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HOW STUDENTS SEEK FOR REALISATION THROUGH EXPLORATORY PRACTICE: A JOURNEY OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND GROWING TOGETHER

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Abstract

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In the field of language learning, advocates of learner development and learner autonomy have not generally allowed for learners to take the initiative in their own learning. This thesis investigates the possibility, and the value, of working towards "learner development", an idea that parallels teacher development. This is done by looking at how one teacher used Exploratory Practice (EP), as proposed by Allwright and colleagues (Allwright, 2003; Slimani-Rolls, 2003) to provide learners with learning opportunities for thinking, reflection and language practice. The context was that of a normal language class taught to students specialising in arts subjects at a university in Taiwan. The aim of this research was to show how a mixed ability group of learners were able to understand their process of learning, through reflecting on positive and negative learning experiences, and thus made their learning more satisfying.

In order to access the voices of learners directly, this thesis focuses on a group of learners' thoughts expressed during an EP-based course. Recordings of student group-talk in class, together with journals written for homework, were analysed in order to explore students' own understandings of learning English. Students' words in their journals were analysed at three levels: first of all through analysis of each journal entry; secondly by drawing up an over-view for each individual learner's journal; and finally by bringing together and discussing the stories, ideas and experiences of the whole group. This allowed detailed investigation of the different ways in which both high level and low level students explored their learning experiences. Their words in group talk were investigated by focusing on how they take control of their learning and undertake their own explorations. As long as sufficient opportunities for learning and reflection are provided, learners can and do develop their learning, both individually and collectively.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to find out what happens in learners' reflection and how learners make sense of their own learning. I am interested in the processes that take place when an opportunity is given to learners to reflect on their own learning – in whether they make use of these opportunities, and, if they do, how they do so. I will explore these research questions:

a) How do students make sense of their learning?

b) How do they monitor their progress?

c) How do they react to their own understanding when it occurs?

d) How do students show evidence of their ongoing development?

e) Are low-level learners in Taiwan capable of reflecting on their language learning in English?

The study was motivated by my observation of students' frustration with learning English, caused by their under-achievement in English proficiency tests or teacher evaluations. Students' English education in Taiwan is test-oriented, especially during the years immediately before they go to university, so it is common for those who do not perform well in tests to feel frustrated, or even guilty. It rarely seems to occur to Taiwanese learners that tests are not the only way to judge their learning. Tests also tend to become the main purpose for learning English, replacing other, more personal and meaningful reasons for learning a language, which might, for example, be related to the use to which the

language will be put; to a special interest in the language itself; to a desire to know better of the cultures of countries where it is spoken; or to a special interest of the learner's that requires knowledge of English.

In order to discuss the importance of helping students find out the purpose of their learning, and how they can make their learning more enjoyable, this study investigates learners' English learning experience and reflection in an elective one-semester course for art students at National Taipei University of the Arts in Taiwan, which was designed to enhance and promote learners' reflection on their own language learning processes. The course also attempted to revive students' enthusiasm for learning, which had often been lost or diminished for the reasons given above.

Without reflection, students tend to underestimate themselves and let their unsuccessful learning experiences take away their self-confidence. Students with negative self-attributions "may cause the learner to slip into helplessness, withdraw from learning opportunities and give up the attempt, feeling discouraged. The learner loses his interest and curiosity for learning and lowers his expectations accordingly" (Kohonen, 2001:33). Traditionally, students in Taiwan have been educated to learn from mistakes as the principal means of enhancing their success in learning. Looking at some common Chinese proverbs about learning, there are few which encourage people to learn from positive experience. Typical ideas traditionally instilled into students in Chinese cultures are that they should "stand up from where they fall", and that "failure is the mother of success".

In the reflection-based course, Exploratory Practice for Reflective English Learners, on which this study is based, students were given opportunities to rethink their goals in learning English, keep weekly study journals, and regularly share their reflection

with others in groups with the support of Exploratory Practice (EP). EP was established by Allwright and associates to promote quality of life and understanding in the foreign language classroom. Students' journals and recorded group talk sessions have been posted on the course website since 2008, with the intention of demonstrating, on the one hand, and investigating, on the other, how students can help themselves by using their own strengths, and exploring their own ways of learning. What students reveal in their reflections can help teachers and researchers better understand the characteristics of learner development, an area that has been little discussed in the field of language teaching and learning.

It is an important priority in EP to encourage students (and teachers) to recall their successful learning episodes, as well as the unsuccessful ones. Over the past nine years of observation of classes doing EP with students, I have observed that in group talk most students can, at least at first, think of few successes in their English learning experience. Every semester in the EP-based course, only around two or three successful experiences are brought up. Perhaps it is because students are never encouraged to recall successful experiences of learning English. Perhaps their experiences mainly consist of unpleasant memories, so their frustrations and worries bury their successful experiences after they occur. Moreover, in the Asian context particularly, people are educated to learn from mistakes and also are encouraged to keep their successes quiet. In other words, if they have enjoyed successes, they feel it would be immodest to tell others about them.

The principles of EP distinguish it from other research approaches in various ways. First, EP aims to bring learners, teachers and researchers together. Second, it aims to develop better understanding of teaching and learning without producing an extra burden of work. Third, it is not a one-shot, short-term experiment, but rather aims for sustainable,

long-term investigation. Fourth, it is probably the only approach which, apart from focusing on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, is also concerned with people's quality of life. Allwright has emphasised the issue of the quality of life for teachers and learners for more than two decades. As Gieve and Miller (2006) highlight, "life" should not be forgotten or suppressed when "work" dominates. These distinguishing features encouraged me to use EP with my students. In particular, the students in the arts university where I am working have to meet endless deadlines for rehearsals, exhibitions or performances. English appears to be a weakness for most of these students, who are often perfectionists in their specialised areas but have little time or energy for other things. Most of their time is devoted to their art training. Their language learning performance is generally characterised by consistent under-achievement, and they therefore tend to lack confidence in themselves when using English.

1.2. Theoretical and methodological foundations of the study

In its theoretical conception, this course, and therefore also this study of the course, follows the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP; Allwright, 2005). It puts emphasis on both students and teachers trying to achieve understanding, rather than trying to solve problems, in the learning and teaching of languages. Students are encouraged to bring to class questions or "puzzles" about their learning experiences, so that they can tackle their confusion (which is the opposite of understanding, according to F. Smith, 1992:35) through thinking, writing and talking individually and collaboratively. It is helpful to remind learners of their background experience, since if learners do not relate to what they already know from previous learning experience (perhaps because they cannot make sense of it, or

they have no interest in it), then they are likely to have difficulty progressing in their learning. F. Smith (1992) argues that learning to think is, in the end, less a matter of instruction than of experience and opportunity. He stresses the need for understanding what we are thinking about as the first requirement for letting the brain gain control over its own thinking. I hypothesize that learners' experience of failure to learn English well is partially caused by lack of motivation, lack of confidence or a negative attitude (it is likely to be a combination of these), rather than simply a lack of ability. It has been encouraging for me to see some students with low English proficiency increase their satisfaction with learning English because of the EP-based course, and it has inspired me to launch an investigation into an approach to learner development which is initiated and directed by the learners themselves. One distinguishing feature of the course has been that students are not told how they should learn English, but rather they set their own goals in learning, choose their individual approaches to exploration in real-life situations, monitor their own development, clarify their confusion about their learning experience and maximize their self-understanding.

In order not to over-emphasize learners' weaknesses, their strengths should also be explored. Students are rarely asked either to look at their positive learning experiences, or to understand when and how these experiences occur. Once learners can understand how their successful experiences happen, then they themselves may try to accumulate more positive experiences and make their learning both successful and enjoyable. One way to do this is to have learners look at their own learning puzzles, investigate these puzzles, and develop their learning skills. Puzzles are questions students ask about what happens in their learning of English. According to my observation of students, mere awareness of learning

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strategies does not necessarily lead to those strategies being adopted. As suggested by Allwright (1981), it appears that at least in the area of language learning that learners "do not learn what teachers teach". In any case, those strategies might not be suitable for some learners. Moon (2008:117) also reviews the literature on students' learning. She finds evidence that ideas held by teachers about the nature of learning, perceptions of what is expected at university or, for example, what an essay is, are not necessarily the same as those held by students. Other writers have come to the same conclusion (Marton and Salio, 1997; Beaty, Gibbs and Morgan, 1997). In view of this, the important thing may not be to teach the learners to discover which preordained "type" of learner they are, or to use some strategy recommended by their teacher, but rather to help learners discover the many different elements that contribute to how they themselves learn best (Cottrell, 2003:5).

The main concern for integrating Exploratory Practice into this course-based study is to explore how students' learning experiences can be noticed, discussed and understood in students' own minds. This does not require a problem-solving approach, but rather the discovery and exploration of any interesting (not necessarily problematic) aspects of their learning that the students choose to look at. The aim is therefore not to find generalisable or global solutions to language learning problems, but simply to understand how students go through the process of reflection. The typical procedures of most academic research or action research, beginning with problems and ending with solutions, do not match the EP approach to either teaching or research, nor would they help in answering the research questions mentioned above. This is because the research questions do not involve a problem either for students or for me as a teacher and a researcher. This is the reason why Exploratory Practice, which stresses teachers or students' understanding in their life of

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teaching and learning, is appropriate for this thesis. I am exploring my own "puzzles" in the same way the learners do in EP. It is my puzzles that are expressed in the research questions.

1.3. Students' journey of exploration

This thesis aims to explore English learners' processes of learning, so I will discuss in the literature review (chapter 2) four different ways of learning by showing how learners react to their experiences. I am interested in investigating the nature of learners' learning and seeking possibilities for helping learners experience meaningful learning, based on their interpretation of their own learning experience.

Student journal writing is used as the main data for this thesis, as their journals can be used to find out how students reveal, examine and understand their lived learning experience, and also to discover how they can learn in a way that will better meet their needs and achieve their goals. Though journal writing is a multifaceted activity (Boud, 2001), which can be used for many purposes and in many ways to promote reflection, for this thesis, the main concern is with the relationship between journal writing, learning, reflection and experience. The data from journals is supplemented by two transcripts of group talk, to show the other main vehicle for reflection that was used in this EP-based course.

1.4. The study

In this study, students' reflection is treated as a continuous process that does not aim at any particular or immediate change, still less any change which has been previously

defined or recommended by teachers. The focal point of this thesis is to explore the possibilities of working together with students in order to understand their individual learning in the past and present, with a view to helping them to decide their purpose of learning English and therefore regain their motivation. In other words, what this study attempts to explore is not what students change after reflection, but how they change during the process of learning and reflecting. It is this distinction which marks one of the key differences between exploratory practice and other, related forms of teaching and research.

The journals that are analysed in this thesis came from students in an EP-based course at Taipei National University of the Arts in 2009. Those who agreed to share their journals posted them on a course website, while others who did not want their journals to be read by other people submitted a paper version to me. It was my intention to look closely at the experiences of individual students as they kept a learning journal over the course of one 18-week semester. I was particularly interested in how students themselves made sense of their learning, how they treated their positive or negative experiences, and how they could enjoy learning English.

I started data collection for my PhD study in 2006, and since then I have continued to share what happened in my classroom teaching with other teachers in conferences. Between 2006 and 2009, I was eager to look for changes students had undergone during my EP-based course, and to use these as convincing evidence for the benefits of EP. However, this seems to go against the original purpose of this study, which is about finding out "how" students make sense of their learning. It took me four years to realise that my focus should instead be on how students understand their learning, rather than on proving that they have changed in any particular way. There are two main reasons why the initial focus on

evidence of change seemed the most obvious approach. First, it appears "normal" or "obvious" for an academic research to look for empirical evidence. Second, seeking for evidence of changes appears to be easier than finding out or explaining how things change. This move from an emphasis on empirical evidence to an emphasis on understanding was similar to one I had experienced previously, when I worked with a small group of teachers trying to follow the guidelines of EP. It actually took us three years to switch from "how" to "why" questions. Teachers in our group were anxious to find out how to make problems vanish, so the major concern for our group members at first was the search for solutions. I tried very hard to remind other teachers to look at things differently by leading the discussions towards finding out the reasons or explanations of specific classroom situations, but it was a slow process.

The experience recounted in this thesis is the story of an opportunity, however puzzling at the time, to understand learning better, through the clarification and interpretation of learning experiences, both positive and negative ones. As a teacher, I find it all too easy to forget what learners are capable of doing. Creating the story of my students' process of learning by interpreting their journals has strengthened my conviction that my students will not only benefit from the process and results of exploring their learning puzzles individually, but also from the experience they have had in creating meanings collectively. Looking into what students have said in their journals gave me the chance to renew a sense of sharing and growing by reconsidering my own understandings of learning and teaching. Learners indeed deserve more respect and trust from teachers than they have usually received from teachers, who tend to have reservations about allowing students to learn on their own.

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What I seek to learn from my students is to me, as an EP practitioner, a precious lesson that carries traces of their realistic and authentic realisation within them, a lesson that helps me discover the profound meanings of my teaching life and which adds pleasantness and happiness to my own life. I left the freedom of decision-making to them on matters such as setting their own goals, selecting their ways of exercising their power to experience themselves being in control, etc. While coping with the heavy workload, feeling like it was tremendously time-consuming to read students' on-line journals outside class constantly, I could view this burden more positively as increasing my understanding of how students deal with their learning in real-life situations, and cater to their individual needs. Each class period also became an opportunity for observation, understanding and learning together with my students. For the most part, my students and I appreciated the learning community created by the course. This view of learning and teaching is similar to the one advocated by van Lier's, with his ecological perspective: "Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships among learners and between learners and the environment (van Lier, 2000:258)."

1.5. My journey as a PhD student

Speaking as a PhD researcher, I not only have a direct relationship with the participants in this research, but I am also one of them. I am the "insider" as defined by Breen (2006), who advocates collegial development through Exploratory Practice. Here he considers the dual role that teachers play in EP:

… while teacher educators would be positioned as students of those understandings revealed through such work – as participating in the understanding of what teachers

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and their learners discover locally and as means for the wider dissemination of these discoveries and the principles of Exploratory Practice for the benefit of the wider community of language teachers. (Breen, 2006:216-17)

This is very different from the third-party, outsider and "objective" view which tends to form the basis of conventional academic research in the social sciences. Choosing to rely on my own course for understanding and for self-mediating not only helped me ultimately to gain first-hand stories from the participants; it also reconfirmed my choice of integrating research into teaching by allowing me to share what I come to know about learning and teaching with other teachers and researchers. Here I aim to do more than report on a course and its analysis. I will also be critical and adapt a systematic way of reading journals.

My journey as a PhD student has fluctuated with the progress of my exploration. The more research papers I have read, the more pressure I have felt, perhaps unconsciously, that I ought to do some kind of measurement, as other studies have attempted to do. However, I resisted these pressures towards quantitative measurement as I felt it an inappropriate approach for a study of EP. Instead, I shifted back my focus to the original purpose of doing this research, which was to closely investigate "how" my students treated their learning experience through EP. My research aim is to understand how learning experiences are interpreted by students individually and collectively. I assume that the way students look at their learning is closely related to their motivation for learning. To investigate this, a case study approach seems more appropriate.

When I first started using EP, I was eager to look for evidence to show how students' change in their thinking as I mentioned above. Perhaps it would seem almost too easy to

seek for "differences" to show in a positive light how a group of students change because of the integration of EP into their course. However, I was aware that it was not me the researcher who should do the evaluation. It is my students who naturally mention their observation of their own, and sometimes other students', learning. Kohonen's categories of analysis, as used in his research into the European language portfolio, appeared to be the most appropriate for my own research. The main point is that what goes on in students' minds is not necessarily observable, whether by me or by the students themselves. Some changes are unobservable, in that they do not immediately lead to any change of behaviour or to any different results in terms of language learning. Yet such unobservable gains or changes in fact matter a lot both to students and to me as their teacher. It is only by reading the actual words students put in their journals that a researcher can have any chance of understanding what is going on in learners' minds.

My next stage was to question whether it is possible to show "how" students change during the course. My research purpose is to investigate how students make sense of their learning, and there are no predicted or expected answers. The difficulty is that the ways in which students change or make sense of their learning is not directly observable to me as a teacher and a researcher. It may not even be obvious to the students themselves. It is also extremely hard to find out why students' minds change. How things work or do not work requires evidence. Yet I am interested above all in the question of "why" things work or do not work, rather than more than "how" they work. Very often as a teacher, I do the same activity in a different class, but the outcome can be surprisingly different. The answers to my own "why" questions can not necessarily be used by other teachers and adopted in their classes. The question of "how" does not appear as important or as fundamental as the

question of "why". In addition, when empirical evidence becomes the principal desired outcome, it sometimes pushes researchers to look for observable changes or visible changes, because it is difficult or can be problematic to present unobservable or invisible changes. From a philosophical point of view, what appears to be a change to different people can be defined differently by different people. What is changing cannot always be seen by others. This is what Chu (2007) argues:

> Nevertheless, the outcomes of reflection may not be observable by others. Some students may not make any outward changes after their reflection and investigation, but outward change can be purely superficial. There may be much deeper change in their emotional state, attitudes or values. (Chu, 2007:234)

In an ancient Chinese Zen Buddhist story from the seventh century, two monks looking at a banner blowing in the wind had an argument about what they saw. One said that the banner was moving. The other monk said it was the wind that was moving. Hwei-neng, the sixth Zen patriarch happened to walk past and he said: "It's neither the banner nor the wind that was moving. It is your own minds that are moving."

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review begins by exploring the different ways that have been recommended for improving the quality of language learning from the perspective of what is done by learners, rather than taking the more usual focus on what is done by teachers. It is evident to most teachers that teaching does not always lead to to learning (Allwright, 1984). In other words, what is taught is rarely, if ever, the same as what is learned. As Hedge (2000) explains, "there is no easy direct relationship between the teaching objectives of our lessons and the learning outcomes for the students" (2000:15). What I am interested in is to investigate how language learners can become better at learning in terms of being more active and motivated. In particular, I will focus on the research areas that have frequently used the terms "learner development", "learner training" and "strategy training", to find out how these terms have been defined, if indeed they have been defined at all. This thesis therefore includes discussions about learner training, strategy training, the good language learner, autonomy and experiential learning. I argue for a broad view of learner training and learner development, based on the principle of allowing learners to take the initiative and to make choices. I will examine the ways in which researchers have suggested that language learners can be helped to make their learning better, and also sketch how learners deal with learning in terms of internalising or personalising their learning experience.

Next, I will move on to look at how group talk has been shown to help learners understand their own processes of language learning as well as their thoughts about that learning. I will take a social perspective to examine the learning opportunities learners gain

and how they benefit from them. These include opportunities to learn about the learning process as well as to acquire language knowledge and skill. Furthermore, I will discuss the value of students' reflection on learning experience and learning journals, since they are both introduced in the EP-based course studied in this thesis. Here reflection is defined in a similar way to that used by Moon. She interprets reflection as a word which has the connotation of a link to the past – going back over ideas and experiences or gathering current ideas so that thinking or learning may progress (Moon, 1999a:97). Moreover, this study draws on Mezirow's description of a transformative approach to learning: "Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow 1996: 162).

According to the notion of transformative learning (Taylor, 2009):

Developing an awareness of context when fostering transformative learning is developing a deeper appreciation and understanding of the personal and sociocultural factors that play an influential role in the process of transformative learning (Taylor, 2009).

Mezirow (2000) and Kegan (2000) believe meaning is socially constructed and making meaning is central to what learning is all about. Mezirow asserts that "transformation takes place when learners are elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming frames of reference or points of view, and transforming habits of mind" (Mezirow, 2000).

For the purpose of understanding the process of learning, I propose next a distinction between four different kinds of learning, considering, in each case, whether learners develop it voluntarily, how they benefit, and what might be developed in the long run.

2.1. Different ways of learning

The four kinds of learning proposed are: non-reflective learning, (naturally) reflective learning, experiential learning, and supported reflective learning. In order to focus on the relationship between reflection and learning, which is the main concern of this thesis, the discussion of learning in the thesis does not attempt to cover all possible categories of ways of learning (see overviews by Tennant, 1997). For example, I do not discuss here aspects of behaviourist orientations to learning (Skinner, 1987), cognitive orientations to learning (Bruner,1977), humanistic orientations to learning (Roger, 2003), or social/situational orientations to learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) because they do not deal with reflection in learning, or at least that is not their main concern.

Instead, with the aim of seeking an understanding of how reflection relates to the process of learning, I will focus on research that throws light on the characteristics of learning when students reflect, or when they do not reflect, and how that reflection affects learning.

2.1.1. Non-reflective learning

First, I would like to discuss how learners react to and understand the situation if

their learning is non-reflective, and how a non-reflective approach tends to encourage low student self esteem, and a tendency to focus only on errors and problems.

Ridley (1991) provides a detailed description of how learners accept unexamined one's self and external environments as "truth", and what happens in reality is not considered as a question of the learner's own choice if there is no reflection. Non-reflective learners tend to take things for granted, and accept learning results without much questioning, so they allow a habitual learning style to become established easily (Habermas, 1976:16). For example, students who consistently get poor results in English may assume that they are simply destined to always be bad at this subject, rather than thinking that the situation might be changed through reflection, a change of attitude, or seeking new sources of motivation. The role of reflection in learning is an important and dynamic process that can engage learners in letting their thinking flow before they make judgements about their performance in learning. Kohonen (1992:17) considers reflection as a bridge between experience and theoretical conceptualisation. He implies that non-reflective learning appears to miss the opportunity for "recycling the experience at deeper level of understanding and interpretation".

Learners who are not reflective tend to be followers. They may simply follow classroom teaching or do self-study without thinking much about what is happening to their learning. They do not necessarily think about the purpose of learning, how they learn or the goal of their learning. They may be obedient learners who do not ask questions about their learning inside or outside class. They may be considered "good" learners because they follow absolutely whatever teachers say, or they may be learners who feel frustrated when

their unsatisfactory performance upsets them. If things go well, non-reflective learners may feel thrilled by success, but then allow the success to fade without learning anything from it. On the other hand, if things do not go well, without reflection such learners may jump to the wrong conclusions and form overly negative perceptions of themselves. For example, if a student does not like English reading, she can easily think she does not have enough vocabulary, or that her grammar is bad. But in fact, the real reason might be she does not like reading in L1 either. In other words, the reason could be due to a general personal habit rather than to a lack of language learning ability. Making progress in this way can become difficult in the long term, because learners cannot make sense of their learning and their experiences of success and failure.

Therefore, due to the points stated above, non-reflective learners lack structured opportunities to ask questions, monitor their progress in learning, or discover reasons for any accomplishments they have made. It is difficult for them to build up confidence for facing new hurdles in future years.

2.1.2. Naturally reflective learning

Boyd and Fales (1983) see reflective learning as the "key element in learning from experience", saying that it is "the core difference between whether a person repeats the same experience several times... or learns from experience in such a way that he or she is cognitively changed or affectively changed." Some learners are naturally good at reflection. They naturally reflect on their learning. Unfortunately, and perhaps this is human nature, when people reflect they tend to look mainly at their weaknesses. For foreign language

learners, this means the negative side of learning. According to my experience in Taiwan, at least, it seems that when learners are asked to reflect, they are encouraged and even educated to look for problems. Students in Taiwan, like most people who have been influenced by Confucius' thinking, are convinced that correcting mistakes from previous wrong doing is the best way or the only way of improving their performance. One of Confucius' famous disciples, Tsen Tzu said "I reflect on myself three times a day". (論語學而：曾子曰：「吾日三省吾身：為人謀而不忠乎？與朋友交而不信乎？傳不習乎」) He proposed a check list of three issues for daily self-reflection. The three questions people are expected to ask themselves are "Have I accomplished the task asked by my employer or friends?", "Have I deceived my friends?", "Have I practised taught skills?" Tsen Tzu's ideas of reflection are to examine oneself and see what is in need of "improvement".

Through traditional school and cultural education, learners in Taiwan are convinced that learning from mistakes is the major rationale for reflection. When reflecting in this way, there is a tendency for only problems and weakness to be taken into account. As a result, interesting questions or positive experiences have no place in reflection. Celebrating success does not seem appropriate for most Taiwanese learners because people are always taught to be modest, and certainly not to show off. For most people in Taiwan, success is not recognised as a source of ideas for achieving more success. Instead, it is failure, and dealing with failure, that is considered to be the key to future success.

Although it is true that people can sometimes learn from negative and unsuccessful experience, if learners overdo this kind of reflection, the danger is that they will blame themselves too much. Gradually, they might lose confidence in their ability to learn, if they

continually focus on their experiences when things do not go well. Experiences without understanding do not produce further success, as Marsick stressed. "[...], for a variety of reasons, people do not learn from their experience, or if they learn, they may simply reinforce errors." (Marsick, 1991: 36). Learners with good reflective skills should therefore be reminded not to over-emphasise their weaknesses, and they should also be encouraged not to neglect their successful experiences.

In other words, reflection in learning is the same as reflection in a mirror. It "gives back not what it is, but what it might be, an improvement on the original" (Biggs, 1999). Nevertheless, reflective learning is not just a cognitive acknowledgement of "what" things occur or "how" they occur. It also encourages learners to address "why" things happen. At the same time, it is inevitable for learners to recall too their memories of feelings they had at certain moments in the past when they reflect on their learning experiences. "To recall" is defined in the Macmillan English dictionary for advanced learners as "to make you feel or experience something that you have felt or experienced in the past."

For naturally reflective learners, their intra-personal intelligence is one of their strengths, and this can be an asset for language learning, especially for oral skills. Yet it is likely that they will neglect this asset if they only look at what they have done wrong in reflection.

2.1.3. Experiential learning

Mezirow (1981) placed critical reflection of experience at the heart of all learning. Rogers (1996) interprets learning as a cycle that begins with experience, followed by

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reflection and later proceeding to action. Kolb (1984) provides a well-known learning cycle which starts with experience, continues with critical reflection and abstract conceptualisation and moves on to active experiment.

In experiential learning, according to Kohonen (1992), personal experience and giving subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts is seen as the focal point for learning. In short, it is about learning from actual experience through reflection. Learners' own experiences have an important place in this kind of learning. According to Kohonen (1992:18), the rationale for experiential learning can be seen in the following arguments:

(1) it facilitates personal growth;

(2) it helps learners adapt to social change;

(3) it takes account of differences in learning ability; and

(4) it responds to learner needs and practical pedagogical considerations.

More specifically, learners are encouraged to learn from reflection. Though the role of reflection has been relatively little discussed, Kohonen proposes reflection as a component of co-operative learning.

It can be argued, in fact, that theoretical concepts will not become part of the individual's frame of reference until they have been experienced meaningfully on a subjective emotional level. Reflection plays an important role in this process by providing a bridge, as it were, between experience and theoretical conceptualisation. The process of learning is seen as the recycling of experience at deeper levels of understanding and interpretation. This view entails the idea of lifelong learning (Kohonen, 1992:17).

Kohonen (1992) provides an experiential model for creating an atmosphere of shared partnership, common purpose and joint management of learning. "Learning requires an explicit awareness and understanding of what it is that needs to be learned (metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness), and why such learning is necessary" (Kohonen, 2004). Without sufficient understanding, learners might solve false problems or create new frustrations. Marsick also raises the risk of actions without understanding. "Unfortunately, learning from experience can lead to repetition of mistakes" (Marsick, 1991:24). This is because under experiential learning, learners are encouraged to look at problems in their reflection, and then they are generally expected to make changes. In this respect, experiential learning is similar to the other approaches mentioned above. If learners are only eager to solve "problems", positive experiences can be forgotten and wasted. On the other hand, learners might solve the wrong problems if they do not actually understand why negative experiences happen. In reality, no one can guarantee that every problem can be solved. Moreover, over-emphasis on problems can easily take away learners' self-confidence and reduce their self-esteem, as Schraw (1998) has noted:

> Sometimes students do not make the effort needed to do well at a task because they believe that intellectual ability, and specifically a lack of it, makes extra effort useless. (Schraw, 1998:121)

The core of experiential learning lies in reflective learning. Boyd and Fales (1983) explain in their introduction: "Reflective learning is the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective. We

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suggest that this process is central to understanding the experiential learning process."
Kohonen summarises four characteristics of experiential learning as follows:

1. Learning takes place along a continuum of meaning, ranging from "meaningless" routine learning to "meaningful", experiential learning that involves the learner.

2. Learning is a continuous process that is grounded in experience. Thus knowledge and skill gained in one situation become instruments of understanding and dealing with situations that follow.

3. The process of learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of grasping and transforming experience.

4. Learning is a holistic process of relating to the world. It involves feeling, observing, thinking and acting, as a cyclic process. (Kohonen, 2001:30)

Kohonen has moved reflective learning towards a larger learning community that arouses students' independent learning and at the same time actively allows students to socially involve in helping other practitioners. Kohonen's work (2004) with portfolio assessment in Finland combines experiential learning, collaborative learning and learner autonomy, and thus provides a way of helping learners engage in individual and mutual learning. Furthermore, though Kolb's learning cycle does not provide clear places for certain elements such as learning goals, purposes, choice and decision-making (Rogers, 1996), Kohonen's recent work with portfolios offers an updated model for experiential learning.

Experiential learning certainly offers a promising model for learning. However, it encourages change as well as understanding, which might lead to certain risks. For example, learners might expect, or feel they are expected, to make changes for change's sake. But in fact, not every one needs to or wants to change after reflection.

2.1.4. Supported reflective learning (e.g. exploratory practice)

In this kind of learning, learners' awareness of learning is treated as part of the thinking that belongs to every learner. Learners do not need any special training to acquire the skill of reflecting. All they need is opportunities for learning, reflection and encouragement from themselves, teacher and group members.

From the perspective of a psycholinguist, F. Smith states:

Monitoring, reviewing, reflecting and revising are regarded as "metacognitive" skills, involving thinking about thinking, which is regarded as a higher kind of thinking than thinking about anything else. "Observing" and "controlling" one's own thought processes are supposed to be different and superior modes of thinking, not practised by many people because they have not learned how. But once again these are all fictitious and prejudicial concepts, favoured by people with vested interests in finding ways of categorising individuals….. No one needs to learn how to think about the consequences of their own thought, although we all have differing propensities to become analytical (and self-critical) in particular circumstances. (Smith, 1992:26)

According to F. Smith, nobody needs training to reflect. Though every learner has

the ability to think and to reflect, not every learner is given opportunities to do so. Supported reflective learning can reduce the danger of reinforcing errors and can in this way contribute to building learners' confidence.

Reflection with the help of exploratory practice goes through a process that is similar to experiential learning. However, with EP, understanding is the first priority. Learners can start their reflective journey because they want to make their learning more enjoyable or pleasant, but not necessarily because they have problems. Besides, actions or changes are optional not absolute. Further details and discussion of EP will be presented in Chapter 3 of the thesis.

Since I have discussed different ways of learning mainly from the perspective of how learners treat their learning, next I will move on reviewing what teachers/ researchers advocate to improve learners' learning. I will start by looking at learner and strategy training, which constitute an attempt to turn students into "Good Language Learners". I will then move the discussion further into the areas of autonomous learning and learner development.

2.2. Review of learner and strategy training

2.2.1. Learner training

First, I will review what researchers and teachers have done to investigate how to improve the quality of learning in the field of learning English as a foreign language. Three decades ago, in order to help learners make good use of a self-access centre in the hope of

promoting learner autonomy, a school of thought emerged in which learners were expected to develop skills related to self-management, self-monitoring and self-assessment. Meanwhile, the "good language learner" described by Naiman's and associates (1978) became a model for learner training. Therefore, learner training started to play a growing role in language teaching (Dickinson and Carver, 1980; Holec, 1980). However, Holec explains that "the methodology for learner training should be that of discovery; the learner should discover, with or without the help of other learners or teachers, the knowledge and the techniques which he needs as he tries to find the answers to the problems with which he is faced" (Holec, 1980:42). Though Holec stresses the importance of training students to find out the solutions to their problems by themselves, his emphasis is based on problem-solving and training to make learners become autonomous. Nevertheless, if teachers focus mainly on leading learners away from bad situations by focusing on problem solving, without any concern for understanding or developing learners' areas of strength, there is a danger that learners may take action on the basis of unexamined assumptions or attempt to solve non-existent problems. For example, a student who realises he/she has a very slow reading speed might decide to do endless grammar practice with the aim of learning to read faster. And yet what they need to do might be to increase their level of vocabulary, or perhaps to learn not to rely on using an electronic dictionary too much. Moreover, if learners focus on solving problems, learners' individual positive learning experience will not be discovered, understood or repeated. Though good practices will not necessarily be abandoned in the effort to address weak areas, it is a danger that comes from over-emphasising "what went wrong". Such an emphasis is likely to lead learners to recall only negative learning experiences

As too much guilt from not doing things well accumulates, confidence can also be easily undermined. Bereft of confidence, it is then hard for English learners to feel positive or willing to learn. An alternative approach involves asking questions about specific situations that occur when learners are learning. This appears to be beneficial and helpful for discovering what learners can actually do to learn better in a way that suits them. When the apocryphal apple dropped on Newton's head, there was no particular problem that needed solving. However, what happened then triggered Newton to ask why it had happened, and as a result he discovered gravity.

Next I will discuss two specific approaches to improving learning: learner training and autonomous learning. Learner training for independent learning was, in its origins, related to a sudden interest in setting up self-access centres. Interestingly, Holec (1980) thinks teaching learners how to carry out self-directed learning would be counterproductive, since the learning would by definition no longer be self-directed. Making learners dependent on teachers' choices of strategies or ways of learning to be independent may not be the best way to increase autonomy in the long term, as Holec explains. However, Holec's advocacy of autonomous learning based on decisions made wholly by learners seems to mean that learners take all of the responsibility for learning and teaching. Outside the self-access centre, Ellis & Sinclair's (1989) well-known course book, "Learning to learn English: a course in learner training" established learner training as a new feature of classroom teaching. Dickinson (1992) also views learner training as a resource to help learners to engage more actively in classroom learning. That is to say, learner training began by encouraging and helping learners to use a self-access centre well, and it gradually

became a part of classroom teaching. However, this approach implies the belief not only that learners need to acquire the ability to learn better, but also that for this purpose they have to be trained.

