PEER INTERACTION

IN THE HAITIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL CONTEXT

Fenel Pierre
M.A.T. School for International Training 2005

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching at the School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont.

March 2005

This project by Fenel Pierre is accepted in its present form.

Date: March 31, 2005

Project Advisor: Pat Moran

Project Reader: Susan Renaud

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No man is an island and no man writes alone. My profoundest appreciation goes to all those who have helped me bring this project to completion.

First and foremost, I would like to extend my gratitude to my reader, Susan Renaud, my editors, Debbie Campbell and Mary Lou Haag for their support, guidance, and their native English expertise.

I am deeply thankful to my colleagues and friends too numerous to mention for their kind words and encouragement.

Special thanks to my academic advisor, Pat Moran, the sine qua non of this project, for supporting me and challenging me. I could not have done it without you.

Special thanks are also due to my students, especially those at the Riverside Language Program in New York, who inspired me to write this paper.

I am indebted to FULBIGHT, SOROS FOUNDATION, and FOCAL, for funding my studies up to this point.

And last, but not the least, I thank my loving wife and my parents who helped sustain me as I worked on this project. Your love and support meant more to me than you will ever know.

Fenel Pierre

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to define peer interaction and its major components. It identifies and examines the major challenges that language teachers in Haiti will face in incorporating peer interaction within the Haitian public school context. It explains the advantages of using peer interaction as a way to generate knowledge. The author concludes by providing practical guidelines and strategies of how to cope with these challenges and describing what he has learned from his research.

Since language is learned mainly through interaction with other learners and speakers of that language, this paper aims at persuading Haitian language teachers break out of the traditional ways of language teaching to promote language learning in authentic language environments. After spending seven years learning a language, students find it difficult holding even a five-minute conversation in the target language. If students do not learn the way teachers teach, it is logical that teachers teach the way students learn. One effective technique we can use to reach this goal is peer interaction. With this powerful technique, which allows students take responsibility for their own learning and develop their own inner criteria, they will end up communicating in the target language through interaction with one another.

ERIC Descriptors:

Teacher Role	Teacher Attitudes
Second Language Instruction	Language Teachers
Teacher Developed Materials	Students Developed Materials

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Our collective understanding of the nature of language learning and of the effectiveness of language teaching is evolving. Many researchers and practitioners are now advocating that language is learned mainly through interaction with other learners and speakers of that language, not simply through working alone. In this paper I endorse this view, and I make the case for using peer interaction as a foundation for second/foreign language teaching, with specific application to classrooms in Haiti. I also describe in this paper my views of peer interaction elicited from my classroom practice and experiences as well as insights that came out of this research.

Peer interaction, as a way to generate knowledge, is a successful learning strategy in which students are divided into small groups. Each group has students of different levels of ability. They use many different learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject by sharing with one another. Each group member is not only responsible for learning the material presented, but also for ensuring that everyone in the group knows the material as well. Peer interaction is not a new concept but it is becoming an increasingly popular strategy. From personal teaching experience, I have found many benefits to using peer interaction in the classroom, and it is a strategy that can easily be integrated into whatever the teacher is doing in the classroom, and at any grade level. It does not cost much and it is not difficult to initiate.

I became inspired to research and write a paper on this topic for two main reasons. First, I realize whether it is the Silent Way Approach, the Participatory Approach, or the Communicative Language Learning Approach, et cetera, peer interaction must be placed in the center for learning to be effective. When students depend on one another for educational purposes, not only will learning take place, but they will also build lasting relationships and they will become good researchers. In fact, students have more talents than we give them credit for, or opportunity to demonstrate. It requires teachers to work not harder, but smarter, in an effort to inspire them.

Second, all the courses that I took about methodology seem to neglect one key aspect of language teaching and learning; namely, the context in which teaching and learning take place.

During the academic year at the School for International Training (SIT), I read about cooperative learning in my approaches classes; but I realized that there was something worth taking into consideration: the context in which we teach. I thought about it but I became more thrilled about the magic of peer interaction during my internship at the Riverside Language Program in New York. I already knew about the concept of the student-centered classroom but the outcome was so phenomenal that it inspired me to write this paper about peer interaction.

There is no royal road to learning, but I strongly believe that peer interaction is pretty close to the best way to learn. Learning is best achieved when students interact with one another in a variety of settings. Unfortunately, educational programs are not normally structured for an effective blend of hearing,

saying, seeing, and most importantly, doing. The way students perceive each other and interact with one another is a neglected aspect of instruction. Much training time is devoted to helping teachers arrange appropriate interactions between students and materials (i.e., textbooks and programs), and some time is spent on how teachers should interact with students. We are much more inclined to offer our students the chance to hear only. Thus, we see little result.

The image of peer interaction that I give is new because I have not found research that places peer interaction in such a specific context. I will explain some factors that are challenges to peer interaction in the context, and provide suggestions of how they can be overcome. My picture of peer interaction is that the classroom possesses energy as the students interact with one another.

My teaching context is the Haitian Public School context. I taught at Lycée Charles Bélair, a public school in Arcahaie, about an hour's drive north from Port-au-Prince. I began teaching EFL in 1995, but I taught at this public school for two years. I had one eleventh grade (Rhéto) and two twelfth grades (Philo) where I taught both English and Spanish. These three classes ranged from eighty to one hundred students. Their ages ranged from twenty to over forty. There were primary school teachers who taught in the morning and came to school in the afternoon. Many students took English just to pass their baccalaureate exam but there were others who wanted to study abroad, take TOEFL[1], or just travel. For the past several years I have mainly concentrated on preparing students for the baccalaureate exams.

[1] TOEFL, Test of English as a Foreign Language, is a test to evaluate the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English.

I also taught one-sixth grade and two seventh grades in the Lycée. They ranged from twelve to eighteen years old. In each class I had from eighty to one hundred students. I taught a seventh grade with one hundred and thirty students and one-eighth grade with one hundred and forty students in a private school in Arcahaie. I also taught in two other private schools but I want to focus on the eleventh and twelfth grade students at the public school (Lycée). They all have had English as a foreign language for the past five to eight years on a twice or three times per week basis. Most of them lived in the vicinity and the majority excelled at school. In the Haitian educational system, these two final classes are subject to two official state exams, which allow them to be admitted to the University after passing an entrance examination.

As I begin writing this paper, I realize how useful it will be for me personally, for my fellow Haitian language teachers in particular, and language teachers worldwide who are still viewed as providers of knowledge. Teachers who prepare students for the baccalaureate exams as well as other teachers and students will primarily benefit from this research paper. Knowing the importance of peer interaction as a way to generate knowledge is of benefit to every teacher of any subject because learning is optimal when learners are involved in the process. In addition, it will be valuable to teachers who have to cope with older students and teaching large classes with limited resources where students depend solely on them.

This paper represents my effort to increase my knowledge of cooperative learning in general, and of peer interaction as a tool to generate knowledge in

particular, and is the pursuit of my interest in this field. "Ask three, then ask me" is an axiom that can be considered as the pivot of peer interaction.

The paper is organized in three chapters. In the first chapter I provide my own definition of peer interaction. I provide evidence and interpretation of peer interaction by other researchers in the field. I provide a brief explanation and definition of the specific components of peer interaction and how they relate to my definition. Furthermore, I analyze the requirements that peer interaction places upon the teachers and the students. Finally, I describe a simple peer interaction technique to illustrate how the theories play out for learners and teachers.

The second chapter focuses exclusively on the Haitian public school context. I describe aspects of the system which will affect peer interaction namely, older students, differences in methodology, and large classes. I concentrate on each aspect separately and provide definitions of the key terms. I supply a clear foundation for later explanations in the paper.

In the third chapter, I conclude with practices, strategies and guidelines for achieving optimal peer interaction, where I focus on my teaching practices, and how I have tried to teach effectively using peer interaction.

John Amos Comenius, the father of pedagogy, is reported to have said, "He who teaches others, teaches himself" (Rodgers 1988:3). When working together on common tasks, peers provide the kind of support that is usually provided by the teacher. While the students are working in pairs or small groups, the teacher is free to circulate, listen and assess individual student learning, facilitate student interaction, offer individual help, and take notes of individual problems to address

to the large group. By using peer interaction, teachers are taking charge of learning instead of taking charge of students or of teaching. Paulo Freire asserts that "Learning is not a gift that the teacher can give, but what the students achieve by themselves"(Auerbach 1992). Learning is a screw; the teacher is a screwdriver that guides the students' actions.

