PEER GROUPS IN THE ESL CLASSROOM:

A CONTROLLED EXPERIMENT

By

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PREFACE

After teaching freshman composition for one semester, I felt that the experience had on the whole been successful. But there had also been those days when I had looked out on rows of frozen faces--immobile aside from an occasional yawn. As a consequence, I began to look for a way to liven up the class and to increase the students' involvement with the subject material. I happened to come across DeVries and Slavin's articles over peer teaching. The concept seemed to have potential, and I began using the technique on a limited basis the following semester. The students responded enthusiastically, and I became convinced that the technique had merit.

Moreover, I found that this type of instruction was especially helpful in ESL classes, where there is a wide variation in language skills among the students. In these classes particularly, peer teaching provided a way to give specialized attention and tutoring to weak students and to eliminate the boredom experienced by the better students.

Intuitively, I felt that peer teaching was superior to traditional lecture/discussion teaching methods. There were, however, very few studies verifying the actual effects of peer teaching on academic performance. Therefore, the experiment documented in this thesis was designed to test the feasibility of peer teaching, and to determine its effect on academic achievement.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all the people who assisted me with this project. I am especially indebted to my adviser, Dr.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Kohn and Vajda (1975, p. 380), peer teaching, peer groups, or cooperative learning all refer to any classroom activity in which the students themselves serve as "informed sources or monitors for each other." Peer teaching, where one student serves as a substitute instructor, is the older, classical version of this teaching method, while cooperative learning, which involves all members sharing their knowledge, is the more recent egalitarian version.

Classical peer tutoring in this country dates back to the one-room schoolhouse. There, quite often, the over-worked instructor would use older, more knowledgeable students to teach the younger ones (Ehly and Larsen, 1971). Of necessity, this practice was continued in economically deprived parts of the country. However, it was not until 1960 that the educational value of the technique was recognized. Lippitt and Lohman (1965) conducted one of the first influential studies concerning peer tutoring, and the positive findings of this study sparked a new approach to the concept, as well as additional research. By the mid-sixties, several large projects were initiated. Among the most successful of these experimental projects was Mobilization for Youth, which operated in the New York City area. In this project, high school students tutored fifth graders in reading; each of the younger students received two to four hours of tutoring a week. Reading levels for most

of these children, who were predominately from the poor black and Puerto Rican sections of the city, were quite low; however, Ehly and Larsen (1971, p. 14) found at the project's close most of the children showed "significant improvement in reading achievement." Following the success of the New York project, Newark and Philadelphia established similar programs, and from there the use of peer tutoring became more widespread. Numerous other studies involving the use of peer-tutoring in elementary schools have been reported. The subjects taught included reading, spelling, math, and some foreign language. Feeny (1976) used peer tutors to teach French vocabulary to his secondary students; and Ellson, Harris, and Barber (1968) of Indiana University conducted a series of ten experiments involving the teaching of vocabulary words. Poor readers were found to have made substantially larger gains than average or above-average readers in this study.

By the late 1960's, many colleges had established peer tutoring programs to help remedial students in basic studies, such as math and English (Etters, 1967). Also, peer tutors were being used in actual classroom situations to help in the instruction of such subjects as composition (Snipes, 1971).

In addition to the classical peer teaching techniques, cooperative learning methods also appeared in the early 1970's. DeVries, Edwards, and Slavin (cited in Slavin, 1981) of Johns Hopkins are generally credited with the educational application and development of these methods. Much of their work was based upon studies in social psychology, particularly Kurt Lewin's training group or T-group as it became popularly labeled (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1983). The first of DeVries, Edwards, and Slavin's cooperative groups was called Student Teams Achievement

Divisions (STAD). In this study, new material was presented to the class as a whole; but after the initial presentation, students split into groups of four to five members, as reported by Slavin (1981, p. 655), "to attempt to master a set of worksheets on the lesson." After completing the worksheets, the students were then tested individually. A slight variation upon this process was the Teams-Games Tournament (TGT). This time, instead of being tested individually, students represented their groups in academic games for which the entire group received recognition.

Since DeVries, Edwards, and Slavin's experiments, various other studies have been documented. Gunderson and Johnson (1980) conducted a study involving the STAD, but combined individual scores to determine 50 percent of the students' final grades. A highly complex cooperative learning design is Aronson's (1978) Jigsaw where, in the initial phase, each student is expected to master only one part of the total material. Aronson reports (p. 104) that once the student is familiar with his portion of the material, he meets in an "expert group" to share information with his "counterparts from other groups." Following this discussion, the student returns to his original learning group to teach his groupmates all he has learned and, in turn, to be instructed by them. Once this information exchanging process is completed, the students are tested individually. A much simpler, loosely constructed version of cooperative learning is Sharon's (1980) Group Investigation model. In this adaptation, the students themselves decide how they will organize to learn the subject material.

Early use of peer tutoring in ESL is documented by Gartner, Kohler, and Riessman (1971), who report that an English language program, based

upon the Mobilization of Youth program, existed in New York in the early sixties. Later, as ESL instructors began to break away from audio-lingual based methodology, peer tutoring began to be used more regularly. Among the instructors adopting the technique in the mid-seventies were Kohn and Vajda (1975). Students in their classes alternated roles, playing the teacher at one point and the student later. Kohn and Vajda (p. 379) found peer teaching a "more cognitive-oriented style of teaching and learning to the drill-for automation precept of the audio-lingual method."

