

Teaching Context

University 1st year Students, Lower-Intermediate- Honors

Class size of 15 students, 5 total native teachers

Lessons once a week, 90 minutes each

Textbook: Tools for Increasing Proficiency in Speaking: Book 2, by Duane Kindt

Good points

Good teacher to student ratio, many opportunities for input

Good course content, such as conversation strategies and interesting topics

Longer class time

Control over how material is taught

Recursive practice

Emphasis on communicative teaching and communication

Issues

Tutor and student beliefs

Tutors believed that if left alone, students would carry on making mistakes
(AR Report November)

Students saw tutors as the final authority in the language

Tutor/student interaction

A tutor-centered interaction when tutors sometimes dominated the conversations

Students preferred to turn to a tutor during problems rather than each other

Lack of collaboration

Between tutors on teaching practices or course materials

Between students in learning vocabulary and solving problems in communication

Lack of scaffolding

Of conversation strategies and conversation in general

Assessment

Goals of the course not tied to student performance or assessment

Not challenging enough for the honors students

Not clear enough for tutors to use with reliability and without bias

Goals

To ascertain teachers and students beliefs about student/student peer-teaching

To monitor changes in student and teacher beliefs about student/student peer-teaching

To give students more opportunities to carry the burden of communication for themselves, resulting in more

negotiation of meaning and a more beneficial learning culture
 To create a more collaborative teaching and learning environment
 To better scaffold conversation strategies and conversation in general
 To improve assessment

What I did

I surveyed students on their satisfaction with methods of assessment and different kinds of conversational interaction.

I tried peer-teaching activities.

I gave a survey on tutor beliefs about student/student peer-teaching.

I gave a students a survey on their satisfaction with peer-teaching activities.

I gave the results of the surveys back to the participants and tried to monitor any changes in beliefs.

I tried to maximize student/student interaction with increased pair-conversations and group discussion.

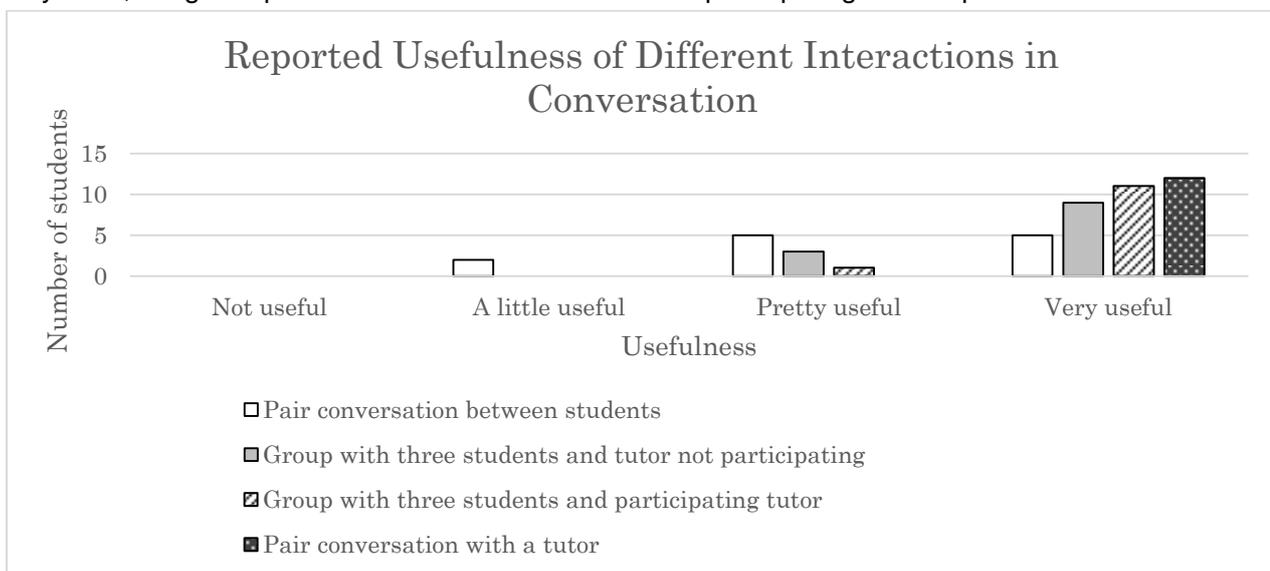
I incorporated conversation strategies into discussion activities to provide scaffolding in guided practice.

