

Making Peer Discussion Work for Primary School Students

**Sharing Session 09-10
Tai Po Methodist School**

Presenters

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Why discussion in KS2 classrooms in our school?

- The primary purpose of language learning is communication
- School's Context: Co-operative learning has been implemented in the school for 3 years
- Discussion is an effective way of learning (Social Constructivists' View and Research on Psychology)
- Large Educational Context: Requirement of the New Secondary School Curriculum

Advantages of discussion:

Evidence from Psychological Research

- **Better group to individual transfer**
- **Deeper understanding**
- **Better implanting of information into memory**
- **Better learning of peers of diverse abilities**

Yager, S., D. W. Johnson and R. Johnson, R.T. (1985) Oral discussion, group-to-individual transfer, and achievement in cooperative learning groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Vol. 77(1), Feb 1985, 60-66



How do we define discussion?

- Discussion is NOT a debate
- Discussion allows students to express their own opinions and ideas
- Discussion allows students to exchange and share opinions and ideas



A discussion that works

- A discussion that works is primarily one in which as many students as possible say as much as possible.
- Apparent motivation of the participants including speakers and listeners.
- Language is used in a variety of ways in terms of subject matter and communicative functions.



Preparing for English Discussion

1. Integrating the necessary discussion language input
2. Teaching students the right attitudes to learn in a group
3. Designing and running student-centred discussion tasks
4. Facilitating discussion through effective teacher feedback



1. Integrating the Necessary Language Input

Expressing self opinions	In my opinion.. I think.....
Showing agreement	Yes, that's right. I agree with you. That's true.
Showing disagreement	But..... I disagree. I don't agree with you.
Closing	Shall we stop here? We should stop here.

It's okay to use the **paraphrase strategy** to express English terms you do not know.

2. Teaching Students the Right Attitudes to Learn in a Group

Attitudes to learn in a group	Language and strategies to facilitate the attitude
Taking turns to speak	Simon, it's your turn. Angel, your turn.
Be an attentive listener	Gladys, your idea is great! Jeanda, that's nice! You are right, Judy. * gesture: nodding head
Respect your group mates	Brenda, what do you think? Ernest, do you have any ideas ?
Group success depends on individual success	Group presentations

3. Designing Student-centred Discussion Tasks (P.5)

Module	Discussion Topic	Language Focus
Giving people advice	What should we do if we see a bee in the classroom? What should we do if we see a classmate vomiting in the classroom?	Sentence pattern 'should'
Fun with making things	How are we going to make a mask?	Sentence pattern: <i>first, second, next</i>
Fun things around us	Discuss the answers to riddles about tools written by classmates	Speaking: Enhancing discussion skills
Accidents around us	Discuss ways to prevent accidents in schools	Speaking: Discuss with <i>elaborated answers</i>
	Discuss the ending of a story in which a boy was nearly killed because he did not use the footbridge	Writing: Creating a new ending to a story

3. Designing Student-centred Discussion Tasks (P.6)

Module	Discussion Topic	Language Focus
When I grow up	Guessing the answer of job riddles written by classmates	<i>Speaking:</i> discuss with reasons
Preparing for the future	Discuss the job requirements of different careers	<i>Reading:</i> consolidating students' understanding of job requirements of different careers after reading a text
Fascinating films	Discuss how to write a cartoon/television program review	<i>Writing:</i> a cartoon or television program review
The magic of stories	Discuss what would do if we were another person.	<i>Language Pattern:</i> <i>If I were the headmistress.....</i>
	Discuss the ending of a story in which a princess was turned into a frog	<i>Writing:</i> story writing

3. Designing Student-centred Discussion Tasks (P.6)

Module	Discussion Topic	Language Focus
Problems in our world	Discuss the differences between Hong Kong and Yunnan	<i>Reading:</i> understanding how differences are presented in texts
Special times of the year	Discuss the differences between Christmas and Chinese New year	<i>Speaking:</i> preparing for a presentation which compares festivals in different places
Unforgettable experience	Discuss what you prefer: To be the only child or have brothers or sisters	<i>Reading:</i> motivating students to read diaries about a girl who felt unhappy to have a baby brother

