Oral Dialogue Journals: Theory and Implementation in the Classroom

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Oral dialogue journals have been used in English L1, ESL and EFL classrooms for a number of years. While a number of claims have been made in the literature regarding the benefits of oral dialogue journals with regard to oral language development, more research is needed to ascertain whether these claims hold true for the South Korean context. In addition, one troublesome aspect reported in association with oral dialogue journal use in relation to speaking development, the extensive planning of discourse before speaking, calls for further investigation as it is uncharacteristic of casual conversation. This article reports on a study conducted over a three-year period with South Korean university students taking an advanced English conversation course. The learners kept an oral dialogue journal and reported on its effects. Using questionnaire and interview data, it was found that many of the benefits claimed for oral dialogue journals were true of the study participants. Unfortunately, many learners also relied strongly on written discourse to complete their oral journal submissions. To counter this tendency a number of task types and various task features were used to identify ways to encourage more spontaneous spoken discourse, some of which were found to be effective.

I. INTRODUCTION

This article describes the results of a longer term study which investigated the use of oral dialogue journals as a means of developing English as a foreign language (EFL) speaking ability in the South Korean context from the learners’ perspective. Written dialogue journals and later oral dialogue journals have been used in first and second language education for a number of years and are credited with providing a number of language learning benefits (Staton, 1987). However, while some research has been done
regarding these benefits in EFL speaking contexts (Allan, 1991; Ho, 2003), much of the research pertains to second language settings (Staton, Shuy, Kreeft & Reed, 1982) where learners have more opportunities to speak English outside the classroom and/or was not primarily intended to examine oral language development (Brinton & Holten, 1989; Brinton, Holten & Goodwin, 1993). The study reported on in this article was designed to determine whether the claims made for the oral dialogue journal apply to the South Korean context. In addition, the study focused on one troubling aspect of oral dialogue journal use, the tendency for learners to plan much of their spoken discourse before speaking (Ho, 2003), something which is not characteristic of the casual conversational register that many language courses seek to help learners develop. To investigate these issues, three groups of university students taking an advanced English conversation over a three-year period were asked to keep an oral dialogue journal and report on their perceptions of its effect on their English oral language development. Based on questionnaire and interview data collected from the study participants, it was found that many of the claims made for the oral dialogue journal did apply to the study context. However, it was found that problem of planned discourse was also common among the study participants. To address this issue, a number of journal tasks with a variety of features were used by some of the participants. The results suggest that oral dialogue journals can encourage learners to speak more spontaneously by using certain task types and by including task features that lessen the learners’ dependence on pre-recording writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Dialogue Journals

Written teacher-student communication is not a new phenomenon. Teachers have been commenting on essays, reports and other assignments for as long as students have been submitting them. Dialogue journals, however, differ from typical essay or report feedback in a number of ways. Staton (1987) writes that dialogue journals are private written conversations between a teacher and a student that occur over an extended time such as a school year or semester. The writing mirrors a spoken conversation style, topics are raised by either participant according to interest and error correction is restricted to those errors which impede comprehension as the journals are not intended to be a vehicle for direct grammatical instruction; rather, learning is to take place indirectly through exposure to the teacher’s input. A more restricted type of dialogue journal is the directed dialogue journal. Teachers using these journals choose a particular topic for discussion (e.g., a novel, culture, teacher training) and guide the interaction toward the topic of interest (Brinton et al., 1993;
Early research on dialogue journals was conducted by Staton et al. (1982) using journal data gathered from the sixth grade classroom of L. Reed (Staton, 1983). According to Staton, early studies examined data from both native speakers of English and English as a second language learners. The introduction of dialogue journals as a learning strategy in Reed’s classes was intended to improve teacher knowledge of students and classroom discipline, engage students in meaningful reading and writing, and provide lesson feedback (Staton, 1987). The rationale for using dialogue journals with English native speakers to develop reading and writing skills was that because these students had already naturally developed some oral language competence, oral language could be used as a bridge to writing and reading (Kreeft, 1984). In practice, this meant that students would be allowed to write in the casual oral language register rather than be expected to adopt the more formal written register of the essay or school report typically associated with the classroom (Staton et al., 1982). In theory, this practice would place less demand on the students and act as a type of scaffolding intended to foster writing and reading development. With ESL learners who did not, it is assumed, necessarily have the same level of English oral language ability as the native speakers, the rationale for using dialogue journals rested on the effective language learning conditions found in first language learning that were associated with dialogue journals (e.g., communicating with more experienced language users, using contextual information to aid comprehension, input from modeling rather than correction, focusing on meaning, unsequenced instruction).

A number of benefits have been claimed for users of dialogue journals. For learners, personal attention from the teacher in the form of individualized communication and instruction are important advantages (Steffenson, 1988). It has been noted that personal communication between the teacher and student promotes mutual understanding and develops the student-teacher relationship (Peyton, 1993; Staton, Shuy, Peyton & Reed, 1988). One way in which dialogue journals do this is by providing a non-threatening environment for communication to occur as compared to the classroom where communication is monitored by other students (Peyton, 1993; Steffenson, 1988). This condition is especially beneficial for students who lack confidence in the classroom setting because of shyness or low language proficiency (Department of Education, n.d.; Staton, 1987). Also, as dialogue journal feedback tends to focus on content and not usage errors (Gambrell, 1985; Peyton, 1993), students may feel less concerned about making mistakes and be encouraged to write more. Moreover, as students become more comfortable communicating with the teacher, they are more willing to take more risks with language (Staton, 1983). This experimentation with new expressions and ideas helps to develop their interlanguage. Personalized instruction such as responses to individual learner
questions and the modeling of correct language in response to learner errors (Staton, 1983) promotes a learner-centered educational model that has been viewed as an application of Vygotsky’s theory in which the learner benefits from the mentoring of someone with the knowledge and/or skills that the learner wishes to acquire (Staton, 1987). Individualized instruction through the use of dialogue journals allows teachers to target and pace instruction to individual learner needs, something which is challenging in a regular classroom with a large group of students (Lingley, 2005; McWhirter, 1990; Staton, 1987). From the learner’s perspective, dialogue journals allow the learner to exercise some control over their learning; thus, creating a more equal power sharing arrangement. One way in which learners are given control over learning is by allowing them to choose topics for discussion (Staton, 1987). When learners are able to choose the subjects for discussion they are able to draw on their knowledge and become the expert in the interchange (Steffensen, 1988), which increases learner confidence. It has also been suggested that increased learner confidence results in greater language risk taking (Urzúa, 1987). In addition, increased learner control of the educational context permits the learner to set the pace of learning (González-Bueno, 1998).