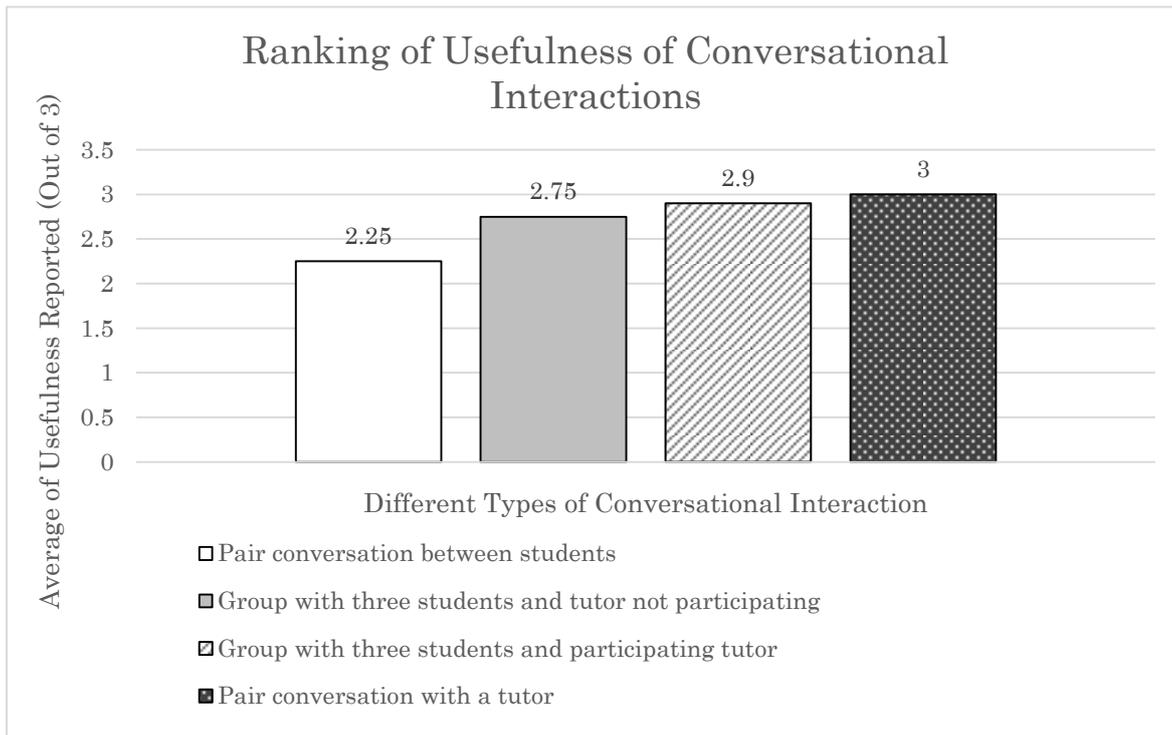
I involved tutors in revising the assessment and course materials to create a more collaborative teaching environment.