More recent experimentation with peer teaching suggests that the technique is especially useful in dealing with problem learners. Perez (1979) and Johnson and August (1979) used peer tutors to help instruct Spanish-speaking children in floundering bilingual programs. In both studies, the tutors were young native speakers of English. Johnson and August (p. 205) report that the peer instruction was "much better than a teacher's lecture--simplified yet entirely natural. It was repetitive; it was contextualized." Reiss (1981) also used peer tutoring as a means of providing problem learners with extra instruction. Non-native speakers, who had become relatively proficient in English, were used in this case. Reiss (p. 126) reports that "the successful learners served as informants and guides and shared their learning styles."

In addition to peer tutoring, cooperative learning groups began to be used in the late seventies in ESL classes. Stichi-Damiani (1981) found cooperative learning groups helpful in boosting class morale and motivation. She states (p. 245) that "attendance at the group-work period was on the whole far more satisfactory than attendance had ever been before."

In general, the use of peer groups in ESL instruction is becoming more prevalent and, typically, instructors feel that the technique is an effective alternative to traditional lecturing and oral and written drilling.

CHAPTER II

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Establishing the validity of peer group techniques has significance for teaching in general and for ESL study in particular. Through peer teaching and cooperative learning groups, students are able to receive more individual attention than they would receive in a traditional classroom. Personalized instruction is especially critical in the ESL classroom, where language barriers prevent the student from understanding all that is going on in the classroom. Also, the group experience creates a more relaxed classroom atmosphere. This factor is of primary importance in the ESL classroom where a student's sense of well being and lack of inhibition are crucial in his acquisition of a new language. Finally, students in cooperative learning groups generally seem to produce better quality work than do students working individually. Support for this assertion is, however, subjective for the most part, and it is hoped that results from this study will begin to substantiate such claims.

Giving individual attention to students in a classroom setting is a difficult job at best and current budget cuts, implemented nationwide, threaten to increase crowded classrooms even more. Peer teaching and group learning have provided a practical solution to this problem in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Within the peer group, students are free to do more questioning and to obtain background information from better informed classmates until they have a grasp of the

subject. Students struggling to acquire new information and concepts are not bound to classroom schedules and a teacher's spare time. More-over, Schmuck and Schmuck (1983, p. 227) found that "students can often recognize the difficulty that another student is having because they have experienced the same difficulty just a short time before." This understanding also enables a student to successfully explain a concept where a teacher cannot seem to communicate. Additionally, students re-ceive instant correction. For ESL students, these corrections include not only those errors concerning a current lesson, but mistakes in pro-nunciation and general English usage as well. Peer groups also allow for more speaking practice than is possible in traditional classrooms, and the speaking practice takes place in a more realistic context. Urzua (1980, p. 43) suggests "This kind of interaction provides students with a variety of language learning situations that other teaching meth-ods could never produce." Students who already have well developed lan-guage skills can strengthen those skills by instructing others. Perez (1979, p. 161) states that "Benefits include additional reinforcement of previously learned skills and an increase in self-esteem."

Positive mental attitudes associated with peer groups make this teaching approach particularly valuable. Working cooperatively in small groups enables students to approach new tasks with confidence and to overcome feelings of isolation and inferiority. Students are not near-ly so afraid of asking questions and making mistakes in a small group as they are in a formal classroom. Semke (1975, p. 126) agrees: "The student is spared the anxiety caused by the possibility of appearing stupid in front of the whole class." Additionally, cooperative groups are less intimidating because their members have a shared goal. Argyle

(1969, p. 223) found studies in social psychology have demonstrated that cooperative groups tend to develop "more positive, friendly, and trusting relations between members" than do groups which "emphasize competition and individual achievement."

All these factors contribute to a relaxed, uninhibited classroom. A less formal, relaxed atmosphere is of special benefit to ESL students who are often extremely self-conscious about their language skills. Reiss (1981, p. 123) states that "successful language students are not inhibited. They are willing to make mistakes in order to communicate in the target language." A number of studies have shown a relationship between low anxiety and successful language acquisition; especially noteworthy is Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) research in internal processing. Their findings indicate that a student's emotional state of mind does much to determine learning success or failure. Anxiety is one of several factors which can "filter" language data and prevent the student from receiving all the available language information. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (p. 51), "The less anxious the learner, the better language acquisition proceeds. Similarly, relaxed and comfortable students apparently can learn more in shorter periods of time." Similarly, studies conducted by Gardner, Symthe, Clement, and Gilksman (1976) found that classroom anxiety negatively correlated with speech skills.

Peer groups can also help dispel the nationalistic partisanism so typical of ESL classes. Students quite naturally choose to sit with members of their own country, but this custom creates definite boundaries and, again, tension within the class. Peer groups provide the instructor with a diplomatic means of breaking up such cliques and maintaining a tolerant, relaxed, learning environment.

The support and encouragement found within peer groups provides a
learning incentive that a single instructor could never hope to dupli-
cate. Gunderson and Johnson (1980, p. 41) assert that "Cooperative
learning groups promote more positive attitudes toward subject areas
and instructional experiences and greater motivation to achieve." There
is also some evidence to suggest that students in group learning situa-
tions actually outperform their counterparts in traditional classrooms.
Slavin (1981, pp. 656-57) reports that since 1976, 27 studies comparing co-
operative programs to traditional control groups have found "a signifi-
cant positive effect on student achievement in 19 cases, no differences
in 7, and in one study there was a significant difference favoring the
control group." The students tested in these experiments ranged from
elementary through high school levels, and the subjects taught included
"mathematics, language mechanics, science concepts, foreign language
and geography." Slavin's report is especially significant in that it
mentions all major controlled studies of peer groups and does much to
establish the validity of this technique.

Other studies of interest include that of Feeny (1976), who used a
high school French class to measure student acquisition of foreign voca-
bulary while teaching lists of words to other students. Feeny (p. 485)
found that " in the process of attempting to teach new vocabulary to
his partners, a student almost invariably learned most of the terms he
was trying to teach." Feeny also found that these students had much
higher retention levels after using group teaching techniques than they
had exhibited in a previous semester using traditional methods.