Other benefits attributed to dialogue journal use are the assessment of student progress (McWhirter, 1990), proficiency (Foss & Reitzel, 1988) and conversation style use (Dolly, 1990); having a positive washback effect on the classroom (Shuy, 1987; Steffensen, 1988); better classroom management (Staton, 1987); more effective lesson planning (Lingley, 2005; Staton, 1987); the development of functional language skills such as complaining, asking and answering questions, and problem discussion (Shuy, 1987; Staton et al., 1988); creating a meaningful context for communication (Staton, 1987; Staton et al., 1988); fostering reflection and critical thinking (Department of Education, n.d.); raising awareness of important issues such as learning goals, values and cultural differences (Foss & Reitzel, 1988; Steffensen, 1988) and developing writing fluency (Brinton et al., 1993; Seelevag, 1986; Staton, 1983). In addition, dialogue journals have been used widely in the training of teachers (Brinton & Holten, 1989; Brinton et al., 1993; Cray & Currie, 1996; Todd, Mills, Palard, & Khamcharoen, 2001; Willett & Jeannot, 1993; Winer, 1992).

The chief limitation of using dialogue journals is the length of time needed for the teacher to respond to the journals (Department of Education, n.d.). As longer responses which address the students’ concerns are more valued than short, general comments (Brinton et al., 1993; Todd et al., 2001), using the journals with large groups of students can be time-consuming. This problem can be made less onerous by adopting strategies such as responding to only a portion of the class’s journals in a given week and asking students to indicate what they would like the teacher to respond to (Department of Education, n.d.).

While dialogue journals were intended to develop the skills of writing and reading, it
became apparent that the strategy could be adapted to focus on the learning of speaking and listening in second/foreign language learning. The conversational style of dialogue journals was one feature that likely facilitated this development. In addition, according to Dolly (1990), “Dialogue writing provides a means of encouraging NNSs to experiment with conversational roles, freed from some of the pressures and constraints of oral conversation” (p. 320). Also, a study by El-Kouny (1998) which compared an experimental group of Egyptian learners to a control group found that dialogue writing led to significant gains in speaking proficiency. Given findings such as these, it would seem natural for educators and researchers to consider the utility of oral dialogue journals.

2. Oral Dialogue Journals

Oral dialogue journals are similar to written dialogue journals in that they are an extended interaction between teacher and student carried on by means of recorded communication. The difference is that the recordings of the former are oral while the latter are written. McGrath (1992) distinguishes among three types of oral journals: (1) audiotape journals, which are used to improve fluency and pronunciation, to allow the student to speak to a native speaker, and to use the teacher’s time more effectively; (2) cassette notebooks, in which students compete language-related assignments (e.g., develop grammar and vocabulary knowledge), and (3) oral dialogue journals, which give ESL students the opportunity to explore cultural issues related to the L2 culture by discussing topics based on in-class discussions. Audiotape journals seem most similar to the typical written journal described above, while cassette notebooks and oral dialogue journals, according to McGrath’s classification, seem more like directed dialogue journals, which have an emphasis on particular learning goals. For the purposes of this discussion, oral dialogue journal (ODJ) will be used to refer to all oral recordings, taped or digital, used to conduct an ongoing interaction between student and teacher for either the general purpose of developing speaking and listening or aimed at more specific oral-aural objectives. This broad definition is used to reflect the variety of purposes oral recordings of the type described above have been used to pursue in the literature (Allan, 1991; Brown, Garver & Sagers, 1996; Brown & Sagers, 1999; Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996; Chernen, 2009; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Duke-Lay, 1987; Henry, 1994; Ho, 2003; Long, 1998; Walker, 2005).

The rationale for using oral dialogue journals with second/foreign language learners is the same as that of written journals. That is, learners are expected to benefit from extended interaction with a qualified interlocutor. As is the case with written dialogue journals, benefits derived from this contact include non-threatening, individualized attention and instruction (Brown et al., 1996; Chernen, 2009; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Henry, 1994),
better teacher-student rapport (Chernen, 2009), positive washback to the classroom (Long, 1998), improved fluency (Allan, 1991; Celce-Murcia et al., 1996), longer turns (Ho, 2003), an opportunity for reflection and critical thinking (Jackson, 2006), greater student control of learning (Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Henry, 1994), a way for students who couldn’t or wouldn’t speak up in class to interact with the teacher (Ho, 2003; Long, 1998), enhanced motivation as oral dialogue journals are popular (Henry, 1994); a chance for meaningful communication which is of especial importance in EFL contexts where opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom are limited (Bristow, 2008; Ho, 2003); topics can be discussed in depth over several submissions (Allan, 1991) and vocabulary can be acquired from teacher feedback (Brown & Sagers, 1999). In addition, both teachers and students can monitor student development over time as the recordings constitute an oral record of work done (Allan, 1991; Henry, 1994)—a record that has novelty value as students often do not have access to such personalized recordings (Chernen, 2009; Henry, 1994). For teachers, oral dialogue journals are a vehicle for providing individualized feedback (e.g., modeling of correct language, explicit attention to grammar and vocabulary) (Brown et al., 1996; Jackson, 2006; Long, 1998) and a way to access information that can lead to improved lesson planning (Henry, 1994).

Additional benefits particular to the oral channel of communication are a focus on pronunciation (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996; Walker, 2005); increased confidence in speaking and listening through practice (Allan, 1991; Chernen, 2009; Walker, 2005), student self-assessment of speaking ability by listening to recordings (Allan, 1991; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Long, 1998), superior acquisition for students who respond best to oral learning (Brown et al., 1996; Brown & Sagers, 1999); improved communication through the use of prosodic features (Henry, 1994) and possibly better vocabulary transfer as oral to written vocabulary transfer has been shown to be greater than written to oral (Brown & Sagers, 1999).

As with written dialogue journals, the main drawback to oral dialogue journals is that they take a substantial amount of the teacher’s time to respond to (Allan, 1991; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Henry, 1994). However, with practice this time can be reduced to a manageable level, and given the benefits associated with dialogue journals, it is argued that the effort to implement the learning strategy is worth the time involved (Chernen, 2009).

3. Oral Dialogue Journals and Conversation

One of the attractions of oral dialogue journals for ESL/EFL teachers of speaking and writing is the conversational style of discourse attributed to the written dialogue journals by researchers (Staton et al., 1982). If it is true that the written discourse was conversation-like and that the similarity to conversation could be enhanced by using the
oral-aural channel of communication, oral dialogue journals would seem to be an excellent strategy for developing learners’ conversation skills. In general, however, recent research primarily in the area of corpus linguistics has demonstrated that the discourse of written and spoken language differs in some quite important ways. For example, Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) have reported lexical differences such as the higher number of nouns than verbs in written discourse compared to the roughly equal numbers in conversation. Another difference is the higher number of content words compared to function words (lexical density) in written discourse as compared to spoken discourse when speakers are talking and acting simultaneously (McCarthy & Carter, 1997). Thornbury and Slade (2006) note that as conversations often happen in a face-to-face setting, a high use of deictic language (e.g., this, that, here, there) is found as being together in one place allows both interlocutors to interpret the meaning correctly. With regard to grammar, Biber et al. (1999) write that the “production demands of conversation result, on the whole, in shorter and simpler clauses” (p. 964) than written discourse. This is not to say that conversation is less complex than written language, but that they differ in the nature of their complexity with the complexity of conversation being especially affected by the need to assemble discourse under time pressure (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

