Loop it! Student participatory research

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This paper reports on a process of looping data back to student-participants, called Critical Participatory Looping (CPL). CPL helps researchers, teachers, and students form mutual understandings by repeatedly checking each other's meaning-making. In other words, this multilayered, iterative looping process encourages the formation of co-constructed understandings through languaging in collaborative dialogues. By sharing opinions with their peers and teacher-researchers, students activate their sense of agency and develop their L2 English learning. When students' views are presented and published beyond the classroom, students can potentially influence even wider educational environments. This paper provides descriptions of CPL, examples of its use in two studies, other theories it resonates with, its advantages, and teachers' responses after trying it at our JALT2009 presentation.

本稿では教師/研究者が収集したデータを研究参加者である英語学習者との間で回覧するCritical Participatory Looping (CPL) という新しい手法を報告する。対話を通してデータを複数回回覧する方法では、回覧過程で研究者、教師、学習者が協調的対話 (languaging) を行い、お互いの理解度を何度も確認することで相互理解（間主観的理解）を得ることができる。英語学習者同士、又は教師/研究者と英語学習者が意見を交換することで、学習者の主体性が活性化でき、自身の英語学習を促進できるようになる。学習者達の声を公に発表、出版することは、学習者達が自身の直近英語学習環境を超えた教育界全体を感化する機会を創出することになる。本稿ではCPLの概念、CPLを利用した2つの研究実例、CPLの概念構築時に基盤となった既存理論の概論、CPLの使用上の利点を順次説明し、最後に全国語学教育学会国際年次大会に於ける本研究発表参加者の意見を集約、提示することで結びとする。

CRITICAL PARTICIPATORY Looping (CPL) is a multilayered research process of returning data collected in tables back to students for commentary and analysis. CPL allows participants to be informed about their roles and the results of their participation, and to refute, ameliorate, or expand upon their research input. The process has been engaging and educational for both students and teachers. We believe learning and publishing students' views about second language (L2) education can transform theory and practice in our field of study, and the governance of students' own L2 education. In this paper we give (1) a description of CPL, (2) an overview of two studies that used CPL, (3) CPL's parallels to Dewey's (1910, 1997/1938) experiential learning and Lewin's (1946) action research, (4) some resonating perspectives from related fields, namely sociocultural theory and critical applied linguistics, (5) a listing of the advantages and limits of CPL, and lastly (6) a report of our attempt to con-

duct CPL in our JALT2009 presentation with those teachers who were present.

What is CPL?

Murphey and Falout (in press) describe CPL and compare it to member checking in ethnography:

> Using Critical Participatory Looping (CPL), we give compiled results, gathered from surveys or assignments, back to the original participants… CPL can be understood as a group style variation of member checking, in which researchers double-check their notes and interpretations through "continuous formal and informal testing of data, interpretations, and conclusions with participants from whom the data were originally collected" (Stewart, 2002, p. 69). This method is used in ethnographic studies and provides credibility of researcher representations of participants' subjective realities, representations recognizable to and verified by the participants themselves (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

It would be too labor-intensive for teachers to conduct individual member checking as done in ethnographic studies (Figure 1), described above. Thus we invited small groups of students to analyze the data collaboratively (Figure 2). This variation of the method could also result in better learning and more engagement with the issues due to its social nature. It offers students the possibility to language (Swain, 2009) with peers, co-constructing meaning through externalizing ideas in language, improving their cognitive processing and internalizing peers' knowledge through assimilating their voices, leading to attaining their own authoritative voice. Languaging in the classroom enacts near peer role modeling (Murphey & Arao, 2001), the modeling of others who are similar in many ways, thus taking advantage of the strong, positive influences of similar peers.

