

Students' Opinions About Peer Teaching

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Abstract

Peer-teaching allows students to teach their classmates to not only deeply explore the topic that they are teaching, but to also develop their empathy, motivation, communication, group-work, and time-management skills. Furthermore, by incorporating a reflective component into the activity, students can have more awareness of the benefits and about how the experience may help them in their futures. Over a 10-week period, two classes prepared, participated in, and then reflected on the activity of teaching their classmates. This study will explore the data from the students' reflection papers. The students wrote about the experience of teaching in regard to what they learned, how the experience will help them in the future, advice they would give to others about peer teaching, and if peer teaching was a positive or negative experience. Also, possible ways for instructors to use peer teaching will be discussed, as well as the benefits to instructors about knowing more regarding students' opinions about teaching practices.

Keywords: peer teaching, students teaching students, student voices

Introduction

This paper will examine students' opinions about teaching their peers. Peer teaching can foster learner autonomy and increase students' knowledge of the content being taught (Benson, 2011). Moreover, other skills can also be developed, such as time management, group work, and communication. Many teachers and instructors may see the value in peer teaching; however, if learners do not see the value in the activity, peer teaching may be seen as a burden of only negative aspects. This study will present students' opinions about peer teaching and what they learned from peer teaching. The project and data from the students' reflection papers will be presented. The study's strengths and limitations will be discussed. For those instructors interested in using peer teaching in lessons, this paper also provides some suggestions or activities that can be used or adapted for their own practice and students.

Literature Review

Peer teaching in ESL and EFL in Japan seems to be an area that is not often explored in practice or research. However, two studies have shown the benefits and positive results of using peer teaching in English language learning. In a study done by Bradford-Watts (2011), peer teaching was implemented at a compulsory English oral communications course at a university in Kyoto. The students reported 13 benefits of the experience as goal-setting, planning, cooperation, and communication. According to Bradford-Watts, "it would appear that peer teaching is an effective means of student-centered, socially-constructed instruction for the foreign language classroom" (p. 34). Though not in Japan, a peer-teaching study of English education students at an Indonesian university presented similar benefits, and further included additional benefits with improved teaching skills, increased confidence, and more peer interaction (Sunggingwati, 2018). According to Sunggingwati, "Peer teaching is considered as an effective way of learning" (p. 150). Other benefits of having students control the planning of the classroom activity can result in increased language learning and autonomy (Benson, 2011, p. 164). To

further make the activity more meaningful to the learners, it seems that incorporating reflecting on the experience is significant. A study by Deacon and Croker (2006), done in Japan of an English class which used peer teaching, emphasized that student reflection of the process was noted as an important component of peer teaching (cited in Benson, 2011).

However, further literature clearly stating the practice and benefits of peer teaching seems limited. More literature is present about learner-autonomy-fostering activities such as peer mentoring, or tutoring with a student who is more of a mentor, with advanced skills than the other student or students (Lingley, 2017). Peer feedback and review activities also appear more commonly, with two students checking each other's language abilities in writing activities (Lee, 2010; Yakame, 2005). Peer teaching does frequently appear in relation to collaborative and cooperative learning as ways of implementing the activity (Rienovita et al., 2018; Sunggingwati, 2018; Whitman & Fife, 1988). In the 1988 report *Peer Teaching: To Teach is to Learn Twice*, Whitman and Fife state, "In seeking to describe the psychological basis for the benefits of peer teaching, no general theory to account for observable benefits has been presented" (p. 27). In addition, Benson refers to peer teaching as "experiments" which are difficult to measure in regards to learning gains (p. 167). Peer teaching research does appear more often in other fields such as medicine, but there is limited published information related to EFL or ESL. Nonetheless, what does exist states it is a positive activity, though it appears lacking in unification and data, particularly student voices.

Design and Procedure

This section will outline the design and procedure of the peer-teaching project. For two university classes, students were required to work in groups of four to five to teach their classmates for one lesson as a mid-term project. A detailed outline of the steps of the project will be presented to hopefully give other instructors or teachers suggested ways to introduce peer teaching into their lessons, which can be adjusted to fit the needs of the teacher and students, in addition to the course's aims. The following table is the schedule of activities leading up to and during the peer teaching activity and assignment deadlines.