Turning to the discourse of written dialogue journals, Lingley (2005) finds evidence amid the conversation style of the writing of discourse markers and grammatical constructions characteristic of written discourse. Moreover, Lingley writes that the turn taking in written journals is different from conversations in that the writer has time to consider his response whereas conversation can result in false starts, hesitations and so on due to time constraints. Also absent are backchanneling and speakers talking at the same time. Similarly, Dolly (1990) reports that in a study of 12 adult ESL learners engaged in dialogue writing, repair occurred less frequently than would be expected in conversation. It is suggested that this result was due in part to the lack of time pressure on the participants. These results suggest that written dialogue discourse is unlike conversational discourse to some extent because it incorporates aspects of written discourse that is made possible by the lack of a time constraint. Furthermore, written dialogue discourse lacks features of conversational discourse dependent on face-to-face interaction (e.g., backchanneling). In a direct comparison of written and oral dialogue journals, Brown and Sagers (1999) found, counter-intuitively, that five of nine EFL learners used vocabulary that occurs less frequently in analyses of discourse when they were speaking as compared to their written discourse. The authors suggest that this might have been because the oral dialogue journals did not impose the time constraint associated with conversations on the participants as they could re-record their journal entries to edit language, stop the recording to consider what to say next or even script the entire discourse and read it as they recorded. Doing this
transforms the discourse from the unplanned, spontaneously produced talk of conversation to the planned discourse more typical of public speaking or poetry recitations. The planned nature of oral dialogue submissions by both students and teachers has been noted by a number of researchers (Allan, 1991; Chernen, 2009; Dantas-Whitney 2002; Henry, 1994; Ho, 2003). On the other hand, some writers have claimed that oral dialogue discourse is more spontaneous than writing (Bristow, 2008; Dantas-Whitney, 2002; Henry, 1994).

What seems clear is that the discourse produced using oral dialogue journals is not that which is typical of casual conversations that occur in a face-to-face setting under the pressure of time constraints. Given this, it is appropriate to ask to what use oral dialogue journals can be put by the teacher interested in developing the skill of speaking. El-Koumy (1998) found that written dialogue journals contributed to speaking proficiency development. As oral dialogue journals are unlikely to be less like conversations than written journals, it seems probable given the use of the oral channel that oral journals would be even more effective in developing speaking. Yet, it is important to know how the planning time typically associated with written discourse and speeches, but not casual conversation, effects learning and to what extent students are planning the discourse that is submitted in their oral dialogue journals. Some students plan more than others (Henry, 1994), while others change the amount of planning time over the course of time (Brown & Sagers, 1999). In addition, it would be useful understand what factors affect the planning time decisions that students make.

4. Planning Time and Fluency Development

One concern regarding the planning time associated with oral dialogue journals is the effect it has on fluency development. As the improvement of spoken fluency is cited as being a benefit of oral dialogue journals (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996), and spoken fluency is strongly influenced by the time pressure conversation participants experience, it seems reasonable to question the efficacy of oral dialogue journals if, indeed, time pressure is not present. A study by Foster (1996) suggests that pre-task planning time leads to the use of a greater range of lexical words than unplanned speech, a finding which concurs with Brown and Sager’s (1999) contention that the planned nature of oral dialogue journals provided learners with the time to deploy vocabulary that is normally less frequently used. Additionally, planning time has been credited with enhancing accuracy (Ellis, 1987; Foster & Skehan, 1996) and complexity (Crooks, 1989; Foster & Skehan, 1996) on spoken tasks. Oral fluency, too, benefits from planning time. A study which measured fluency in terms of silence and pausing on oral tasks (Foster & Skehan, 1996) showed strong advantages for planned speech, as did another study which operationalized fluency with respect to pausing, silence and the repetition of words and phrases (Foster, 1996). Contrary to those
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who cite the planned nature of oral dialogue journals as a limitation of the strategy as a learning tool (Allan, 1991; Ho, 2003) because it does not result in discourse characteristic of conversations, Foster (1996) suggests that learners be provided with planning time as it permits them to focus on the development of oral language fluency, accuracy and complexity. Thus, oral dialogue journals would function as a form of oral language learning scaffolding by relaxing the need to communicate under time pressure and allowing learners to pay attention to fluency, accuracy and complexity instead of having to choose one of these aspects as would be the case if their cognitive resources were challenged by the need to speak in an unplanned way.

III. THE STUDY

1. Research Orientation and Areas of Interest

The study reported on in this article used survey research to explore students’ perceptions of oral dialogue journals in an EFL context. As well as collecting data on participants’ perceptions of ODJ use with regard to claims that have been made in the literature (enjoyment of strategy, benefits of feedback, language development), a particular emphasis was placed on the amount of planning students did before recording their journal submissions, as it has been shown to be important to the argument made for the utility of oral dialogue journals, and the effects of task type. The study was designed as an exploratory research project which was intended to be hypothesis-generating rather than one which tested specific hypotheses. It extended over a three-year period and while many of the literature claims were assessed in all three years, some questions were generated by one group of participants and investigated more thoroughly with reference to a succeeding group or groups. Issues raised in this latter manner were (1) task-related ones (time, type, number and topic) and (2) instructor-student rapport. Understanding the effect of task type on learner language production is considered to be of especial importance as some studies have noted such a relationship (Foster, 1996; Foster & Skehan, 1996; Skehan, 1998). For example, Foster found that narrative tasks, though seemingly less cognitively demanding than decision-making tasks, resulted in long silent periods as learners struggled to spontaneously create a narrative from a series of pictures.

2. The Participants and Context

The data collected in this study came from South Korean university students enrolled in an advanced English conversation course offered by the Department of English Language
and Literature. The course was intended to help students develop oral English fluency and accuracy. The data were gathered from three different groups of students who took the course in three succeeding years—none of whom repeated the course. The majority of the students were in their junior or senior years, and were in their twenties.

The research presented in this article was conducted in the EFL context of South Korea where spoken English ability is prized by students you wish to study abroad, and has become of increasing importance to students seeking employment. Spoken English is often necessary not only to secure employment, but also to succeed at a position once hired by an employer (Jeong, 2007; Lee, 2007). Unfortunately, the ability of South Koreans to speak English has been rated quite low (Card, 2006). As with other EFL learning environments (Brown & Sagers, 1999; Ho, 2003), there are few opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom. Indeed, students in my classes have reported feeling intimidated when attempting to speak English outside class as they have been accused of “showing off,” or in other words trying to draw favorable attention to themselves by demonstrating their English language proficiency. In this context, oral dialogue journals offer students an opportunity to not only practice spoken English, but to do so in a meaningful context which gives them the chance to speak at length. Meaningful interaction has been espoused by the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as helping learners develop the ability to use the L2 for the purpose of genuine communication (Brumfit, 1984; Nunan, 1989; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). It also aids in the generation of long turns, something not common in the typical Initiation-Response-Feedback sequence of the classroom (Coulthard, 1992), although it is a necessary part of a proficient speaker’s repertoire (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Another reason for using oral dialogue journals in the EFL context derives from problems that have been observed when trying to implement CLT. Li (2001) found that South Korean teachers were reluctant to use CLT in part because of their poor oral English ability and the fear of losing students’ respect when they couldn’t answer questions about English culture. By using oral dialogue journals, teachers would be able to provide students with an opportunity to use spoken English in a way that gave the teachers enough time to prepare suitable responses; thus, decreasing the stress caused by needing to respond immediately to students.

