The Use Of Dialogue Journals
With University EFL Students:
A Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract: This paper reports on a study about two teachers' use of dialogue journals with university EFL students in China and Hong Kong. A dialogue journal is a regular, ongoing written exchange between a teacher and a student. The dialogue journal communications are reciprocal and typically continue for a period of time (e.g., the length of a semester-long course).The article first examines three key concepts from sociocultural theory: the zone of proximal development, scaffolding, and affordances. The data from the students' dialogue journal entries and the two teachers' responses to those entries were analyzed using a sociocultural theory framework proposed by Walqui and van Lier (2010). The framework describes six features of pedagogical scaffolding: continuity and coherence, supportive environment, intersubjectivity, flow, contingency, and the handover/takeover principle, each of which is briefly explained. The two university courses from which the data were derived are described in some detail, and examples of the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses are provided. The research question we posed was this: Are the six features of pedagogical scaffolding present in the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses? That is, this research examined whether these six elements

were present in written exchanges between teachers and language learners, since previous research on pedagogical scaffolding had focused largely on spoken interactions. The data analysis revealed that continuity and coherence, supportive environment, intersubjectivity, flow and contingency are evident throughout the dialogue journal entries. Some evidence of the handover/takeover principle appeared as the students' independent ideas emerged over time.

Keywords:
Proximal development, scaffolding, coherence, intersubjectivity, contigency

INTRODUCTION

What is a dialogue journal? According to Peyton (1993), "A dialogue journal is a written conversation in which a student and teacher communicate regularly (daily, weekly, etc., depending on the educational setting)… The teacher is a participant in an ongoing, written conversation with the student, rather than an evaluator who corrects or comments on the student's writing" (What is a Dialogue Journal? section, para. 1). In dialogue journals, "language teaching and learning are organized so that communication is systematically dialogic" (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000, p. 99).

Dialogue journals are tools by which participants interact with each other in written form (Peyton, 2000). This ongoing communication can promote learners' language and literacy development and cultural understanding (Peyton, 2000). Through the process of writing back and forth, teachers are able to gauge their learners' current levels of English proficiency. Notebooks are often used to record the writing exchanges, but computers may be used too. In the language classroom, the purpose of dialogue journals is to establish regular communication between the teacher and students (Peyton, 2000).

Dialogue journals "can be employed at almost all proficiency levels and in almost all educational contexts" (Mirhosseini, 2009, p. 43). In fact, dialogue journals have

been used with language learners of various ages: elementary school children (Nassaji & Cumming, 2000), junior high school students (Connolly, 2007), high school students (Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005; Johnson, 1989), college students (Spack & Sadow, 1983; Weissburg, 1998), and adult learners (Dolly, 1990; Sanders, 2000). In this paper we will describe the use of dialogue journals with university students who were learning English as a foreign language (EFL).

SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND DIALOGUE JOURNALS

In this exploratory study we have taken a sociocultural approach to investigating dialogue journals. Before we describe the research design, we will briefly discuss three concepts from sociocultural theory that are particularly relevant to this study.

Zone Of Proximal Development

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development, as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In fact, Vygotsky asserted that "with collaboration, direction, or some kind of help, the child is always able to do more and solve more difficult tasks than he can independently" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 209), and that "social interaction actually produces new, elaborate, advanced psychological processes that are unavailable to the organisms working in isolation" (Vygotsky, 1986, p. 61). Although he was writing about how children develop cognitively when he proposed the construct of the ZPD, Vygotsky's work has been widely applied in discussions of language teaching and learning.

This concept emphasizes the idea that through participation in scaffolded interaction, teachers and learners

can jointly construct a zone of proximal development. By locating and entering the learners' ZPD in the dialogue journals, teachers can scaffold the learners' work with the materials and tasks used both in individual lessons and across units. Also related to understanding our learners' ZPD is the idea that language development "cannot occur if too much assistance is provided or if a task is too easy" (Ohta, 2000, p. 53).

Scaffolding

In sociocultural theory, the metaphor of scaffolding is used to represent the means by which learners' language development can be supported. Physical scaffolds provide a platform for workers to construct, paint, or repair a building, and as the work is finished the scaffold is removed. By definition, a scaffold is a temporary structure.