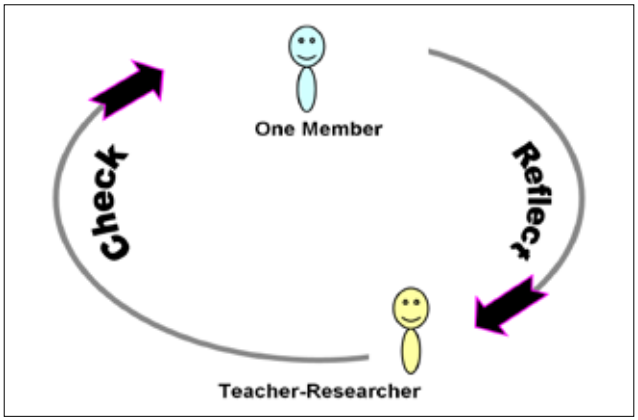

Figure 1. Member checking in ethnography

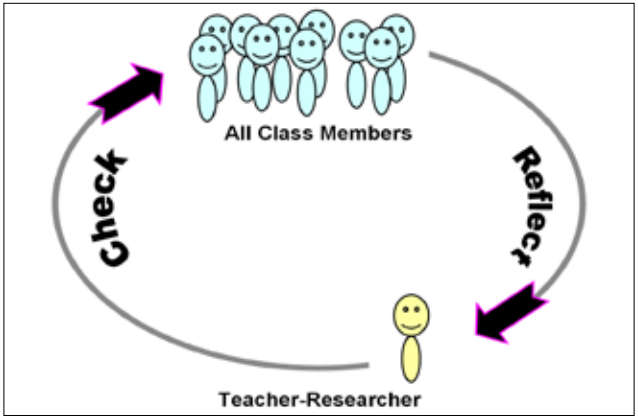

Figure 2. Member checking with whole classes

Murphey and Falout (in press) also state the advantages of CPL:

> Results from research about language learners can be strengthened by including the learners themselves in the data analysis, and inviting them to check researcher interpretations to confirm the validity of the data, to search for alternative interpretations, and to delve deeper into their beliefs…

In this paper we will first present two examples of how we used CPL, and later we will cover how inviting students to participate more fully in research about themselves can empower them as agents with more control over their lives.

Overview of two studies using CPL

In the two sample studies of CPL (Falout, Murphey, Elwood, & Hood, 2008; Carpenter, Falout, Fukuda, Trovela, & Murphey, 2009), data were first collected, analyzed, and represented in tables by the researchers, the "first layer" data. Then in class, the data tables were distributed to small groups of students to analyze and comment on, which became our "second layer" data.

For generating this second layer data, students at first were told that their individual responses on earlier surveys were included in these tables and that their opinions or experiences were represented in these data. They were next requested to analyze the data in a variety of ways, looking for patterns and making preliminary conclusions. They were encouraged to first notice the data by making marks next to items, for example, checking whether the results were surprising or whether or not it pertained to them. Finally, they were asked to write their reactions and interpretations of how these data might explain the attitudes and beliefs of students, and their experiences with L2 education. Comments and analyses were collected from groups or individuals either directly in the class or later in individuals' notebooks that they turned in.

Study one

We invited 440 college students to comment on their junior high school (JHS) and high school (HS) English L2 classes in the first study using CPL (Falout et al., 2008). These first layer data were given back to the students in data tables, which had ranked categories of positive and negative experiences, and suggestions for change. In small groups, students noted surprising features of the data with check marks, discussed the meaning of these data, and wrote their explications. These second layer data were tabulated, and the comments guided our understanding of L2 student needs in this educational context.

The first layer data tables had presented HS "grammar" as both the highest ranking positive experience and the second-highest ranking negative experience. Students pointed out how these results were seemingly contradictory, and expressed disbelief that these data matched their feelings about studying grammar. When compiling the positive category in first layer analysis, we had conflated what students "liked" and "found helpful" in JHS and HS. For clarification, we re-checked the original data.

We found most students valued grammar only as a tool for doing well on university entrance examinations. Ultimately, most perceived grammar instruction negatively due to its mono-methodic approach of "one-way" teacher centered grammar drills and lectures disconnected from personal and socio-cultural contexts. This reanalysis prompted by our collaborative student researchers allowed us to disambiguate the results, thus improving the representation of their attitudes with a new table and explanations (see Appendix 1). Through compulsory L2 English education and its dominant methodology, most of these

students spent six years in secondary school learning through passive engagement. With CPL they had a chance to proactively participate in reflection and analysis of their L2 education.

