes indicate that each student creates her or his own ZPD consciously or unconsciously depending on her or his own context.

#### **4.3.2. Learning of the contents of teaching materials**

- (1) I understood that Scott was sad because the man whom he asked for direction ran away (A).
- (2) I thought that running away without saying anything was bad manners (A).
- (3) I didn’t know that children had to work in poor countries (B).
- (4) To provide chocolate for us, many children have to work in Ghana, and they can’t go to school (B).
- (5) The school lunch in Ghana didn’t look tasty (B).
- (6) Songs can convey feelings (C).
- (7) I feel sad that many tragedies occur on Earth one after another, though it may look like a place where people live peacefully and happily when seen from the universe (C).

As I argued in Chapter 2, despite focusing on the grammatical aspect, the textbooks include many topics that will help students’ mental development. Therefore, in addition to grammar or vocabulary, if teachers pay attention to the content, it would expand the usability of a textbook as a learning resource to broaden students’ understanding of society.

In addition, understanding of society will make foundation of students' social learning. Point (7) shows how the student felt when she knew the world's reality, and so this note may as well be categorized in "learning of attitudes and values."

#### **4.3.3. Learning of social skills**

- (1) I want to know what I can do to ensure that other members in my group speak more (A).
- (2) I reconfirmed the importance of group work (A).
- (3) I enjoyed working together in a group. (C)

There were few notes concerning social skills, because the reflection sheet did not have a separate column for it. However, the notes that were written indicate that such experiences made a strong impression on the students who wrote them.

The student who wrote Point (1) ranks very high in the examinations, and he sometimes cannot help but assume an arrogant attitude towards other students. It is praiseworthy that he noticed that there was little communication in his group. In response to this reflection, I wrote a comment on the sheet and returned it to him, which was: "In another group, I saw a certain student asking to speak in turn. However, it may be better not to pressure someone who cannot say anything. I hope your group will have a friendlier atmosphere."

As Akita (2012) mentions, it is necessary to provide students with opportunities to learn manners of learning, which will at the same time develop their social skills.

The rest of the notes referred to group work. Point (2) was written by a student who does not attend school regularly. When he comes to school, he usually wears a mask. His reflection notes were written in tiny letters, almost within nine or ten square millimeters, and were too light to read. When he moved his desk to make a

group, he carefully made a slight gap, five millimeters or so, between the side desk and the front desk. I generally did not allow students to leave such a gap, but in his case, I overlooked it. Though he wrote about the importance of group work, he had little social skills. Indeed his notes indicate that he aspires to join the group.

It is often indicated that schools that adopt collaborative learning have few non-attending students. This is not due to the method of collaborative learning, but is a factor of the philosophy shared by teachers that every student should be respected, cared, and supported, which underlies collaborative learning, and the atmosphere in the classroom created by those teachers.

#### **4.3.4. Learning of attitudes and values**

- (1) I want to know how to talk with people from abroad without feeling nervous (A).
- (2) I imagined what I would do if I were in the same situation as the Japanese person who was asked directions (A).
- (3) I will buy fair trade products from now on (B).
- (4) I want children in Ghana to eat chocolate (B).
- (5) I want to know what to do to stop child labor (B).
- (6) I hope the earth will be a peaceful place, as it looks from space (C).

As I mentioned previously (4.3.2.), learning in attitudes and values is based on understanding of the content. These notes indicate that the students tried to extract lessons that they can share as local, national, or global citizens after they broadened their perspectives on the issues through sharing their findings and ideas about the content. The content of teaching materials affects students' social learning considerably.

#### **4.3.5. Existential learning**

- (1) I decided to study English harder so that I would not cause a case like this (A).
- (2) I would not run away, but would help, using gestures because my English is poor (A).
- (3) I think I can do something for people who want to know the way to where they are going, even though my ability in English is not sufficient (A).
- (4) We could describe children's lives in a developing country in English (B).
- (5) I was amazed with our improved ability in English, because we could make English sentences to explain the scene in the photograph (B).
- (6) I could read the English sentence we made in front of my friends (B).