One way language teachers can help their students make progress is through scaffolding the language to which students are exposed. *Scaffolding* in language learning can be defined as "providing learners with relevant and increasingly more precise information in the environment at the right time to help to solve a particular problem" (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2005, p. 81). Scaffolding, thus, is an inter-psychological support structure that can arise from interaction with more capable others, equal peers, less capable peers, and even oneself (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). As language learners' skills develop, teachers can to decide what particular pedagogical scaffolding features may be removed in order to promote greater learner autonomy.

Affordances

Another key concept is the notion of an *affordance*: the "relationship between an organism and a particular feature of its environment" (van Lier, 2000, p. 252). While an affordance allows action, it neither triggers nor causes that

action: "What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it" (p. 252). By way of example, van Lier says that a leaf offers "different affordances to different organisms: crawling on for a tree frog, cutting for an ant, food for a caterpillar, shade for a spider, medicine for a shaman," and so on (p. 252). He adds, "In all cases the leaf is the same: its properties do not change; it is just that different properties are perceived and acted upon by different organisms" (p. 252).

In language acquisition, learners are not controlled by their environment, nor by the *input*, "language which a learner hears or receives from which he or she can learn" (Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985, p. 143). Rather, they explore the new language and take advantage of (some of) its affordances – a point we will return to below.

PEDAGOGICAL SCAFFOLDING

Walqui and van Lier (2010) have proposed a model in which six features of pedagogical scaffolding are arrayed from more planned activities – the setting up of temporary structures (such as tasks, routines, projects, or games that support effective functioning) – to less planned activities (contingent interaction that occurs within these pedagogical structures). The processes involved in the less-planned types of scaffolding occur in the moments when unexpected and innovative events happen in the learners' interaction or work. This continuum of more-planned to less-planned types of scaffolding will be exemplified below, after we briefly describe each of the six features of pedagogical scaffolding discussed by Walqui and van Lier (2010). Their model is reproduced here as Figure 1.

Figure 1
Features of Pedagogical Scaffolding
(adapted from Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 34)

More Planned	**Continuity & Coherence** Task repetition with variation; connecting tasks and activities; project-based or action-based learning
	Supportive Environment Environment of safety and trust; experiential links and bridges
	Intersubjectivity Mutual engagement; being "in tune" with each other
	Flow Student skills and learning challenges in balance; students fully engaged
	Contingency Task procedures and task progress dependent on actions of learners
Less Planned	**Emergence, or Handover/Takeover** Increasing importance of learner agency

The first feature of the Walqui and van Lier model (2010) is *Continuity and Coherence*. This phrase refers to "tasks and activities that occur again and again, but with variation and room for improvisation" (p. 35). Walqui and van Lier (2010) note that "having continuity and coherence in their curriculum and instruction provides second language learners with a steady platform from which to venture out in new linguistic directions" (p. 35).

The second feature of pedagogical scaffolding, a *Supportive Environment*, means that language learners "must feel safe and trusted and must know that any mistakes or failures will not be held against them" (p. 35). In such a context, students "can trust the teacher and their fellow learners to be supportive and tolerant of their attempts to try something new even if they might not be fully successful yet" (p. 35). Thus, creating a supportive environment provides a setting where learners can task risks with the new language.

Intersubjectivity, the third feature, is the idea that language learners "listen attentively to what others have to say…help others…and are comfortable asking for help without feeling embarrassed. They are willing to invest time and energy in understanding each other" (p. 36). This condition can arise in pair work, group work, or even whole-class interaction.

The fourth feature of the model, *Flow*, is a state of mind that occurs when learners "are working on tasks and projects that…have support structures and room for autonomy, when skills and challenges are in perfect balance" – when language learners "are engaged in the activity for the sake of the activity itself and are absorbed in their work" (p. 36). *Flow* is the full engagement and absorption of the interaction, which is intrinsically motivating (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It occurs when the challenges involved in a task are matched with the skill levels students need to complete that task (Egbert, 2005).

The feature called *Contingency* states that in pedagogical scaffolding, "task procedures and task progress depend on initiatives taken by learners….The language used is supported by what has been said so far, and it contributes to what is said next" (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 37). Just as regular conversations are contingent in nature (van Lier, 1989), interaction in language lessons can be organic too. That is, unlike the practice provided in inauthentic repetition drills, in contingent classroom discourse, interactional turns follow naturally from the previous turns.