Table 1

Class Schedule for Peer Teaching

Lessons	Activities
Lessons 1-9	The instructor modeled the structure of the classes.
Lesson 10	Students received the peer-teaching assignment and discussed their ideal classroom activities.
Lesson 11	Students' individual presentation activity based on another assignment was done. At the end of the presentations, students were assigned to their groups and chose the lesson to teach.
Lesson 12	Planning time to work on the lesson outlines, slides, and to find other teaching materials. Instructor feedback and advice was given during the lesson. By the end of the lesson, students were expected to send a draft of their lesson outline.
Lesson 13	Students revised their outline draft based on instructor feedback and continued the planning process. At the end of the lesson, students submitted the outline and slides so the instructor could set up their lessons and materials on the class' shared drive.
Lessons 14-19	Groups peer-taught the lessons. After the lesson, those who were not peer teaching were required to complete an entry in a reaction table in response to their classmates' lesson. Those who taught worked on their reflection papers.
Lesson 20	The reflection paper was due.
Lesson 21	The reaction table was due.

The planning process began in lesson 10, after students were taught nine lessons most of which followed the same structure, when students received the peer-teaching assignment which outlined the structure for lessons 12 to 19. They were also given the due dates for the three parts of the assignment: (a) planning and teaching activity, (b) reflection paper about the peer-teaching experience, and (c) reactions to each lesson that their peers taught. Also in lesson 10, students were given examples of possible pair, group, and class activities, and asked to decide which they felt were ideal. They shared that pair interviews, group discussions, and vocabulary quizzes would be best. In lesson 11, students were assigned to their groups, which had on average four members. Students used an outline to plan their lessons, and this was completed and submitted before the deadline at the end of lesson 12. Please see the Appendix. This outline included the assigned lesson, learning goals, ways to achieve the goals, materials such as videos or articles that the students felt could help their classmates understand the topic more deeply, and classroom activities that could help with critical thinking and to synthesize the topic being taught. Students were also given a slide template the same as the instructor used to create their own slides that would help guide their lessons.

The first part of the peer-teaching assignment put emphasis on not only the actual teaching aspect, but also on preparation time and research about the topic being taught with supplemental materials other than the textbook. Students used the textbook which was the basis for most of the content used from the beginning of the class. Using a textbook which students were familiar with can lessen the decision making done regarding topics and activities. Students were also given the answer key for the unit that they taught. In regards to language usage, students taught the lesson completely in English. However, during the planning time, Japanese could be used, but since there were international students in the classes from countries such as China, Taiwan, and Korea, some groups also did the planning using English. In these cases, students seemed to become more familiar with the English related to the topic being taught.

Each group was responsible for teaching their peers, but within each group, members would be responsible for certain activities in the lesson, such as the textbook reading, textbook activities, question-and-answer checking, presentation of discussion questions, and eliciting comments about group discussions. The activity seems to increase unity within the groups, as they were required to work with the same peer-teaching members not only when teaching, but also when being taught by their classmates, as students sat in groups. Those teaching were required to teach for 90 minutes of the 100-minute class. At the beginning of the lesson, the instructor took attendance, and after the peer-taught lesson finished, the remaining time was for students to work on the lesson reactions or teaching reflections. Each peer-taught lesson seemed to go quite smoothly, with those teaching adhering to their outlines and those being taught mostly focusing on the lessons. In the second part of the peer-teaching assignment, the peer teachers were required to reflect on the experience. Their reflections will be discussed more extensively in the *Data Collection and Analysis* section.

The third part of the assignment was when the students who were not peer teaching were required to write a reaction about what they learned from the peer-taught lesson. They also wrote about the things they liked about peer-teaching groups, or things that they would like to do when they peer teach based on the peer-teaching group's practice. This enabled students when receiving a peer-taught lesson to think more deeply about the experience, share what they felt were the classmates' strong points, and perhaps even incorporate their students' teaching practice into the lesson that they would teach if they had not yet peer taught a lesson. In Lesson 21, students were required to submit the table, which contained three to four rows based on the number of times that they received a peer-taught lesson.

Hopefully the above project provides a guide that could be modified for students of different ages and classes with varying levels of English proficiency. Furthermore, it appears that peer teaching in small groups, rather than in pairs or individually, allowed for students to share the responsibility and lessen the anxiety of teaching. In the groups, the members all seemed to be active in the preparation process and had equal roles as teachers. So it is suggested when using peer teaching, particularly if it is the first time for the class, to use groups. It seems that as long as students have an understanding of the lesson's structure, a clear outline for the expectations of the activity, adequate instructor support, and time to prepare, peer teaching can be a positive experience.

Methodology

Participants

The 35 participants were from two different classes at a liberal arts university in Tokyo during the 2019–2020 Fall semester. The study gathered data from the 36 of 38 students who were present for the final class when a consent form was given to ask for permission to use their reflection papers. One student was absent on the day assigned for peer teaching, so was unable to contribute data.

