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# The Impact of Peer Tutoring on the Improvement of Linguistic Competence, Self-Concept as a Writer and Pedagogical Satisfaction

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**ABSTRACT** After examining several conceptual elements of peer-assisted learning and peer tutoring, this article presents a study analysing the effects of peer tutoring – with fixed and reciprocal roles – in the improvement of curricular competence of Catalan language skills, self-concept as a writer and satisfaction with pedagogical assistance. The results, using curricular competence improvement as a control, show an increase in self-concept as a writer for all students who were given the opportunity to act as tutors; either in fixed or in reciprocal role tutoring. Only fixed tutees, but not reciprocal tutees, feel more satisfied with their peer tutors than with the teacher's help.

**KEY WORDS:** cooperative learning, peer learning, peer tutoring, self-concept, self-esteem.

## Introduction

### *Peer-assisted learning*

Peer learning has aroused a great deal of interest in the field of education for a variety of reasons: it is a powerful instructional strategy for inclusive education (Ainscow, 1991); it fosters skills and attitudes that are fundamental in helping to build a democratic society (Slavin, 1995); it improves empathy and helps provide perspective (Duran and Monereo, 2005) and it constitutes one of the pillars of networked learning (Heller et al., 2004). In short, it is also an excellent resource for promoting the mastering of the interpersonal competencies that are so crucial in the society of knowledge.

What is more, peer interaction is a true learning engine. If contributions from Piaget's theory depicted interaction as a means for

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generating the cognitive conflict that fosters development; the socio-cultural theory goes even further, emphasizing that the key role of interaction which, with the help of a mediator, is transformed into learning. Socio-cultural research has helped to modify the belief that all interactions lead to learning and has made us aware of the complex network of factors that promote or hinder development (Hogan and Tudge, 1999).

Apart from the contributions of these two theories, there have been attempts to articulate integrative models for peer learning (Grannot, 1993; Murray, 2001; Slavin, 1996), which, still, have not managed to weld into unitary conceptual frameworks. However, we have identified the groups of processes that can explain the effectiveness of peer learning (Topping, 2005) and the main elements that can help us to reference the theoretical model, such as the contributions from social constructivism, which see the negotiation of meaning through dialogued interaction as the optimal mechanism for interiorizing shared knowledge, we understand that students learn – or jointly construct knowledge – through a process of scaffolding assistance provided by their peers.

Nonetheless this co-construction of knowledge does not take place spontaneously, as we have argued from the view of dualist approaches (Monereo, 1995). In our opinion, the teacher must predetermine part of what must be learned and how this must be done when taking curricular and organizational decisions, and especially when defining a structure to guide interaction. Peer learning, based on the interaction generated within the framework supplied by the teacher, places speaking between classmates as one of the most decisive factors in this process of mutual help and transfer of control (Teasley, 1995) and concludes with the internalization of useful knowledge for future situations.

Although peer-assisted learning is referred to in different terms, we prefer the distinction used by Damon and Phelps (1989) which states three dimensions for peer interactions, describing tutoring, cooperation and collaboration according to their ascending degree of symmetry and mutuality. The additional contributions by McCarthey and McMahan (1992) help us to gather cooperation as the midpoint on this continuum. For this reason, we have adopted the expression cooperation or cooperative learning as an umbrella term for the remaining peer learning situations, including collaboration and tutoring.

*Fixed and reciprocal peer tutoring.* We shall define peer tutoring as a method of cooperative learning based on the creation of pairs of students with an asymmetrical relationship and a single common goal, which is known and shared and must be achieved through a relationship framework planned by the teacher (Monereo and Duran, 2002).

Although peer tutoring encompasses a varied range of classroom possibilities, we shall focus on the two aspects that have aroused the greatest interest: the ages within the pair and the consistency of the roles.

The age difference within the pair enables us to distinguish between same-age tutoring and cross-age tutoring. Without a doubt, the latter is more common in school practice due to the fact that it more closely fits within the traditional conception associating a tutor with a teacher. However, some studies indicate that more than age, what is important is the difference in skills between the tutor and the tutee (Verba and Winnykamen, 1992). Daiute and Dalton (1993) go further than this; they even doubt whether one can speak about expert students, and they stress that having a classmate with whom you can talk with and exchange points of view is the mechanism that promotes development.