Finally, the sixth feature, known as *Emergence* or *Handover/Takeover*, acknowledges that students "become increasingly autonomous. They find their own voice and take initiative in proposing, planning, constructing and reflecting on subject area tasks" (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 37). As the learners' skills and knowledge increase, teachers hand over – and learners take over – more responsibility for accomplishing tasks in the new language.

These six features of pedagogical scaffolding may occur singly or in combination. They are usually associated with oral interaction, but we wanted to know if these features of pedagogical scaffolding occur in the written interaction of dialogue journals as well.

OUR RESEARCH CONTEXTS

The data for this study were collected at two different universities in Asia: Guizhou University in Guiyang, China, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong. For the students in both contexts, we consider English to have been a foreign (rather than a second) language. Dave Chiesa and Kathi Bailey were the teachers in Guiyang and Hong Kong, respectively.

Dave's class in Guiyang was entitled "Raising Cultural Consciousness through Language." It was a required course for third-year Translation and Interpretation students. There were eighty-one students in three sections of the course with twenty-seven students in each class. The journal assignment for that course was described to the students in this way:

> The journal is designed to give you a place to personalize your learning, by exploring what interests you, by making connections between what you know and what you are learning, what you believe and what you are learning, and what you observe out in the real world and what you are learning. It is also a place to take risks, to take positions, to solidify knowledge, and to ask questions and get help when needed.

In their dialogue journals, Dave's students were encouraged to do the following:

> react to or describe class discussions, ask questions about readings/discussions, argue for/against something you read, react to or describe something you read related to a topic discussed, relate readings/discussions to your own experiences, describe new knowledge you have obtained, explore pedagogical implications of discussions (if you want to be an English teacher), fit new knowledge into what you already know, and/or ask questions about or get help for an assignment.

Dave also told his students, "A journal is a place to explore ideas, and reactions. While I do not expect you to comment on everything we discuss, I do expect the journal to be an ongoing

exploration: At least ONCE A WEEK – MINIMUM 3 FULL pages *per week* (12 point font, Times New Roman, Typed, DOUBLE SPACED).” Thus Dave’s students submitted their dialogue journal entries as word-processed documents, to which he responded by using the “insert comment” function of Word, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
An Example of a Dialogue Journal Entry and the Teachers’ Response from Dave’s Class

In Hong Kong, Kathi’s class was an EFL elective course on speaking and listening, with an emphasis on learning strategies and communication strategies. Two sections of the course were given each semester with a total of forty-three (lower) intermediate students per term (i.e., there were twenty-one and twenty-two students per class in both fall and spring).

Each week, starting with the second week and going through the thirteenth week of the semester, students were to submit one hand-written single-spaced page in English, sometimes in response to a prompt, sometimes about anything that interested them. Their dialogue journals were submitted on Wednesday and returned to the students with Kathi’s responses the following Monday. An example of these students’ journal entries and the teacher’s responses is given in Figure 3.

Figure 3
An Example of a Dialogue Journal Entry and the Teacher's
Comments from Kathi's Class
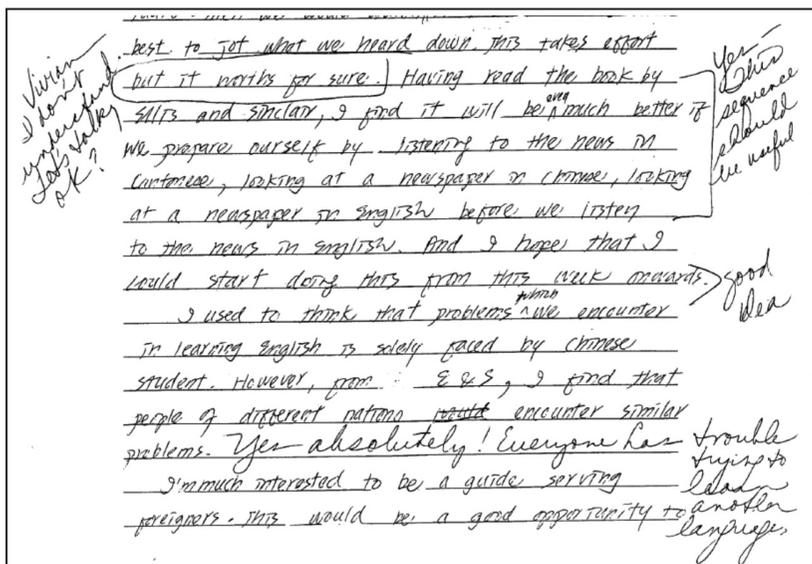
The text written on the horizontal lines in Figure 3 is the student's original entry, while the additional comments were made by the teacher. In addition to writing in and around the students' texts, Kathi also wrote a final page-long comment at the end of each student's dialogue journal entry every week.