The first class was a mandatory advanced English presentation class for first-year intercultural communications. Most of the 21 students were returnees having TOEIC scores of over 700. These students had also been together in the previous Spring semester and were taught by the same instructor. The second class was an elective cross-cultural communications class for 15 second- to fourth-year students from various faculties. This semester was the first semester that all the students had studied together. Most of the students in the elective class had lower English proficiencies than the first-year students. Both the classes met twice a week for 100-minute lessons for 14 weeks.

The two classes were not focused solely to learn English skills but to gain academic content through English and learn about various issues across different cultures. For example, the textbook topics ranged from overfishing to renewable energy, economic equality, telecommuting, social media, body language and customs, individualism, politeness, and communication styles. This is important to note because it appears that most literature about peer teaching in an EFL or ESL setting is for skill-based lessons.

Instruments

The instrument used to collect data was a reflection paper, the second part of the peer-teaching assignment. Again, as noted by Decon and Croker (2006), reflection can be useful in peer teaching (cited in Benson, 2011). The section of the paper focusing on peer teaching was comprised of the below prompts, which were to be answered in a paragraph:

1. Things you learned from teaching
2. Ways the experience will help you in the future
3. Advice you would give others about teaching
4. Reasons it was a positive or negative experience

All responses were written in English. The students' responses were divided into the four prompts and then coded for themes. The prompts were to explore the values students perceived from the activity, how peer teaching may help them outside of the classroom in other activities and in their future, their advice for other students about peer teaching, and their opinion of the experience.

It seems it would be valuable to learn not only students' reflections but more about how students connect peer teaching to their futures, as this could give more merit to the activity. In addition, to continue the teaching component, asking their advice to share with other students, as well as the instructor, was significant, as it could guide future classes that incorporate peer-teaching activities and the instructor's teaching practice.

Data Collection and Analysis

As this was not a survey, it is important to note that there were challenges in the data analysis. Due to the differences between the proficiencies of the two classes, and even amongst the students in each class, there were variations in the data gathered from the reflection papers. It appeared that some students did not clearly understand the prompts, while some directly answered the prompts or even gave responses that could be interpreted for multiple prompts. Also, for some of their answers, there was an overlap with the answers, and multiple answers for each prompt were also possible.

During the literature review, few articles shared student voices about teaching their peers. According to the 2005 report *Research as empowerment?*, "Research is a competitive activity and it can be hard to share power" (Toronto Group, p. 17). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) define giving voice as a way to empower groups that might not have the opportunity to share (as cited in Ashby, 2011). It seems that presenting students' qualitative data is a positive way to share power with learners by providing a site for their opinions to be shared with a wider audience other than just their teacher. The following section will focus on giving voice to the participants' opinions in their own words. At times, their English is not always grammatically correct, but it is understandable.

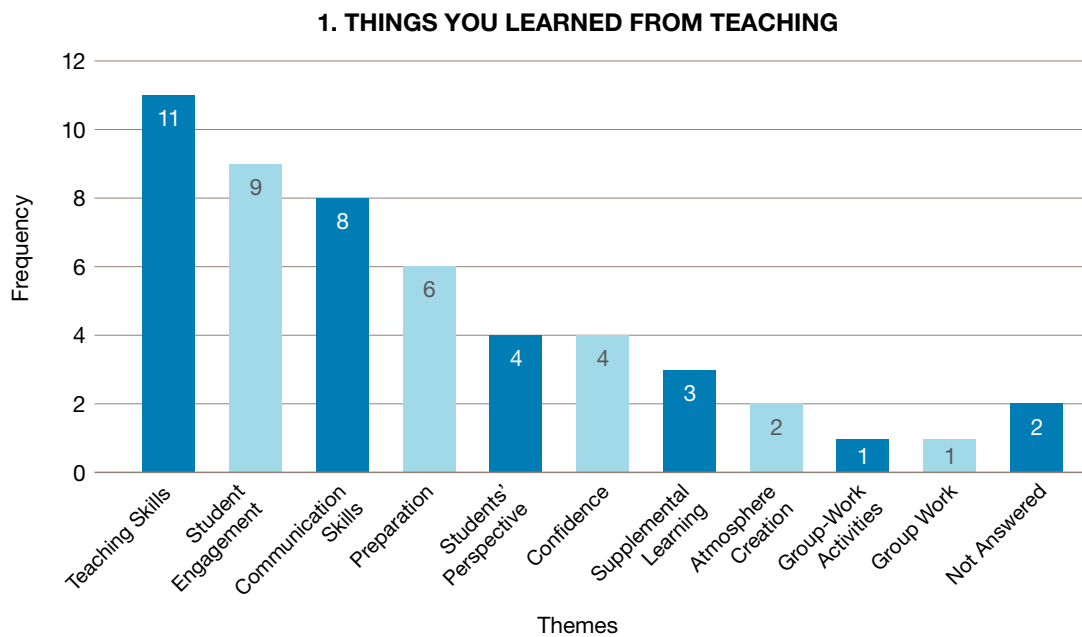
Findings

Prompt 1

Students answered that the things they learned from teaching were primarily teaching skills, the importance of student engagement, and communication skills, as can be seen in Figure 1. The need to be prepared, consider the lesson from the learner's perspective, and to have confidence when teaching were also shared. Some shared that there were challenges to peer teaching.