King et al. (1998) maintain that scaffolded learning can take place among students of similar ages and skills. They have to be proficient in the use of patterns of structured interaction provided by the teacher. Students, when verbalizing their cognitive processes and decisions and redefining them with the help of the peer, will be able to better build their cognitive representations. These will become more conscious, more speakable and thereby modifiable, as Karmiloff-Smith (1992) has stated.

Obviously, cross-age practices are working only on a fixed role basis. Each member of the pair always plays the same role, either being a tutor or a tutee. However, the increasing use of same-age or similar skills tutoring allows students to exchange periodically their role. These practices are known as reciprocal peer tutoring (Fantuzzo et al., 1992).

Despite the fact that the factors explaining its effectiveness have not been thoroughly examined, reciprocal tutoring has aroused a great deal of interest due to its hypothetical superiority over fixed tutoring (Duran and Monereo, 2005). First, the advantages of fixed tutoring can extend to both pair members, thus alleviating its disadvantages (including authoritarianism, dependency on the tutor and the model of transmission of knowledge). Moreover, it exploits the advantages of collaboration (symmetry, mutuality and negotiation of knowledge), while minimizing the disadvantages (avoidance of the role of mediator or the risk of the competent student regressing).

*Effects of tutoring on affective and relational processes.* Within the realm of educational psychology, concerted efforts have been made to overcome the historical duality between cognitive and affective dimensions. What is more, emotional factors are beginning to be analysed in conjunction with cognitive factors, and a type of 'cool' cognition, tied to the objectives of the task, is beginning to be analysed, along with a

'warm' cognition related to reinforcing the motivational and emotional aspects of achieving these objectives (De Sixte and Sánchez Miguel, 2002). Thus, cognition and emotion are viewed not as isolated, static and personal compartments but rather as integrated and highly contextualized processes that are constructed through interaction with others.

In the realm of peer learning, Echeita (1995) suggests a structure to guide research. This map, as he calls it, is centred on *psychosocial relationships* among the peers, which will be different according to the structure of the learning task (cooperative, competitive or individual) and will set cognitive, affective and motivational processes into motion.

Focusing on the cooperative structure, which is the one that interests us from the standpoint of peer tutoring, and in terms of affective-relational processes, in this study we shall centre our attention on how this way of interacting influences the representation students build of themselves that includes factors such as self-esteem, self-concept and personal satisfaction.

According to the two-dimensional model of self-esteem (Mruk, 1999), self-esteem is the integrated sum of self-worth and self-competence or individual's judgement of competence. In association with the last component, we define self-concept as the representation the students construct of themselves as a learner, with skills and shortcomings for dealing with learning in the school setting. Some studies (Marsh, 1990) have suggested that new basic academic self-concepts (such as in the area of sciences, language and so forth) should be included, and they suggest that there may be specific sub-components within each discipline (such as biology, physics and economics within the academic sub-concept of mathematics). Given this, it seems clear that within a school setting, where students are constantly being required to construct texts, self-concept as a writer could also be a specific sub-component within academic linguistic self-concept.

Craven et al. (1991) suggest that improving confidence in one's own potential must shift from the traditional Direct Enhancement Approaches, based on feedback on action through external reinforcement, to Indirect Enhancement Approaches, which enable self-reinforcement systems that stimulate intrinsic motivation to be generated.

Perhaps cooperative learning might function as an Indirect Enhancement Approach for self-esteem. Indeed, peer models (Shunk, 1992) have been shown to be more effective than teacher models, probably because peers are regarded as more sincere when judging outcomes, while the teacher's assessments are viewed as exaggerated in an attempt to prevent the student from giving up or feeling like a failure.

The majority of studies on cooperative learning surveyed by Slavin

(1996) detect changes in some of the dimensions of self-esteem. However, Johnson and Johnson (1990) make a strong case in acknowledging that the cooperative learning experiences studied are too brief to produce changes in this personality dimension. For this reason, actions aiming to produce changes in self-esteem must take place over a longer period of time, as Kaufman and Burden (2004) show in a specific situation.