Sinclair (2006) describes two extreme positions on learner training in her review of learner training over two decades. One is a highly teacher-directed approach (e.g. what teachers typically do in "study skills" course), the other is a wholly learner-directed approach to learner training (Breen 1984). The teacher-directed position of learner training stresses teacher control. They tend to offer training in some set of strategies or skills which have been pre-determined by the teacher. The teacher controls all aspects of learning. Sinclair categorises "strategy training" as a similar approach to learner training, though some researchers now also include encouraging students to reflect on the processes of learning (see Cohen, 1995; Oxford, 1990). This traditional "teacher-centred transmission position" (Kohonen, 2001) means that students miss out on the learning opportunities involved in decision-making.

The opposite "extreme" approach to learner training categorised by Sinclair is the wholly learner-directed approach. She sees this extreme version as having emerged from a background of critical theory and what has become known as the "process approach" to language learning (Breen, 1984). She further points out that only if learners find they need to discuss learning processes will there be a specific focus on these. In other words, there may be no focus on learning or reflection at all, if the learners chose not to have one. It does appear a challenge to teachers, because the syllabus always comes out of the process of negotiation and is therefore unpredictable. Allwright raises concerns over Breen's

process syllabus, arguing that teachers' responsibility should not be shifted onto learners.

> Unfortunately, this approach fails to recognise the possibility of their learning all sorts of other things in the process, if they were truly open to all the incidental learning opportunities that their learning process offered. But they would not think to evaluate all this incidental learning because it had not been precisely targeted for learning, and so they would not notice either what they had missed or what they had incidentally learned. (Allwright 2006:13)

Sinclair argues that some students might be able to manage under a learner-directed way of teaching, but others might still need teachers' suggestions to improve their learning. She then proposes a "teacher guided/ student-centred" approach as a "middle" way for learner training. This version of training does not impose a set of strategies on learners, but it does offer them some guidance. It encourages learners to reflect and develop metacognitive awareness and strategies (see represented work by Dickinson, 1992; Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Wenden, 1986).

In her review, different researchers address learner training as "learner development", "learning to learn", and "promoting autonomy". Apparently, Sinclair does not see the need for distinguishing the different use of the terms. However, it should be pointed out that there is still a need to make a distinction between learner development and learner training. Briefly, learner training presumes and implies that learners need to be trained to achieve goals which are defined by teachers. Learner development, on the other hand, begins with the belief that, with or without teachers' training, learners already show their traces of learning development in their real lives. Learner development advocates that

teachers and learners can together work towards achieving an understanding of their learning and teaching, without any predefined objectives or supposedly "correct" strategies. Further discussion about learner development will be presented separately in section 3 of this chapter.

2.2.2. Strategy training

The initial focus in strategy research was on discovering the characteristics of "good language learners" (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975) and what could be learned from them. O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Wenden (1991) set out to investigate the factors that contribute to enhancing learners' effectiveness. There has subsequently been much research into strategy use (e.g. Cohen, 1998 & 2002; Dornyei, 2005; Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 1993; Yang, 1999). Researchers next addressed the question of how to teach the strategies used by good language learners to less successful learners, under the assumption that if weaker learners are taught "good" strategies, they will become more successful.

However, there are problems with this assumption. Chamot mentions that the good language learner cannot be described in terms of a single set of strategies, but rather through the ability to understand and deploy a personal set of effective strategies (see Chamot, 2005 for an updated review). Larsen-Freeman (2001) highlights the fact that each piece of research on learner action in terms of learning strategies has tended to be studied in isolation from the social context. She also comments that much of the research on learning strategies continues to be descriptive. She gives two examples of contradictory findings in

learning strategies research. One is from Green and Oxford (1995). They conclude from their research that more successful students use more strategies. The other example is from Huda (1998). She reports that good language learners use fewer strategies than less proficient learners. Thus, the findings from different researchers contradict each other. Researchers on strategy training on the other hand have not seemed to investigate the "quality" of learners' strategy use, which is one of the suggestions that Cohen and Marcaro (2007) make in their review of strategy training over the last thirty years. It may not be the strategy itself that is most important, but the way in which it is deployed.

In Hassan et al's (2005) systematic review of strategy training, they conclude that it is evident that strategy training is effective, but it is not possible to say from the research evidence that the effect can be long-lasting. Hassan et al (2005:3) state that:

> There is sufficient research evidence to support claims that training language learners to use strategies is effective, but it is not possible to say from this evidence whether the effect of training is long-lasting or not. Furthermore it is not really known to what extent the specific mechanics of different training interventions are responsible for the effect, or if it is due to improved awareness that a broad range of training might engender in the learner (Hassan, 2005:3).

However, it is not clear whether they mean by "effective" is "effective at teaching the prescribed strategies", or "effective at improving language learning". Only the latter would indicate that strategy training was worthwhile investment of class time. In order to show this, they would also need to show that it was more effective than the equivalent amount of teaching without any strategies training.

One of the main critiques of strategy training, identified by Dornyei and Skehan (2003), is the absence of a theoretical basis for the concept. One of the most fundamental problem seems to Dornyei (2005) to be the ambiguity of the literature in explaining the difference between "engaging in an ordinary learning activity and a strategic learning activity".

The early development of strategy training started off by recording what most successful learners do. Further research in the 1980s and 1990s in the area continues to be largely descriptive. Cohen and Macaro (2007) comment that much of the research on strategy training so far has resulted in the development of taxonomies which have limited value for the development of the field. They argue that researchers into strategy use and training face an enormous challenge: on the one hand to identify how learners learn; on the other to throw a spotlight on the interrelationship between teaching and learning (Cohen and Macaro, 1997:27-8).

2.2.3. A broad view of "learner training" and "learner development"

If teachers are generally expected to move on to teacher development from teacher training, are learners also expected to move on to learner development at some point in their process of learning? Do learners have to rely on teachers to develop their learning indefinitely? It seems to some researchers that learners are unable to get to the stage of learner development if they are not trained first. Ironically, throughout the literature reviewed here, most strategy-oriented researchers discuss only learner training, not learner development. Researchers into, and advocates of, "training" do not seem to think that

learners are ever likely to have had enough training to deal with their learning, so they persist in insisting that it is teacher's responsibility to keep offering training.

Benson places a strong emphasis on strategy training. In his book "Teaching and Researching Autonomy in Language Learning", he mentions six approaches to learner development:

1. Direct advice on language-learning strategies.

2. Training based on "good language learner" research and insight.

3. Helping learners to consider the factors that affect their learning and to discover the learning strategies that suit them best.

4. Synthetic approaches drawing on a range of theoretical sources.

5. Integrated approaches treating learner training as a by-product of language learning.

6. Self-directed approaches in which learners are encouraged to train themselves through reflection on self-directed learning activities. (Benson, 2001:143)

Holec (1987) Esch (1997) have described self-directed programmes of this kind. Perhaps surprisingly, in writing that is supposedly about learner autonomy, each of the approaches advocates teacher-directed "training". Though points five and six above put less stress on direct training, they still seem to suggest first training learners to be self-directed, only after which they will become autonomous. Also, approaches three and six actually

sound similar. Although Benson uses the term learner development, he still seems to mean teacher-directed learner training. In Benson's approach to learner development, the learners' role during the development process remains unclear. In my view, learner development does not and cannot come through training, but rather should be similar to teacher development, in relying on practitioners' choices in terms of decision-making and goal setting.

The differences between learner training and learner development can be divided into three areas. First, learner training implies "imposition" from outside, while learner development happens without direction by others, and it is directed by learners' own choices. Second, learner training tends to be based on the expectation that it will produce effective learning outcomes, but learner development focuses on the learners' learning process. That is to say, learner training appears to be product-oriented but learner development is process-oriented as well. Thirdly, learner training implies a limited time scale, and teacher dependence, while learner development, because it comes from within the learner, is independent of the teacher and indefinitely sustainable. There are several reasons why it is worth making a distinction between learner development and learner training. I will expand on these issues with further discussion in a separate section 3. Here is an example given by Allwright and Hanks to illustrate the complexity of learners' learning. Allwright & Hanks stress:

> Another worry about learner training is the implied assumption that learners are fundamentally ignorant of what strategies might be available and useful. We prefer a more optimistic (and arguably more accurate) view of the situation; that most

learners are probably well aware of the strategies that might make their language learning more effective. If in practice they do not use them, it is probably because they are inhibited by the social nature of the classroom. (Allwright, 1997b). For example, people readily agree that asking questions about things you don't understand is a familiar and inherently sensible learning strategy, but many learners, perhaps fearful of public humiliation, hardly ever ask any questions during lessons. (2009:87)

2.2.4. A critical review of learner training

Perhaps, in reality, learners do not necessarily need extra strategy training due to the rich existing learning experience they have had. This has already been suggested in the passage by Allwright & Hanks quoted above. Perhaps what learners need is better understanding of their background experience to enable them to choose and strive for their goals.

Rees-Miller (1993) gives a critical appraisal of learner training. She cautions teachers/researchers to provide empirical evidence for a correlation between conscious strategy use and greater gains in language proficiency. She argues against making too much effort in strategy training because it is not likely to be cost-effective. She also questions whether the effects of promoting good learning strategies are long-lasting. In fact, Rees-Miller (1993, 1994) raises four major objections to the underlying assumptions of strategy training:

1. There is no empirical evidence for a causal relationship between awareness of

strategies and success in learning.

2. Some of the characteristics associated with success in learning, such as being active in the learning process, cannot be defined as specific behaviours and may therefore be unteachable.

3. Case studies of unsuccessful learners suggest that the adoption of strategies employed by successful learners is insufficient in itself to lead to more effective learning.

4. Successful learners do not necessarily use recommended strategies and often use non-recommended strategies.

Rees-Miller's criticisms directly question the need for strategy training. Teachers who would like to introduce strategy training presume that transferring successful strategies to students can alter their philosophy and approach to learning. Macaro (2001), for example, hopes to train students to think through adapting strategies provided by the teacher. Usually, therefore, the emphasis seems to be on teaching strategies that have been shown to result in success for other learners. However, some researchers have expressed concerns about this approach:

It also appears that attempts to characterise good and poor language learners according to the strategies they use are over simplistic. A number of studies indicate that unsuccessful learners actually employ the same strategies as those used by successful learners. In this case, the reasons for their lack of success may be far more complex, and the teaching of more learning strategies may not be the answer

(Williams and Burden, 1997:161-162).

Allwright (1996:1) also raises major concerns about learning strategy training in four questions:

Firstly, do we actually know what language learning strategies are *typically* productive? Secondly, do we have reason to believe that these strategies will be productive for the *particular* learners we are trying to help? And, thirdly, do we know *how* to teach them? All three are serious questions that need further investigation, even if the general outcome of research so far is broadly positive…. I have a fourth question, a major 'preliminary consideration', which is far more worrying: are learners who do actually know about learning strategies able to use that knowledge in their classroom language learning?

These four questions do not only express important concerns about strategy training, but also suggest an alternative way of helping learners. Can learners improve their learning without going through a process of learner-training? What does "learning better" mean to learners individually?

2.2.5. Are strategies teachable?

Claxton (1990) presents a different view of how and why learning takes place. He proposes that strategies are definitely learnable, but equally definitely not teachable.

The fact that they can be identified does not mean that they can be deliberately acquired through practice. This is because an essential aspect of intelligence is

knowing intuitively the power and limitations of each of the strategies – having a good feel for their appropriateness for different contexts and purposes and *this sense can be developed only in a situation where learners experience real choice and uncertainty* (Claxton, 1990:11).

For example, in conversations, what might be involved in "real" choice and uncertainty could include students' word choice and the uncertainty of a fellow-speaker's reactions. The suggestion here seems to be that if learning strategies are taught, this will, paradoxically, make it more difficult for learners to acquire them successfully. I would also argue that learners may have their own creative and effective ways of learning, and forcing them to switch to their teacher's choice of strategies is unlikely to be helpful.

At best, strategy training might thus appear to be unnecessary, while at worst it could be counterproductive. Claxton notices that the teaching practice of many teachers does not reflect what/how they were trained in the teaching course, but instead reflects how they were themselves taught as learners. This is an interesting reflection, which suggests again that what learners are taught may not determine what they learn, nor the way in which they learn if it differs from their previously acquired habits, beliefs and attitudes (Allwright, 1991 & 1984).

2.2.6. Strategy training and autonomy

Some researchers seem to suggest that strategy training is the key to leading learners to being autonomous. Most of the research about strategy training aims to measure the effectiveness of the use of certain strategies, which have usually been selected by teachers

or researchers. Some researchers seem to suggest that learners cannot learn better or be autonomous without training. This is ironic in view of the fact that learner/strategy training has been closely associated with the concept of learner autonomy (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Dickinson, 1992). Cohen (1998), for example, views autonomy as the aim of strategy training. However, when Benson (2001) talks about strategies and autonomy, he recognises that inviting learners to explore their reasons for language learning might be more conducive to autonomy development than a focus on awareness of strategies and skills. It is at least questionable whether we should assume that "training" creates "better learners".

Strategy training leads to what R. Smith (2003:130,131) calls a "weak" version of pedagogy for autonomy. He describes two versions of pedagogy for learner autonomy. "Weak" versions of pedagogy for autonomy tend to view autonomy as a capacity which students currently lack (and so need "training" towards), and they may also identify it with a mode of learning (for example, self-access) which students need to be prepared for. A "strong version" of pedagogy for learner autonomy, on the other hand, is based on the assumption that students are, to a greater or lesser degree, already autonomous, and already capable of exercising it. Strategy training therefore fits in well with a weak version of autonomy, but not so comfortably with a strong version. The strong version of pedagogy focuses on:

> ...co-creating with students optimal conditions for the exercise of their own autonomy, engaging them in reflection on the experience, and in this manner (rather than via transmission of a "good learning" to bear in further exercise of learner autonomy. (R. Smith, 2003: 131)

2.3. Is learner/strategy training equivalent to learner development?

In this thesis, a central idea is to stress the need for distinguishing between learner/strategy *training* and learner *development*. In Chamot & Rubin's (1994:771) response to Rees-Miller (1993), they explain that though "*learner training*" is a widely used term, they prefer the terms *education*, *instruction*, and *development*. Wenden (2002) also explains her choice of using "learner development" as an alternative term to "learner training", "learner education" and "learning to learn". In fact, for many researchers there seems to be no distinction at all between learner training and learner development. It seems that many researchers into strategies and strategy-training think that different words are simply being used here for the same thing, so the wording does not really matter.

However, if teacher development is recognised as an important area for teachers and researchers, and is seen as distinct from teacher training, then it would seem reasonable for learner development to be similarly recognised as a distinct enterprise from learner training. In both cases, "training" implies a more traditional passing on of knowledge and skills from teacher to pupil, and does not involve an ability to discriminate for oneself and exercise judgement. All that is required is to apply exactly what one has been trained to do. Meanwhile, "development" suggests inner growth and learning according to a person's understanding and perceived needs.

Wenden (2002) identifies two fundamental ideas concerning learner development: self-directed language learning (SDLL) and learner strategies in language learning (LSLL). She presents learner development narrowly within SDLL and LSLL, and she actually excludes any consideration of social contexts that help to give real, concrete meaning to

learning and teaching situations. Learner development should involve more than "strategy training". As Palfreyman (2003:243) argues, Wenden's interpretation sees learner autonomy and learner development as essentially the honing of an individual's repertoire of learning strategies.

> Representing LSLL as based purely on theory and principles of "effectiveness", as in Wenden's paper, exaggerates the legitimacy of LSLL. More seriously, it walls in (legitimates and focuses the attention on certain ideas) a relatively disempowered representation of the learner, and also walls out (marginalising or diverting attention from) other conceptions of learning and development which are closer to the lived experience of learners in real-life contexts. (Palfreyman 2003:244)

2.3.1. Distinction between learner training and learner development

Though there is no absolute distinction between strategy training and learner development, it is nevertheless essential in this study to raise the issue of recognising the value of learner development, a topic which has probably been overlooked in favour of training planned and directed by teachers. Yet the principles of EP suggest that in fact learners are capable, with some help, of directing their own learning and keeping up sustainable development with their own initiatives in setting goals, monitoring their progress and achieving their personal goals rather than being forever trained to fulfil their teachers' goals.

Kohonen (2001) distinguishes between learner training and learner education, as laid out in the table below. The characteristics of learner education defined by Kohonen

exemplify the position that this thesis holds on learner development.

Clearly, learner training represents a transmission position, with a process that moves top down from the teacher to the student, who is expected to learn the skills while taking a passive role as the recipient of teaching. In contrast, learner education as Kohonen proposes represents a transformation position, where the goals are self-actualisation and personal and social change. Under learner education, the relationship between learners and learning is interconnected in a holistic way.

Figure 2.1 : Kohonen on language teaching as learner training and learner education

Language teaching as learner training:	**Language teaching as learner education:**
Goal orientation: narrow, specific objectives, situations and tasks	Goal orientation: broad communication and personal growth
Syllabus contents: specific clearly defined communicative skills	Broader syllabus communicating in new, unpredictable contexts
Linguistic effectiveness: correct performance on limited tasks, learners working mainly alone	Personal efficacy: in addition to communication skills, emphasis on risk taking, self-direction, learning to learn, and social skills
Teacher role: direct, frontal reaching; learners progress mainly at the same pace in the class	Teacher role: more indirect, individual guidance, negotiation, and contracts learning tasks
Emphasis on external performance testing by specific criteria	External evaluation, self-assessment and reflection of processes

(from Kohonen, 2001:21)

Learning takes place as a gradual organisation of meanings into the individual's

world picture. Human beings are seen as intentional and self-directed, capable of making choices and assuming an ethical responsibility for their lives in the social context (Kohonen, 2001:17).

2.3.2. Learner development

Following the clear distinctions drawn by Kohonen between learning training and learner education, it may help if I draw a parallel between teacher training and teacher development, on the one hand, and learner training and learner development on the other. A distinction is commonly made by researchers between teacher training and teacher development. For example, Freeman (1989) draws it in this way:

| Teacher training | The aspects of teaching that are seen as "trainable" are discrete chunks, usually based on knowledge or skills, which can be isolated, practised, and ultimately mastered (1989: 39). |
| Teacher development | Development is a strategy of influence and indirect intervention that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching; these aspects are idiosyncratic and individual (1989:40). |

Teachers learn the basic knowledge and skills of how to teach during their training, but when they start working in real classrooms, they are generally expected to continue their teacher development on their own. They need to think about how to deal with real classroom situations as they arise, and to develop their own ways of teaching. In brief, teachers are told what to do in teacher training, but then it is teachers' own choice and responsibility whether and how they want to initiate or continue their own teacher

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development (see Underhill, 1988; also Head and Taylor 1997 for another definition of teacher development). Likewise, teachers should not dismiss the possibility of learner development for the sake of holding on to their power as teachers. On the contrary, teachers should trust learners and be confident that they can and do move on to learner development, with or without out their current teachers' recognition. A language class does not have to be a preparation for students' future needs. Instead, students can benefit more from the learning community they are involved in by taking advantage of learning opportunities. For example, research about in-class pleasure reading shows that it increases students' exposure to English outside of class (Lao & Krashen, 2000). What matters more perhaps is not "training" students how to read, but offering them opportunities to exercise motivating reading.

> Learners can develop, do develop and will develop whether or not language professionals recognise the fact. But if we make a direct parallel between teacher development and learner development, explore its implications in some depth and look for ways of assisting learner development, we can expect it to be highly productive for all concerned. (Allwright and Hanks, 2009:2)

Palfreyman (2003: 245) defines learner development from a social point of view as "supporting learners in participating with increasing confidence and empowerment in a language community". Learner development can be defined as the process of developing as learners: learners willingly seeking for or creating learning opportunities for themselves and each other, consciously or unconsciously, whether inside the classroom or in real life situations. Learners' realisation of their learning process grows as their development

increases and vice versa.

Since journal writing and group talk are used to help students explore either their previous or present learning experience as a medium of reflection for the study of this thesis, I will next discuss the connections between students' reflection, journal writing and group talk in learning.

2.4. Learning, journals, reflection and group talk

Dewey explained the principle of continuity of experiences. It "means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (Dewey 1938:35). Learning is continuous, so past experiences that students have had might come to light and be useful if students have a chance to record, recall and understand them. On making the connection between past and present, Dewey wrote:

> As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning contribute. (Dewey, 1938:44)

Journals give students adequate space to step back and rethink their process of learning. Journal writing is effective in raising the learners' consciousness of their own learning process (Matusmoto, 1996). During the process of reflection, students can go

through the process of making sense of their learning experience in at least two possible ways – journal writing or group talk. It is hard to imagine students continuously moving on to further learning development without understanding their learning experiences. Students can easily lose their drive for learning if they do not even know what it is they want to learn, how they want to learn or why they want to learn.

It is useful to follow Moon's (1999b) illustration of distinguishing "external" from "internal" experience (Marton and Booth, 1997) in order to discuss how meanings are produced or reproduced from experiences. The meanings students come up with can therefore be seen as their learning. External experience refers to the object, idea, the concept, the image – whatever it is that the learner wants to assimilate. Meanwhile "internal experience is the experience that the learner brings to the learning situation from her current cognitive structure. It is the sum of prior experiences of (knowledge of feelings about) the object." This is how Moon (1999b) defines meaning:

> ...We use our internal experience and guidance from others, if it is available, in order to distinguish what we need to learn from what is not needed for the current sense-making. Meaning is not present or absent but something that is invested in a person's internal experience of an object. When interpreting or representing meaning, the learner will try to pull out the meaning relevant to the context (Moon, 1999b:23).

As for the possible purposes of journals, Moon (1999b:44-49) gives an extensive list. The ones that are mentioned here are the ones that I have observed most in the journals written by my students. The purposes of journals may be:

-to record experience

-to facilitate learning from experience

-to support understanding and the representation of understanding

-to develop critical thinking or the development of a questioning attitude

-to encourage metacognition

-to increase active involvement in and ownership of learning

-to increase ability in reflection and thinking

-to improve writing

-to improve or give "voice"; as a means of self-expression (Moon, 1999b)

Likewise, teachers can get to know better about how students actually think and act. As Brookfield (1990:338) states, analysing journals provides a very effective method of understanding how people learn to learn. That is what this thesis hopes to investigate. In short, with the focus on learning from journals, learners are encouraged to explore their selves, their personal constructs of meaning and also to understand their view of the learning environment and the world. The implications of the individual learner's constructing their prior experience can distort or reinforce their perceptions of new experience, so journal writing has served as a helpful tool not only for learners, but also for professional development (Holly, 1991; Knowles, 1993). Nevertheless, the educational process (e.g. journal writing) should not only aim to promote awareness of prior conceptions, "but to develop the understanding to form an appropriate basis for further

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learning" (Moon, 1999a:83). Journal writing not only raises learners' awareness of learning, but also produces opportunities for learners to recognise, evaluate and discover their individual learning events. "If people's awareness of what is happening to them can be heightened, and if they can internally examine life events, then they can make more of each experience." (Candy, et al., 1985) Therefore, learning and journal writing relates closely to the process of reflection by which experience is noticed, examined and interpreted.

This is how Mercer illustrates the relationship between language, learning and experience:

> We use language to make the future from the past, to build a relationship between what has been and what is to come; and we use the resources of past experience to make new, joint, knowledge and understanding. Using language, we can transform the raw material of our shared life experiences into stories which have continuity and coherence. This is a joint enterprise, in which we have to make assumptions about the amount of relevant prior experience and understanding we share with the people with whom we are communicating, and draw partners' attention to what is relevant. (Mercer, 2000:46)

In Matusmoto's study of helping L2 learners reflect on their learning, the benefits of journal writing were recognized and confirmed by the learners. However, the learners showed their need for a phase of finding out what other learners do in their exploration of learning through writing. For example, a student reported:

> It is true that the diary analysis helped me analyse and evaluate my own EFL

learning in the classroom, but I am actually not completely satisfied with this. It seems to me that it would be more beneficial to share my thoughts with my classmates, not just making sure that my way of learning is like this, or my beliefs and attitudes are like this, and so on. I want to know what other students are actually doing and thinking when learning English. (Matusmoto, 1996:145)

Learners are actually eager to find out what other people do and think when learning English. This is where group talk comes in. With the support of group talk, stories of learning experiences can be retold, shared and hopefully understood. The accumulation of experience does not automatically in itself allow learning to take place. From a sociocultural perspective, the events that happen to people can only make sense if they can be fitted into an existing plot, or if the plot itself can be reconfigured or replaced (Pavlenko and Lantolf, 2000:140). Mercer stresses the importance of conversations that stimulate people to think collectively. In this way, people do not only share information. "Rather, they gain a completely new way of using their minds in combination for the purpose of solving problems, transforming individual experience into shared knowledge and making shared knowledge available to individuals." (Mercer, 2000:168) According to Garrison (1995), "For Deweyans [followers of Dewey], the mind that manipulates meaning emerges socially through participation in the social process of meaning construction" (p722).

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed different ways of learning chosen by students, consciously or unconsciously, to proceed and improve their learning. The argument about

the ambiguous taxonomies of learning strategies has been presented, and the need to make a clear distinction between "training" and "development", from learners' point of view, has been explained. Learners' phases of learner development should proceed in a similar way to teacher development. Consequently, it is crucial for this thesis to call for the need to recognise the fact that learners do normally move on to learner development, whether or not teachers/researchers neglect this fact. This chapter also examined how researchers and teachers have attempted to help learners to learn better by providing learner- or strategy-training. In addition, the review discussed the value, from a sociocultural perspective, of journal writing, group talk and making use of experiences. Furthermore, the relationship between writing, talking, learning and reflection has been linked to stress how learners benefit from it to create a better context for learning for themselves and for others.

In the next chapter, I will draw on Exploratory Practice (EP) as a theoretical framework and methodology for this thesis. First, the research questions for this thesis will be presented. Next, the principles of EP and its guidelines will be illustrated and justified as a baseline for the discussions on trusting learners, which is one of the main assumptions for this study. The way in which EP can allow learners and teachers to develop individually and collectively.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework – Exploratory Practice

3.1. Theoretical Framework for the thesis: Exploratory Practice

This study follows the principles of Exploratory Practice (EP), as established by Allwright (1991). Allwright believes that teachers and learners are far more suited and better-positioned than researchers to understand their teaching and learning environment, and can do so by using simple pedagogical procedures as investigative tools. Though there have been some previous kinds of participatory research (Heron and Reason, 1997; Kemmis and McTaggart, 2000), these are not primarily motivated or led by the participants. EP fills this gap by involving everyone, particularly learners, in the research. Exploratory Practice therefore encourages a fully inclusive research model that emphasises the role of learners, as well as teachers, as potential researchers. It is "first-person" research rather than a "third-party" research. That is to say "practitioner" researchers in EP are "people investigating their own practices, as insiders to their own teaching" (Allwright and Hanks, 2009:109). EP can be applied to learners and learning as well as to teachers and teaching. Teachers and learners are encouraged to use their regular classroom experiences to explore and understand their own teaching and learning.

One of the benefits of the EP research model is that it takes place within the normal process of teaching and learning, with a minimum of extra work involved. In this way it is very different from other kinds of research, which are usually part of a research project, involving considerable amounts of extra work. Researchers have applied EP to different kinds of classroom research. Silimani-Rolls (2003) investigated the reasons that impeded

smooth progress in group work in language classes. Zhang (2004) engaged in a dialogue with learners through group work to find out how the quality of extensive reading lessons could be improved. Gunn (2003) used in-class interviews between students and students to find out how students observed their communicative misunderstandings, and how they reflected on their performance. She analysed transcripts of teacher-student oral interviews together with the learners in order to improve her learners' communicative performance. Perpignan (2003) researched the effect of her written feedback to her students and their responses to it. Through EP Allwright has provided a sustainable research framework that promotes meaningful research without creating an extra workload for the practitioners involved.

Two decades ago, Allwright started working together with English teachers and researchers in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. They experienced mutual development through working for understanding to make classroom life better. Principles and pedagogic procedures were established over many years, during which teachers worked together to find out why things happened in certain ways in their classrooms. Although most of the work in Rio involved teachers, it has always been the aim to bring learners into the exploration of classroom life. This therefore distinguishes EP from traditional kinds of research, where learners (and often teachers) are the subjects of study rather than being participants in it. Although EP does not discourage changes where they are needed, it differs from action research in that changes are not the goal. It is understanding and quality of life that EP advocates, which may or may not lead to a desire for eventual changes. Nor does EP see problems as the exclusive starting point for the process of research or reflection. That is the reason why EP practitioners are prompted to think of "puzzles" to

reflect on, rather than starting with supposed "problems", which might, on reflection, turn out not to be problems at all. The danger of starting with "problems" is that practitioners may rush to find solutions that might not be necessary, once the situation is fully understood. The starting point for Exploratory Practice is to encourage practitioners to ask questions beginning "Why". This helps to avoid the danger of prematurely asking "How" questions, such as "How can I solve this problem?"

Only the learners can do their own learning. And it is their parallel practice as learners that either will or will not effectively complement the efforts of teachers and of other, more "background" language professionals (like textbook writers and curriculum developers) to make language classrooms productive. So why not try to think of learners as *practitioners of learning*, and not just "targets of teaching"? (Allwright and Hanks, 2009:2)

That is to say that in order to develop a general understanding of learning, we also need to help learners develop *their own* understanding as *key practitioners of learning*; and encourage learners to investigate their own puzzles about their own learning. "Inclusive practitioner research" is therefore proposed by Allwright and associates to encourage teachers and learners to work together as co-practitioners. Dewey stressed a similar view to this, when he stated that:

"control of individual actions is affected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are co-operative or interacting parts (Dewey, 1986:30)."

According to some studies, learners have their own ways of participating (Allwright, 1984; Kramsch, 1993; Woods, 1997). The way in which learners actively cope

with the complexities of classroom life, as described by Kramsch (1993), demonstrates that learners can and do manage their own learning for their own learning purposes. Woods (1997) indicates that learners' decision-making in the learning process, for example, doing homework, reading or watching programs, etc., is clear to be seen, although it may not be noticed by teachers. Larsen-Freeman remarks "today it is recognised that learners are complex constellations of behaviours, thoughts, feelings, social needs, experiences, strategies and political needs, at the very least" (Larsen-Freeman, 1998:211). Breen (1998) criticized the way in which learners have been portrayed in the literature in SLA. "SLA research persists in decontextualizating learner contributions, the learning process, and learning outcomes from the location in which these three factors are realised" (1998:116).

Furthermore, Allwright and Hanks (2009) discuss and map out a detailed view of learners as key developing practitioners within their five propositions which are expressed in a single sentence:

Learners are both unique individuals and social beings

who are capable of taking learning seriously,

of taking independent decisions,

 and of developing as practitioners of learning.

(Allwright & Hanks, 2009:15)

The following paragraphs, summarised from Allwright & Hanks (2009:4-7) gives further elaboration to the five propositions EP holds about learners.

Proposition 1: Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.

Treating learners as "an undifferentiated mass" ignores the fact that every lesson is a different lesson for each learner. Only if learners' unique individuality is respected, can they be expected to learn and develop. In his book Experience and Education (1963), which is recognised as a major contribution to educational philosophy, Dewey criticised traditional education for enforcing artificial uniformity. "They put seeming before being" (Dewey, 1963). He further argues that this is a fatal impediment for teachers who wish to understand the individuals they are educating.

Proposition 2: Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.

It is often assumed that learners should be treated in isolation, rather than considering their learning in a social environment, together with other people. Apart from learning alone, most people enjoy learning in a group with mutual support. Dewey (1963) argued that the driving force of education is to bring learners together.

If we took instances of co-operative activities in which all members of a group take part, as for example in well-ordered family life in which there is mutual confidence, the point would be even clearer. In all such cases it is not the will or desire of any one person which establishes order but the moving spirit of the whole group. The control is social, but individuals are parts of a community, not outside of it. (Dewey, 1963)

Likewise, the sixth proposition Williams and Burden present in their book, Psychology for Language Teachers is along the same lines, with a stress on the social and shared community. "Learning takes place in a social context through interaction with other people" (Williams and Burden, 1997:206).

Proposition 3: Learners are capable of taking learning seriously.

Learners deserve positive expectations from teachers. Learners are likely to conform to what their teachers expect of them. If learners are never allowed to make decisions, it may be difficult for them to do so on the rare occasions when they are asked to. However, in a supportive atmosphere where their views are taken seriously, it is learners who have more chances to show they are uniquely capable of understanding and contributing to their own learning.

Proposition 4: Learners are capable of independent decision-making

Williams and Burden (1997) present some propositions they consider crucial for language teachers. They stress the importance of individuals making choices about what they do, of goal setting and of feeling in control. Accordingly, they emphasise that teachers need to encourage learners to talk about their purposes in learning a language, to clarify their goals and to arouse their sense of responsibility. Their argument is summarised in this precise proposition. "Learners learn better if they feel in control of what they are learning." If learners are not given space to decide what to learn, how to learn or when to learn, then they are likely to be incapable of taking independent decisions. According to psychological research, the more people practice making decisions, the more capable they become (Wood

& Bandura, 1989).

Proposition 5: Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning

Though it might not always be realistic to expect young learners to be fully developed as learners when they come together in language classes, there is always room for their ability and maturity to develop towards taking their own learning seriously, and taking productive independent decisions about it. Following Proposition 1, learners are expected to develop best if they are treated as unique and idiosyncratic. From Proposition 2, when learners are treated to be "key practitioners of learning", their development is best seen as a mutual social process where practitioners all gain most by sharing understandings, ideas and experiences. Van Lier proposes a social approach to language learning. "Ecological educators see language and learning as relationships among learners and the environment" (van Lier, 2000:258). How language professionals treat learners itself influences the process of learning.

The propositions of EP presented and discussed above provide a set of principles for the course being organised in the way it was. These prepositions about learners are proposed as a framework for reviewing the field of language teaching and learning and as a principal form of inclusive practitioner research. They also inform people who agree on the need for a greater effort to understand learners better and help them learn better (Prabhu, 1987).

3.1.1. Reflection and EP

Reflection is an important process when doing EP. The Chinese expression for

reflection is literally "to use one's eyes less". It suggests not relying on what is seen, but on what is heard from the mind. EP encourages practitioners to think about teaching and learning as seeking better understanding rather than measuring effectiveness. However, what EP advocates is not a once-and-for-all event or change. Instead, it is a continuous process that goes on as long as the practitioners decide to do so. In this case, practitioners can benefit from regular reflection.