Figure 1

Participants' Responses to Prompt 1



Of the 11 responses for Teaching Skills, below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *By being a teacher of the English class, I was able to learn that the teacher should be patient until the students to be[come] quiet before moving onto the next section. This is really important, since [the] teacher should not leave any student behind, and be responsible of making them understand the content.*
- *[The] teaching activity was difficult for me. I had many mistakes and the things I regret. However I think accepting my mistakes and practising hard with confidence is the good way to help me in the future.*

Student engagement, particularly the challenges of keeping their classmates attention, was also perceived as an important thing learned from peer teaching, with nine responses. Below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *[M]aking the students active is important.*
- *[D]ifficult to attract the audience's attention.*
- *Some of the students participated in the class actively and we actually felt their passion. However, there were also some students seem[ed to be] not interested in our class; they were chatting or using phones.*
- *[I]t was quite challenging for me to make students concentrate and enjoy the class. Their focus didn't last for long; hence, teachers are required to make students enjoy the class.*

Two students responded that atmosphere creation was learned from the peer-teaching experience. The response of a student who taught a lesson about overfishing is as follows:

- *We thought the atmosphere of the classroom was important, so we decided to play music related to [the] ocean, yet everyone knows. Consequently, the atmosphere was great and they focused on their work.*

The data appears to indicate that these students viewed the teacher as not just needing the knowledge of the topic under study, but the ability to engage students by gaining their attention and

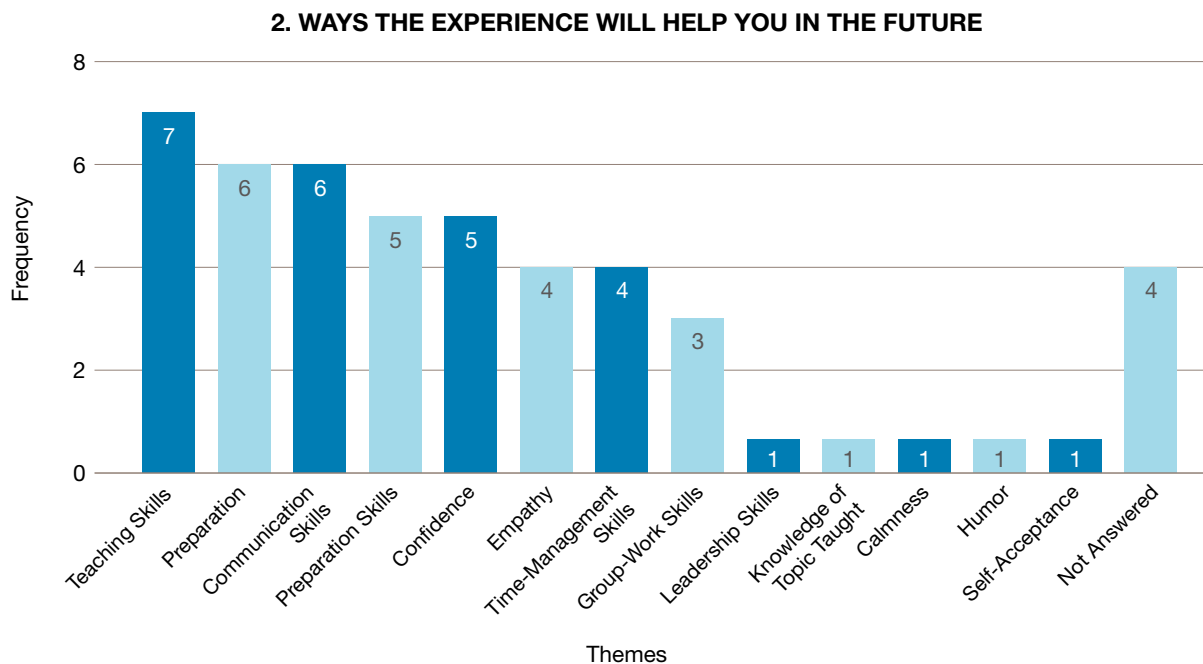
trying to motivate them. They viewed that learning the importance of good communication skills, utilizing supplemental learning materials, and creating an environment where the students could be comfortable learning could all increase the learner's motivation. Having confidence aided through sufficient preparation, and considering lessons from the learner's perspective, such as ensuring students clearly understand what the teacher is conveying, was also viewed as significant.