Thus, despite the weak empirical evidence, the influence of peer tutoring on self-esteem – especially creating self-competence – seems clear from the conceptual standpoint, regardless of whether it acts through an indirect approach that generates self-reinforcing systems (especially for the student tutor) or as a deliberate strategy that provides models, feedback and differential reinforcement (especially for the tutee). In all cases, as Miller and Moran (2006) suggest, paired tutoring could be a specific technique to increase a sense of self-competence. Research is thus needed to provide data to support this hypothesis.

Finally, in terms of the feeling of satisfaction, Echeita (1995) assigns enormous importance to the experience of personal usefulness, to the self-perception of skill and confidence and to the confidence that is generated by successfully completing a joint project between peers, which logically positively affects both self-esteem and self-concept.

Wiegmann et al. (1992) have also stressed how shared satisfaction resulting from attaining positive results in peer tutoring situations diminishes anxiety, depression and stress. One factor that might explain the achievement of satisfactory results is that peer's aid is shown to be contingent, personalized and ongoing, in contrast to conventional classroom situations, where personal educational needs are not adequately met.

Demonstrating that a tutored student feels satisfied with the help received from his or her peer is an especially interesting factor to study since it might help to change teachers' traditional conceptions, as teachers tend to believe that the only quality help available in a classroom is what they can give. It might also help to explain the improvement in the student tutor's self-concept (the satisfaction of the tutee can act as feedback and reinforcement of the tutor's success), and to show students the potentiality of peer learning (since their own peers' satisfaction is a key indicator of successful learning).

#### *A study on affective and relational processes and peer tutoring*

The study we present here forms part of a broader research agenda that is attempting to determine the influence of peer tutoring on certain cognitive and relational factors through the combination of a quasi-experimental study and a micro genetic study (Duran and Monereo, 2005; Duran and Vidal, 2004). We shall concentrate on the

former, although we shall use some data from the latter to help interpret the results, as seen below.

### **An optional credit based on peer tutoring**

The study compiles data from a real school setting, in an optional credit lasting 35 hours per term based on peer tutoring, for teaching and learning Catalan at the obligatory secondary school stage. For the student tutors, the credit involves expansion since they must recall, prepare, examine and apply the contents of the field to new contexts in order to be able to teach it. For the student tutees, on the other hand, this is a reinforcement credit since they receive personalized support through a new methodological choice, which enables them to consolidate basic contents.

This credit requires a highly structured framework of tutor–tutee relations, which in turn implies initial training of the students in two sessions. Once the pairs are created, the tutoring sessions begin. The activities in each hour-long session are divided into three sections, which are inflexible during the first few sessions; once the tasks become part of the students' routine the pairs have the possibility to gradually distribute the time devoted to each section.

During the first 15 minutes the activity involves reading, based on a series of activity sheets presented by the teacher. After eliciting previous ideas and forming hypotheses about the content, the pairs read the text using the PPP (Pause, Prompt and Praise) method set forth by Wheldall and Colmar (1990). This means the tutor will let the tutee know when he or she has made a mistake, waiting a few seconds to see if the tutee can correct it, providing clues if necessary and finally providing the correct version. The technique always ends with reinforcement, which tends to be an encouraging sentence or gesture.

In the next 15-minute segment, the pairs focus on text comprehension by responding to activities of differing levels of difficulty. During the last half hour, the students write in pairs. In order to facilitate this process, students are supplied with a guideline adapted from the cooperative method of writing called Paired Writing (Topping, 1995), which guides the steps – which do not necessarily have to be sequential – in the process of writing and guides the decision-making and the degree of support the tutor gives in each step. Finally, the last 15 minutes of the last session each week is reserved for pair self-assessment, in which the students assess the academic progress of both partners.

### *Hypothesis of the study*

As will be explained below, the sample of 24 students was divided into two types of tutoring: fixed tutoring (FT) and reciprocal tutoring (RT), with 12 pairs performing each type. Once the initial assessments were completed and the optional credit was covered through peer tutoring, the first two hypotheses had to be checked on a test and retest basis while the third one could only be tested at the end of the credit.

