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Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups in the Dual Language Classroom

Cristina I. Celis
St. Catherine University, cicelis@stkate.edu

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PEER TUTORING AND COOPERATIVE GROUPS IN THE DUAL LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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St. Catherine University

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Abstract

How do we help children practice and retain the second language in a Dual Language program? We must find effective and fun ways, like Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups. This research was conducted with a group of 21 six and seven year olds in a Dual Language Immersion classroom in a Title 1 school. There was a mixture of boys and girls, Latinos, African-Americans and Caucasians. Data collection was done through surveys, observations, artifacts and narratives. The data showed that while these strategies did increase vocabulary, they did not inspire the children to speak more Spanish. They still reverted back to speaking in English. Based on my findings, students require more vocabulary and would benefit from more opportunities to practice it.

Keywords: Peer Tutoring, Cooperative Groups, Dual Language
“¡Por favor hablen en español!” (‘Please speak in Spanish!’) I have repeated this hundreds of times in the classroom. Because we live in the United States, understandably, most of the children speak English. Interestingly, the children whose native language is not English, also prefer to speak in English. In a Dual Language Immersion program, where children are taught in two languages and where becoming bilingual and biliterate is the goal, it is imperative we find ways to help children practice and retain the second language. This ambition has propelled us, Dual Language teachers, to find effective and fun ways for children to acquire the second language.

Bilingual education has been around in the United States since 1619, when Polish immigrants were granted permission to have schools where Polish and English were simultaneously taught. Bilingual education has taken on different forms since then and one such form is Dual Language Immersion. Dual Language Immersion programs seek to retain students’ native language while teaching them a second language. In other words, students are taught in both their native language and the target language. Dual Language Immersion programs have been gaining momentum in the United States, and Dual Language teachers continue to look for strategies to help in second language acquisition.

I have identified two strategies that are both fun for students but also effectively promote second language acquisition: Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups. In both these strategies, communication is at the center. The tutors must teach in the second, or target, language and the tutees must answer in the target language. In Cooperative groups, the children must communicate effectively to get the job done. There is dialogue, conversation and instruction involved. Because these strategies rely on communication, they appeared to be conducive to the acquisition of the target language.
Furthermore, both these strategies involve the children working with each other and minimize the role of the teacher, an important element of the Montessori approach which holds that children learn best through socializing and talking with each other. While the teacher, or guide, is there to give the initial lessons, the children enjoy working independently with each other. Also, as most children age six and seven love to talk to and with others, these strategies would give them ample time to do this.

Peer Tutoring involves the children tutoring each other. Some students are selected to be the tutors by the teacher. They are trained on how and what to tutor. They then tutor their peers. At the end, they assess their peers to see how well they did. Usually, it is one-to-one tutoring or small group tutoring. Cooperative Groups involves the children working together in small groups to accomplish a task. The children in the small groups must collaborate to do this. Roles or jobs are often designated and everyone is required to participate in some capacity.

This Action Research was conducted with a group of twenty-one six and seven year olds in a Dual Language Immersion classroom in Virginia. Twelve of the children were boys and nine were girls. Eight were Latino, seven were African-American and six were Caucasian. Of the thirteen children who were not Latino, four had never had Spanish instruction before. The other nine had been in the program in Kindergarten.

The school is a Title 1 school where most of the children receive free or reduced school lunches. A majority of the children come from low-income families. In addition, it is a somewhat transient population due to military ties or families moving to find more affordable housing. Most of the Latinos are recent immigrants or the children of recent immigrants.
Based on the population and so as to find the best way to help these children acquire a second language, I looked at Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups. My Action Research question was: What effect will heterogeneous cooperative groups and peer tutoring have on helping second language learners become more proficient in Spanish? The hypothesis to be tested is that these two strategies are effective for second language acquisition.