Further indication of student achievement in reference to peer
group techniques comes from composition teachers who found that an

audience of class peers generates extra enthusiasm for writing assign-
ments (Fitzgibbon, 1980; Celani, 1979). Witbeck (1976, p. 325) also
discovered that peer correction in his ESL class produced "a greater
concern for achieving accuracy in written expression.in individual stu-
dents and created a better classroom atmosphere for teaching the correc-
tional aspects of composition." Wingfield (1975) also recommends peer
correction in ESL composition classes, and Salimbene (1980) has found
peer groups useful in beginning and intermediate ESL classes. She
states (p. 91) that "group discussion made each assignment oral as well
as written . . . and peer correction helped develop that inner criterion
or sense of correctness so important in language mastery." Encouraging
as such reports are, they are admittedly subjective and intuitive evalu-
ations. Again, the need for empirical study of peer group effects on
student achievement is necessary to legitimatize claims for the technique.

CHAPTER III

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To determine objectively the effects of peer groups on student achievement, a controlled study measuring the academic improvement of two different classes was designed. Two ESL freshman composition classes, consisting of 18 members per class, were selected to participate in the program; the primary objective of the experiment was to ascertain by the end of the semester which class's writing had improved the most as a result of their classroom experience. During the course of the semester, the controlled class was taught with traditional lectures and class discussion, as well as with scheduled student-teacher conferences. The experimental class was taught with minimal lecturing and student-teacher conferences only at the student's request. Most of the classroom activity in the experimental section revolved around the peer groups. In fact, 8 percent of each student's overall grade was based on group projects.

The groups themselves were composed of five students, one of whom was potentially an A-student. This particular combination seemed to combine the best of both cooperative learning groups and the original peer teaching concepts. By this means, structured, informed dialogue could take place within the group while the sense of camaraderie and ease experienced in cooperative learning was preserved. ESL students in particular seem to be encouraged by associating with successful language

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learners (Celani, 1979). A substitute teacher, however, might be seen as something of a threat.

In setting up the experiment, it was first necessary to verify the general equality of the classes. English proficiency in both classes was determined through TOEFL scores and by a panel of three judges who read student essays written the second day of class. Additionally, students were surveyed as to their general background and language experience.

Analysis of the TOEFL scores showed that both classes were relatively comparable (see Table VI, in the Appendix, for TOEFL raw scores). The average TOEFL score for the 18 students in the control section was 534.62, while the average score for the 18 students in the peer section was 532.70; the difference was not significant, $t(34)$ = .18, p > .05. TOEFL scores for listening skills also differed. The mean was 52.87 for the control section and 54.06 for the peer section; the difference again was not significant, $t(34)$ = .69, p > .05. The mean score on the grammar section of the TOEFL for the control group was 53.27, while the peer group achieved a mean score of 52.50; the difference was not significant, $t(34)$ = .50, p > .05. TOEFL reading scores for the control section were somewhat higher than those of the peer section. The mean score for the control section was 53.53, and the mean score for the peer section was 51.93. Again, the difference was not significant, $t(34)$ = 1.50, p > .05 (see Table I).

The writing ability of the students was determined by a panel of three judges who graded essays written by the students on the second day of class. Panel judges were graduate students, majoring in ESL studies, who had taught ESL composition classes for at least three semesters. In

TABLE I

MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND t-SCORES
FOR TOEFL AND PANEL GRADES

	Control Section	Peer Section	t	p
Sample Size	18	18		
TOEFL Composite Score			0.18	>0.05
Mean	534.625	532.705		
Standard Deviation	22.759	36.353		
Minimum Value	500.000	500.000		
Maximum Value	580.000	620.000		
Variance	517.983	1321.590		
TOEFL Listening			0.69	>0.05
Mean	52.866	54.062		
Standard Deviation	4.596	4.999		
Minimum Value	43.000	46.000		
Maximum Value	59.000	63.000		
Variance	21.123	24.995		
TOEFL Grammar			0.50	>0.05
Mean	53.266	52.500		
Standard Deviation	4.096	4.273		
Minimum Value	48.000	48.000		
Maximum Value	64.000	62.000		
Variance	16.780	18.266		
TOEFL Reading			1.15	>0.05
Mean	53.533	51.937		
Standard Deviation	4.538	2.948		
Minimum Value	48.000	46.000		
Maximum Value	59.000	62.000		
Variance	8.595	20.595		
Panel Grade			0.55	>0.05
Mean	1.458	1.311		
Standard Deviation	0.856	0.821		
Minimum Value	0.000	0.000		
Maximum Value	2.500	3.000		
Variance	0.733	0.574		

Note: TOEFL requirements were waived for two students in the control
        section and one student in the peer section.

evaluating each essay, the judges used the general criteria established by the Oklahoma State University English Department for gradint the written compositions of international students (see Table XII, in the Appendix). They did not, however, assign one score for "organization and content" and a second for "grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics" to produce a single score. Each paper was read for an overall impression and then assigned a grade from 4 to 0, with 4 as the highest score, or the equivalent of an A paper, 3 the equivalent of a B paper, and so on.

Results of the scores from the panel of judges indicated that the writing ability of both classes was similar. The mean for the control section was 1.46, while the peer section received a mean score of 1.31. The slight difference in the scores was not significant, $t(34 = .55$, $p > .05$ (see Table I and Table VII, in the Appendix).