While reading this paper one needs to remember that this project alone cannot fully synthesize my teaching philosophy regarding peer interaction. As I continue to build on my awareness, attitudes, knowledge and skills in language education, I am convinced that this final piece of work will serve as a landmark in my journey as a language learner and teacher.

CHAPTER ONE

DESCRIPTION OF PEER INTERACTION

In this chapter, I will first of all define peer interaction, supported by theorists' definitions. Next, I will provide a brief explanation and definition of the specific components of peer interaction and how they relate to my definition. Additionally, I will discuss each of the key components of peer interaction. Furthermore, I will discuss the requirements that peer interaction places upon students and teachers. Finally, I will describe one peer interaction technique to illustrate how the theories play out for students and teachers, written from my personal experiences as a teacher.

I. Peer Interaction: my own definition, supported by theorists' definitions

For me, peer interaction is a successful learning strategy in which students are divided into small groups. Each group has students of different levels of ability. They use many different learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject by sharing with one another. Each group member is not only responsible for learning the material presented, but also for ensuring that everyone in the group knows the material as well.

Theorists in the field such as David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1987), both Professors at the University of Minnesota; and Spencer Kagan (1994), Director, Resources for Teachers, San Juan Capistrano, California, describe peer interaction as "The organization of students into small groups that have varying

abilities in which all students can participate to achieve a common goal." They view it as "a teaching strategy that motivates students to set higher goals and become intrinsically motivated." Kagan (1994) believes that "peer interaction benefits students in many ways, mainly in their level of confidence, motivation and sense of achievement."

My definition of peer interaction is derived from many sources of educational theories and practices that explore the learning that occurs when students work together on their own. Among the sources that have most influenced me are cooperative learning, peer learning, Vigotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, and scaffolding. In separate but overlapping ways, these views of learning in groups all play a role in my view of peer interaction. I will briefly describe each of these, and indicate its particular role in peer interaction.

a. Cooperative learning

"Cooperative learning, a particular type of active learning, is a formal instructional approach in which students work together in small teams to accomplish a common learning goal" (Kagan 1994). Cooperative learning is fundamentally different than simply asking students to work together to complete a task. In the cooperative learning classroom, the teacher is responsible for forming groups and providing those activities that are needed to ensure that the groups have the skills to work together effectively.

b. Peer Learning: Definition

Peer learning is a form of cooperative learning that enhances the value of student-student interaction and results in various advantageous learning outcomes

for each individual student. In order to obtain the benefits of peer learning, teachers must provide intellectual scaffolding in the form of adequate preparation, cognitive structuring, and role structuring. The teacher prepares students by selecting for discussion, topics, of which all students can safely be presumed to have some relevant knowledge of. In cognitive structuring, the teacher provides students with questions or issues that prompt them towards more sophisticated levels of thinking. Role structuring includes devising collaborative processes that get all group members to participate meaningfully.

c. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The ZPD, according to Vygotsky (1978, p. 86; Italics in original), is "the distance between the actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving (without guided instruction) and the level of potential development as determined by problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."

Assisted performance defines what a child can do with help, with the support of the environment, of others, and of the self. For Vigotsky (1989), "The contrast between assisted performance and unassisted performance identified the fundamental nexus of development and learning that is the zone of proximal development (ZPD)." In other words, the ZPD is the distance between the child's individual capacity and the capacity to perform with assistance.

The ZPD contains four stages. First, the performance is assisted by more capable others. It can be either parents, teachers, experts, or coaches. Such

assistance of performance has been described as "scaffolding", a metaphor first used by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) to describe the ideal role of the teacher.

Second, the performance is assisted by the self. In this stage, the student carries out a task without assistance from others. However, this does not mean that the performance is fully developed or automatized.

Third, the performance is developed, automatized, and fossilized. At this stage, assistance, from the adult or the self, is no longer needed. Vigotsky (1962) described it as "the "fruits of development;" but he also described it as "fossilized", emphasizing its fixity and distance from the social and mental forces of change.

Fourthly and lastly, de-automatization of performance leads to recursion back through the ZPD. The student needs at this stage to start the learning process all over again.

d. Scaffolding

As was previously stated, assistance in the ZPD is called scaffolding and it is a major component of effective teaching. Bruner (1984) defines scaffolding as "a communication process where presentation and demonstration by the teacher are contextualized for the learner; performance of the student is coached; and articulation is elicited on the part of the learner."

Traditionally, scaffolding occurred through personal interaction between students and teachers. Nowadays, scaffolding is rather a means of coaching students until they can perform intellectual tasks on their own. More capable peers can also do this coaching. This is the reason for which I consider scaffolding as a component of peer interaction. It is crucial that students take the first steps towards

becoming self-reliant, self-regulating, and self-evaluating in designing their activities.

Fading is the process of gradual reduction of support until the scaffolding is no longer needed. The right level of scaffolding is critical. The student should not be given too much support nor fail to perform due to too little scaffolding.

II. Brief explanation and definition of the specific components of peer interaction and how they relate to my definition

David and Roger Johnson (1991) mention that "there are five basic components of cooperative learning namely, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability and personal responsibility, small group skills, and group processing." As cooperative learning and peer interaction overlap, I am going to consider these components as peer interaction components also. I will define them briefly in the paragraphs that follow. It is only when these components are taken into consideration that peer interaction will be effective and productive.

A. Positive interdependence

This first component requires that the students learn the assigned material and ensure that all members of the group do the same. The technical term for that dual responsibility is positive interdependence. Positive interdependence exists when students perceive that they are linked with each other in such a way that they cannot succeed unless their peers do (and vice versa) and/or that they must coordinate their efforts with the efforts of their classmates to complete a task. Positive interdependence promotes a situation in which students set themselves two standards. First, they see that their work benefits classmates and their classmates'

work benefits them. Second, they work together in small groups to maximize the learning of all members by sharing their resources to provide mutual support and encouragement and to celebrate their joint success. This component relates to my definition of peer interaction in that the students, after having learned the material assigned, share their resources in the group. One student cannot fully complete his task unless he gets support from his peers.

B. Face-to-face interaction

Positive interdependence results in face-to-face interaction. David and Roger Johnson (1991) define face-to-face interaction as "individuals encouraging and facilitating each other's efforts to achieve, complete tasks, and produce in order to reach the team's goals." Although positive interdependence in and of itself may have some effect on outcomes, it is the face-to-face interaction among students fostered by the positive inter-relationships, psychological adjustment and social competence that make successful groups. This component suggests that students are not only working, but they are also encouraging their peers to do so in order to achieve their common goals. Each student is not only responsible for learning the material that is presented, but also for ensuring everyone in the group knows the material as well.

C. Individual accountability and personal responsibility to achieve the group's goals

The third essential element of peer interaction is individual accountability. It exists when the performance of individual students is assessed, the results are given back to the individual and the group, and the student is held responsible by

classmates for contributing his or her fair share to the success of the group. It is important that the group knows who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in completing the assignment. It is also important that group members know they cannot "hitchhike" on the work of others. This third component says that although it is a group project, each individual student must play his role and is held accountable for the outcome.

D. Frequent use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills

The fourth essential element of peer interaction is the appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills. "In order to coordinate efforts to achieve mutual goals, students must get to know and trust each other, communicate accurately and unambiguously, accept and support each other, and resolve conflict constructively" (Johnson, 1990, 1991; Johnson & F. Johnson, 1991). In the group, there may be students with various levels of ability and social skills. This kind of diversity is what is needed to help the group accomplish the assigned task. It is like we say in French, " L'unité issue de la diversité."

E. Group processing

The fifth and last essential component of peer interaction is group processing. It is defined as reflecting on a group session to describe what members' actions were helpful and unhelpful, and to make decisions about what actions to keep or change. The purpose of group processing is to clarify and improve the effectiveness of the members in contributing to the joint efforts to achieve the group’s goals.

While the teacher observes the students using peer interaction, he or she gets an overview of what students do and do not understand as they explain to each other how to complete the assignment. Listening to the students' explanations provides valuable information about how well the students understand the instructions, the major concepts and strategies being learned, and the basic elements of peer interaction. Group processing is the component that is going to help the group ensure that everyone in the group learns the material. If the group was not successful, group processing will help the group change for the better when they consider actions that were helpful from those that were not.