Schraw (1998) describes the importance of reflection as a way of promoting general awareness. Extended practice and reflection play crucial roles in the construction of meta-cognitive knowledge and regulatory skills. This is especially true when students are given regular opportunities to reflect on their successes and failures (Kuhn, Schauble & Garcia-Mila, 1992; Siegler & Jenkins, 1989). Studies examining the construction of theories of mind also suggest that reflection, both as a solitary and group endeavour, contributes to the breadth and sophistication of such theories (Astington, 1993; Montgomery, 1992; Schraw, 1998:118).

Schraw's view clearly outlines the advantages of regular reflection. With the principles of EP, learners are free to treat their learning exploration both from negative and positive side of learning experience. Reflection is often defined narrowly in terms of learning from recognised error or ineffectiveness in practice, as Mackintosh (1998) critically observed.

A distinction between the views of reflection in experiential learning and Exploratory Practice lies in the fact that the latter allows the aims of reflection to include change, but also no change; problem-solving, but also understanding. Problem-solving and

making changes are just two possible practitioner choices out of many, rather than the only final destinations.

3.1.2. "Exploratory practice" as a means of working for understanding

Perhaps it is necessary to sketch what "understanding" actually means in education. "Understanding" goes beyond simply "knowing". "Understanding is a matter of being able to do a variety of thought-demanding things with a topic- like explaining, finding evidence and examples, generalising, applying analogising, and representing the topic in a new way." (Perkins and Blytle, 1994:5). Likewise, when learners work with each other to think together, and go through the process of reflection, clarifying the nature of their own learning and seeking meanings to themselves, they experience ways of "understanding".

I will now turn to consideration of how exploratory practice is identified as a means of working for understanding. Understanding can derive from self-realisation or from group talk. For example, learners can look into their individual process of learning, share what they think with their friends, and record reactions from their friends, their teacher or they themselves. The process allows students to have complete freedom to explore what they feel puzzled about in their learning, and to go deeply into their investigation of learning so as to create better understanding. Students gain support from their teacher, their fellow-students and themselves. They have regular opportunities to report the progress of their reflection in group talk, so reflection is not isolated from the course, their learning or their real life. It exemplifies the concept of using language to think together as proposed by Mercer.

Language is the prime tool of teaching-and-learning. Education happens in conversations where the combined mental resources of teacher and learner are focused on developing the learner's understanding (Mercer 2000:169).

With the opportunities they are given to use group talk for reflection, students feel supported and less lonely than they otherwise might. Additionally, learners benefit from actively identifying and analysing their process of learning and from observing or listening to others presenting their thinking.

As Moon (2008:145) acknowledges, the ability to work with meaning and generate new meaning is fundamental to a deep learning approach that aims at understanding ideas by learners through "relating ideas", "looking for patterns", "checking" and "examining cautiously and critically".

In the process of "working with meaning" a learner might simply review what they know without changing their understanding but increase their knowledge by being more aware of the content of that knowledge. This may be a matter of bringing the tacit knowledge to consciousness. However, when "working with meaning" yields new conceptions, then new material of learning has been generated and the cognitive structure may need to accommodate it. (Moon, 2008:145)

When learners and teachers work together for understanding, they grow to know themselves better. Meanwhile, they grow to understand their teaching and learning better. Since they make better sense of their teaching and learning, they get to know more about their process of teaching and learning and make their purpose for teaching and learning

clear to them. Tobin (1991) suggests that understanding is the basis of education. With this aim for teaching, teachers' roles change accordingly. Tobin (1991) describes how teachers change their roles from dispensers and controllers to facilitators by helping students to reflect on their metaphors. Dewey states:

"Growth in judgement and understanding is essentially growth in ability to form purposes and to select and arrange means for their realisation....[Growth] is the power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation" (Dewey, 1963:64).

A teacher is a participant in student activity, as Dewey suggests. In the language learning context, this means that the teacher encourages student linguistic development through language practice, but also reflection and exploration that will lead to social and individual growth. In order to enact one's purpose effectively, it is essential to understand the contingent interaction between learning, and real-life experiences. Through integration of classroom and non-classroom experiences, the realisation from students' investigations into learning contributes to the enrichment of asocial and educational learning community both for teaching and learning.

3.1.3. Working from positive rather than from negative experiences

The second issue is about how students look at their learning experiences in EP. I encourage students to recall their positive and negative experiences. If people want to learn from experiences, it seems reasonable that the extent of their success- their areas of strength

as well as their mistakes and difficulties- should not be missed out or neglected by focusing only on one or the other. It seems imbalanced if learners are pushed only to look at why they did not do things well. Williams and Burden discuss the nature of the learning context from a psychological and sociological perspective.

> Language classrooms in particular need to be places where learners are encouraged to use the new language to communicate, to try out new ways of expressing meanings, to negotiate, to make mistakes without fear, and to learn from successes and failures. Emotionally, a suitable environment for language learning should be one that enhances the trust needed to communicate and which enhances confidence and self-esteem (Williams and Burden, 1997:202).

Williams and Burden describe some important elements for a language learning environment in this quote. They stress the importance of communicating without fear of making mistakes and of learning both from success and failures.

Wood and Bandura's (1989) research identified the impact of prior experience that can influence people when they set their personal goals. Cumulative previous negative experiences and failures lower people's willingness for future goal-setting. In contrast, the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the higher the goals people set for themselves and the stronger the commitment to them (Wood & Bandura, 1989). In foreign or second language learning, it is easy to notice that students' over-concern with academic and personal evaluations of his or her performance competence in the target language is caused by fear of negative evaluation (Maclntyre & Gardner, 1991). Though it is commonly believed that people make progress through correction of their mistakes, and that is the way many

teachers and learners teach and learn at present, it is at the very least a rather limited approach to education to treat failures and mistakes as the main sources of growth. Wood and Bandura constructed the fact from their findings that it is not easy to expect learners to benefit from facing difficulties or failures since different people have different level of efficacy. "It requires a strong sense of efficacy to deploy one's cognitive resources optimally and to remain task oriented in the face of repeated difficulties and failures" (Wood & Bandura, 1989:408). Apart from the limited nature of a correction based approach to language learning, doubt has even been cast on the idea that correction can result in any useful learning.

Some learners may inappropriately view foreign language as a test situation (especially in Taiwan) rather than as an opportunity for communication (Horwitz, 1986). If learners do not have good results from tests, their reflection on their learning might show intrusive thinking that "creates stress and undermines effective use of capabilities by diverting attention away from from how best to proceed to concerns over personal deficiencies and possible adverse outcomes" (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Different learners react differently to difficulties. For example, the major difference between anxious learners and non-anxious learners is the continuity of learning. Non-anxious learners are prepared to face the challenge or difficulties and yet resistance stays with anxious learners (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Therefore, working on both positive experience as well as negative experiences allows learners to balance their frustration from failures (e.g. unsatisfying test results or unsuccessful experience) with their satisfaction from any success that is recognised by learners. Then learners are likely to have better

chances of learning more from their experiences.

Consequently, it is hard for learners who do not have good results in tests to keep a positive conception of their ability if they are not reminded by themselves or others that they probably have some valuable successful experience that has not been understood or repeated. Perhaps those successful experiences have been treated as "good luck" or "accidents" are in fact worth understanding as a positive force to make learners want to continue to learn or as a way of accumulating confidence. Furthermore, what learners recognise as failures or unsuccessful experiences may in many cases be part of the "process" of learning that will lead to better accuracy or better performance as time goes by. What many learners are likely to need is to increase their opportunities for language use, to clarify their learning purposes or increase their fluency, rather than striving to produce faultless language or achieve excellent test results. The effort to pass tests, often the only available kind of evaluation available to learners, inevitably enhances their anxiety. Whether or not learners make progress as a result of having their mistakes corrected, exclusive reliance on error-correction is obviously a waste of opportunities for other kinds of learning. Learners miss the opportunities for growth from positive experiences if the successful experiences are simply left in a quiet place or forgotten. Allwright (1984) proposed a view of language lessons as sets of learning opportunities, many of them unplanned and uncontrolled:

I believe it helps if we look at language lessons as co-produced events in which all the participants are simultaneously involved in the management of interaction and, ipso facto, in the management of their learning. Following this line of thought, we

can look upon language lessons as sets of learning opportunities, some deliberate but many incidental, all created through the necessary processes of classroom interaction. It should now be easier to see why the relationship between teaching and learning is problematic. What the learners do learn is presumably limited by the learning opportunities that are made available to them. But the provision of learning opportunities is not just determined by the teaching. The teaching is just one factor though sometimes a powerful one in the overall process by which lessons happen and learning opportunities are created (Allwright, 1984:5).

In order to encourage learners to recall their positive experiences as well as negative ones, I suggest three steps: recognising success, bringing back success and focusing on areas of strength.

3.2. The process of recalling positive experiences

3.2.1. Recognising success

Since my students tend to find it hard when they are asked to think of a puzzle question about their own learning, I ask them to use the EP worksheet to think about it or write about it before class. It takes time to find out what their minds really think. Students can actually be reminded that there must be something positive that is worth noticing.

Brookfield (1991) uses critical incidents to explore learners' assumptions which are defined by him as "comprising those successes, bringing ideas, common beliefs, and self-

evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions" (Brookfield, 1991:177). Using critical incidents is designed to help learners become aware of major assumptions informing their thoughts and actions in one of the most important domains in their life (Brookfield, 1991:187). He finds it frequently a good idea to pair critical incidents by asking participants to describe one successful event and one unsuccessful one. He always asks for descriptions of the successful event first, since to talk about one's success is much less threatening than to talk about one's failures. Recognising and benefiting from success means to amplify strengths rather than repair weaknesses, according to suggestions from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Moon (2008:83) indicates the relationship between reflection and learning. "Personal or guided reflection is the process by means of which these pre-existing schemes of experience or cognitive constructs can be recognised." Success should neither be excluded nor neglected in reflection because people can recognise it, understand it and repeat the successful history. There are arguably times when learners might need to get away from just repeating what has "worked" in the past. However, it is necessary to stress that the meaning of success is not defined by teachers or tests only. Learners are encouraged to define success for themselves.

In EP, with the support of group talk and journal writing, students jointly explore positive /negative learning experiences by starting from real-life situations. For instance, I once heard a shy girl from the music department tell other fellow students in her group that she helped a foreigner get what she needed in a convenience store the previous week. She realised that the reason why she did not worry about her level of English at that moment

was because she wanted so much to help the foreigner that she did not think about her English ability at all. She shared her experience in class, where she discussed that latest success and learned to understand why it had occurred. She helped herself understand her success, and she also encouraged other students to focus on the positive results of communication rather than on the mistakes they made while trying to communicate.

3.2.2. Bringing back success

Encouraging students to explore and understand their background learning experience plays a prime role in improving the quality of learning. Sometimes successful experiences might be interpreted as accidents. Without discipline and sustained effort, positive experiences are "unpredictable and their transformative impact will be rather limited" (Lama, 2000:30).

Moskovitch (1999:178) states that "the better students feel about themselves and others, the more likely they are to achieve." Once students can bring back success into their present learning, they can increase their self-confidence and enjoy learning. This is an important factor for students in Taiwan, mainly because many of them have fear or guilt about not learning English well. As long as students can accumulate more and more positive experience, they will gradually become confident and learn that enjoyable learning does not have to be the preserve to a certain level of student. People who think they can perform well on a task do better than those who think they will fail.

3.2.3. Focusing on areas of strength

Though it can be helpful to learn from one's mistakes, it is commonly seen that learners tend to put too much tress on problems or weaknesses. Similarly, focusing on one's strengths and areas of success can be an alternative to emphasising problems and searching for quick solutions. Individual areas of strength needs to be remembered and understood for current and future learning. Whenever my students are encouraged to think about their own strength, they shine with a bright smile. Thinking of previous success already allows self-confidence to grow naturally.

3.3. "Exploratory practice" as a transformative tool

Once learners learn to bring back success by means of focusing on areas of strength, they are transforming their mind or experiences through EP. This section is to discuss further about how learners can transform learning after they identify their needs and purposes. With EP, students are given opportunities to seek for understanding of both the positive and negative experiences in their learning. It is important to understand why negative experiences happen, rather than simply feeling guilty or frustrated. Similarly, it is worth understanding why positive experiences occur because people can learn to repeat successful experiences. It looks simple, but people tend to neglect to reflect when things go well. Sadly, without further understanding, successful experiences might simply be considered as lucky or accidental, and then be forgotten.

3.4. Access to learners' reactions towards being decision makers

Exploratory Practice was introduced in an elective course taught wholly in English, Exploratory Practice for Reflective English Learners, which has been offered at Taipei National University of the Arts since 2008. The research for this thesis is based on this EP-based course, which is offered by the department of general education for all under-graduate or post-graduate arts students at the university. The class meets two hours a week for eighteen weeks each semester. The first hour of a class is spent on different ideas for studying English and coping with university academic education (e.g. working with others, aspects of academic writing, note taking, team work, etc.). The second hour is dedicated to EP.

In the beginning of the course, I give a preliminary introduction to the principles of Exploratory Practice, explaining the basic ideas of EP to students, and showing some examples of previous students' learning journals as well as EP worksheets as we go along.

The course was funded by the Taiwan Ministry of Education during the academic year of 2009-10, so I had a teaching assistant and a course website assistant to assist with the course. The teaching assistant was in class to help students with their group talk, uploading their course work such as learning journals, making recordings of group talk, or designing in-class posters. The course website assistant mainly maintained the website and uploaded students' in-class videos to youtube or posted audio files. The course requirement was for students to produce 9 journal entries (60%), to write 6 online pieces of feedback (10%), to participate fully in class generally, and in group talk in particular (20%), and to attend class every week.

I had offered the same course while working in a junior college (since 2000) before I worked for this current university. As a result of my experience gained in designing and delivering the course over nine years, I have developed a structure for using EP with students. This structured procedure is aimed at making individual reflection and group work more focused and productive (see Appendix 1). Students have complete freedom when they follow this procedure, being free to stop at any stage if they decide they need to have more time to explore their puzzle question. The freedom referred to here includes students' observation (of their learning), judgements and their thoughts (Dewey, 1963). An old puzzle can also be given up if students no longer worry about it or if the issue has been resolved, clarified or understood, without any need for further thought or action. The major idea is to stimulate and encourage students to make their learning experience understood. F. Smith states education was in the past considered synonymous with experience. He puts it well when he says that "Learning was what happened as a consequence of rich and varied experience, and the worst way to learn was to isolate yourself from the world and other people" (F. Smith, 1998:74). He then criticises modern views of education, suggesting that nowadays all too often "learning and education don't mean gaining experience, they mean acquiring, storing, and retrieving information (which is what computers do)" (F. Smith, 1998:74).

I ask students to bring a puzzle to class and talk about it with other students in self-selection groups of four to six. I usually use a yin-yang diagram (see figure 3-1 below) to help students identify puzzles from their learning. The colours of tai-chi are black and white, representing positive and negative learning experiences. This is to help students

balance their reflection when they recall their learning. A puzzle question can be a problem about their English learning that either happened before or is still confusing them. Alternatively, a puzzle can be something they have done well before and they are now interested in figuring out why it happened. I ask them to fill in the EP worksheet and after class they can decide whether they want to upload the worksheet to the course website or not. The following week, it is totally up to the students whether they want to work on the same puzzle or move on to a new puzzle question. Very often, without needing to be told, the students are willing to engage and spontaneously start giving feedback or suggestions to each other.

Figure 3.1.
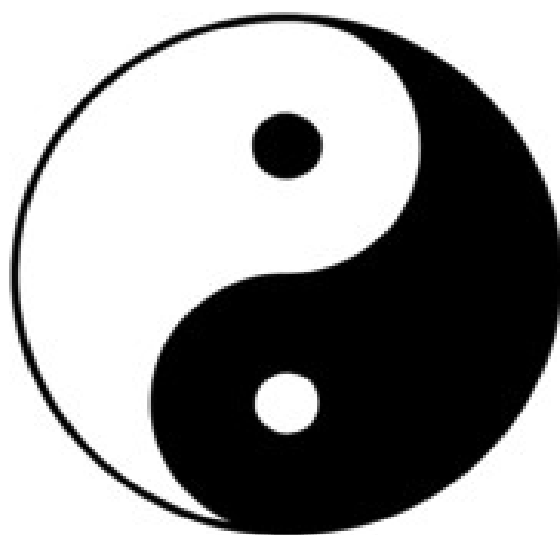
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the "wholeness" (Jaatinen 2007) of meanings, thinking, reflection, and discovery in English language learning situations, mainly based on students' investigations into their learning experiences. This includes rethinking, descriptions, monitoring of learning and understanding. Individual students, the learning community, and their relations with each other are all part of the analysis. I inquire into how the setting of goals, the making of choices, the identification of preferences and self-evaluation are understood by learners. Another key area of focus is how learners link together and use their areas of strength to help them learn.

4.2. Role of Teacher and Researcher

In the course studied in this thesis, I have two roles – as the teacher and as the researcher. The researcher is part of the process of understanding which I am inquiring into. Therefore, the researcher and the teacher's pathway towards an understanding of the process of reflection is an essential part of the thesis. The interpretations to be described and analysed are the flow of thoughts and views on the nature of language learning as recorded by the learners themselves. Hence, this thesis draws on a philosophical point of view combined with an authentic description and searching for new opportunities in language teaching and learning. As the teacher of the class being investigated I was there to encourage learners' reflection, their discussion, their mutual help, and their use of English. As a researcher, my job was to assess how well the process worked out for all the practitioners involved. In this way, I increased my understanding as a research practitioner

through helping my students develop their own understanding of learning.

4.3. Teaching Professional Project

If I had been doing a conventional professional development project, I would have looked largely at quantitative learning outcomes, in the way I am always expected to present my work to the Ministry of Education in Taiwan for my university's Teaching Excellence Project. I would have had to show specific changes students made, how much progress they actually made, and what precise, measurable changes they had made. Typically I might have given the class a pre-course test and a post-course test, to show their change in test scores. It would have been the effectiveness of the course in terms of an increase in language proficiency that mattered. Alternatively, if I could have encouraged the class to take English proficiency tests, and reported the number of students who could pass after they had taken the course, the ministry of education would also have been satisfied. Qualitative findings such as increased motivation, confidence, or interest are generally considered inadequate or inappropriate by such bodies. Of course, I could have followed another dominant trend in Taiwan by doing an action research project to "improve" my teaching, as opposed to my teaching life or my students' lives of learning. The development of my inner understanding of teaching and learning is not going to be revealing to a ministry of education that will only evaluate my contribution to improving my students' English proficiency when measured in specific, quantitative ways.

4.4. Research aims

However, this was not my aim of doing this PhD research. My research aim was to

prioritise "quality of life" in my classroom. My purpose was to go along students' learning paths together with them, in order to understand how they themselves seek for their purposes of learning; how they decide they want to learn; how they make meanings together with each other; how they connect their previous learning experiences to present ones and how they pursue learner development to achieve their goals.

The thesis is based on the analysis of students' situational awareness. I focus my research inquiry into learning and teaching on following the principles of Exploratory Practice. The EP approach to the roles of researcher and teacher in my investigation means paying attention to the meanings and understandings of English learning situations. The starting point of the research journey was a conscious attempt to elevate the quality of classroom life in teaching and learning. I tried to approach and understand better the students' learning stories in real-life situations; understandings and ways of learning are unveiled and discovered by the students, in their own words. I also sought to understand the ways in which the understandings of the students were developed. The investigation in this thesis examines the process of students' sense-making and clarifies how teachers and students can work together to make teaching and learning pleasant to all involved.

Table 4.1. Data

EP-based course:	an elective course provided from February until the end of June 2009, lasting eighteen weeks, at Taipei National University of the Arts.
Number of the students registered in the	35.

course:	
Students' background:	30 undergraduate art students from the departments of fine art, music, dance and theatre and 5 post-graduate students majoring in technology art. Their ages were between nineteen and twenty-five.
Total number of journal entries uploaded to the course website:	256 Each student was asked to write 9 entries during the course.

Table 4.2. Course evaluation for the class contributing to students' final score

Grade A	a journal rich in both description and reflection, including not only reference to what was presented in class, but also the learner's own development and interpretation of these and other ideas, and an attempt to make connections to real-life experiences
Grade B	a journal that includes a descriptive recall of the course, some independent reflection and some connection to the learner's real-life experiences
Grade C	a journal is largely descriptive with a minimal amount of reflection and little or no connection to real-life experiences
Grade D	a journal is completely descriptive
Grade E	a journal was not submitted

4.5. Exploratory Practice and other approaches

4.5.1 Principles of Exploratory practice

Here I present the principles of Exploratory Practice as the research methodology and a philosophical basis for this thesis:

Principle 1: "Quality of life" for language teachers and learners is the most appropriate central concern for practitioner research in our field.

Principle 2: Working primarily to *understand* the "quality of life', as it is experienced by language learners and teachers, is more important than, and logically prior to, seeking in any way to improve it.

Principle 3: Everybody needs to be involved in the work for understanding.

Principle 4: The work needs to serve to bring people together.

Principle 5: The work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development.

Principle 6: Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.

Principle 7: Integrating the work for understanding fully into existing curricular practices is a way of minimising the burden and maximising sustainability.

These principles promote understanding, collegiality and inclusive research. My research aims to find out how students make meanings together.

Allwright and Hanks stress:

If anyone needs to understand, then everyone needs to understand (especially if we

see situational understanding as the collective property of the group, rather than of each individual separately). Everyone should have the opportunity of reaching whatever level of understanding they are capable of, however "deep" or "shallow" that may be. All learners are in principle capable of taking learning seriously, of taking independent decisions and of developing as practitioners of learning. (Allwright and Hanks, 2009:151-52)

4.5.2. Exploratory Practice and other approaches to reflection and classroom investigation

For the purpose of this investigation, and in order to show the appropriateness of using the principles of EP as a research model for this thesis, it is helpful to distinguish and examine the differences between Reflective Practice, Action Research, and Exploratory Practice. I will use the table below to distinguish EP from other research methods.

Here is a table comparing them.

Table 4.3. Differences between EP and other comparable approaches.

	Reflective practice	Action research	Exploratory practice
WHO does it?	teachers, learners	teachers, researchers sometimes can be collaborative	teachers as researchers teachers and learners together collaborative, collegial
How much WORK is involved? When does it happen?	occasional, small scale, not necessarily time consuming	occasional, smaller scale, infrequent time consuming	sustainable, small scale no extra burden, part of routine work, sustainable
What are the AIMS?	contemplation for	practical solutions,	teaching insight –

	understanding change after reflection	change - how can things be changed?	understanding professional satisfaction – why do I have these experiences?
HOW is it done?	problem- solving or action for change	action, experiment	puzzles, reflection, normal class routines

Here is another view of how Exploratory Practice works:

Figure 4.1. How EP relates to other approaches to classroom research and reflective practice

http://www.prodait.org/approaches/exploratory/relate.php
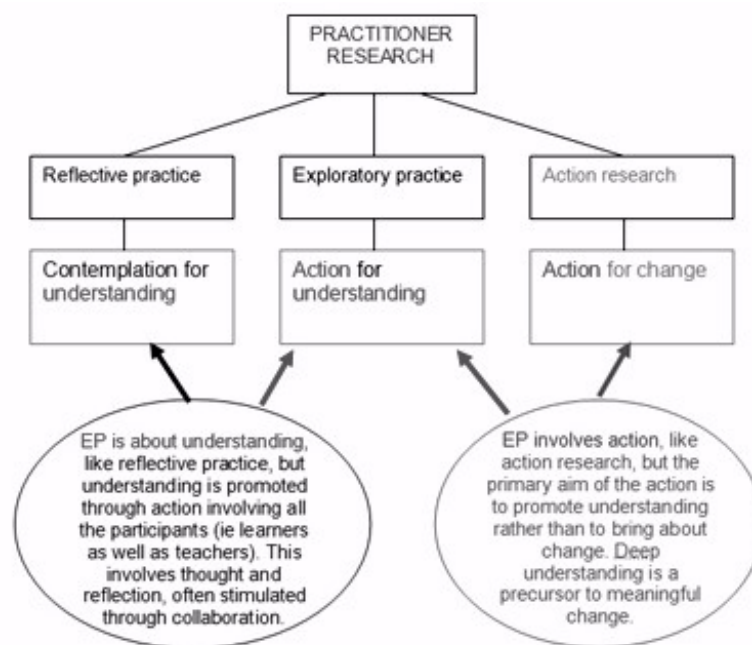
EP promotes action to promote understanding rather than to achieve immediate effects, at least in terms of visible changes, so taking action is just one, optional outcome, and only occurs when it is necessary for practitioners. EP stresses understanding through actions that involve the collaboration of teachers and learners, so EP minimises the

"parasitic" nature of much classroom research, where only the researcher tends to benefit. Meanwhile action research is likely to produce a heavier classroom workload and to require an extra effort that might disrupt regular classroom teaching. Breen (2006) points out the main characteristic of EP:

It is distinctive in explicitly resisting performativity and a preoccupation with effectiveness by replacing these with a focus upon teachers' quality of life or professional well-being through the cooperative understanding of everyday puzzles in practice (Breen, 2006: 216).

This study aims to find out if students' existing experience is connected to their previous experience, on the one hand, and to their future experience on the other. Teachers can help students to build these connections.

4.6. Qualitative research: Case studies

This research uses case studies based on the principles of Exploratory Practice. Because the thesis is concerned with finding out how students' realisations happen, I pay special attention to the connections between the interpretation and use of learning experiences. The experiences have to be selected carefully in order to represent the consciousnesses of students' observation and the self-evaluation of their English learning. I select certain entries in students' journals so as to demonstrate the whole process of their thinking.

4.6.1. EP-based course

The research is based on the course I offered called, Exploratory Practice for

Reflective English Learners at Taipei University of the Arts between February and June 2009. It was a whole English, elective course for upper-intermediate students at the department of general education for under-graduate and post-graduate students.

The course was funded by the ministry of education, who sponsored a website assistant and a course assistant. A course website was created through a google site at the beginning of the course. Students were encouraged to upload their course work to the course website. However, some students chose to submit their journals to the teacher in person.

4.6.2. Access to students' journals

Thirty-five students registered for this course called, Exploratory Practice for Reflective English Learners. Twenty-two of them who agreed to share journals with other people uploaded their journals to the course website, a public googlesite (http://sites.google.com/site/972epel/Home). The rest of the students who did not want their journals to be read by other people submitted their journals to me by email or in person. The data used in this thesis is from the journals uploaded by students who agreed to be read and shared by other people. The way I collected my data was to download students' journals and Exploratory Practice worksheets from the course website. Though the students were asked to write nine entries learning journals during the eighteen-week course, seventeen students wrote more than what they were required.

Students' journals and group talk were uploaded to the course website during the course, and downloaded when the course finished. The reason for using journal writing and

group talk as the principal sources of data for this study was because the aim was to find out how students themselves viewed their learning experiences in their own words, and how they made meanings together with other students. The journals and recordings gave direct access to the students' ideas in both written and oral form.

Data from the EP-base course:

4.6.3. Journal analysis

I examine students' journals within eighteen weeks as written by students according to the following considerations: realisation, connections between current learning with previous learning, learning development (e.g. goal setting, self-monitoring, motivational language learning, achieving goals).

The purpose of integrating EP into the course and the research is to intertwine the meanings from students with my own understanding, so as to help not only my teaching, but also those students' present and future learning. My purpose is to describe how the Exploratory Practice approach "lives" in teaching and learning. Meanwhile, I hope to demonstrate how students use English and EP to link each one to the other, and both of them to their personal lives. With the help of these principles of understanding, it is possible to see how students investigate their experiences, how they reflect, and the way they deal with their interpretations. In the data analysis sections, I compare two groups of students to see whether those with a lower level of English are capable of reflecting and developing their own learning.

4.6.4. Group talk

Some students uploaded their audio files of group talk to the course website. I chose two groups out of seven for this research. The first group I chose is to show how quiet students deal with group talk and to show students can do the transcript themselves as language practice. The second group I chose is from a group of more fluent students.

4.6.5. Process of learning

I examine the students' reflection as a whole process of thinking, and try to find the meanings that the learners themselves perceive through their reflection, rather than imposing my own interpretation or fitting their diverse thoughts into my own schema. Because the thesis is primarily exploring learners' experiences, the most important aspects of this research are to examine the relationship of the students to their learning environment, and to observe how their discoveries occur.

4.7. Research questions

This thesis aims to find answers to the following questions.

a) How do students make sense of their learning?

b) How do they monitor their progress?

c) How do they react to their own understanding when it occurs?

d) How do students show evidence of their ongoing development?

e) Are low-level learners in Taiwan capable of reflection on their language learning in

English?

4.8. How I deal with the data

I read through students journals many times. The steps below explain how I deal with the data from my students' learning journals.

Step 1: journals downloaded from the course website.

Step 2: students' words highlighted in non-cursive bold when they showed their reflection and thinking and noted down my interpretation.

Step 3: students' words highlighted in non-cursive script and in curly brackets when monitor their own progress.

Step 4: students' words underlined when they showed their understanding of learning or reasoning about their goals, change of attitudes.

Step 5: examples selected that showed understanding, reflective thinking.

Step 6: two groups selected: Group A, whose level of English is high, and Group B, whose level of English is low in comparison to other students on the course.

Step 7: case studies done of students' journals in the above two groups

Step 8: journal entries and group talk studied and analysed on the following three levels:

1. Separate interpretation of each entry or a contribution to group talk.

2. Whole process of each individual journal or group talk taken together.

3. Overview of each participant's reflection and of overall outcomes.

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(For a sample of data analysis see Appendix 6.)

4.9. Difficulties with data analysis

The first difficulty of data analysis started with the data collection. The data for the thesis consists of journals written as homework and in class recordings of group talk, both of which were uploaded voluntarily to the course website only by those students who chose to do so. This meant that the number of journals or of group talk recordings that were uploaded could not be predicted or controlled. In the end twenty-two students out of thirty-five uploaded their journals, while seven recording files of group talk were uploaded, involving a total of 27 students. The recording of group talk seemed to make students extremely uneasy, so not many of them were willing to record their talk, let alone upload their recordings to the website. In fact, five out of seven audio files uploaded were of discussions that involved the teaching assistant. For analysis I chose instead two files that were recorded without the teaching assistant's contribution to the group talk, in the hope that analysing discussions conduced by the students alone would provide greater insight. The data I collected for analysis was intended to be as authentic as possible, with minimal external involvement, either from myself or from the teaching assistant.

The main purpose of the study is to collect words directly from students and analyse how they interpret and understand their processes of learning. Therefore, the data from what students said was open-ended. My research purpose was not to use the students' words in order to generalize and arrive at some common features of learners' thinking. Nor was there any plan to use a pre-test and post-test to show the change of the students' language ability or their views about language learning. Instead, I wanted to look into certain

students' individual processes of learning over eighteen weeks, in the hope that interesting insights would emerge. The emphasis was on achieving a detailed and high quality picture, rather than on covering a great amount of data or a large sample of learners. This meant that I would probably not be able to cover all of the data or all of the students. Therefore, a case study approach seemed the most appropriate choice.

The second difficulty occurred during the process of data analysis. In order to show how learners at different levels of proficiency make sense of their own learning, I chose to focus on students at both higher and lower levels. The level of students' English performance was judged by myself as the teacher, on the basis of their classroom performance during the eighteen week semester. My judgement was based partly on my in-class observation of students' use of English and their interaction with me and other students. However, the students also showed their English proficiency in their journal writing. Group A students were those who showed better fluency, accuracy and communication skills than other students, particularly in speaking and writing. Group B consisted of students who were very quiet and shy: they generally struggled to participate in in-class activities and also found it difficult to write learning journals in English. Their overall level of English ability appeared to be lower than that of the other students. Some students were weak at journal writing but appeared to be confident about using English for in-class activities, while others were better at journal writing than speaking. However, group B students were the students who were both weaker in journal writing and group talk.

Since each student was asked to write nine entries in their learning journals during the 18 week semester, the total quantity of student writing came to around 40,000 words, which was too large a sample of data for the kind of qualitative analysis that was planned. I

therefore decided to select four students in each group because they seemed to reveal a sufficient variety of examples of learning experiences, without introducing a quantity of data too big to accommodate in a single thesis. To make the groups representative of the range of students in the class, each group included two under-graduate students and two post-graduate students. Mature students often have good thinking skills and are capable of deep reflection, even if they may not be able to express their thoughts easily in English.

The third difficulty was related to the categorisation of the data. For example, it was not always straightforward to decide whether a student was doing "self-practice in real-life situations" or using "personalised learning strategies" when she mentioned "using TV news & the internet news in English for expanding vocabulary *(E-W5J2)"*. I therefore accepted that sometimes certain categories overlapped.

Chapter 5: Data analysis I

5.1. Introduction

In this section, I provide samples of students' words in their journals to show the development of their reflection and discovery. This will include what they come to understand and how they gain their new realisations. I will discuss journals from two groups of students. The first group is chosen from students with high level of English, who show more reflective thinking and a better ability to express themselves in English in their journals. The second group is chosen from students with a low level of English. The journals from the second group appear to be more descriptive and less reflective. Each group will be discussed by examining four students' journals.

5.2. The Journals

There are two reasons why I present some students' complete journals; one is to show the whole picture of their process of thinking; the other is to show how lessons unfolded through the lens of students' observations. The coding system for each entry of journals specifies (1) the student's name; (2) which week of lessons they wrote about: and (3) which is the relevant entry in their journal. For example, A-W1J1 means it is written by Ann for the first week lesson and this is her first entry of her journal: A=Ann; W1=1st week; J1=1st entry of journal.

5.2.1. Ann

The first student's journal is from a first-year student, Ann who majored in fine art.

A-W1J1

In the beginning of the class, the teacher shared a story about dream with us. Then we had a short discussion on it. Some people thought the story inspiring and some thought it unbelievable. To me, a dream is not a dream if it is only told. Fulfilling a dream does not take only determination but right methodology. And learning one language well takes great methods as well. First, we need to have confidence in ourselves. Therefore, the teacher asked us to share experiences in learning English with others. To my surprise, some of the classmates in this class are so active and good at sharing. Their attitude toward goals is really something I want to take as a model. I believe it will do me good.