Point (1) indicates that this student found a reason to study English, namely, to be able to cope with the troubles of people from abroad. Points (2) and (3) show that these students found confidence in themselves that they could do something to help people. Points (4) to (6) are related to English learning. These students found themselves more competent in English than they were before and expressed a sense of achievement. All six reflection notes indicate that existential learning occurs in the context of the relationship with other people or with society.

#### **4.4. Summary**

While designing a classroom where any level of students could participate, I thought of expanding the accessibility and usability of material resources and social resources and creating the contexts to use those resources. Collaborative learning and teaching materials were the keys.

Collaborative learning is one way to increase the accessibility and usability of social resources, or group peers. When teaching materials had a possibility to create

ZPDs, to be more specific, when the level of the task was beyond students' present levels or when the task was an authentic one which had no decisive ways to achieve, the students' access to resources was increased. Both high-level students and low-level students had spaces for learning according to their own contexts. At that time, they were no more passive listeners nor note takers but active participants or contributors in the classroom.

It was also found that the physical condition in collaborative learning such as the placement of desks and physical distance among students mattered much to drive students to participate in the group work. Another finding was that material resources such as dictionaries and whiteboards sometimes had roles to connect the students both physically and mentally when those resources were shared among the students.

As for teaching materials, when the content was meaningful to students' lives, they provided students with rich learning in various aspects besides just in knowledge and skill of the English language. It was irrelevant to the level of English.

In short, it was clear that collaborative learning had the potential to facilitate every students' participation when teaching materials were designed to make use of the merits of collaborative learning with meaningful content and a possibility of creating ZPDs.

In the next chapter, I present the conclusions drawn from this study, which suggests further pedagogical implications in designing a collaborative and resourceful EFL classroom focusing on collaborative learning.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

As I was documenting the students' learning in the previous chapter, I remembered Tudor (2001) claiming that language classrooms were notoriously complex places. In the sociocultural view, they really are. Students' learning varies according to so many conditions in the environment.

Suppose there are two classrooms of the same size, the same students, the same teacher(s), the same equipment; everything is the same. One is designed and taught based on the AM (*acquisition metaphor*), and the other is designed and taught based on the PM (*participation metaphor*). According to the *setting*, which is "the context as experienced by a participant or set of participants with reference to a social context" (Palfreyman, 2006, p. 355), students' learning in these classrooms look very different, in terms of the number of usable and accessible resources, the number of students who are devoted to learning, the expressions on students' faces, etc. The differences will affect the outcomes of learning in the classroom in different ways. Compared to the AM classrooms, the PM classrooms are more complex, more subject to chance, and more fruitful.

In fact, there is a recent movement afoot in Japan that suggests taking another look at the abilities that are associated with the outcome of learning, and it involves reforming the major framework of education. In 2006, as a response to the social changes occurring, the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) proposed "basic abilities for adults," which consist of action, thinking, and teamwork (METI, 2007). Following this report, the minister of MEXT has asked its advisory board to revise the national curriculum guideline on the basis of "abilities for the twenty-first century," which consist of competences such as thinking, inquiring, and generating

new values through social interaction (Katsuno, 2013). The terms of “teamwork” and “interaction” imply that learning is no longer solely an individual event.

If these ministries do mean to promote this trend, will the classroom scenarios change? Or will teachers simply be confused again? Will the education reform be aimed at raising excellent personnel for global competition? Or will they be implemented for the development of a democratic and peaceful society?

We need to keep the aims of education in mind all time for all the students. I argue that designing a collaborative and resourceful English classroom is an attempt to guarantee all students’ participation in learning activities by expanding the accessibility and usability of resources. To reconceptualize our understanding of learning is not an easy task, but it is only when we are able to make the theoretical and pedagogical turn, I believe, that all the students will have education to become sensible and mature citizens who are able to create a more peaceful and democratic society. I have pursued a way to contribute to realize such a society in the field of English education in this thesis and found that collaborative learning is one of promising approaches that can be implemented within the present *arena*.