After having defined the components of peer interaction, I am now going to discuss each of these components more profoundly.

III. Examination and discussion of each of the key components of peer interaction

A. Positive Interdependence

The first requirement for an effectively structured peer interaction lesson is that students believe that they sink or swim together. It goes without saying that motivation is of paramount importance. When positive interdependence is clearly understood, first, each group member's efforts are required and indispensable for group success (i.e., there can be no "free-riders"). Second, each group member has a unique contribution to make to the joint effort because of his or her resources and/or role and task responsibilities.

There are four ways to achieve this positive interdependence. In the following paragraphs, I am going to briefly discuss each one of them

1. Positive Goal Interdependence

In positive goal interdependence, the students perceive that they can achieve their learning goals if and only if all the members of their group also attain their goals. The group is united around a common goal. To ensure that students believe they sink or swim together and care about how much each other learns, the teacher has to structure a clear group or mutual goal, such as, "learn the assigned material and make sure that all members of the group learn the assigned material." The group goal always has to be a part of the lesson.

2. Positive Reward -- Celebrate Interdependence

In positive reward interdependence, each group member receives the same reward when the group achieves its goals. To supplement goal interdependence, teachers may wish to add joint rewards (e.g., if all members of the group score 90% correct or better on the test, each receives 5 bonus points). Sometimes teachers give students a group grade for the overall production of their group, an individual grade resulting from tests, and some bonus points if all members of the group achieve the criterion on tests. Regular celebrations of group efforts and successes enhance the quality of cooperation.

3. Positive Resource Interdependence

In positive resource interdependence, each group member has only a portion of the resources, information, or materials necessary for the task to be completed. The members' resources have to be combined for the group to achieve its goals. Teachers may wish to highlight the cooperative relationships by giving students limited resources that must be shared (one copy of the problem or task per group)

or giving each student part of the required resources that the group must then fit together (the Jigsaw procedure).

4. Positive Role Interdependence

In positive role interdependence, each member is assigned complementary and interconnected roles that specify responsibilities that the group needs in order to complete the joint task. Teachers create role interdependence among students when they assign them complementary roles such as reader, recorder, checker of understanding, encourager of participation, and elaborator of knowledge. Such roles are vital to high-quality learning. The role of checker, for example, focuses on periodically asking each group member to explain what is being learned. Rosenshine and Stevens (1986) found out that "checking for comprehension to be one specific teaching behavior that was significantly associated with higher levels of student learning and achievement." Although the teacher cannot continually check the comprehension of every student, he can engineer such checking by having students work in cooperative groups and assigning one member the role of checker.

In summary, group membership and interpersonal interaction among students do not produce higher achievement unless positive interdependence is clearly structured. The combination of goal and reward interdependence increases achievement over goal interdependence and resource interdependence does not increase achievement unless goal interdependence is also present.

B. Face-to-face Interaction

Face-to-face interaction is characterized by individuals who provide each other with efficient and effective help and assistance, exchange needed resources such as information and materials, process information more efficiently and effectively, and provide each other with feedback in order to improve their subsequent performance. It is also characterized by individuals who challenge each other's conclusions and reasoning in order to promote higher-quality decision-making and greater insight into the problems being considered. These individuals aim for mutual goals, influencing each other's efforts to achieve the group's goals. They act in trusting and trustworthy ways, motivating each other to strive for mutual benefit while maintaining a moderate level of arousal characterized by low anxiety and stress.

C. Individual Accountability/Personal Responsibility

"What children can do together today, they can do alone tomorrow."

(Lev Vygotsky, 1962)

The Holy Bible (NIV, 1987) states in II Thessalonians 3:10 that, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." Everyone had to do his or her fair share of the work. This principle clearly fits the subject of peer interaction, particularly personal responsibility. To ensure that each student is individually accountable to do his or her fair share of the group's work though, teachers need to assess how much effort each member is contributing to the group's work. Additionally, teachers need to provide feedback to groups and individual students, help groups avoid redundant efforts by members, and ensure that every member is responsible for the final

outcome. The purpose of peer interaction is to make each member a stronger individual in his or her own right. Individual accountability is the key to ensuring that learning cooperatively in fact, strengthens all group members. After participating in a cooperative lesson, group members should be better prepared to complete similar tasks on their own. Later in this chapter, I will provide some common ways to structure individual accountability.

D. Interpersonal and Small-Group Skills

Placing socially unskilled students in a group and telling them to cooperate does not guarantee that they have the ability to do so effectively. We are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Interpersonal and small-group skills do not magically appear when they are needed. Students must be taught the social skills required for high quality collaboration and be motivated to use them in peer interaction. The more socially skillful students are, and the more attention teachers pay to teaching and rewarding the use of social skills, the higher the achievement of peer interaction will be.

E. Group Processing

There are two levels of processing. The first one is small group; and the second one is whole class. In order to ensure that small group processing takes place, teachers allocate some time at the end of each class session for each cooperative group to process how effectively members worked together. Groups need to describe what member actions were helpful and not helpful in completing the group's work and make decisions about what behaviors to keep or change.

Such processing, first of all, enables learning groups to focus on maintaining good working relationships among members. Second, it facilitates the learning of cooperative skills. Third, it ensures that members receive feedback on their participation. Fourth, it ensures that students think on the metacognitive as well as the cognitive level. Lastly, it provides the means to celebrate the success of the group and reinforce the positive behaviors of group members.

Some of the keys to successful small-group processing are:

1. allowing sufficient time for it to take place
2. providing a structure for processing (e.g., "List three things your group is doing well today and one thing you could improve.")
3. emphasizing positive feedback
4. making the processing specific rather than general
5. maintaining student involvement in processing
6. reminding students to use their cooperative skills while they process
7. communicating clear expectations.

In addition to small-group processing, the teacher should periodically engage in whole-class processing. When using peer interaction, the teacher observes the groups, analyzes the problems they have working together and gives feedback to each group on how well they are working together. The teacher systematically moves from group to group and observes them at work. A formal observation sheet may be used to gather specific data on each group. At the end of the class period the teacher can then conduct a whole-class processing session by sharing with the class the results of his or her observations. If each group has a peer

observer, the results of their observations may be added together to get overall class data.

An important aspect of both small group and whole-class processing is group and class celebrations. It is feeling successful, appreciated, and respected that builds commitment to learning, enthusiasm about interacting with peers, and a sense of self-efficacy in terms of subject-matter mastery and working cooperatively with classmates.

What makes group work effective?

Two major mistakes often prevent groups from reaching their goals. First is a lack of definition. Second is a lack of perseverance. Learning in community takes work, and patience. One frequently used mnemonic device by Richard C. Weber (1982) describes the process as:

Forming: getting the group together. Richard says, "The goal for each individual at this stage is to establish safe patterns for interaction."

Storming: struggling to make the group a cohesive fellowship that understands and appreciates each other.

Norming: establishing balance and preparing to fulfill the objectives that the group was made for.

Performing: getting to the business you were called to do.

As one iron sharpens another, all the courses I took at SIT help me to develop and articulate my beliefs and practices as a teacher. The inner resource that the students bring to the classroom is the most valuable base for learning. I consider the students' background knowledge, experiences, abilities and intelligence as

essential capital to be utilized. In my teaching, I would like to maximize these rich resources that the students bring with them. The work of Freire and Auerbach, promoters of the Participatory Approach, has left a deep impression on me and will be incorporated into my own teaching philosophy.

When the students' needs are met, when they take responsibility for their own learning, when learning is made meaningful, useful, relevant and enjoyable to them; then effective learning takes place. For this to happen, we need to know what the students need, what strategies are effective, what kind environment is desirable for them to maximize their leaning, what kind of feedback is useful to them for improvement, and so on.