- Hypothesis 1. All students, regardless of the type of tutoring (fixed or reciprocal), will gain improved linguistic competence. Thus, the differences between the scores on the initial and final assessment tests of the Catalan language should be statistically significant.
- Hypothesis 2. The student tutors (thus, the tutors in the FT sub-group and all students in the RT sub-group) will have enhanced self-concepts as writers. The students who do not have the chance to act as tutors, however, will not (tutees in the FT sub-group). Thus, statistically significant differences are expected on the initial and final writer self-concept questionnaire.
- Hypothesis 3. The tutored students (thus, the tutees in the FT sub-group and all the students in the RT sub-group), at the end of the course, will express satisfaction with the pedagogical help received by their respective peers. Statistically significant differences are expected to be found in the degree of satisfaction with help from the teaching staff as a whole compared to degree of satisfaction with the help from the peer tutor.

### **Methods**

The study employs an ecological approach with real classroom practice applied to a specific school credit commonly taught in schools at these ages. The participants were 24 students enrolled at a public secondary school where the optional credit that has served as the basis of this study is usually offered. For these students, then, peer tutoring is not a strange educational practice nor one that could generate attitudes typical of teaching innovations, rather it is accepted as yet another option within the elective part of the curriculum.

The group of students, with a mean age of 14, reproduces the diversity in the grade they come from, with everything from highly gifted students to students with severe difficulties. Once the initial tests were conducted, two equivalent groups – in terms of linguistic competence – were made. Then, each group was randomly assigned a type of tutoring.

In Fixed Tutoring (FT), the pairs formed maintained relative distance of ability in Catalan. In other words, the student ranking was



divided into two lists and students were then paired in strict order (the first student in the first list with the first student in the second list, and so on successively). The roles remained fixed throughout the course. In Reciprocal Tutoring (RT), however, students were paired according to the result obtained (first with second, third with fourth, etc.), in such a way that the distance between level of ability in each pair was minimum. They switched roles each week.

Once the roles were set and the initial training had been conducted, the tutoring sessions got underway and information from the protocols was gathered in order to analyse the interactions. All the pairs were recorded in four sessions during the course, in the last half of class when the students were doing the pair writing. The protocol is made up of a transcription of the recording, the text produced by the students, the teacher's field notes and an individual post-recording report by the students.

Thus, the study we are presenting uses a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design in two groups, supplemented by data from a micro genetic study that was being undertaken parallel to this study for other purposes. We have decided to avoid using a control group, not only due to the problems using a comparison group in an ecological approach involves, but due to the fact that the effectiveness of cooperative learning has been well proven in what is known as the first generation of research, who compared these practices using control groups.

The data-gathering instruments for the former were:

- Knowledge-test of Catalan. To avoid familiarity with the test, Versions A and B of the upper cycle were used in test/retest format, which corresponded to the schools' internal assessments and were developed by the Catalan government's Department of Education.
- Writer self-concept questionnaire. Based on the proposed questionnaire of self-image as a writer set forth by Cassany (1993), we have developed a questionnaire, which is contained in Appendix 1, consisting of ten questions, with five possible ranked answers, that enabled us to generate a score out of ten that supplies the image students have of themselves as writers.
- Satisfaction questionnaires. In one of these, the overall degree of satisfaction with help from the teaching staff is assessed through a questionnaire adapted from King et al. (1998). It asks about the students' perceptions of the usefulness of the help and the skills of the teachers (listening, giving time to think, feedback, support, explaining and help with the activity). In the other one, every tutee evaluates the degree of satisfaction with the help offered by his/her tutor. Some question examples are contained in Appendix 2.

## Results

Before presenting the results, the issue of whether there were significant differences between the different experimental conditions should be examined. Regarding the subjects assigned to Fixed Tutoring (FT) and Reciprocal Tutoring (RT) as two independent samples, the Levene Test for Equality of Variances was not statistically significant, thus confirming that we started with two balanced groups.

### *Linguistic competence*

In Table 1 we present the averages, the standard deviations and the bilateral meaning of the entire group of students for the different components of the linguistic competence test. Each one, apart from Reading Comprehension, together with the total of the test is statistically significant as assayed by the related samples *t*-test.