RESEARCH DESIGN

We turn now to the research design employed in this investigation, which is essentially an exploratory qualitative study of pedagogical scaffolding in dialogue journal exchanges between Asian university EFL students and their teachers. First, the research question is articulated. We then briefly describe our sampling strategy and our data analysis procedures, before turning to our findings about the six features of pedagogical scaffolding.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Given these data and our interest in the Walqui and van Lier (2010) framework, we posed the following simple research question: Are the six features of pedagogical scaffolding present in the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses? That is, we wanted to know whether these elements were present in written exchanges between teachers and language learners, since previous research on pedagogical scaffolding had focused on spoken interaction (Walqui & van Lier, 2010)

SAMPLING STRATEGY

For the data analysis, we selected samples from the dialogue journals from the second semester of Kathi's classes and Dave's classes. We chose to focus on data from our respective second semesters because by that time we had both systematized our use of the dialogue journal assignments.

Since female students outnumbered male students by about two to one in both the Guiyang and Hong Kong contexts, we maintained that proportion in our data sampling as well. We randomly selected the dialogue journal entries written by four women and two men from each context. Thus, the data for this study comprised these twelve students' ongoing dialogue journal entries and their teachers' responses for the entire semester.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis consisted of combing through the dialogue journal entries and responses for evidence of the six features of pedagogical scaffolding, as described above. To begin, we discussed in detail what the six features of pedagogical scaffolding meant to us, and how they might be realized in written exchanges. After this discussion, one complete set of semester-long journal entries from both Dave's and Kathi's classes was chosen and independently coded. We

then discussed our analyses to further develop our mutual understanding of how the six features of pedagogical scaffolding might be represented in the dialogue journal entries. We then coded segments of the written interaction in the other ten randomly selected dialogue journals based on our discussions and our understanding of Walqui and van Lier's (2010) framework.

FINDINGS

Our research question was, "Are the six features of pedagogical scaffolding present in the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses?" To address this question, we will discuss each of the six features portrayed in the Walqui and van Lier (2010) model, and give illustrations of each feature from the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses. The students' are identified only by the English names they had selected for themselves. Their original spelling, grammar, and word choices have been left intact, but in this paper we have underscored and bolded elements of the dialogue journal texts that illustrate the particular feature of pedagogical scaffolding under examination.

Continuity And Coherence

The cyclical nature of the dialogue journal task provided Continuity and Coherence, the first feature of pedagogical scaffolding described by Walqui and van Lier (2010). That is, both in Dave's classes in Guiyang and Kathi's classes in Hong Kong, students had an ongoing responsibility to submit their dialogue journals throughout the semester. Although the content of the dialogue journal entries changed over time, the process and the structure did not.

The reflective nature of the task lets students make connections between their dialogue journal entries and the language class. For instance, a student in Kathi's class referred to H. Douglas Brown, the author of one of the course textbooks, when she wrote,

"**As I said before**, I really hope that I could pick up English again. **I agree with Prof. Brown** that we should set some specific goals every day. Indeed I do set some already. Try to talk with NSs in hall. Memorize 10 vocabulary words each day. Learn bit by bit, day by day. And of course, step by step" (Vivian, #2).

The students also made connections with their lives outside of school, as shown in this entry from one of Dave's students:

"This week you showed us ten minutes' part of film to illustrate the STEREOTYPES, and **I watched the whole film this weekend**. Mean Girls, haha" (Arianna, #2). These connections often have clear lexical markers that emphasize continuity (e.g., "as I said before").

Making such connections may help learners "venture out in new linguistic directions" (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 35).