This year I experienced many group settings in my classes at SIT. Through this process, I learned the value of learning from peers and these experiences stimulate me to write about it. I was constantly amazed by how great of a source of learning, inspiration and support they were to me. I also learned how to respect my peers in different situations and how to be respected by following group norms. I considered the cultural differences in such learning settings, since group dynamics change dramatically when there were differences in communication styles, learning styles, comfort styles, and language proficiency. This experience helped me to see practical ways I can lead my students to become more respectful learners. Teaching is about building relationships, enjoying the interaction between people, and the exchange of energies, inspirations and ideas. This is why I believe that teaching is an art, a life style, a profession, job, career, a hobby, a means of meeting and connecting with people, a means of learning, and a process of self-discovery. As I

think of this profession, I am reminded of the initial reason why I wanted to be a teacher, for teaching is a person-to-person relationship. For the past twelve years of teaching experience, the relationships I built with students were my joy and reward. Respect is of great significance in building true relationships with the students. It is the basis of a healthy learning community.

Kolb (1984) mentions that "in the classroom, one must consider the issue from various perspectives, essentially going through the stages of the experiential learning cycle: participating, describing, interpreting, and responding to the issue. Setting group norms and evaluating group work are two helpful strategies to raise this awareness. One of the norms I propose for effective small group work is "focus on the subject matter/task and do not take things personally", so that we can use our limited time efficiently. From being a member of so many groups during the academic year at SIT, I became more observant and knowledgeable of qualities that contribute to and hinder such process.

From a Cuban perspective through the eyes of Pepito (2002), Pepito asks the following questions that I find relevant to peer interaction.

"Why don't we sit down in a circle at the same level and share tasks and functions? I would feel safer and more relaxed. I am tired of sitting in rows and looking up at you."

"Why do you explain everything? Tell me where it is, and I will look for it. Show me the way, and I will try. If I get lost, go and find me."

"Why do you put me to work alone? I need a partner or someone to share my learning with. Learning in groups is fun. It makes me feel good, comfortable, relaxed, and keeps my self-esteem high."

"Why don't you teach me to listen, speak, read and write appropriately? Teach me to be cooperative and polite, to be a competent communicator, then I will get along in life by myself."

"Why don't you change a little and be open to new trends in teaching? I need a more affective, loving, enthusiastic, sensible, and tender teacher, as well as a school where I can share, interact, elaborate, create, and socialize as a true human being."

"Why do your lesson and your school look like square buildings in a round world?"

I believe if we could find answers to these questions, our classrooms would be a much better and safer environment for our students.

IV. Cooperative learning Vs Peer interaction

I cannot talk about peer interaction without talking about cooperative learning. They are like mother and child. While cooperative learning is the big picture, peer interaction is part of it. Cooperative learning requires that students cooperate to achieve a specific goal, peer interaction requires that students interact in small groups, preferably in pairs, providing mutual support to one another on what has been acquired. They do so to make sure that they themselves know the material being presented and also their partners do the same. Both techniques

require cooperation, and cooperation is at the heart of our society. Our survival in this world depends upon our ability to get along and work together.

It becomes more and more apparent that schools must prepare students for the new society. Along with the traditional role of providing students with information, increasingly schools must produce students capable of higher-level thinking-skills, communication skills, and social skills. Students who work in small groups learn significantly more than students who work primarily alone do. Peer interaction promotes higher level thinking skills, while allows students to develop better social skills. Most importantly, it places the responsibility for student learning where it should be: on the learner.

V. Advantages of cooperative learning

A. Cooperative learning is good for all students

Peer interaction is not of value only to children with low IQ, but also to all students including those who have been identified as at risk, bilingual, gifted, and normal. All students need to learn and work in environments where their individual strengths are recognized and individual needs are addressed. All students need to learn within a supportive community in order to feel safe enough to take risks.

Matthews (1992) mentions that "some educators have challenged the use of cooperative learning in classrooms with students who are identified as gifted, claiming that gifted students become permanent tutors and are resentful of having to work with students of differing abilities." Such arguments must be examined critically. We must ask ourselves what we want students to learn in school. Beyond academic subjects, don't we want all students to be comfortable with and accepting

of individual differences (their own and others)? Don't we want all students to have sophisticated social skills that will enable them to work with people they perceive as different or even difficult? Furthermore, don't we want a society in which all people are valued? I am sure we all do.

B. Cooperative learning is part of comprehensive school reform

Not only is cooperative learning supported by a compelling research base, it is also fully compatible with other best practices currently being promoted. Whole language, which involves having students read literature and write stories, has been implemented very successfully in cooperative groups, and many of the practices promoted by whole language experts are inherently cooperative (e.g., editing conferences, book sharing, collaborative writing).

Important skills such as critical thinking, creative problem solving, and the synthesis of knowledge can easily be accomplished through cooperative group activities in inclusive classrooms. Teachers need not envision cooperative learning as one more thing they need to do, but rather as an organizing value and principle for all the instruction in their classroom. Building a cooperative, inclusive classroom community can be the framework within which other teaching strategies and practices are woven.

C. Cooperative Learning Means Teachers Cooperating

In order for cooperative learning to be successful in inclusive classrooms; teachers who have traditionally worked in isolation will need to find new ways of collaborating and sharing their expertise. This kind of collaboration can be challenging because it involves sharing responsibilities, communicating with

others, and of course time; but it can also be exciting and rewarding. Teachers who plan together will sometimes find that they have unique skills and ideas to contribute to the process. Teachers who are used to working with larger groups of children often can contribute important classroom management and organizational strategies to balance some of the individualized approaches proposed by other teachers.

Similarly, teachers who are learning to work together may encounter struggles over expertise, ownership, and responsibility. These also need to be negotiated. Peer interaction provides an important opportunity for teachers to develop their own teaching skills. Supportive administrators will find creative ways of providing teachers with adequate planning and preparation time so that inclusion becomes an opportunity for better teaching rather than an imposed burden.

VI. Demands/requirements that peer interaction places upon the students

Socialization is probably the main factor that can result in tremendous problems in the classroom because today, students come to school without the necessary skills to work together appropriately. The family structure of children has changed. We can no longer assume that students come from two-parent households; and the number of one-parent household continues to grow. This phenomenon has resulted in an increasing number of children who must come home to an empty household after school. Children who leave the countryside to come to school in the cities sometimes complicate matters even worse. They have very little contact with their parents, closing another opportunity to practice

socialization skills. Without appropriate socialization skills, the ability to cooperate and work with others as a group is minimized.

The way students interact with one another is very diverse. There are many factors that can influence their reactions. How well a student knows another may influence his/her behavior. Also, the community in which the student lives can sway him to be more or less friendly to others. Familiarity can be a huge factor. If a student does not recognize another student's values, then that student may not be as receptive to a friendly gesture from the other as if he or she did recognize the other student. Students ought to respect one another even though they are not familiar with one another at first. These are some factors that can affect greatly peer interaction.

Moreover, communities and the environment influence the behavior of the people who live there. They help shape the individuals who live in them. The community values affect the person who dwells there. A person living in a particular community feels more relaxed and he connects more with the others in that community. Also, a group can influence how people act and react. Some students will act accordingly, and some will not. Luckily, they come to school where they have to socialize with their peers. Peer interaction will help them accomplish this goal.

Another important thing that the students need to do is to cultivate tolerance and good listening skills. Students must have the opportunity to express their innermost thoughts within their groups. This involves real caring for one another. I would call this kind of atmosphere empathy, not sympathy. Sympathy is a sharing

in the emotions of others; but empathy is the ability to listen and understand another without a judgmental attitude. Empathy exists in an atmosphere of openness and trust. Students need to show interest in what their peers have to say. They must be ready and willing to learn from others. Creative listening is impossible for those who believe they already know everything and others do not know anything of importance to them. Students need to believe in the value of others as individuals and the possibility that they have ideas and information of worth. Most of us, most of the time, want to get our views across and we tend to find other people 's speeches as interruptions to our own ideas. If this atmosphere exists in the classroom, then peer interaction will be impossible to be implemented.

Consequently, teachers need to provide students with adequate preparation of social skills for peer interaction, especially when they have already spent years using more individualistic or competitive type approaches. Thus, chances are there that these students need time and adequate preparation in order to work in groups using peer interaction successfully. Socialization involves cooperation and cooperation is at the heart of peer interaction.

On the contrary, students who are cheerful, talkative, outgoing, willing to share, want to spend time with others, smile, create a good atmosphere that facilitate peer interaction. Both the students and the teacher need to work together to create this kind of class atmosphere.

VII. Demands/requirements that peer interaction places upon teachers

One of the demands that peer interaction places upon teachers is making the shift from a teacher-centered approach to a student or learning-centered approach,

which is at the heart of cooperative learning. This calls for a significant attitudinal shift on the part of the teacher, a different orientation to the work of teaching and learning.