When shown these student comments, HS teachers had mixed feelings individually and as a group. The teachers read the students' pleas for less grammar-oriented lectures and more communication-based activities, which were clear even in the first layer data. From one presentation, fourteen comments from HS teachers seemed in favor of listening to the students' voices, six comments showed helplessness or resistance to the learners' pleas. In this way, HS teachers were included into a data loop. Here is a sample of the HS teachers' quotes which are left intentionally unedited:

1. students want us to teach English for Entrance Exams.
2. I'm still struggle the conflict between the ideal and entrance exams.
3. I suppose that student need "Grammar" not for the entrance exams but for "Communication". That's what's lacking currently.
4. I'll try to let the students interact in English more.
5. But I'll try to ask my students what they really want in my class.

Study two

In our second study using CPL (Carpenter et al., 2009), we explored the attributions students placed on their demotivation and the attributions for strategies they used to remotivate themselves to learn L2 English in Japan. In the first layer of the study, the survey finished with the open-ended question: "What did you think of the questions on this survey? Do you have any other comments about your English learning experiences?" While 40 percent left this question blank and 20 percent had various responses, another 40 percent commented on how the survey helped them to reflect on their past educational experiences and present attitudes for more positively approaching their L2 learning. They also expressed interest in learning more about what could be useful for improving their motivation, including requesting to see what their peers wrote on this survey. That so many wrote such positive responses for an open ended question at the end of a long questionnaire astounded us, so we redoubled our efforts to get these data—their peers' responses—back to them.

For the first layer, students reported to us their strategies to maintain motivation to learn English. We compiled these data and ranked them into a list of top 20 most frequently used strategies. Then student groups were given the list mixed out of rank order, and asked to guess how these strategies had ranked. Additionally they were asked to mark each strategy they used, wanted to use, or didn't want to use. Next they were given the list showing motivational strategies in rank (see Appendix 2). For the second layer data collection we asked the open-ended question, "What do you think of this research?" Students responded in ways that indicate they felt empowered through competence, relatedness, hope, and agency:

> "We learned from the findings of this research that what we were doing unconsciously is related to English studies. We also learned that there are more opportunities to use English in Japan than we expected. We will be able to improve our English studies by learning about how other students study English. Now we can notice what we didn't otherwise notice when studying English." (translated from Japanese)

> "This is very interesting. We can feel sympathy for other students as they notice the importance of maintaining motivation to study English but that they can't put into

practice. We hope you will reflect this result when you design your classes and we hope that you will get better results when you do the same research next time." (translated from Japanese)

In this study, everyone in the CPL process potentially influenced each other:

1. Students became motivated in the first-layer survey to reflect upon their learning and to seek how their peers learn.
2. Therefore teacher-researchers analyzing this first-layer data felt motivated by the students' responses about wanting to see their peers' remotivation strategies, and gave the data back to the students.
3. Then in the second layer survey students were able to reflect about the learning processes of their peers.
4. Teacher-researchers receiving this second-layer data found evidence that students felt empowered in the process, and therefore reported it in publications.

Parallels of CPL with experiential learning and action research

We find CPL procedures parallel Dewey's experiential learning and Lewin's action research. Dewey (1910, 1997/1938) described an active classroom where students create and follow through on their own investigations, outside of the textbook, through four phases of reflective thinking, which are: have an experience, make a description, analyze it, and take intelligent action. For example, students in our studies experienced JHS and HS English education, they described it in our surveys, they were given the data back to analyze, and took intelligent action by proposing intelligent interpretations and giving recommendations to students, teachers, and administrators.

Lewin (1946) described action research as "a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action and research leading to social action" (p. 35) that uses "a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action" (p. 38). In implementing action research, teachers reflect on their situations, make a plan, act, and observe what happens. Then the cycle continues with more reflection, planning, action, and observation. Sometimes this is depicted as a continuous cycle (Figure 3), or with some sort of evolution and movement implied (Figure 4).