**Review of Literature**

Dual Language has been steadily gaining momentum in the United States. There are several models or different ways of implementing Dual Language. Regardless of the model, the main component is that native English speakers and native Spanish speakers (or speakers of other languages) receive instruction in both English and the second language throughout the day to become bilingual. There is a need to find best practices to help students acquire and become proficient in their second language. The primary complications that present themselves are that students with academic challenges in general, such as struggling readers and writers, often labor to increase their Spanish proficiency. Several articles and books offered two strategies which I hypothesized would be effective in overcoming these difficulties: cooperative groups and peer tutoring.

According to Montague (1997), one of the components necessary for successful dual language programs are the role of elicited response. Elicited response is when speakers have the opportunity and are expected to speak the other language. Speaking the second language is a fundamental preset of a Dual-Language program. Through
cooperative learning and peer tutoring, students will have ample opportunities to talk in the targeted language.

There is much literature that addresses the benefits of working in cooperative groups. In cooperative groups, students collaborate and communicate to accomplish a task. In one study, Kumar (2009) was challenged by the parents of students in his classroom to show them why collaboration was beneficial for all students, particularly their gifted children. Through dialogue, student artifacts, discussions and observation, he showed parents that the collaborative process “illustrates how groups function, shows how students enhance each other’s knowledge, and explains how individual students benefit from working in groups” (95). For example, shyer students felt more comfortable sharing with peers in a safe environment and students shared their perspectives and knowledge, enriching the learning experience. He also noted the benefits of having discussions and communicating within the cooperative groups.

More specifically to Dual-language and because of the need for interactions between the native and non-native speakers of both English and Spanish, cooperative learning appears to be beneficial. In the article, Sustaining a Dual Language Immersion Program: Features of Success, Alanis and Rodrigues (2008) reported that in a successful Dual-language program, teachers used heterogeneous groups to help students in language acquisition and comprehension of content.

In another article, Alanis (2013), declared that “cooperative teams employ higher levels of thought and retain information longer than children who work individually” (42). Therefore, pairing children who have varying language and cognitive abilities in heterogeneous groups is an effective strategy in these classrooms. These pairings also
provide more time for focused discussions. She added that “working in bilingual pairs drives language and concept development, provides opportunities to develop more complex language patterns of talk, and builds linguistic confidence in a fun, relaxing environment” (43).

Furthermore, Soto (2007) wrote that “studies suggest that when ethnically and linguistically diverse students work interdependently on school tasks with common objectives, student’s expectations and attitudes toward each other become more positive, their academic achievement improves, and their development of the second language is enhanced” (3). This study also points to the benefits of using cooperative teams for learning the second language.

Besides cooperative groups, peer tutoring is another strategy that appears to benefit students who are learning a second language. According to Bowman-Perrott (2003), “peer tutoring is an instructional strategy that involves students helping each other learn content through repetition of key concepts” (39). In another study, Kourea et al. (2007) focused on best teaching strategies for urban minority school children who were educationally disadvantaged. They decided to investigate the efficacy of peer tutoring dividing it into five components: tutor huddle, practice, testing, charting and rewarding. Their results indicated that the tutees learned more words and retained these words more through peer tutoring than through teacher-led classroom instruction.

Similarly, Bowman-Perrott et al. (2003) conducted research on the academic benefits of peer tutoring, focusing on dosage, grade level, disability status, content area and reward. They found that peer tutoring benefitted students across grade levels in all
content areas. They also discovered that it was particularly helpful for students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

More specifically to language, Angelova et al. (2006), found that “in peer interactions, children served as resources for one another and drew on what they know of both languages to co-construct language and literacy events” (187). Furthermore, Liu and Devitt (2014) conducted a study on the effects of reciprocal peer teaching on language competence, autonomy, and motivation. They found that reciprocal peer teaching did increase language skills, but mostly for the tutor.

In addition to the literature on cooperative groups and peer tutoring, Dr. Montessori (2007) indicated the need for the child aged six to twelve to interact with their peers for social and cognitive reasons. According to Montessori, an “interesting fact to be observed in the child of six is his need to associate himself with others, not merely for the sake of company, but in some sort of organized activity” (4). Cooperative groups and peer tutoring would fit the requirement of the six to twelve-year-old child to meet this need for organized social interactions.

