

Encouraging Teachers to Promote Peer-Mediated Interaction in the Language Classroom

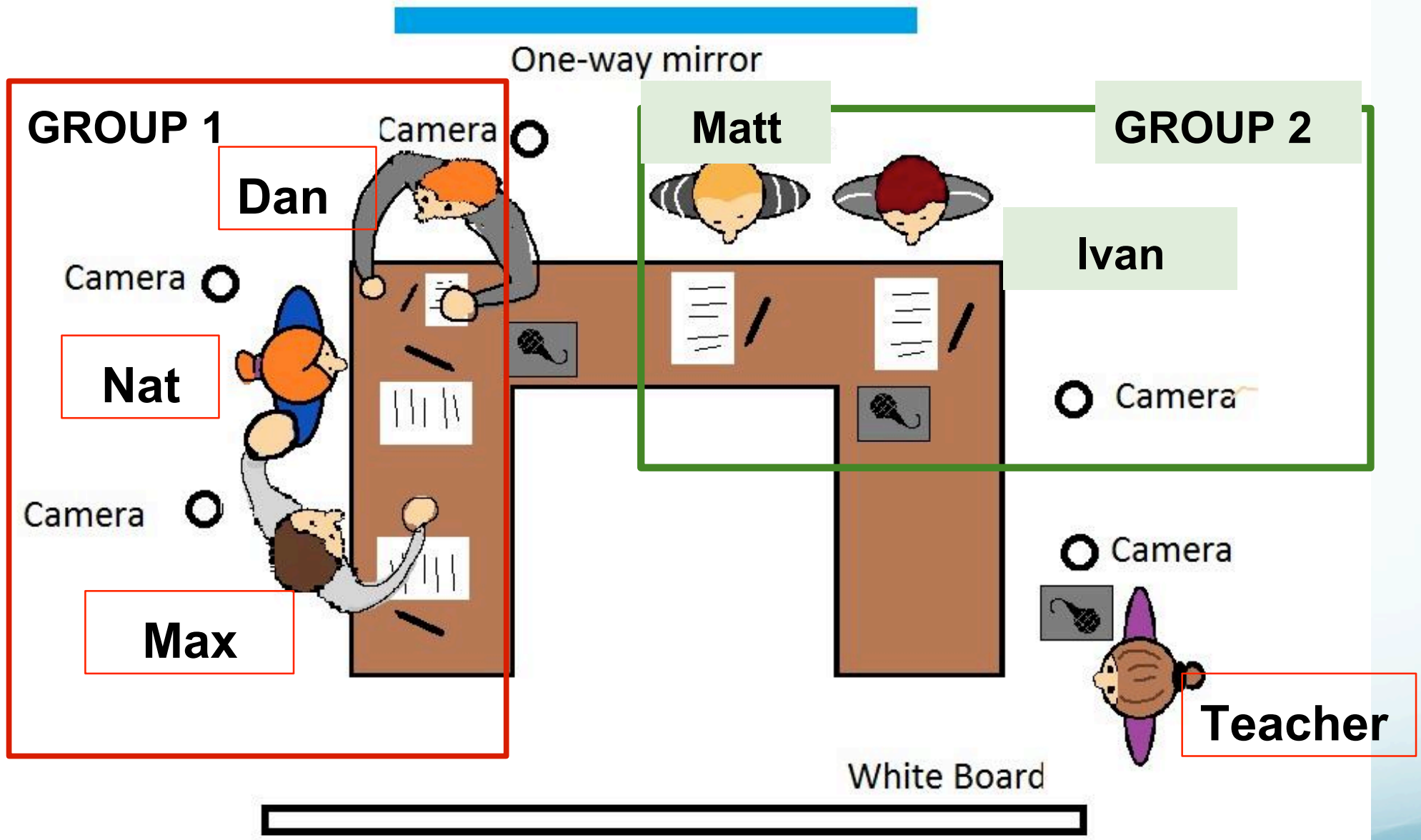
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Group Dynamics

- Group dynamics (Dornyei & Malderez, 1997; Slavin, 2002); characteristics of good groups and group cohesiveness (Dornyei & Murphey, 2003; Radford, 2006); individual characteristics that affect the group as a whole, such as agency, emotion, and motivation (Al-Hoorie, 2015; Thibault, 2004; Waninge, 2014)
- Classroom changes from task to task, hour to hour, and group to group
- Group work creates a variety developmental opportunities
- Merits of peer mediation in the context of small group learning activity
- Current project: same task, same class, same directions, two different groups

Introduction of the setting

- Russian LabSchool project:
 - Record, catalog, and analyze spoken Russian language produced by advanced learners of Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) and Russian as Heritage Language (RHL) in the classroom environment.
- Participants:
 - One teacher and seven students (four RHL and three RFL) in advanced content-based courses for the Russian Flagship Program at a large research university in the US
- Recording classroom:
 - Six cameras, two ambient microphones, three radio microphones.