**Table 1** Results of the test and retest on knowledge of Catalan

	<i>Test</i>	<i>Retest</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Spoken language	13.58 (5.76)	19.83 (4.00)	0.000
Reading comprehension	13.83 (5.40)	14.33 (4.56)	0.632 (n.s.)
Lexicon	6.58 (2.12)	8.42 (1.50)	0.000
Grammar	2.96 (1.60)	5.96 (1.83)	0.000
Writing expression	6.25 (4.48)	14.38 (4.73)	0.000
Oral comprehension	9.92 (3.40)	11.67 (4.58)	0.005
Total	53.13 (19.61)	74.58 (17.52)	0.000

The results of the test on Catalan do not show significant differences as far as the type of tutoring – fixed or reciprocal – is concerned. Since this hypothesis is merely for control purposes, these results suffice to confirm the hypothesis – through the statistically significant difference of the scales taken as a whole – and to establish that all the students, regardless of the type of tutoring, improved their knowledge of the Catalan language. Obviously, because there is not a control group there is no guarantee that this improvement is only due to the peer tutoring course. But at least we can assure that peer tutoring does not interfere in the learning process, because all the students gained linguistic knowledge. Without that improvement, none of the results analysed further below would make any sense in the school context.

### *Self-concept as a writer*

In terms of self-concept as a writer, the hypotheses formulated expected to find statistically significant differences between the test and retest scores on a questionnaire of self-concept as a writer for all students,

except for those who had not been given the opportunity to act as tutors (tutees in FT), for whom no significant changes were expected.

Table 2 indicates statistically significant overall improvement in self-concept. Table 3 examines the effect of type of tutoring.

**Table 2** *Results of test–retest for self-concept as a writer*

	<i>Test</i>	<i>Retest</i>	<i>Significance</i>
Self-concept as a writer	6.492 (0.962)	7.342 (1.112)	0.000

**Table 3** *Results of test–retest in self-concept as a writer, by type of tutoring*

	<i>Fixed tutors</i>	<i>Fixed tutees</i>	<i>Total FT</i>	<i>Total RT</i>
Self-concept as a writer 1	7.000 (0.704)	6.633 (0.924)	6.817 (0.807)	6.167 (1.026)
Self-concept as a writer 2	7.633 (0.528)	7.700 (1.212)	7.667 (0.892)	7.017 (1.249)
Significance	0.026	0.135 (n.s.)	0.019	0.006

Despite the fact that taken as a whole the students involved in fixed tutoring displayed statistically significant increases, if we differentiate the tutors from the tutees, we can see that the significant difference (95 percent Confidence Intervals) between the scores obtained on the retest of the questionnaire on self-concept as a writer takes place exclusively amongst the tutors and not the tutees, who do not display a significant difference. This result is in line with what had been expected and seems to confirm that those students that do not have the opportunity to act as tutors in the process of producing a text do not improve their self-concept as a writer.

The hypothesis was confirmed by the results compiled in the same table for all the students involved in reciprocal tutoring, in which all the students act as tutors throughout the course and statistically significant differences were obtained.

All the data taken as a whole lead us to believe that those students that do not act as tutors in the process of producing a text attribute the responsibility for the quality of the product to the peer who led the process, to whom he or she assigns the role of expert, which enables the tutor's self-concept as a writer to improve, while the tutee's does not.

The analysis of one specific case, that of a tutee participating in fixed tutoring who had an initial score on self-concept as a writer of 8.2

(higher than the average), but who finished with a score of 7.6 (within the mean, but with a clear individual decrease) can serve to illustrate certain processes that make it difficult for the self-concept of tutored students to increase within the sub-component of writing. In the following excerpt (Fixed Tutoring, pair 1, session 4, 46–56), we can see how the tutor is the one to decide on the topic of the text (the students have to write a critique of a cultural product they are familiar with), ultimately choosing a CD that the tutee had never even listened to.

Tutor: Should we just do a CD?

Tutee: Have you read any of the Harry Potter books?

Tutor: No.

Tutee: Oh ...

Tutor: Have you read "The Never Ending Story"?

