

Issues related to the Discussion of Essays in Peer Response Activities with Chinese Students.

TANAKA Nobuyuki

Keywords : Chinese students, peer response, discussion of essays, beliefs, interview.

The 19 Chinese students who participated in this study took part in eight sessions of discussion-based peer response activities. After the eight sessions, they were interviewed about their beliefs regarding peer response. The interview content was then analyzed to determine the kind of problems students faced in the discussion activities.

In the interview, participants were asked 1) whether they benefited from discussing their essay with their classmates, and 2) whether they thought it was appropriate to conduct the discussion in Japanese. The interview content was examined according to the descriptive approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Qualitative data took the form of an interview transcript and quantitative data was collected by categorizing interview responses into positive, mixed and negative answers, according to Mangelsdorf (1992).

Analysis of the results revealed the following three problems with the discussion activity:

- 1) Some students had a strong desire to learn from the teacher, rather than from classmates.
- 2) Some students were not able to adapt to the idea of discussing their essays with peers.
- 3) The limited Japanese language ability of some students inhibited their ability to have smooth discussions.

Possible solutions to these problems are discussed as follows:

Points 1 and 2 indicate a need to not only improve the way that the activity is introduced, but also to develop post-activity briefing techniques. For example, the teacher could have the students write an introspective essay on the activity, and if the essays show a negative attitude to peer response, the teacher could counsel the students

to help them further understand and adapt to the technique. A solution to Point 3 could be found by considering ways to involve the native language (L1) in discussion activities with intermediate learners. Although most students used L1 in the discussion, the interview results showed they had a strong desire to use Japanese when possible. It would be useful to develop ways to encourage this desire in intermediate learners, while still allowing effective use of L1.

This study concludes that further research is required to develop more effective activity introduction techniques, teacher mediation and use of L1 in discussion between intermediate students. It is also necessary to investigate the beliefs held by advanced Japanese language students regarding these activities, to determine whether discussion would be an effective technique with higher-level students. It would be useful for subsequent research to record the discussion activities for analysis, and to evaluate whether the essays improved in quality after the discussion activity.

(Hokuriku University)