In a typical classroom, some students will be more inactive and quieter than others. They may be labeled as “shy”, although some degree of shyness is considered normal (Parent Education Network, 2010).

Of course, the word “shy” can be defined in different ways. Brophy describes shyness as “inhibited, lacking in confidence, socially anxious”. He goes on to state that shyness begins to emerge as a problem if it becomes not merely situational but dispositional, so that the child is labeled as shy. Especially if the child internalizes this label, a generalized pattern of shyness may become established and begin to include such additional symptoms as diffidence about entering social situations, discomfort and inhibition in the presence of others, exaggerated self-concern, and increasingly negative social self-concepts (Brophy, 1996, p.380).

Greco and Morris evaluate shyness and related behavior. They note that shyness is essentially a stable condition that can eventually become disabling, leading to functional impairments. They state that shyness and social anxiety disorder are related, and they are overlapping phenomena characterized by similar cognitive, behavioral, and physiological responding. Additionally, many children and adolescents who experience shyness and related social difficulties endure significant behavioral and emotional problems. Evaluating and enhancing interventions applied to this population can help to reduce the internal distress and peer relationship difficulties currently experienced by socially inhibited children (Greco & Morris, 2001, p.301).

However, what Western educators perceive as shyness and an impediment to learning may be due to miscom-
communication and cultural differences. For example, Burrows feels that shyness is a feeling which affects many Japanese students, especially those participating in group classes, where extra pressure from other group members exists. Furthermore, the author has often observed Japanese students writing their answers during speaking activities, instead of using the time more productively, as students assume papers will be checked and that having the ‘correct’ answer is paramount. Others quickly complete speaking exercises, as opposed to using the tasks as a means to communicate and develop their linguistic proficiency... In a country such as Japan, which values conformity and group feelings over individual expression, trying to inspire some kind of rigorous challenge or competitive interaction can sometimes prove frustrating. Japanese students tend to value consensus rather than confrontation, resulting in activities such as discussions that require active involvement, appearing somewhat passive and orderly. (Burrows, 2008, p.29-30)

My personal experience as an EFL educator in Japan for the past several years mirrors this perspective. Consensus does indeed appear to be valued more highly than confrontation. Open-ended questions and activities designed to invite debate are often met with stony silence.

However, one learns to design lesson plans which do work for most Japanese EFL classes. Through the use of well-structured activities, the vast majority of students can become more engaged. Still, there are students who are almost always quiet and reluctant to participate in any speaking activities, although evidence from various assessments suggests that they are capable of doing so. Perhaps some of these students suffer from language anxiety, or they are naturally shy, or they have another reason for falling silent; in a short university course with a large class, it is very likely that an instructor may not know the precise reason. Regardless, it is the teacher’s duty to try to include these students.

From the first day

As reported by Kramer and Korn (1996), it has been established that during class discussions teachers dominate the discussion; they talk up to 86% of the time, even if this monopoly of talk-time is not intentional.

During the first day of the semester, EFL teachers of speaking classes should include a rule among the class rules which states that all students must speak frequently in the class, even if they can’t speak English very well or can only understand and speak a few words. This “speaking participation” rule should be clearly explained on the first day, included on the class syllabus, and if possible given a weighted percentage of the students’ final grades in the class.

This should not be mentioned once and then disregarded in the bustle of completing the semester. Throughout the semester, teachers must actively monitor themselves to make sure they are not completely dominating the speaking time during class discussions, and students who are particularly quiet can be reminded about this
important rule, and shown a breakdown of their current grade with a failing mark in the clearly designated category of “speaking participation”. In my experience, establishing that this rule is extremely important on the first day of class, and subsequently reminding quieter students about it and showing them the current grade breakdown on 1-3 occasions, is often enough to prompt the students to become much more vocal.

