

Field: Others (Learner Development)

Attitudinal Changes of Four University Students in Second-Language Group Work: A Case Study

FUSHINO, Kumiko (Rikkyo University)

In this presentation, I will report a case study of four students' attitudinal shifts regarding second-language (L2) group work over one semester in an English course at a Japanese university. Group work has been increasingly used in college English instruction, and cooperative learning (CL) has started being used in order to make group work more 'learning-rich'. CL is defined as "principles and techniques that employ small groups as an instructional means so that students work together to increase their own and each other's learning to the maximum" (Fushino, 2008). In CL theories, heterogeneous grouping is considered to be important because students can learn more by obtaining various views and ideas, improving interpersonal skills, developing more understanding and acceptance of others, providing elaborated explanations to peers, and receiving well-tuned explanations, while working together with students who are different from themselves in various ways (e.g., Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002; Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 2002; Kagan, 1994; Sharan & Sharan, 1992). However, these are teachers' views, and how students' attitudes toward L2 group work shift in such classes over a period of time has not been investigated to the best of my knowledge.

In addition, in many CL classes, heterogeneous groups were often made based on students' academic performance. However, in classes where students are placed based on their performance on a placement test, classes are relatively homogeneous in terms of students' English proficiency as well as their ethnicity and first language. Therefore, we need another means of making heterogeneous groups. In order to answer to this demand, I constructed the concept of Readiness for L2 Group Work, which refers to "learners' self-perception of the degree to which they are prepared cognitively and affectively for

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L2 group work” (Fushino, 2008). Readiness for L2 Group Work was measured using the Readiness for L2 Group Work Questionnaire, which was found highly reliable and valid (Fushino, 2008).

The purpose of this study is to look into students’ attitudinal changes in L2 group work by employing a qualitative inquiry method. Data were collected in a semester-long freshman English class (35 students) at a co-ed university in Tokyo in the second semester of the 2005 academic year. Groups of four or five students were heterogeneously formed in the class based on the results of the Readiness for L2 Group Work Questionnaire. A group of four students (two boys and two girls) was chosen as the focus group. Initially, based on the CL principle of heterogeneous grouping, I speculated that their attitudes toward L2 group work would positively change while working together with their group members. Semi-structured teacher interviews (in English) and student individual interviews (in Japanese) were conducted three times: at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the semester. All the interviews were audio-recorded, and the student interviews were later transcribed.

The interpretation of the individual student interviews revealed that attitudes of the four students working in the same group changed differently. Contrary to my initial speculation, each of the four students showed distinctive patterns of attitudinal shifts: one male student changed his view on group work to the positive, one female student maintained a positive attitude toward group work, the other female student kept a rather negative attitude toward group work but changed her view on her group members to the positive, and the other male student started group work with mixed feelings about group work and his attitude toward group work became even more negative. Various factors, such as individual, group, teacher, class, English curriculum, school, social factors, which were inextricably intertwined, are considered to have influenced these changes as ecological perspectives suggest (van Lier, 2004). In this presentation, I will show these differences by introducing the four students’ voices. At the end of the presentation, I will also suggest some pedagogical implications.