Theory and Methodology

Sociocultural perspective: “The central and distinguishing concept of sociocultural theory is that higher forms of human mental activity are *mediated*.... As with physical tools, humans use symbolic artifacts to establish an indirect, or mediated, relationship between ourselves and the world” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 80).

Microgenesis (Vygotsky, 1978; Leontiev, 1981)

These type of peer-peer data lend themselves well to microanalysis of interaction in the classroom. *Why do we need microanalysis?*

Language development occurs during the moment-by-moment unfolding of a language learning activity. A microgenetic analysis of collective activity provides a look at the language and concept development in individual learners (Lantolf, 1997; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006).

Key constructs guiding the microanalysis

Learning and interaction: “Rather than seeing learning as “having,” we must see learning as “doing”.... a process, an activity, something we take part in, perform (Walsh, 2011, p. 49). It is a dynamic and constantly shifting process, co-constructed.

Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) (Walsh, 2011): “Teachers’ and learners’ ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning” (p. 158). It is interactional competence that helps one survive in “real world” situations: people must show they understand, can clarify meanings, and repair breakdowns.

Research Questions

1. In what ways do language learners mediate each other to promote cognitive development, specifically language development?
2. Although the teacher is not supposed to be “present” in the peer interaction, in what ways might she still function as a “mediator”, and are these mediational strategies conducive to language and cognitive development?

Poaching (Group 1)



Poaching (Group 1)

- **Elicitation** (line 1): explicit request for information or assistance
- **Interthinking** (Mercer, 2000) (lines 2-21): co-constructing definition of poaching
- **Appropriation of the word:**
 - Echoes “poaching” (line 3)
 - Possible uptake, “Oh!” (line 8)
 - Writes down word (line 13)
 - Anaphora (line 21): uses “it” to refer back to ‘poaching’
 - Silence (line 20): **pausing** to write/think/wait for others

Depressing (Group 2)



Depressing (Group 2)

- **Pauses** indicate Matt's initial struggle (**line 5**: 15 seconds; **line 8**: 8 seconds)
- Ivan takes over the turn after periods of silence indicating Matt's inability to continue (line 11)
- Ivan **elicits** Matt for lexical term (line 14)
- Conversation continues without solving lexical inquiry

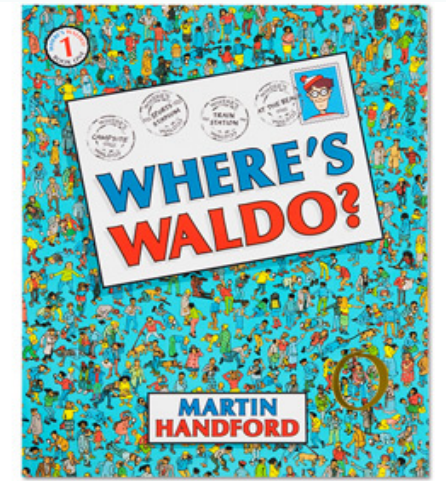
Greenhouse (Group 2)



Greenhouse

- **Elicitation** to instructor (line 3) - does not try to ask Matt first
- Scolding by instructor (line 4) - Ivan admits to have done homework in English and thus does not know the term
- Instructor **mediation** - provides term multiple times (line 8, twice; line 10; line 18, twice)

So, “Where’s Waldo?”



- Dialectical relationship between T and S
- “Leading from behind” the scenes (Gibbons, 1998; Samuda, 2001)
- Group 1: “Distant” mediator; Group 2: Explicit mediator

Micro-level ‘Distant Mediation’

- Handout/task-type (Pica, Kanagy, & Falodun, 1993)
 - Carefully chosen tasks; clear guidelines
 - Provides “tools” (e.g., handout & questions)
- Task Design
 - Interactional activity & Communication goal (Pica et al., 1993)
 - Role between task and T = complimentary (Samuda, 2001)

Macro-level Mediation

- Classroom Socialization
 - Appropriation of roles & shifts in epistemic stance (see Boyd & Maloof, 2000)
 - “Learning how to teach occurs in activity settings that are situated in cultural places” (Maynard, 2004, p. 517)
 - Transfer cognitive model of teaching

Conclusions

1. How learners mediate each other to promote language development and cognitive development:

- Co-construction of meaning
- Cumulative talk and exploratory talk
- Clarification questions
- Elicitations

2. How does the teacher function as a “distant” mediator and an explicit mediator?

- Handout and task types (TBLT)
- Student roles and epistemic stance the students take in carrying out an “independent” task
- Explicit intervention in group 2

Implications

For L2 teachers:

1. Teachers can design group work around handouts that are conducive to language and cognitive development (as evidenced by Group 1)
2. Teachers can be more attentive to groups that are struggling and be more pragmatic with the kinds of classroom interactional competence (CIC) they decide to employ.
3. Group formations should be taken into consideration.

For teacher educators:

1. TEs can provide teachers-in-training opportunities to notice 1) how to design effective questions for group work activities, 2) how to provide students the pragmatic abilities to work through a task on their own, and 3) how to mediate a group that is faltering in the task.
2. TEs can help teachers reflect upon their own teaching practices.

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Thank you!

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