3. Designing Student-centred Discussion Tasks

- **Appropriate topics:** students' personal life, school life, imaginative situations, problem solving, new story creation
- **Language Focus:** link to reading, writing, speaking, sentence pattern learning
- **Topics to avoid:** simple sequencing, topics that are too argumentative, outcome of discussion are too obvious, topics that students do not have enough language or previous knowledge



Results of Students' Choices of Discussion Topics

Topic A: Topic about my school and classmates

- When my classmate vomits, I should....
- Ways to prevent accidents in school

Topic B: Imaginative ideas

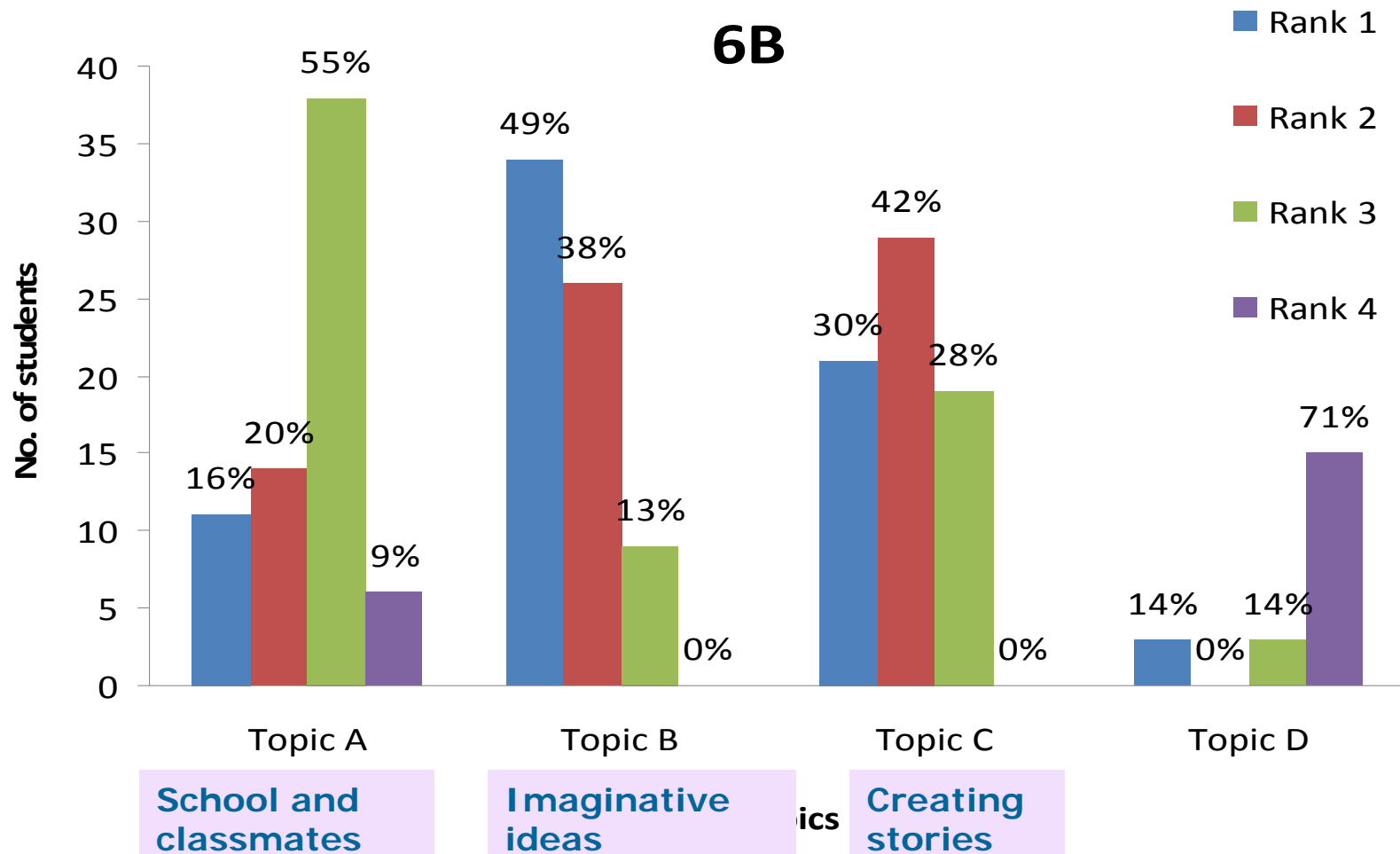
- If I were the headmistress....