What Happened

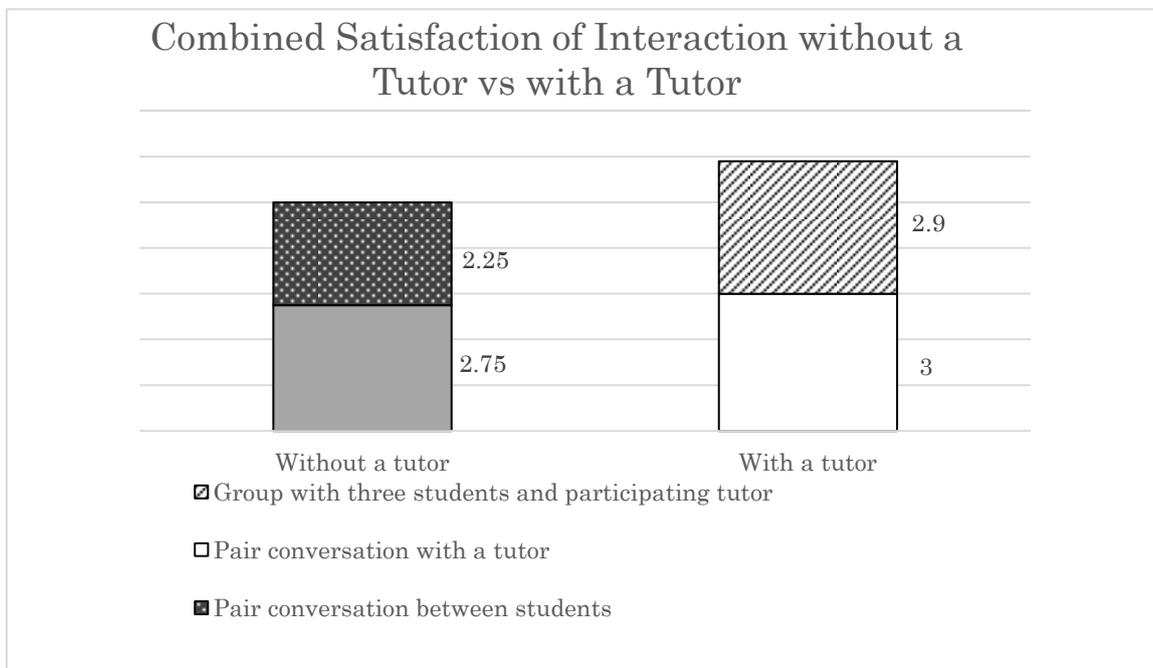
From Mid-term AR Report

In the mid-term survey on one class's satisfaction with different kinds of tutor/student interaction during recursive conversations, overall reported satisfaction averaged high. Most students (8 of 12) reported all interactions as useful or very useful. Most students reported that interactions including a participating tutor were very useful; all students (12 of 12) said pair conversations with a tutor were very useful, and most students (11 of 12) said group conversations with a participating tutor were very useful. It cannot be definitively said that students prefer teacher-centered teaching practices, as the quality of participation varies between tutors. However, these results could indicate a bias toward teacher-centered interaction, or at the very least, a higher opinion of interactions that include a participating native speaker.