Correlations between the panel scores and TOEFL composite scores were not significant: $r = .10$ for the control group and $r = .30$ for the peer group. Correlations between the panel scores and TOEFL listening scores were not significant: $r = .21$ for the control group and $r = .10$ for the peer group. Correlations between the panel scores and the TOEFL grammar scores were also not significant: $r = .27$ for the control group and $r = .34$ for the peer group. Significant correlation was found between the panel scores and the TOEFL reading scores for the peer group: $r = .48$. However, correlations between the panel scores and the TOEFL reading scores for the control group were not significant: $r = .26$ (see Table II).

A survey concerning the students' language learning experiences showed that in this area too both classes were similar. Well over half the students in each section spoke more than two languages. In the

TABLE II

CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS

	Listen- ing	Gram- mar	Read- ing	Panel Grades
Control Section				
TOEFL Composite	0.57 *	0.54 **	0.46	0.10
Listening	--- ---	0.09	0.13	0.21
Grammar	--- ---	--- ---	0.17	0.27
Reading	--- ---		--- ---	0.26
Peer Section				
TOEFL Composite	0.67 **	0.76 **	0.80 **	0.30
Listening	--- ---	0.17	0.21	0.10
Grammar	--- ---	--- ---	0.63 **	0.34
Reading	--- ---		--- ---	0.48 *

Significant r values:

* = p < .05.

** = p < .01.

control group, 8 students spoke another language in addition to English and their native tongue. In the peer group, 10 students spoke another language in addition to English and their native tongue. Nearly half of the students in both classes had studied English for over one year in an English-speaking country. The time the students had spent in the United States varied somewhat from student to student. One student in the control group had spent only a few days in the United States, as had four students in the peer group. Five students from each group had spent less than six months in the United States. Six students in the control group had spent between six months to one year in the United States as compared to seven in the peer group. One student in the control group had spent two years in the United States and yet another student in the control group had spent a total of eight years in the United States (see Table III).

Overall then, the language proficiency and writing ability of both classes was determined through the use of TOEFL scores, a panel of judges, and the students' own language learning experiences. Any differences between the two groups was insignificant, and the experiment proceeded.

Course Content and Objectives

The course objectives for these classes, as with most freshman composition classes, centered around the development of fundamental writing skills, beginning with complex sentence structures, paragraph writing, and essay writing using specific methods of development. Writing instruction was supplemented with periodic reviews in general English usage. Lectures and class discussion formed the primary method of teaching in both classes. The lectures and discussion were, however, extended in the

TABLE III

SURVEY

Age Range	Control Group 18-25	Peer Groups 19-28
Students speaking more than two languages	8	10
Years of English study		
Under 5	2	5
5-10 years	8	8
Over 10	8	5
Students studying English for over one year in English-speaking country	8	7
Time spent in the U.S.		
Few days	1	4
Less than six months	5	5
Six months to one year	6	7
One to two years	1	0
Three to eight years	1	0
Students planning to remain in the U.S.	3	2

control section and kept to a minimum in the peer section. The peer groups met on an average of twice a week for 30 to 40 minutes a session.

Assignments for both classes included workbook pages from the textbook Writing Academic English by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue. These exercises involved sentence construction using subordination, parallelism, and coordination. Other assignments included four exercises in sentence combining, provided by the instructor, three additional exercises over subject-verb agreement, verb particles, and sentence fragments. The control section worked these assignments individually, or with the instructor's help when possible, and then later discussed them as a class. The peer section worked on the assignments jointly, with the instructor moving between the groups, assisting, answering questions, and making corrections where necessary.

In addition to the original diagnostic essay, students were required to write a set of three paragraphs and five expository essays, and to revise all but the final essay. Peer groups read and proofed each other's papers and also worked together brainstorming as a prewriting exercise for the two out-of-class essay assignments. Brain-storming sessions were conducted in the control section as a class.

Eight percent of each class's grade was derived from miscellaneous exercises which included the four sentence combining exercises, sentence fragment exercises, an essay outline, and subject verb agreement exercises. Peer groups turned in each assignment as a group project, for which an overall grade was assigned, and the control section worked each assignment individually. Peer groups also competed in grammar competitions twice during the semester for bonus points to be added to the overall 8 percent score.

Required student-teacher conferences were held with the control section twice during the semester. The peer section had no required conferences scheduled; however, many of the students in this section did request conferences on an individual basis throughout the semester.

One student in the control group was sent to the writing laboratory because his English proficiency seemed especially low. This student dropped the course at mid-term, however, and consequently no out-of-class language instruction occurred during the experiment.

The Experiment in Progress

To determine the actual effectiveness of peer teaching techniques, a panel of three judges graded student essays written at the beginning and end of the semester. Significantly higher scores for the experimental group would verify the effectiveness of peer groups over traditional teaching methods, while comparable scores for both groups would indicate that the use of peer groups as a teaching technique is as effective as traditional methods but not superior. Because the course being taught in the experiment was composition, it was felt that actual samples of the students' writing would be the most valid indication of progress and change.

Once TOEFL scores and essay results were evaluated, the students in the peer section were assigned to groups. Initial reaction to the "peer group" concept was mixed; the shy students in the class were reluctant to get involved, while the more outgoing students were receptive and enjoyed participating in the discussion. During the first assignment, the students were told to exchange and grade each other's papers. The lecture that week had been over standard organization, and the students were

instructed to specifically judge papers for thesis construction and general organization. This particular assignment did not require much group participation, but did help the students to become acquainted with each other. Students were told to mark in pencil the errors they found and to make comments on a separate sheet of paper. They were given 15 minutes at the end of the period to check over their own papers and do any necessary rewriting. Additionally, they were warned to look for items that might be incorrectly marked.

Although a few students resented having another student read and mark their papers, most enjoyed seeing another classmate's work and appreciated the comments and suggestions. Not surprisingly, during this first grading session, a few of the students made irrelevant and inappropriate comments concerning the personal opinions expressed in the papers. In general, however, the students' appraisals were very fair and accurate. Most took the task quite seriously and were neither too harsh nor overly generous.