During the group talk, my partner told me one of her shadow on learning English in childhood. I am sorry for her sadness but glad to see her never give up. Also, I somehow feel blessed that I have had a smooth going in learning English.

After the class, I know we all have a lot of possibilities still. I will cherish the chance of joining this class working harder and happier in improving English ability.

Ann had the highest level of written English in the class, though she was only a first year student at the university. She proposed her guiding belief about learning a language, which was that it is essential above all to have confidence. It was surprising to many of the students, including Ann, to find themselves in a class where many people were trying to share their thinking with each other in English.

A-W2J2

The topic this week about working with others. Miss 朱 first mentioned that all students in this university all need group work. So, how to create a peace and effective group work becomes a big deal. A very impressive story told by the teacher was about Asian students abroad. Students in Asia seldom realize that no opinions is equal being selfish. We just used to stay silent in discussion to exempt from responsibility. Nevertheless, a successful group requires all members' participation and opinions. That's what we often forget.

Besides give and take are also required in a group work. It is impossible that the whole group hold the same view. When different ideas come out, we must learn to respect and analyze the pros and cons then to decide. We should never stay stubborn or even rude. Nothing is absolute. There is always a balance. Communication and patience are differently needed in group work.

These are all we need to learn continuously.

Ann was impressed by the story I shared in class about how being silent in group work could be taken as being selfish. She gave her opinions about making group work successful. For example, paying respect to different ideas. These are her reactions to the lesson in week two.

A-W4J3

"Learn from not only your failure but your success." This is the statement that the teacher has continuously reminded us. Since I have been instilled deeply that failure is the mother of success. It's quite striking and a brand new to me. This new idea brought me to

reconsider my attitude towards my "puzzle". I am always asking and worrying about why I "cannot". But the fact is, I never stop think how I "can". Experiences talk. Successful experiences therefore tells you how you can do something. So, I tried to recall having been able to talk in English confidently. And I found that is the beginning of my English learning. Then the puzzle is not a puzzle anymore. Why? Because I know what's wrong with me.

In week 4, Ann described her sudden realisation that she had never even considered trying to learn from her success. This new direction encouraged her to recall her successful experiences. The puzzle Ann mentioned was a way of starting students' reflection in group talk by asking questions. She puzzled about why she could not do well in group talk. Her puzzle about speaking was then understood and disappeared, because she no longer worried about it. Her discovery helped her to realise that she was actually capable of speaking English with confidence. This is an example of how new ways of thinking stir a students' mind and create confidence from within. As a teacher practitioner, I felt glad for her. Speaking English is challenging for the majority of Taiwanese students, who do not have much chance of practising English, not to mention of using it for sharing their thinking with other students.

Learning more and more in English, I also grow to know how to criticize. Overemphasizing on my worries, I spontaneously am only aware of my worries. For I tend to persuade myself that I am not oversensitive; to warn myself that the problem is actually there. So I care about grammar, about vocabulary, about accent, and so on. Nonetheless, when I learn to change the attitude, I see the difference. I don't blame myself when using wrong grammar. I

told myself, "Ann, you'd been able to talk in English fluently and confidently before. So you can do now as well." I can do it I know, I had done it years ago, when I didn't know many rules about grammar; when I only wanted to express myself.

Encouragement coming from a teacher or other people is helpful, but in fact it can also come from a learner herself. Knowing more grammar and rules ironically became an obstacle for her. She had to remind herself of her previous level of fluency when she knew less about the structures of English or grammar rules, but felt more confident about using the language.

I know that is a very big and difficult change. Though I gradually know how to do it, how to think in a positiver way, I still struggle between my rooted concept and the new idea. But every beginning is good. Just like my beginning in English. I will try, and I'm glad that I know I can try.

Though she felt thrilled with the idea of positive thinking, she was well aware that her habitual attitude towards learning from mistakes was deeply rooted in her mind. "Knowing" what she could do to help herself gain confidence mattered, but it was not everything. She was aware that in reality, it was not a straightforward task to lead herself onto a new way of thinking. Fortunately, she was prepared to face this change in her mind and to be ready for a new beginning. Believing in herself was an encouraging start for her. The following EP worksheet was uploaded by Ann around the same time when she uploaded her week 4 journal above. Ann described her realisation both in her journal and in an EP worksheet.

W4 Ann's EP Worksheet 1

Exploratory Practice：**elaborating，developing and exploring a puzzle.**

First idea:

A puzzle： I would like to know how I can develop the confidence when I am in a group talk.

Exploring what the puzzle really is:

A narrative: As we all know, we need enough confidence to learn well. Nevertheless, confidence is something I am really lack of. During group talk, I seldom express my opinions or give others my advice, for I do not really sure whether others would like to know. I do actually dislike my performance in both academics and oral. I do not know why but I feel bad about myself. I know I must pick up my confidence or I will never improve. And I will also be sorry to my group members.

Refining the puzzle:

My puzzle: I want to pick up my confidence in a group talk.

Ideas for exploring the puzzle:

Ideas: To develop confidence, I need to take chance creating a successful experience. Also, I need to see my performance in another aspect. Nothing is completely worthless, so

> do our any tiny advice.

What I will do first to explore my puzzle:

> **Plan:** I will try to speak out in group talks, being helpful to my friends. Therefore, I will stop dwelling on the negative criticism I have given to myself.

This EP worksheet was what Ann used for the EP group talk in class. She used journal writing for her individual reflection and the EP worksheet for sharing her puzzle with other students. In this way, she focused on the puzzle she decided to investigate by means of self-reflection in thinking and in journal writing, as well as talking through it with other students in class. She wrote back to the course website after she received my comments on her journal saying she felt better and happier when she knew she was capable of doing something and she could do something "again."

This is a good example for showing the connection between ability and confidence. In Ann's EP worksheet, she obviously felt upset about her performance in the group talk because she was aware that she did not express fully enough the opinions that she wanted to convey. As she described in her journal as well, she needed more confidence in her speaking ability. Ann went to England for a year after she finished this course. She did a foundation course for getting into a university in UK. Last year, two years after this course ended, I found out that Ann actually took two IELTS tests during the course. She obtained an overall 7 the first time and a band 8 the second time for her overall English proficiency. In fact, in her second IELTS test she was awarded a band 9 in her speaking test. In that test,

she was asked to talk about art in her speaking test. Since she was studying art, she felt really confident and comfortable about speaking English. What she needed to value was her own opinions and the help she could give to other group members, so she was clear that it was her confidence in group talk that was essential. In her next journal entry, she continued to recall positive experiences, this time, as a reader.

A-W5J4

The best way to learn reading is – start reading right the moment. I enjoy reading a lot and here I want to share my experience in English reading with you all.

I am not a early English learner. I've started learning English when I was 12. I felt shameful at that time because my classmates in English cram school were all kids. Although studying hard and performed well in academic, I was still diffident. I don't like English learning and I never thought about reading in English. After learning the k.k. and the basic grammar rules and vocabulary, my English teacher bought me a English novel – Harry Potter and the Secret Chamber.

It's a huge book for leaner like me at that time. Nonetheless, I was a Harry Potter fan at that age and I'd known the story already so I opened the novel, and read. I read it slowly, probably few pages a day. But gradually I became familiar with the vocabulary within, I could read faster. About three months, I finished my first English novel. And, I fall in love with reading in English. I like the sense of achievement when I finished a book; I also enjoy reading a story in its original language. Years and years, I have read the series of Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings, Agatha Christie's detective novels, and other stories I enjoy.

My English ability of course has improved much. Soon I said bye to my kids' English cram school. Pieces and pieces, I find the interests in learning English.

This experience certainly changed me a lot. But performing well in examination is not the point. Understanding that it is never too late to try something you are not good at is the most important feedback I got. You never know unless you try. Sitting in the classroom doubting whether I can do something is useless. Go and just do it, the answer will come after.

She described her learning history and how she became a reader in English in great detail. Through her autobiographic writing, she shared her belief and attitudes towards learning English. She did not just present her philosophy of learning, but also used her own success in becoming a reader of English books for pleasure in order to encourage other students in the class. She mentioned the importance of believing in "self" and not giving up hope. She encouraged other students to get started by doing something about learning English.

So pick up one book that you are interested in, and read without hesitation. One page after one page, soon you'll know what it reading. In my opinion, reading is the ticket to visiting and enjoying the world I don't know. There, I can find things I want to know, also things I don't want to know.

As a teacher, it was certainly rewarding to read such comments. Ann constantly encouraged herself and other students to reach out to the world through reading. She showed her group support in group talk and in her journals as well. In her next journal, she

gave a good sketch of an episode that occurred in the class.

A-W7J5

A graduate student came to our class sharing us her research about fingerprints. She not only shared us something special to understand our characters but also showed us her diligence in this presentation. She tried really hard to give us an English presentation, though with some Chinese because of the professional vocabulary. I really want to cheer for her courage. For I don't think I could overcome my stage fright to give an "extra" presentation. Using a foreign language to share a research isn't easy. When I heard that she spent at least eight hours on this presentation, I know that we all need to learn to give ourselves chances to do something challenging. So we'll improve.

In order to encourage students to link their areas of strength to their practice of learning English, I invited a student who was in my previous EP class to give an English presentation about something she was very interested in. This guest speaker student, who had been a very quiet student lacking in confidence about using English when she was in my previous EP class, accepted my invitation to give a presentation about a topic that she was quite familiar with - "fingerprints". Though her English was not fluent, the class felt her enthusiasm for the topic. In fact, many students talked about how much they enjoyed her talk in their journals. Her preparation and presentation inspired many students, in spite of her "not so good English", she put it. To take Ann as an example, she admired this student's courage and special knowledge.

Later in the class, the teacher asked us to take turn reading a letter loud and take notes if

needed. I found myself dislike taking notes while listening to something like stories. When the article is a story, making notes interrupts my concentration. The story can't continue. But if the content is like TED what the teacher asked us to watch, I must take notes or I will fall asleep. Though everyone has different learning methods, I still think this is because of my efficiency in making notes. So probably I need to do some practice.

In this class, I asked students to experience note taking for different purposes. Ann reflected on her own learning preference. This shows that even for one specific strategy, Ann noticed that for her it was a useful skill in some situations, but not in others. I asked students to work in pair**s** in an activity for practising note taking**,** while their partner read out loud an English letter. She compared her strategy choice for understanding a written letter and a spoken talk on an internet video. With the learning opportunities provided in class, Ann found out that, for her, taking notes was useful if she listened to talks on the TED website, but not when she listened to stories. This was her understanding of what she had learned.

In the end of the class, our group had a discussion on studying tools. This is going to be my next step to try out. Since I think knowing how to study ourselves is vital for a college student. ☺

This journal entry above is a common description of a follow-up plan. Ann set her next goal as gaining the necessary tools for studying. In her next journal entry, Ann linked what she learned in class to her own learning.

A-W12J6

Sometimes, when I sit here, recalling the class, there's no words come out and that drives me crazy. People never believe in my sayings because they've always seen a lot of words after all. I have no secrets actually; I just forget everything about writing, and start talking. "Talking block" sometimes comes up, then I murmur or stop to do something else like drawing. This week, we are talking about writing block.

It is difficult to start a journal entry, as Ann describes here. She explains what happens to her whenever she tries to start writing. Feeling "blank" is a commonly heard complaint among students, and in fact among writers in general. Interestingly, Ann shared an idea for dealing with this: she usually started by talking to herself, pausing or drawing.

For writing a journal for this class, I think the writing blocks usually come from having no idea on how to start. For me, the best way to solve this problem, I usually try to find one most impressive part of the class to help me. I don't like having too much trivial information in the beginning. I prefer my thoughts progressing step by step, which will make my writing more sensible and complete. So I think that mind map is helpful to me since I need a main point. Also, during high school years, I had been instructed to try using "free writing" to practice overcoming writing block. That was very helpful. In free writing, you can't stop or use eraser. All you need to do is writing down everything you can think of about your topic. This method could not only train your thinking but also make you become more familiar with the language usage.

Ann tried to clarify how writer's block occurred when writing journals, and how she dealt with it. She offered a helpful strategy that worked for her: she would start by recalling the most impressive part of the lesson. She also explained her preference for letting her

thoughts flow rather than recording trivial matters. In addition, she mentioned her previous training in Chinese writing and found it useful for writing journals. By adapting the writing skills she had learned before, she recognised the benefits in terms of developing her English writing ability.

How to overcome writing block differs from people. Nevertheless, I think the main thing is that we have to try ourselves. Books and teachers can tell us theories, but experience can tell us the realization.

Ann again stressed the importance of independent learning. She concluded her journal by emphasising the point that experience can bring realisation. Interestingly, Ann mentioned the strategy that worked for her when she dealt with writer's block, she focused on what she could do and shared her ideas with others. Six weeks previously, she decided to think positively and it seemed that she did not just keep the idea to herself, but also helpfully shared her change of attitude with other students.

A-W13J7

We separated into few groups talking about the most important four vocabularies in our field. I saw many of my classmates writing down "passion". I can't agree with them more. Passion, something we really need in our learning and everything. In creating arts, in practicing the musical instruments, and in nonstop rehearsals, we take passion. And of course, in learning a language we need passion.

In my opinion, learning English is just like meeting a new person. You will feel a bit odd, embarrassed and speechless in the beginning. Sometimes, you will feel very tired to find

topics. Sometimes, you feel that the person can't understand you well. Even sometimes, you feel that you can't express yourself in front of him/her. When we go into a new environment, we try to be friendly and sincere so that we can make new friends easier. We do so because we want to feel free and because we are eager to make friends with those new faces.

Since this course put an emphasis on stimulating students to link their art training and learning English, this activity is an example for encouraging students to use English on the one hand to express the key features in their art training, and on the other hand to create possibilities for themselves to use English as a tool for engaging in art development. Here Ann sketched a classroom episode in this journal. In fact, this is what many students tended to write in their journals. However, a reflective learner like Ann would never miss the chance of connecting classroom learning opportunities to her learning English. She treated English as a tool for meeting people. This perhaps sounds like an obvious benefit of learning a language, but in Taiwan English is very often considered by learners only in terms of tests, and of no other real-life utility.

So, if we want to learn a language better, we need to be more friendly and have the "eager" to work on. It's not easy when we were in senior high due to we were under the pressure of entrance exam. But now we are free. I believe this is the very new beginning for all of us to discover our passion in a language, to enjoy the process of knowing a new culture by languages. When we were kids, we always try to yell out our needs by our poor Chinese. We didn't know what is feeling embarrassed, didn't know what is wrong pronunciation. We just spontaneously used all we'd known to experience our brand new life. We even felt excited when knowing a new vocabulary. It's our passion in gradually

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knowing how to speak out.

Ann described the typical learning background university students had in Taiwan. Students were too busy studying English for tests in senior high school to think about the real purposes for learning English. "Passion" was something Ann found important to help other students to speak up. Her suggestion was to look back at how people learn a language in childhood and thus to "feel" the passion for their present learning. Her opinions illustrate the principle of continuity in education, as proposed by Dewey, whereby previous experience is connected to present experience.

I really believe no one will dislike learning language. Knowing another way sharing is never a boring thing. We're just too easy worrying about not being perfect. But stop a while, who really is that perfect the first time meeting a new friend? Or who really is that perfect the first he pronounce "mama"? It's not that difficult to find our passion.

As an English learner and an art student, Ann seemed to know well about what other students worried about most- for example, being a perfectionist. She gave support to other students and so helped to build an encouraging spirit for learning English. In her last journal entry, she clarified her purpose for learning English through writing.

A-W16J8

What is your purpose of learning English?

For me, in the beginning I learned English because everyone is learning English. Now I learn English because I want to study abroad someday in the future. I want to have the ability to keep touch with the world easier. I am very sure about my goal, and am very clear

about how much efforts I have to make. With this belief in mind, fatigue or unhappiness would not be the obstacle on my way to fulfilling my determination. In this class, the speaker told us that what is "good enough" depends on what our purpose is. This statement was something that really can give us confidence. There is no a scale for your learning; you never have to compare with others about what you have learned. You just work on your own goal and benefit from it. Only you are the master to decide how high you are going to reach.

In the beginning of this journal entry, Ann thought through her purpose of learning English. She wanted to study abroad. After the course finished at the end of June 2009, Ann took a year off and went to England to do a foundation course for going to a university in UK. She had a clear goal and strong determination. She demonstrated what she had learned about learning: confidence can come from self-evaluation. What is good enough for a particular student depends on what that learner wants to achieve.

This EP-based course was funded by the ministry of education (MOE), so I was sponsored to invite two speakers to class. The speaker Ann mentioned below was a Spanish teacher from northern Spain working at a university in Taipei. He shared his experiences of learning languages with the class. The speaker had started learning English when he studied at university but he had never had much practice actually using English until he moved to Taiwan. He is European, so people in Taiwan just assumed he was a speaker of English. His English only became fluent after he had been living in Taiwan for around ten years.

Besides, the speaker told us that we always misunderstood his nationality so that he gained confidence for speaking English from this misunderstanding. These reminded us two

important things: the first is our narrow world outlook; the second is that faith does help

improving. The two above I think are the main point of today's speech and what we do have

to reflect on.

Ann reflected on some ideas about learning from the talk.

W17 Ann's EP Worksheet 2

Exploratory Practice：elaborating，developing and exploring a puzzle.

First idea：

A puzzle
How do I balance my English learning and my major?

Exploring what the puzzle really is：

A narrative
When I were in high school. My major is to study, study and study, English included of course. However, now I am in TNUA, I do not have many studies to do, but a lot of my time contributes to my major. Studying English really is a minor. I feel guilty but have no choice.

Refining the puzzle：

My puzzle：
I have to change my way improving English.

Ideas for exploring the puzzle:

Ideas：

To study English while doing my major. For example, reading the English biography of artists. (ideas from my high school teacher)

What I will do first to explore my puzzle:

Plan：

I read the biography of van Gogh, Vincent, one of my favorite artists.

In Ann's journal, she showed her process of understanding her learning. For example, after she felt thrilled about the value of positive experiences, she realised her worries about mistakes inhibited her from doing as well as she expected. However, she did not take actions to solve the problems of the worries. Rather, she recognised her previous performance in oral proficiency when she was younger, in order to encourage herself to gain confidence and help her express her thinking in group talk. Her previous success was recognised, understood, transformed and linked to her present learning. Her reflection shows a continuous development in her own deep understanding, allowing her to regain her passion for learning English. Her realisation came from her understanding about her own mind. This is exactly what "realisation" means in Chinese, "悟", "understanding my mind".

Ann's Realisation -1

She understood the importance of positive experiences.

She used to worry too much about rules, so her spoken English was not as good as she expected in group talk.

She recalled her previous experience as a younger learner. Her spoken proficiency was better than now.

Instead of worrying about making mistakes or avoiding them, she chose to focus on her success from previous experiences to increase her confidence for better performance in group talk.

Ann's Realisation – 2

She recalled how she became a voluntary English reader as a positive experience.

Two reasons were discovered in her reflection: interest and enjoyment

She decided to use this existing experience to link to her major fine art training: read about art.

Ann's Realisation – 3

Current success: How and why she could overcome the "writer's block" in writing the journal for this course?

She realised that she began with recalling the most impressive thing happened in class.

In Ann's reflection, she did not rely on actions to put an end to her worries or solve her problems. When, for example, her state of mind changed her attitude towards group talk, her worries vanished because she realised that she needed to give herself confidence. It

was not that she lacked ability. Her understanding came after clarification of what puzzled her, so that in the end she did not need to take any action to tackle her puzzle about group talk.

Her process of discovery can be looked at by focusing on two particular issues. One is the connection between her background learning experience and her current learning. She regularly made comparisons to help her understand. The other issue is her reactions to the change of mind. First, she recalled her previous successful experience. Second, she understood her success by comparing her previous learning experience with her present learning. Third, she was aware during the course that focusing on her previous success gave her confidence which made her learning become better and happier.

5.2.2. Wei

The second student's journal is from a first-year student, Wei who majored in fine art.

W-W3J1

Communication is an important skill in now society, without communication skill we can't accomplish many things. In this class, before finishing class, we always have group discussion, I think this is a good chance to practice our communication skills in English, today teacher gave us little paper slip to have some interesting practice, first, we read somebody's feeling when he was learning English, and his thought just like mine, he said he is afraid making mistake when speaking English, then I share my puzzle with my members, they are very kind and encouraged me do not afraid to speaking English, they said "now is the best time and chance to practice, no one will laugh at you when you making mistake,

because I would not notice…haha!", and then all of us burst into laughter.

This experience make me think about TED video, it tell us play can make things interest, sometimes if we dealing with things too serious, it will be very boring. Have fun not only can deal things more efficiency also make you enjoy it.

I think drawing to me is playing color and lines, it make me happy and I can express my pressure effectively. So, don't forget playing, using our imagination and humorous can make our life full of color and happiness.

Wei described what she and her group talked about in class. From her journal, her group talk appeared to provide a friendly and warm environment for learning. The group members tried to encourage each other to make good use of the learning opportunities afforded by group talk. Talking in a group in English was the best chance for them to practice speaking because they did not need to worry about making mistakes and they knew that no one would laugh at them.

W-W4J2

As a student, it is very important to know how to be a good speaker and also a good audience. Just like every talent and skill we learn, it is common that we have to spend a lot of time and mind practicing how to be a good one over and over again. Even the most talented genius also need to be diligent in learning.

During the class, we practiced to be a speaker and a audience, but it's just a beginning. To be better, practice is unavoidable. During a speech, a good speaker will not only speak with mouth but also with some gestures. By gesturing, the speech will be more attract and

clear. And a good one will take as many examples as he can to let all the audiences understand what he wants to express. In the meantime, a good audience must concentrate their attention on the speaker, even writes down what the speaker just say. Dozing off is the most impolite behavior we have to avoid. Maybe being a good audience seems easier than being a good speaker. But it is the same that the more time we practice, the better we are.

Though her journal looks quite descriptive, she talked through her ideas about giving a talk and being an audience.

W-W5J3

As I went into the classroom, teacher told me took a book and read it, I saw a familiar cover and I choose that book at once, and I remember I have read this book when I was about three or four, my mom read it for me, when I was little, I can't understand the whole story, but now, of course, it's very easy to understand, those cute picture make me have connect with my childhood memory, through the good song, I really enjoy in fun story and good memory.

Then we began to share something about the book with each other, sharing how you read or the story, I found that each one's reading habit it's totally different, and through free and easy chatting, I feel relax and have a lot of fun. I think after sharing the story can help us understand more, maybe next time, after reading some English book、 article or web side we can find some to share, it can help us to get things together better.

This class teacher talk about how to be a smart reader, and gave us many new idea, like when you reading the best music is classical music, but after I try, I feel a little sleepy, so

from now on, I am going to find something to fit me.

Sharing thinking with each other in class is always interesting to students. Wei was surprised when she found out that different students had different reading habits.

W-W6J4

In the class, the game, "fingers," is really interesting. All of us had a great time. I recall having ever played a lot of game like this one when I was five years old in nursery school. I still remember there is a game called "big wind blow." A host will say "Big wind blow!", and other people will answer to him and say" Blow what?" After that the host will say, for example,"Blow someone with long hair!" At this time everyone with long hair have to move away from his seat to another one. And finally the last one who don't have a seat should become the host and maybe should be punished. From playing "big wind blow", I learn how to concentrate myself and focus on one thing, what the host says.

When I was a five-year-old child, I knew not much and even didn't understand any word. Therefore, playing is learning or learning is playing. However, when we grow up, learning is not playing anymore. Instead of playing, we learn from one and one textbook. Perhaps the best way to learn is playing, not studying from the lifeless textbooks.

The finger game Wei mentioned was a language activity to link to a video the class was going to watch called "why play is vital". Students were asked to practice note-taking skills during the video. Interestingly, many students were really surprised to be asked to play simple games, and they enjoyed them very much. The activity really brought back memories of their childhoods. It made them appreciate the enjoyment of learning through

playing.

W-W7J5

Each week, teacher always add some funning part to make English more interesting, this week, we talk about fingerprints, it's very interest me, because I never obverse my finger so closely like that, and I think this kind of forecast is much more accuracy.

Making notes is very useful, in class we make notes to help us understand more, though making notes we can have a clear thinking, I think making notes' purpose is help you memory at once, better than go bake and study it. Making notes is not only for study, I also making notes to gather my creation inspiration, I always write down what I see, what I think, or just draw down my dreams and do some sketch, I like obverse the surroundings, including the buildings、 the plants and people in my everyday life, this really bring me lot of inspiration.

Wei was a fine art student. She found note taking useful because she recorded her ideas about creation all the time. Seemingly, her art training made her really observant.

W-W8J6

Today, I feel more and more comfortable when I speaking English. Because I get familiar with classmate bit by bit, we are not shy at all, so we can chat whatever we want, it make me relax and have fun, like today, after we talk about puzzle, we talk about the homework, not only in writing journal but also in each one's professional field, it make me think that we need to learn more professional word, so that, when we introducing others about our professional field, we can get the more clear ideas, for example: engraving, woodcut,

scratchboard and so on……

I quite agree teacher said when you have group discussion, don't worry about making mistake, just make your sentence more fluency, whatever we can have a free exchange of view or chew over some interesting topic, just don't be shy and say more, I really found that I have much more confidence in speaking English, and feel a little proud, however, I know that I still have many things to learn to improve my English, but I think it's good for me to have more motive to go on.

Thanks teacher always have many good idea and advices to encourage us learning!

Wei noticed her improved ability to participate in group talk. She became more confident about talking to other students in English because she tried not to worry about making mistakes. She felt proud of herself and her new-found fluency.

W-W11J7

My first article was finished when I was a first-grade child in the elementary school. I still remember my teacher admired me for my writing. And teacher asked me to read my article to all of my classmates. I was so happy and proud of myself and my "masterpiece." However, when I entered my senior high school, I was not so good in writing, not to mention the English writing.

Every time I wrote article in English, I always think one thing. The thing is whether I am happy in writing or not. I think I have lost my interest in English writing until recently I read a English novel. It is a story of love. A girl accidentally makes a magic perfume which can make any man love her. But she runs out of the magic perfume finally, and those men

she wants have no interest in her any more. She is very upset and wants to make the magic perfume again. But she keeps failing. It seems that there is no happy thing coming to her again. But she doesn't know there is a boy loving her for many years. Without the magic perfume, she find her true love.

The story makes me want to write some article like the story.

Wei recalled her ability in Chinese writing when she was at elementary school. She could still remember how proud she felt when she was asked to read aloud her writing. The way she started writing in English was interesting because she first had to decide whether she was happy to do it or not. She retold an English novel story she had read for pleasure. Having a good story to tell in writing was important to her. Perhaps that is why her journal usually read like a story.

W-W17J9

Memory plays a very important role in my life. From the elementary school to the college, I use my memory to deal so many things. For example, I had to remember my many telephone numbers such as the home number or my cell phone number when I was a child. So that I can tell the police officer my home number if I lost myself.

Memory is also used in advertising. Recently, I watched a commercial about Heineken which really impressed me. It used a very humorous way to introduce their product. In the commercial, the leading role takes her friends to her bedroom. And all of her friends scream crazily when she just open her big closet. Because there are so many beautiful shoes in the closet. At this time, they hear their husbands scream, too. Their husbands

scream because there is a room filled of Heineken.

The main idea of this commercial is "Beautiful shoes make women crazy, but what makes men crazy? It is certainly Heineken!"

Therefore, how to keep something in your mind easily? The answer is a strong impression.

Wei associated the topic of the lesson with her childhood and to an English commercial she had seen. The point she made was that creating a strong impression was beneficial for memory. Though Wei did not show much of her reflective thinking about the process of her learning, she did connect what the lesson talked about to her own opinions about memory.

Overview of Wei's journal:

In her journal writing, she linked the themes of the course to her learning more than presenting her state of thinking with regard to her own learning. In the middle of the semester, she felt proud of herself because she noticed in group talk that she became more fluent in speaking English. Her progress made her more confident and more motivated than before. This is reminiscent of findings in psychology that positive experiences increase people's confidence and motivation for learning. Schunk (1983) states students who have the capabilities to detect subtle progress in learning will increase their levels of self-satisfaction and their beliefs in their personal efficacy to perform at a high level of skill.

5.2.3. Elaine

The next student Elaine was a post-graduate student who studied Tech Art

(Technology and Art).

E-W4J1

I learned when a good talker in front of the class or on the stage, all he think about is to let the audience understand what he have said. I never thought about that before. And now I understand that why I always feel nervous on the stage. I found I used to give a talk to teacher but audience. So I will feel nervous. I thought I might pay more attention abut "what can I let audience understand my ideas more?" rather than "what grades will I get in the presentation?"

Another reason makes me nervous is that a presentation always limited minutes. And I'm not a good time controller. So I ask John "how to control time in the limited minutes and so let the content variety as well?" John answered "You can do some game what is very related with your content that takes few time and can let the audience understand your point immediately"

After the little group talk, I felt exciting to try to give a talk just like the ways my teacher and classmates do.

Elaine was at first extremely worried about giving a talk on her art work in English. She was clarifying her attempt to change this attitude at the time when she gave a talk. She used to worry about her performances but she wanted to try in the future to make audiences understand her ideas. Elaine accepted an invitation to give a talk to my students the following semester. By this time she seemed confident about using English to talk about her latest art work.

I like the class EPEL very much. In this class, teacher assigns us to discuss our English learning puzzle to each other. From the group discussion, I can find my English puzzle and members can give their advice to me. I can also learn from others' puzzle, to think if their puzzle ever happens to me.

Elaine found the group talk session in the course helpful because she realised how much students could help each other. Sometimes other students' puzzles also made her think about whether she herself had had similar experiences before.

Today when we talk about puzzle again, I shared my ways to improve English. I practice my English from both from the CNN news on TV and the CNN website. First, I'll watch the CNN news on TV; I try to understand what the host saying. At the time my brain keep thinking and guessing the words and the meanings in the news. Then I go to my computer to get on the CNN website, to check the article I just watch form the CNN news on TV. To read the news and I will find the answer what I not sure during watching the CNN news on TV before. In this way I can practice both my English listening and reading abilities. I can also expand my vocabulary library in my brain. And the most important is that cost nothing.

It is common for students to talk about how they practice English outside class. For example, Elaine shared her experience of using resources such as TV news programmes in English and English news websites on the internet to help her build up better background knowledge for understanding the news in English. She found it really helpful for her to

expand her vocabulary, and these resources were available without cost. The reason why Elaine talked about "price" could be because in Taiwan many people go to an exam preparation school when they want to improve the level of their English. The way she tried was helpful and free. Elaine appreciated the use of the internet to help her learn English and she also suggests other students should try it. This is an example of sharing helpful ideas or resources with other people, as Elaine mentions.

E-W6J3

In class, teacher show us the [TED] movie "why play is vital". That is talk about play. In the movie the speaker showed a picture in the past, it said people play at public ground with children and adult and having 24 different kinds of playing way. I think in the past, people have happier life than nowadays. They had time to play even children or adult. And we lost playing time now, lost our smile. It's a pity to people now. I think the reason that play is vital is play can make people closer, when they get closer, they can share their frame of mind. After playing they can hold in their arms. It would make the social getting worm!

Elaine gave her opinions about the issue in the video. It is interesting to see how Elaine associates "play" with a social interactive way for sharing thinking.

E-W8J7

I was glad to have a group talk with teacher today! At that moment, teacher shared her experiments about "To Give a Talk". She did this kind of thing quiet often just like John did. They have twice chance during two year to present their ideas from their academic papers. From their experiments, I learned when a good talker in front of the class or on the

stage, all he think about is to let the audience understand what he have said. I never thought about that before. And now I understand that why I always feel nervous on the stage. I found I used to give a talk to teacher but audience. So I will feel nervous. I thought I might pay more attention abut "what can let audience understand my ideas more?" rather than "what grades will I get in the presentation?"

Another reason makes me nervous is that a presentation always limited minutes. And I'm not a good time controller. So I ask John "how to control time in the limited minutes and let the content variety as well?" John answered "You can do some game what is very related with your content. That will takes few time and can let the audience understand your point immediately"

After the little group talk, I felt exciting to try to give a talk just like the ways my teacher and classmates do.

Sometimes I join in students' group talk in class and share my ideas with the students. Often my suggestions are aimed at encouraging them to simply get their own message across, rather than paying too much attention to their errors, or to what they cannot say. In real-life situations when students encounter barriers to using English, they themselves need to overcome their difficulty with confidence. In reality, students cannot usually improve their English as much as they would like within a couple of months, but it is possible to help them deal with their emotions and lack of confidence first, so that they can focus on communication instead of thinking about what they cannot say all the time. John and Elaine and the partners in their group are post-graduate students, so they are asked to go to conferences and do presentations in English. The way in which I try to help them is

to encourage them to use their own words to make themselves understood, rather than memorising sentences directly translated from Chinese when they talk. Elaine gave a presentation in English later on in class and she did it quite well. She actually talked about her interactive video art work in English without any script, and she helped the class to understand and become interested in her video.

Elaine Week 8 EP worksheet *(E-W8 EP Worksheet)*

First idea:

> **A puzzle**：
>
> I have a puzzle about having a conversation with foreigners. Because I think they don't understand my words.

Exploring what the puzzle really is:

> **A narrative**：
>
> I joined a workshop last year. And this is my first time to join a English workshop. I have to face so many foreigners in class. I found, when I told to them. They almost can't understand what I said. Because they can't hear clearly sentence or words from me. It really confused me. Because bad English. At the result, I learned less than I were expected at first.

Refining the puzzle：

> **My puzzle**：
>
> 1. I have few vocabularies in my brain.
> 2. I use the wrong words.

Ideas for exploring the puzzle with the minimum of disruption and a maximum of understanding:

> **Ideas**：
>
> 1. I have few vocabularies in my brain , so when I want to talk with foreigner I don't know how to start. My brain is empty…
>
> 2. Even if I'm talking to foreigner I don't know that I used the wrong words. So they might misunderstand me or get confused.

What I will do first to explore my puzzle：

> **Plan**：I will find a person who can speak well in both English and Chinese. I think he or she may tell me what's going wrong when I speak English. And he can teach me the correct sentence of conversation.

Elaine explained her puzzle about her wrong use of vocabulary, which caused a misunderstanding in an art workshop. Her frustration came from her lack of vocabulary and communication skills. She planned to increase her conversation practice with someone who could correct her errors.