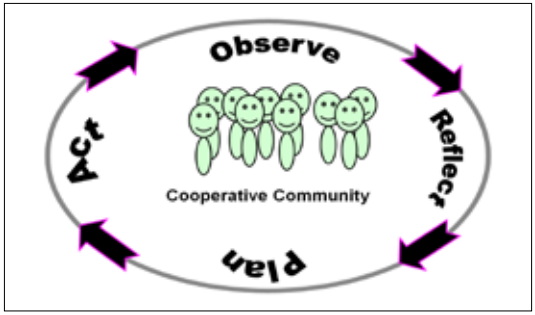

Figure 3. Action research cycle

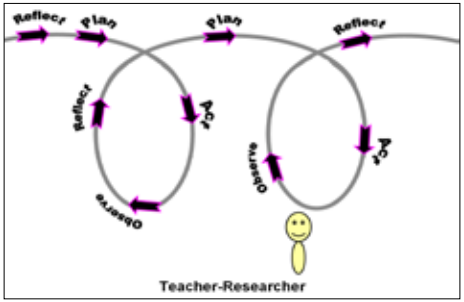

Figure 4. Action research loop

CPL combines action research with ethnography's concern for involving the people who are giving the information by doing member checking with them. Thus, while action research is often seen as teacher or researcher-controlled, CPL allows student-participants more control over the direction of the research. And, while ethnography does member checking with individuals, CPL does member checking with classes and groups. We see no limits on how many times data loops can be made. These parallels are rendered in Figure 5, an amalgamation of the preceding figures.

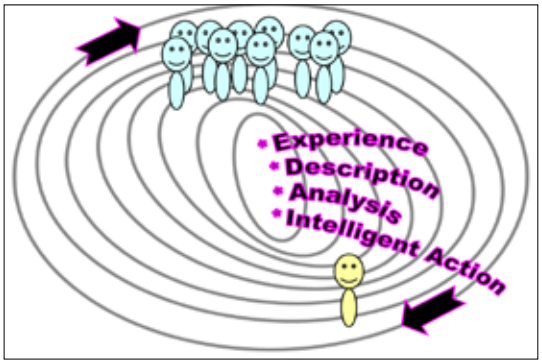

Figure 5. Critical Participatory Looping

Languaging the resonating perspectives of CPL

JALT2009 plenary speasker James Lantolf (2009) asserted that the "dialectic unity of consciousness (knowledge/theory) and action [is what] gives rise to new forms of understanding and behaving" (p. 6). He described dialectics as "the fusion or unity of opposites," and we suggest that CPL is a tool to promote dialectics, in that student, teacher, and researcher become one, shifting from compartmentalized entities to a fusion of all three (Figure 6).

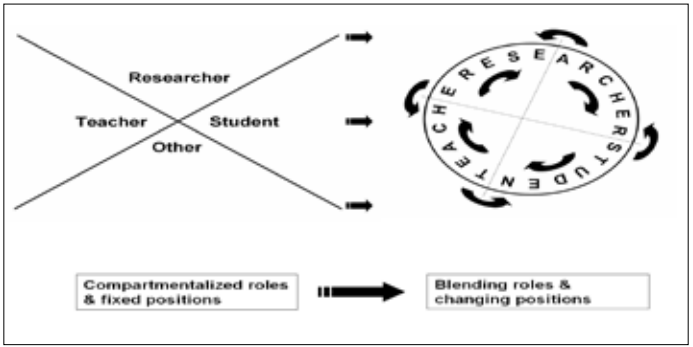

Figure 6. Transforming roles and positions

Equally important is the concept of languaging. Merrill Swain, another JALT2009 plenary speaker, described this concept as "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experiencing through language" (p. 14). Languaging is the process of speaking and writing, of producing language as a process of creating meaning. Languaging can be used to co-construct meaning in social contexts, and it can be a form of externalizing inner speech. Swain asserts that languaging and thinking are "united in a dialectical relationship" (2006, p. 95). By collaboratively languaging about the L2 in either their first or second language, learners can acquire L2 knowledge, skills, and agency for learning and speaking more (Swain, 2006; 2009). Through CPL our students language intensively, thus they are collaboratively shaping the development of their thoughts and words. Often new understandings of their personal and socially-perceived roles as agents in L2 education emerge.