Prompt 2

Students shared 13 different ways that they felt the experience of peer teaching would help them in the future, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Participants' Responses to Prompt 2



The following are a selection of student responses, which range from the application of teaching skills, the most frequent theme, in other settings such as a part-time job or club activity, to a deeper understanding of the fundamentals of teaching.

- *Since I am thinking to apply for a part-time job of a teacher at [a] cram school, this experience will be helpful for me to keep in mind [of] how I can engage with students and create a fun, active and motivational class.*
- *The experience will help me in the future when I am teaching others during the circle [activity]. Since I belong to the hula circle and I have been dancing for more than ten years, I have a lot of chances to teach and give some advice to my friends [about] how to dance. Because of this, I want to improve my teaching skills so they will understand easier. Since I had improved my teaching skills [a] little bit, I would like to try to teach others more.*
- *I think it is important to not only saying the word but also let everyone remembering a new thing in during the class.*

- *To make the students focus in the lesson is definitely the most important aspect in teaching a class.*

The second most frequent theme was preparation. Students shared that preparing adequately for the peer teaching activity influences their understanding of the requirements for teaching, in addition to improving their teaching abilities. The following is a selection of student responses:

- *However after standing in the opposite position it made me recognize how tough planning classes are as a teacher. I believe it will help me massively in the future.*
- *The 1 point is that preparedness is highly important. The reason is that I thought [it] is that there are many factors to organize the class well. For example, confidence, [a] loud voice, eye contact and etc. All of that is caused by good preparedness. Good preparedness leads [to] confidence. So I think preparedness is very important in some aspects even [in the] future.*

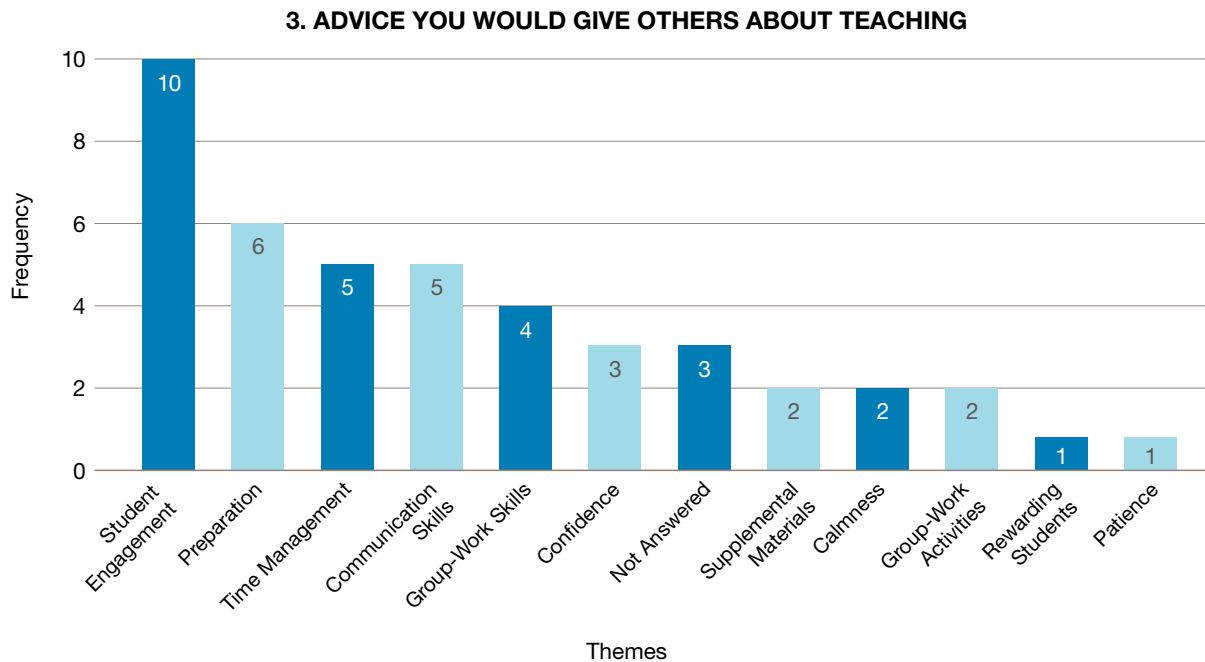
Empathy also appeared as a theme in the ways that peer teaching would help students in their future, by providing them with a deeper understanding of the teacher's perspective. This could potentially change their future behavior as students. Below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *We had this chance to observe the classroom from a teacher's perspective and realized that being a teacher is definitely not easy work.*
- *Moreover, this experience would help me by changing [my] attitude toward[s] classes. I could understand how hard it is to lead classes from the teacher's point of view, which makes me join classes more actively.*
- *[F]rom now on I will be able to have a new perspective. When I take classes I am now able to think of the teacher's point of view.*

In answering the above prompt, students had the opportunity to consider the ways that they felt peer teaching could benefit them in their futures, potentially adding more value to the experience.