Throughout my teaching experience I have developed three simple theories that do not really take too much to put into practice. First, students learn by doing (we learn to play the flute by playing the flute). Sometimes, you may hear a teacher say when asking about his class, "it was phenomenal!" But it was phenomenal only for him, not for the students. It was a show. The teacher did everything and the students had to write down notes only. This is not a good way to proceed with teaching because there is total consensus that most people learn10% of what they read; 20% of what they hear; 30% of what they see; 50% of what they see and hear; 70% of what they talk over with others; 80% of what they do in real life, and 95% of what they teach someone else. Second, students learn from experience. Third, students learn by trial and error.

If businesses were run like some teachers operate their classes, they would soon fold. Every important work must be planned. If you have no plan, you are wasting time. If you fail to plan in advance, you are wasting time. The best way to save time is the best way to save money, that is, by budgeting. When you budget time, you discover that you do not have enough time to buy everything (as when you budget money), so you buy with time only those activities worth buying. Planning far ahead helps one get ahead. Teachers need to plan ahead of time how they are going to initiate peer interaction in their classrooms. In the following

paragraphs, I will provide some guidelines although I believe that teachers are their own best resources.

First, give students opportunities to use their life experiences when appropriate in class assignments. Students are more interested in what is happening in their own lives than what is going on around the world. Second, instead of asking if the students understand, check if they demonstrate understanding by sharing with peers or the whole class. Third, have students retell orally instructions to peers to ensure comprehension. Finally, help students learn to provide waiting time when questioning.

I now use a simple framework when introducing a new topic, a framework that engages students in the learning process. It's called a KWL chart: What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Have Learned. Students fill in the chart as the lesson progresses. This framework will help both teachers and students to see where they are now and where they are heading.

Here are some common ways that have been proved efficient in structuring individual accountability. First, keep the size of the group small. The smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability will be. Second, give an individual test to each student whenever possible. Third, randomly examine students orally by calling on one student to present his or her group's work to the teacher (in the presence of the group) or to the entire class. Fourth, observe each group and record the frequency with which each member contributes to the group's work. Fifth, assign one student in each group the role of checker. The checker asks other group members to explain the reasoning and rationale underlying group

answers. Lastly, have students teach what they learned to someone else. When all students do this, it is called simultaneous explaining.

There is a pattern to classroom learning. First, students acquire knowledge, skills, strategies, or procedures in a cooperative group. Second, students apply the knowledge or perform the skill, strategy, or procedure alone to demonstrate their personal mastery of the material. Students learn it together and then perform it alone.

Before forming groups, teachers can do this simple investigation in order to find the students' learning styles. This simple survey will probably help in deciding which students to put together.

Directions: Circle either (a) or (b) for each item.

1. I usually like

    a. mixing with people

    b. working with just my friends

2. I am more inclined to be

    a. fairly reserved

    b. pretty easy to approach

3. I am happier when I am

    a. alone

    b. with other people

4. At a party, I

    a. interact with many, including strangers

b. interact with a few - people that I know.

5. I can usually do things better by

a. figuring them out on my own

b. talking with others about it

6. Interaction with people I don't know

a. stimulates and energizes me

b. annoys me

7. In a group of people I usually

a. wait to be approached

b. initiate conversation

8. In a classroom situation I prefer

a. group work, interaction with others.

b. individual work on my own

9. I would rather

a. be at home on my own

b. go to a boring party

10. My usual pattern when I am with other people is

a. to be open, frank, and take risks

b. to keep myself to myself.

The following group work self-assessment (Course documents, 2003) can help teachers establish successful and effective groups. The students often respond openly and honestly to the following questions.

1. What makes group work effective?

2. What makes group work ineffective?

3. What are your strengths as a member of a group work?

4. What are your weaknesses as a member of a group work?

5. What are your goals for improving your own effectiveness as a group member in this class?

6. What norms (group rules) would you propose for effective small group work in this class?

If students have already spent many years in schools using individualistic or competitive approaches, it will take time and adequate preparation to implement cooperative learning successfully. One alternative is to have students sit in heterogeneous base groups so as to structure both formal and informal opportunities for cooperation between students throughout the day. For example, have students start their day with an informal group activity at their desk; complete class jobs with a partner from their group; and engage in formal, structured cooperative learning activities with group members. Leave cooperative learning groups together for about one month so that students have an opportunity to get to know and work together with group members, but change groups after so that they will have an opportunity to learn to work with other classmates throughout the year. The goal is for students to have worked in cooperative groups with all their classmates by the end of the year.

One important aspect of creating cooperative learning groups is maximizing the heterogeneity of the students within the small groups. Students should be placed

in groups that are mixed by academic skills, social skills, personality, and sex. It is often helpful for teachers to work with other teachers in the school who are familiar with their students when groups are being formed. With all of the different aspects of student diversity that need to be taken into consideration, forming successful groups can seem like an onerous task that will be too difficult for any one person.

In forming groups, some teachers focus on student choice, asking students whom they would like to work with. Although it makes sense for teachers to provide students with multiple opportunities to choose within the school day, student choice may not be the best way to form groups. When students choose their own groups and work only with those they already know, the groups often tend to be same gender and ability. The more homogeneous groups there are, the more students will learn to value the diversity that exists in the classroom and in society.

There are ways, however, that teachers can incorporate some aspects of student choice into group formation. For example, by asking students questions such as: "Who are two people you think you could work well with?" "Who are two people you do not know well and would like to know?" you will allow them to participate in group formation. Although it is important for students to work with those they already know at first, it is also important for them to learn to accept, value, and work with others they do not know well yet.

When setting up collaborative learning activities, the teacher needs to decide whether to assign group roles or to let the group members decide. Some criteria to consider may include the educational maturity of the students, their familiarity with group work, and the available time for the activity.

Some groups function best if they decide the roles themselves. This is often true with more mature students or students familiar with group work. However, students may opt for the role they are most comfortable with and avoid the opportunity to develop other skills. If this is the beginning of the course, this may be a reasonable approach since it is non-threatening. Alternatively, the teacher can simply rotates roles within the group after the first activity to assure that all students experience a multitude of roles.

Here are some roles individual group members can play.

a. Group facilitator: moderates discussions, keeps the group on task, assures that work is done by all, and makes sure all have opportunity to participate and learn.

b. Timekeeper: monitors time and moves group along so that they complete the task in the available time, keeps area clean, assumes role of any missing group member.

c. Recorder: takes notes of the group discussion and prepares a written conclusion.

d. Checker: makes sure that all group members understand the concepts and the group's conclusions.

e. Summarizer: restates the group's discussions and answers.

f. Elaborator: relates the discussion with prior concepts and knowledge.

g. Researcher-Runner: gets needed materials and is the liaison between groups and between their group and the teacher.

Establishing successful Groups

While it is true that interaction with peers can play an important role in one's own learning, I have had experiences with peers that were not very educational. One person dominates the discussion, and one person never speaks up, etc. Successful groups cannot just be a random collection of individuals in the same room.

The literature on cooperative groups in education advises teachers to choose tasks that are more easily done by groups than by individuals. Thus, the task itself establishes a clear need for group members to cooperate. Elizabeth Cohen (1986, 57-58) and David and Roger Johnson (1991, 54-58) provide a list of characteristics of suitable tasks. These characteristics include:

a. Having more than one way to solve the problem
b. Allowing different students to make different contributions
c. Requiring a variety of skills and behaviors
d. Requiring positive interdependence (the success of one depends on the success of others)
e. Including face-to-face interaction which promotes learning
f. Requiring individual accountability and personal responsibility

So far, I have hypothesized that reflection with peers is important in the construction and assimilation of new knowledge about learning and teaching, and that the teacher who uses group work needs to choose appropriate tasks and train the students in behaviors and attitudes that promote cooperation. Additionally, in

order for cooperative activities to be successful, teachers need to give attention to the following key elements.

A. Group formation

Teachers introducing cooperative learning for the first time might let students select their own groups. But once comfort is established, the greatest potential for benefit occurs in heterogeneous groupings, with the teacher assuring a balanced mix of ethnic groups, females/males, handicapped with non-handicapped students, and students of low-to-high ability and productivity.