Supportive Environment

Supportive Environment is the second feature of pedagogical scaffolding. It develops through the exchange of the dialogue journal entries as trust is built between students and their teachers. Through the communication process, students gradually begin to feel safe and to take risks in the target language, even if they believe they might not be successful. Here is an example from Sylvia's first dialogue journal, in which she remarked on the supportive environment in Dave's class after he commented on one of her class assignments:

"**I am so appreciated** that Dave really read every word of my picture…And **what Dave have done just make me feel that what I have done have be respected**. Every time, when people have tried their best to do something, they always hope that this work can be appreciated, or they just looks forward to some serious reaction, which means that their papers or pictures have really been read. So here, **I want to say that, thank you Dave, thank your for your serious comments, heartfelt**" (Sylvia, #1).

Dave responded, "I take seriously every comment, suggestion, and opinion you either say or write."

The discussions within the dialogue journals were low-risk, private conversations between the particular student and the teacher. As Dave told his students in his syllabus, the dialogue journals were "a place to take risks, to take positions, to solidify knowledge, and to ask questions and get help when needed." Because the dialogue journal exchanges were largely private, they were relatively low in potential face-threat. There was also less time pressure for composing and editing (as opposed to the pressure of speaking English in class).

The Supportive Environment feature of pedagogical scaffolding also emerged during the class lessons and was later written about in the dialogue journals. Claire was a student in Guiyang, whose mother had died during the semester. In her dialogue journal, she wrote about coming to class when the topic of the day was family:

> "**Dave thanks for your kind care**. Originally I thought that I wouldn't be able to attend the class topic on Family, however I told myself repeatly that I should go to class, **thanks for making it ok**." (Claire, #3).

Dave replied, "You were strong. Thanks."

Intersubjectivity

The third feature, Intersubjectivity, moves away from the more-planned to the less-planned types of pedagogical scaffolding. This facet of the model usually refers to people understanding one another by listening and asking questions in spoken interaction. A comment from a student in Hong Kong reveals how Intersubjectivity emerged when each student exchanged a journal entry with a peer:

> "**I really enjoy reviewing my classmate's journals**.... By reading my classmates journals, **I find I am not working alone**. **We both have identical goal** (improving English). **Through response we would get others' support and share experience with each other**" (Vivian, #9).

Examples of Intersubjectivity also emerged in the teachers' responses to students' dialogue journal entries. For instance, after a lesson about domestic violence, a student in Guizhou wrote in his dialogue journal that his father had beaten his mother. Dave replied, "WHOAH!!!!! First of all, thank you for opening yourself up. Secondly, I am so sorry to hear about that. Thirdly, are you OK?" The teacher's comments reveal that he is indeed "in tune" with this particular student's situation (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 34).

Additionally, Intersubjectivity can often be detected in these students' dialogue journal entries in interrogatives (as seen above in the teacher's comments to his student). When students ask questions of the teacher (or vice versa), there is a sense of trust and willingness to "invest time and energy in understanding" (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 35). For instance, one of Dave's students became confused about the differences between *stereotype* and *prejudice* and shared her confusion with him in her journal:

> "Is stereotype like a kind of prejudice? You want to told us not ever to judge people? I think it's hard to judge a person, but it's easier to define a certain group of people. Errrrrr…..I am confused again." (Arianna #2).

In this entry, Arianna questioned herself, gave an opinion of her own, and struggled *in the moment* of writing. She was searching for understanding and reached out to the teacher for assistance. He, in turn, wrote the following response to try to help her understand: "I think you are confusing yourself. A stereotype is like a prejudice. We shouldn't judge people but we do – that is bad. Judging others negatively is bad. It leads to negative feelings, physical violence, etc."

Flow

The concept of Flow, a state of mind that exists between the two complementary psychological areas of arousal and control (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004), was the hardest feature to detect, because it is experienced by the learners, and may or may not be reported on in their dialogue journal entries.

In analyzing our data, we could only recognize Flow if the students commented explicitly on their own mental states. Here is an example from Angela, in which she discusses racism.

> "Hey Dave,
> Journal again! **I love this really. It's the time for me to express myself and review my mind and my life. Journal time really makes me excited and I've found I have become more and more passionate about it. Thanks so much to let me have such valuable experience**…When I am going to talk about the "racism", **I take it very seriously**." (Angela, #2).