**Nice and easy**

If this rule and subsequent well-placed reminders aren’t enough to spur a student into producing speech, one experienced teacher of EFL in Japan suggests a solution which may be helpful with some students:

A problem often encountered in Japanese schools is shy students, especially if the students are of different proficiencies. There is often one student who has little confidence, never speaks up, and takes a long time to answer when spoken to. The best way to deal with such students in my experience is to gradually but relentlessly try to build up their confidence. When practicing a drill or role play, do not call on them first. Lob easy questions to them, increasing the frequency until they find themselves talking a lot; just that will break some of their shyness. You can increase the difficulty when you feel they are ready. Be sure to be liberal with praise, but not obvious or condescending; it should not be too much more than you give other students as well. Try to get them to answer with something if you ask them a question; for example, you can tell them once in a while that if they don’t know the answer, all they have to do is ask another student for help. The main idea at that point is to get them to speak, the more functionally the better. (Poza, 1998)

As stated above, Poza suggests that asking questions with a low level of difficulty may be effective at first, to help draw students out. I have found this to be effective as well. However, left unsaid is what constitutes an “easy question”.

The University of Waterloo helpfully uses Benjamin Bloom’s six cognitive levels as an aid to help teachers create questions at varying levels of difficulty (University of Waterloo, n.d.) Using this resource as an aid, in combination with information obtained in a “first day questionnaire” (see the following section), a teacher can formulate questions which are both relatively simple and include the student’s interests as a theme.

For example, perhaps the class is having a conversation about tennis. The teacher already knows from information previously provided on the first day questionnaire that a student who is usually quiet in class is interested in tennis. The teacher poses the following question to the class:

*(Synthesis)*

*If you were an aging tennis player, how would you attempt to stay in shape?* (predicting)
The class is arranged in a circle, and the teacher calls on the students one by one to hear the various responses and to stimulate a class discussion. The first two students answer the question, but the third, quieter student, reminds silent when asked.

In this situation, a teacher may move on to the next student after a few seconds of silence and continue to go around the circle to elicit more responses. I would submit that although this is an easy way to move the class along and perhaps spare the student a bit of embarrassment, it does nothing to include the student in the class, improve his or her English, or to help the student become a little more comfortable speaking English in front of a group. Another option for this teacher is to ask a question utilizing skills classified as having an easier degree of difficulty, for example:

(\textit{Knowledge})
1. Who is your favorite tennis player? (identifying)
2. Who are the three best women’s tennis players in the world? (listing)
3. When do you watch tennis? (recalling)
4. Where do you play tennis? (recalling)

(\textit{Comprehension})
1. Who was the better player in the last tennis match you watched? (recognizing)
2. Who do you think is the best tennis player in the world? (interpreting)
3. What is one difference between men’s and women’s tennis? (distinguishing)
4. What is a main difference between a professional and an amateur tennis player? (distinguishing)

\textbf{If you interest me, I'll collaborate with you}

One simple way a teacher can quickly and unobtrusively be made aware of a student’s interests is through the use of a “first day questionnaire”. Such a paper can be distributed on the first day of the semester, and it can be an effective way to quickly gain a basic understanding of both a student’s interests, and writing ability.

In addition, I would strongly suggest a thorough evaluation of the student’s tests, quizzes, homework assignments, class work, portfolio additions, and any other work submitted throughout the semester. What are his or her strengths? Does the student have any hobbies, interests, or special skills which may be incorporated into a theme for a lesson that may make it more likely that the student will feel engaged, and thus more likely to participate?

One teacher found that her shy indigenous Triqui and Mixteco students, indeed, suddenly became much more vocal when she integrated material they were personally stimulated by into her curriculum. As she read a
book entitled The Tortilla Factory, she came to a passage in which corn was planted and then flour was made. Suddenly, students who had been shy became very animated, and described how they had helped to perform similar acts in their home countries, and explained how to make tortillas. In fact, these formerly non-vocal students even told her that they wanted to teach her how to make tortillas. The class then proceeded with a group discussion in which they actually became the dominant voice in the classroom for the first time, told the teacher all the relevant information, and planned to design a “tortilla project”. Shy students who had previously been embarrassed by their heritage decided to follow through with a cooking demonstration. They brought in materials, set up tables, and explained various aspects of creating tortillas, like removing kernels of corn from a cob, preparing green chili sauce, and how to prepare tortillas by hand. This collaborative work created a community of respectful, motivated students, and the personal interest of the students in the topic was an important catalyst in involving quiet students in the work of the class (Freeman & Freeman, 2003, p.118-119).