Topic C: Creating new stories

- A princess turned into a frog

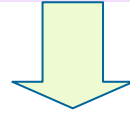
Survey Results of Students' Choices of Topics

Ranking of the discussion topics in 6A and 6B

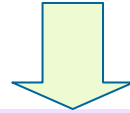


3. Running a discussion class

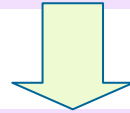
1. Identify language focuses or ideas that you would like your students to learn or think about.



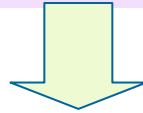
2. Allow student time to think about the topic independently



3. Allow students enough time to discuss in groups



4. Give students immediate feedback while they are discussing



5. Conclude the discussion by giving students post-discussion feedback. It can be comments on creativity, language errors, strengths of writing or organization.

✗ Finish the lesson once students finish the discussion.

✗ Assign students different roles in a group (time-keeper, record-keeper etc) .



**What do you prefer?
To be the only child in the family or
to have brothers or sisters?**

You may want to think about the following points

The only child in the family

- You can have **all** your parents' (father and mother) love
-

But

- You feel lonely because no one plays with you.
-

To have brothers or sisters

- You can share housework with your brother or sister.....
-

But

- You may argue with your brothers or sisters.
-

Student **D**

- ☐ To be the only child is better
- ☐ To have brothers or sisters is better

Reason 7: _____

Reason 8: _____

Student **A**

- ☐ To be the only child is better
- ☐ To have brothers or sisters is better

Reason 1: _____

Reason 2: _____

Conclusion (choose 2 reasons)

- ☐ To be the only child is better because of reasons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 7, 8
- ☐ To have brothers or sisters is better because of reasons 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 7, 8

Student **C**

- ☐ To be the only child is better
- ☐ To have brothers or sisters is better

Reason 5: _____

Reason 6: _____

Student **B**

- ☐ To be the only child is better
- ☐ To have brothers or sisters is better

Reason 3: _____

Reason 4: _____

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide featuring a large green balloon at the top, a blue balloon in the middle, and a purple balloon at the bottom, all with yellow streamers and small yellow triangles.

To be the only child

1. Because I don't have to share toys.
2. Brothers or sisters are too noisy. If I don't have brother or sister the house will be quite.
3. No need to share the house
4. I want my parents to love me only
5. My mum and dad will buy me many things
6. If you travel to other place, you need to share things with your brother and sister.
7. Because my father and mother will buy many beautiful and special things for me
8. Because my mum just give me some money, then, I can buy a lot of things.
9. Because my parents will only buy toys to me.
10. Because my mother only cook some yummy food to my



To have brothers or sister

- Because brother and sister can help me to do housework
- Brother and sister play with me
- Brother and sister talk with me
- They will share things with me
- I can have a competition with my brother
- I can teach them to do the homework
- Take care of you
- We will not be boring
- We can share the toys with them
- We can teach us somethings and we can get good results

Discussion Topic: Writing a story about a princess who turned into a frog





Discuss: Record of Discussion

For students:

- A tangible record of students' discussion process helps students to find focuses of their interaction
- A checking mechanism to make sure every group member contributes
- A written record for members of a quick speaking task to comment and feedback on
- A written record helps students to visualize writing convention
- A script for presentation later on

For teachers:

- Monitor students' discussion process
- An output for teachers to comment and feedback on
- Allow teachers to identify students' problem promptly





Statistics about student-teacher Interaction in a short discussion

Discussion Topic: Writing a Film Review

Discussion During: about 13 minutes and 30 seconds

Date 16th Oct., 09

- 
- Comments or feedback initiated by teacher= 19
 - Questions initiated by students= 18
(5 on spelling; 4 on ways to finish the task)
 - Total interaction between teacher and students: 19
(Teacher comments or feedback) + 18 Student
initiated questions = 37 times
 - Interaction between teacher and students: 1
interaction each 21 second
- 

Types of Teacher-student Interaction

Step-in: Teacher takes the lead in interacting with students to form complete knowledge.