E-W10J8

Things impressed me most in class was the ways of learning English. Giles said his students in NTU have different ways to learn English. This sentence kept in my mind for a long time. Because I never thought about learning English can be in variety ways. I used to learn English in grammar fist and force myself to keep lots of vocabularies in my mind, then practicing writing skills. So I felt that learning English was hard and bored before. But Giles provided us an idea that we can choice what we like to do in learning English. Maybe singing to learn, reading comic books to learn, talking with foreigners to learn. The

variety ways make me like using English to communicate. After this class I thought I will soon to find my favorite way to learn English!

Giles was a guest speaker for the course. Though students are constantly encouraged to think about how they like to learn during the course, students are often more easily influenced by their peers than by their teacher. Elaine was so impressed when she heard that people used different ways to learn English. As a teacher, I sometimes take it for granted that all students will be aware that everyone is different, and therefore people learn English differently. Some people prefer to read a lot, some people watch movies and others use the internet. Yet it seems that to many students this realisation comes as a surprise.

Elaine Week 10 EP worksheet

Exploratory Practice: elaborating, developing and exploring a puzzle.

First idea：

A puzzle：I have a puzzle about speaking English. Mmmmm, I mean when I talk to others in English, there's nothing in my brain.

Exploring what the puzzle really is：

A narrative：When I talk to others in English, there's nothing in my bran. Actually, It really irritates me, because my work needs to have lots of communicating with Foreigners. So, that's what really a big puzzle on me. I can' express what I think about work. That even cause me make less foreign friend…

Refining the puzzle：

My puzzle：I can' express what I think about work in English.

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Ideas for exploring the puzzle with the minimum of disruption and a maximum of understanding:

Ideas：I should practice English conversation more.

What I will do first to explore my puzzle：

Plan：My sister's boyfriend is a foreigner. I can talk with him more to practice my English conversation.

The EP worksheet was designed to provide a structure for group talk, so as to encourage students to focus on the exploration of their learning. Obviously, Elaine was really worried about her spoken proficiency. She sometimes had to explain her art work to foreigners, but she found it very frustrating. She thought that through having more practice she would be able to speak better and her mind would no longer go blank when speaking to foreigners.

E-W11J10

I had a presentation about my artwork today. I explained my ideas and played video in the class. My artwork tells about society and a girl being controlled. And I didn't tell much concept about my artwork. Because I hoped my audience in class could be inspired from my work. I also hoped someone could give me feedback about their feeling of my work. But there was no one told to me. It's ok. I could feel their concentrate of hearing my present. That's enough to me. After the presentation, people gave me a big hand. I felt very happy to

present.

In another section of this class "time of group talk", we talk about our favorite cartoon. My favorite cartoon is SpongeBob. It's a story about sea animals. I like the story and the painting style of it. It's really interest me. I almost paid 30mins per day to watch this cartoon. And I always laugh until my stomach getting hurt. Although it is the kid cartoon. And its English level is easier then movie. So it's another way to learn English of me. Something special in group talking is one of my members can simulate SpongeBob's laughter. He was really good at it! We had a great time of group talk.

Elaine was pleased with her presentation though she was a bit disappointed because no one gave her any immediate feedback. Students in class do not always give feedback directly in class, perhaps because they are shy. Elaine is a student from the Tech Art (Technology and Art) department, and she and her friends are interested in animation and video. Interestingly, Elaine uses her favourite cartoons for learning English.

E-W12J11

I expect my English class every week, wondering which way will we take in learning English. Today's special was "Line Up". The rule of the game is that we had to divide into several groups. Each group had three members. And we lined up depending the messages on the wall. Such us "Line Up according to the length of hair", etc. When we received the messages we had to ask questions to each other such as "How long is your hair?" and then lined up from the length of hair. Something interesting in the game was that let us to know each other more. From the game I knew which country of Taiwan were my classmates from.

And how many children were their families. Those questions are the first contact to know each other. And let us open our mind to make friends with others. After class, I keep contact with Will. And he is a very nice guy!

The other term of this class was writing block. For me, to write in English is interesting. When I finish a journal I know that my English will prove more. And I like to check my articles several times. Each time I will correct my words or sentences. So, at next time I will use the more exact word in a phrase.

Students in the EP course are given opportunities for language practice apart from discussions about learning skills and regular English group talk. Students appreciate the opportunity to know about each other's family background or other personal information. The class provides opportunities for social interaction through language activities. Elaine feels positively towards journal writing and she believes she will improve through writing more.

E-W13J12

Today we had an interesting way of group talk. Teacher gave us some slices of papers and asked us some questions to write down on the papers. And then we took these slices of papers to explain to classmates. One thing was interesting for me. When teacher asked "Write down four words to explain your work". I wrote down four words that were about my creations were – translate, media, interaction, and people. But the one girl from dance part wrote down- determination, passion, encourage, body. There was something interesting. My way of creating art was totally different from her. I even admire her for

using the human nature to create art. She can use her body and challenge her mind in performance. But I always use the cold hard computer and machine to create my work. That let me want to use my body more, to feel my body more. And remind me to put the human nature resources in my technical work.

Students are happy to hear what other students consider important in their individual art training. Elaine noticed the difference between her own and others' ideas. Different forms of art require different ways of presentation and training. Interestingly, all of the vocabulary students think of about the key features in their art training is positive.

E-W15J14

Today we had an activity to write down the phrase from teacher saying about critical thinking. I felt it's a very hard activity to me, because I can't understand most of the words. And even when I saw these phrases on the blackboard, I couldn't understand their meanings. I didn't know why some statement belong to critical think and others not. But the member in our group wrote down every statement in right answer. She was great.

Today we also had one classmate from Theater Department to show us the makeup skills. That was shocked everyone. I have never seen the makeup machine, it can spread the oil to your face and let your skin looked "blink blink" and nature. I thought that was really convenient for makeup. I thought it can be use in body painting, too. But it was too expensive or I would like to buy one.

The activity Elaine found difficult was a dictation exercise. Students were asked to listen to different ways of thinking and judge whether they were descriptive or analytical.

Students were asked to understand the meanings of English phrases and the characteristics of different ways of thinking. That was why Elaine found it too challenging.

E-W16J15

Today we had a speaker from Spain to talk about learning English in Taiwan. He said that not every foreigner can talk in English well. Some foreigners in Taiwan may come from Europe or somewhere without taking English as their mother language. So they don't speak good English just like us. For him, he is from Spain and there is not lot of chances to use English. There are even less chances than in Taiwan. So we don't have to feel shy to talk to foreigner in English. Maybe we have the same level of English. I can understand of him. I have some French friends. They told me that they were afraid of talking with someone who talks quickly or uses hard words in English. On the other hand, if you talk to them with slow temple and use simple words that they will appreciate of you, because you let them feel relax to talk with you! I think English is a tool of our life. We can take easy to deal with it. And learning English might have the environments that every one use English at some places. So you have to use it to communicate then your English skill will getting well.

Elaine reported on the speaker's experience with learning English in Spain. She learned that it was even more difficult for the speaker to have the chance to practice English in Spain than in Taiwan. Elaine then mentioned her friends' worries about speaking English. Her friends also felt afraid if English native speakers used difficult words or spoke too fast.

Overview of Elaine's journal

Elaine shows that she recognised the need for change: Elaine used to worry about her English when she gave a talk, but after some reflection she decided to focus on trying to make her audience interested in her ideas in the future. This might make her feel less nervous giving an English talk. She realised her previous focus on her teacher as the main audience and her worries about her grades awarded for her presentation could be changed into something more positive.

5.2.4. John

John is a post-graduate student. Not long before he took the course, he was both a Phd student at a top university and an MA student at our arts university.

Jo-W2J1

Learning English via exploratory practice is fresh and useful to me, it helps me to find my learning puzzles through working with classmates. I would like to offer my views here. First, speaking out make me organize my problem, even if there is no suggestion that offer by others, the sharing behavior helps me clarify my thinking. Second, face to face conversation enforces me pay more attention to listen since I want to figure out what the other say and response. This course is unlike the traditional English class that the teacher talks and the students only listen.

John was a very mature student in terms of his age and his thinking. He noticed the values of sharing thinking and the process of clarification in group talk. John thought the EP course was different from traditional English classes in Taiwan where "the teacher talks and the students only listen."

Jo-W3J2

First, I not only have to be confident in myself but also have to encourage my partner, just like around me there are so many students in Taiwan are used to saying "My English is poor" before their speaking. In my view, I think slow down the speed while speaking is a good start. And second, we should thinking in English before saying. This will help us scaffold what sentence want to say naturally.

John pointed out that he had to encourage himself and other group members to be confident about speaking English, instead of blaming themselves for their low ability in English before they even tried. Slowing their speaking speed and thinking in English were two suggestions John gave to other students.

Jo-W4J3

Learning English abilities: listening, speaking, reading, writing

In this week I have figured out some learning skill in English. I feel the skill about the learning ability have follow sequence: the priority of abilities should be listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those abilities were figure out by me in the recent three years. Many times the Prof. asks me to submit conference paper or some artwork oversea. When it was accepted, I have to give a short presentation in English. Give a talk to audience is fine but more intractable thing is in the question and answer time. Sometimes I can't understand the questions so I can't answer. But other times when I can understand the questions but I don't know how to express my answers. In following my sequence, after you can understand what you are listening to, then you can learn to speak on what you've heard. After you can speak

the language, then you can read out loud the words on paper. After you seen enough words then you could begin to write.

John shared his theory of learning English by showing the stages of his own learning as he learned from his experiences, especially from presenting papers at conferences overseas.

Jo-W7J6

This week's topic was really interesting to me. A student from Techart gave us a talk about fingerprint. The slides on the relationship between our brain and fingerprint inspired a lot of thoughts in my mind. About two years ago I had taken a class on Neuropsychology. The slides brought back memories and also created many ideas. Which lead to some suggestions that I would like to offer to the presenter:

1. There are no references in the slides. This makes me doubt the source of her presentation. Is it only her personal views on the subject? The speaker should give references or research evidence in a scientific way to back up her ideas.

2. Another part puzzled me is the table list. How do our five fingers mapping to our 4 brain lobes?

Overall, I am fascinated with this kind of topic. It was a nice talk for me.

Since John was once a PhD student, he tended to be more critical than other students.

Jo-W9J8

Plagiarism is very serious issue especially during my PhD course and my many years of experience in writing papers. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether or not you have cross the line of plagiarism or not when someone else has a similar idea. Our PhD professor once told me a rule of thumb is not to have seven consecutive words that are the same as another article or paper. I tend to stay away from using the same exact words in order to prevent plagiarism.

John often gave feedback on what he heard in class and shared his personal experience with other students. Here he stressed the importance of plagiarism, which is an issue that many Taiwanese students do not take seriously enough in academic study.

Jo-W10J9

This week's class was fun and interesting. I liked the class activities the speaker taught us. Two of the activities made a strong impression on me. First one is the game where papers were spread out in the classroom. Students worked as a team of four or five. Students run to the corners and remember the phrases written on papers and rush back to recite the phrase to one team member. The student who receive the phrase had to type out the phrase other team members recite. One of our team member usually is not comfortable in speaking English. However, this game motivated him to remember every word of the phrase and recite them out loud. Another activity made an impression was the lyrics game. In this activity the speaker passed out a piece of paper with problematic lyrics. The speaker actually sang the song while playing the guitar. This is the first time I heard a teacher singing in class. These unconventional class activities has improved my attention in classroom. Not only will I remember what was taught in the session, but also increase my

interest in learning English.

As John mentioned, interesting language activities do not only make students remember what they learn, but also increase their interest in learning English.

Jo-W11J10

This week we watched the movie "Freedom Writer". I have seen movies in the same genre many times, which always involve a group of trouble kids and a teacher. This movie deals with racial problems where the black students are having problem with a white teacher teaching them. Why the troubled kids are always black and the white teacher always saves the day. Why the black students are always the one initiate problems to be solved? Usually the director for this kind of movie is white. Rarely can you see a movie with a class full of troubled white students and a black teacher. I wonder if there is any connection can be made to explain this. Is the movie trying to show the social issue of racism or the relationship between teacher and student? In fact, racial conflict has been a great issue in many countries, and it reveals a lot of controversies not only in society but also in school. In this movie the ambitious teacher does her best to bridge the gap between the students and herself. She encourages her students to write down their feeling to express their fear, anger, hopelessness, and etc. I totally agree with that, writing not only helps me to record what happen in my life, but also is a good way to express my feelings. On top of that, getting used to writing in English is a good way to improve my English.

John made comments on the film shown in class. He wrote a critical film review in his journal. He mentioned his point of view toward racial conflict and stereotypes of black

students by questioning whether the director was white. He also mentioned what happened in the film was actually a universal social problem existing in different parts of the world. What the film promotes is the value of writing. John agrees writing is a good way of recording his life, expressing his feelings and also a good way of improving his English.

Jo-W12J11

This week we have the activity where questions are post on the whiteboard and students line up accordingly to answer the questions. I think this activity is a helpful experience because the questions are related to our lives. The questions are something we know on the daily basis. I found it easier to answer the questions since I know what words to use. This made me more willing to talk with other students. In addition, I feel I learned more about my classmates and know each other better through this activity. The violin performance is nice. I think we should have more art performances since we are studying in an University of Art.

John and other students enjoyed this kind of activity because they could get to know more about other students. He also felt positive about the art performance activity at the end of course. Students were encouraged to present their artistic interests and skills and talk about them in English.

Jo-W16J14

This week I did not make it to class because I was preparing my presentation late at night and over slept my alarm. Looking at other classmates' journal I have some feedbacks on foreigner speaking English. From my experience I found some foreigners will speak slower

and in a louder voice when talking to someone with little English skills. It seems strange to me that raising their voice is their way of trying to make themselves more understandable. If I cannot understand the vocabulary they use, no matter how slow or how loud they talk, I still cannot understand.

John noticed an interesting phenomena that foreigners raised their voice when they thought they were not understood.

Jo-W17J15

I have no idea about where I will be or do in 2024. The beauty of future lies in its unpredictability. Having a dream is fantastic, but how to make it come true requires step by step in reality. We cannot just talk about future on paper; we have to create the future we desire. I am filled with anticipation on my future as I work hard in achieving it. Every person is a different entity in the class; I learned a lot not only from our teacher but also from our classmates.

John gave his feedback on the class activity about visualizing his life in 2024. He was less excited about the unknown future than other learners in class. He believed in making a steady effort in order to create his own future. He recognized that he got much out of the course not just from the teacher but also from his classmates.

Overview of John's journal

John constantly talked about his view points about learning English. For example, in his third journal entry, he discovered the sequence of learning English and explained the reasons behind it. He compared what he learned from the course with the previous English

classes he had taken, and gave positive feedback on exploratory practice for helping him clarify his thinking. EP also encouraged him to listen to other learners and find out how to respond to others in English. He very often constructed his own theories about learning, particularly about learning to speak, where he underlined the importance of thinking in English first before speaking. Moreover, he regularly encouraged other learners to speak up.

5.3. Overview of students' journals

Students revealed different ways of reflection in journal writing. Their journals illustrate EP's propositions from chapter 3 of the thesis: that learners are unique individuals, yet social beings who are capable of taking learning seriously, of taking independent decisions and of development. Their descriptions of what they and their classmates did, and of my help in their investigations gives a good sense of the engagement and the supportive learning community that were generated. They also demonstrate their ability to report reflectively on the experience, both in class and outside class in real-life situations.

5.3.1. Mutual support for individual and collective understanding

Students constantly offered support to each other. As is often mentioned in their journals, they appreciated sharing and knowing how other students went through their individual learning, though sometimes they were surprised when they realised there were different and, for them, new ways of treating experiences or different ways of learning English. Understanding does not always require action. Not every student decided to tackle their weakness by eliminating it. Ann is a good example of a learner who did not set out to

deal directly with a "problem". Rather, she chose to learn to encourage herself, giving herself confidence by seeking for existing positive experiences.

5.3.2. Thinking differently

In fact, students were not the only people who noticed the individual differences in attitudes towards and ways of learning. As a teacher and a researcher, I was continually reminded how different each student could be, even if for the most part they had a very similar school education background. Though they were all art students, they set different learning goals, and also monitored themselves differently.

Ann tends to show a clearer process of exploration in her reflection. Perhaps she is naturally good at reflective thinking, but she also has a high level of English to help her express her ideas, and she likes the ideas of students sharing and supporting each other. In her journal and EP worksheets, she mentioned several times that she hoped to express her opinions better in group talk. The point I want to make here is that "good students" like Ann usually have high expectations of their performance, so it is not easy for them to observe any progress. It is hard for them to praise themselves too. Perhaps this explains why Ann was so thrilled when I encouraged them to treat their positive experiences with as much attention as their negative experiences. Ann's example is not just encouraging to other students: it is equally rewarding to me, as an EP practitioner. Ann worked for understanding continuously, which illustrates EP's principle 6 discussed in chapter 4: Working for understanding is necessarily a continuous enterprise.

Wei's written English ability was not as good as Ann's, and yet it appeared easier for

her to notice her own progress than it was for Ann. She described more about the learning environment in class, how students interacted with each other, and how she personally reacted to the themes we discussed in class. She mentioned her independent learning through pleasure reading. How she felt about learning decided whether she wanted to learn or not.

Elaine was a post-graduate student. What she worried about most was her presentation skills in English. She spent most of the time trying to understand it in group talk, her journal and the EP worksheet. Gradually, she seemed to realise that perhaps she could switch her focus towards the audience, thinking about making them interested, rather than worrying about pleasing her teachers or getting high grades.

John was the most senior student in the course. He always made precise comments on the issues we discussed in class or proposing personal theories about learning. He was very serious about learning English and being supportive to other students. During the group talk in class, he usually played as an adviser to other students. He understood how other students felt, and how they worried about speaking English, so he tried to express his opinions as much as possible to encourage others to speak up too.

5.3.3. Learner development

These journals show what students actively did outside class to use their personally chosen ways for practising English to achieve their individual learning goals. Ann read books about art to balance her art training with her interest in learning English. Wei read English romantic novels for pleasure. Elaine watched English cartoons to learn about

animations and to practice English at the same time. They all loved their own chosen ways of learning English. They set their own goals, tried out experiments to look for ways that were suitable for themselves, and moved towards achieving their goals. They chose to expand their learning because they wanted to, not because they were told to.

5.3.4. Learning opportunities for language practice

Students appreciated the learning opportunities for language activities and considered them as opportunities to get to know each other better. English is used as a tool for reflection in group talk and journal writing. In the beginning of the course, I gave students a survey sheet to prioritise their expectations and aims for learning English during the course. Speaking was the first priority for better performance for the majority of students, so perhaps that is why they felt their learning needs had been met and why they participated well in class.

5.3.5. Collegiality

Cross (1999) remarks that "if you want to know how students learn, find out what makes them tick. Looking carefully at how even one student learns is often quite revealing, and most of us have an opportunity to observe a wide variety of learners in the act of learning" (Cross, 1999:267). It is the teacher who can have this privilege for direct observation while working together with students as advocated by EP principles 4 and 5. Principle 4 states that "The work needs to serve to bring people together", while principle 5 adds that "The work needs to be conducted in a spirit of mutual development. A good example of mutual development is the sense of gratitude whenever I read students' journals,

because while they are learning, I am also learning with them. There is so much I can learn from their words that show how they look at the lessons, whether they find the course helpful or not, how they benefit from supporting each other to use English in group talk, and how they establish learning development in real-life situations. For example, different people learn English differently, they have different learning preferences, different reading habits or different learning purposes. What my students teach me in their words has made my teaching life more meaningful because of more understanding of students' learning lives. I did not set out my research because I wanted to look for solutions for any kind. Rather, I wanted to create portraits of my students and share these with other people, in the same way my students shared their reflections and ideas with others.

5.4. Summary of findings-Learner Development

Table 5.1 presents a summary of the findings in this chapter. It summarises the findings in five categories of learner development: goal setting, personalised learning strategies, monitoring progress, language practice in real-life situations and realisation. For each category, the table shows where the evidence comes from, and from which learner. Each journal entry mentioned in the table can be found in this chapter in sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4.

Table 5.1 Learner Development [following page].

Learner development	Learner	Journal Ref.
Goal setting:		
having confidence in group talk	Ann	*(A-W1J1, A-W4J3, A-W4EP Worksheet)*
studying abroad	Ann	*(A-W16J8)*
knowing common terms for fine art in English	Wei	*(W-W8J6)*
giving a presentation in English	Elaine	*(E-W4J1)*
thinking in English	John	*(Jo-W2J1)*
Personalised learning strategies:		
recalling the most impressive part of the lesson to overcome writer's block when writing a journal	Ann	*(A-W12J6)*
Monitoring progress:		
became more fluent in group talk	Wei	*(W-W8J6)*
noticed a group member's progress in speaking	John	*(Jo-W10J9)*
Language practice in real-life situations:		
using TV news & the internet news in English for expanding vocabulary	Elaine	*(E-W5J2)*
Realisation:		
understanding the importance of positive experience	Ann	*(A-W4J3)*
recalling how she became a voluntary English reader as a positive experience	Ann	*(A-W5J4)*
understanding how and why she could overcome "writer's block" in writing the journal for this course	Ann	*(A-W12J6)*
focusing on the audience during a presentation	Elaine	*(E-W8J7)*
sequencing of the four skills in learning	John	*(Jo-W4J3*

5.5. How the key findings relate to the research questions

Research question 1: How do students make sense of their learning?

It is common to see students use descriptions when they try to make sense of their learning. When students describe their learning experience, they often mention a description of their feelings towards a certain learning context. Next, they naturally link their previous learning experiences to current ones by comparing or identifying similarities or differences. Then they mention how they want to move on. This exemplifies Dewey's principle of the continuity of experiences, as described in chapter two of this thesis.

For example, in A-W4 EP Worksheet, Ann felt bad about her performance in group talk for not expressing much about her opinions or not giving her advice to other students. She was worried that other students might not want to know her ideas in group talk. Perhaps it is surprising to see a good language learner, in terms of her high proficiency level, being so unsure about her contribution to group talk. Fortunately, she did realise in the end that her under-performance in the group was not caused by her language ability. She understood it was due to her lack of confidence. Therefore, she decided to try to boost her confidence, as well as to be aware of more positive experiences than negative experiences in doing the group talk. Ann's story exemplifies how students go through the following stages: (a) description – describing their experiences and feelings; (b) comparison – comparing current experiences with previous experiences and also comparing their own experiences with those of other students; and (c) decision making – which is when they try to make sense of their learning.

Research question 2: How did students monitor their progress?

Some students monitored their progress from their performance in group talk. With the help of regular EP group talk and journal writing, students apparently became more aware of their learning process and performance with respect to language knowledge and use.

W-W8J6 Wei said:

Today, I feel more and more comfortable when I speaking English. Because I get familiar with classmates bit by bit, we are not shy at all... I really found that I have much more confidence in speaking English, and feel a little proud, however, I know that I still have many things to learn to improve my English, but I think it's good for me to have more motive to go on.

Wei noticed her progress in fluency and confidence from the weekly group talk.

Interestingly, students also monitored other students' progress, even without intending to. For example, John noticed his group member's progress in an in-class speaking activity (*Jo-W10J9* in Chapter 5).

This finding shows the importance of the learning opportunities that in-class exploratory group talk provides. Students were often aware of how much they said or how well they contributed **to** group talk as a way of observing their progress in speaking. Since group talk took place every week, it became common for the students to notice their language performance and progress.

Research question 3: How did students react to their understanding when it occurred?

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Different learners made different decisions as a response to their newly-found understanding. Ann obviously decided not to seek any outward change after she realized the importance of recognizing previous success and achieving more success (*A-W4J3*). However, Elaine chose to switch her focus from her teacher to her audience when she gave a presentation. She felt excited about taking action and experimenting (*E-W8J7*). Ann felt really thrilled with her realisation, and that was enough for her, no further action being necessary. Elaine felt the need for a change to improve her presentation skills. Learners' understandings do not always lead to changes. This shows the value of EP, in that it allows practitioners total freedom to rethink their learning experience, and to reach greater awareness, without pushing them to change for change's sake.

Research question 4: How students did show evidence of their ongoing development?

Students often mentioned, either in their journal or in group talk, how they practiced English on their own initiative outside class. Wei read novels about love stories. (*W-W11J7*). Elaine practiced English from CNN news on TV and the website. She watched the TV news first, and then she used the website to find out about the things she could not understand (*E-W5J2*).

Chapter 6: Data Analysis II

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I look at journals from a group of four students (Zoe, Jay, Jenny, Phoebe) whose level of English was low compared to other students in the course, to investigate whether they were capable of reflecting, how they treated their learning experiences, how they understood their learning, and how they reacted to this EP-based course. Their ability in writing and speaking in class was considered to be less proficient than other students judged by my observation of classroom performance and of their journal writing.

6.2. Journals

6.2.1. Zoe's journal

Z-W3J1

Zoe was a first year student from the fine art department. She was friendly but very shy. She did not say much in class but she hardly missed a lesson during the course.

> *How to dealing with difficult moments in the group? In my opinion, it is seem a little difficult to the students of fine art. It is mean that the things we do are very personal. So, when we are in group we usually can not show ourself well. But, we can be a very good listener, and we can give the leader the best accept about 6 characteristic that teacher said. For this reason, we always have a person with*

good idea to leader us, and then we can show a fine team work. In today's group

talk, I pointed out that l can do a great sentence in mind. But can not speak out it

fluently. I think it is kind of learning obstacle to me. ''It's a obstacle it just that you

are too nervous. Try to be relax.'' one of my classmate say that. Very thanks for her

cheer. It made me feel better.

Though she noticed that her English ability was weaker than the average level of the class, she valued her role as a good listener, even if her limited English meant that it was hard for her to participate fully in discussions: she still managed to share her experiences both in the EP group talk, and in her journal when she wrote about it afterwards. She believed in the importance of having a leader in the group, who could make sure that the group worked well. The group talk made Zoe feel better after she shared her puzzle not being able to speak up with other students. She was advised not to be too nervous and to try to relax. This shows the value of group support and how the social context contributed to learning.

Z-W4J2

Not only in English but also in other languages, we should have a good attitude to

show our esteem. With this time, it made us knew again about ourselves and learned

anew. Not only the thing that first sentence mean but also in our life. That is a good

story teacher share with us. It is about a girl who wrote down her problem again

and again, then her problem was gone. That mean when we write down what we

torment with, at the same time we can think twice about it. And then we can find the

way to solve it. So having a good writing habit can make us to fact up to many

thing.

Zoe mentioned the importance of having a good attitude and to have some self esteem. In this class, I showed the students a Dear Ann Letter from a girl who was confused about her relationship with her boyfriend, and wrote to an agony aunt to ask for advice. The girl did not need any advice by the time she got to the end of the letter because her confusion had been clarified through the process of writing about her relationship. She understood her relationship better through writing about it. In the extract, Zoe expressed her agreement with the idea behind the story – she agreed that writing often made her think twice about things.

Z-W5J 3

> *We learned to read by pictures, word, voice, or even smell. What l mean is when we closed the book what can be remember to share with someone else. I think that we can try to search the photo of the book in our brain and then read it. That will be a useful way to catch what the book say. By the way, it a interesting experience for me that once when l share a novel with my friend, I play the music and smell the order the same with the time l read it. I can quickly remember it. In group talk, after talking about how did l beset with puzzle. I try to find it on the basic of learning English. So finally I found that ' Do we have to recite vocabulary every day with hardly, or just keep in touch then we can remember them. All of ouch are agree with the latter. And l think that is a part of reason that teacher propose us to read every day.*

Zoe was a fine art student, which made her appreciate the technique of using "pictures" to visualise the story from a book and read it in the head. She used to play music while she was reading a novel, and such was her sensitivity that she felt that she could actually smell a scent that was described in the book. Zoe always mentioned how she reacted in group talk in her journal writing. She raised two issues about learning vocabulary in the group talk. Her friends in the group all agreed that practice using vocabulary was a better way to remember words than reciting and repeating the words in isolation, as they were asked to do in senior high school. She understood that was one of the reasons why I encouraged them to read for pleasure everyday, as through reading they would come across new words in contexts that made them comprehensible.

Z-W6J4

> *To make notes when we read or listen. It is good way to assist with learning. In my opinion, I always use picture to make notes, it can avoid my wrong vocabulary spelling and make me know it by glance.*

Zoe mentioned her preference for learning vocabulary through pictures. She also realised the reason why she preferred to use pictures instead of English words while taking notes- the purpose was to avoid making spelling mistakes.

Z-W10J6

> *We have many little games this week. Let my reflection be deepest was the game that teacher post out an article on the wall, then we have to do teamwork to remember it and write it down. That made me know about that we can not only sit before the*

desk, we can do more body movement that make learning more interesting. So when I went home I try to do an experiment that when I do my homework from the sculpture class I put some piece of papers with sentence. So when I take a break, I can see it and try to remember it then I knead it and shoot it into the basket. That I can score how many ball did I get, I think it is a little funny game to kill the time and to try to do something for English learning.

Language activities for this course were always perceived by students as "games". Interestingly, Zoe did her own experiment after class by posting English sentences around her when she had to work on a sculpture project for her art class. The way she evaluated her vocabulary was to throw the word papers she remembered into a basket. She invented her own "game" for testing vocabulary creatively. This occurred around the middle of the course. Zoe regularly tried to use her own way to improve her vocabulary ability, especially by linking her artistic intelligence to her learning of English.

Z-W14J8

This week we have a time to view and admire the movie freedom writers. That made me remember a song, we can make a different. That is true, thought the problem students can make themselves different. So I can do this. In the movie, the teacher tried to make students write down some things about themselves in English. I think that is a good idea because write it just like take down an own story. It can't make pressure. In the way, we can make thought which being from heart. The other thing the teacher tried was reading the story book with the interesting plot can make reader have more motive. Both of the ways are good. I think I should tried to do

some things not for schoolwork. Then try to find the time to finish the movie, maybe

after I do some things I can have different thought about it.

Even though Zoe's English was not as good as many students in the course, she tried to use her words to express her thinking, as, for example, when she wrote a film review. She agreed with the value of writing in English to express thoughts.

Z-W16J9

That the speaker said that he do not have many chance to practice English in his hometown. I think that we have same problem with him, though he said that Taiwan give him chance to practice. So we practice it just in class, and l remember that teacher have told to us just talk longer as you can. But when l practice with my classmate l can not say too long. In my opinion, all we need is the chance. We have to make it to do something for our English.

Zoe became aware that for her, just like for the Spanish speaker, there were not many chances to practice her English. Therefore, classroom practice appeared to be the most useful and realistic way to improve her speaking. Though she could not talk very much in English, she thought learning opportunities were important and would lead to improvement.

Z-W17J10

What will l be in the future? Speaking the truth, l didn't think about it. Because l just do what l like and what l want. In my opinion, the most important thing is lives in immediately. But l have a new idea about that maybe l should do more practice

which more related English books about art. By this way, to improve professional knowledge. Then l can put interest and occupation together. Today's subject , 'memory' l think that will be work upon success. Take me as the example, l have many good memory about painting, so l to more efforts on it. Then my ability about art go in to good. On the contrary, l have bad memory about learning English, it lead my English to poor. What can l do to change this situation? I learn more in the class, like learn it by games, reading storybook, listening to address…. Although l have a bad memory on it, l still have chance to improve it. After the class, l just want to believe that l can make my English better.

Zoe tried to compare her effort in art and English. She associated her painting skills with success and yet English only reminded her of bad memories in previous classes. She wanted to believe she could use different ways of learning English to make her English better. Students were asked to think about their future in 2024. This is an example of an activity that encourages them to show a positive attitude towards learning English. Zoe became aware of her preferences for using various ways of learning English. This is remarkable for a student whose English was weak and who did not have much confidence due to previous overwhelmingly negative experiences.

An overview of Zoe's journal:

Zoe always looked very friendly in class, even though she could not say very much. She puzzled about learning vocabulary and she appreciated the support she gained from the group talk. She felt happy about discussing different ways of learning vocabulary with other students. Though her English ability was lower than she expected, she made good use

of learning opportunities in class and experimented with her unique and fun way of learning vocabulary. Gradually, she noticed her individual preference for learning English which was to use "pictures" and "visualisation". Her previous learning experience did not give her very positive memories, but she hoped to try out different ways of learning to make her English better. Zoe's learning attitude became more positive after she realised that there were different possibilities for her to learn English. She demonstrated the importance the first proposition of EP: Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways.

6.2.2. Jay's (a post-graduate student) journal

Ja-W2J1

Jay was a post-graduate student from the Tech Art (Technology and Art) graduate school. He found speaking English was a big challenge. He was shy but did not show any dislike of the course.

> *Today is the first day I took the English course. Moreover, it's also the first day I took the English course at Taipei National University of the Arts. I went to classroom too early but I got the extra point unexpectedly. When I was an undergraduate, I took many English courses. When I was a graduate school student, I need to read English article or browse English website frequently. Suddenly I need to take English course and speak English in class, I felt nervous. I hope I can enjoy the class in the semester.*

As Jay described in his journal, he was very worried about speaking English in class

so he felt nervous. It is common to hear students comment on this. In Taiwan, students are not usually asked to speak up in an English class, so some students feel anxious, especially in the first lesson.

Ja-W2-2J 2

> *The topic of the discussion today is working with others. Suddenly, I had to speak English let me feel very nervous. I have some ideas but I don't know how to say. I do not know which vocabulary can express my thought. What is the important thing in the team? First, I thought that people should find the right team members to cooperate. Second, I thought members must have the sense of responsibility. Third, everyone should finish their job before their deadline thus they won't delay others.*

Jay felt nervous in group talk. He started clarifying why he worried about speaking English. He felt frustrated because he had trouble choosing the right words to express his thoughts. Here he gradually realised that he lacked vocabulary in speaking English. Responding to the theme discussed in the lesson about group work, he gave his opinions and explained his ideas quite well in the end.

Ja-W4J3

> *I talked about my puzzle in class today. My puzzle is how do I learn more vocabulary? I can't remember much vocabulary, therefore, I just can use few words. I always only understand 50% part of meaning when I do listening and reading. After the discussion, the classmate thought that my puzzle is not about how much vocabulary I learn, instead of how I had more interesting in English. This*

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discussion is meaningful to me. It can let me face my problem of English.