Based on the literature reviewed, cooperative groups and peer tutoring appear to benefit every child, especially those who are less-advantaged. These interventions would serve the needs of second language learners and those students who struggle academically. It stands to reason that implementing these two interventions will help these learners increase their level of Spanish proficiency.
Methodology

Pre and Post Questionnaire

At the beginning of my Action Research project, the students were asked a few questions verbally. I annotated their responses using the questions from Appendix A. These questions sought to ascertain if they liked working in groups and what they liked about working in groups. They were also asked how they thought working in groups would help them in learning the second language. All the questions were asked in Spanish and nothing was translated. The questions are listed in Appendix A. After both the Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups parts of the research, the children were again asked the same questions to see if they would answer the questions differently or if they would answer in Spanish.

Peer Tutoring

After the questionnaire, the students began to be exposed to the Peer Tutoring method. Initially, the eight native Spanish-speaking students in the class were selected to be the tutors. I assumed that these students would make the ideal tutors because they were native-Spanish speakers. They were told they were going to tutor the rest of the 13 students in the class on ten forest animal vocabulary words (skunk, fox, deer, rabbit, owl, beaver, wolf, squirrel, raccoon and bear). We had gone over the words as a class already and had written them down in the Spanish journals. The tutors were to see how many words the other students knew, tutor them, and then see if they had retained any more words. They used sets of picture cards and word cards of each animal. See Appendix B
for an example of the cards. Some ideas the peer tutor students came up with to tutor were the following:

- They had competitions to see who knew the most words; each student received a card for the words he or she got right. Then the cards were counted to see who had the most.
- They showed the pictures of the animals, said the animal name, and then had their tutee repeat the word.
- They had their tutees pair the animal pictures with the animal names using the animal cards.

During the first session, three tutors were each paired with a classmate, while five tutors were each paired with two classmates. As I observed, I quickly realized that not all the tutors were equipped for the task. Some forgot the words while others mispronounced the words. A few had a difficult time staying on task and were unable to tutor at all because they were goofing around. This led me to reevaluate which students to choose as tutors and how to better prepare the tutors.

The second week, only six students were chosen to tutor because they had shown they were dependable and were able to handle the responsibility. Two of these students were native English speakers, while the other four were native Spanish speakers. Again, we went over the ten words as a class and wrote them down in the Spanish journals. Before I sent them to tutor their peers, I sat with them and prepared them by making sure they knew the vocabulary and were able to pronounce the words correctly. This time, the theme was on desert animal vocabulary words (vulture, snake, roadrunner, tarantula,
lizard, scorpion, coyote, wild boar and armadillo). Before meeting with their tutees, they practiced with each other for about five to ten minutes to make sure they were ready.

The following day, they were assigned either two or three classmates each and were asked to tutor them. Some of the tutors still had a difficult time pronouncing and recalling some of the vocabulary words. At this point, I concluded that either the tutors needed even more preparation or the vocabulary words were too difficult. These tutoring sessions took approximately fifteen minutes.

The third week, the students focused on ocean animals (whale, dolphin, shark, seahorse, sea star, fish, octopus, medusa, crab and sea turtle). Eight tutors were chosen: three were native English speakers and five were native Spanish speakers. Two more students were added because they had shown they were dependable. Again, we went over the words as a class and wrote them down in the Spanish journals. After that, I sat with the tutors and reviewed the vocabulary to make sure they knew the words and could pronounce them. This time, because I wanted to give them more autonomy, they were allowed to choose the peers they could tutor. The children excitedly chose their classmates. The tutoring sessions went better because the children remembered all the words and were able to pronounce them correctly.

The fourth week, the students focused on jungle animals (lion, zebra, elephant, tiger, crocodile, parrot, monkey, giraffe, gorilla and hippopotamus) in the beginning of the week and animals of the tundra (beluga, orca, seal, walrus, wapiti, snow hare, snow fox, polar bear, penguin and narwhal) at the end of the week. I decided to include both in the same week because we were running out of time and the children were familiar with the routine. We went over the ten jungle animals on Monday and the ten tundra animals
on Wednesday and wrote them down in the Spanish journals. Six students were chosen to tutor based on my observations on how they did in previous tutoring sessions. These six were chosen because they were able to retain the vocabulary, pronounce the words correctly, and were able to stay on task.