- Teacher modeling
- Teacher offers explanation
- Prompt students following incorrect or partly correct answers

Englert and Dunsmore (2002) in Brophy (ed. 2007)

Step-back: teacher repositions students in central roles

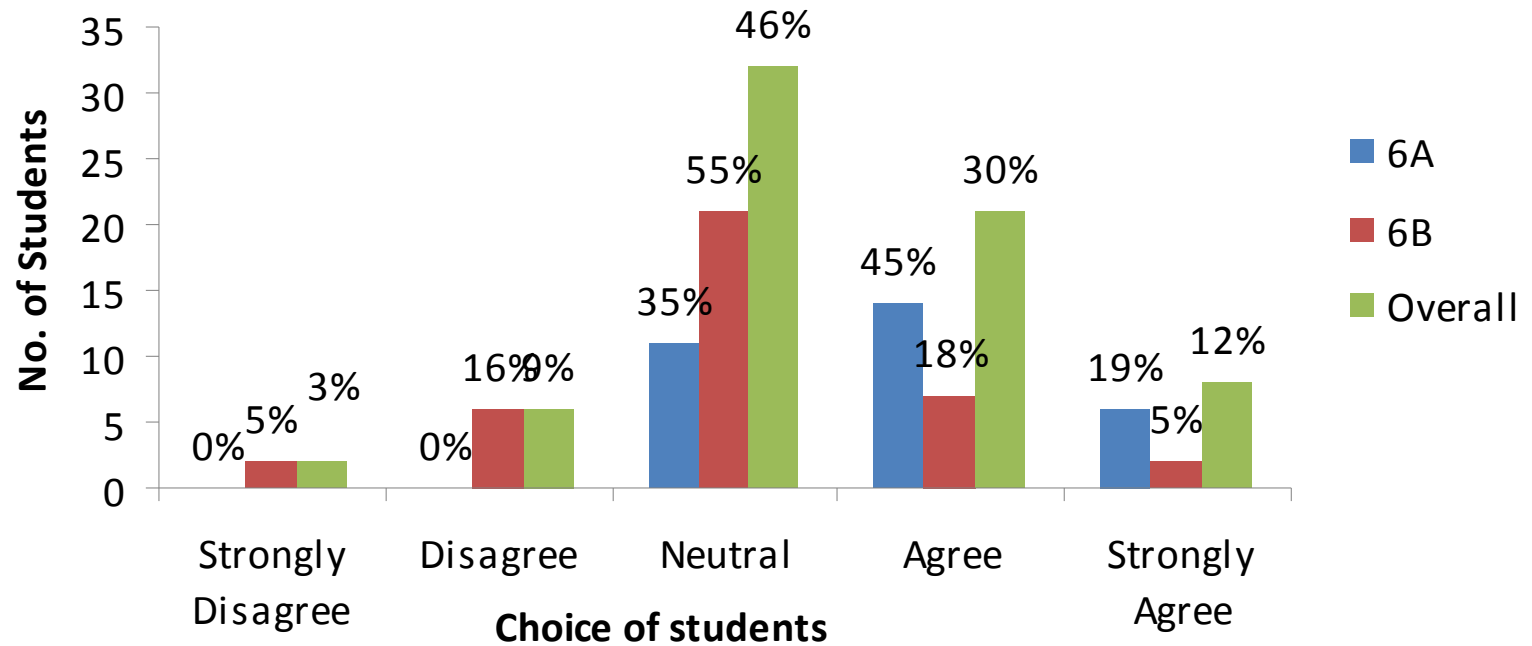
- Teacher asks students to explain
- Teacher asks students to offer opinions about what to change or revise
- Teacher asks students to engage in decision-making
- Teacher asks students to direct the thinking process
- Teacher confirms what students have done