Collaborative learning is sometimes said to be inefficient or time-consuming. It is obvious that the AM view of teaching and learning is easier and faster. “*Yamayama*” is “mountains.” “*Doromizu*” is “muddy water.” We could present the words in just three seconds. However, the inefficiency of collaborative learning is rather a pedagogically necessary detour for active participation of as many students as possible and for their development required to become sensible and mature citizens for a better society.

Nevertheless, EFL lessons to be taught within a school year are limited, and teachers have to cover one textbook within the year. Thus, it is not easy to plan and

implement collaborative learning in all the lessons. I would like to give the following practical suggestions:

- It is necessary to decide which content is worth spending time.
- It is also necessary to discern which materials or tasks are possible for students to learn by themselves.
- It is a good opportunity to design a task with a possibility of ZPDs when reviewing a section or a chapter related to the content of textbooks.
- Even in mechanical tasks or drills, working in pairs or groups is effective.
- Teachers should intentionally provide opportunities for students to learn the manners of collaborative learning.

I also would like to emphasize the effectiveness of conversation analysis to deepen understanding of the context and socioculturally oriented learning process of each student in the relationship with the environment (Donato, 2000).

In this thesis, I could not cover how groups transform through collaborative learning and how collaborative learning affects development of students' citizenship in the long view, which should have been necessary to discuss education and society. I would like to study about those issues in another occasion.

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, "A classroom is a little society in which a large variety of students with their unique personalities, abilities, preferences, backgrounds, future dreams, and more unfold in a kaleidoscope of dramas." The sociocultural framework provided me with a perspective with which to appreciate multifaceted classroom practices in which none of the students' learning is measured only by academic scores. Classrooms are attractively complex places where every student can learn, struggle, and become, and teachers need to support all of their students as they receive an education that supports a desirable society.



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**Appendix A: A questionnaire for the seventh graders in 2012 (Original)**

1年( )組( )番名前( )

① 出身小学校( )小学校

② 小学校の「外国語活動」ではどんなことをしましたか

③ 小学校の「外国語活動」は

- ( ) とても楽しかった
- ( ) まあまあ楽しかった
- ( ) 普通
- ( ) あまり楽しくなかった
- ( ) 全然楽しくなかった

④ ③の理由を教えてください






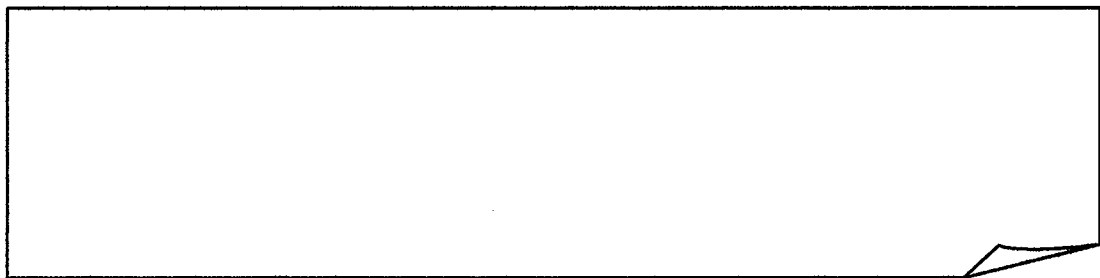
**Appendix C: A reflection sheet (Original)**