The same routine was repeated. We sat together and I prepared them by going over the words making sure they knew them and could pronounce them. They then practiced with each other. After that, they chose the peers they could tutor--two each and a few choose three. They sat with their peers, tested them first, then tutored them, and tested them again at the end.

Cooperative Groups

After the Peer Tutoring part of the research, I began with the Cooperative Group project which lasted two weeks. On a Friday, I chose five heterogeneous groups of students. Each group had both boys and girls, both native English and native Spanish speakers, and a mixture of academic abilities. Once the groups where chosen, each group was asked to choose a captain to be the leader. This leader would be the spokesperson of the group as well as the person to whom I relayed information. Then, to make it fair, I put the names of the captains in a box. My classroom helpers picked one name out of the box at a time and that captain and his/her group choose the habitat they wanted to explore.

On Monday, the children were asked to each choose an animal from their habitat and write about it using the vocabulary they had already been taught. They also had their “special dictionaries”: they could ask me how to say a word in Spanish and I would write it in there. (This was in case they wanted to use words I had not taught them.) They
continued writing about their animals, editing their work, and drawing a picture of their animal on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, the groups were asked to plan their diorama. I explained what a diorama was and showed them pictures of ideas from the internet. The groups were to try to speak in Spanish as they planned out what they wanted to include and what materials they would need to do their projects.

On Thursday, the children began constructing their dioramas. They used construction paper, cotton balls, and sticks and grass from outside. Again, the children were reminded to try to speak in Spanish. When I saw a group was stuck or I sensed discord, I intervened and asked them questions in Spanish to guide them to a solution. The children finished their dioramas the following day on Friday.

On Monday, the children wrote about their habitat as a group. First, they made a web that included plants, animals, weather, and miscellaneous categories. They brainstormed ideas to include in each category. Then they began to write. They could use books for ideas or they could ask me. With some groups, we looked up answers to their questions on the internet. To save time, once they finished, I typed their paragraphs. If we had more time, I would have asked them to type the paragraphs themselves.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, the children were each given some clay so that they could make the animal about which they had written. The clay dried overnight and the following day, they painted their animals. We had some mishaps and I had to use crazy glue and a hot glue gun to repair some appendages.

On Thursday, the children presented their projects to a Dual Language Kindergarten class. Before that, they had practiced reading their habitat papers and their
animal papers to their classmates. As part of the presentation, each student read his/her animal paper and one person was chosen to read the habitat paper. They stood next to their diorama to refer to what they were reading. On Friday, they presented their projects to the other First Grade Dual Language class. See Appendix C for examples of their individual writings.

**Data Analysis**

**Pre and Post Survey**

In the pre and post survey results, the same themes surfaced over and over. To the first question, “Do you like to work in a group? Why or why not?,“ most of the students responded “yes” for one of three reasons: it was fun, they helped each other, and the work got done faster. One student said that it was less lonely working in a group because he could be with others. Seven students responded in Spanish, six responded in English, one in Spanglish and the rest did not respond because they did not understand what I was saying. (Spanglish is a mixture of English and Spanish.)

To the second question, “¿Cómo te ayudará aprender español/inglés trabajar en un grupo? (‘How will working in a group help you to learn Spanish/English?’), the students kept repeating the same idea. The majority talked about how they would ask their peers for help when they did not know a word. So, not only was working in a group fun, but the students could look to their peers for help. This appeared to give them assurance and make the tasks less daunting because they knew they were not alone.