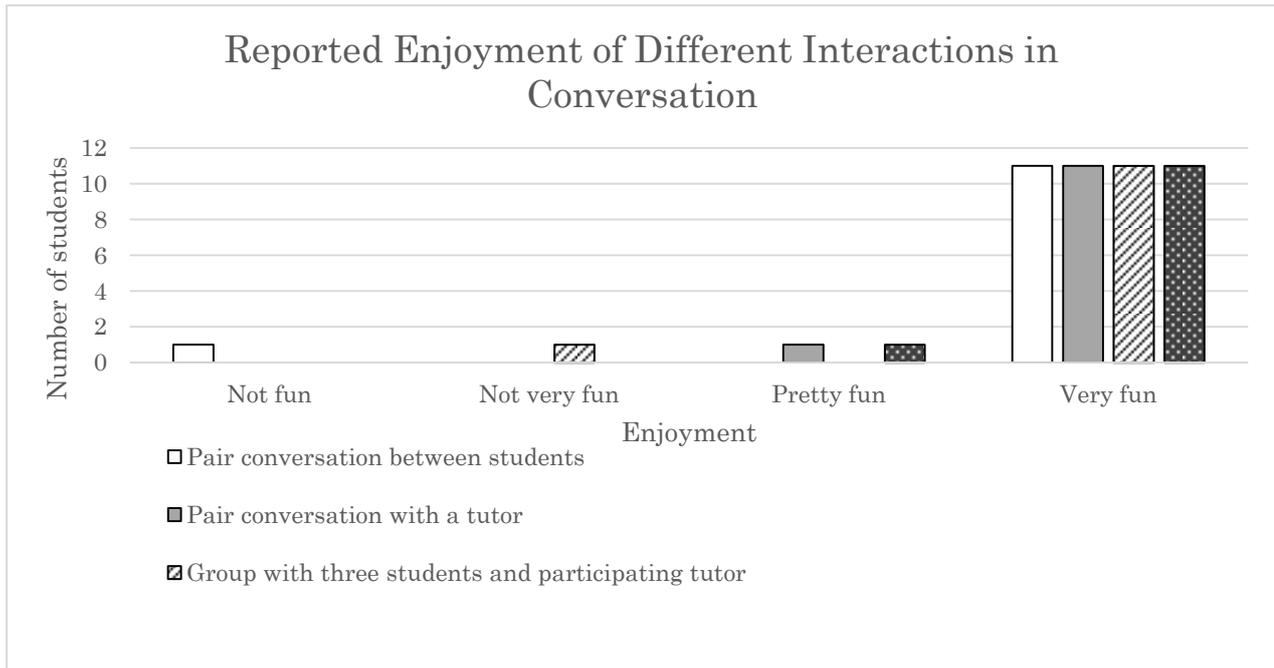




Of the different interactions, students reported pair conversations between two students as the least useful with an average of 2.25 out of 3. Again, this could indicate a higher preference toward a more teacher-centered interaction, and a lower preference for a more student-centered interaction.



There was not a significant difference in the average reported enjoyment of different interactions, with a majority (11 of 12) reporting that all interactions were very fun. That being said, one student gave the lowest rating (not fun) to one-on-one pair conversation between students.



Overall, these results indicate a greater satisfaction with interactions involving participating tutors and a lower satisfaction with interactions that rely on students to carry the burden of conversation.

From October AR Report

Student Opinions of Peer Teaching

After an activity in which students were to teach and learn idioms from each other, one class of students reported that the peer-teaching of idioms was useful or very useful (8 and 7 of 15, respectively). Most of the students said it was fun or very fun (5 and 6 of 15, respectively), although four students said that it was just neutral. Students' comments were positive in regards to the benefits of peer-teaching, as well.

However a few students mentioned that they would like to confirm the meaning of the idioms after the activity. While this could indicate a lack of confidence in their own ability to teach and learn from each other, it could also reflect a lack of confidence which was created by the open-ended nature of the activity. In either case, peer-teaching and student confidence is an area which deserves further study.

Selection of Students' Positive Comments

- I was glad when my friend understood my meaning
- I couldn't explain well, but my friend understood what I said and help[ed] me.
- It's good time [chance] to understand the meaning of words by myself
- She used a lot of different examples that she (and others) had thought of, so it was easy to understand and fun.

Selection of Students' Negative Comments

- It was useful, but I want to teach (be taught) precise mean[ing] after this activity because I was a little bit worried whether I could understand correctly

- It was difficult to explain, but I was very glad to understand the idioms mean[ing]

Strategies students used during the activity

After the peer-teaching activity, I asked students what they and their partners did when they couldn't understand each other. In open response, students reported using eight different strategies to understand or be understood, including one strategy that they had not been formally taught in PUT class (Giving Synonyms). This reflects the strong communicative nature of the activity, as it appears to require students to be innovative in how they solve problems in communication.

Tutor opinions of peer-teaching

Tutors were surveyed on what they perceived to be the advantages and disadvantages of peer-teaching vs. tutor teaching. While all five tutors reported a variety of advantages to both peer-teaching and tutor-centered teaching, a commonly held belief was that a risk of peer-teaching is that students will teach each other an incorrect definition.

Tutors' Comments on Accuracy in Peer-Teaching

- [Peer-teaching] can mislead if they misunderstand the way it is used
- Something could be taught wrongly, although I wonder if this is a real concern
- Students may not teach each other the correct meaning if they didn't understand 100%
- [There's a] chance of teaching incorrect meaning.
E.g. SA: Crunch time is when you do important thing very hard SB: Ah, ok. Crunch time is doing something very hard.

Overall, the results of this study seem to indicate that in this class, there was some agreement between tutor and student beliefs on the risks of student/student peer-teaching, although it is difficult to compare beliefs of students and tutors when they were not given the same survey questions.

The tutor comments in particular seem to point to a lack of trust in students' ability to be accurate, or may reflect a belief that students will teach each other incorrectly.

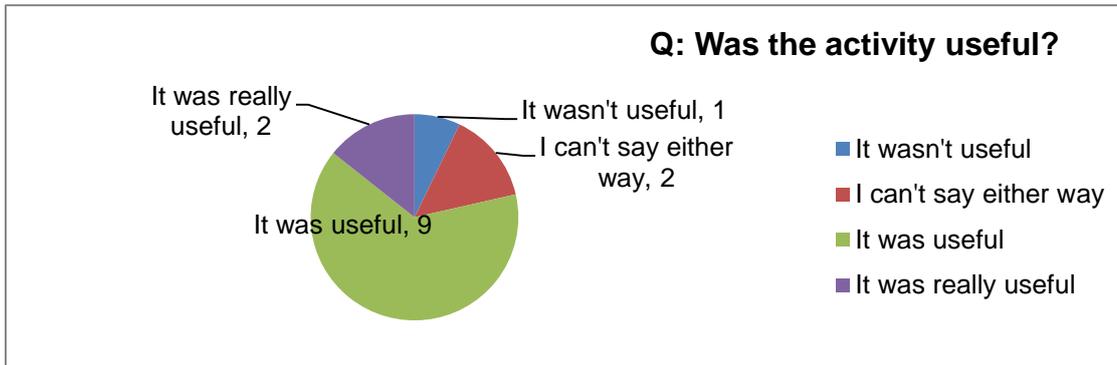
From November AR Report

I tried another peer-teaching activity, in which students worked together to practice defining Japanese cultural concepts in English. I surveyed the students on their perceived usefulness, enjoyment, and capacity for cooperation during the activity. The results seem to reflect an overall satisfaction with the perceived usefulness and capacity for cooperation (11 of 13 responses for both). However, slightly less than half of students reported that it wasn't as fun (6 of 13). The students' negative open responses may point to reasons why relatively so many students found this activity less fun.

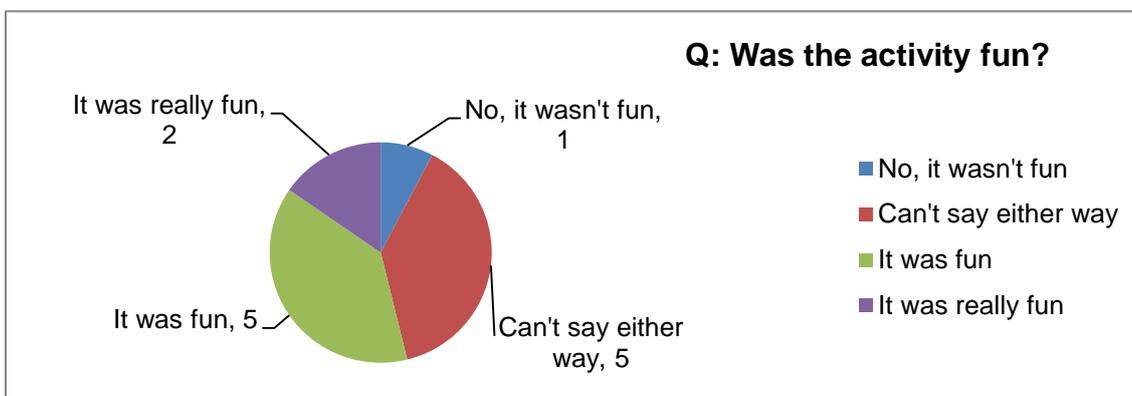
Results of Student Surveys

Many of the students' negative feelings were about the topic, not the activity

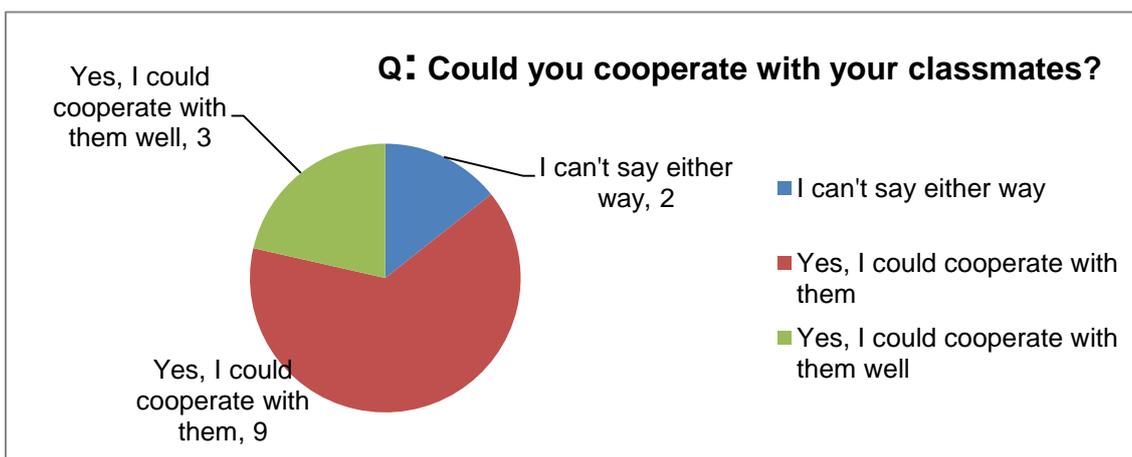
Students seem to think that activities with a clear explanation of the purpose and procedure where they can talk with their friends, warm up, share information, and talk to foreigners about their own culture or culture differences are enjoyable and useful.



Most thought it was useful or very useful (11), though a few weren't sure (2)



Many thought it was fun (5) or really fun (2), but many weren't sure if it was fun (5), and one (1) said it wasn't fun



Most could cooperate with classmates (9) and a few could cooperate well (3) but a few weren't sure (2)

Students' Open Responses

Most of the students open responses were positive (25 of 34 total responses) particularly in regards to understanding their own culture and cooperation (9 and 6, respectively).

Samples of Students' Positive Responses

It helped them understand their own culture (9)

- 日本の物を英語で説明する方法を学べて良かった
- I can know Japanese culture which I didn't know, and practice to explain Japanese culture.

It was good to work together (6)

- みんなで考えることは、良いことだと思いました
- みんなで協力して意見を出せた

It is an important skill (5)

- I can learn how to explain something and communicate with people.
- I could explain about I never think deeply things.

It was fun (5)

- It was fun because I could talk with my friends.

Samples of Students' Negative Responses

It was difficult (4)

- 自分たちが何気なく使っている物の説明が難しかった
- I couldn't give my opinions to my partner clearly

I would rather know what foreigners think about Japanese culture (2)

- I couldn't see the point of Japanese people explaining Japanese culture to each other
- I think it would be more fun if we asked foreigners their opinions of Japan

I didn't understand the purpose (2)

- I'm sorry but [at] first, I couldn't understand the meaning of activity. But, finally I could cooperate with my friends

I wasn't fun (1)

- It was a little bit boring.

Overall, the results seem to indicate a rather positive belief in student/student cooperation. However, a few students showed a preference for talking with foreigners about their own culture over working together. This could be due to a preference for a more teacher-centered interaction, or could simply point to a need for more authenticity in the activity itself.

From December AR Report

Dynamics of Group Work

I observed how the quality and quantity of student participation in group work changes depending on how many tutors are supervising and whether a student or a tutor is holding the pen. In short, I found:

- Students with no tutor at the table also held the pen, and were observed to speak frequently, using strategies such as Asking to Repeat or Asking for Meaning.
- Students with one tutor, regardless of who held the pen, were observed speaking equally with the tutor. Students were observed communicating primarily with whoever was holding the pen, and

students who held the pen asked questions about spelling or grammar. Other strategies used are unknown.

- Students with two tutors at their table were observed only speaking in response to what the tutor said, and although a student held the pen, this student was observed only writing what the tutor said specifically to write.

These results seem to indicate that in this particular instance, more tutor interaction resulted in less student participation with little/no negotiation of meaning, and less tutor interaction resulted in more student participation and more negotiation of meaning.

I also conducted an interview with one tutor on some of the reasons why he held the pen during the group work activity.

Excerpts from Interview with Tutor

Q: This time, why did you decide to write during the group discussion activity?

A: It's faster- puts the focus on brainstorming and producing more content in a short amount of time.

It also helps with student accuracy and grammar.

Q: What's the worst that could happen if [tutors] didn't participate at all?

A: Students would use lots of Japanese, depending on their level.

The tutor's responses appear to point towards a belief that it is the tutor's responsibility to keep the time and to help students stay on the task, as well as to improve students' grammar. It is interesting to note that the reasons he gave for holding the pen (or, roles that this tutor listed as his own responsibility) are often roles assigned to students in cooperative learning tasks; for example, time-keeper, group leader, task manager, and so on. Those reasons, as well as this tutor's apparent view that tutor involvement could "help with student accuracy and grammar," could reflect a more teacher-centered approach to group work, aligning with other teacher-centered beliefs in results from previous AR reports.

What I Learned in Summary

About AR

Last year, I jumped around between many different AR projects. This approach helped me develop my teaching, but made it difficult to compare data from project to project or over the year. This year I will focus my energy on fewer projects.

It's important to share the results of your surveys soon after they are administered, or participants will forget what they said and why they said it.

About student and teacher beliefs

Students rated pair conversations with each other as the least useful PUT interaction (AR Midterm report), which might keep them from taking advantage of that interaction as a learning opportunity. If students don't trust student-centered teaching, they might be less likely to take advantage of opportunities to learn from each other.

Some tutors indicated a lack of trust in students to not make mistakes if left to themselves (November AR Report). If tutors don't trust students, they might inadvertently reduce their opportunities to learn from each other.

While most students and teachers reported positive feelings toward the activities, I need to address students' confidence in themselves as well as teachers' confidence in students.

About peer-teaching activities

Students said many positive things about peer-learning activities, particularly in regards to cooperation and strategy use. However they still expressed a doubt in their own ability to be accurate, a belief that seemed to be shared by many tutors. (See November AR Report, "Advantages and Disadvantages of Peer-teaching")

About collaborating with coworkers

True collaboration is an ongoing conversation, and it takes time.

When asking for feedback, it's better to ask specific questions in short bursts over time, and it's important to share the results of the collaboration with the group's members.

If you show that you're always listening and give your collaborators lots of chances to speak, you'll create an environment more conducive to collaboration.

One tutor said, "Even if I don't always have something to contribute, I appreciate the hum in the background."

About group work and discussion

To be effective, group work needs to be structured and the purpose made clear for both students and teachers. This is because group work alone is not necessarily beneficial; its success hugely depends on the members of the group, the task and the teachers. (See December AR Report)

Incorporating conversation strategies into group discussion or activities makes the purpose more clear and is good scaffolding.

Future Issues

I want to continue aiming for a student-centered PUT.

I want to foster a positive belief in students' ability to learn from each other, and measure that change in beliefs with a year-start and year-end survey.

I need to incorporate student recordings into my research to measure students' improvement.

I want to continue a collaborative dialogue with my coworkers about assessment and course materials.

Now that assessment has been revised to align with the goals of the course, and we have a plan for incorporating assessment and self-reflection into almost every class, I expect students and teachers to be more familiar with the course goals. This should make it easier to administer a beginning and end of year survey, and I can begin measuring the results of my classroom activities and curriculum.

Ideas for next year

Change practices

Scaffold self-assessment over the course of a year

Continue to use peer-teaching of vocabulary when possible

Monitor improvement

Check students' recorded conversations for increased instances of strategies used in peer-teaching such as circumlocution or asking for/giving meaning

Keep track of students' improvement in communicative ability (change in conversation scores in a year)

Monitor changes in beliefs

Survey teachers on their beliefs about student self-assessment and peer-teaching at the start and end of year

Use students' self-evaluations to monitor their own improvement

Share students' improvement and beliefs with students and tutors

Monitor students' change in beliefs about the values of peer-teaching and self-assessment

Lesson Plan, from October AR Report

Teaching context

University 1st year Students, Lower-Intermediate

One class of 13 students, 5 total native teachers

In-house textbook, Tools for Increasing Proficiency in Speaking: Book 2 by Duane Kindt

Goal

Overall, creating a more student centered PUT classroom; in this lesson, students can express their ideas about their language learning history using conversation strategies.

Objectives

Create a more student-centered classroom through peer teaching of vocabulary items (idioms).

Students can understand how to use the conversation strategy, Getting Time to Think, and use this strategy during the timed conversations.