Class \_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

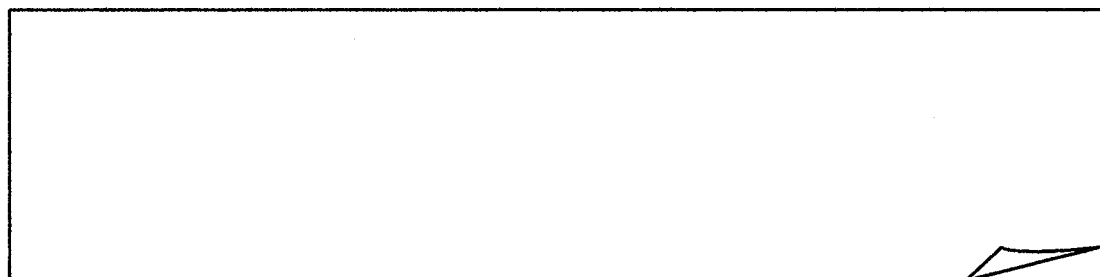
1. 英語に関して学んだこと、復習になったこと



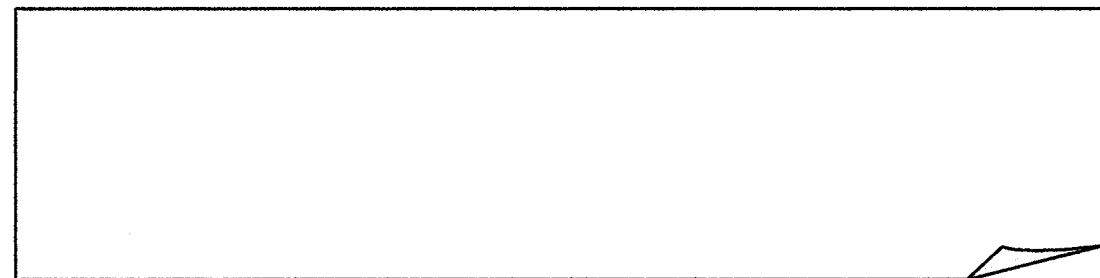
2. 英語以外のことで、学んだこと、考えたこと



3. 難しかったこと



4. もっと知りたかったこと、その他、何でもどうぞ



Thank you.

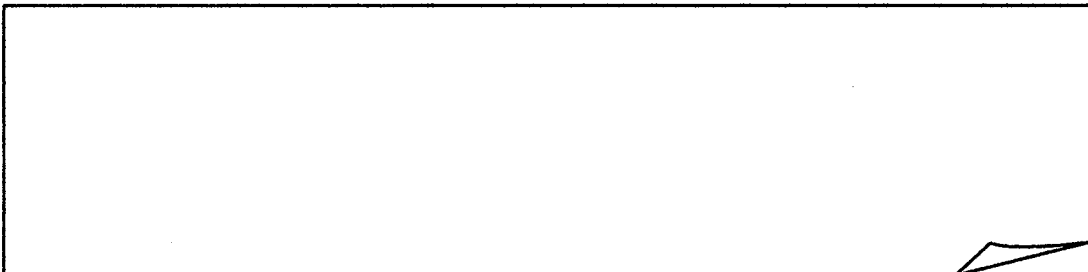
**Appendix D: A reflection sheet (Translated)**

Class      No.      Name \_\_\_\_\_

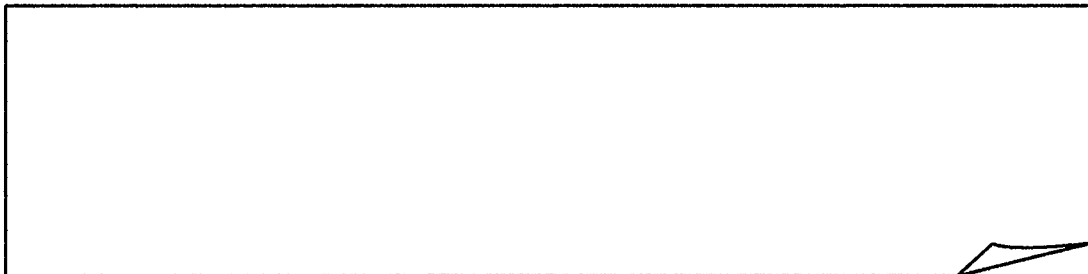
1. What did you learn or review concerning English language in this class?