Tutee: (Makes a negative sound).

Tutor: Come on, let's just do a CD. By Dover.

Tutee: Okay, okay.

Tutor: Should we do the new one?

Tutee: All right.

Tutor: Even if you haven't heard it. / I mean, it's ... really good, no, it's better than the first one ...

If the tutor chooses the topic, even if this entails contravening the instructions for the task provided on the activity file, the tutee's participation in the draft cannot be anything more than slight, and writing the text virtually becomes taking down dictation of the tutor's contributions (Fixed Tutoring, pair 1, session 4, 149–156):

Tutor: Because it says, this latest CD I was Dead in the City of Angels it's pretty similar, isn't it? Very similar ... very similar to the one before ... to the one before (very slowly). Hmm ... We could add something from here (referring to the sample critique in the activity file). Here, too, it talks about the songs and lyrics ... and okay, well we don't know the lyrics, because we don't, we don't know English and I don't have a translation of them. We have to put (very slowly): their songs are / much more melodic // their songs are much more melodic / much more melodic. You have to say something too, okay? Let's ... are you going to say anything ...

Tutee: I don't know what to say.

Tutor: I know, but try ...

Tutee: Okay, the other CD was very / very hot ...

Tutor: (Laughing) very ...

Tutee: Burning.

Tutor: Yes, it was very ... yes, you could put that // (very slowly): Even though harmony still doesn't appear on any of their CDs, there's no harmony, right? It was very burning. Full stop. Despite that, the harmony (very slowly), there's no harmony in any of their songs // in any of their, in any of their songs. Full stop. Hmm ... Now we have to put, we've pretty much explained

what it was. Yeah, we've done the introduction, now we have explained the, I mean the content of ...

Tutee: Of the CD.

In these conditions, where the drafting of the text is so clearly led by the tutor, it is no surprise that there are references to the text as the property of the student tutor, as shown in the following excerpt (Fixed Tutoring, pair 1, session 4, 60–63):

Tutor: How many stars does it have? No, but first we have to put a title / Like it says here: Couldn't be better. We should put a different one ... Ah, no, you shouldn't put all the stars ...

Tutee: They don't all go?

Tutor: No. It doesn't matter, cross them out for me, it's just the draft ...

Tutee: Okay.

This type of process, which can surely be minimized with better training of the tutors and guidelines from the teacher for the more insistent tutors, may be responsible for the improvement of the self-concept as a writer of students who, acting as the tutor, are perceived as the ones primarily in charge of the quality of the text produced.

#### *Satisfaction with pedagogical help*

In terms of satisfaction with pedagogical help, the hypothesis formulated expects tutored students (tutees in FT and all the students in RT) to express satisfaction with the help received from their peer tutors. Statistically significant differences were expected to be found between the degree of satisfaction referred to the help by teachers as a whole, and the degree of satisfaction referred to the help from the peer tutor at the end of the course.

It is worth noting that the scores referring to overall satisfaction with the help received from the teaching staff as a whole are quite high (average of 7.8). Despite the fact that the questionnaire includes questions about the perception of the usefulness of the help and the mediator's skills (including listening, offering time to think, giving feedback, providing support, making clear explanations and helping with activities), which could suggest quite specific factors, in the qualitative section of the satisfaction questionnaire, the students supply general comments. Let us examine two examples:

In general, I feel I get enough attention at school, I receive the attention I need and I'm pretty happy. (Reciprocal tutoring, pair 1)

I'm very happy with the attention I receive and I think that all the teachers I've had throughout my secondary education have treated me very well and have paid enough attention to me. (Fixed tutoring, pair 2).

The critical factors come from the 'radial' organization of the classroom, where a single teacher must simultaneously attend to a large group of students and, as a result, divide and delay individual attention:

I think I am well attended, but I receive little attention. Keeping track of 24 students is pretty complicated. (Reciprocal tutoring, pair 3)

In Table 4, we display the results according to the type of tutoring. There are no data on the fixed tutors since the questionnaire was not administered to them as they never acted as tutees.