B. Group Functions

Students may work in groups on any of the assignments they would ordinarily do alone. They may meet to collaborate on solving a problem, to discuss an issue without direct leading by the teacher, to brainstorm for new ideas or summarize what they have learned about ideas previously presented, to formulate concepts out of information and facts they have been given. Particularly valuable is the potential of a group to share the parts of a complex project or jointly produce an assigned product. Goals for the group might range from practice in-group communication processes to preparation for a presentation to the whole class group.

C. Group Norms

Teachers need to proceed slowly and with patience to introduce students to cooperative learning. It is not enough to rearrange the seating. It is important that the teacher help students learn to coach and teach each other. Brighter students'

learning is enhanced by their efforts to teach the others; less-capable students benefit from increased one-to-one attention.

D. Group Skills

Students need to be taught procedures and given practice opportunities for rearranging the classroom space, moving quietly into groups, responding to teachers' signals for attention, etc. So, too, it is important for them to receive explicit instruction and regular practice in the interpersonal skills that this method, as well as life in a democratic society, requires. These include:

1. Teamwork
2. Support and acceptance of differences
3. Active/reflective listening
4. Positive feedback
5. Reaching consensus
6. Coaching and tutoring others

E. Group Goals and Roles

Clear instructions, goals, and time lines for group activities are essential to successful cooperative learning. It is also important that each member has a specific function within the group. Roles should be changed frequently, so that members have opportunity to practice new roles, and should be designed to fit the group's particular task.

Peer interaction encourages students to work together cooperatively to reach a common goal. In their efforts to construct knowledge, students must work together

as an interdependent group, encompassing the credo “all for one and one for all”. By working cooperatively as a group, students get a “flavor” of real-world application, through the application of social skills, higher-level thinking skills, and communication skills.

1. Cultural expectations of appropriate roles of teachers and learners

The Haitian educational system is based on the central role of the teacher in planning, directing, and evaluating learning. To these students who have grown up with the traditional, teacher-centered, teacher-directed classes, the shift to learner-centered and learner-directed cooperative groups can be misunderstood as an abrogation of responsibility on the part of the teacher.

2. Individual learning styles and preferences

Individual students have different learning styles and preferences which affect the amount of time they wish to spend in group discussions. This poses a problem for the teacher in trying to meet every student's needs.

3. Personality differences

It is possible to find students who want to work alone. When this happens, this student may need to be given the opportunity to work alone during the group sessions. Over time social isolation may provide sufficient motivation for renewed effort at functioning within a group.

4. Over-reliance on their first language

The students may want to shift from the target language to their mother tongue since they share a common language. A heterogeneous class of students from a number of linguistic backgrounds would be ideal since students do not share

a common language and thus need to interact and negotiate in the target language. I was able to do this during my internship in New York because I had 25 students from Spanish, French, Russian, Japanese, Ukrainian, and Arabic language backgrounds; but a teacher does not always have this opportunity.

5. Exposure to imperfect language models and incorrect feedback

An additional problem voiced by both teachers and students is with the imperfect nature of students' contributions in group discussions. The students may be using their strategic competence[2]. Teachers need to help students understand that errors are natural when students are focused on making themselves understood, and that there are appropriate and inappropriate times for and means of correcting each other. Teachers need to help students understand that mistakes are steps toward learning.

VIII. Assessment

One important and often complex aspect of instruction with peer interaction is evaluation. Effective evaluation of peer interaction in inclusive classrooms must focus on both the content and the process of the group experience. Teachers must be careful that the structure of group evaluation accounts for differing abilities. Furthermore, teachers need to assess individual as well as group efforts. During peer interaction activities, both teachers and students can assume responsibility for evaluating the skills and contributions of group members. While students are engaging in group activities, teachers often collect and share information on how

[2] In Canale and Swain's definition (1980:30), strategic competence is called into play "to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence" (cf. Canale, 1983).

groups are functioning in regard to the academic and social aspects of the lesson. This information is shared with groups both during and after the lesson. Direct observation is a valuable tool for teachers who are concerned about a student's performance in a specific area.

In addition, the teacher needs to often ask students to discuss how they worked together to accomplish the task. This information is shared within small groups and then with the entire class. An important part of peer interaction includes the instruction of students in how to observe, evaluate, and provide feedback to group members in positive ways. Peer evaluation affords students a chance to appreciate and critic the efforts of their peers with the group project in mind. Self-evaluation can also be a part of peer interaction activities in which students set their own goals and share them with group members. These forms of evaluation are more qualitative in nature and provide rich information about students that could not be ascertained as readily through traditional testing.

IX. Materials

Building materials or finding the appropriate materials is another aspect that the teacher needs to bear in mind. Teachers can create class-specific materials based on themes they have identified by listening to students. I believe if the materials are built upon students' interests, they will be more attentive and the lessons will be more effective. A good teacher uses a lot of different materials, equipment, and teaching methods in an attempt to make his/her lessons interesting.

Besides building materials, it is also helpful if the teacher can think back to his/her own language learning experiences and note to what it was that he/she now

attributes his/her success or failure, passing these insights on. When the appropriate moments occur, he/she should seize the opportunity to teach his/her students how to learn telling them about his/her failure or success in learning languages. By doing so, he/she will increase the students' opportunities for strategic investment in their learning process. They will greatly benefit from the teacher's daily attention to the many little tricks of the trade that can be passed on to them. I call this "making use of impromptu teacher-initiated advice".

Peer interaction is a good learning strategy to initiate because especially children, once they have learned something, quickly want to take over and teach it back; either to the adult who taught them, or to their own peers. Peer interaction allows students to work together in small and mixed-ability groups. The teacher's role shifts from being a provider of knowledge to being a facilitator. The responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the students. Furthermore, students working in groups have an additional twist to their learning.

X. Description of one peer interaction technique from my personal experience as a teacher to illustrate how the theories play out for learners and teachers.

Partners

This is a technique that I used mostly when I was teaching 6th and 7th graders at "Le college de Cote-Plage" in Carrefour, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. This school was well structured. There was a student laboratory. Compared to other schools, it was manageable in size. I normally had around forty five students in each class. Not only was this a fair and manageable number of students, but also

the classrooms were big enough to accommodate pair and group work. Most of these students were very enthusiastic about learning English. I taught there for almost two years. Each student had his or her own textbook. We used "In Touch".

For this peer interaction technique called "Partners", I divided the class into groups of four. As each bench had four students, I divided them by bench at first; but as we moved ahead throughout the academic year, students had the opportunity to work with all classmates. Time was allotted according to the content of the activity. Partners moved to one side of the room. Half of each group was given an assignment (a grammar point, vocabulary, short conversation, etc) to master and to teach the other half. Partners worked together and could consult other partners working on the same material. Groups went back together with each set of partners teaching the other set. Partners quizzed and tutored their peers. I gave them enough time to process.

Usually, they say that they enjoy the sharing and learn much out of it. As we normally say at SIT, “sharing time is happy time”. As a way of evaluation, group members review how well they learned and taught and how they might improve the process. This process works well when the teacher leaves some time at the end of the lesson for assessment. During this assessment, the teacher takes note about what the students are saying and the difficulties they face. These are to be addressed in subsequent lessons. The evaluation tells the teacher what the students did and did not learn.

Usually, when one student says that he does not understand something during the evaluation process, there will be at least one other student who will be

willing to explain. Again, the teacher needs to let this happen and provide answers only as a last resort. Let the students take charge of their own learning. This technique results in an effective outcome for various reasons.

First, because students know that they are going to share with others, they are eager to learn the material themselves to make sure they do not appear inept in front of their peers. By teaching others they themselves get to master the subject much better. In the words of Comenius; "He who teaches others, teaches himself" (Rodgers 1998:3).

Second, the atmosphere and the environment are excellent. There is enough space for students to move about easily.

Third, it requires preparation on the part of the teacher. While the students are interacting, it is not a time for the teacher to sit at his desk grading papers; but a time to circulate between the groups to help them when they encounter difficulties.

I remember during an activity in which I was using this technique; two students in a group were arguing about the correct pronunciation of "were." One student pronounced it correctly, as "were" with the mouth almost closed, the other pronounced it as "where" with the mouth opened. I helped them solve the problem with the simple question, "Where were you yesterday?" I said it several times and asked them to write it down. Eventually, both of them wrote the same thing. Then, I asked them to dictate the sentence to me. Finally, they were able to differentiate between these two words.