Prompt 3

This section focuses on how students would advise other students in the process of peer teaching. When the answers were first examined, it seemed many might be under the umbrella of teaching skills. However, in further analysis of the responses to this prompt, the students provide more detailed explanations of what they believe constitutes good teaching skills as ways to successfully engage and communicate with students. Therefore, instead of "teaching skills", student engagement, preparation, group work skills, and communication skills appear with the most frequency in the students' writing, as can be seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3*Participants' Responses to Prompt 3*

In regard to student engagement, below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *Based on this teaching experience, I would advise others to increase engagement with students and create an active-learning class. Because I believe motivation is the key for students to have [a] positive attitude to learn about new things.*
- *[Y]ou should think about how to make students interested in the topic that you are going to teach beforehand.*
- *[A]dvice I would give others about teaching is to make students participate during class.*
- *To make the students focus in the lesson is definitely the most important aspect in teaching a class.*

Preparation appeared the second most frequently in the student responses. In regard to student preparation, below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *I learned that enough preparation is important.*
- *What I would give others [advice] about teaching is that just prepare and practice.*

In regard to communication, students shared an understanding of the importance of non-verbal skills as well as the volume and tone of voice to communicate more effectively. Below is a selection of direct student responses:

- *I think if we managed the class with [a] smiling and high tone, students took the class [with] more interesting. ... I have to be strict and give instructions politely and easily.*
- *I recommend that when you are teaching, please have eye contact with your students and also increase your speaking volume.*
- *To be a good teacher, except having enough professional knowledge of educating, we realized that the ability of taking interactions with students is also important.*

Other themes students viewed as significant were being confident, calm, and patient. This can be seen in their direct responses as follows:

- *I would like to give advice to students whose going to teach others not to be afraid.*

- *And I would say, the fact which you should be patient should be an advice to others considering that, including myself[,] many of us tend to rushed the class.*
- *So if I need to give advice about teaching I would suggest[to] be calm and methodical.*

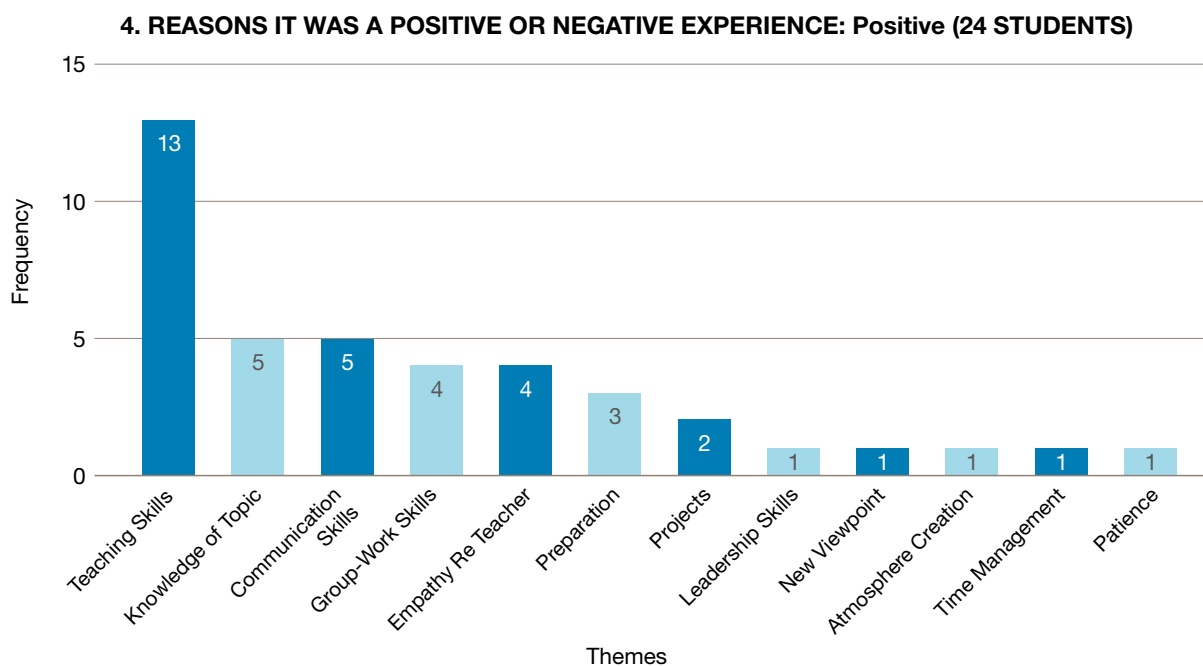
Students' responses to the above prompt provided a deeper understanding of their perceptions of what they believe constitutes good teaching practice.