Though Jay was not used to doing group talk in English, he realised the value of discussing his learning with other students after four weeks of class. This is an example of how students help each other. The students in Jay's group were friends, who were also post-graduate students from the same department, so they knew him quite well. When Jay talked about his puzzle about increasing vocabulary, instead of tackling the puzzle directly, his friends instead tried to encourage him to take a greater interest in English first. It is interesting to see how students help each other in their own way. Jay's friends were not misled by the focus of his puzzle question about vocabulary. Instead, they probably noticed that Jay was not interested in English, and that this was probably the reason why he did not learn as much English as he expected.

Ja-W5J4

> *Teacher gave us a quiz paper in class today. According to the scores, we can understand what sort of language leaner we are. My scores sort out that I'm a mixture learner. Most of people are mixture learners. I think I should learn English with different ways. Then, I discuss with classmates about my new puzzle-How do I get more interesting in English learning? Finally we had a conclusion. The classmates suggested me that I can start from reading something interested me. For example, I like nature things, then I can browse some website about the nature. I can learn English with the things I like.*

The "quiz" Jay mentioned was a self-evaluation questionnaire that was meant to

help students to recognise their learning styles for their reference. Jay started thinking about different ways of learning. His puzzle in this week switched from vocabulary to his interest (or lack of interest) in English. His friends suggested he should read something interesting to him. It was Jay who realised that he could browse English websites about nature, and thus link this interest of his in the natural world with English.

Ja-W6J5

> *The subject of the class today is finger game and movement. Teacher taught some funny finger games today and played a video from TED. The topic of the video is "why play is vital". It told about how important of play. I was very impressed by the section of the video. Some students simulated that they have a meeting. They wrote down their comments on each other's back. It's a unique way of meeting. I think it's very interesting. Then, teacher also played the tape and let us write down what we listen. I only got a little part and I can't remember it. I thought drawing is a good way to note because of my poor English.*

By this stage of the course (week 6), Jay seemed to be much better at reporting what the lesson was about and at expressing his ideas than at the beginning of the course. When Jay practiced note taking while he was watching the video, he noticed he could not take notes in English because of his level of English. But he sounded quite positive about using drawing for note taking instead.

Ja-W7J6

> *I saw my classmate, Huang, Yu-Jie, in the English class today. She taught everyone*

how to read fingerprints. We can tell which personality we have from fingerprints. I checked my fingerprints and observe them for a while, but I still didn't know which personality I have. Maybe I didn't have much interesting in fingerprints, I felt boring. After the speech of fingerprints, we started to discuss with classmates. The topic is which kind of person I don't want to be. A classmate is glad she is not a selfish person and another one didn't want to be a traditional person. Then, how about me? I'm glad I am not a ………….dead guy! I'm glad I am still alive, not dead. I have a lot of hope!

Jay did not enjoy the guest student's talk about fingerprints as much as the other students did. He could use simple English to show his likes and dislikes. He was also capable of reporting what his group discussed in English.

Ja-W9J7

Today we have a very interesting discussion in the class, the discussion's topic is "how to let young people not to take illegal drugs "everyone has many different kind of ideas, those ideas are interesting. One of the interesting ideas like put those people who take drugs together and let those people in an island, some strange ideas, and my classmate Iris draw the picture of our discussion. Some pictures of our discussion are funny. It is a very interesting discussion.

With limited English, Jay could still take part in a discussion activity and enjoy it. After class, he recalled some of the interesting ideas his friends spoke and wrote about in English.

Ja-W10J8

There is a foreigner in the class, he taught us some ways to learn English and he used some interesting learning activities in the class., I think he look like a music player, as expected he play Guitar and sing a English song in the class. Sometimes, using different ways of study, I thing that's great.

Jay appreciated the language activities brought by the guest speaker.

Ja-W11J9

Today we watch the movie in the class, and then take some discussions. Then, my classmate takes her notebook and goes to the stage to talk about her interactive art work. Everyone needs once Speech in a semester, I think using English to Introduce my work is great, because I can learn how to use English to Introduce my work, I think that's very useful to me.

Though Jay was shy and never felt confident about speaking English, he recognized the value of presenting his art work in English to other students as a way of practising speaking and building up confidence.

Ja-W12J10

Today, teacher let us to do some activity with other classmates; I like this way to learn English, because it is interesting then other ways. Then a classmate do a performance on the stage, he is a music department student. He performs the Violin. Listening to Violin's performance very close is a rare experience. He is very good at playing violin, it's very good and amazing.

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He recognised the value of learning English through interesting activities. We did two language activities that week. Students were asked to draw a life line to show the important changes in their lives. Then Zoe from the fine art department was invited to show her pictures to the whole class. She showed her life line according to the change of the length of her hair. The other activity we did was "line up accordingly." Students were asked to line up in a particular sequence depending on the prompt. For example, they might line up in order of age, height etc. After that, they were asked to line up in a new way decided by their team, and let outsiders from other teams guess the criterion according to which they were lining up. This activity provides a lot of practice with asking questions. Students enjoyed this activity because they had practice speaking English and found out more about their friends in the group. Jay liked the violin performance. In fact, the whole class enjoyed watching each other's art presentation in English.

Ja-W13J11

> *Today Jing, Fancy and I have to introduce our works. My work is "net recall", I talk about my work many times, but this is the first time I use English to introduce this work. I just use easy words and simple grammar to finish my Introduce. Jing Introduce her work "Friday experience", it is an interactive performance. Fancy Introduce his 3d matrix. I think those are very funny works.*

Jay talked about his art work and animation in particular, as this was something he was really good at. It was the first time in his life that he had spoken about his special interest in English. He gave a talk about his art work. He did not say very much, but he tried to describe something he knew very well in English. He looked nervous when he

talked but he did succeed in giving an English presentation about his artistic interests.

Ja-W14J12

> *Today I use the internet to find some information on the English website, those website are Arts Electronica and Japan Media Arts Festival, I hope I can finish my work before those Awards dateline; I visit some website and watch the some video to help me to do my work.*

He browsed an English website to find out about an art festival that he was interested in, because there was a contest he hoped to participate in. Though his level of English was low, he needed to use English to find out information for his art training and he was obviously aware of this need.

Ja-W17J15

> *I read the newspaper today. There is a page teaches English in the newspaper. The page has many English news, English stories, English conversations and English comics. One of the English comic is very funny, it is a Garfield comics. One day Garfield walked through a pet store, then he went into the pet store and talked to the shop assistant. He said "please get me a hamster meal".*

Jay was clearly very shy, worried and embarrassed about his English. He read an English newspaper and described an English comic he liked. This was around the end of course. Jay had finally started reading something he liked in English, and seemed to have enjoyed it.

An overview of Jay's journal:

It is easy to tell from Jay's writing that his English was quite limited. However, he thought, reflected and discussed with other students with simple English in both the journal and the group talk, and he evidently enjoyed this learning process. He managed to use short sentences and simple English to report on what happened in class. He actually produced 1043 words in his English journal. For a non-English major student like Jay, this is quite an achievement. From Jay's description in the reflective group talk, he shifted his puzzle about increasing the size of his vocabulary to increasing his interest in English after he discussed with his group members. He found the suggestion was meaningful to him. Gradually, he thought about what his interest was during the course. He gave an example of what he did outside class to learn English in week 17. He enjoyed reading an English comic in an English newspaper.

Jay's process of exploration and learning development
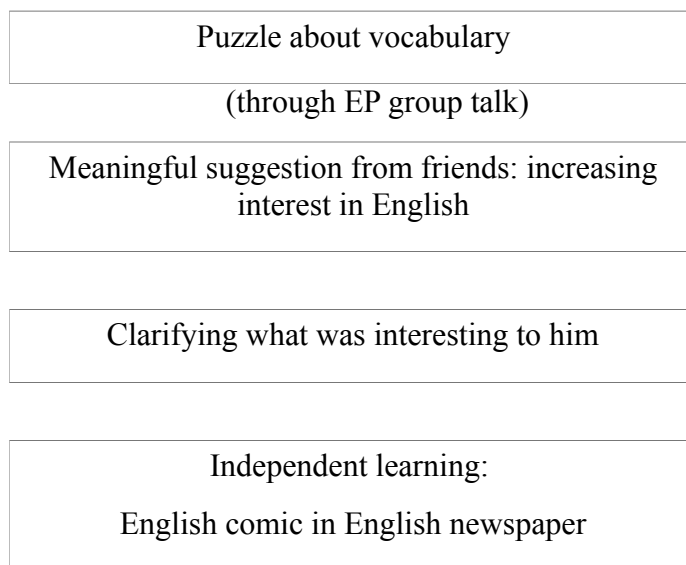
Puzzle about vocabulary
(through EP group talk)

Meaningful suggestion from friends: increasing interest in English

Clarifying what was interesting to him

Independent learning: English comic in English newspaper

With opportunities to do EP regularly, Jay had plenty of language practice, while at the same time thinking, receiving support from other students and showing his own

initiative in learning English. It exemplifies some key EP propositions about learners, particularly propositions 2 and 5.

Proposition 2: Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.

Proposition 5: Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

It took Jay over ten weeks to become more interested in English, to find out what he liked exactly and to take the initiative in finding a suitable and enjoyable way for learning English. What matters to Jay or me was not what he changed. Instead, it was the experience process he went through that matters, as this would be more meaningful in the longer term. Because of this internal change, it could be hoped that Jay would continue to search for ideas for learning that would be suitable for him. I would refer here to Dewey's principle of education; what matters is not what students know. Instead it is how they experience learning and want to learn more (Dewey, 1963).

6.2.3. Jenny's journal

Jenny was a post-graduate student who also majored in Tech Art. She was not confident about speaking English, though she tried hard in class.

Je-W2J1

Last week we talk about the team work. I used to work alone, thus I didn't think about those questions. It's hard for me to work with other people, because I like to control everything. If I had to compromise on my idea and change it into something

I don't want, then I would feel unbearable. However, team work should be an important challenge that I have to face. It's unavoidable in my life. In the class, we talked about different kind of roles in team work. I think it helps me to know how to start doing team work.

Jenny was a mature student. She mentioned two characteristics that seem to be common among art students- that they view things subjectively (rather than attempting to be impartial and objective), and that they want to be in control and are not usually prepared to accept other people's ideas, so it was hard for her to do team work. However, she was aware that she could not avoid team work in this class, and adjusted to it. She found that the topic of the lesson could help her to deal with team work.

Je-W3J2

Though English is important in my daily lives, I still have not thought to improve my English since I graduated from high school. As a graduate school's student, I always need to do research, reading lots English papers. Therefore, I think my reading skill is fine, I can understand most of the articles. However, my speaking and writing skills is terrible. I have a great difficulty in English grammar so I don't have confidence with writing. Besides, I' afraid of making mistakes in front of people thus I always get nervous. Furthermore, getting nervous let me can't organize myself quickly. The group talk is a big challenge for me in class. My poor English is always embarrassed me, but I think this class may help me to find out what is my problem with English through discussion.

Jenny was not satisfied with her ability in English speaking and writing. Above she clarified that she did not have confidence in writing because of her difficulties with grammar. In addition, she was afraid of making mistakes in front of other people, so she always felt nervous about speaking. She was sure that was why she could not organise what she had to say in English. It is interesting to see how Jenny reasoned about her learning performance.

Je-W4J3

> *Through the small group talk in this week, I thought with my puzzle. My puzzle is how do I feel more comfortable when I talk to others in English? It's really embarrassed me when I talk to others. I felt nervous and my hands always sweat. I wanted to solve this problem and I thought that if I can prepare what we going to talk about, maybe I will feel better. Therefore, I wrote down my puzzle and my stories I going to talk of and practiced speaking in front of the mirror or my pet. I hope it will be helpful.*

Jenny felt embarrassed about talking in English to other students because she felt nervous, and her hands even sweated when she tried to talk. Perhaps this is a typical sign of being a perfectionist, caused by her horror at the idea of making mistakes. She thought about her puzzle and talked about it with her friends. She was determined to prepare before class for what she wanted to say, by using the EP worksheet and by talking to herself in the mirror, or even talking to her pet. In this sway she hoped to overcome her fear of mistakes.

Je-W6J4

After watching the video and listening test, we had a group talk again. We still talked about our puzzle. It was just the chance I can see if my preparation did work. Then, I thought it was effective. I felt better when I speaking English.

For Jenny, understanding why she felt nervous was not enough, so she prepared for the group talk beforehand and she felt better about it afterwards. In Jenny's journal, she decided to make some preparation for her group talk in order to improve her speaking. Then a week later, she noticed that she felt more comfortable in group talk, and gradually her confidence increased. Jenny felt better about her performance in group talk because she herself tried out her own idea- preparing for her group talk before class- and it worked for her. She turned her fear into a virtuous circle: careful preparation meant that she made fewer mistakes, which reduced her fear of mistakes, leading to improved confidence and a better all-round speaking ability.

Je-W10J4

...According to the list, we have to ask different people "Do you ever……?" It was very interesting. I can have a chance to talk with others in English and know others' ways of learning. I surprised that many classmates reading English newspaper to learn English....

This sharing of ideas and experiences was one of the things that students most appreciated in the EP-based class. Activities used in class tended to offer the whole class to get to know each other more. Weekly group talk provided students with regular opportunities for reflecting on their own learning experience. Nevertheless, language

activities help students know more about other learners in class. For instance, Jenny noticed that many students in the class learned English through reading English newspapers.

Je-W11J5

> *We did an interesting activity today. Teacher put the cards on the wall in different corner in class. We have to line up according to the words on cards. I didn't do activity in class for a long time...*

Jenny's journal made me realise how little opportunity students have to move around in class, and how motivating it was for them when they were asked to find out more personal information about their friends in class.

Je-W12J6

> *I had a presentation today. I show my art work to classmates. I'm really nervous. I prepared many parts of my work, but when I stood on the stage, my brain was completely blank. I skip some parts. Even though I felt nervous and let my presentation become fast, I finally complete my presentation. The work I introduced is an interactive video installation. I worked with a TAP dance regiment. I caught the sound of the dancer's moves. Then, I let the sound to control the video through the computer program. So, the dancer can change the video with his moves. This performance is talking about a man who loves dance, but he have to go to work for his life. He doesn't like his job and tired of going to office every day. In a special Friday night, he can't wait to get off work, he imaged all the things in the office started to dance with his rhythm. I think it's maybe many people's feeling. We can't*

always to do what we really want to do.

During the semester, I asked each student to talk about their art work in English for four minutes without any notes or a script. I think it is a good idea to let students practice using English to talk about their areas of strength. Jenny described the video she made in great detail. She mentioned above in the beginning of the course that she did not have confidence about writing. But this time she wrote about her art project, which was something she had created and she felt confident about, so she wrote quite well. Jenny talked about her art project and wrote about it, both in English.

Je-W14J 7

> *This week I met my friend who studies in U.S. now. He told me he felt the education in US is not what we think. We thought that maybe study in other country is relaxed. However, he felt that taking course in US is tougher than Taiwan. The professor gives them lots of the homework every week. Moreover, they think promptness and regular attendance are important. It overthrow what I think. Maybe I should talk to my friends often. I can't be a person with narrow views!*

Jenny compared how she learned with how other people learned. She mentioned her friend's comments on western teachers' expectations of students. She appreciated her friends' comments, and they made her notice that she needed to broaden her views on learning.

Je-W17Jl9

> *Last week we talked about how to learn more vocabulary and reading. The*

classmates said sometimes she can't totally understand some articles, especially when she reading the academic essays. We shared some tips of reading difficult articles. I think "Google" is a helpful shortcut. When I can't totally understand the essay, I will put this article's keywords on the search engine and find other related articles. Then, I can understand the essay through reading other related articles...

Jenny and her friends were all post-graduate students, so they were very concerned about reading academic articles. Very often they felt frustrated about not being able to understand the articles they had to read for their studies. Through the group talk, they got to know different ways of dealing with their difficult reading materials. Therefore, although their reading ability might not have changed rapidly, their learning attitude gave them hope and encouraged them to look for different ways that might be suitable for improving their understanding of academic texts in English.

An overview of Jenny's journal:

Jenny was shy but was determined to be in control of her learning, especially when it came to speaking English. She understood why her writing skill was not good. The reason she herself gave was that she had difficulties with grammar. As for not speaking English well, she thought it was because she felt nervous about making mistakes. For Jenny, understanding her puzzles was not enough, so she was determined to try out some experiments to help her with group talk. Therefore, she used the EP worksheet, filled it in and talked to herself and to her pet before class. Then, she felt better when she spoke English because she monitored her performance in group talk, and found out that her preparation helped. She paid attention to how she and other students learned English.

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Through classroom language activities, she found out that most of the students read English newspaper to help them with their English. In group talk, she discovered that her friends from the same graduate school dealt with their reading materials, mainly academic articles, in different ways. She helped her friend by suggesting he use key words in "google" to help understand some academic articles.

6.2.4. Phoebe

Phoebe was a first year student from the dance department.

Exploratory Practice：elaborating, developing and exploring a puzzle. One way to do it.

First idea：

> **A puzzle：**
>
> Why I can't express directly what I want to say?

Exploring what the puzzle really is：

> *A narrative：*
>
> When I was in the senior high school, I went to New York for the dance audition.
>
> I lived in my sister's home who also graduate from my school. And her husband is a foreigner. Every night he asked me what I did today. I always said some simple words. Although he understood, I really felt embarrassed.

P-W3J1

Today we talked about working with others. I think if you want to work with others in the good situation, you should control your emotion. And just do what Voltaire said."I disapprove of what you said, but I will defend to the death all your right to say it." We respect each others. Then any problems or any questions will be dealt with. In this English class, I feel that I am not as good as others in the class. I always say some simple words. And sometimes I don't understand what people

talking about. But I will still try. I hope i can make progress in the class.

She was shy, but aware that English could be really useful for her dance career. She was aware that her level of English was lower than many other students because of her choice of words and her limited listening ability. However, she was prepared to make an effort in order to make progress.

P-W4J2

When the class started, teacher shared a story with us. The story is about a woman that she has some problems with her lover. But through writing, she found the answer. The story want to tell us that writing can make you more thinking. And the problem will be clear. When we have some problems,we can also ask our friends and get some different opinions. After that we shared each one's puzzle in a group. Although I don't understand sometimes, I encouraged myself to ask classmates said it again. When it's turn to me, I felt that others in this group can understand what I say. I really happy to find this. I have to keep it going.

Teacher also shared another real story that was about her student talked with foreigners. The student found If he talked with foreigners longer, than his nervous would disappear. For me, I can't talk with foreigners for a long time. I think this thing is not good. I have to improve it. First, I have to read more vocabularies. Keep going. :)

Phoebe understood the value of writing for clarification. She was happy in group talk because she managed to make herself understood. She compared her learning

experience with a previous student's experience. She wanted to increase her vocabulary.

P-W5J3

> *From the beginning to the middle of semester, I found that I have been not scared to talk in English. Before attending this EP class, I did not usually talk to people in English. I always avoid the situation which I need to talk in English as possible as I can. But in the universities, especially art of universities, It's a lot of chances to listen to English conversations. For example, our department will invite teachers all over the world to teach us. And another is that we have exchanged students. We have many opportunities to use English. In the class, although I still do not well, I have progressed. I always say some short sentences to my friends. And if they don't understand I will explain. Then we just keep talking in English until no words we can say. In this conversation ,we also discuss grammars,vocabularies,and so on. It's good to practice.*

> *Although we are busy on our major subject, I will still listen to some English news in BBC or read some English stories with pictures. I hope I can have more progressed and more confidence on talking in English.*

Phoebe noticed that gradually she did not feel as scared as before about speaking English because of the many learning opportunities she had enjoyed in the EP class. Though she did not do as well as she expected, she made progress. She could say short sentences to express herself. She was not worried as much as before because she was prepared to explain herself if she could not make herself understood at first. She planned to

squeeze some English practice into her tight schedule in order to have more confidence in speaking English.

P-W7J4

> *Today teacher invited a person to our class, and she gave us a fun presentation. She was talking about fingerprints. Everyone have their own fingerprints. It's unique. We can figure out people through that. That's why the robbers always wear the gloves when they were robbing. The speech showed that I am a good person. Haha. It's really fit in with me. Next we wrote down a sentence. My sentence is I am glad that I'm not a child in the violent family. My family always bring happiness and encouragement. I love my family. Teacher asked one person from each group to show our sentences. I stood up directly because I think I can have confidence to say it. And I got teacher's praise. :)*

> *Teacher want us to check out a website which is about English learning. I have a friend she goes to MIAMI for study. She always writes her blog in English. I can care about what is she going and also practice my reading. But it's not a learning website. Sometimes I watch BBC's news in website. Although it's difficult for me to understand at first time, I can review several times.*

Phoebe wrote about the talk she enjoyed and it made her appreciate the happiness and encouragement her family brought her. In this class, she thought she was confident and ready to use English more, so she volunteered to share her thinking with the whole class. Although it took Phoebe seven weeks before she felt ready to speak English in public, when

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she did so it was certainly an achievement for someone who was so worried about her speaking ability. She also mentioned opportunities for practising English outside class, for example, reading an English blog of her friend's who had gone to Miami. Also, she mentioned watching the BBC news website. She had to watch news stories several times before she could understand them. That was her voluntary choice for learning English. This entry in Phoebe's journal shows support for EP propositions 1 and 4: "Learners are unique individuals who learn and develop best in their own idiosyncratic ways"; and "Learners are capable of developing as practitioner learners."

P-W8J5

> *Today teacher gave us a letter. It's about a person wrote a letter to his friend to tell him some things in England. First, he talked about the weather. It's always bad, windy and cold in England. Next he want to tell to his friend is food in there. It is seem not to eat rice. Everything is just with chips. When it comes to studying in his university, he seemed not to get with it. He said that he has a lot of essays to write. And they don't have any exams. For me, writing essays is more difficult than having exams. But in the university, It's seemed to have more essays or reports to write.*

> *Group talk: Penny shared her plan to Boston Ballet Summer Dance Program. It's a good opportunity to learn ballet. And it's also a good chance to visit different countries. But she worried about her English. I encouraged her that don't worry. Our advantage is body language. Just don't be afraid. Everything will be alright. I hope she will do it well in there.*

The text students read in class made Phoebe notice that writing essays was more difficult than taking tests for her. Though Phoebe herself had been really worried about her own speaking ability, she told her friend not to worry and tried to encourage her friend who was about to go to a dance festival abroad. Also Phoebe advised her friend to use her kinaesthetic intelligence, body language for communication. This was commonly seen in class actually. Very often, students themselves see their worries in other people, so they show a lot of encouragement and support to their friends. They can understand how their friends feel. It seemed that Phoebe was encouraging her friend and at the same time she was encouraging herself. EP's proposition 2, that learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment, is well illustrated here.

P-W10J6

> *This week teacher invite Giles to give us a class. He is comes from England, but lives in Taiwan. First he wants us to ask some questions to classmates. The questions are about learning English. In the process, I found that when I asked questions to people, I don't feel unconfident. On the contrary, I will get nervous when I was asked. I think It's because I worry about my ability of listening. After this questions, Giles wrote down some words on the blackboard. If we want to know that meaning of words, we have to ask a question about the words and make Giles say that words.*

> *Next we have to write down a story which is a paper far away from us. It's a challenge for our memory. I had fun on that time. Last Giles sang a song. I want to say that Giles is really good at music. The song he played and sang is pleasant to*

hear.:)

In week 10, Phoebe noticed that she did not worry about asking other students questions in English, though she felt nervous when she was asked questions by others. The dictation activity Phoebe mentioned was challenging but fun, as many students commented afterwards. Students were asked to read different Taiwanese learners' stories posted on the wall about learning English, memorized them bit by bit, and gradually dictate the whole text to their group members, one after another. The last activity was a song, "Lord Franklin". Students liked the activity, though it was quite hard for many students. They were asked to do three different tasks with the lyrics: changing the order of lines, crossing out the extra words and recognising the wrong words.

P-W11J7

Today we watched a movie. That's about a white teacher teach students who are all black. The students are given up by other teachers except the white and young teacher. Students don't accept and agree the teacher because she's background isn't same as them. I remember that I already have watched this movie. But I just can't remember where I watched. Miss 朱 let us watch a movie. I think teacher want to tell us that watch a movie is also a good way to learn English. My brother who is good at English always see movies. In the NTU, he is busy in his lab. So he watched movies to release his stress. And if the films are worthy of watching, he will suggest me seeing. So I have many movies in my computer. But I don't have enough time to finish whole movies at a time. I always stop it half way. I have to plan my schedule and I will have time to see movies. I have a good model in my family. I should learn

hard and keep going.

In fact, my main purpose for showing the film Freedom Writers in class was to let students see the value of reading and writing. Phoebe interpreted the activity quite differently, seeing it simply as a way of learning English. This reminded me that students do not always learn what the teacher wants. Phoebe's brother studied at the best university in Taiwan, so she thought he was a good model for her learning.

P-W13J8

Today our classmates in drama department have performances. So when the class begin, there are just 5 dance department students and 2 others department students. I feel comfortable and relax in that time. And I find that I can understand more what teacher says. I have no idea why I will feel comfortable and have better listening ability. I think maybe many people in the class makes me easily distract my attention. And maybe I'm not confident enough to speak in English in the public.

First teacher wants us to write down four important words in our major. My words are "passion", "determination", "trust myself", and "confident". More passion can make more determination. Then when you make more determination, you have to trust more yourself. Tell yourself that you can do it well. Last, you will feel confident. This is my goal. I hope I can achieve what I say.

Phoebe noticed that when the class was smaller than usual, she felt relaxed and more comfortable and understood what I said in class better. She thought it was probably because she could get easily distracted when there were many students, or perhaps she was

not confident. As a dancer, Phoebe wrote down what mattered a lot to her and explained it in English. I hoped to encourage students to clarify the meaning of their art training in their life, to see the link between art and life, and talk about these questions in English. After class, Phoebe wrote down her ideas in English, just as the other students did.

An overview of Phoebe's journal:

Phoebe felt worried about her speaking ability at the beginning of the course. Around week 5, she noticed she already worried less than before because she could use short sentences to make herself understood, so she felt happy about her progress. Meanwhile, she planned to watch BBC news as a way of learning English. In week 7, she mentioned her experience with watching BBC news- she needed to watch the episodes several times before she could understand the news stories. In week 10, she did not worry about talking to other students in English any more, but she still noticed she felt nervous when she was asked questions by other students, so she told herself to be more confident about listening to others. In week 13, she noticed that she actually understood what I said in class much better when there were fewer students in class. She reasoned that perhaps it was because there were fewer distractions when the class was smaller. Phoebe's reflection illustrates the process of her learning during the course. She was trying to make sense of her English learning, seeking the opportunities for practicing inside and outside class. Though her English level was lower than she expected, especially her speaking ability, she projected her expectations onto her friend and gave her encouragement to use English for communication by using body language if necessary – something they are certainly good at as dancers.

Phoebe was treating the development of her learning as a continuous process, just as I do as an EP practitioner researcher. I am trying to understand how Phoebe made sense of her learning, how she decided to deal with her personal learning goal, how she monitored her learning and how she became happy about herself. She was using English to make sense of her learning English, in the same way that I encourage students to link the meanings of their art training to their lives. I am using the principles of EP to increase my understanding of students' learning lives and my own teaching life. I feel happy whenever I find more meanings in teaching and learning.

6.3. Overview of these four students' journals

Zoe's English, especially her speaking ability, was not fluent enough for her to express much in class. However, Zoe always participated really well both by saying something about what she thought and giving her feedback to her group members. She did not feel upset about her ability, or at least she never mentioned it in her journal as other students did. She enjoyed finding out different ways of learning English and was prepared to continue to try out more ideas about using her art interest to help her practice English.

Jay began by worrying about his vocabulary earlier in the course, but he gradually moved to seek for greater interest in English, as his friends suggested. His interest in English developed over ten weeks. A quiet student like Jay set his own goals, adjusted his own pace and established his interest in learning English.

Jenny felt extremely nervous when she spoke English in a group, and she realised that the reason was that she felt bad about making mistakes. She did not find understanding

this was enough for her, so she used the EP worksheet to prepare for the group talk beforehand. She was consciously aware of her performance all the time. Then, she monitored her speaking in group talk and felt happier about herself because of the preparation she had made in advance. She was interested in knowing how other students learned English and in comparing her own way of learning with those of others.

Phoebe was not confident about speaking English like the other three students mentioned above. The way she tried first to speak up was to make use of practice opportunities in class. Gradually, she realised her friends could understand her well, even if she used short sentences, so she felt better about herself. Outside class learning opportunities were created by her even though her life was already busy through watching the BBC news website, and she mentioned she could read her friend's English blog to learn English.

Students like Zoe, Jay, Jenny, and Phoebe, all had low ability in speaking and in their general English. Their journals illustrate that they were going through a process that helped them approach English in a way that suited them. Williams and Burden (1997:112) present three stages of the motivation process along a continuum:

"Reasons for doing something" → "Deciding to do something" → "Sustaining the effort, or persisting"

The first two stages involve initiating motivation, evidence for which can be found in these students' journals as discussed above. Within an eighteen-week course, it is too early to tell whether or not students would move on to the third stage of the motivation

process, which involves sustaining motivation. However, their reflection clearly shows the continuous process of developing understanding. Smith (1998) proposed that reflection is the antidote for confusion. "We shouldn't give up the moment we are confused – we should look ahead and see if something that comes later makes sense to us" (Smith, 1998:88).

6.4. Implications for teachers

Shy students in class can be easily forgotten or underestimated by teachers. Perhaps sometimes they make teachers worried because they do not, or cannot, act as teachers expect. From what the students said above, their reservations for not speaking in class involve the following:

-shyness

-fear of making mistakes

-lack of confidence

-face-threatening nature of some activities

-low English ability

-classroom atmosphere has not made them feel secure.

When students do not speak up, they are not necessarily lazy. They are probably not ready (e.g. Jenny, Jay) but perhaps they are happy to take part in activities and play a role as a team member joining and listening to others attentively (e.g. Zoe). Encouragement does not rely on teachers, especially when there are many students in the class. Students who cannot make long utterances in communication can still receive responses and encouragement from other students (e.g. Phoebe).

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6.4.1. Regular reflective group talk

Speaking English is hard for many students in Taiwan not to mention using English in group talk for a real discussion. However, if group talk is a part of the classroom activities, then the students can have more chances of focusing on what they want to express or share with others than worrying too much about making mistakes in front of other students. Repeated exploratory talk allows students to use English as a tool for a real communication. What happens in group talk as students described above is language practice as well as working for understanding something. Hardly any other courses ever invite students to think about their learning not to mention talking about it.

6.4.2. Language activities before group talk

Some warm-up language activities to make students relaxed can be helpful for reducing their anxiety before they start a group talk. Besides, students can get to know each other in an informal way, learn to have a small talk, or simply enjoy singing English songs. Students appreciated classroom language activities that allowed them to

-ask and answer questions

-find out how each other learn English outside class

-find out some personal information from each other

-find out each other's learning goals

-work together on interesting tasks (e.g. Group dictation marathon)

Table 6.1 Learner Development [see following page].

Learner Development	Learner	Journal
Goal setting:		
trying to relax when speaking English	Zoe	*(Z-W3J1)*
increasing interest in English	Jay	*(Ja-W4J3)*
dealing with team work	Jenny	*(Je-W3J2)*
expressing ideas in English	Phoebe	*(P-W3J1)*
increasing vocabulary	Phoebe	*(P-W5J2)*
Personalised learning strategies:		
using music to increase reading efficiency	Zoe	*(Z-W5J3)*
self-talk preparation for in-class group talk	Jenny	*(Je-W4J3)*
Monitoring progress:		
invented a vocabulary game	Zoe	*(Z-W10J6)*
felt better and more confident in group talk	Jenny	*(Je-W6J4)*
felt less scared about speaking English & was able to communicate with other people with short sentences	Phoebe	*(P-W5J3)*
Language practice in real-life situations:		
invented a basket game for sentence practice	Zoe	*(Z-W10J6)*
read English comics in newspapers	Jay	*(Ja-W17J15)*
read BBC news on the internet	Phoebe	*(P-W7J4)*
Realisation:		
using pictures while taking notes to avoid spelling mistakes	Zoe	*(Z-W6J4)*
not compromising in team work	Jenny	*(Je-W2J1)*
speaking difficulty being caused by worrying about making mistakes	Jenny	*(Je-W3J2)*

6.5. Summary of findings

Table 6.1 presents the summary of findings in this chapter. It summarises the findings in five categories: goal setting, personalised learning strategies, monitoring

progress, language practice in real-life situations and self-realisation. For each example, the learner and the source are provided. Each journal entry in the table can be found in this chapter in sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.4.

6.6. How the key findings relate to the research questions

Research question 1: How do students make sense of their learning?

For low level learners, it is common to see students tackle their difficulties in language learning when they try to understand their learning. Zoe described her difficulty in group talk and explained why it was not easy for her. She said that for her training in fine art (her major), creating an art work was something very personal and individual, so she found it hard when she was asked to express personal opinions in group talk. She tried to understand her difficulty through her background and training. Jay mentioned he could not say much in group talk because he felt very nervous about speaking English. He clarified his difficulty and realised the importance of increasing his interest in English through journal writing and group talk. Jenny said she felt embarrassed about her English ability. There are many examples of students describing their difficulties and feelings in the data. They were also often found to mention their previous experience or background education when they were in the process of trying to understand their learning.

Research question 2: How did students monitor their progress?

Practice in real-life situations and their performance in group talk provided students with chances for monitoring their progress. Zoe evaluated her vocabulary in self-invented games while she did her art project outside the classroom- for example, when she was

making a sculpture. Jenny was highly aware of the change in her performance in group talk after she prepared in advance by talking to herself in the mirror. After that, she felt better when she was speaking in class. Phoebe noticed that she was nervous about speaking, and once she became aware of this she began to overcome her nervousness. She was prepared to explain things to her friends if they did not understand her rather going into a panic as she did before. She recognized her progress in speaking during language activities and group talk. It seems to show clearly that students can become aware of their language performance by themselves and that they are able to notice little things that bring them successes in their learning.

Research question 3: How did students react to their understanding when it occurred?