That same day, the control class read essays written by other composition classes, and they too were instructed to check for organization and thesis construction. The control section was also given the last 15 minutes to correct their own papers, and I offered to assist if they wanted help with the revisions before submitting their papers. Three students approached me to ask for help, but very few students made any changes in their papers before turning them in.

At the end of the third week, both sections were given a sentence combining exercise; a total of four such exercises were given both classes during the course of the semester. These exercises contained groups of short, choppy sentences which were to be combined into one concise clause:

Alcohol, a drying agent, is frequently used in cosmetics.
The drying agent evaporates rapidly.
The drying agent therefore has a cooling effect.

The gypsies are really a nomadic people from India.
The gypsies migrated into Europe.
The gypsies were once thought to be Egyptian.
(From Writer's Options: College Sentence Combining.
1979. Donald A. Daiker, author.)

The peer groups were instructed to work on the project jointly, and after a moment or two of hesitation, the better students in two of the groups took charge, suggesting various ways of combining the sentences and explaining how they had arrived at such a construction. The better students in the remaining two groups were more retiring and not so assertive. Although discussion within these latter two groups was very animated, work on the assignment bogged down. The final paper submitted by these two groups contained quite a few errors in grammar, and the clauses themselves were needlessly wordy. The scores these two groups received on the assignment were in the C range. When the next assignment was made, however, the better students were much more forceful, and the groups' grades came up dramatically.

The control class received the same assignment, but worked it individually, or with my help if they wished. The following day, both classes received their corrected papers and a discussion of which combinations were possible and which were most appropriate followed.

Another major assignment given to both classes involved writing a preliminary outline for that week's essay assignment. Again, the peer groups worked on the project collectively, first brainstorming to get ideas, then narrowing the topic and developing a thesis and outline. The brainstorming phase of the process proved to be the most productive part of this group exercise. The students discussed any number of possibili-

ties collectively and the group interaction prompted a number of original ideas. Narrowing these ideas, however, was much more difficult. Conflicting opinions and ideas about thesis statements and the outline structure created endless discussion and disagreement. This particular exercise took up about three class periods, and still two of the groups had to meet out of class to complete the project. The final outlines were extremely well done, with much detail, but the time and frustration involved in producing them was prohibitive. The control group managed to complete the same assignment in a single class period, and although their outlines were less detailed than those of the peer groups, most were adequate. The peer groups continued to participate in brainstorming sessions, as a pre-writing exercise, with excellent results. The group brainstorming sessions were especially helpful when a new type of essay development had been introduced during the class lecture. An information exchange of this sort helped students review the various types of essay development previously presented and to clarify misunderstandings about the type currently being studied. There were, however, no more group writing assignments requiring much original, highly structured writing.

By the sixth week of the semester, the students in the experimental section had become comfortable with the concept of group work and with one another. One of the groups was especially harmonious and even referred to each other as "the family." By this time, too, the best writers in each group were fully recognized, and there did not seem to be any resentment toward these individuals. The group discussions remained lively throughout the semester.

Moreover, each group had developed a particular pattern for approaching each project. As mentioned, each group did have a leader, or a member who checked the final paper before it was submitted, but each group produced the paper in a different manner. In one of the groups, members worked independently and did not exchange information until the last few minutes of the class period. Then, each student's work was reviewed by the group collectively, and the best parts of each paper submitted in the final project. In another group, two members of the four worked together, and then, as in the case of the previous group, exchanged information, reviewed the work, and compiled the best work from both papers.

Yet another group had a fairly forceful leader, who divided the work among the members and supervised their progress quite closely. Interestingly, members of this particular group were extremely fond of their leader and quite often made arrangements to meet him outside class for additional tutoring in English and other subjects. Finally, the last of the four groups also divided the work, but did so on a cooperative basis. They also reviewed each member's work collectively, and occasionally disagreements did arise. But differences of opinion were usually settled by the group leader without problem. This group was the most harmonious of the four, and the one which referred to its members as "the family."

The peer group section worked several exercises the control section did not, primarily because the two required conferences scheduled for the control section did not allow time for additional practice in this section. These included subject-verb agreement and verb particle exercises. International students have great difficulty with verb agreement errors, even though they understand the grammatical concept. So, to give them additional practice with this grammatical structure, the groups were

asked to write twenty sentences containing subject-verb agreement errors and their corrections. The peer groups were ideally suited for this exercise. The individual group leaders supervised and corrected the work of the other members, explaining why particular constructions were wrong and others correct. I worked among the groups, checking their progress, but the group leaders did much of the instructing and answered more questions than I could have in a fifty-minute period.

As another additional assignment, a list of verb particles was presented to the class, and each group was given a cloze test with the verb and particle omitted (see Table X, in the Appendix). Again, the group leaders were especially helpful in correcting the other students and providing them with additional practice in this area.

The peer groups also competed in grammar games for extra points. Two competitions were held during the semester, and these games were great fun for the entire class, with the possible exception of one student, who felt the contests were too childish and undignified for college students. During these competitions, students were assigned specific types of errors and asked to write a sentence containing the error on the board. The first group to identify the error and to formulate a correction was awarded a point. If none of the groups was able to identify the error, a point was awarded to the group who provided the incorrect sentence.

During the competition, the groups did a superb job of coaching one another and checking answers. This type of exercise also seemed to help the students to identify errors in their own work and to become better proofreaders.