Prompt 4

This prompt's responses are divided into two sections. Most of the students directly answered that the experience was positive and gave reasons. Nonetheless, some students did not provide a direct answer but gave reasons which seem to indicate the experience was positive. This section will explore the responses that directly answered that peer teaching was a positive experience, which can be seen in Figure 4. The theme that appeared the most frequently was teaching skills, which was shared by 10 students. It is important to note that students expressed that they did not only learn skills regarding ways to better interact with and motivate students, but also shared that they enjoyed the experience and may even pursue teaching as a career.

Figure 4

Participants' Responses to Prompt 4 as a Positive Experience



A selection of the students' responses is below:

- *By being a teacher of the English class, I was able to learn that the teacher should be patient until the students to be quiet before moving onto the next section. This is really important, since [the] teacher should not leave any student behind, and be responsible of making them understand the content.*
- *It was a positive experience because I learned about how to teach, and it will be very helpful for me if I become a teacher in the future.*

- *By experiencing teaching in front of the class today,..., [I] could realize how amazing and pleasure[able it is] when students react actively.*
- *The positive point was that I could enjoy teaching because it was the first time to teach in English.*
- *I felt teaching experience was positive and valuable because I became more interested in teaching others and I learned that even though it is not easy to teach others but I felt it was worth doing it.*
- *Overall, I thought [a] student-led class was a positive experience because even though I always teach junior high school students as a part-time job, giving a lecture to university students was [a] totally different experience than I expected. In this way, I have come to consider that teachers have to be flexible with the way of teaching and the ages of students.*

The second most common theme was increased knowledge of the topic taught, with five responses. Students appeared to focus more intently on the topic in the role of teacher than that of the role of student. A selection of students' responses is below:

- *Moreover, I could read the textbook much deeper than usual.*
- *Of course, I got to earn more knowledge about the economy than before.*
- *It was a good experience because it was a good opportunity to ... think about what way is effective to understand topics.*

The second most common theme was communication skills, with also five responses. They wrote that good communication is directly connected to others' increased level of understanding regarding what is shared by the speaker, or in this case, the peer-teacher. A selection of students' responses is below:

- *I needed to speak clearly for students to easily understand and grasp the concept. This experience will help me to explain to others about something easily and understandably.*
- *It was a good experience because it was a good opportunity to talk in front of everyone and think about what way is effective to understand topics.*

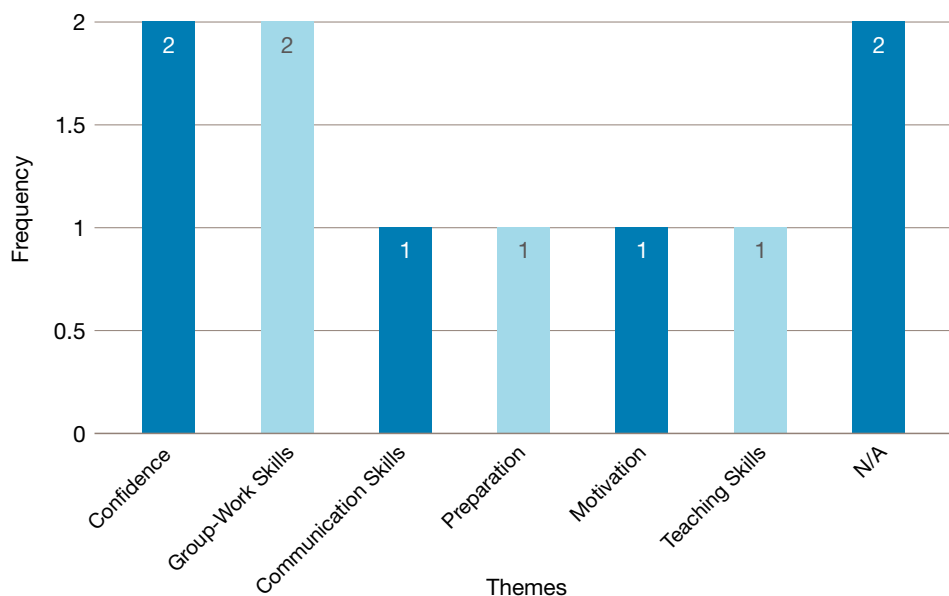
For the students who directly stated that peer teaching was a positive experience, there were over 10 different themes which demonstrate the value of the activity.