**Table 4** *Results of satisfaction measurements, according to type of tutoring*

	<i>Fixed tutees</i>	<i>Reciprocal tutees</i>	<i>Total</i>
Satisfaction about teacher's help	7.767 (0.869)	7.833 (0.9975)	7.811 (0.994)
Satisfaction about peer's help	9.217 (0.500)	7.727 (1.832)	8.472 (1.166)
Significance	0.012	0.502 (n.s.)	0.063 (n.s.)

For the student tutees in reciprocal tutoring, there is no statistically significant difference between both tests. One might think that the high scores obtained in the teacher's help questionnaire might make this difficult. However, the fixed tutees, who start with very similar scores, do show a statistically significant increase, reaching quite high average scores.

We have compiled several of the additional comments on the questionnaire in which the fixed tutees gave reasons for their degree of satisfaction:

I think that my tutor was very attentive during the course. She always helped me and I am very happy and satisfied with both our progress. (Pair 1)

Yes, yes, yes. It was very hard for my tutor to encourage me, but in the end, in the last classes, he did encourage me. Very good, you've gotten better! (Pair 3)

I am very happy with my tutor because she helped me a lot to understand and make progress in Catalan. (...) I think I have made a lot of progress and I think that in the beginning I didn't know what I know now. (Pair 5)

It seems that providing help and encouragement were the factors that were most highly valued by the fixed tutees. Indeed, by compiling the results of tutees after the recording, the same types of reasons are also stated. The fixed and reciprocal tutees, in equal measure, claim to have felt good at some point in the session because of the tutor's encour-

agement ('S/he told me I'd got better', 'I'm doing well', 'I worked hard...'). In terms of whether or not they felt satisfied throughout the session, ten of the fixed tutees say that they did (only two said that they did not); while among the reciprocal tutees only half claim to have felt satisfied. The reasons provided coincide with the issue of the support received, and only one student put his satisfaction down to the fact that the tutor 'listens to me and answers me well'.

Thus, although we do know the factors behind the increase in satisfaction of the fixed tutees, we do not know what makes this difficult to achieve among the reciprocal tutees.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Our first hypothesis, that all the students would improve their linguistic knowledge, was confirmed by the test results. The fact that the students improve in their linguistic competence is a necessary condition, in the school context, among other possible gains as we will mention later. The self-concept improvement or the feeling of satisfaction with tutor help would not make sense if the participation in a peer tutoring experience did not enable the students to improve their curriculum knowledge.

Since for many years research on peer learning was oriented towards its influence on competencies related mainly to socialization, part of the teaching staff tends to view cooperative learning as useful for these type of issues, which are more attitudinal in nature and are to a certain extent undervalued compared to what is traditionally regarded as the core of the disciplines, the concepts. We believe that showing that students learn the contents of the subject is of great value in contributing to debunking this prejudice and facilitating the introduction of cooperative practices in the classroom.

In terms of self-concept as a writer, which, as we have mentioned, we view as an approach to a specific sub-component of students' academic self-concept in the area of language, related to the self-competence component of self-esteem, the data confirm the second hypothesis, as they reveal significant statistical differences for all students who were given the opportunity to act as tutors. Thus, the fact that the fixed tutees did not significantly improve their scores on the questionnaire indicates one of the disadvantages of fixed as opposed to reciprocal tutoring. We could cautiously extrapolate that fixed student tutees believe that the expert in producing texts is their peer (without whom the text produced would not have been carried out). Thus, the tutees' self-representation as writers could not be improved precisely because of their perception of dependence on the expert help of the tutor.

The remaining students, who had had the chance to cooperate with

their peers by leading the writing process, giving clues or providing different types of help and feedback, did indeed feel that the result of the joint activity when producing a text was attributed to their actions. This enabled them to gain awareness of their skills and realize their valuable and necessary contributions. Once again, this holds true for both the fixed and reciprocal tutors. These results are consistent with the two-dimensional model of self-esteem that maintains the necessity of providing the opportunity to achieve real success as a way to create self-competence (Miller and Moran, 2006).