At the end of both Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups, the students’ responses were similar. They reiterated that they liked working in groups because it was fun, because others could help, and because the work could be done quicker. Only one student
did not appreciate working in groups because the student felt it got too noisy. Eight students answered in Spanish, five students answered in English, four students answered in Spanglish, and four did not answer because they did not understand what I was saying. One student who had previously only spoken in English, attempted to speak in Spanish by saying “yo no español” (‘I do not speak Spanish.’).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Responses</th>
<th>English Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Porque hacer el inglés o no esta español a la persona a la ayudan.”</td>
<td>“Si, it teaches us new things.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Si porque la gente se ayuda mucho.”</td>
<td>“If people doesn’t understand, you can ask a Spanish person.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Si porque así podemos hacer más rápido la tarea.”</td>
<td>“Si you have someone you can work with.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Me gusta hacer en grupo porque los otros me pueden ayudar.”</td>
<td>“Because it’s fun to me.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1. Responses to Post Survey*

**Peer Tutoring**

When I began my data collection, I assumed the Spanish-speaking students would be the tutors to the English speakers because presumably the former would know the vocabulary that was central to the theme. The first week I tried the tutoring, I realized I was wrong on this point. The Spanish-speakers did not know all the vocabulary words and some had a difficult time reading the words. Despite going over the words with them initially, some had a hard time retaining the vocabulary. Student G could not read all the words and he was unable to pronounce all the words correctly. Student I would only speak in English when giving directions even though he was asked to speak in Spanish. Student H did well except that his English-speaking peer knew some of the vocabulary
words he did not. Not all the English-speakers were tutored this time. I stopped the peer tutoring at this point to deal with these issues.

There were also behavior issues that arose. Student N insisted that he knew all the words already and became frustrated because he did not want to participate. Student A knew the words so tutoring him seemed pointless. Also, his tutor, Student B, spoke in English. Eventually, they began fooling around instead of continuing with the tutoring sessions. Students U and Q attempted to do the session properly but Student U forgot some of the animals and Student Q kept confusing a couple of the animals.

At this point, I had to stop and rethink my strategy. I concluded that I had to prepare the tutors better and that I had choose the tutors more selectively. To prepare the tutors, I did a mini-review of the words, practicing pronouncing the words properly. Then, I had them practice with each other before they tutored their peers. This time, I recognized that Students I and F were more comfortable with English than Spanish and actually needed to be tutored themselves. So Students I and F were taken off the tutor list and Student R added to the list. Student G was also taken off the tutor list because he was struggling with retaining the vocabulary words. The tutors who were chosen were Students A, B, C, D, E, H, R and U. These students were able to remember the vocabulary words, pronounce them correctly, and had the maturity to tutor their peers. Students A, H and E were native English-speakers while the rest were native Spanish-speakers.

After the first week, the tutors also got to choose who they would tutor. They were able to choose because I wanted to give them autonomy. I have observed that children are more invested in their work when they take ownership of it. Despite the
challenges, the children looked like they were enjoying the experience and were happy to be doing this with their peers. Many students were smiling, and some were laughing as they tried to name the animal on the card that their tutor was holding up. While tutoring, Student H, despite the fact that he has only been in this country six months, preferred to give directions in English. When he came to the United States from Mexico over the summer, he did not know any English. Since September, he had been learning English but was hesitant to speak it. Then, from one day to the next, it seemed, he began to speak in English. From then on, he preferred to speak in English and said he wanted to speak in English so the native English speakers would understand him. During this process, I noticed that the children were very positive towards one another. They wanted to see the others succeed. At one point, Student B said to Student L, “you are winning. I am proud of you. Give me a high five.”

During the fourth week, we had Peer Tutoring sessions on Monday for ten jungle animals and on Thursday for ten tundra animals. I decided to do this because we were running out of time and by this time, the children had gotten used to the routine.

Table 1 shows how many words the children knew before and after their peer tutoring sessions. Before the children had their Peer Tutoring sessions, I taught them the vocabulary as a whole group using direct instruction with picture and the word cards. I would say the words and the children would repeat them. The number of vocabulary words the children knew after my direct instruction and before the Peer Tutoring session are indicated on the table in the “Before” sections.
While the children tutored in Spanish, the students being tutored mostly spoke in English. Towards the third and fourth week, I started hearing a little more Spanish, or perhaps, more accurately, a sort of Spanglish. For example, a native English speaker said, “I got cuatro (four) wrong.” Also, according to the data, for the most part, the children retained more vocabulary words after their tutoring sessions.