3. Procedure

Oral dialogue journals were used with three classes of learners over a three-year period. The first group of 19 students completed four oral tasks individually (Table 1). Near the beginning of the semester, the students were given a handout which described the oral dialogue journal strategy, recording options (digital or taped), the task schedule and topics,
and the assessment criteria. On the day each task was assigned, students were given
detailed information regarding the task (e.g., topic, questions, submission date). One half
of the tasks were assigned before the midterm exam and one half after. For Group 1, three
of the tasks were directed in that the topic was chosen by the instructor/researcher and
questions were given to guide the students’ responses. The fourth task was non-directed in
that the students were able to select their topic and no questions were given. Group 2 had
only two tasks, one of which was directed with a choice of two topics and questions, and
the other non-directed. Group 3 had three directed tasks (see Appendix B for an example),
one with written questions, one with oral questions and one without questions (a pair task).
The final task was non-directed. A range of time limits was set for the students’ responses.
Generally, in Groups 1 and 3, the time limit for first task was shorter than for tasks 2 and 3,
while task 4 was the longest. Group 2 had two ten-minute tasks. The students were given
one week to complete the tasks with the exception of task 3 for Group 3, which had to be
submitted one day after it was assigned. Assessment points were evenly divided among
task time, content and language (grammar, fluency, pronunciation) for Groups 1 and 3, but
for Group 2 the assessment for content was increased and for language (informal
conversational style) decreased. Content assessment was based on the clarity and richness
of the responses.

### TABLE 1
Oral Dialogue Task Specifications for Three Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N = 54</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1. Directed; written questions given; solo; 3-5 min Topic: Why are you taking this course?</td>
<td>Time-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Directed; written questions given; solo; 5-7 min Topic: Reflect on emotions and attitudes</td>
<td>Content-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Directed; written questions given; solo; 5-7 min Topic: World travel-past and future</td>
<td>Language-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Non-directed; no questions given; solo; 7-10 min Topic: Students’ choice</td>
<td>Total-30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1. Directed; choice of tasks; questions given; solo; 10 min Topic: (1) World travel-past and future or (2) Post-graduation plans</td>
<td>Time-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Non-directed; no questions given; solo; 10 min Topic: Students’ choice</td>
<td>Content-15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1. Directed; written questions given; solo; 3-5 min Topic: Post-graduation plans</td>
<td>Time-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Directed; no questions given; pair; no time limit Topic: Being environmentally friendly</td>
<td>Content-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Directed; oral questions given; solo; 5-7 min</td>
<td>Language-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The instructor’s feedback on the journal submissions was returned to the students in the mode in which it was received (i.e., digital submissions were returned in a digital mode and cassette submissions were recorded on the student’s tape) usually within one week of receiving them. The feedback included a mark and comments on the three assessment criteria: length of the recording, content and language. Content feedback was designed to be specific and related to points raised by the students as has been suggested in the literature (Brinton et al., 1993; Todd et al., 2001). Language usage feedback was given as it is something that students typically desire (Chernen, 2009). For Groups 1 and 3, the feedback focused on grammar, pronunciation and fluency with an emphasis on problems that impeded communication (Ho, 2003). Errors were commented on and corrected in an explicit manner as recommended in the literature (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). For Group 2, a different approach was taken, and language was assessed solely on language style (casual spoken versus written). The learners were informed they were supposed to speak in an informal style, and that they would not be assessed on accuracy or fluency. With regard to language style, all the groups were told that it was not desirable to merely record the reading of a script as the purpose of the oral dialogue journal was to give them a chance to practice online oral language production similar to that used in casual conversation. The students were told that they could make notes to help them when speaking, but that they should formulate the discourse as they were speaking/recording. The instructor listened to the submissions once and took notes on content and language problems. Then, immediately after listening, feedback was recorded extemporaneously with reference to the notes. Finally, the students were informed that both their submissions and the instructor’s feedback would be treated with strict confidentiality.

4. Data Collection

The participants’ perceptions of the oral dialogue journal strategy were collected using a questionnaire that was filled out approximately one week after the final task feedback had been given. The questionnaire (Appendix A) consisted of ten statements to which the participants responded using a 5-part Likert scale and ten opened ended questions (11 for Group 3) that could be answered in either English or Korean (the participants’ L1). The questionnaires for Groups 1 and 2 were identical with the exception of a statement regarding the desirability of the number of tasks—four for Group 1, but two for Group 2.
Group 3’s questionnaire substituted a statement about student-teacher rapport development for the task number statements in Group 1 and 2’s questionnaire. Also, Group 3 answered an additional question about task type usefulness. While an effort was made to keep the questionnaire content constant, minor modification was necessary to reflect developing research interests. The questionnaires were trialed before use to address question ambiguity, unsuitability due to cross-cultural factors and mechanical errors. The questionnaires were completed anonymously to encourage truthful reporting.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were held with seven students from Group 1 and three from Group 3 who volunteered to participate in the study. The interview questions were designed to either support or challenge the findings of the questionnaire. In addition, interviewees were given the opportunity to ask questions and/or make comments on aspects of their oral dialogue journal experience not covered in the study questions. The interviews were audiotaped for future analysis. Due to time constraints it was not possible hold interviews with the students from Group 2. Also considered were written reports on the oral dialogue journal experience that students submitted independently.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants’ perceptions of using the oral dialogue journal, on both per group and combined group bases, were analyzed first with regard to the statements in Table 2. Responses to the statements in the one to two range of the Likert scale indicate agreement with the statement while those in the four to five range indicate disagreement. A response of three means that the respondent was not sure how to answer. As mean scores are used to interpret the results, it is important to also consider the standard deviation (SD) of each mean score. A large SD suggests a wide variety of learner responses, whereas a low SD suggests that the respondents tended to cluster their responses around the mean, thus giving more weight to that particular value. With regard the combined results for statements one through nine, Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the results of the three groups in the study for each statement to check for intergroup agreement. To do this the two positive categories of the Likert scale (totally agree and somewhat agree) were combined into one category as were the two negative categories (totally disagree and somewhat disagree). Very high positive correlations (0.90-1.00) were found for all of the statements except statements four and nine (which will be discussed below) suggesting that the respondents in all three groups gave highly similar responses. A high correlation coefficient together with a low SD lends support to the mean scores calculated for the three study groups combined. To better understand the study findings,
the scalar results (Table 2) will be examined with reference to the most frequently given participant responses to the related open-ended and interview questions.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>All Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoyed doing the ODJ tasks.</td>
<td>2.16/.502</td>
<td>2.08/.64</td>
<td>1.91/.81</td>
<td>2.05/.784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The ODJ helped me improve my English ability.</td>
<td>1.84/.502</td>
<td>1.92/.862</td>
<td>1.68/.71</td>
<td>1.81/.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The ODJ took too much time to complete.</td>
<td>2.79/1.13</td>
<td>2.46/.776</td>
<td>2.82/1.50</td>
<td>2.69/.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Recording my voice was helpful.</td>
<td>1.74/.34</td>
<td>1.85/.899</td>
<td>1.68/.839</td>
<td>1.76/.824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The instructor's feedback was useful.</td>
<td>1.53/.612</td>
<td>1.31/.480</td>
<td>1.27/.551</td>
<td>1.37/.548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I would like to keep an ODJ in the future.</td>
<td>2.11/.658</td>
<td>1.77/.927</td>
<td>2.05/.95</td>
<td>1.98/.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I recommend using an ODJ with future learners.</td>
<td>1.79/.63</td>
<td>2/.108</td>
<td>1.55/.85</td>
<td>1.78/.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It was difficult to use the ODJ equipment.</td>
<td>3.9/.105</td>
<td>3/.129</td>
<td>3.23/1.48</td>
<td>3.38/1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I knew what I had to do to complete the ODJ.</td>
<td>1.79/.535</td>
<td>1.69/.63</td>
<td>1.41/.666</td>
<td>1.63/.610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I wish there had been more than four tasks.</td>
<td>3.32/.749</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I wish there had been more than two tasks.</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
<td>3.15/1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The ODJ helped me feel closer to the instructor.</td>
<td>1.59/.734</td>
<td>1.59/.734</td>
<td>1.59/.734</td>
<td>1.59/.734</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1=Total agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Not sure; 4=Somewhat disagree; 5=Total disagree