Realisation did sometimes make students feel thrilled, but different students reacted differently. Zoe realised that she preferred to take notes by drawing pictures in order to avoid making spelling mistakes. She did not intend to make any immediate changes to deal with this. At this stage of discovery, she tried to understand why she chose to draw pictures rather than words while taking notes. It shows that understanding does not always lead to change in the process of exploration. Jenny reflected on why she was not good at speaking or writing. According to her understanding, she was not confident about writing because she had difficulties with grammar. Worrying about making mistakes in front of other people made Jenny also feel nervous about speaking. In view of all this, Jenny decided to prepare for the in-class group talk at home beforehand – not by writing down what she would say, but by speaking English to herself while looking in the mirror. These learners' reactions show the value of the way in which EP respects practitioners' choices. It

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is the practitioners' freedom to decide what they want to do and how they move on in the journey of understanding. What matters most of all is their better understanding of both their learning and themselves.

Research question 4: How did students show evidence of their ongoing development?

By means of in-class group talk and of journal writing for homework, students provided evidence of the possibility of self-directed development in learning. Zoe was interested in talking about different ways of learning vocabulary with other students during her group talk. She actually tried out a way of reviewing vocabulary by playing her own basket game. Jay gradually took interest in reading English comics in newspapers. Phoebe read the world news in English on the Internet. Before complaining that students are lazy, perhaps teachers need to find out if they have given students chances to reveal their own learning habits and preferences in their lives, both in and outside the classroom.

Research question 5: Are low level learners in Taiwan capable of reflecting on their language learning in English?

According to the findings, low level learners like Zoe, Jay, Jenny, Phoebe were all capable of reflecting on their language learning in English. They showed their thinking about their experience, tried to understand their weaknesses, strengths and areas of intelligence to help them improve their English and enjoy learning the language with their self-chosen goals, strategies and self-monitoring. Reflection was not an activity that was open only to learners whose level of English was high. Low level learners also benefited, not only from the language practice involved, but also from the process of trying to understand themselves and their learning better. They used simple words to describe their

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reflection. They themselves recognized the value of using English to work out the meanings of their experiences. Through this EP-based course, Zoe became aware that her bad memories of previous English learning experiences had put her off learning. However, she compared her existing experience of learning art with learning English, observing that she felt no frustration in her art training, while she was often frustrated when using English. As a result, she always felt prepared to put more effort into her art work, while she often felt discouraged from making more effort in English. She gained understanding from this process of reflection and became more positive about learning English. She was highly aware that she needed to try different ideas to help her learning. The answer to my research question five is therefore positive. Even if the low level learners in this group could not speak fluently in group talk or write accurately in their journals, they were still able to communicate their thinking and reflections, within the limits of their ability. They also gained language practice through reflecting on their learning, so the benefits in terms of both reflection and language learning were just as important to them as they were to higher level learners.

Chapter 7: Group Talk

7.1. Introduction

In this section, I will show two examples of group talk and discuss how they helped learners reflect and practice their English at the same time. Students were encouraged, but not required, to record their group talk, to upload the sound file to the course website, and finally to upload the transcript of their group talk. Seven audio files were uploaded before the end of the course. One group of students even uploaded a conversation they had outside class. In addition, one video file was uploaded by a girl student, who talked about learning English with her roommate outside class. The reason for asking students to make the transcript was to encourage them to to hear for themselves what they had actually said, and hopefully in this way to raise their awareness of the language they knew and used. The transcript from the first group talk was done by the students. The second group talk was not done by the students, perhaps because it was fifteen-minute long. I therefore did this transcript myself.

7.2. A transcript of group talk in class

In order to give an idea of how students talked in class, I present below a transcript of one session of group talk. This particular transcript was chosen because the sound file and the transcription were particularly clear:

Ann: *Our topic is about how to re-find your passion in English.*
Zoe: *well…*
Ann: *I think it's difficult. hahaha*

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Wei: *maybe you can read the book you're interested in*.

Ann: *oh*

Daisy: *waiting for long vacation so you have a lot of time. You will have your passion again*

Jason: *You can set your goal. If there is no, you can find. I advise you not to force yourself.*

Zoe: *how about, something interesting like comic books*

Wei: *you can find a test so if you want to pass the test you will*

Daisy: *my puzzle is about conversation, like right now. Sometimes, I can't find the words to use*

Jason: *it takes time*

Ann: *I think it takes experience*

Daisy: *maybe I should talk to my roommates*

Wei: *I think try to use English to talk, not translate from Chinese*

Ann: *I think maybe speak naturally will be better*.

Zoe: *I agree with what Angela said*

Jason: *yeah*

Daisy: *thanks*

Jason: *my puzzle is I can't translate Chinese into English exactly. I can't translate what I want to said*

Wei: *when you are writing or speaking?*

Jason: *both*

Wei: *I had that puzzle last week, and the teacher told me a website. It's like dictionary. You can't find meanings and some other same meanings' sayings.*

Ann: *You can use Thesaurus maybe. You can find maybe beautiful, and a lot of words about beautiful.*

Jason: *thank you. I think it's easier to write than speak, because you have time.*

Zoe: *my puzzle is about journals*

Ann: *for example today, you can go back and write down this conversation*

Wei: *movie, today's movie*

Wei: *my puzzle is how to find my own way to learn English*

Daisy: *I think you need to ask yourself, haha*

Wei: *yeah*

Jason: *You need to have patience,*

Ann: *keep trying different ways*

Wei: *ok, thanks*

7.3. Implications for teachers

7.3.1. Mutual support

A brief summary of the transcript, and particularly of the puzzle and the advice given, can perhaps show more clearly how these students engaged in group talk, and how they benefited from it. I therefore summarise below how they helped each other in tabular form:.

Figure 7.1: student group talk feedback summarised.

Ann's Puzzle: re-find passion in English

Feedback from group members
-read what you are interested
-when the vacation came, you would have passion again
-set your own goal, if not, don't force yourself
-read comic books

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-take a test

Daisy's Puzzle: conversation, can't find the words

Feedback from group members
-it takes time
-it takes experience
- (Daisy) talk to roommate
- use English, not translate from Chinese
- speak naturally

Jason's Puzzle: I can't translate what I want to say

Feedback from group members
-online resources, e.g. Thesaurus
Jason: writing is easier than speaking
-speak English without translating from Chinese

Zoe's Puzzle: journal writing

Feedback from group members
-write down today's group talk
-write about the movie we watched today

Wei's Puzzle: How to find my way to learn English

Feedback from group members
-need to ask yourself

-need to have patience
-keep trying different ways

Students chose their own partners for group talk. This was a whole-English class, so group talk was always conducted in English. Zoe and Daisy were very shy girls but they were actively participating in this session of group talk. The students in this group recorded their group talk in class and made the transcript. Then they uploaded their audio files and the transcripts to the course website.

7.3.2. Discussion

The reason why I use students' transcript is to demonstrate what students themselves are capable of. It was not easy for students to record their group talk. They felt really uneasy when there was a mp3 recorder. The example I showed here was recorded in week 14, three quarters of the way through the course, so by this stage students were used to doing group talk in class. They knew how to help each other speak up about their puzzle questions, and how to comment and advice appropriately. In this nine-minute group talk, they demonstrate their thinking, mutual support, ideas sharing, and language practice. Most students in Taiwan are like many of the students in this course worry, in that they feel very nervous about speaking English. However, in this example of group talk, students were giving feedback and expressing their ideas about learning English in simple but clear English.

Weekly group talk gave students regular opportunities for in-class reflection. It gave students the freedom to choose their puzzle, recall their learning stories, set their learning

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goals, carry out self-evaluation and to discuss all of these with their group-mates. They tried to use English to work out the meanings of their learning experiences or learning stories together with each other. The EP worksheet mentioned above (chapter 5) was used as a structure to help students focus on issues relevant to English learning. They usually took turns finding out what was puzzling them, each week beginning with a different student. Then, they reacted to their friends' puzzles. Very often, they gave suggestions or asked questions if they did not understand what their friends were worried about.

7.4. Group talk 2

This was recorded by a group of four undergraduate students from the theatre department. They are Sally (a second year student), Hanna (a fourth year student), Peter (a second year student) and Jim (a fourth year student). Sally majored in script play writing, the other students majored in acting. Their in-class recording was fifteen-minute long.

Sally: *What's your puzzle?*

Peter: *I'm not thinking my puzzle yet.*

Sally: *Last week I'm reading P.S. I love you and I think last week I read the book, the read is more fast, but I think when I reading a book, I can't understand the meaning the first time I read, I have to read it*

Peter: *read it twice*

Sally: *I look the chapter twice and I can't understand the meaning. So, that's my puzzle. Would you like give me some suggestion.*

Jim: *I have seen this movie before. P. S. I love you.*

Sally: *oh, in English?*

Jim: ya

Sally: *so, how about the book*

Jim: *I don't know that book.. what that book but I... I have seen the movie. I think the movie--*

Sally: *you have to suggest me the puzzle (Sally laughed) and we can chat the... the story later*

Sally started the group talk by asking about the students' puzzle question. She volunteered to talk about her puzzle about reading an English novel. Her puzzle was that she had to read some of the chapters twice. Jim told Sally that he had seen the movie but not read the book and he wanted to talk about the movie. Sally wanted the group talk to focus on an exploratory talk, so she asked Jim to give her suggestions about her puzzle first. She told Jim to "chat" later.

Jim: What's your puzzle? (Group laughed)

Sally: *I have to read one chapter twice and I could understand the meaning, so how can I improve the problem?*

Jim: *I think maybe you can, um.... you repeat because you don't know that word or if you read too fast?*

Sally: *Oh!*

Jim: *ya*

Sally: *you mean I have to read slowly*

Jim: *ya*

Jim helped to think whether it was because Sally had problems with unknown words or if she read too fast.

Sally: *OK, how about you?*

Hanna: *I think in the beginning you read it twice but after that you need to read all the things twice? Or just in the beginning?*

Sally: *maybe some chapters I don't have to read that twice but some chapters I have found more difficult vocabulary, I have to read that twice or just one page*

Hanna: *sometimes when I reading a book, I will guess*

Sally: *oh...*

Hanna: *guess the thing so I'll read really pass away pass away, when I get a stop, I will review the book, so I think it will same way, just stop reading, just read it again*

Sally: *oh,*

Hanna: *read it over*

Sally: *I think, maybe it's my reading habit I don't want, I don't like, I will stuck at one thought and I want to know that very clearly and I'll go uneasy.*

Sally was active about seeking feedback from her friends. Hanna tried to help Sally

find out how her puzzle arose, by asking her to explain when she needed to read things twice. Did it only happen at the beginning of a book? Asking for more detail and explanation is a common way of clarification in EP group talk. Then, Hanna shared her reading experience: she would often try to guess the meanings of unknown words, and skip the parts of the book that she still did not understand. Hanna shared her reading own strategy with Sally, which was to read through a book and ignore the parts she could not understand. Sally eventually explained her own puzzle by reasoning that her need to reread parts of a book was caused by the fact that she could not tolerate any confusion in her mind when she was reading. She reasoned that was her reading habit, because she did not like the feeling of being "stuck".

Next Peter made his own suggestions:

Peter: *when we are in exam, the teacher will always tell us a reading test, you can get the chapter first sentence or last sentence*

Sally: *oh*

Peter: *it will reveal the meaning of this, um, um this chapter, so, I don't know it, if it work in reading novel*

Sally: *you don't mean "article"*

Peter: *oh, article*

Hanna: *You didn't tell him in the beginning* (Group laughed)

Hanna: *you tell him until he is finished* (Group laughed)

Peter: *no, no, no, I, I, m, I just want to help you to* (Girls laughed) *to got the chapter the most important part because when you when you*

Sally: "*god*"?

Peter: *got, "g", "o", "t"*

Sally: *oh*

Peter: *because when you didn't understand the chapter clearly, so you just keep it quiet and get the most important key words or something, so I think it will be more helpful to reading novel*.

Sally: *Thanks*.

Peter: *You are welcome*.

Peter shared a different reading strategy, one that was taught as a technique for taking reading tests. He suggested Sally should focus first on the beginning and the end of the text to help her understand the story. He had a strong accent when he said certain words, so he caused a bit of confusion in the group when he spoke. Furthermore, he tried to persuade Sally to look for key words in reading a novel, not realising that the strategy might not be useful for reading a novel, as opposed to doing a reading test.

Sally: *next one* (sounded cheerfully)

Sally: *What's your puzzle*?

Jim: *my puzzle is.... let me think... um...um...*

Sally: *OK, what did you do last week in English learning?*

Jim: *I just see some movies*.

Sally: *When you watch English movies, did you find thought or something*?

Jim: *um...* (Group laughed)

Sally: *What movies you watched?*

Jim: *about X'man, but it is a action movie*

Sally: *Do you Chinese subtitles or English?*

Jim: *um... Chinese, ya*

Hana: *So, what the movie talking about*?

Jim: *It's about a man call Rogan. He is a man who has bad trouble. He want to...want to* 報仇. (revenge in Chinese)

Hanna: *revenge, take a revenge*

Jim: *take a revenge, ya*

Hanna: *to kill somebody*

Jim went silent for around 30 seconds.

Sally: *so, maybe you think and talk later*

Jim was not ready for the group talk, so he could not say much. Sally and Hanna were trying to encourage him to speak up, so they asked him to talk about the movie and

asked him if he used that movie for learning English. But their questions did not help Jim to say more. Sally directly told Jim to think first and talk later.

Hanna: *OK, my puzzle is I am reading a novel and sometimes I'll think the writer write the thing difficult to understand, it's not because of the grammar or the vocabulary, it's their think, their thinking, sometimes, I will think in the beginning the story is very easy and it's very peace or realistic (寫實) and in the middle it will begin to fantasy, and you will think, am I reading another book or something (Laughed) In the beginning, it's like a real world. But in the middle, it's like a fantasy world. It's like a fairy tale. And I have finished that book, so it's problem, it's different language, maybe when we read Chinese novel we will translate very fast. In the beginning, ordinary thing, so...*

Sally: *What's the book?*

Hanna: *The Joy Luck Club*, 喜福會(Chinese title)

Sally: *the writer is American or*?

Hanna: 華裔 (overseas Chinese)

Sally: *OK*

Hanna: *In the beginning it talks about the mother and daughter. They just run away from their own country to America. Her daughter has different thought but she is from China. Her daughter is born in American. They have different type of thought and sometimes they were argue something. And in the middle, I just realise something in the story about the moon lady, it's 嫦娥, writing about childhood*

about her grand-mum, her mother

Jim: 嫦娥's grand-mum? (Group laughed)

Hanna: *no, no, no, moon festival, her grand-mum told her* 嫦娥 *story, and the story is very strange a ball in the water, suddenly, she jumped in a river, and no one helped her, her grandmother is upset because* 她弄髒她衣服 *(she made her clothes dirty), she asked her to* 罰站 *(stand up as a punishment), stand on a* ball/stoll? *She just fall into the river. And she's crying louder and want her grandmother to help her but no one want to* (Group laughed) *I don't know they are mean or they are just didn't hear her voice. And finally, he just pick up by another boy. I think it's strange like a dream cause no body found her, it's not like a real world.*

Sally: *maybe when you read the end, you will*

Peter: *find out the meaning*

Sally: *or just like a style, American like, OK*

Hanna shared the story she read with the group. Her puzzle was she felt too surprised by the strange events and changes in the plot in a novel called "The Joy Luck Club" written by an overseas Chinese writer. She told the story in fairly fluent English, but she could not believe how a story could be so "strange". When she talked about the story, the students all listened to her very attentively. Sally thought a "strange" story like that was designed for Americans tastes, and was less appealing to Chinese readers. Sally and Peter both though Hanna would feel less confused when she got to the end of the story.

Next Peter explained his puzzle:

Peter: *my turn, puzzle? um, when talking to foreigners, um, because of China now, it's a bit empire, or something, so many foreigners will like to learn Chinese and talk to you in Chinese, so, however, he thought her Chinese is not good. Well, so when talking to them, I don't know which language I can use because when I talk in Chinese, they don't understand clearly. However, when I use in English, it's kind of weird, they want to learn Chinese, it's really strange. So, that's my puzzle.*

Sally: *What do you think?*

Jim: *maybe you can use simple Chinese or simple English to make them understand*

In these exchanges, the students seemed to know that everyone should participate. They often used cues such as "your turn" or "my turn" to help the conversation keep flowing. Peter's puzzle was about talking to foreigners who wanted to learn Chinese. He did not know what to do when talking to such people. Jim was asked by Sally to give feedback. This time he gave Peter some advice.

Sally: *So, your puzzle?*

Jim: *Last week, I saw a movie that is called Angel and Devil, ya, that is a special movie. It's about Italy history and in this movie even you have a good English you can't understand the word very well because it's talk Italy history.*

Sally: *oh,*

Jim: *So, that's my puzzle about watching movie*

Hanna: *maybe you can search on the internet about the history part*

Peter: *or maybe you watch another movie to practice English*.

Everyone: *OK, thank you, goodbye*.

Jim was interested in movies, so that was all he wanted to talk about. He found it was hard to understand the English in Angels and Demons. Interestingly, he thought it was not because the film was in English. Instead, he thought it was to do with the background knowledge about Italian history, which was necessary to understand the film, but he lacked. Hanna suggested that Jim could use Google to search for key words to help him understand the movie. Yet Peter thought Jim should just choose a different movie for learning English.

7.4.2. An overview of group talk 2

Sally was very helpful in keeping the conversation going in the group talk. Sometimes she appeared to be a bit pushy with Peter and Jim, but she did make sure everyone contributed to the talk. When Jim remained quiet for a long time, she asked him questions to encourage him to talk. But she did not like waiting for too long. The longest silence in this fifteen-minute group talk lasted under 30 seconds. Sally always used questions to stimulate other students to think and talk. When she talked about her puzzle, she mentioned that she noticed her progress in reading speed. One week after they did this recording, Sally finished reading the book. She wrote in her journal, "when I finished the book "P.S. I Love You", the 470 page book, I felt so proud of myself. It took me 3 weeks".

Hanna was fascinated by the story she had read/ or /was reading, a "strange" story she called it. Once she started talking about the story, she could not stop. She actually talked for over four minutes. Usually, when students are asked to do a one-minute talk

individually, they find it challenging. Hanna focused on sharing her surprise from reading an English novel with her friends, and found that she had so much to say.

Peter did not prepare for a puzzle question before the group talk, but he listened and gave feedback to other students when they needed. He was teased by Sally and Hanna twice, but he did not seem to be upset. He had an interesting habit when he listened. He sometimes knew what other students wanted to say, so he finished their sentences for them.

I summarise below how the second group of students helped each other in tabular form:

Figure 7.6 Puzzles and advice from peers

Sally's puzzle: Why do I read some chapters twice?

Feedback from group members
Jim: clarification-- unknown words or speed to fast
Hanna: guess the meanings, stop and think
Peter: read the first and the last paragraph of the text

Hanna's puzzle: Why can't I understand the novel story?

Feedback from group members
Sally and Peter: get to the end of the book to find out the meanings of the strange story

Peter's puzzle: How can I talk to foreigners who don't understand much Chinese?

Feedback from group member
Jim: use simple English to help them learn Chinese

Jim's puzzle: The English in Angel and Demons is difficult to understand

Feedback from group members
Hanna: use google to search key words
Peter: choose a different movie for learning English

7.5. An overview of Group Talk 1 & 2

Students in the first group talk were more reserved than the second group. They talked less and talked quieter. The students in the second group talked noticeably more clearly and loudly. But in terms of feedback they gave to each other, everyone seemed to be happy to contribute their ideas to the group. When students heard a "puzzle" question, they all tried to understand what exactly their friends puzzled about first. They used simple questions to help each other to clarify their puzzle questions.

The students in the first group all seemed to be prepared for the reflective discussion, even though they could not talk long. Peter and Jim in the second group only began to think about their puzzle after the group talk started. They might have missed the chance of thinking beforehand, but in class they still had a chance of practicing using English to express their thinking, something simple but real.

Zoe was shy but she was ready to talk. Jim was not prepared and he could hardly

say a word at the beginning of the group talk. However, he gradually lost his inhibitions, and one minute before the second group talk ended, Jim felt happy to give useful feedback with some fluency, and talked about his puzzle.

7.6. Implications for the teacher:

Jim (in group talk 2) and Wei (in chapter 4) represent some choices made by learners. Jim became fluent in speaking when he talked about movies. Wei regained her interest in writing after she read a romantic novel. Students with a low level of English probably do not talk much but they can talk enough to make themselves understood and share their ideas with others.

Even if teachers cannot provide all of the learning opportunities for students to learn or guarantee that learning takes place, at least they can provide a chance for learners to think about, talk about or write about what is really going on in their learning lives. Perhaps some students cannot say very much to explain their thinking, but simple words can still have rich meaning, at least to the students and the teacher in the classroom context. Students often associate speaking with fear, making mistakes and lack of confidence. With the regular opportunities for reflection, students set their own goals, use their strategies, monitor their progress and feel good about themselves. Learning and reflection can be part of classroom life.

7.7. How the findings relate to my research questions

Research question 4: How did students show evidence of their ongoing development?

In group talk 2, Sally mentioned that she was reading "P.S. I Love You". She felt

proud of herself when she finished the book within 3 weeks. Hanna talked about "The Joy Luck Club" when she shared her strategies for guessing meanings and pausing for understanding a story in English while reading. Peter felt really enthusiastic about telling his classmates about the English films he had watched. The findings confirm again that students willingly discuss their personal learning development in group talk. It became normal for them to describe what they do to practise English in their daily lives when they did exploratory talk with other group members.

Research question 5: Are low level learners in Taiwan capable of reflecting on their language learning in English?

In group talk 1, though Zoe did not say very much, she made it well understood that she was puzzled by how to set about journal writing for the course. She did not know how to start and what to write in her journal. She also gave feedback to other group members. Even though Zoe's English was lower than the average for the students on the course, she used short sentences to share her thinking about her learning as well as to give helpful suggestions to other students. The results repeatedly show how low level learners can talk about their learning even with limited vocabulary. They listen, respond to different puzzles with feedback and voice their individual learning. The process of reflection is not just the prerogative of high level learners.

Chapter 8: Implications and Discussion

The findings from the data (in this research) can be discussed in two parts: *Increasing self-awareness* and *What can teachers and learners do to promote learning?* These themes are presented in turn below, followed by a discussion.

8.1. Self-awareness

8.1.1. Increasing self-awareness in self-evaluation

Through doing EP, students are encouraged to look into their learning, so they frequently think about it. This is why students usually comment that once they use EP for reflection and learning, the idea of EP stays in their mind. With the help of structured reflection, for example through EP, experiences are constantly used for understanding. In this case, learners are encouraged to be consciously aware of the learning process. They are aware of their performance, particularly in real-life situations. Therefore, they notice their reactions towards how they use English for their own individual purposes.

Self-evaluation results in awareness. Learners have a better chance not to reinforce bad learning habits. On one hand, when they know they have difficulties or are unsatisfied with what they have done, they have a clearer picture of their performance, their emotions, and reactions. On the other hand, when their performance goes well, they also are attentive. Even though learners are not always able to avoid making the same mistakes again, they still have more chance to avoid aggravating their difficulties if they are more aware of their learning process. Along with an increasing awareness of negative performance, learners

need to be encouraged to welcome constructive criticism. In EP, learners get to observe the state of their minds and the changes in their minds. Reactions to learning experiences can be observed by the learners themselves. How learners accept their reactions can affect their future decision-making accordingly. If they actually treat their performance fairly, they make allowance for better quality of learning in terms of being more confident, happier, or being reasonably critical without applying unnecessarily destructive criticism to their learning.

8.1.2. Increased self-awareness in teaching

Different learners react to what they are taught differently. Even when learners accept a teacher's point of view, it is perceived in their own way and it is hard for them to see that point of view exactly as the teacher would. Learners may have their own ways of interpreting and evaluating the meanings of their learning experiences and they may not match their teachers' expectations. Once learners have been given opportunities for investigating their process of learning, as an EP practitioner teacher, I need to be aware of the freedom my students have. For example, when students talk about increasing their level of vocabulary, they usually talk about memorising vocabulary word by word from a book- usually one called "vocabulary 4000 words" that is organised in alphabetical order. My reaction to this choice is no longer one of shock only because this has been brought to class too often. In fact, many senior high school English teachers ask their students to memorise words in this way, which goes against some widely accepted principles of learning, as well as my beliefs in teaching. Instead of challenging my students' beliefs, which arise from their previous learning experience, I use activities to let students try out different ways of

learning vocabulary in class, discuss what research findings show and psychologists say about learning and learning vocabulary. Then I leave the choice to them. If students decide to cram a vocabulary book like the way they used to do, there is no point in trying to stop them. When Cranton (2000) discusses individual differences and transformative learning, she suggests increasing an educator's self-awareness in order to help him/ her to recognise how different learners create their learning experiences so that they can meet their needs.

> The adult educator who has a good understanding of herself can become an authentic teacher, working with her strength rather than trying to be what she is not, while respecting and valuing that her learners are different from her. (Cranton, 2000: 201)

As an English teacher, what matters most is providing opportunities for everyone to use their preferred approach to explore their way of learning and achieve their own goals. In order to meet learners' needs, as Williams and Burden (1997) suggest, learners should be asked about their own perceptions and discuss these with teachers. This can raise a teacher's awareness to create the most conducive environment for his or her learners.

8.2. What can teachers and learners do to promote learning?

I am proposing in the thesis some suggestions for promoting learning. The points I am making here bring together some of the key issues that have been discussed in the chapter of theoretical framework of the thesis.

8.2.1. Purpose of learning

It appears obvious that learners should know why they want to learn English, but as a matter of fact they are not really clear when they are first asked to think about it. Nevertheless, they are able to decide their individual purpose when they think deeper. Being aware of their purposes in learning can motivate learners to make progress along the track that they themselves have decided. This echoes Dewey's view of education – that educating learners to know things is far less important than encouraging them to want to learn more.

8.2.2. Inclusivity

Working together for understanding is an inclusive way of teaching and learning since it allows the teacher to gain insights into the students' thoughts and facilitates a better understanding of students and the teaching. Through combining research with experience, Cross (1999) explains how teachers can know about students' learning:

> [teachers] show an interest in students, get to know them through informal as well as formal channels, engage in conversations with them, show interest in their intellectual development, then students respond with enthusiasm and engagement (Cross, 1999:264).

A teacher needs to be a part of individual's learning environment to "get inside" of students' learning. As Confucius said long ago in ancient China, "teaching and learning grow together": this means that the more teachers teach and learners learn together, the more they both realise that their "knowledge" of teaching and learning is "inadequate".

However, I would suggest further that teachers and learners need and want more teaching and learning because they want to discover something more meaningful in their lives. This is the reason why Allwright (2003) advocates "prioritising quality of life" as an essential part of EP.

The views expressed above can encourage teachers to integrate teaching and research. Meanwhile, learners can be considered to be practitioners of learning, who should have their own say about their own learning.

Working for understanding life in the language classroom will provide a good foundation for helping teachers and learners make their time together both pleasant and productive (Allwright, 2003:114).

8.2.3. Learning opportunities

In Dewey's principle of continuity, it is important for teachers to create learning opportunities for helping learners to connect their previous learning with present learning, and thus to enhance their future learning. What I want to argue in this thesis is that what counts most is probably not how much learners know in a course. Instead, from a broader and educational point of view, it is how learners experience making sense of their learning that matters. It is through learning opportunities, rather than through being taught specific content, that people learn. The creation of these opportunities depends on the learners and the teachers.

Learning opportunities are the means through which learners and teachers observe and practice their teaching or learning through involvement in reflection and decision-

making. Learners can be assisted to engage actively and adequately the reflecting and the learning they experience, so that they can begin to understand their learning experiences in real-life situations from an active practitioner's position, rather than as a mere recipient of teaching. Opportunities for learners to make decisions and interpret their process of learning are particularly powerful developmentally. Learners need practice in goal setting, selecting their own learning strategies, and evaluating their progress and growth that is meaningful to themselves.

8.2.4. Positive thinking

For language learners, positive thinking is extremely helpful to remind them of different areas of strength. I often hear students say they feel very frustrated because English was always the only subject they failed at senior high school, so they thought they must have "done something wrong". This is a typical judgement students make when they do poorly in written tests that mainly measures students' ability of doing tests. Even if learners are not ready for contributing their opinions in class or in a group, they can still be supportive to other learners by being good listeners, so as to encourage other students to talk. Perhaps positive thinking should apply to teachers as well. Only if teachers believe learners can take learning seriously, they then can give trust on learners. In fact, teachers should also take learning seriously. Cross (1999) suggests:

> If we (teachers) are to take learning seriously, we will need to know what to look for (through research), to observe ourselves in the act of lifelong learning (self-reflection), and to be much more sensitively aware of the learning of the students

that we see before us everyday. (Cross, 1999:268)

In an investigation of group work through EP, Slimani-Rolls stresses:

> We need teachers to consider the potential they and their learners have for contributing to the understanding of the lives they are leading together, and thus for helping those lives become even more satisfying and productive for all. (Slimani-Rolls, 2003:223).

8.3. Concerns for learners

This thesis investigates how students in an EP-based course made sense of their learning individually and collectively. The words they wrote in their learning journals were analysed as evidence of their thinking to show a) how students understood their learning; b) how they linked their current learning to their previous learning and to plan for future learning; c) the importance of seeking any small success in real-life situations; d) how they set about transforming experiences for better learning.

8.3.1. Learner expectations

Dealing with learners' expectations is a complex issue. Those who have a higher language learning ability or those who are more successful are likely to have high expectations of themselves. Therefore, paradoxically it is likely that they will not recognise success easily. Conversely, learners with lower level of English or those who have been less successful sometimes are more able to notice, and willing to welcome, any progress.

For some learners, it is hard for them to believe that they can learn English well, due

to their expectations of failure from previous learning. Failures or negative learning experiences are likely to be perceived as evidence of low ability. In order not to demonstrate their weaknesses, and especially to avoid making mistakes, some learners simply choose not to speak English in class.

8.3.2. Learner reticence

Asian students have the reputation for being reserved, shy or reluctant to speak English to each other in class. It is not always easy for students to talk about their learning when they are first given the opportunity to do so, whether their English level is high or low. For many students, expressing ideas of any kind is hard enough, not to mention sharing abstract thoughts in English. However, this thesis has provided examples to show that students gradually feel comfortable about making use of the learning environment created in the course, and also feel appreciative of having such an opportunity.

However, if teachers are really worried about the ability of students to use their L2 (e.g. English) for reflection, it may be possible for students to write their reflections in their mother language before class, and then talk about them in English in class. Or else they can discuss their thoughts in their L1, and later write them down in the L2. Alternatively, students can choose to fill in the worksheet where they begin their reflective thinking in their first language, if their English is considered too weak.

8.4. Concerns for teachers: Language accuracy & spoken proficiency

I have shared my experiences of offering an EP-based course with other teachers or

researchers at several conferences, and have been invited to talk about this course in various parts of Taiwan over the past five years. Interestingly, two questions or doubts have come up nearly every time. Some teachers doubt that their students would be able to use English in group talk in the way that my students do. Other teachers are concerned that I do not focus on correcting students' mistakes in their journals, but rather give them feedback about what they say in their journals. In other words, they feel I should focus more on the language than the content.

The first doubt is exemplified in a comment from a teacher who works at a top university in Taiwan, who said to me: "your students are artists, they like to show off, so they can do group talk in English." In fact the opposite is the case, as many arts students have been deterred from studying English because of the previous negative performance, or have become scared of using English as a language for the same reason as many other students in Taiwan- because they are perfectionists, and cannot accept failure (or what they are told is failure). Perfectionists do not perform well in oral proficiency (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002). They tend to worry too much about mistakes, so they expect themselves to make no mistakes. Unfortunately, such low expectations tend to lower learners' achievements in language learning (Prabhu, 1990). Sadly, if teachers do not offer learning opportunities to students, they will not be taken. And if teachers' expectations of students are low, students will tend to behave in the ways that they are expected to. My experience shows that, when given the opportunity, even low level learners who lack confidence in English can participate in, and benefit from, an EP-based class. Williams and Burden indicate "a suitable environment for language learning should be one that enhances the trust

needed to communicate and which enhances confidence and self-esteem" (Williams and Burden, 1997:202).

As for responding to what my students say in their journals rather than correcting their writing mistakes, I would say that this is essential if a teacher wishes to encourage students to engage in genuine reflection, rather than focusing on avoiding errors. During the course I usually encourage students to use their own words in their reflection, even though some of them have limited vocabulary or bad grammar like what they usually say. Twenty-nine out of thirty-two of the students in EP courses met the course requirement by writing up around one thousand to two thousand words within eighteen weeks. They felt so pleased with their achievement, and so did I. In fact I do make some corrections, principally related to vocabulary use, where meaning is unclear. I explain to students my reasons for doing this are to encourage them to trust their ability and to express their thinking with confidence. Furthermore, I share with students the findings of certain researchers, indicating that error correction has not been shown to lead to long term improvement (Truscott, 2007). It is clear that English is specifically used as a communicative tool for reflection in this EP-based course, not a subject for an exam preparation. I also encourage students to tell me if they have any particular preference for the kind of feedback comments they want, but I have not received any such requests so far.

8.5. One researcher's belief: Only mistakes make learners progress

Two years ago, When I applied for a government grant in Taiwan, one of the reviewers criticized my concern for promoting students' positive experience. This reviewer

said strongly and firmly that positive experiences only make people stay in the same place, so people can never make improvements this way. Is it really true? Why are some researchers so against even considering alternative ways of making progress? What if some mistakes are not easily repaired or cannot be repaired within a limited time, for example during the course time? Does this mean that nothing can be learned? In any case, focusing on positive experiences does not mean keeping learners at the same weak level, or amplifying their low ability and not letting them move on. In fact, focusing on different areas of strength has a better chance of building up learners' confidence. If learners are encouraged to link their strengths with learning English, they might be able to use these strengths to increase their interest and motivation for learning English. Positive experiences have been recognised and recommended in psychology for decades, yet it is unfortunate to see researchers who deny their value, or even reject the possibility that they can make a contribution to learning.

8.6. Research questions revisited – tentative answers

Finally, I will review the original research questions, to see to what extent this research and discussion has provided answers to them.

1. How students made sense of their learning.

Rethinking their learning experiences on their own and in group talk gave students chances of understanding and clarifying the confusion in their learning process. The meanings of their learning were interpreted through their realisation through reflection and clarifications with the help of other students or teacher.