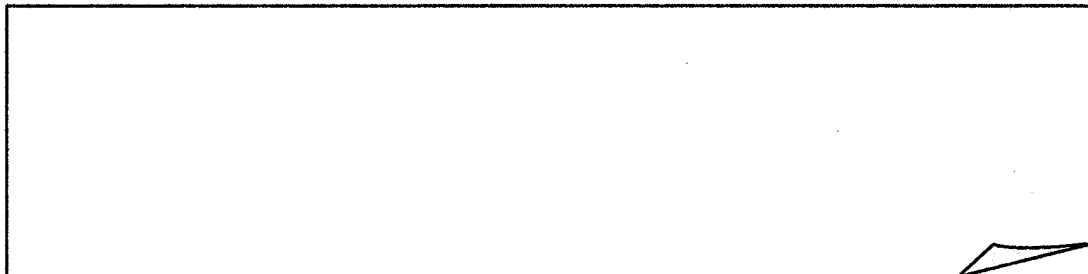
2. What did you learn or think besides English language in this class?



3. What did you find difficult in this class?



4. Please feel free to write anything, e.g., what you want to know more.



Thank you.

## Appendix E: A lyrics sheet of "From a Distance"

From a distance, the ( ) looks blue and green, and the snow capped ( ) white.	遠い所からだ 世界は青や緑に見え 雪に覆われた山々は白く見える
From a distance, the ocean meets the stream, and the eagle takes to flight.	遠い所からだ ( )は小川と出会い ワシは空を飛び回る
From a distance, there is harmony, and it echoes through the land. It's the voice of hope. It's the voice of peace. It's the voice of every man.	遠い所からだ ハーモニーがあり それは大地にこだましている それは希望の声 それは平和の声 それはみんなの声
From a distance, we all have enough, and no one is in ( ). And there are no guns, no bombs and no disease, no hungry mouths to feed.	遠い所からだ 私たちは満ち足りており 困っている人などいない そして銃もなければ ( )も病気もなく 食べ物がなくて空腹の人もない
From a distance, we are instruments marching in a common band, playing songs of hope, playing songs of peace. They're the songs of every man.	遠い所からだ 私たちは( ) 同じバンドで演奏している 希望の歌を奏でながら 平和の歌を奏でながら それはすべての人々の歌
*God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance	神様は私たちをご覧になっている (×3) 遠い所から
From a distance, you look like my ( ) even though we are at war. From a distance, I just cannot comprehend what all this fighting is for.	遠い所からだ あなたは私の友だちに見える 私たちは戦っているというのに 遠い所からだ 私には理解できない このすべての戦いは何のためなのか
From a distance, there is harmony and it echoes through the land, And it's the hope of hopes. It's the love of loves. It's the heart of every man.	遠い所からだ 調和があり それは大地にこだましている それは希望の中の希望 それは愛の中の愛 それはみんなの心
It's the hope of hopes. It's the love of loves. This is the song of every man.	それは希望の中の希望 それは愛の中の愛 これはすべての人々の歌

## Appendix F: Transcription Conventions

[ ]	—	points where overlapping talk starts and ends
=	—	latching
(.)	—	pause of one second or less
(3)	—	silence; length given in seconds
xx	—	unintelligible speech with the length given in seconds
::	—	extended vowels; length shown by the number of colons
-	—	cut-off; self-interruption
?	—	slightly rising intonation
.	—	slightly falling intonation
,	—	continuing intonation
↑ ↓	—	sharply rising or falling intonation, just before the syllable in which the change in intonation occurs
CAPS	—	higher volume than the speaker's normal volume
<b>(bold letter)</b>	—	transcriber's description of events, including nonverbal conduct