

# Cultivating Knowledge Building Culture in an ESL Writing Class

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### Introduction

- English language learners (ELLs) are more sensitive to the views of others due to the lack of confidence in their language abilities. The feelings of stress and anxiety inhibit their language learning and performance abilities (Tanveer, 2007).
- In the absence of guidance directing students to build upon peer responses, they will often default to posting a personal response (Leafstedt and Hannans, 2020).
- A design based research (DBR) methodology (Anderson & Shattuck, 2012) was used in this exploratory study with two interventions implemented, inspired to KB principles, to cultivate a relaxing and supportive environment for students to form, share and improve their authentic ideas.
- The study is not attempting “full-blown” KB, but to zero in on “real ideas, authentic problems” and “knowledge building discourse” as starting point for build KB culture.

### Methodology

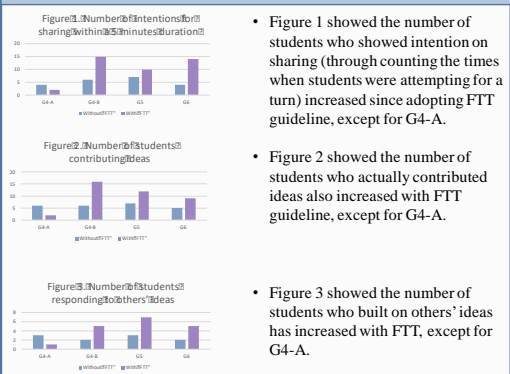
- Participants:** Students involved in this study were all ELLs from an internationalized K12 school in Dongguan, China. The data have been collected from the students from 4 different classes, with three 40-minute sessions for each class, of two subsequent academic years:
  - **2019-2020:**
    - G4-A:** 14 students (7 boys and 7 girls); Lexile range: Highest: 545L-695L; Lowest: BR240L-BR90L; Median: 183L-333L
    - G4-B:** 14 students (8 boys and 6 girls); Lexile range: Highest: 505L-655L; Lowest: BR80L-70L; Median: 225L-375L.
    - G5:** 17 students (8 boys and 9 girls); Lexile range: Highest: 950L-1100L; Lowest: BR20L-130L; Median: 605L-755L.
  - **2020-2021:**
    - G6:** 15 students (6 girls and 9 boys). Lexile range: Highest: 750L-900L; Lowest: 0L-150L; Median: 405L-555L.

- Educational setting:** Prior to producing a final written work, the students attended classes that were designed to equip them with notions and tools for a strong opinion essay. The goals of the classes were 1) students are able to clearly express their opinions; 2) students understand the importance of including reasons and examples, as well as counter-claims for the use of making their opinions stronger. With the interventions, students were expected to achieve the goals through their own improved ideas.
- Observed Variables:**
  - G4-A is a tidy classroom with strict rules managed by their homeroom teachers.
  - G4-B is a messy classroom without strict class rules.
  - G5 and G6 are classrooms with a fair amount of rules.
- Data collection methods:**
  - Observations (in class, recorded class video)
  - Students’ artifacts (KB scaffolds, essay paper)
  - Teacher reflective journal

#### KB Strategy Intervention 1: Free Turn-taking

- Procedure:** FTT (Free Turn-taking) indicates a different sharing guideline from a regular primary or middle school class norm. Students were asked not to raise their hands for a turn to talk, mimicking real life situations. Instead, they voluntarily took turns when the previous student finished sharing. The teacher majorly acted as a recorder for students’ ideas. The guideline was adopted twice each class.

#### Intervention 1 Result



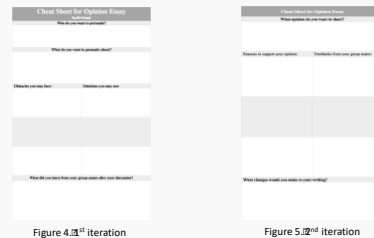
#### Conclusion and Implication

- The FTT strategy for cultivating a relaxing and comfortable environment positively impact ELLs to form, share and improve their authentic ideas.
- Students from a relatively strictly managed or traditional learning environment may need more time to get used to FTT.
- The ELL friendly scaffolds, rooted from KB principle “knowledge building discourse”, allow ELLs to advance their abilities in forming persuasive arguments.
- Studies on bilinguals suggest that a foreign language plays an important and unconscious role in thinking (Jiang, Ouyang, & Liu, 2016). In order to encourage ideas sharing in a second language, it is crucial to ensure the English language learners are feeling relaxed and willing to take more risks, such as voicing half-baked notions and giving and receiving criticism.

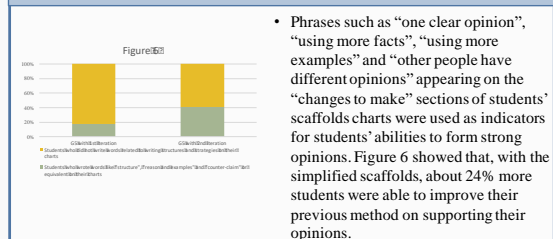
#### KB Strategy Intervention 2: ELL Friendly Scaffolds

Knowledge Building scaffolds can easily be modified to support students’ progressive discourse in different content areas and in different levels of education (Zhang et al., 2011).

- Procedure:** Students first worked individually then as a group with their KB scaffolds charts. When finished, they shared their ideas to the whole class. This intervention has been adopted in all homerooms; however, G5 was the only class involved in both iterations.
- Iterations:** The strategy was implemented in two iterations.



#### Intervention 2 Result



#### References

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