Students usually recalled how they "felt" about their previous learning first. It was students' feelings that were described when thinking of their background learning experience. Then, they compared the way they learned before with the current learning to see the differences or similarities. Their decisions for further learning were made after they connected with the previous learning.

2. How students monitored their progress.

Once students gained learning opportunities through EP, their increased awareness helped them notice all kinds of "small-scale" progress. For example, better reading speed, saying more short sentences, understanding better what other people said in class, etc. Their monitoring took place in class and also in real-life situations. Students with a low level of English usually noticed their progress more easily than students with high level of English. The possible reason for explaining this reaction was the high expectations some "good students' held of their performance.

3. How students reacted to their understanding when it occurred.

Some students felt satisfied with the understanding they achieved, but some students wanted to take further action and to make changes. For example, Ann (in Chapter 5) understood her puzzle about not doing well in group talk. After she heard my encouragement to recall positive experience as well as negative experiences, she felt thrilled. Then, she realised that she lacked confidence and she knew she could remind herself of her previous achievement, and that this would help her to gain confidence. Her realisation made her feel confident about herself, so she said her worries did not exist any

more.

Jenny (in Chapter 6) reasoned about her puzzles in speaking and writing. She understood her worries about making mistakes lowered her speaking performance. She also understood her difficulty with grammar made her writing weak. However, for Jenny understanding was not satisfying enough for her. Therefore, she decided to take action for change. She used the EP worksheet to prepare for the next session of group talk, and practised by talking to herself and her pet before class. Later on, she noticed her preparation had worked. She felt better about her speaking.

4. How students showed evidence of their ongoing development.

Students whose level of English was low did show their ability of reflection in group talk and journals. In group talk, they appreciated the chances of practising for speaking, sharing ideas with others, and finding out how other students learned. In journals, their efforts in writing did not show less than other students whose level of English was higher. They showed their ongoing development in group talk and in journals.

- Ann: long history of pleasure reading

- Vivian: reading romantic novels

- Elaine: watching English animations

- John: reading a lot of academic research articles

- Zoe: inventing her own games for learning vocabulary

- Jay: reading English news story and comic

- Jenny: talking to other students about ways of learning

- Phoebe: reading friend's blog in English, watching BBC news on the internet

- Sally: reading P. S. I Love You

- Hanna: reading The Joy Luck Club

- Peter: teaching foreigners Chinese

- Jim: watching English movies

5. Are low level learners in Taiwan capable of reflecting on their language learning in English?

The students discussed in Chapter 6 showed their reflection in journal writing. They were aware that their English was lower than the average of the class, but with sufficient learning opportunities and support, they were willing to try to use limited English to describe their thinking and ideas. In fact, very often they had interesting things to say, and they were not afraid to speak about them to the whole class. Zoe's low level of English did not prevent her from being reflective. She and other students like her made use of learning opportunities for practice, especially in class. They usually were the people who were well-prepared for the group talk before class. Phoebe also increased her confidence about sharing ideas of learning with others, after she realised she could make people understand. She accepted that her best way of communication in English was to use short and simple sentences. The limitations of English ability did not stop students thinking. They actually appreciated the chance of using English to talk about something they can be in control of-

their own learning stories.

8.7. Learner development

"Learners can develop, do develop and will develop, whether or not language professional recognise the fact" (Allwright and Hanks, 2009:2). Williams and Burden's (1997) proposals for teachers also stress the importance of learner development among learners. The evidence presented in this thesis supports these assertions:

- Learners learn what is meaningful to them.

- Learners learn a way that is meaningful to them.

- Learners learn better if they feel in control of what they are learning

- Learning takes place in a social context through interaction with other people

  (Williams and Burden, 1997: 205-206)

When students receive the learning opportunities provided by teachers as proposed above, they learn even more. There is so much learning within students, especially outside class, that teachers are not aware of. Allowing students to have the freedom to decide their purpose, to evaluate their motivation and to select the means for monitoring their progress, it creates students' power of self-control. Then, the goals or outcomes students pursue become meaningful.

Cross (1999) suggests teachers should take learning seriously:

If we are to take learning seriously, we will need to know what to look for (through

research), to observe ourselves in the act of lifelong learning (self-reflection), and to be much more sensitively aware of the learning of the students that we see before us everyday (Cross, 1999:268).

This thesis particularly contributes to research in the field of learner development. What is new and original about the thesis is that it shows that learners actually do learner development well in the sense that they are capable of deciding their goals, monitoring their progress, personalising learning strategies, and making sense of their learning experiences. Learner development exists all along the path learners take in their journey of learning, even when teachers or researchers do not recognise it. With the help of exploratory practice, learners gain a variety of learning opportunities for understanding themselves individually and collectively. The way in which teacher and learners work together, as reported in this thesis, offers a realistic approach for combining teaching and researching. Integrating teaching with research can happen in a sustainable way using EP, because it does not demand huge amounts of extra work for either teachers or learners. Therefore, this thesis suggests that learner development is something that comes naturally to learners, that they do it anyway even if teachers do not ask them to, and that they can do it well. It therefore seems only sensible for teachers to contribute to and become a part of this development.

8.8. The originality of the findings highlights some important issues.

a) EP helps learners come up with their own learning strategies.

The following are just a few examples of the way in which EP helps learners come

up with their own learning strategies. Elaine decided to watch international news programmes in order to expand her vocabulary. Zoe played games that she designed herself for reviewing vocabulary. Jay began reading English comics so as to improve his English. We see in these examples how three learners chose different strategies that suited them for improving their English. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 provide more detail on the different choices learners made for their individual learning strategies.

b) Perceptions of the tasks differ among learners and teachers.

The teacher and different students have different perceptions of the same task. For example, when I showed the film Freedom Writers in class, my purpose was to show the value of reading and writing, as this is the theme of the film as I see it. However, Phoebe obviously interpreted the activity differently, considering watching a film to be simply a good way of learning English. Meanwhile John seemed to interpret the message of the film as being that writing was a good way of recording one's life. He made many other comments on the film and wrote a critical review in his journal, discussing the film in relation to various universal social issues. Here we can see that the teacher and two different students perceived the task in very different ways, and may even be said to have experienced different "activities" while completing the same basic task (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). This study provides support for the idea that learner idiosyncracy and learner perception of the task may be as relevant, or more relevant, to learning as the design or type of task, as argued by Slimani-Rolls (2005). The findings here therefore question the basic assumption of much of the research into tasks in language learning – that task types and task conditions will determine learning outcomes. It seems that learner perceptions and

experience of the task will be at least as important.

c) Learners play the role of "teacher" in developing or "progressing" group talk.

An example of this is the following: during a session of exploratory group talk, Sally was encouraging her group members to focus on exploring each other's puzzle questions when a fellow student began a digression about his own topic of special interest. Sally played the role of the teacher by bringing discussion back to the original point, and bringing this digression to an end.

d) Peer collaboration helps students to develop a positive approach to learning.

Examples of this can be seen in the occasions when peers collaborated in discussing each other's puzzles. Jay described a session of group talk in his journal, when his puzzle question was: "how do I learn more vocabulary?". His friends in the group suggested that he should increase his general interest in English rather than worrying about his level of vocabulary. Jay's friends knew him well enough to notice that Jay was actually not very keen on learning English. A more positive attitude seemed more important than finding vocabulary learning techniques, if he was to make progress. Another occasion was when Phoebe encouraged her friend who was going to Boston for a summer dance program, and told her not to worry so much. She reminded her friend of her area of strength, which was her ability to use body language well. This helped her friend to realise that she could afford to be more optimistic about the trip.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

9.1. Broadening the understanding of learning outcomes

It is common to see learners in a test-oriented environment like Taiwan judge their own and others' language learning performance mainly according to their test results. According to Horwitz (1986), some learners may inappropriately view all foreign or second language production as a test situation rather than as an opportunity for communication (Horwitz, 1986). This kind of biased evaluation can easily lead learners to accumulate unnecessary feelings of guilt, or to blame their failures on a lack of ability, which then creates frustration and an unwillingness to learn English voluntarily. Helping learners to reflect fairly and frequently on experiences from the past or the present allows more chance of encouraging learners to understand themselves and their learning better. As Dornyei (2003) suggests, teachers should increase learner satisfaction and encourage positive retrospective self-evaluation in order to motivate learners and make learning stimulating and enjoyable. With the integration of EP into a course, learners and teachers gain mutual respect and trust, as they follow the propositions EP holds about learning and teaching. "Trust breeds trust" (Allwright and Hanks, 2009: 256). How teachers are prepared to believe in learners and to create learning opportunities for learners can strongly influence teaching and learning. Working together with learners to unveil their process of learning does not only increase the chances of making learning better in a sense that is defined by learners, but also expands teachers' understanding towards making learning and teaching more pleasant and meaningful for all concerned.

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Once learners are given constant learning opportunities for language use or reflection, they accept their roles as decision-makers for goal setting, monitoring learning progress, connecting learning to real-life situations and becoming more motivated. When their own personalised purposes of learning English are discovered by learners, they start independently looking for ways of achieving their individual goals through exploring and understanding the process of learning, both individually and collectively. The classroom life of teaching and learning becomes meaningful and pleasant because of the mutual support and the trusting environment.

This thesis has investigated how students in an EP-based course made sense of their learning individually and collectively during the course. The words students wrote in their learning journals were analysed as evidence of their thinking to show a) how they made sense of their learning; b) how they monitored their progress c) how they reacted to their own understanding when it occurred; d) how they show evidence of their ongoing development. It is also my belief that e) the data provided here is evidence that low-level learners in Taiwan are capable of doing reflection on their language learning in English. The journals and group talk transcripts provide an indication that these learners linked their current learning to their previous learning and to plans for future learning. In this way they were prepared to transform their experiences to create the conditions for better learning in the future. I have also shown the importance to these learners of noticing and valuing any small success in real-life situations

Learners deserve opportunities for exercising their freedom for thinking, understanding and working together with other people. If teachers compel learners to

accept the choices of learning strategies passed down and tested by teachers, the underlying implications are opposed to any genuine notions of autonomy or learner independence. They also contradict the propositions of EP. Confidence and encouragement can come from teachers or other people, but they can probably be more effective if they come from learners themselves.

I have been offering an EP-based, similar to the one analysed here, since 2000. Before I started this PhD research in 2006, I had already seen students work out meanings for their learning English, and also witnessed how I myself as a teacher could learn from and enjoy participating in students' discovery of meanings through their reflection. EP provides a workable and realistic means through which a teacher can help students find their own purposes of learning, link their lives to their learning of English, and actually come to like it. There really was a way of working together with students to develop mutual understanding about teaching and learning. Now, through the journey of doing this PhD research, I have improved my pedagogy, because I have found out what works for me, while I also feel confident of being able to reproduce it. During my own exploration as a PhD student, I had to greatly expand my knowledge of academic research, to file students' journals, to look more closely at what each student said, to connect what they said in each journal to let their thinking come out of their words, to investigate if possible how they arrived at their realisation individually and collectively, to think back about my classroom teaching and my interaction with the students, to reflect more on my previous and present teaching, and to write a thesis so that I could share this research with other researchers. As Breen (2006) put it, as a PhD student I am serving an insider as a resource within the

exploratory work. My role as a teacher "is positioned as students of those understandings revealed such work – as participating in the understanding of what teachers and their learners discover."

I treat students in accord with the propositions of EP about learners: All learners are in principle capable of taking learning seriously, of taking independent decisions and of developing as practitioners of learning.

I consider the conclusion of this research of students' investigations into learning as only the start of my investigations. I propose to use the findings of this thesis as a starting point for further investigation and discussion in three domains: a) How much does enjoyable learning and teaching mean/matter to teachers and learners? b) What might be teachers' worries if they adopt inclusive models of research? c) Why do some teachers and learners give up hope of a pleasant classroom life?

9.2. Contribution to the research literature

The findings in this thesis contribute to the research literature in two ways. First, learners were included in the research process, as well as in the results, and the journals and discussions from the learners involved in this research provide evidence that learners were active participants. In traditional research or action research, learners are neither allowed to know the true nature of research, nor included as practitioners, as it is thought that this may distort the results. Studies of learner diaries (Cohen and Hosenfeld. 1981; Bailey, 1983) illuminate insights for learners, but learners are treated primarily as sources of data, and only later, perhaps, as consumers of the results. Secondly, research about learners' diaries or

journals has not previously considered the possibility of allowing learners themselves to learn from their own, and each others', words. Though Matusmoto (1996) helped learners reflect on classroom learning, their words were read by the researcher alone, without offering the chance for learners to learn from each other. Learners in the EP-based course which provided the basis for this research were invited to read each other's journals and to give comments, so they could know what puzzled other learners, find out how they made sense of their learning, and give supportive feedback. In this way the learners were true participants in, and beneficiaries of, the research.

9.3. Implications of the study for future research and/or teaching

This study has shown that there is so much that learners are capable of doing with the support of other learners and the teacher. It is important for further research to discover more about how learners manage their learning in terms of deciding what they want to achieve, how they reach their targets, and why. Learners have better chances of learning well if they are given opportunities for clarifying things that happen or have happened in their process of learning, whether these are in the past or in the present. Experiences are continuous, so the understanding from the previous or current experience can influentially shed light on future learning. Learners' experiences deserve to be voiced, understood and shared, so it is a teacher's duty to take teaching and learning seriously and to provide sufficient learning opportunities, rather than only focusing on their own teaching As for researchers, it seems preferable for them to work together with learners and teachers, instead of keeping the results to themselves and other classroom "outsiders". Everyone should benefit from discovering the reality of classroom life, but especially those most

directly involved in it.

9.4. Limitations of the research

Since this thesis is based on an elective EP-based course, the nature of the course perhaps makes the study different from studies taking place in a more traditional setting such as a compulsory course, where there would typically be lower levels of motivation. The Arts University where the course took place is also perhaps atypical in various ways of university settings in Taiwan and elsewhere. It would therefore be useful to have similar studies based on compulsory university courses, and also one taking place in different kinds of university.

A further issue is that the journals that were uploaded to the course website used for the study were only from those learners who were willing to publish them openly. This might well have produced a degree of bias in the results because it meant that the contributors and the data were to some extent self-selected. Those who did not contribute journals or group talk may have had a different story to tell. However, if all participants in the EP course had been forced to produce journals and to record group talk, this would have changed the nature of the course, and would probably have distorted the data even more. The risk of bias was therefore a necessary one.

However, the possibility of bias does not undermine the findings of this research, partly because of the variety of level and attitude shown in the available student data, and partly because of the nature of this research. In all, thirty-five students registered in this course, but one post-graduate student was forced to leave the university. The data used in

this thesis comes from 22 students. The remaining students' journals were not used for two main reasons. Firstly, some of the students did not want their journals to be read by other people. Secondly, some students were late for online submissions. There is some evidence, that as things turned out, the sample data was not actually biased. For instance, a range of language abilities and views were reflected in the online journals and recordings. My own personal and informal observation is also that those who posted journals or discussions were no more or less enthusiastic about EP than their classmates who did not post anything.

In any case, this is not a quantitative study, and there is no attempt to prove that EP will always work with all types of learners. The point is rather to show how it worked in this particular case for one particular group of learners.

9.5. The reasons why I used EP and how practitioners benefit from EP

Voices from learners are certainly essential listening, if teachers and researchers want to take teaching and learning seriously. Opportunities for learners to work on understanding themselves together with other learners and teachers are as valuable as language learning and teaching. EP seems to resonate with certain philosophical principles in Buddhism related to the meaning of life, including the search for self-realization and happiness. It allows practitioners to clarify and interpret their individual life and learning stories in a social context. Understanding does not always have to come through problem-solving. Instead, pausing for reflection may be more likely to lead to deeper understanding. EP respects teachers' and learners' own decisions taken while they attempt to understand their teaching and learning. It is self-initiated and of equal benefit to all those who

participate in it. It is not just a teacher or a researcher's personal project. Once practitioners experience EP, the realization achieved can enrich their quality of life and enhance the meaningfulness of their teaching and learning. Such realization might eventually appear in the form of a few simple words, yet it is often achieved through a complex process of discovery.

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Appendix 1

EP worksheet for students.

First idea：

A puzzle：

Exploring what the puzzle really is：

A narrative：

Refining the puzzle：

My puzzle：

Ideas for exploring the puzzle with the minimum of disruption and a maximum of understanding：

Ideas：

What I will do first to explore my puzzle：

Plan：

Appendix 2

Students's EP worksheet Puzzle in class, Date: 03.17.2009

First idea：

A puzzle：
How do I improve my writing?

First idea：

A puzzle：
I am afraid to talk in English. I felt my English is very poor.

First idea：

A puzzle：
I can't remember many vocabulary.

First idea：

A puzzle：
My puzzle questions was ground off in my period of master and Ph.D. I have to write a lot of thesis and prof. force me to present in English.

First idea：

A puzzle：

I can't talk with my professor very well. Because he come from UK. A lot of times that I can't understand what he say.

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why can't I control my time?

First idea：

A puzzle：

My communication is very slowly when I talk with someone.

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why I can't use more vocabulary

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why I can't express what I want to say?

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why I can't control my time in English studying.

First idea：

A puzzle：

I always worry about my using word, so that let me hesitate when I chat with others.

First idea：

A puzzle：

How can I understand a professional book well?

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why can't I feel relax when I talking in English?

First idea：

A puzzle：

Why can't I feel confident when talking in English?

First idea：

A puzzle：

How to set or find my puzzle?

First idea：

A puzzle：

How can I speak English well?

First idea：

> A puzzle：
>
> How to chose good English programs?
>
> What is the best way to make English better?

First idea：*i want to use my time well*

> A puzzle：
>
> I get too many thing at one time.
>
> It's too heavy that I couldn't handle that how.

First idea：*I can't get up very early every day*

> A puzzle：
>
> I always sleep very late every night because I can't sleep very well at the night. I wasted too much time to think too many things that I wanna do.

First idea：*I want to control my emotions when I speak in English.*

> A puzzle：
>
> I want to control my emotions when I speak in English. I usually feel nerrous when I start conversation. My emotions would affect my ability of speaking. I would not speak correctly even though the sentences are simple.

First idea：*I want to write down my words!!!*

> A puzzle：
>
> When I mail to my teacher, I usually forget the words I learned before, and I need search the dictionary, it really takes much more time. How to remember well?

First idea：*Why I'm nervous when I facing the stranger who speak English to me?*

A puzzle：

Maybe because they're stranger and have different kind face, so when they talking to me, I 'll close my ears. That's why I'm nervous. cause I can't hear anything, and I don't know what to say.

Appendix 3

Group Talk transcripts

Group Talk 1 transcripts
Transcript of group talk in class
The transcripts showed below:
- **words in *italics* were transcribed by the students**
- **words <u>underlined</u> were to the transcripts added by the teacher – they were present on the recording, but missed by the students transcribers.**

Ann: *Our topic is about how to re-find your passion in English.*
Zoe: *well…*
Ann: *I think it's difficult. hahaha*
Wei: *maybe you can read the book you're interested in.*
Ann: *oh*
Daisy: *waiting for long vacation so <u>(and)</u>you have a lot of time. You will have your passion again*
Jason:<u>(I think you can find your goal. Find what you want. If there is nothing what you want. Maybe you... maybe you...I advise you not to...not to...not to enforce yourself.)</u> *You can set your goal. If there is no, you can find. I advise you not to force yourself.*
Zoe: *how about, something interesting like comic books, <u>(interesting English, or something....) (Ann: Ah! Maybe.)</u>*
Wei:<u>(I think he said where you are going is good...)</u> (Ann:hmm.) *you can <u>(just)</u> find <u>(OK, you find)</u> a test so* (delete so) *if you want to pass the test (yes) (Ann: <u>OK</u> softly)you will (group laughed)* (the group went quieter for a few seconds)

(Wei: <u>how about you</u>) (the group sounded a bit lost for a few seconds) (Jason: *What's your puzzle?*) (the group laughed Ann: *I forgot your puzzle.* laughed)
Daisy: *my puzzle is about conversation, (Ann: <u>oh, conversation</u>)*
Daisy*: like <u>(this now)</u> right now. <u>(We are conversation now</u> but everybody but Sometimes <u>(we know vocabulary but we can't use immediately)</u>, I can't find the words to use <u>(What's your suggestion</u>?)*
Jason: *it takes time (the group laughed)*
Ann: *I think it <u>(this)</u> takes <u>(needs)</u> experience (*She sounded very friendly.*)*
Daisy: (Ya.) (<u>more practice</u>) (Ann: about...)
(Daisy<u>: but we have have so much we have to do</u>...)
(Ann: <u>maybe you talk to your friend</u>)
(Zoe: <u>maybe you can talk to your roommates</u>)
Daisy*: maybe I should talk to my roommates*
Wei: *I think <u>(we all speaking English)</u> we don't try to use English to talk, (we don't need to...) what I say <u>(you don't need to translate Chinese words you think Chinese words you</u>*

know how to say but if you translate to English I think it is difficult, so just use your..your English word and try to try to say what you want) not translate from Chinese
Ann: (Yes) *I think maybe speak naturally will be better. (I mean nature from your heart, because you know, I have taken another class, we always need to speak in English, always(laughed) I am nervous, but one time that the teacher asked me to answer a question in a very sudden, so so I don't know what I say, I say a lot of things and after but he said very good) the group all laughed (and I, what did I say?) Ann was laughing amusingly.*
Zoe: (I realise what you say when you talking we all know what you mean) *I agree with what Angela said*
Jason: *yeah*
Daisy: *thanks*

(Daisy: your turn)
Jason: (my turn?)
(I have no chance to talk in English, and I, I cannot translate my Chinese to English exactly, yap, sometimes we can find the Chinese words in many ways maybe Chinese 美麗 漂亮 艷麗 but English we just say beautiful, pretty like that, we cannot, I cannot translate in what I want to English)
Jason*: my puzzle is I can't translate Chinese into English exactly. I can't translate what I want to said*
Wei: (oh)
(Jason: yap)
Wei*: when you are writing or speaking?*
Jason: (yap)
(Wei: when you writing or speaking, when)
Jason*: both*
Wei: *I had that puzzle last week, and the teacher told(give) me a website. It's like dictionary. You can't find (its) meanings (both same meanings you can find a lot of vocabulary and it will teach you when to use it)*
(Jason: umm)
(Wei: ya, I think if you are writing you can use that website) and some other same meanings' sayings.
Ann: (I think there is a dictionary call *Thesaurus or something like that)*
(Jason: called what?)
(Ann: Thesaurus, I'm not sure how to spell it)
(Ann laughed.)
(Ann: That kind of dictionary is like you can find beautiful and you can find a lot of words about beautiful)
(Jason: haa, really)
(Ann: maybe you can use another dictionary to be sure that how to use that.)
Ann:You can use Thesaurus maybe. You can find maybe beautiful, and a lot of words about beautiful. Students only summarised the dialogue in the sentence above.
(Jason: OK! Thanks, I got it.)
(Ann: or I think in writing or in speaking you can also try to explain what you want in sentence not in words.)

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(Jason: I think writing is more easy to speaking, writing you can think more time but speaking... yap)
Jason: *thank you. I think it's easier to write than speak, because you have time.*

(Ann: *her puzzle*)
(Wei: writing her journal)
Zoe: *my puzzle is about journals*
Ann:(maybe I mean) *for example today, you can go back (home) (and write what you have said in this class and to make it a composition afterwards) and write down this conversation*
*Zoe: I don't... (*group laughed*)*
(Wei: I think today's movie, you can write something about.)
(Zoe: yes! I have some ideas about the movie.)
Wei:*movie, today's movie*

(Ann: your puzzle?)
Wei: *my puzzle is how to find my own way to learn English*
Daisy: *I think you need to (delete need to must) ask yourself, haha*
Ann: *keep trying different ways*
(Ann: *try many ways*)
Wei: *yeah*
Jason: *You need to (delete need to must) have patience,(*group laughed*)*
(Zoe: *use your sound to read the English*)
Ann:*I think you need to try* a lot of ways
(Wei*: ya)*
(Ann*: maybe reflect that in the past, when how you studied, is there anything useful*)
Wei: *ok, thanks*

Appendix 4

Introductory activity for EP, for use with new EP classes:

Exploratory Practice

Why did you feel bad about the last experience?

Why did you do so well?

Do you want to let that experience happen again?

Do you want to avoid more bad learning experiences?

How did you feel when you had success with learning the language?

How did you feel when you didn't do well with learning the language?

Please talk about your latest successful experience with learning a foreign language.

Please talk about your latest frustrating/bad experience with learning a foreign language?

Appendix 5

Some classroom activities used in the course and mentioned in the thesis.

1. Line Up Accordingly. Line-up Commands:

line up according to age
line up according to shoe size
line up according to size of family
line up according to distance of journey to school
line up according to length of hair
line up according to 100 m time
line up according to length of your name
line up according to time you get up
line up according to how far you were born from school

Target questions

- Are you older than ...?

- Do you have larger feet than... ?

- Is your family larger than ....?

- Is your journey to school longer than ...?

- Is your hair longer than...?

- Do you have a faster 100 m time than...?

- Is your name longer than ...?

- Do you get up earlier than ....?

- Were you born further from the school than...?

The Grammar Activity Book CUP 1999 p31

2. Problem Page/ Agony Aunt. Dear Ann letter

Dear Ann:

I'm a 26-year-old woman and feel like a fool asking you this question, but—should I marry the guy or not? Jerry is 30, but sometimes he acts like 14....

Jerry is a salesman and makes good money but has lost his wallet three times since I've known him and I've had to help him meet the payments on his car.

The thing that bothers me most, I think, is that I have the feeling he doesn't trust me. After every date he telephones. He says it's to "say an extra goodnight," but I'm sure he is checking to see if I had a late date with someone else.

One night I was in the shower and didn't hear the phone. He came over and sat on the porch all night. I found him asleep on the swing when I went to get the paper the next morning at 6:30 a.m. I had a hard time convincing him I had been in the house the whole time.

Now on the plus side: Jerry is very good-looking and appeals to me physically. Well - that does it. I have been sitting here with this pen in my hand for 15 minutes trying to think of something else good to say about him and nothing comes to mind.

Don't bother to answer this. You have helped more than you will ever know. —Eyes Opened.

Krashen, S. (1993). The Power of Reading. Englewood: Libraries mUnlimited. (Permission granted

by Ann Landers and Creators Syndicate.)

Appendix 6

How I deal with the data

Step 1: journals downloaded from the course website.

Step 2: students' words highlighted in non-cursive bold when they showed their reflection and thinking and noted down my interpretation.

Example

A-W1J1

In the beginning of the class, the teacher shared a story about dream with us. Then we had a short discussion on it. Some people thought the story inspiring and some thought it unbelievable. **To me, a dream is not a dream if it is only told. Fulfilling a dream does not take only determination but right methodology. And learning one language well takes great methods as well. First, we need to have confidence in ourselves.** *Therefore, the teacher asked us to share experiences in learning English with others. To my surprise, some of the classmates in this class are so active and good at sharing. Their attitude toward goals is really something I want to take as a model. I believe it will do me good.*

During the group talk, my partner told me one of her shadow on learning English in childhood. I am sorry for her sadness but glad to see her never give up. Also, I somehow feel blessed that I have had a smooth going in learning English.

After the class, I know we all have a lot of possibilities still. I will cherish the chance of joining this class working harder and happier in improving English ability.

Ann had the highest level of written English in the class, though she was only a first year student at the university. She proposed her guiding belief about learning a language, which was that it is essential above all to have confidence. It was surprising to many of the

students, including Ann, to find themselves in a class where many people were trying to share their thinking with each other in English.

Step3: students' words highlighted in non-cursive script and in curly brackets when they monitor their own progress.

Example

W-W8J6

{Today, I feel more and more comfortable when I speaking English. Because I get familiar with classmate bit by bit, we are not shy at all, so we can chat whatever we want, it make me relax and have fun, like today,} *after we talk about puzzle, we talk about the homework, not only in writing journal but also in each one's professional field, it make me think that we need to learn more professional word, so that, when we introducing others about our professional field, we can get the more clear ideas, for example: engraving, woodcut, scratchboard and so on......*

Step 4: students' words underlined when they showed their understanding of learning or reasoning about their goals, change of attitudes.

Example

A-W4J3

"Learn from not only your failure but your success." This is the statement that the teacher has continuously reminded us. Since I have been instilled deeply that failure is the mother of success. It's quite striking and a brand new to me. This new idea brought me to

reconsider my attitude towards my "puzzle". I am always asking and worrying about why I "cannot". But the fact is, I never stop think how I "can". Experiences talk. Successful experiences therefore tells you how you can do something. So, I tried to recall having been able to talk in English confidently. And I found that is the beginning of my English learning. Then the puzzle is not a puzzle anymore. Why? Because I know what's wrong with me.

Step 5: examples selected that showed understanding, reflective thinking.

Example

J-W3J2

> *Through the small group talk in this week, I thought with my puzzle. My puzzle is how do I feel more comfortable when I talk to others in English? It's really embarrassed me when I talk to others. I felt nervous and my hands always sweat. I wanted to solve this problem and I thought that if I can prepare what we going to talk about, maybe I will feel better. Therefore, I wrote down my puzzle and my stories I going to talk of and practiced speaking in front of the mirror or my pet. I hope it will be helpful.*

J-W6J4

> *After watching the video and listening test, we had a group talk again. We still talked about our puzzle. It was just the chance I can see if my preparation did work. Then, I thought it was effective. I felt better when I speaking English.*

Step 6: two groups selected: Group A, whose level of English is high, and Group B, whose level of English is low in comparison to other students on the course.

Group A: Ann, Wei, Elaine & John

Under-graduate students	Ann, Wei
Post-graduate students	Elaine, John

Group B: Zoe, Phoebe, Jay & Jenny

Under-graduate students	Zoe, Phoebe
Post-graduate students	Jay, Jenny

Step 7: case studies done of students' journals in the above two groups

Step 8: journal entries and group talk studied and analysed on the following three levels:

1. Separate interpretation of each entry or a contribution to group talk.

2. Whole process of each individual journal or group talk taken together.

3. Overview of each participant's reflection and of overall outcomes.

Example

J-W17J15

I read the newspaper today. There is a page teaches English in the newspaper. The page has many English news, English stories, English conversations and English comics. One of the English comic is very funny, it is a Garfield comics. One day

Garfield walked through a pet store, then he went into the pet store and talked to the shop assistant. He said " please get me a hamster meal".

Jay was clearly very shy, worried and embarrassed about his English. He read an English newspaper and described an English comic he liked. This was around the end of course. Jay had finally started reading something he liked in English, and seemed to have enjoyed it.

An overview of Jay's journal:

It is easy to tell from Jay's writing that his English was quite limited. However, he thought, reflected and discussed with other students with simple English in both the journal and the group talk, and he evidently enjoyed this learning process. He managed to use short sentences and simple English to report on what happened in class. He actually produced 1043 words in his English journal. For a non-English major student like Jay, this is quite an achievement. From Jay's description in the reflective group talk, he shifted his puzzle about increasing the size of his vocabulary to increasing his interest in English after he discussed with his group members. He found the suggestion was meaningful to him. Gradually, he thought about what his interest was during the course. He gave an example of what he did outside class to learn English in week 17. He enjoyed reading an English comic in an English newspaper.

With opportunities to do EP regularly, Jay had plenty of language practice, while at the same time thinking, receiving support from other students and showing his own initiative in learning English. It exemplifies some key EP propositions about learners,

particularly propositions 2 and 5.

Jay's process of exploration and learning development

Puzzle about vocabulary

(through EP group talk)

Meaningful suggestion from friends: increasing interest in English

Clarifying what was interesting to him

Independent learning: English comic in English newspaper

Proposition 2: Learners are social beings who learn and develop best in a mutually supportive environment.

Proposition 5: Learners are capable of developing as practitioners of learning.

It took Jay over ten weeks to become more interested in English, to find out what he liked exactly and to take the initiative in finding a suitable and enjoyable way for learning English. What matters to Jay or me was not what he changed. Instead, it was the experience process he went through that matters, as this would be more meaningful in the longer term. Because of this internal change, it could be hoped that Jay would continue to search for ideas for learning that would be suitable for him. I would refer here to Dewey's principle of education; what matters is not what students know. Instead it is how they experience learning and want to learn more (Dewey, 1963).

Overview of four students' journals

Zoe's English, especially her speaking ability, was not fluent enough for her to express much in class. However, Zoe always participated really well both by saying something about what she thought and giving her feedback to her group members. She did not feel upset about her ability, or at least she never mentioned it in her journal as other students did. She enjoyed finding out different ways of learning English and was prepared to continue to try out more ideas about using her art interest to help her practice English.

Jay began by worrying about his vocabulary earlier in the course, but he gradually moved to seek for greater interest in English, as his friends suggested. His interest in English developed over ten weeks. A quiet student like Jay set his own goals, adjusted his own pace and established his interest in learning English.

Jenny felt extremely nervous when she spoke English in a group, and she realised that the reason was that she felt bad about making mistakes. She did not find understanding this was enough for her, so she used the EP worksheet to prepare for the group talk beforehand. She was consciously aware of her performance all the time. Then, she monitored her speaking in group talk and felt happier about herself because of the preparation she had made in advance. She was interested in knowing how other students learned English and in comparing her own way of learning with those of others.

Phoebe was not confident about speaking English like the other three students mentioned above. The way she tried first to speak up was to make use of practice opportunities in class. Gradually, she realised her friends could understand her well, even if she used short sentences, so she felt better about herself. Outside class learning

opportunities were created by her even though her life was already busy through watching the BBC news website, and she mentioned she could read her friend's English blog to learn English.

Students like Zoe, Jay, Jenny, and Phoebe, all had low ability in speaking and in their general English. Their journals illustrate that they were going through a process that helped them approach English in a way that suited them. Williams and Burden (1997:112) present three stages of the motivation process along a continuum:

 "Reasons for doing something" → "Deciding to do something" → "Sustaining the effort, or persisting"

The first two stages involve initiating motivation, evidence for which can be found in these students' journals as discussed above. Within an eighteen-week course, it is too early to tell whether or not students would move on to the the third stage of the motivation process, which involves sustaining motivation. However, their reflection clearly shows the continuous process of developing understanding. Smith (1998) proposed that reflection is the antidote for confusion. "We shouldn't give up the moment we are confused---we should look ahead and see if something that comes later makes sense to us" (Smith, 1998:88).