Van Lier (2004) believes, "Teachers can encourage students to develop their own 'voice' in the new language (and first-language learners need to do the same thing in the academic regis-

ters of their own language) by embedding language in meaningful activity" (p. 30). If students see the purpose of classroom activities as artificial, they engage them artificially. We find CPL brings an authentic purpose and forum for students to state their opinions. We tell students at the beginning of our studies that their words and ideas will be presented to JHS and HS teachers by us at conferences, and that we might quote students in our papers. We tell them that their comments could find their way to the Ministry of Education and influence national educational policy. As they take this public responsibility seriously, and the personal responsibility to contribute within their group, they begin languaging in earnest with their peers. Through voicing their opinions, many sense a small gain of agency and become excited as they discuss how to improve education. They feel they have influence because they are listened to—by peers, teachers, and educational policy makers.

Surveys can be seen as "slightly problematic in the sense that they do not measure beliefs but, rather, responses to the researcher's formulation of a belief" (Dufva, 2003, p. 148). However with CPL, participants have the chance to discuss issues critical to them, make their own meanings out of data they generated, and challenge and rectify researcher assumptions. Theoretically, CPL turns a one-way-receiving positivist instrument (surveys) into a mutually beneficial dialectal activity that promotes students' and teacher-researchers' social learning and personal growth.

We also feel that CPL aligns with critical applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2001) through concerns with "the importance of relating micro relations of applied linguistics to macro relations of society, the need for a critical form of social inquiry, critical applied linguistics as a constant questioning of assumptions, the importance of an element of self reflexivity in critical work, the role of ethically argued preferred futures" (p. 2). CPL invites students to challenge assumptions in applied linguistics, and thereby guide themselves in their own language learning, and guide linguists in making informed decisions for research and pedagogy. This occurs when compartmentalized and fixed roles of students, teachers, and researchers start blending and changing positions.

Traditionally students have often been constructed into submissive relationships with their teachers—as exemplified by many of the metaphors that teacher-researchers and even students use for themselves: containers, machines, strugglers, sufferers (Ellis, 2001), while teachers are often described in more active or higher positions, such as advisors, coaches, gardeners, gatekeepers, molders (Oxford et al., 1998). These metaphors position learners as submissive recipients rather than as active participants in the discussion about their own learning (Freire 2007/1970). CPL transcends such limitations by allowing students the possibility to voice their opinions.

The benefits and limitations of CPL

CPL offers advantages for researchers, teachers, and students to become more critical of their attitudes toward learning and of their learning environments, which may create deeper investment in their education, something Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as "endogenous research—that is, research in which the respondents have equal rights of determination" (p. 27), i.e. they should be allowed to collaborate with researchers on interpretation and meaning-making. These features result in three further advantages of CPL: (a) research findings are more congruent with the participants' views and understandings, leading to teaching that has a better chance of meeting participants' learning needs, (b) increased learning, especially meta-cognitive insights such as learning about their own learning, and (c) increased feelings of ownership and belongingness in a community of learners.

To summarize, we think our research with CPL shows that:

1. Multilayered emic (emerging) data from participants can inform research and teaching, guiding researchers in understanding ways to more effectively meet learners' needs.
2. Research data gathered from students, and given back to them for further comment and reflection, can be instrumental in enabling them to think more deeply. Students are not only curious about the results but have often reported learning something from seeing the variety of responses.
3. Researchers can see students as collaborators and cultural informants through CPL. Our students worked with excitement at the prospect of discovering new things and contributed to the research.
4. Teachers can see students as collaborators in instruction, enlisting them in designing more of their education through CPL. Students tend to feel a sense of ownership when they are consulted about how they learn.
5. It is worth asking at the end of surveys, activities, or exercises for reflections on their value and how they might have been better. Researchers can reflect upon their research design and students upon their learning.
6. Students are often impressed more by other students' points of view, what near peer role models (Murphey & Arao, 2001) say, more than what teachers say. Peers' views more often sound usable to them, falling within their Zone of Proximal Development, i.e. what they see as closely attainable (Vygotsky, 1978).
7. Researchers can gain multiple perspectives from the participants on data analysis. Co-constructing meaning with participants through languaging gives more validity to the interpretation of data.