Throughout the remaining weeks of the semester, both groups continued to operate in similar patterns. Three more sentence combining exercises were assigned to both sections, and the peer groups continued to exchange papers and to discuss, collectively, all new essay assignments. Exercises from the text Writing Academic English were generally given as homework after an introductory lecture or review. Occasionally, however, extra class time was devoted to more difficult grammatical concepts, such as restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses and parallelism. Then workbook exercises were done in class jointly, in the case of the peer groups; and individually, in the control class. I checked the progress of each group in the experimental class and of various individuals, beginning with the poorer students in the control section. Corrections were provided for both classes at the end of the hour; none of the workbook assignments was turned in for a grade.

Results of the Experiment

At the semester's close, the students in each section wrote a final essay which was graded by the same panel of judges who had previously evaluated their first essay. The results from this evaluation showed that there was no significant difference in the writing ability between the two groups. The control section had a mean score of 2.27, with an overall grade increase of .80. The peer groups scored slightly higher, with a mean of 2.41 and an overall grade increase of 1.08; $t(34) = -.68$, $p > .05$ (see Table VIII, in the Appendix). Change scores computed for the first and final essay also indicated no significant difference between the scores of the two groups; $t(34) = .56$, $p > .05$ (see Table IX, in the Appendix).

Correlation scores for the panel of judges showed that the grading had been relatively consistent throughout the project. Judges 1 and 2 correlated most consistently: r = .62. Correlations between judges 1 and 2 and the third judge were .44 and .51, respectively. Overall, the mean correlation for the panel was .53 (see Table IV).

Student evaluations of their instructor and classroom environment were also very similar (see Table XI, in the Appendix). Interestingly, the control group wrote many flattering remarks in the comments section of the evaluation, while the peer section wrote very little. But, as mentioned, the actual scores from both sections were very close. In the experimental section, nine students gave the instructor an excellent overall rating, while six gave a rating of good and three gave a score of average. There were no poor grades. In the control section, eight students rated the instructor excellent, with seven good and three average scores. Again, there were no poor ratings. The t-score was .384, p > .05 (see Table V).

Students in the peer section liked the type of assignments made in class somewhat more than did their counterparts. In the peer section, 8 students judged the assignments excellent, while 6 gave them a good, 3 an average, and 1 a poor. In the control section, only 4 students thought the assignments were excellent, while 8 thought they were good, 5 average, and, again, 1 poor. The difference here again was not significant, however, with t(34) = .941 where p > .05 (see Table V).

The students also rated the grading procedures, which in the experimental section included not only grades assigned for peer group projects, but the individual writing assignments as well. Consequently, scores here may or may not be relevant in assessing the project's success. In

TABLE IV

PANEL GRADE CORRELATIONS

	1 & 2	1 & 3	2 & 3
Essay 1			
Control	.62	.65	.58
Peers	.72	.44	.44
Final			
Control	.55	.23	.51
Peers	.60	.46	.53
Overall	.62	.44	.51

Z Transformations

Z Scores

r_1 .62   0.725

r_2 .44   0.472

r_3 .51   0.563

$Z_r = 1.760$

$M_z = 0.590$

0.530^*

*Fisher conversion.

TABLE V

STUDENT EVALUATIONS

	Peers				Control				t	p
	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1		
Instruction										
Teaching	6	7	5		5	8	5		0.281	>0.05
Communication	9	7	2		8	7	3		0.392	>0.05
Attitude	11	3	4		12	6			0.970	>0.05
Procedures Objectives	8	6	4		5	8	3		0.214	>0.05
Overall	9	6	3		8	7	3		0.384	>0.05
Course										
Assignments	8	6	3	1	4	8	5	1	0.941	>0.05
Grading	5	8	4	1	5	5	6	2	0.219	>0.05
Overall	7	7	4		4	6	6	2	1.560	>0.05

Grading Scale: 4 = Excellent
3 = Good
2 = Average
1 = Poor

the peer section, 5 students rated the grading procedures excellent, 8 good, 4 average, and 1 poor. In the control section, again 5 students judged the grading procedures to be excellent, 5 good, 6 average, and 2 poor. Again, the difference in scores was not significant, $t(34) = .219$, $p > .05$ (see Table V).

In an overall assessment of the course, the experimental section awarded higher marks than did the control section. Of the 18 students in the peer section, 7 rated the course excellent, 7 felt it was good, and 4 thought it average. No student in this section rated the course poor. In the control section, on the other hand, only 4 students gave the course an excellent rating, while 6 thought it was good, another 6 thought it average, and 2 students rated the course poor. Again, however, the difference in the evaluations was not statistically significant, $t(34) = 1.56$, $p > .05$ (see Table V).

Discussion of the Experiment

The results from this study indicate that the use of peer groups can be an effective alternative to traditional teaching methods. The data produced in this study do not indicate that this technique is superior to traditional methods, but that it is certainly comparable. This finding is of significance for educators seeking additional means of enriching the classroom experience of their students.

This study also demonstrates that some classroom assignments particularly lend themselves to group activity. For example, group discussion is extremely helpful in stimulating individual creativity. For composition classes, this kind of activity is a good pre-writing exercise, helpful in thesis construction and in developing content and supporting

arguments. Simple writing exercises are also excellent projects for group discussion. Normally dull grammar exercises are more enjoyable when done collectively, and students are able to see the numerous possibilities involved in sentence construction and expression.

Aside from enlivening a dull classroom routine, which generally revolves around an instructor's lecture, a learning group also provides moral support and more personal attention. There was a noticeable difference in the attitude of the experimental class and that of the control section. The experimental class, by the semester's close, was much more relaxed and open than was the control class and asked questions more frequently and more spontaneously than did the other class. That this improved attitude was not reflected in a more significant grade differentiation between the two groups is unfortunate. Perhaps a similar study involving a longer time frame would produce more significant results.