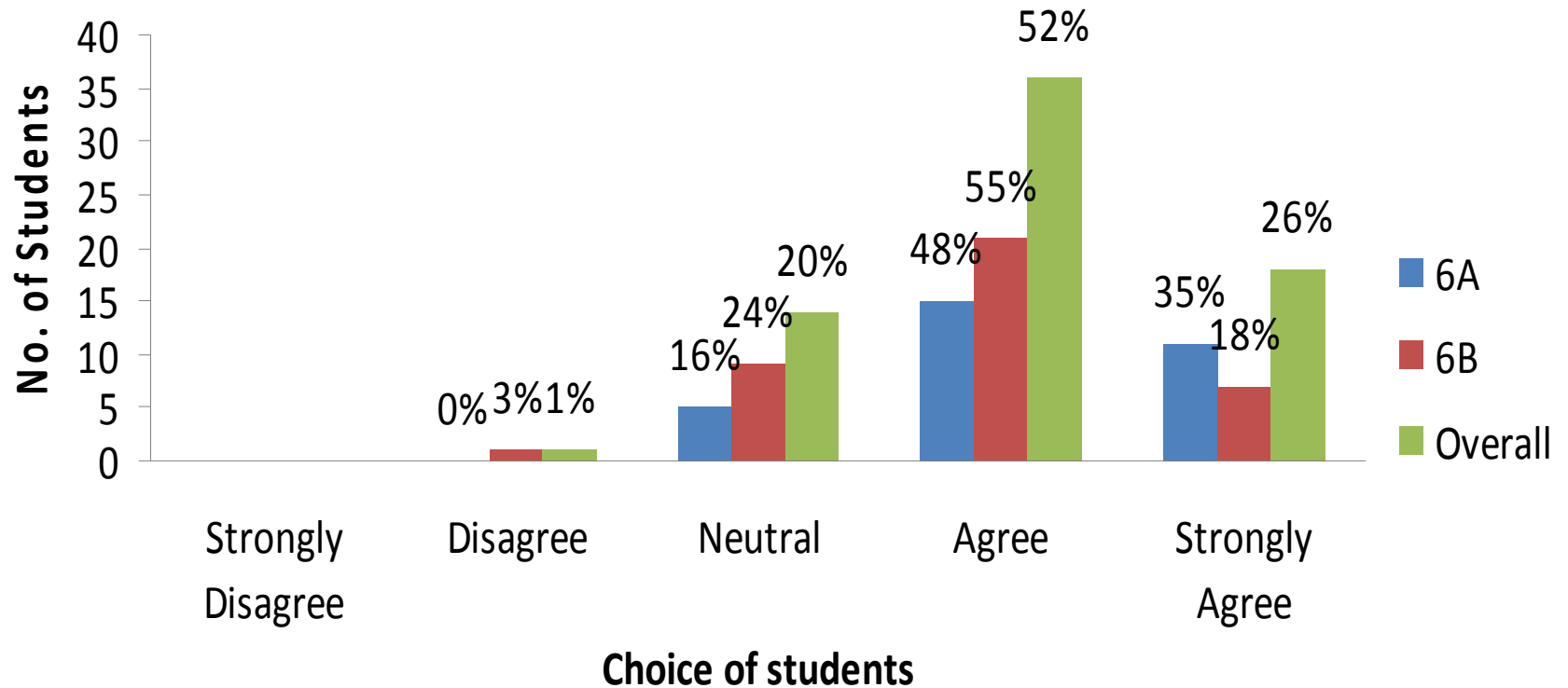
Transcript

- T: (Walk to Group 4.) Yes, very good. Shoemaker. Yes. It is about... (Walk to Group 3.) Okay, guys. Listen. Because this is the name of the cartoon... you have your name, Joshua. With the big “j” at the beginning of your name, right? You have the big ‘n’ of the beginning... at the beginning of your name, right? Then how about the shoemaker? How about the shoemaker? Yes, yes. Very good. (Read Group 3’s writing.) A stupid shoemaker? This is so nice you put a good adjective here. Why do you think he is stupid?
- G2S2: Because ar...
- G2S1: Because he plays tricks on the queen.
- T: Okay. He plays tricks on the queen. Alright. (Walk to Group 6.) Very good.