Faced with a similar situation in my classroom, I attempted to duplicate the results of the project detailed above. One class I taught included many students with a particular interest in international current events. Repeated attempts to engage the class in discussions related to this topic were fruitful, but six out of twenty students remained quiet and did not participate. I decided to create a short collaborative project which would ensure that all students would participate, and integrate the theme of “international current events” into the lesson. I began by initiating a short class discussion about the latest world news, and elicited various responses from the most outgoing students, but the quieter students remained silent. I attempted to limit my own talking time during this discussion. Next, a handout I created was distributed to each student in the class.

I proceeded to play a 30 minute recording of a CNN broadcast of international news, called “World Report”. This particular recording was chosen for its diversity of topics. For example, stories covered included presidential politics, Christmas, the Philippines, terrorism, climate change, money, the weather, war, soccer, Cambodia, and more. Advertisements were also meant to be watched and evaluated, and they included a variety of international advertisers such as Rolex, Canon, Thai Airways, Marriott, Samsung, Sharp, the Indian government, Emirates, Credit Agricole, and several promotional spots for CNN itself. Students watched the recorded material in several segments. I paused it repeatedly for them to have an opportunity to fill out the handout in groups, share information about targeted phrases they were able to “catch” in the broadcast that I had pre-taught, answer a few questions that I had posed, and complete various other tasks related to our classwork. Further mirroring the project reported in Freeman & Freeman’s research, I set a task for collaborative work: the writing and presentation of a television news script. This required everyone to become an active participant, and doubled as a four-skills assessment. Students wrote TV news scripts, following rules such as “use conversational contractions”, “try for short sentences”, and “use the present tense as often as possible”. After rounds of editing, students read their scripts to their partners and to the class as a whole. Students followed fun, involving, accurate newsreader rules for this activity, including standard TV news anchor dictates such as:
A. Read at about three words per second.
B. Don’t worry about your accent. Focus on clarity.
C. Read using middle tones.
D. Relax. Be in control, and calm. Take deep breaths before going “on air”.
E. Sit comfortably, spine erect. Legs uncrossed.
F. Don’t shout, but command attention. Project your voice.
G. Drive the script with consideration to the meaning of what you are reading.
H. Use your mouth to shape the words. The audience is lip reading!

The speaking participation of the quieter students in the class during this multifaceted, student-interest based collaborative project definitely increased in the same manner that Freeman & Freeman described as a result of the “tortilla project”. This increased level of participation continued for the remainder of the semester.

What’s my role?

Role-plays are another option for teachers searching for ways to draw out quieter students. They may be provided with scripts, or tasked with writing them on their own. In a course focused on the improvement of conversational strategies or speech functions, role-plays are an especially useful activity to assign. If the students are provided with scripts, they may be read verbatim at first, but then should be used as a starting point and reference for producing new speech. Audiotaping, transcription, self-evaluation and peer evaluation may be used with this activity (Riggenbach & Lazaraton, 1991).

Instead of starting with a script, role play cards may be distributed and used during this activity. Pertinent conversational strategies, speech functions, vocabulary, idioms, etc. should be taught beforehand. Next, cards are distributed. Two cards might read, for example:

(Card A)
Name : Henry
Situation : You are a customer attempting to return spoiled milk to the supermarket.
Problems : 1. You lost the receipt, so you cannot prove where you bought the milk.
2. Although you think the milk is spoiled, to other people it smells fine.

(Card B)
Name : Nicole
Situation : You are a cashier at a supermarket.
Problems : 1. You didn’t sleep much last night so you aren’t in a very good mood.
2. You usually try to dissuade customers from returning products after they are bought, because you feel that people should keep what they buy. You are also suspicious that some customers may replace new products with old ones in a sneaky attempt to make a little money.

As this is a structured performance activity, quieter students will benefit by having clearly defined roles and expectations. These students will also benefit from a guided discussion, provided that a clear framework for this activity is explained and understood by the students before they are asked to begin speaking.