1. Participant Responses

1) Instructor Feedback (Statement 5)

Beginning with the results that suggest a high degree of consistency among the learners, as determined by low standard deviations, we find that the participants of all three groups strongly agreed that instructor’s feedback was useful ($\bar{X}_C = 1.37$, $SD = .548$). When asked to comment directly on the usefulness of the feedback, all of the participants responded positively. Overwhelmingly, the reason given for liking the feedback was that it informed learners of their English language weaknesses. Specifically mentioned in order of frequency were problems related to grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary and fluency.

The next most commonly cited reason for appreciating the oral dialogue feedback was
that it increased instructor-student rapport. As increased instructor-student rapport has been claimed to be a benefit of dialogue journals (Chernen, 2009), participants in Group 3 were asked about it directly (statement 12). One concern was whether it would be more difficult for a foreign instructor (as was the case in this study) to establish good rapport with his students than an instructor of the same nationality. Although some research has been done with instructors and students of different nationalities (Allan, 1991; Brown et al., 1996), much of the early research was conducted with students developing their L1s or in ESL contexts where the instructor’s nationality would most likely conform to the social norm and not be regarded as foreign. The results ($X^3 = 1.59$, $SD = .734$) quite strongly support the claim that oral dialogue journals facilitate the building of rapport between students and teachers. One way in which rapport developed, according to the respondents, was when the instructor shared personal opinions and beliefs pertinent to the topic under discussion. 

Questionnaire respondents (and participants who provided unsolicited e-mails) also described the feedback as motivating, in that it encouraged them to work harder on their journal submissions than they might have otherwise, and exciting because it was unusual to receive detailed comments on their assignments.

2) ODJ Implementation (Statements 8 & 9)

Turning to the implementation of the oral dialogue journal, it was found that the participants were aware of what they had to do to complete the journal assignments ($XC = 1.63$, $SD = .610$). This is important because it removes suspicion that the results might have been influenced by participants’ lack of understanding of the journal requirements. On the other hand, a related issue, difficulty associated with using equipment to make the journal submissions (statement 8), may have affected learners’ experience of their journals. While the combined mean score for this statement (3.38) suggests the students were unsure of how to respond, further examination prompted by the large SD (1.27) shows that the respondents were quite varied in their responses. In addition, the slight to high correlation coefficients for the three study groups indicate intergroup differences (G1-G2 = -.016; G1-G3 = .593; G2-G3 = .795). The raw data show that Group 1 had little trouble with the equipment (difficult to use = 10.5%; not difficult to use = 63.1%), Group 3 more trouble (difficult to use = 36.4%; not difficult to use = 54.6%) and Group 2 the most trouble (difficult to use = 46.2%; not difficult to use = 38.5%). Encouragingly, six of the respondents in Group 3 noted that though they had initial difficulties using the equipment, they got better with the practice. The two main problems cited for equipment problems were not having the necessary equipment (e.g., microphone, cassette recorder) or not being able to access a recording program. This finding suggests that teachers need to be cautious about assuming that different groups of learners will have the same access to and/or
knowledge about the equipment needed to complete their oral dialogue journals, and that teachers need to take measures to assist students who experience equipment-related problems.

3) English Language Development (Statements 2 & 4)

Another claim made for dialogue journals is that they help learners improve their English language skills. In this study, respondents from all three groups supported this view ($\overline{X}C = 1.81$, $SD = .693$). Of the 54 students in the study, 48 students reported the oral dialogue experience to be beneficial to language development, five thought it somewhat helpful and one did not think it improved his English ability. The student who thought the oral dialogue journal to be unhelpful suggested that more tasks be assigned as he believed the four tasks given to Group 1 to be too few to affect language development. The students who thought their language ability was positively influenced reported the following areas of improvement (most to least commonly reported with the number of responses, five or more, in parentheses): speaking (31), vocabulary (22), pronunciation (16), listening (10), grammar (9), organization of ideas (8) and fluency (7). When asked about how the oral dialogue journals had facilitated the development of their English ability, the most common reasons given were making and listening to their recordings, and listening to the instructor’s feedback. Their recordings were helpful in part because the learners extensively re-recorded their journal tasks. This process of (1) beginning a recording, making a mistake, and then re-recording to eliminate the mistake or (2) recording the entire text, listening to the recording for mistakes, and then re-recording to fix the mistakes afforded the learners with a great deal of speaking and listening practice. The learners’ responses to statement 4 (Table 2) support the view that they found recording their voices helpful ($\overline{X}C = 1.76$, $SD = .824$). The instructor’s feedback was particularly useful because it highlighted mistakes that the learners were unaware of. With regard to vocabulary, a number of respondents reported that the journals were a good place to try out unfamiliar vocabulary because they knew that the instructor would identify misused words and expressions.

4) Enjoyment of the ODJ (Statements 1, 6 & 7)

Given the participants’ endorsement of oral dialogue journals as a language learning tool, it is not surprising that they reported having enjoyed doing the journal tasks ($\overline{X}C = 2.05$, $SD = .784$). In a similar vein, they supported the idea of using the journals in the future both for themselves ($\overline{X}C = 1.98$, $SD = .845$; statement 6) and for other learners ($\overline{X}C = 1.78$, $SD = .856$; statement 7). Some other reasons given for supporting the use of oral dialogue
journals were (1) being able to speak at length, (2) having an opportunity to think in English, (3) native speaker language modeling was beneficial, (4) it was less stressful to communicate in private and (5) the journal was interesting because it was an unusual activity. Somewhat disconcertingly, learners also thought the dialogue journals helped them develop their writing and presentation skills. While normally writing and presentation skill development would be salutary, with regard to oral dialogue journals it highlights one of the main reasons that learners questioned the usefulness of the journal strategy.