I am more willing to ask my teacher questions during discussion time

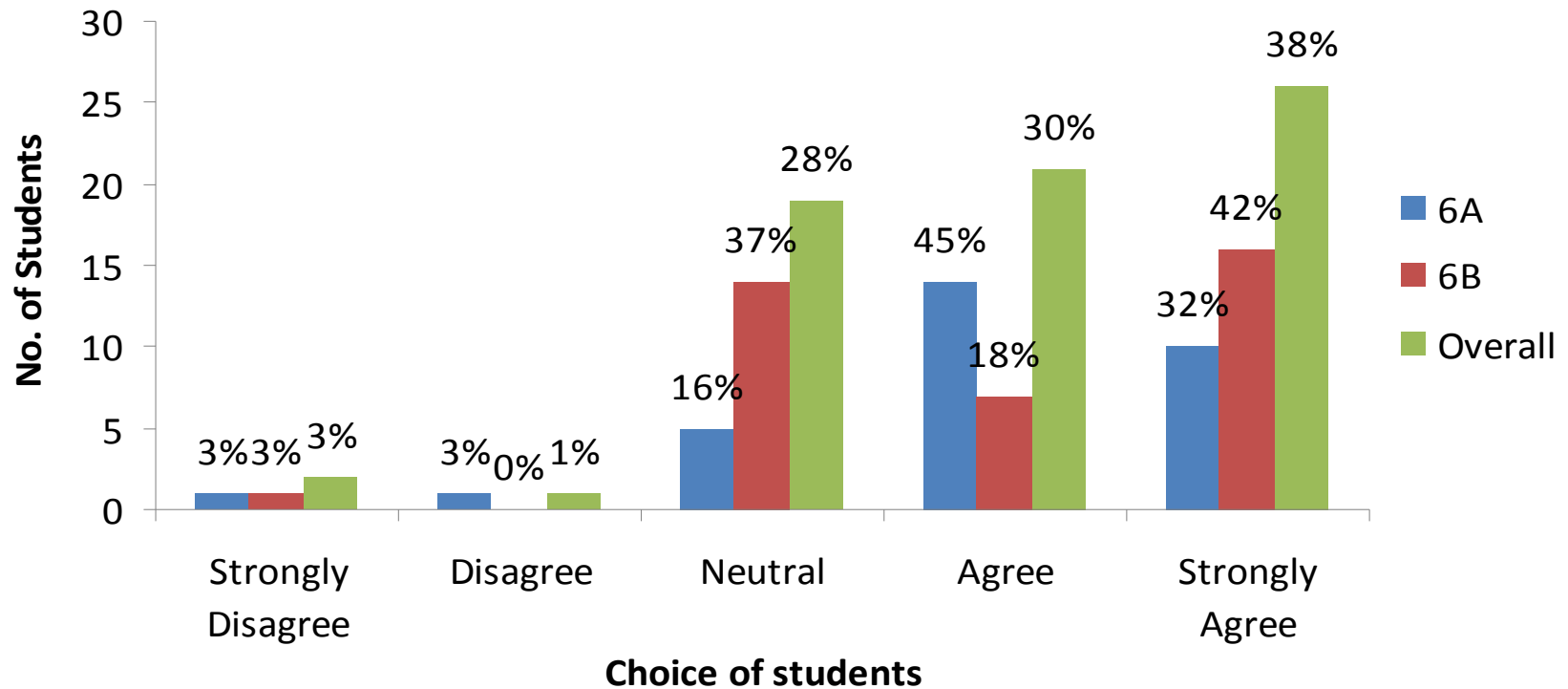


Teacher's feedback and comments during and after discussion facilitate

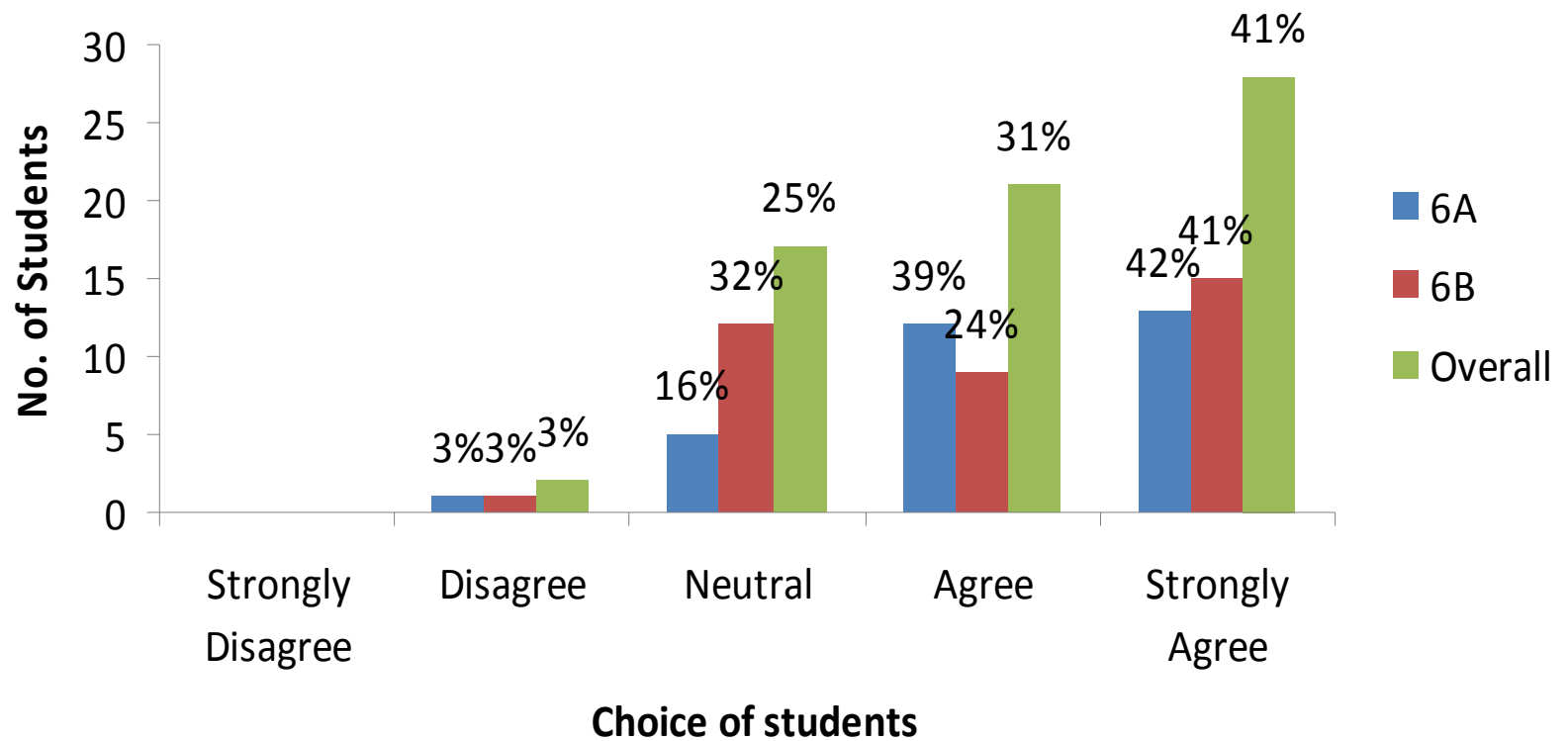


Students' comments on the use of discussion in the classrooms

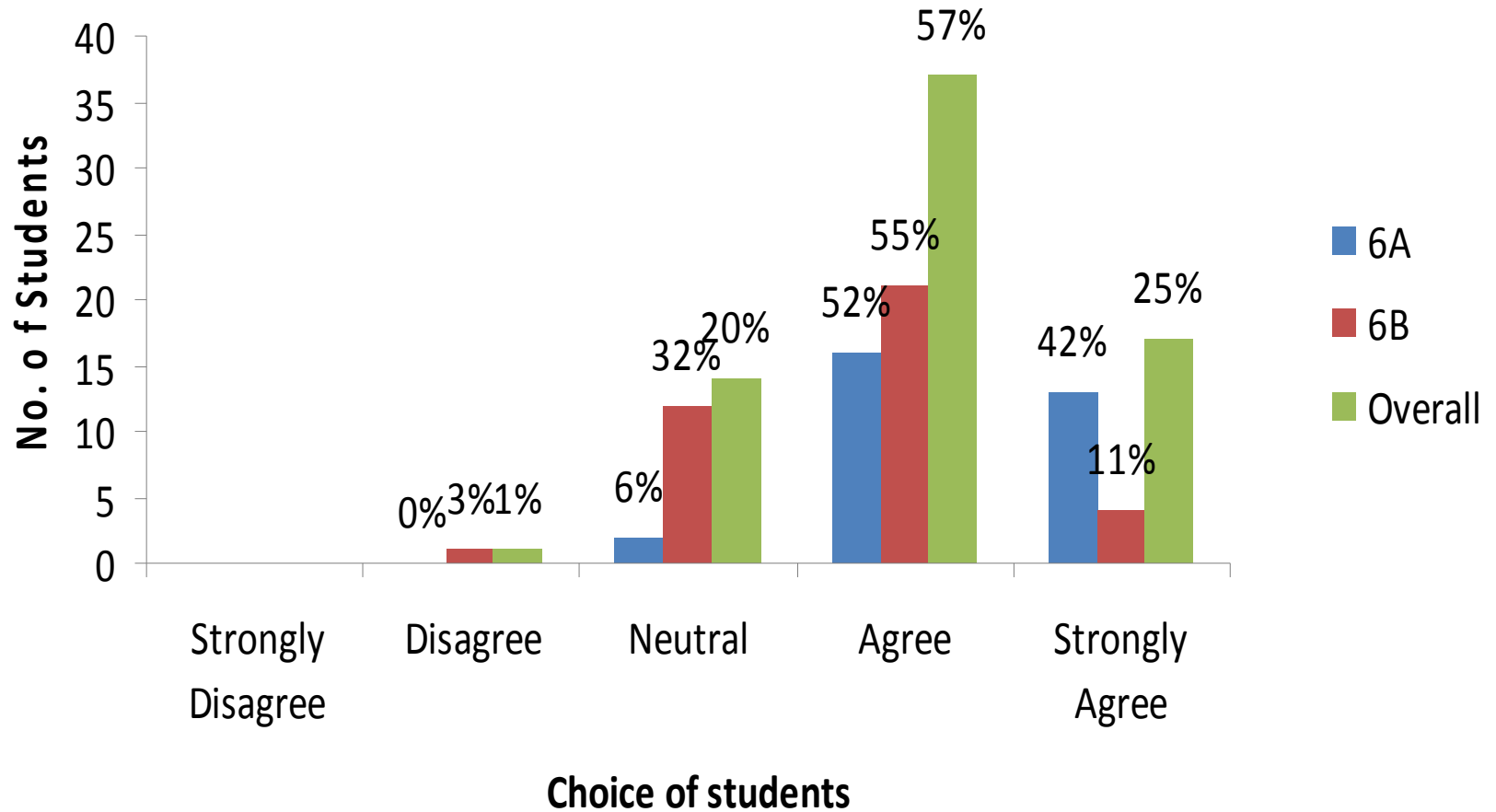
I am more attentive in discussion classes, compared with classes in which teachers talk most of the time



Discussions have improved my English speaking skills



I can learn English effectively through discussion





Conclusion

- Group-to-individual transfer does take place.
- Procedures of discussion should be structured.
- Further development on teachers' feedback is needed.



References

Brophy, J. (Ed). (2007). *Social Constructivist Teaching, Affordances and Constraints*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited

Ur, P. (1981). *Discussions that Work: Task-centred Fluency Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Yager, S., D. W. Johnson and R. Johnson, R.T. (1985) Oral discussion, group-to-individual transfer, and achievement in cooperative learning groups. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Vol 77(1), Feb 1985, 60-66