It happened that I heard the argument again with two other students. This time I asked one of the two previous students to come and explain the meaning in

pronunciation between these two words. They did it to the satisfaction of the whole class. I cannot agree more with Caleb Gategno (1976) when he commented on his method of teaching languages, "I don't teach languages. I involve students in the right activities pertaining to the linguistic situations, and they end up functioning in the language."

Conclusion

Peer interaction, as a way to generate knowledge, is not something new but it is becoming an increasingly popular teaching strategy. From personal teaching experience, I have found many benefits to using peer interaction in the classroom, and it can easily be integrated into whatever you are doing at any grade level. It does not cost much and it is not difficult to initiate. It can be challenging to initiate, but in the long run it will be a rewarding learning experience for both the teacher and the students.

In this chapter, I have defined peer interaction as a successful learning strategy in which students are divided into small groups. Each group has students of different levels of ability. They use many different learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject by sharing with one another. Each group member is not only responsible for learning the material presented, but also for ensuring that everyone in the group knows the material as well.

I have defined, discussed, and explained the key components of peer interaction; namely, positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability and personal responsibility, small group skills, and group processing. I also have looked at the requirements that peer interaction places upon

both teachers and students, and I have described one peer interaction technique drawn from my own teaching experience.

I conclude this section about peer interaction by saying that one of the marks of a great teacher is the willingness to afford students the opportunity to learn from one another. A mediocre teacher tells. A good teacher demonstrates. A great teacher inspires. It is this inspiration, provided by the teacher, which motivates the students and makes them want to do the job assigned. As it is often said, "It takes better teachers to focus on the learners" (qtd. in Fenel, 2001, p.134).

The context in which teaching and learning take place is a crucial determiner of the success of the students; but it is often neglected and ignored. Since the learning context is crucial, the first step for the teacher is to identify the key aspects of that concept before deciding how to teach. In the next chapter, I am going to focus on the context.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HAITIAN PUBLIC SCHOOL CONTEXT

Having defined peer interaction and its components in chapter one, it is now time to look at the context in which this peer interaction is going to take place. This said, this chapter does not set out to provide a comprehensible taxonomy of all the aspects within the Haitian public school context, given the scope of this paper; rather to mention some key challenges for peer interaction. This chapter will begin with a brief history of the Haitian educational system and will examine the reform initiatives that have taken place. An overview of the present Haitian educational system will be presented, along with a personal analysis of that system. The chapter will conclude with an examination of the implications for peer interaction within the Haitian context and some key challenges to peer interaction, such as older students, differences in methodology and large classes.

1. Brief History

Haiti's first schools were established shortly after the Constitution of 1805, which mandated free and compulsory primary education. The Education Act of 1848 created rural primary schools with a limited, mostly agricultural curriculum. But while education was promoted, at least in principle, by Haiti's post-colonial leaders, a comprehensive and accessible school system never developed. Modeled on the French system, the Haitian educational system followed a classical curriculum. This curriculum remained basically unchanged until the education reform of 1978.

As in France, the educational school cycle consisted of 14 years of education: seven at the elementary level and seven at the secondary level. Elementary primary education began with kindergarten and continued through preparatory, elementary, and intermediate cycles, each of which lasted two years. Upon completion of the six years, a student received a Primary Education Certificate (CEP). The student could then take examinations for admission to secondary school, and upon passing the exam, enter either a *lycée* (a public school) or a *collège* (a private school). Secondary education consisted of seven years of instruction: a three-year lower cycle and a four-year upper cycle. Education at the secondary level was rigorous and usually of high quality. Successful completion of the philosophy class, the seventh year, qualified the student for admission to university.

Reform Initiatives

Many years after the first schools were established, there were efforts to reform Haiti's educational system to make education more accessible to the poor and more relevant to their needs. The reforms, however, were only partly successful at best, and much of the old system remained in place throughout the country. Other instructional innovations involved grouping children by ability and an emphasis on discovery learning rather than on memorization.

Despite the reforms, obtaining an education in Haiti remained an elusive goal for most people. Even though education was technically free in Haiti, it remained beyond the means of most Haitians, who could not afford the supplemental fees, school supplies, and uniforms required. Thus, education

remained a privilege of the upper and middle classes, with fluency in French a marker of success. Today, although plans for further implementation of reforms have not been abandoned, the current economic and political crises in Haiti have overshadowed educational concerns. Haiti's school system still needs an overall reform.

For close to two decades, Haiti has been carrying out extensive reforms of its educational system. The latest, the "Bernard Reform," named after the then Minister of Education, was authorized by the Schools Act of March 1982. However, lack of participation on the part of beneficiaries, as well as misunderstanding and even hostility on the part of the public, led those in charge to make major changes to the context of the project in an effort to make it more acceptable.

The idea of reforming the Haitian educational system was born in 1980. In fact, two years later, in March 1982, a law officially launched this reform, which outlined the implementation of basic education spread over a 10-year period. One year was devoted to early childhood education and three cycles of three years each, which would enable the student to proceed to secondary school for three years, leading to a general or specialized baccalaureate.

Compared to 1982, the current situation has changed only slightly: preference is given to basic education spread over nine years, after which the student is entitled to proceed to the 4-year secondary level. One cannot help but notice that, thanks to the reform, a new dynamic has been brought to the

educational environment, thus demonstrating the will to produce a system which is much more efficient.

Shortly after the introduction of this reform, following the fall of the Duvalier regime in February 1986, the country found itself facing a serious socio-economic and political crisis that affected all Haitian institutions. The education sector was not spared. This explains why the system functioned without any real operational guidelines until the adoption of the constitution of 1987, which resulted in the preparation of the National Education and Training Plan (PNEF) in 1995, based on a thorough examination of the educational system.

The plan has four general objectives.

1. Reinforcement of the quality of education
2. Improved external efficiency of the educational system
3. Increased access to education
4. Improved governance of the system

Once these objectives are met, education should be able to foster, among Haitians, an awareness, a sense of belonging to their country, and the capacity to ensure its economic and social development.

Among the problems identified, which the PNEF aims to solve, is that of older students, a major source of concern and a serious handicap to the improvement of the Haitian educational system. Besides large classes, it is one of the many problems that affect peer interaction and the efficacy of education. According to statistics gathered between 1994 and 1998, over-age students represent almost 50% of the school population. At such a high percentage, this

phenomenon has become too prevalent, and is likely to limit the scope of all future efforts of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MENJS) which aimed at improving and consolidating the educational system.

To this end, the mission pursued by the new Haitian educational system is to develop a sense of responsibility and community of spirit among Haitians. With this aim in mind; peer interaction will play a very important role in the process.

II. Overview of the Present Haitian Educational System

On the subject of reform initiatives, it is still difficult for a large majority of Haitians to get an education. It goes without saying that the system needs to be improved still. In order to have a bird's eye view of the present Haitian educational system; I would like to provide a chart that can explain the system. Then I will briefly consider the public and private school sectors and teacher education.

A. Organizational Chart of the Present Educational System

Employment

University

Tertiary Education

Secondary Education

Final year(Philosophy)	18th year
1st year	17th year
2nd year	16th year
3rd year	15th year

9th AF (3rd cycle)	14th year
8th AF (3rd cycle)	13th year
7th AF (3rd cycle)	12th year

Primary Education

6th AF (2nd cycle)	11th year
5th AF (2nd cycle)	10th year

4th AF (1st cycle)	9th year
3rd AF(1st cycle)	8th year
2nd AF (1st cycle)	7th year
1st AF (1st cycle)	6th year

Pre-school

Upper Section	5th year
Middle Section	4th year
Lower Section	3rd year

The formal system of education consists of:

1. Early childhood education(kindergarten, from 3 to 5 years)
2. Primary Education (nine years)
3. Secondary Education(four years)
4. Technical and Vocational Education(this option is still under consideration)
5. University Education (provided by faculties and institutes of higher learning in the Haitian University system, or in private institutions recognized by the University of Haiti (UEH). To be eligible, students need to have completed the second part of the baccalaureate.

B. Public and Private Schools

The private sector owns the majority of the schools. Those private schools are very expensive, taking into consideration the parents' income. For this reason, the parents cannot afford them. Some of these private schools have the infrastructure but do not provide a high quality education. They get the cheapest teachers possible.

