Improving Group Discussion Interaction
Scaffolding Communication Strategies in Small Group Discussion

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ポスター発表

1. Is it possible to improve group interaction in the classroom?

Interactionist education researchers have touted the benefits of classroom small group discussion for more than a generation. However, it is not uncommon even now to find concern expressed here in Japan and abroad about lack of communication confidence or general reluctance to communicate among students in a small group setting. Instructional scaffolding, sufficient support to students when new skills are being introduced, was key to Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner's ideas from the beginning. Perhaps an ongoing problem is that we are making the false assumption at the university level that students come to us posessing an already developed sense of how to participate in an academic discussion with peers. This classroom research explores the scaffolding of the small group discussion environment itself through modeling academic discussion norms, providing structured guides, and through coaching of interaction.

2. Research Methods

Participants in this continuing research are students at Tokushima University in communication courses focused on EFL group discussion. The participants are engaging in two different types of discussion interaction each week. The first type of discussion is centered around grammar development through group study. The second type of discussion is centered around TED talk content related to the students' field of study. This second type includes not only understanding the material together, but also sharing opinions, connecting the talk to their experiences in Japan, and building on each others' ideas. The classic fishbowl technique has been used each week to model weekly goals for improving interaction. Students gather around the model group to observe the way they interact. The teacher asks the students in the "fishbowl" to model various discussion techniques and provides feedback. The observing students then return to their own seats and begin their own discussion practice. Students also receive written linguistic cues that they can chose to use to facilitate the discussion. Basketball is used as a metaphor for turn taking and teamwork in discussions. Relating to that metaphor, students pass a ball among the team members as a visual representation of how the discussion is moving. It is a training tool. The idea is that the ball will clarify who is talking and how much. It is hoped that the visual representation will help students to balance participation among all members, and that passing the ball will help to keep the discussion moving fluidly. Guided reading handouts are also given to provide structure to the discussion each week. The questions included in the guided reading handouts are designed to span the several levels of Blooms Taxonomy in order for students to have the opportunity to interact more deeply with the content and with each other. Coaching occurred throughout the process based on hurdles and

successes observed during discussions. The teacher floated from group to group to listen and provide feedback and suggestions for students.

3．Data

Group discussions are video recorded and student interactions are analyzed based on the following criteria:

- Are group members effectively able to focus the group on a task and signal when it's time to move on through verbal or visual cues?
- Can members use communication strategies to take the floor and give way respectfully?
- Is care taken by the group to assure all members are involved and have an opportunity to speak?
- Is care taken to acknowledge group members' contributions?
- Is there a good effort shown to confirm understanding?
- Can students build upon the ideas of their peers respectfully?

4．Intermediary Findings

Initial results show positive growth outcomes among students. To what degree students are able to demonstrate improved communicative competence and the instructional lessons learned from a trial of this teaching method will be described in the poster presentation. Possible broader implications for teaching group discussion for use in L1 classes will be discussed as well.

5．Reference List

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