Students involved in this experimental study were, on the whole, very enthusiastic about their classroom experience. Their comments included these:

> I like the fact that we are able to discuss essay topics before we write the essay, and exchanging papers after the essays are written helps me pinpoint my errors.

> I benefited a lot by participating in a paired group. By participating, I found that I can understand more about what was being taught in the lecture and to understand more about English structural grammar.

> This kind of work helped me to improve my vocabulary by exchanging ideas and arguing with my classmates. Moreover, studying in groups is fun.

> Working in a group is really an excellent way to improve the class spirit. Each student was able to participate, and, with the instructor moving from group to group, members got a lot of personal attention. I feel that this practice should be

continued, but the games, with all the robust running/rushing
to the board is unsuitable. I suggest this practice be dis-
continued.

Comments such as these, and the data collected during this study, verify

the effectiveness of peer teaching and cooperative learning groups.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Past studies involving peer teaching and cooperative learning groups have shown promising implications for educators. The purpose of this project was to establish the effectiveness of peer teaching techniques for ESL. To determine the actual effectiveness of the technique, a controlled study measuring the academic improvement of two different classes was conducted. The controlled class was taught with traditional lectures and class discussion, as well as with periodic student-teacher conferences. The experimental class was taught with minimal lecturing and concentrated instead on peer group activities.

TOEFL scores for the two groups showed that the English proficiency levels in both classes were similar. Additionally, scores obtained from a panel of judges grading a diagnostic essay also indicated that the classes had similar writing ability. The mean of the panel scores was 1.46 for the control section and 1.31 for the peer section. The difference between the sections was not significant, $t(18) = .55$, $p > .05$.

At the semester's close, the same panel of judges also evaluated final essays for both classes. The results showed that there was still no significant difference in the writing ability of either group. The control section had a mean score of 2.27, with an overall grade increase of .80. The peer groups scored slightly higher, with a mean of 2.41 and an overall grade increase of 1.08; $t(34) = .56$, $p > .05$.

Student evaluations of their instructor and classroom environment were also very similar. Students in the peer section liked the type of assignments made in class somewhat more than did their counterparts. But the difference here again was not significant; $t(34) = .94$, $p > .05$.

Results from this study do not indicate that peer teaching techniques are superior to traditional methods. However, the study did prove that peer teaching techniques are as effective as traditional methods. Obviously, further objective study is needed to show how this teaching technique could be most appropriately used. But clearly, the use of peer groups in the ESL classroom is a feasible alternative to traditional methods, appropriate either as the major means of instruction or, perhaps, as part of an eclectic teaching approach.

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TABLE VI

TOEFL SCORES

Section	TOEFL Composite	Listening	Grammar	Reading
Control				
1	510	53	52	48
2	553	59	51	56
3	523	52	52	53
4	507	48	55	49
5	560	55	59	54
6	537	59	50	52
7	500	49	48	53
8	520	49	51	56
9	*	*	*	*
10	580	55	64	55
11	513	49	53	51
12	*	*	*	*
13	530	57	50	52
14	527	43	56	59
15	567	*	*	*
16	547	56	55	53
17	540	57	50	55
18	540	52	53	57
Peer				
1	*	*	*	*
2	500	52	50	48
3	503	46	55	50
4	620	62	62	62
5	537	56	51	54
6	510	50	52	51
7	507	48	50	54
8	520	58	48	47
9	520	58	48	50
10	503	55	50	46
11	547	52	55	57
12	523	58	49	50
13	537	48	57	56
14	593	*	*	*
15	533	55	58	47
16	510	54	50	49
17	593	63	57	58
18	500	50	48	52

*TOEFL scores were not available for these students.

TABLE VII

PANEL GRADES FOR PRELIMINARY ESSAY

	Test Scores for Control Group				Test Scores for Peer Group			
	1	2	3	Grade Average	1	2	3	Grade Average
	2	2	1	1.660	0	1	1	0.660
	1	2	2	1.660	2	2	2	2.000
	1	0	1	0.660	2	2	3	2.330
	1	1	2	1.330	4	2	3	3.000
	1	1	2	1.330	2	3	1	2.000
	2	2	2	2.000	0	0	0	0.000
	3	2	2	2.330	1	2	3	2.000
	3	2	3	2.660	0	0	2	0.660
	0	0	0	0.000	0	1	1	0.660
	0	2	2	1.330	1	2	2	1.660
	0	0	2	0.660	3	2	2	2.330
	0	0	1	0.330	0	0	1	0.330
	2	3	3	2.660	0	0	1	0.330
	3	1	3	2.330	2	1	0	1.000
	2	3	2	2.330	0	1	1	0.660
	0	0	1	0.330	1	1	2	1.330
	0	1	1	0.660	2	2	1	1.660
	2	2	2	2.000	1	1	2	1.330
Mean	1.278	1.333	1.778	1.458	1.167	1.278	1.556	1.311
Population S.D.*	1.096	1.000	0.786		1.167	0.870	0.896	
Population Variance	1.201	1.000	0.617		1.361	0.756	0.803	
Sample S.D.*	1.128	1.029	0.809		1.201	0.895	0.922	
Population Variance	1.271	1.059	0.654		1.441	0.801	0.850	