When asked in the questionnaire about the disadvantages of doing oral dialogue journals in a conversation class, the most frequently cited reason (17 responses) was that learners tended to write their report, and then read and record it. The learners rightly considered this process to be unlike spontaneously created conversational discourse. In their more detailed responses regarding the planning of their journal submissions (Appendix A, question 5), no students reported recording unplanned reports. Twenty-five percent of students stated that they wrote everything first, while 46% wrote some sentences or a combination of sentences and notes. Only 29% of participants completed the tasks without writing complete sentences first, something the students in all three groups were specifically requested to do. When asked why they wrote their journal material before recording it, the interviewees in Group 1 replied that writing first helped them produce reports that were better organized and more accurate than ones that were composed spontaneously, especially when the time limit was long. They added that as the oral dialogue journal tasks were marked as a homework assignment, every student wanted to do his or her best.

With regard to assessment, the assessment points for Group 1 were equally divided among time, content and language (Table 1) in order to encourage learners to speak at length, to speak about the topic and not merely copy and record a text, and pay attention to fluency and accuracy, which was a course goal. However, as the assessment focus on language was cited as contributing to the lack of spontaneously produced discourse by Group 1 interviewees, for Group 2 the language criterion was reduced to five points from ten and the content criterion raised to fifteen points from ten. In addition, the language of the journals was assessed only in terms of whether it was characteristic of casual spoken language and not an oral version of a written report. This change may explain the reduced attention given to writing among Group 2 participants. Where 78% of the learners in Group 1 wrote at least some sentences before recording only 54% of the learners in Group 2 did this. To verify this finding, the assessment criteria for Group 3 learners repeated the weighting used with Group 1 in which language was more heavily weighted than for Group 2. Among Group 3 learners, 76% of participants wrote at least some sentences before recording. These findings suggest that not scoring students on language knowledge
and use of that knowledge (grammar, fluency, pronunciation) while instead assessing
language style (spoken versus written), and weighting language assessment less than
content, encouraged learners to write less before recording their journal reports.
Nevertheless, over half of the participants in Group 2 still wrote at least some sentences,
something that they would not have time to do in a normal conversational context.

As naturally occurring casual conversation is largely unplanned, we cannot categorize
the discourse of the oral dialogue journals as being typically conversational. However, the
fact that the discourse of the journals is not that of casual conversation does not mean that
the oral dialogue journal should be rejected as a learning strategy. As noted above, many
language learning benefits have been ascribed to dialogue journals. In addition, planning
time, while not typical of casual conversation, has been shown to act as scaffold for
language development (Foster & Skehan, 1996), and planning time used to write can be a
useful pre-speaking learning activity (Bailey, 2005). This is especially important for
students lacking proficiency and/or confidence, as was reported to be the case by some
respondents in the present study. However, for students trying to develop conversational
competence, language learning tasks need to lead learners in the direction of language
production that is interactive and unplanned.

2. Participant Responses Related to Task Characteristics

1) Task Type

Both the planned nature of the oral dialogue journal discourse and the lack of
interactiveness were cited as disadvantages of the journal strategy by respondents in
Groups 1 and 2 of the study. To address these concerns, tasks were introduced for Group 3
which sought to encourage less planned and more interactive submissions (Table 1). To
provide an opportunity for learners to interact, task 2 required two students to work
together to record a conversation. Task 3 was designed to discourage students from writing
their report in its entirety before recording it. To do this the topic questions were given
orally in the hope that the oral channel of delivery might encourage an immediate oral
reply. Also, the learners were given only one day to submit their reports, as opposed to one
week for the other tasks. With less time to write their reports, it was hypothesized that the
learners would be more likely to respond more spontaneously. In order to assess the effects
of the various task characteristics, the Group 3 participants were asked to rate the tasks in
terms of language learning usefulness. Of the 20 respondents, eight chose task 2 as the
most useful task, five selected task 3, four thought task 1 the best and the remainder chose
task 4. Task 2 was believed to be the most useful because (most frequent to least frequent
responses) the students enjoyed working together, it was more conversation-like, it was
more motivating and challenging, and they were able to solve problems together. It should be mentioned, though, that one interviewee reported that it was difficult to schedule a time to meet her partner, and others noted that because much of the recording is done at home, it would be difficult to work with partners that one was not close to. Task 3 was selected as the next most useful task because the students spoke spontaneously, they were proud to answer the questions in a limited time, it was easier to respond without writing and it was more challenging. One interviewee did suggest choosing a time to assign the task when learners were not extremely busy with other assignments, as the limited time to complete the assignment might mean that other work has to be postponed. With regard to the task questions, some students mentioned that having oral questions to answer made the report more conversational, and less like giving an oral presentation. Having questions to answer, according to the interviewees in Group 1, also reduced the difficulty of the assignment because they provided an organizational structure for the content and lessened the need to research the topic. These comments suggest that providing learners with questions to answer in addition to topics will reduce their cognitive burden, which in turn should allow them to focus more on thinking about how to phrase their ideas in the L2, and obviate, at least somewhat, the need to write before recording. Task 1 was chosen because the topic was interesting (post-graduation plans) and it had a short time limit (3-5 min). Finally, learners chose task 4 because they could choose their own topic and the time limit was longer (5-10 min). These comments suggest that task 2 fulfilled its aim of meeting learners need for more interactive journal tasks, while task 3 was successful to some degree in encouraging learners speak more spontaneously. The comments related to tasks 1 and 4 emphasize the importance of two other task characteristics, time and topic.

2) Task Time Limit and Number (Statements 3, 10 & 11)

When using oral dialogue journals, instructors must consider the number of submissions a learner will make and whether or not to impose a time limit (and if so, how long the time limit should be). Both factors are important because they affect the amount of time the learners needs to commit to complete their journals and the time it will take for the instructor to respond properly. In this study, the learners were quite varied in their responses to the statement concerning the time it took to complete the journal both within individual groups and among the study groups (X̄C = 2.69, SD = 1.14). The correlation coefficients for the responses to this statement (G1-G2 = .945; G1-G3 = -.189; G2-G3 = .143) suggest that Groups 1 and 2, while having a fairly similar response pattern, both differed from the responses given by the learners in Group 3. The major difference seems to be that more learners in Group 3 disagreed with the statement that the tasks took too much time (36.4%) as compared to Groups 1 (26.4%) and 2 (7.70%). This would suggest
that the time needed to complete the tasks was more acceptable to the learners in Group 3 than in the other groups. However, further examination reveals that 45.5% of the Group 3 respondents thought the tasks took too much time compared to 36.8% for Group 1 and 53.9% for Group 2. Given that Groups 1 and 3 had the same number of tasks, the only differences between the two groups’ tasks were the more flexible time limits and more varied task types used with Group 3. It is unclear if either of these factors or both explain the difference in responses regarding task completion time. More suggestive is the 53.9% of learners in Group 2 who thought that the tasks took too long and the only 7.70% who disagreed.