### Table 2. Number of Words Tutees Knew Before and After Peer Tutoring Session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tutee</th>
<th>Forest Animals</th>
<th>Desert Animals</th>
<th>Ocean Animals</th>
<th>Jungle Animals</th>
<th>Arctic Animals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Before</td>
<td>After</td>
<td>Before</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following tables show the comparison of the words the students knew before and after the Peer Tutoring Sessions.

**Table 3. Forest Animal Vocabulary Acquired Pre and Post Tutoring**

![Graph showing forest animal vocabulary comparison](image1)

**Table 4. Desert Animal Vocabulary Acquired Pre and Post Tutoring**

![Graph showing desert animal vocabulary comparison](image2)
Table 5. Ocean Animal Vocabulary Acquired Pre and Post Tutoring

Table 6. Jungle Animal Vocabulary Acquired Pre and Post Tutoring
Tables two through seven indicated that all the students except for one continued to improve after the Peer Tutoring Sessions. Only Student I knew less words after a Peer Tutoring Session. For this particular student, other factors might have been in play: he may not have been paying attention or may have been careless when identifying the vocabulary words. These complications only were significant factors on two occasions with this student.

**Cooperative Groups**

During the Cooperative Group activity, the children were asked to try to speak in Spanish. Some tried more than others. Below is a transcript of one of the sessions when the jungle group was trying to figure out what to include in their diorama. The transcript evidences how some children tried to speak in Spanish or tried to remind the others to speak in Spanish. At the same time, it also shows that the vocabulary is limited. This was a discussion among the students from the Jungle habitat group:
B: No en inglés. ¿Qué animal? (‘Not in English. What animal?’)
D: ¿El delfín? (‘The dolphin?’)
S: Yeah.
E: ¿Sí? (‘Yes?’)
D: El clay. Necesitamos a poner pasto. (‘The clay. We need to put grass.’)
B: Necesitamos a poner cebras, monos, jirafas. (‘We need to put zebras, monkeys, giraffes.’)
P: My mom did this.

B. Necesitamos poner árboles y más cosas como cocodrilos y elefantes. (‘We need to put trees and more things like crocodiles and elephants.’)
P: Sí. Elefantes. Sí. (‘Yes, elephants, yes’)
S: Mucha coyotes. (‘A lots of coyotes’)
B: Hay coyotes yo creo. (‘There are coyotes I think’)
D: Y nombre y fecha. (‘And name and date’)
B: ¿Nombre y fecha? ¡No! Papeles y después cartones para ponerlo adentro (‘Name and Date? No! Paper and then cardboard to put inside.’)
P: Elefantes, león, tigre. (‘Elephants, lions, tigers.’)
D: Y una jirafa. (‘And a giraffe.’)
P: Like, put them on. Put them on. Are you going to buy the toys?
B: Español. (‘Spanish.’)
D: Nubes también. (‘Clouds too.’)
P: I don’t have any money.
E: I have three dollars.
S: I have dos dólares. (‘I have two dollars.’)
B: Yo tengo mucho dinero. (‘I have a lot of money.’)
P: Y el mono. (‘And the monkey.’)
D: Y perico. Y ramas. (‘And the parrot. And branches.’)

While some tried to speak in Spanish, others spoke a combination of English and Spanish. When a few spoke in English, there was always someone in the group that
would scream out to speak in Spanish. Unfortunately, I also had to give a lot of reminders to try to speak in Spanish. If I did not remind them, they would invariably speak mostly, if not all, in English.

The Cooperative Group project did produce interesting artifacts that helped the children improve their Spanish. Each child had to write about an animal; then, as a group, they wrote about the habitat and made the diorama. Pictures of the dioramas, their mini-reports and the group reports of their habitat can be found in Appendix D.