Grading Scale: 4 = A
3 = B
2 = C
1 = D
0 = F

TABLE VIII

PANEL GRADES FOR FINAL ESSAY

| Test Scores for Peer Group | | | | | Test Scores for Control Group | | | |
| Grader | | | Grade | | Grader | | | Grade |
1	2	3	Avg.		1	2	3	Avg.
4	4	3	3.67		2	2	2	2.00
2	1	2	1.67		1	2	1	1.33
1	1	2	1.33		2	2	2	2.00
4	3	3	3.33		2	2	1	1.66
3	2	2	2.33		3	3	3	3.00
2	3	3	2.67		2	2	2	2.00
2	2	2	2.00		1	2	2	2.67
1	1	1	1.00		2	1	2	1.66
4	3	3	3.33		1	1	3	1.66
1	3	2	2.00		3	3	3	3.00
2	2	2	2.00		1	2	1	1.33
4	2	2	2.67		2	1	1	1.33
2	2	4	2.67		2	3	4	3.00
2	2	3	2.33		4	4	3	3.67
1	2	2	1.67		3	2	2	2.33
2	3	2	2.33		2	3	2	2.33
4	4	3	3.67		2	2	3	2.33
3	3	3	3.00		3	4	3	3.33
2.444	2.389	2.389	2.407	Mean	2.278	2.778	2.222	2.269
1.170				Population S.D.	0.870	0.870		
1.247	0.891	0.891		Population Variance	0.756	0.756	0.854	
1.149	0.916	0.916		Sample S.D.	0.895	0.895	0.878	
1.320	0.793	0.793		Population Variance	0.801	0.801	0.728	
	Overall Grade Increase 1.08					Overall Grade Increase 0.80		

Grading Scale: 4 = A
3 = B
2 = C
1 = D
0 = F

TABLE IX

CHANGE SCORES

Test Scores for Control Group				Test Scores for Peer Group		
Preliminary Essay	Final Essay	Change Score		Preliminary Essay	Final Essay	Change Score
1.66	2.00	0.34		0.66	3.67	3.01
1.66	1.33	-0.33		2.00	1.67	-0.33
0.66	2.00	1.34		2.33	1.33	-1.00
1.33	1.66	0.33		3.00	3.33	0.33
1.33	3.00	1.67		2.00	2.33	0.33
2.00	2.00	---		0.00	2.67	2.67
2.33	2.67	0.34		2.00	2.00	---
2.66	1.66	1.00		0.66	1.00	0.34
---	1.66	1.66		0.66	3.33	2.67
1.33	3.00	1.67		1.66	2.00	0.34
0.66	1.33	0.67		2.33	2.00	-0.34
0.33	1.33	1.00		0.33	2.67	2.34
2.66	3.00	0.34		0.33	2.67	2.34
2.33	3.67	1.34		1.00	2.33	1.33
2.33	2.33	---		0.66	1.67	1.01
0.33	2.33	2.00		1.33	2.33	1.00
0.66	2.33	1.67		1.66	3.67	2.01
2.00	3.33	1.33		1.33	3.00	1.67

Grade Increase 0.80.

t = .56, p > .05.

TABLE X

VERB PARTICLE CLOZE TEST

It was a beautiful morning in the city of Sillywater. Federico, who lived in Sillywater, woke up, stretched, and _____ out of bed. He thought about what he would do that day while he _____ his pajamas and put on his clothes. The phone rang. It was Emad. "Ranjel and I are having a party," he said. "Why don't you _____?" Federico was very happy to be invited to the party. He _____ immediately and didn't even take time to _____ the lights.

Horatio and Victor were also going to the party, but Victor, who was driving, was still so sleepy he almost _____ Kalid. Victor turned the steering wheel hard and missed Kalid; however, he drove off the road and _____ a pole instead. Rafael, who was riding his motorcycle, saw Horatio and Victor. He stopped his motorcycle and _____ the engine. He _____ the car and saw that Horatio and Victor were okay. "Oh dear!" said Rafael to his friend Abdulla, who had just arrived at the scene. "Someone had better _____ Emad's number in phone book so we can call and tell him we'll be late.

TABLE XI

TEACHING EVALUATION FORM

Course No. _____ Instructor _____ Semester _____

Item	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Comment (Use Reverse Side for Additional Comments)
INSTRUCTION Teaching (Preparation, organization, presentation, knowledge of subject)					
Communication (Explanation of subject, emphasis of major elements)					
Attitude (Toward students, toward subject; available when announced)					
Procedures and objectives clear					
Overall					
COURSE Assignments (Reasonable, clear)					
Tests (Fair, basis clear)					
Grading Procedures (Clear, fair)					
Texts (Useful, appropriate)					
Syllabus (Useful, appropriate)					
Overall					

TABLE XII

GUIDE TO GRADING ESL WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS

Section I:	Organization and Content
15 14 13	An interesting and substantial controlling idea; a fairly clear sense of organization (introduction, good development, and conclusion); appropriate length; good details and/or examples.
12 11 10	Adequate (but not extensive or thorough) development of relatively and complex ideas; insufficient details; marginal clarity and coherence.
9 8 7	Weak development of routine thought; topic not narrowed sufficiently; occasional digressions; lack of concreteness and specificity; few details.
6 5 4	Little sense of organization beyond sentence level; much irrelevant material.
3 2 1	No apparent organization; does not stick to the topic; a jumble of confusing ideas.
0	Totally off-the-mark; inappropriate response to the topic assigned.
Section II:	Grammar, Vocabulary, and Mechanics
10 9	Excellent, near-native command of English structure, except minor lapses; evidence of idiomatic control; good punctuation.
8 7	At least three-fourths of the sentences are grammatically acceptable; moderately complex sentence structure and diction; occasional errors; evidence of fluency; very few misspelled words; few punctuation errors.
6 5	Frequent grammatical errors; vocabulary limited to common words; several spelling and punctuation errors.
4 3 2	Only phrases and fragments are correct; only basic vocabulary is used; poor punctuation and frequent spelling errors.

Minus Points (After Computation)

-2	Poor presentation, handwriting difficult to read; scratches and erasures; evidence of hurried or unplanned writing.

Directions to the Instructor: Assign one mark from each of the two sections below. Add the two and multiply this "raw score" by 4 to obtain the composition score (Maximum: 100).

VITA ⅔

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