When Group 1 was asked if they wanted more tasks to complete (statement 10), the response was not positive ($\bar{X}_1 = 3.32, \text{SD} = .749$). In fact, a number of questionnaire respondents in Group 1 complained that the journal was taking too much of their time, while some of the interview respondents specifically said that four tasks were too many. Responding to this concern, the instructor reduced the number of tasks to two from four for Group 2, but set a time limit of ten minutes each to encourage the learners to speak at length. Considering the critical response above of Group 2 participants regarding the time needed to complete the tasks, this was not a well-received innovation. Also, when the learners in Group 2 were asked if they wanted to have more than two tasks (statement 11), they were not supportive of the idea ($\bar{X}_2 = 3.15, \text{SD} = 1.28$). However, given the wide variability in the responses (positive = 23.1%; not sure = 38.5%; negative = 38.5%), the instructor was encouraged to look for an explanation for the learners dissatisfaction other than the number of tasks. One possible explanation for this result relates to the amount of time it took learners to fulfill the time requirements of the tasks. Group 2 learners took an average of 173 minutes, the longest of the three groups, to do their tasks, which might explain why so many of them thought the journal took too much of their time even though they had fewer tasks. The learners in Group 1 took on average 145 minute while those in Group 3 took only 90 minutes, which may explain why more learners in Group 3 disagreed with the statement that the journal took too much time as compared to the other groups. Examining the within-group results, it is clear that reducing the number of tasks to 2 for Group 2, but imposing the longest time limit of all of the tasks (10 min) was not popular. However, for the other groups, the results indicate a wide variability in response to the journal time issue. In Group 1, 36.8% agreed that the tasks took too long, while 36.8% were unsure and 26.4% disagreed. In Group 3, 45.5% agreed with the statement, 18.2% were unsure and 36.4% disagreed. These results suggest that different participants responded differently to the time demands of the oral dialogue journals, something that was borne out in the questionnaire comments. Although some students in Groups 1 and 3 complained that the tasks took too long, others wrote that they wanted more time in which to speak or praised the tasks with longest time limits because they gave them the
opportunity to speak at length.

The results suggest that assigning four tasks was acceptable to many learners, but that a time limit of 10 minutes was too long for some students. One solution is to offer students more freedom regarding the length of their submissions, as proved popular with some of the learners in Group 3 who favored task 4 because of its more flexible time limit (5-10 min). The final task characteristic to consider is task topic.

3) Task Topic

The importance of task topic to the success of dialogue journals has been noted from the early research on (Allan, 1991; Staton, 1987). While appropriate topic selection has been credited with advancing learner engagement and through that language acquisition, it is often difficult for the teacher to select topics that appeal to all learners (Dantas-Whitney, 2002). In this study, a variety of topic choice modalities were offered: directed (instructor-selected based on non-textbook content; instructor-selected based on textbook content; instructor-selected with a choice of topics, one based on the course textbook, one on non-textbook content) and non-directed (student-selected). Group 1 was assigned three task topics by the instructor—Why are you taking this course? and Reflect on your emotions and attitudes related to language learning (non-textbook-related content), and World traveler (textbook-related content)—and permitted to choose one topic themselves. Questionnaire comments from Group 1 concerning task topics included (1) a demand for more interesting topics, (2) a desire for a choice of topics or to be able to choose their own topics, (3) wanting topics linked to class material and (4) suggesting that topics be easy so as to discourage writing before recording. Responding to the suggestions of the learners in Group 1, Group 2, which had only two tasks, was given a choice of two topics for their first task, one related to the course content (World travel) and one unrelated topic (Post-graduation plans), and was allowed to choose their topic for the final task. The major complaint regarding task topic by Group 2 (39% of participants) was that they found choosing their topic stressful and wanted the instructor to assign a topic. One of the reasons they found topic choice stressful was that the long task time requirement (10 min) meant they had to choose a topic that was relatively complex. For Group 3, it was decided to ask learners to choose one of the task topics because this had appealed to a number of participants in Groups 1 and 2, but to try to appease students who might be intimated by choosing tasks to meet long time limits by making the time limit more flexible (5-10 min). Two popular tasks topics, based on Groups 1 and 2’s results, were retained (Post-graduation plans and World traveler). In addition to being interesting, these tasks did not require students to conduct extensive research in order to prepare their reports, which would encourage them to speak more spontaneously according to comments from Group 1.
In their interviews, the learners from Group 1 reported disliking difficult topics, and said that one reason for writing extensively before recording was that they couldn’t think of what to say when the topic content was foreign to them. Finally, the remaining pair task topic (Being environmentally friendly) came from the topic under discussion in the class in the week in which the journal task was assigned. As has been mentioned, a number of the respondents in Group 3 selected task 1 as the most useful task because the personalized nature of the topic (Post-graduation plans) appealed to them. Other students chose task 4 as the most useful task because they could choose their own topic, something which motivated them to work harder. Despite these efforts, when asked how the oral dialogue journals could be improved a few learners (9%) from Group 3 still recommended having more interesting and more varied topics. In general, though, these results suggest that using topics that were popular with previous groups of students continues to be an effective strategy, and when learner interest is less certain, a choice of topics can offered. Also, a combination of directed and non-directed tasks remains a way to appeal to some learners’ desire for direction and others’ preference for the freedom to self-select topics.

V.  LIMITATIONS

The small scale of this study, the lack of randomly selected participants and the focus on tertiary-level learners limits the generalizability of the findings of this study. Nevertheless, because of the adaptability of the oral dialogue journal in terms of topic difficulty, time limit and criteria for success, language educators are encouraged to consider whether the oral dialogue might provide their learners with a new opportunity to speak English. Another limitation of this study is the focus on the participants’ perceptions to the exclusion of both instructor concerns and discourse analysis related to the effect of oral dialogue journals on language acquisition. With regard to the instructor, previous research with native speakers of English (Chernen, 2009) suggests that though responding to learners’ journals is time-consuming, with practice it can be achieved in a timely fashion. However, there is a need for research into the use of oral dialogue journals by non-native speaking teachers of English. The primary question to be answered would be to what extent the utility of oral dialogue journals is affected by the teacher’s lack of confidence in speaking English (as was the case with the implementation of CLT as noted by Li [2001] in South Korea). Next, although the participants’ perceptions can provide much valuable information about the usefulness of oral dialogue journals, it remains the task of careful discourse analysis to conclusively determine exactly which aspects of the learners’ interlanguage are influenced and to what extent by ODJ use. This study was intended to be a preliminary step aimed at suggesting hypotheses regarding the possible effects of oral
dialogue journals on second language acquisition, and it has achieved this goal. Finally, as with all studies that rely on the self-reports of participants it is necessary to consider to what extent these reports can be trusted (Burns, 1990). In this study, an effort was made to enhance the validity of the findings by collecting data from a variety of sources (Likert scale, questionnaire and interviews), by ensuring that the respondents understood the importance of the accuracy of their responses for future classes of learners and by making the scalar and questionnaire responses anonymous.