**Guide me into a discussion**

Using guided discussions related to a text or specific topic may help quieter students to gain self-awareness, and deal more effectively with their environment. Such discussions, to be effective, need both a focus topic as well as specific goals to work toward (Peterson, 1993). How can an instructor begin such an activity? Several suggestions provided by Frederick (2003) may be adapted for inclusion in an EFL speaking class with the goal of sparking the increased involvement of shy students.

1. Students can be asked to take responsibility for the content of the discussion. Students read or skim a text, and then in pairs determine what is the primary value of the text. This causes the students to take ownership of the topic to be discussed, and thus may prompt quieter students to speak more easily as their interest may be stimulated. As an alternative activity, students may be asked to compare two texts, create a list of themes that the two texts have in common, and then the various lists can be used by the instructor to determine guided discussion topics.

2. After a reading a short text, each student can be asked by the teacher to share one notable image, scene, event, or moment from the text. The teacher then creates a list of the student suggestions, and this list can then be used as a basis for class discussion. Quieter students are likely to participate in this activity because the amount of speech they are being asked to provide is modest; a word or two will suffice. This input can then be used as a springboard for further discussion, and thus a student who is hesitant to speak, who has in fact said very little, has still played an essential role in the creation of a class activity.

3. Before beginning the full-class guided discussion, the class can be broken into smaller groups. This is possible regardless of the overall class size. This can be beneficial for shy students, because students who are particularly hesitant to speak to a large group may be more willing to do so after they have practiced with a smaller audience. In helping small groups to work together effectively, the instructions provided by the instructor must be very clear and task-oriented, the groups should be formed with different students from day to
day, and the ways in which groups report the results of their work when reassembled should vary.

4. Students may be asked to engage in “forced debate”, in which they must choose a side of a controversial issue, and defend it. In this situation, students who are hesitant to speak in front of a group and engage in open debate will often respond that they cannot choose a side because both sides have merit. A teacher, when faced with such a response, can say “OK. Then, I would like you to take a middle position in this debate and talk about why you partially agree with both sides”. The student therefore has no path out of participation in the conversation.

5. With some shy students who do not react well to “forced” speaking situations, a very different approach than the one listed above may be effective in stimulating them to speak. A teacher may simply hold up a text after students have finished reading it, smile, and say “So how’d you like it?” Certain students may feel both disarmed and engaged by such a casual, relaxed invitation to participate in a class discussion, and thus become more likely to speak.

We must open our doors, step into the corridors, and share responsibility for all our students, including the most challenging.

—Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching, 2012

It may not be particularly taxing for a teacher to deliver a lecture while many or most students daydream in the back of the classroom, or to assign group work and then spend the majority of class time passively standing by and allowing the students to work on their own, often engaging in unrelated conversation or remaining silent, essentially unsupervised. Outgoing, motivated students may be able to succeed in such an environment. However, some students with additional needs will “fall through the cracks” and gain nothing from such classes. As educators, it is our responsibility to address the needs of all our students, including those who are more challenging to engage. It is hoped that some suggestions in this paper may be helpful to instructors of EFL speaking classes who wish to involve quieter students in classroom activities.
References

The problem of including quieter students in university ESL/EFL speaking classes is a vexing one. At the elementary, junior high and high school levels, teachers often teach smaller classes and meet with students on a daily basis, so there is much opportunity to work with them and employ various strategies to bring out students who are very hesitant to speak. However, at the university level, classes are often large and meet as infrequently as once a week, for a single semester. With such a short amount of time and much academic ground to cover, EFL teachers of speaking classes may be tempted to move their classes along by focusing on the most outspoken, extroverted students. In such a situation, students who know enough English to speak and respond to questions, but who are shy, may have little participation in the class, or may be completely ignored. This is unfortunate and unnecessary. This paper describes how shyness manifests itself in the classroom, and explains strategies which the university EFL instructor may employ in speaking classes. It is hoped that readers of this paper will feel better prepared to include shy students in their speaking classes.

Keywords: shyness, student pair work, classroom environment, classroom management, collaborative learning