In a similar sense, the results lead one to believe that peer tutoring acts as what Craven et al. (1991) call an indirect programme for improving self-esteem, which enables self-reinforcing systems to be generated. In our case, when the tutors see that the success achieved in the peer writing that they have tutored is the result of their privileged contributions (privileged either due to their greater expertise or because they play a role that enables them to lead and monitor the writing process), the specific sub-component as a writer within their competence self-esteem is reinforced. Thus, one of the advantages of the opportunity to act in the role of tutor, which reciprocal tutoring offers to all students, is revealed.

In the third hypothesis, we expected tutored students to show greater satisfaction with the help received from their peer tutors compared to the overall help they received from their teachers. Statistically significant differences were expected for all students except, of course, for the fixed tutors. However, although the results indicate a trend toward significance, they do not show this improvement in satisfaction by all students across the board. The only ones that do achieve statistically significant differences are the fixed tutees.

Once again, we find differences between the two types of tutoring. Although the fixed tutees do feel highly satisfied with the pedagogical help they received from their peer tutors, the reciprocal tutors/tutees, in contrast, do not feel more satisfied with their peer tutors than with the help they received from their teachers. However, it bears mentioning that they do not feel less satisfied either, and it is worth stressing that these results are sufficient to refute another teaching prejudice against cooperative learning: the belief that students tend to prefer teachers' help over peers' assistance.

At the beginning of this article, we suggested that reciprocal tutoring might combine the advantages of fixed tutoring and collaboration, thus minimizing the disadvantages of both. However, we see that one of these hypothetical advantages of reciprocal tutoring regarding satisfaction is not supported by the results. Our research is in keeping with studies (such as Griffin and Griffin, 1998) who found no conclusive differences in favour of either type of tutoring.



Along these lines, according to the results, we agree with those studies (Baudrit, 1999) that point out that what is important is establishing the degree of heterogeneity within the pair, which can be either fixed (with one student always reaping the benefits) or reciprocal (with both students alternately reaping the benefits depending on the sessions, activities and so forth). In the former, this distance between tutor and tutee can stem from their ages, their previous training or their skills. In reciprocal tutoring, it must be a result of the previous training for a specific task and/or the system of help or resources.

It is precisely the need for this difference between students that makes, as mentioned in the beginning, peer tutoring a powerful instrument for attending to diversity in which the differences between students – even in terms of the level of curricular knowledge – are viewed as a resource from which pedagogical advantage can be taken, instead of as a problem.

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## **Appendix 1**

Do I think I am a good writer?

Name and surname \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions are related with your text production. Keep in mind that a writer is a person who writes texts. Now, answer these questions as honestly as you can. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Simply state what you think about yourself as a writer.

1. I like writing ...

very much     quite a lot     quite     a little bit     don't like it

2. Do I bother about writing?

never     hardly ever     quite often     frequently     always

What do I like best about writing? \_\_\_\_\_.

What do I like least about writing? \_\_\_\_\_.

3. Why do I write?

to enjoy myself     to communicate     to learn     to study  
 because I have to

4. Do I spend some time thinking, before I start to write?

never     occasionally     quite often     frequently     always

5. Do I use a rough draft?

always     frequently     quite often     occasionally     never

6. Do I check on my writing?

never     occasionally     quite often     frequently     always

7. Do I check up in the dictionary, grammar books or other sort of books?

always     frequently     quite often     occasionally     never

8. Do I feel happy with my writing?

never     occasionally     quite often     frequently     always

What is my strong point in writing? \_\_\_\_\_.

And my weak point? \_\_\_\_\_.

9. What do other people think about my writing? It is ...

excellent     good     all right     poor     very poor

10. Can I improve my writing?

not at all    a little bit    quite    quite a lot    a lot

## **Appendix 2**

Examples of questions to evaluate the satisfaction with peer tutor help

1. My peer tutor helps me ...

never    occasionally    quite often    frequently    always

2. My peer tutor pays attention to me ...

always    frequently    quite often    occasionally    never

3. My peer tutor gives me enough time to carry out the activities...

never    occasionally    quite often    frequently    always

4. My peer tutor gives me feedback about what I write ...

always    frequently    quite often    occasionally    never

5. My peer tutor solves my doubts immediatly ...

never    occasionally    quite often    frequently    always

6. My peer tutor encourages me to do my best ...

always    frequently    quite often    occasionally    never

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