VI. CONCLUSION

The study reported on in this article was designed to examine the usefulness of oral dialogue journals as a learning strategy to develop second language speaking ability from the learners’ perspective. Based on data collected over a three-year period from 54 participants, it was shown that the most important benefit to the learners derived from the feedback they received from the instructor. This feedback was valued because it made learners aware of unconscious mistakes and because it helped to develop a positive instructor-student relationship. The study results also cautioned instructors against making assumptions about learners’ ability to access and use the hardware and/or software necessary to complete the oral dialogue journal. The study revealed intergroup variability with regard to equipment savvy which suggested that assumptions made based on one group need not necessarily apply to other groups. Given this, it is recommended that instructors provide instruction regarding the use of oral dialogue journal equipment and be prepared to assist learners who have problems with the equipment and/or computer programs they will need to use. Next, the study respondents reported that the oral dialogue journal aided in the development of their English language ability. In particular, they cited the benefits of the journal for the improvement of speaking, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, grammar, text organization and fluency. They reported that the journal facilitated this language development by providing instructor feedback on inappropriate language use and by encouraging the self-assessment of mistakes and subsequent correction through a process of recording, checking and re-recording their journal submissions. Supporting previous claims in the literature, the oral dialogue journals were very popular with the learners who reported that not only would they like to use such journals in the future, but that the journals should be used with future groups of learners. In addition to the benefits cited above, the learners supported journal use because they were permitted to speak at length, they could think in English, the instructor’s feedback modeled appropriate language for them to use, private communication with the instructor was less stressful than speaking in the classroom, and the journal was unusual and, thus, an interesting language
learning activity. With regard to the issue of the planning that occurred before the final journal submissions were made, it was found that this was done by the vast majority of learners because they wanted to submit well-organized, mistake-free work. While this concern is understandable, it encouraged participants to write their discourse before recording it, a process that is unlike the largely unplanned discourse associated with casual conversation. The study suggests two ways of reducing learner dependence on writing before speaking: (1) reduce or eliminate the assessment of language mistakes (e.g., grammar, pronunciation, fluency) and focus instead on the meaning expressed in the journals and (2) assign tasks that stimulate more spontaneous communication. Two task features that were reported to promote spontaneous language production were topic questions, particularly questions delivered orally, and a short response time. Topic questions were beneficial because they reduced the cognitive load of the learner and created a more conversational environment, while the short response time reduced the time for writing before recording. With regard to other task features, the study found that pair tasks were well-regarded because they simulated casual conversation, were enjoyable and allowed learners to support one another. Also, flexible task time limits were suggested because they permitted more participant freedom with some learners wanting to speak for longer periods of time and others for shorter time periods. If learners were forced by the time limit to speak for more time than they were comfortable with, it led to more pre-recording writing and less spontaneous communication. Finally, the results highlight the importance of including non-directed and directed tasks as some learners wanted to choose their own topics while others regarded topic choice as stressful. Also, topics that learners were comfortable talking about, and which did not necessitate pre-recording research were reported to encourage more unplanned spoken language.

Overall, the learners in this study were very supportive of the use of oral dialogue journals as strategy for developing English oral language ability. Given the benefits reported above, it is suggested that teachers consider the use of effectively designed oral dialogue journals in their classrooms.

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APPENDIX A
Oral Dialogue Journal Questionnaire 3

Instructions

(1) Do not write your name or student number.
(2) How much do agree or disagree with the following statements? Put a checkmark in the best box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>strongly agree</th>
<th>somewhat agree</th>
<th>not sure</th>
<th>somewhat disagree</th>
<th>strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. I enjoyed doing the oral dialogue tasks. -------------------------

2. The oral dialogue tasks helped me improve my English ability. ---------

3. The oral dialogue tasks helped me to feel closer to the instructor. --------------

4. The tasks took too much time to complete. ------------------------
5. Recording my voice during the tasks was helpful. ---------------------------------
6. The instructor’s feedback on the tasks was useful. ---------------------------
7. I would like to do oral dialogue tasks in the future.---------------------------------
8. I would recommend doing oral dialogue tasks with future learners who take this course, ----------------------------
9. It was difficult to use the equipment needed to do the oral dialogue tasks. ----
10. I understood what I was supposed to do to complete the oral dialogue tasks.--

(3) Please answer the following questions. You can write in either Korean or English.

1. What was **good** about doing the oral dialogue tasks? Why?
2. What was **bad** about doing the oral dialogue tasks? Why?
3a. Did the oral dialogue tasks help you improve your English ability? Why or why not?
3b. If you answered “yes” to Question 3a, tell me which parts of your English language ability improved by doing the oral dialogue tasks (for example, listening, speaking, vocabulary, etc.)
   How much did they improve (a little, somewhat, a lot)?
4. How much time did you spend doing the oral dialogue tasks on average?
   0-30 minutes ____
   30 minutes-1 hour ____
   1 hour-1½ hours ____
   1½ hours-2 hours ____
   2-3 hours ____
   more than 3 hours ____ Tell me how much time you spent. ______________
5. How much did you prepare before you recorded your task report? Circle one letter.
   I wrote down everything I wanted to say.
   I wrote down some sentences.
   I made lots of notes, but no sentences.
   I made a few notes.
   I thought about what I wanted to say, but I didn’t write anything down.
   I didn’t prepare. I just turned on the recording equipment and started talking.
   Other __________________________________________________________________
6. Was the instructor’s feedback helpful? Why or why not?
7a. Of the four oral dialogue task types, which did you find the most useful in terms of improving your English language ability?
   1) Task 1: A short task (3-5 minutes) about a topic that the instructor gave you (Post-graduation plans) that you could complete at your own pace.
   2) Task 2: A task that asked you to record your homework conversation with your partner.
   3) Task 3: A longer task (5-7 minutes) in which you had to respond to oral questions that the
instructor gave you under time pressure (one day).
4) Task 4: A longer task (5-10 minutes) in which you could discuss a topic of your choosing at
your own pace. Task 1, 2, 3, 4 (Circle one.)
7b. Why did you choose that task?
8. Was it difficult to use the equipment to complete the oral dialogue tasks? If yes, tell me about the
problem(s).
9. Do you think the instructor should use the oral dialogue tasks with other students in future
classes? Why or why not?
10. What could the instructor change to make the oral dialogue tasks a better language learning
activity?
11. Is there anything else that you want to tell me about doing the oral dialogue tasks that might help
me better understand whether it is a good language learning strategy or not?

APPENDIX B
Oral Dialogue Task 1 (Group 3)

Submission Date: October 9
Time: 3-5 minutes
State your name and student number before you begin the task.

This task asks you to think about your future. You can talk about your hopes, dreams and plans for
your life after graduation. Please try to relate your aspirations to past and present experiences so that
I can better understand why you hope for the things that you do. Use the questions and statements
below to help you organize your thoughts. If you have enough time, you can add other comments
that are related to the topic.

What do you hope to do in the future?
Why are these things important to you?
Are there past experiences that helped to determine your future hopes and dreams?
What do you think you will do if you experience difficulty in the future?
What do you think will be the hardest to achieve in the future?
What is your definition of a bright future?

Applicable levels: tertiary education, K-12 education
Key words: oral dialogue journal, speaking development

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