We take the following comment to be indicative of Flow: "Journal time really makes me excited and I've found I have become more and more passionate about it." Here, Angela commented explicitly on her cognitive state of being aroused to write in her dialogue journal entries. Thus, "arousal is the area where most people learn from, because that's where they're pushed beyond their comfort zone and to enter that – going back to flow – then they develop higher skills" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004, Ted Talk Video File). Likewise, racism was an important topic for Angela, in which she felt in control and thus could become engaged in the discussion. Csikszentmihalyi emphasizes that "control is also a good place to be, because there you feel comfortable but not very excited. And if you want to enter flow from control, you have to increase the challenges" (2004, Ted Talk Video File). Angela increased her challenges and created Flow, by trying to understand the concept of racism from both western and eastern perspectives. Yet she was not overwhelmed in considering this issue since her skills was up to the challenge – a key characteristic of Flow. We will return to Angela's comments below, when we discuss Emergence or Handover/Takeover, the sixth feature of pedagogical scaffolding.

Contingency

The fifth feature in Walqui and van Lier's (2010) model of pedagogical scaffolding is Contingency – the characteristic

of conversations to be organic, where one turn proceeds naturally from another. In seeking examples of Contingency in the dialogue journal entries, we looked for evidence that students' comments were related to the teachers' previous comments and vice versa. For instance, one of Dave's students wrote, "**And as a feedback for your comments, here are some answers for your questions**."

Another example of contingency from one of Dave's students appears in her reaction to his comments on her dialogue journal:

> "I would like to say something about my dream flower **and your response. How amazing! You said** I seem like a very progressive woman who will one day want to be the president of China. That's true, when I was in primary school I really want to be the president to order my Minister of Education to alleviate burdens on students." (Cynthia, #1)

Here the student refers explicitly to the teacher's prior comment and builds upon its content.

Contingency was a regular and pervasive characteristic of the teachers' remarks, since we were typically responding to the individual journal entries we had just read. However, there is also evidence of Contingency occurring in the students' dialogue journal entries, as they responded to questions the teachers raised in previous dialogue journal responses or to issues that had arisen in class. For instance, after a discussion about mental illness, Gloria, a student in Hong Kong wrote, "I am really quite surprised that people with mental and/or emotional problem are looked down upon by other people in the United States" (Gloria, #10). Evidence of Contingency appeared in phrases such as "I really agree that…" (Gloria, #2), and "After reading your response to my journal…: (Jenny, #7). The most obvious examples of Contingency in the students' dialogue journal entries occurred when they provided information soughtby their teacher. For example, in response to her request for advice, the students in Kathi's classes told her what to expect and what to do for the Lunar New Year celebration in their fifth journal submission. Then in the subsequent dialogue journal entries, several of them asked her what she had actually done for the holiday.

Emergence Or Handover/Takeover

The feature called Emergence, or Handover/Takeover, was apparent in the dialogue journals when students nominated their own topics for discussion, extended their understanding of a reading assignment, or took an ongoing issue (either from class or from the dialogue journals) further, or in a new direction. As an example, here is the continuation of Angela's dialogue journal entry about racism, part of which we quoted in our discussion of Flow above. The student wrote,

> "**I had a conversation with my dad** before I wrote this. … if we want to analysis "racism", we must give an exact definition to "racism". **I did not consult any materials to get the definition**. According to my dad, "racism" is a western concept in sociology that involves priorities and descriminations in aspects like law, social principles, local policies, languages and religions or so; and it should exist along with some behaviors and ideologies that mark separation, isolation, exclusion and domination, otherwise it cannot be called "racism". Thanks to my dad's definition, **I realized that as a matter of fact, "racism" is not the issue of China, but of western world! I would like to state that "racism" should not be involved in China's issues to any extent. China is a country without racism. …Dave, we may have some different or even opposite ideas about the racism issue because we are nurtured in totally different environment and culture system, or we may share some ideas. Anyway, this is a topic that is worth being discussed further. And I believe I will have a further discussion with my dad in the future and I also look forward to talking with you if possible**." (Angela, #2).