The major advantages are that students' voices are given priority, students are the primary beneficiaries of their own data and reflections, and students learn that research has a face and consequences. Limitations of the CPL process might include the inability of some students and teachers to accept critical perspectives, and to gain the courage to share learning and teaching roles.

Concluding—a taste of CPL with teachers

For our session at JALT2009, we gave the audience a taste of CPL. In preparation, we surveyed teachers who we thought might be going to the conference, and later at the conference we interviewed more teachers, about their feelings concerning student feedback and how they receive it. We collected about 20 responses and were getting the data organized up until the time of our presentation. For the last five minutes of our session, we dictated to the audience-participants these data collected into a table (looping it back), asking them to collaboratively discuss with those beside them the meanings of the data, and give us their feedback about the CPL process at the end. They discussed in small groups, and afterward we collected their written and verbal feedback about using CPL:

1. Student perceptions of their teacher can influence the level of honesty when providing opinions.
2. Informal talks with learners outside of the classroom might provide teacher-researchers more information than a formal feedback process in the classroom.
3. Intuitive observations made by the teacher can yield more explicit feedback about learners than survey results.
4. What students say needs to be actually put into practice, instead of only listening to their voices.

The participants at our session responded that, after seeing our presentation, they had been inspired to act. Here is a sample, which we have left intentionally unedited:

1. [I plan to] Try looping
2. We have to learn more from our students to be a better teacher.
3. I may keep a loop (critical incident journal) of informal conversation. Up to now I have relied on my memory and impressions.
4. I'm going to show my teaching goals to students at the beginning of semester and have them evaluate my teaching based on the goals I showed them.

CPL resonates with the educational theories of experiential learning and critical pedagogy, and it can transform educational environments. CPL helps researchers, teachers, and students form mutual understandings by repeatedly checking each other's meaning-making, co-constructing our knowledge and practice of L2 education by blending roles, languaging, and sharing opinions. Most importantly, inviting students to participate more fully in research about themselves empowers them as agents with more control over their lives.

Acknowledgements

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Bio data

Joseph Falout researches developmental motivational variables of language teachers and students in EFL contexts.

Tim Murphey researches agency and hope within a sociocultural theory perspective.

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Appendix 1

Attitudes toward grammar from 192 comments from 440 learners

(Falout et al., 2008). Recalculated from first layer data in response to students' concerns in the second layer research.

Complete breakdown of attitudes toward grammar	Count (%) JHS	Count (%) HS
Negative affect / Dislike grammar	55 (12.50%)	46 (10.45%)
Useful for exams / Conditional support	41 (9.32%)	26 (5.91%)
Positive affect / Like grammar	6 (1.36%)	18 (4.09%)
Total Count mentioning grammar	102 (23.18%)	90 (20.45%)

Appendix 2

Most frequently noted strategies to maintain motivation.

From the last question in the survey, students asked to see these results to learn about their peers' strategies (Carpenter et al., 2009), i.e., first layer data given back to students in the second layer research.

1. Writing in English. 1.25%
2. Going to a conversation school. 1.25%
3. Talking to myself in English. 1.56%
4. Communicating online with the internet with communities and email. 1.87%
5. Taking a rest from study and relaxing. 2.49%
6. Making friends who study together and help each other. 2.49%
7. Talking to foreigners. 2.80%
8. Study for TOEIC or other tests. 3.74%
9. Listening to spoken English. 3.74%
10. Traveling to foreign countries. 4.05%
11. Exposing oneself to lots of English. 4.36%
12. Learning new vocabulary. 4.67%
13. Doing activities to learn EVERY DAY with persistence. 6.54%
14. Talking in English to friends and classmates, improving pronunciation. 7.79%
15. Enjoy learning English in many ways. 7.79%
16. Have a clear goal or dream for my use of English. 8.10%
17. Study hard, do my homework, and attend classes regularly. 8.41%
18. Watch movies or TV shows. 9.97%
19. Reading newspapers, magazines, books and online. 11.84%
20. Listening to English songs. 13.08%