**Conclusion**

From all the data collected, Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups did manage to increase students’ vocabulary. The charts indicated that the majority of the students knew more vocabulary words after the Peer Tutoring sessions. They were also able to use this vocabulary to write about the animals and the habitats. In addition, they presented these reports to the class in Spanish.

At the same time, there was not as much Spanish spoken during the activities as I had hoped. The children reverted to English frequently and had to be reminded to speak in Spanish. Also, because the children’s vocabulary was limited, they did not have as many words to use to speak to one another. Even the native Spanish speakers chose to speak in English the majority of the time in both the Spanish and English part of their day.

To make these strategies more effective, I will need to rethink and rework some of the activities and methodologies. I will choose my tutors more wisely next time and will make sure they can identify and pronounce the words correctly. They must also be
students who show some leadership qualities since they will be in charge of one to two students. Also, the Peer Tutoring sessions could be more times a week for shorter amounts of time. So, instead of having two sessions for 20-30 minutes each, we can have three or four sessions for 10 minutes each time. This would give the students more time to practice and to internalize the vocabulary.

Furthermore, for the Cooperative Group activity, I may consider doing fewer activities but giving them more vocabulary so they can try to speak to each other in Spanish. The key is to continue to increase vocabulary from which to choose.

**Action Plan**

I set out to see if Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups would have a positive effect on second language acquisition. I was hoping those two strategies would help students become more proficient in Spanish. With Peer Tutoring, the students did, for the most part, learn more vocabulary. Some vocabulary was easier to learn than other vocabulary. I noticed that the students were able to retain the vocabulary of the animals with which they were more familiar versus the animals with which they rarely came in contact.

During the Cooperative Group activities, I hoped the children would use their newly acquired vocabulary and speak more Spanish as they began to make their dioramas and reports. They did use more Spanish, but English encroached regardless. Most of the children, including the native Spanish speakers, preferred to speak in English.

For this reason, I saw the need to continue to increase their Spanish vocabulary so that they have more words to use. I also need to give them more meaningful opportunities
to practice using this vocabulary. With Peer Tutoring, most of the students retained more vocabulary, so we can continue to use this strategy to learn more vocabulary. We can also use this strategy across subject areas. With Cooperative Groups, the children enjoyed working together to create the dioramas and helped each other write and read their reports. Working in Cooperative Groups did not, however, result in them speaking more Spanish during the times they worked together.

Based on what I observed and the outcomes of the strategies, I will continue to use Peer Tutoring to increase vocabulary and across other subjects, such as Math. The majority of the children enjoyed working with their peers and the pairing or small groups ensured that everyone had ample time to practice the vocabulary. It also helped the tutors make sure they knew the vocabulary and how to pronounce each word properly.

In my practice, I will use the Cooperative Groups more sparingly. I noticed that a few children had a difficult time working in a group so there was much discord and dissonance during some of the sessions. In order to have more effective Cooperative Groups, I would need to give some more lessons on how to work together and allow each member of the group the time and space necessary to make a contribution. Also, working in groups means it takes longer to accomplish a task because there is a lot of discussion involved and the members of the groups have to come to agreements before continuing with the project at hand. If they were discussing these issues or directions in Spanish, I would welcome the extra amount of time. But because most of the discussions were in English, I would have to come up with alternative activities to ensure they did practice their Spanish more.
Based on my research and findings, here are suggestions for implementation. First, choose tutors wisely and do not assume that all native Spanish-speakers would make ideal tutors. Second, take the time to prepare the tutors adequately so that they teach the vocabulary properly. Third, give ample time for the undertaking: one day should be reserved for preparing the tutors and at least two or three days for all the tutors to interact with the rest of the students. The reason it took me so long is that I only had three sets of the vocabulary cards that could be used at any one time. So, a teacher could do a Peer Tutoring cycle over a few days or he/she can have sufficient sets of cards so that all the tutors could teach on the same day. This may or may not be possible depending on the resources available for making copies of the vocabulary card pictures, especially if they are in color. Fourth, make sure to teach the students how to be respectful tutors and respectful tutees. Finally, also make sure that the tutors and tutees are paired wisely to prevent too much fooling around and lack of focus. If Peer Tutoring is done with proper preparation, then the children will increase their vocabulary exponentially.