In this section, the responses from eight students who did not directly state if the experience of peer teaching was positive or negative will be examined. It seems that their responses indicate that the experience was a positive not a negative one, as these students responded that peer teaching gave them more awareness of confidence, group-work skills, communication skills, preparation, motivation, and teaching skills, which can be seen in Figure 5. First, in relation to confidence, the following responses indicate either a gain in confidence, or what is necessary to do to demonstrate confidence.

Figure 5

Participants' Responses to Prompt 4 Not Directly Answered as a Positive or Negative Experience

**4. REASONS IT WAS A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE: Not Answered Directly
But did not Write Negative Comments About the Experience (8 STUDENTS)**



Below are the two student responses:

- *However, I could have confidence a little by this teaching.*
- *What's not good about [my] lecture is [I am] nervous, my weak voice and I should teach with confidence.*

Next, group-work skills were expressed by two students as something learned from the experience of peer teaching. Below are their direct responses:

- *However, I think the group balance was the best of 4 teams. We could cooperate with each other, so we could lead a class on schedule.*
- *What's good is dividing roles properly and proceeding according to plan.*

One student expressed their increased awareness of the importance of being well prepared for the lesson. The response is as follows:

- *We think out ways in the teaching. First, before [the] lecture, we make a time for discussing because we want you [the students being taught] to talking freely without [the] lecture's thinking. Second, before watching [the]video, we tell you about discussion questions for understanding easily.*

As mentioned previously, peer teaching influences the students' motivation not only in the role of teacher, but also in the role of the student, as can be seen with the below response:

- *Thus, I think I need to do my best both in the lesson and when working as a teacher.*

Even for the students who did not directly answer if peer teaching was a positive or negative experience, they were able to recognize the significance of communication, motivation, group work, preparation, and teaching skills through the activity.

Discussion

This section will focus on the importance of gathering data from students and what it can reveal, in addition to how this activity can be used with a variety of students and classes. Also, the factors that may have influenced the data will be discussed. In this project, students were able to act as teachers, and were then asked to reflect on their experience. Their data provided insight into their opinions, which helped the instructor understand alternative perspectives on teaching practice. As teachers, it seems that it may quite often be the case that our primary focus is on the class aims and our own areas of interest in teaching practices. However, in gathering students' perspectives on teaching, the teacher's practice can incorporate what students value as significant for educators to do. Working at the university level, it was surprising that students felt that instructors were responsible for motivating the students. This was in contrast to my experience as a university student, wherein I felt that the motivation to learn was intrinsic, with the student being solely responsible for maintaining their own motivation. Another area of interest is not only what students viewed as important for teachers to do, but what they felt was significant to do when they were peer-teaching. For example, as with atmosphere creation through music, and other ways of possibly increasing student engagement. Students' responses gave new perspectives about teaching.

Based on how the performance of these students, it is possible that with sufficient preparation time, direct modeling by the teacher, and clear criteria, most students should be able to adequately peer teach. However, the teacher's willingness to foster learner autonomy by allowing to have control, and the student's willingness to be more autonomous in an activity such as peer teaching, will also influence the outcomes. Possible limitations are that these students either had a higher level of English in the mandatory class or quite a strong interest in developing their English in the elective class. As a result, teaching their peers using English was not as challenging as it could be for learners of lower proficiencies, or those having less interest in learning and using English. Furthermore, students may potentially share different themes learned from the peer-teaching experience based on their perceptions of teaching due to their values and expectations, as well as in relation to the class that they peer teach. The instructor's role in guiding the class before and during peer teaching, in addition to the instructor's perception as to what peer teaching is, will also influence the activity.

Conclusion

In this study, peer teaching was viewed as a positive experience by the participants, that can result in increased communication, group-work skills, teaching skills, confidence, motivation, and empathy. Peer teaching can also give students the chance to consider teaching as a possible career path, and how skills related to teaching may transfer to their futures. If the teacher implementing peer teaching in their practice also asks their students to share about the experience, the teacher can potentially gain more awareness into their learners' values and beliefs in respect to teaching. Peer teaching in EFL and ESL is a research area for further exploration, particularly in regards to students' voices.

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Appendix

Assignment 2: Lesson Outline

Group Members:

Unit Number and Topic:

Date:

Things that you want the students to learn in your class:

Ways that you will help the students learn those things:

Materials & Estimated Time:

Activities: