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PEER TUTORING

Peer tutoring has been a heated topic in second language learning for the past two decades. Its role as an important supplement to teacher feedback has been well demonstrated in various scientific sources.

Most of the previous empirical studies on peer feedback have investigated its effectiveness for improving students' L2 writing (Connor & Asenavage, 1994; Paulus, 1999; Shihhsien, 2011; Villamil & Guerrero, 1998a; Yang, Badger, & Yu, 2006) and the dynamics of pair interaction in peer feedback sessions (Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Mendonca & Johnson, 1994; Storch, 2002a; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996; Zhu, 2001). However, most of the previous research on students' interaction in peer feedback sessions was conducted in ESL and mainly investigated how students interacted with each other. Although Topping (1998) proposed that students should be of equal status when paired into peer assessment dyads, this is a rather idealistic situation since “there are evidently individual differences that affect perceived status and may impact peer feedback perceptions and subsequent performance” (Strijbos, Narciss, & Dnehier, 2010, p. 292).

Dividing students into small groups seems to provide an opportunity for students to become more actively engaged in learning and for teachers to monitor students progress better and properly, assess progress through questioning, discussions, and checking workbook exercises and quizzes geared for the particular group.

David Berliner contends that teachers who engage in small group instruction seem to attend five strategies of teaching [2]:

- 1) **Compensation**, favoring the shy, quiet or low-achieving students,

- 2) **Strategic leniency**, ignoring some inappropriate behaviors of students,
- 3) **Proper sharing**, enlisting some students to aid in sharing homework or tutoring responsibility,
- 4) **Progressive sharing**, compensating for the problems of low-ability students
- 5) **Suppressing emotions**, limiting students emotions or feelings because teachers feel they are inappropriate or may lead to management problems.

Thus, the apparently simple task of organizing small groups involves numerous complex decisions and strategies.

Researchers have found that students benefit from peer-tutoring because the curriculum and instruction are tailored to the students' abilities.

Generally, a peer tutor is anyone who is of a similar status as the person being tutored. In an undergraduate institution this would usually be other undergraduates, as distinct from the graduate students who may be teaching the writing classes; in an K-12 school this is usually a student from the same grade or higher. There are some basic rules to establishing your peer tutoring program, the key to success is a clear objective. Thorough planning and evidence gathering activities will contribute to substantiation of the decisions you will make [1].

The importance of peer tutoring is emphasized in scientific works of R. Slavin and A.Madden [3] who postulate that peer tutoring within the same class is the most common in elementary and middle schools.

Overall, peer tutoring is also called pairing students, that is the assignment of students to help one another on a one-to-one basis or in small groups in a variety of situations. There are three types of pairing:

- 1) students may tutor others within the same class;
- 2) older students may tutor students in lower grades outside of class;

- 3) two students may work together and help each other as equals with learning activities.

The purpose of the first two types is to pair a student who needs assistance with a tutor on a one-to-one basis, although small groups of two or three tutees and one tutor can also be formed. The third type, also called peer-pairing, is more than tutoring.

Experienced researchers R. Slavin and Nancy A. Madden indicate that of the three pairing arrangements, peer tutoring within the same class is the most appropriate. A student who is a higher achiever or who has completed a lesson and has shown understanding of the material is paired with a student who needs help.

One noteworthy facet of the research concerning peer tutoring, highlighted by Slavin and Nancy A. Madden in “What Works for Students at Risk” and by Theresa A. Thorkildsen in “Those Who Can Tutor” [3], suggests that through group-pairing students are less threatened by peers, they are more willing to ask fellow students questions that they fear the teacher may consider “silly”. Particularly, they are less afraid that fellow students might criticize them for being unable to understand an idea or problem after a second or third explanation.

In summary, a tutorial program shows that the students being tutored not only learned more than they did without tutoring, they also developed a more positive attitude about what they were studying. In addition, the tutors learned more than students who did not tutor.

Resources

1. A peer tutor [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_tutor
2. David C. Berliner. Laboratory Setting and the Study of Teacher Education // Journal of Teacher Education (November-December). - 1985. – P.2-8.
3. Slavin and Nancy A. Madden. What Works for Students at Risk // Educational Leadership (September). – 1989. P. 4-13.