For Cooperative Groups, it is advisable to take into account how the groups are made. First, there should be heterogeneous groupings of students to ensure there are some native Spanish speakers in each group, that both genders represented in each group, and that a variety of gifts and talents are present in each group. Students of varying academic levels should also be interspersed in each group to give all students a chance to participate and to share their expertise. Second, students should be given lessons on being respectful and on sharing responsibility within each group. Finally, students should be reminded to speak in the target language so that they can practice it. If all these things are
taken into account, then Cooperative Groups can be a good way to improve second language acquisition.

For the future, I would like to investigate how to improve Peer Tutoring and Cooperative Groups so that they can be avenues for the children to practice the target language more. To make these strategies more effective for second language acquisition, I would change a few things. One option would be to see whether children retain more vocabulary if the tutors are better trained or if the students get more sessions than just one. Another option would be to ensure that students have multiple sessions being tutored with each group of animal vocabulary before seeing if they have retained the vocabulary or not. I also need to find out how to better choose the potential tutors. In addition, I want to find out how I can encourage the students, especially the native Spanish-speakers, to speak more Spanish during the Cooperative Groups.

Furthermore, I would like to find other strategies that help in second language acquisition. There were other strategies suggested in the literature that could help in increasing language proficiency; specifically I would like to employ Think-Pair-Share which requires students to think about a passage or book, talk about it with a partner, and share it with the class or a group of students.
References


Appendix A

Student___________  Date______________

1. ¿Te gusta trabajar con un grupo? ¿Por qué sí o no? (Do you like to work in groups? Why or why not?)

2. ¿Cómo te ayudará aprender español trabajar en un grupo? (How will working in a group help you to learn Spanish?)
The camel lives in the desert. It is big. It is brown. The camel walks. The camel has hair. The camel eats leaves.

The shark lives in the ocean. The shark is big. The shark has skin. The shark has fins. The shark is pretty. The shark is scary. The shark swims. The shark has big teeth.
The polar bear lives in the Arctic. The polar bear is white. The polar bear is big. The polar bear has four legs. The polar bear eats fish.

The elephant eats many plants. The elephant walks and goes rrrrrr. The elephant has a trunk. The elephant lives in the jungle. The elephant drinks water. The elephant has a baby elephant.
Appendix D

(Translation: In summer, it is hot. In winter it is cold. In the spring and fall, the weather is so so. The forest has a lot of green. In the forest, there are trees, flowers, grass, and bushes. The rabbit, wolf, bear, beaver, raccoon, skunk, deer, squirrel, fox, and owl live in the forest.)

(Translation: The Arctic is very white. In the Arctic there are pines and few plants. In the Arctic it is cold. There is snow and a lot of cold. The white fox, the penguin, the polar bear, the hare, the orca, the walrus, the wapiti, the seal, the beluga, and the narwhal live in the Arctic.)
In the desert, it is hot in the day. At night, it is cold. In the desert there are bushes. In the desert there are few plants. There are cactus. There is sand. In the desert there are few trees. In the desert there are camels, snakes, coyotes, scorpions, tarantulas, roadrunners, wild boars, lizards, vultures, and armadillos.

There is a lot of water in the jungle. It rains a lot. It is hot. There are many colors in the jungle. There is some blue in the jungle. There is a lot of green in the jungle. There is a lot of gray in the jungle. There is yellow in the jungle. There is a lot of orange. There are many trees and plants in the jungle. There are giraffes and parrots and big elephants and tigers and zebras and gorillas.
El Océano


(Translation: The weather in the ocean is cold and hot. The climate depends on the weather and the season. Some animals live in the desert. The octopus, fish, medusa, shark, dolphin are animals from the ocean. The sea turtle eats plants. The plants are green. In the ocean there are many plants even small blue ones. In the ocean there is algae and corals. There are a lot of algae in the ocean. Maybe there are a lot of corals in the ocean. The water is salty. In the ocean, the water is blue.)