In this entry, Angela reported on an epiphany when she wrote, "I realize," because she was "engaged in the activity for the sake of the activity itself" and was absorbed in her work (Walqui & van Lier, 2010, p. 36.). Her comments also show that she has deepened her understanding of racism by talking with her father. Finally, the fact that she wanted to discuss this topic further with both her father and Dave

suggests that she was developing initiative and perhaps autonomy in her perception of racism.

In his response to this student, Dave assured her that he was glad to learn that she had been discussing racism with her father. He also told her that he disagreed with her comment about China being a country without racism and pointed out that her view of the Western world was, in fact, a stereotype.

Here is another example of the Handover/Takeover feature from Dave's teaching journal about an incident that happened in class:

> "James was so moved by the videos during the class that he had to write down his feelings and present them to me in this journal entry. I told the class that if they felt uncomfortable, sad, angry, depressed, or whatever during the content of the lesson, that they can take time away (remove themselves) and I will not ask why.... James was the only one during the lesson who stood up, went to the back of the room, and wrote. …He did not want to forget because he wanted it to be a journal entry." (Dave re: James, #2)

Another example of the Emergence, or Handover/Takeover, feature occurred when Kathi's students taught her about the Lunar New Year in their journal entries. This topic provided a natural information gap in that the students knew a great deal about the holiday and the teacher knew next to nothing. Family responsibilities, food, sayings, folklore, and the Lunar New Year customs were all issues the students explained to the teacher in their dialogue journal entries.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Our research question was, "Are the six features of pedagogical scaffolding present in the students' dialogue journal entries and the teachers' responses?" We can say, based on our analyses, that these features of pedagogical scaffolding are all indeed present in the dialogue journal

entries. First, the feature of Continuity and Coherence is evident throughout the process of dialogue journaling: The students submit original dialogue journal entries repeatedly throughout an entire semester. Additionally, what students write about is often connected to the material covered in class. Second, the feature of a Supportive Environment appears as trust is built between students and their teachers during the exchange of dialogue journal comments. Third, Intersubjectivity exists in dialogue journals because they allow for the teacher and students to be mutually engaged when writing. Fourth, the concept of Flow is present both implicitly (because the teacher ensures that the learners are optimally challenged in writing their dialogue journal entries), and explicitly (when they report on having had a Flow experience). Fifth, Contingency can be recognized throughout the process of dialogue journaling because the teachers' and students' writing is connected to material covered in lessons and because the questions one writer raises require future attention from the responder. Finally, evidence of the Handover/Takeover feature appears as independent ideas and learning emerge over time. The dialogue journal entries reveal that students become more autonomous as shown in the thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and attitudes they record in dialogue journal entries.

At the beginning of this paper we summarized three concepts from sociocultural theory: the ZPD, scaffolding, and affordances. We believe that reading our students' dialogue journal entries gave us a much better sense of their individual ZPDs than did their oral interaction in lessons alone. Also, scaffolding the language to which students are exposed is an essential feature of dialogue journals. We combine the concepts of scaffolding and the ZPD to note that, depending on their proficiency levels, students may not be capable of recording lengthy or detailed journal entries at the outset. Teachers should be mindful of students' abilities in the target language when using dialogue journals in the language classroom. Additionally, the level of difficulty of the questions teachers raise when responding to students' entries should be roughly answerable by the students so that the students can gain affordances from their teacher's input.

In terms of affordances, the protracted, asynchronous conversations in the dialogue journal entries are co-constructed over a period of several weeks, as teachers and students discuss both the material covered in class that students react to and new issues raised in the journal entries themselves. We should add that the affordances students may gain from engaging in the dialogue journal process may vary from one learner to the next. For some it may be just a homework assignment; for others it is an opportunity to explore new ideas or to share concerns. We believe that the dialogue journals let us, as foreign language teachers, locate and enter our students' various ZPDs, providing private tailored input and modeling to each individual, while also engaging with the substance of their ideas

We wish to end with a comment from a dialogue journal entry of student in Guizhou. It captures the spirit of what we hoped to accomplish by using dialogue journals in our university EFL classes:

> "Education requires two things to cooperate with each other – teaching and learning. Successful education, of course, should have good cooperation of teacher and students. Each one side of cooperation should give out and receive things equally. If one side is imbalance, cooperation failed and education failed." (James, #1)

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