Procedure

Today's lesson plan

A. Peer teaching

- ① At each table, tutors teach their students a vocabulary item (idiom) using as many means as possible, including drawing pictures, making example sentences, explain social situations where it is used, making questions and answers using the new words, etc.
- ② Head tutor writes some helpful expressions on the board, including "Sorry, what?" "Can you give an example?" "Can you make a sentence?" "How do you say it in Japanese?"
- ③ Students practice explaining the idiom at the table using the expressions on the board
- ④ Students go around and teach each other the new word and learn the new phrase of their partner
- ⑤ At the end of the activity, report back to their table and teach their idioms to the group. Tutor can correct misunderstandings. Also students can say, "Hmm..." or "Wait a sec.." if they need time to think while explaining

B. Comprehensible input/ output through three short timed conversations

C. Verbal Feedback

D. Final Group Conversation/Assessment: Students talk in a group of three and tutor evaluates them

What Happened: Peer-teaching

What I observed

Students were very actively using a variety of conversation strategies to teach and learn the words. At first they looked nervous, but eventually they warmed up and did everything they could to communicate.

Results of Student Surveys

- Students said the activity was useful (8 students) or very useful (7 students). Most of the students said it was fun (5 students) or very fun (6 students), although 4 students said that it was just neutral.
- Students reported using conversation strategies that I hadn't taught that in PUT to negotiate meaning. For example, they gave synonyms or asked for situations to use the idioms. I think this really speaks to how powerful peer-teaching can be- it makes strategies necessary and can cause students to invent or innovate ways of communicating.

See Table "Strategies Students Reported Using During the Peer-Teaching Activity", October AR Report, for full results

Results of Teacher Surveys

Most (4) teachers seemed to agree with students that a risk of peer-teaching is that students will teach each other an incorrect definition. However, one teacher said that this may not be a problem, and another teacher after class recognized that even native speakers define idioms differently.

See Table "Advantages and Disadvantages in Peer Teaching", October AR Report, for full results

In other words:

	...students teaching each other	...tutors teaching students
Advantages of...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Interesting ● Deeper understanding ● Feel closer ● Not afraid of making mistakes ● Students often know the easiest way to explain something-sometimes using ways the tutor doesn't think about ● Really encourages the use of strategies to convey meaning, guess meaning from context. ● Also promotes general confidence in dealing with language above Ss current real or perceived level. ● Students have more chances to speak, to negotiate meaning, and to solve problems in communication by themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perhaps a more accurate description, more examples of natural/real usage ● Correct usage through modeling ● Helps pronunciation ● Tutors often have experience teaching the word or grammar so know the best way to teach it ● Tutors are more able to adjust what they say to suit different levels of English ability ● Because tutors don't have to participate, they can step back and provide guidance on a meta-level- how and when to use strategies or certain words- in a way that students can't
Disadvantages of...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can mislead if they misunderstand the way it is used ● Something could be taught wrongly, although I wonder if this is a real concern ● Students may not teach each other the correct meaning if they didn't understand 100% ● Chance of teaching incorrect meaning. E.g. SA: Crunch time is when you do important thing very hard SB: Ah, ok. Crunch time is doing something very hard. ● Peer teaching can be unsettling because students don't trust themselves/ believe teachers have all the answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Non-peer teaching could make it seem like "imparting" info instead of learning something and making it your own ● Sense of distance leads to students feeling things are unobtainable, thus de-motivating them ● Tutors may sometimes have trouble putting themselves into the students' shoes ● If tutors feel they have to be teacherly and lecture, or solve all problems in communication, then students can be robbed of the opportunity to use strategies.

Peer teaching can have some affective (emotional) benefits, and students may have more chances to use strategies. However, accuracy may take a hit. It seems that we (students and teachers) don't quite trust students to teach each other correctly.

Tutors can help improve students' accuracy through many means and provide guidance from outside of the conversation.

However, we seem to be saying that when tutors teach, there is a distance that could de-motivate; or, it could keep students from making knowledge their own/using strategies.

Do you agree or disagree with any of these points?

What are some ways we could offset the disadvantages of peer-teaching?

What are some ways we could offset the disadvantages of tutors teaching?

The goals of PUT are to develop students' confidence, understandability, participation and use of strategies. With this in mind, to what degree should we employ peer-teaching or tutor-teaching in the context of PUT? Is there a percentage? How about a time frame? How about a context? How about with Q students in particular?