In the so-called public schools in Haiti, there is an entrance exam. The entrance exam is a means to get the cream of the crop. But in some instances, it is not the cream of the crop that gets the chance to pass; it is an acquaintance. The reason lies in the fact that the private schools are so expensive that the parents cannot afford them. So, they will do whatever it takes to get their children into the public schools. These schools have too many students. In some instances, students sit on the floor because there aren't enough seats for them. They have to buy their own books. In the public school where I was working in Arcahaie and most public schools, there is no library. Public school teachers are sometimes on strike for a salary increase due to the rising cost of living.

Haiti is one of the Caribbean countries that has the highest percentage of illiterate people because the government is partly depending on the allied countries for humanitarian help. Also, there are not enough job opportunities to support the people. This has caused many children to drop out of school before even attending high school. While the world is introducing computers in the classrooms, in Haiti, children are still memorizing sentences that they sometimes don't even understand.

According to statistics gathered by UNICEF[3], "the percentage of primary school entrants reaching grade 5 is 41 from 1998 to 2001(administrative data); and 88 from 1997 to 2003 (survey data). The secondary school enrolment ratio for male is 21; and the secondary school enrolment ratio for female is 20 from 1998 to 2002." (For more detailed statistics from UNICEF, see bibliography). The majority of Haitian children do not attend school after the primary grades. Haiti remains with a 65% illiteracy rate.

In short, although a lot of reforms have already taken place, there are a lot of problems still to be solved within the Haitian educational system.

C. Teacher Education

Secondary school teachers for the various disciplines are trained at the Secondary School Teacher Training Institute (ENS), a public institution. Many teachers enter the profession after having done their philosophy class, with no specific training. For primary and secondary school teachers, the MENJS and operators of private educational institutions organize seminars and professional development workshops. There are also few private institutions that train teachers. It goes without saying that there is a huge number of teachers who are not trained. The Ministry of Education has no set of standards for teachers and no minimal educational requirements.

III. A Personal Analysis

It is ironic that the school --which alone among formal institutions has teaching as its primary goal --is notable for a lack of teacher-training and

[3] Unicef stands for United nations International Children's Emergency Fund

mandatory in-service upgrading. It should be no secret that great teaching and learning are so intertwined as to be virtually inseparable. For instance, the Hebrew words for teach (*lamad*) and learn (*limmud*) both derive from the same root l-m-d. It helps communicate the fact that an outstanding teacher must be a diligent learner; the excellent learner has the best opportunity to be a great teacher. Teaching and learning are part and parcel of the same package of communication

Teaching is a complex subject. It involves a teacher, a pupil(s), an environment or context, the subject matter, an aim, and a method. Communicative language teaching (CLT) has served the language teaching profession well for many years, and the benefits of an emphasis on communication are widely accepted by language teachers everywhere. However, CLT has always neglected one key aspect of language teaching: the context in which it takes place. Many of the researches have to do with small classes with access to good resources.

Teaching in public schools in Haiti, as well as in other third world countries, is a challenge. The emphasis of this paper is public schools, but teachers in many private schools in Haiti face the same challenges. I remember teaching English in two classes: 7^{th} and 8^{th} graders in a private school in Arcahaie a couple years ago. The seventh grade had 130 students and the eighth grade had 140 students. During the two months spent there, I could only name a few students. Normally my motto is: "Go to people, live among them, learn from them, respect them, start from what they know, and build on what they have." However, I found myself powerless and unprofessional. I taught these two classes for two months:

October and November; then I looked for a substitute who was eventually very glad to get the job, and I quit. I carry this picture with me everywhere.

I learned a lot during the academic year at the School for International Training, but my concern was how could this knowledge be applied to the Haitian context. The focus on methodology leads us to neglect the context in which teaching takes place. It sends the message that the solution to the problem of teaching is a methodological one. This message and attitude send a damaging effect on the profession. It implies the context is incidental, to be taken for granted. Methodology is not the magic solution in learning languages. The context is recognized as a crucial determiner of the success of learners. Good teachers instinctively take account of the context in which they teach.

Since the first priority is the learning context, the first step for the teacher is to identify key aspects of that concept before deciding how to teach. This will include an understanding of individual students and their learning needs and styles, as well as the course books, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, national culture, and so on. Then the teacher will identify a suitable approach and language focus. It may be that an emphasis on grammar is useful to start with, or an emphasis on oral communication. It may be that group work is suitable, or not. The approach will probably be eclectic, in order to meet various learners' needs.

Since the first priority for the teacher is to identify the teaching/learning context, it is important to consider some of the different elements that make up this context. Once these elements have been identified, it is essential to see how they apply to the teaching/learning context as it exists in Haiti.

The first element is the **social** context (friends, colleagues, shared assumptions and values of the workplace and the discipline). The social environment, including the relationship between teacher and students, and the cultural norms play a significant role in what can and does occur in the classroom. This is where older students can be a challenge to the effectiveness of peer interaction. The younger ones sometimes show little respect for the older ones. How friendly/approachable a teacher seems to be determines how outgoing students will be and the kind of communication that will characterize classroom interaction. The cultural norms-what is expected of a teacher and a student-also have to be considered. This includes norms and attitudes regarding gender, age, class and ethnic roles. Girls are likely to interact with girls, but boys see it differently. Students in public schools in Haiti are very sociable, but at the same time can be very noisy. They respect teachers who respect themselves in the way they dress and prepare their lessons.

A social event is a favorite Haitian activity. Haitian students are quite comfortable and confident in challenging statements and arguing with their peers. Their confidence comes from their everyday life experience. Argumentative discussion is a major feature of social interaction among Haitian adults and can be seen in the way people in Haiti interact. This form of discussion, which facilitates peer interaction, can be a great resource for students as they practice English.

Haitian students may also be disturbed by the informal teacher–student relationship, and may perceive this informality as a lack of respect. In Haiti the teacher addresses all students by their last names and has total authority over the

class. Some students speak only when asked a question. By the same token, Haitian students may sometimes overstep the boundaries of informal behavior that they are trying to learn from their classmates and teachers; this should be tolerated as part of the learning process.

The second element is the **institutional** context. The way the school is organized, its structures of rewards and expectations makes the institutional context. There are some private institutions in Haiti where the administrators care little about what is taking place in the classrooms. The institutional norms play a similar role as cultural norms but perhaps more strongly affect what behaviors the teacher and students see as acceptable. There are schools where teachers are encouraged to take risks or try something new and many where they are not. There are also some where students are highly encouraged to take an active role in their own education. The culture of the institution determines what is valued/ rewarded/recognized in the context.

In Haiti, parents are not routinely asked or encouraged to participate in school matters and decisions. They feel that teachers know best. In Haiti, if a parent is called to school, it generally means that the child has committed a great transgression; as a result, Haitian parents may react negatively or fearfully to a request for a routine parent–teacher conference. Haitian parents, like their offspring, also need to be gently educated as to what is expected of them.

The third element is the **educational** context: how the curriculum and the educationally shaped contexts -hours, courses, organizational matters -are structured. It is even difficult sometimes for teachers to get a copy of the

curriculum then, one can foresee how catastrophic it is for students who have a teacher who creates his own program or teaches without regard to the program. School directors need to make sure that the teachers are following the curriculum because regardless of which school the student attends, he is going to take the final state exam like everybody else. For instance, it is stated in the curriculum that three hours per week should be given for English and three for Spanish, but some schools just give two. This provides less time for the student to be able to communicate in the language after spending seven years learning it.

Students who have participated in the Haitian educational system will exhibit different behaviors and certainly have values and expectations different from other students. A major difference between the Haitian educational system and other systems can be seen in styles of teaching and learning. The Haitian curriculum requires learning many subjects in detail. Raw learning and memorization are the norm.

Grading and testing are very strict and formal in Haiti. Haitian students tend to attach greater importance to grades and tests, even quizzes than to interacting with one another during a learning process. The notion that what one learns is more important than the grade one earns will be somewhat confusing to a Haitian student.

The fourth element is the physical context. The physical environment includes the classroom where teaching/learning occurs. For instance, the arrangement of the desks encourages some kinds of interactions and discourages others. Most public schools in Haiti have benches instead of desks. In some

instances, students sit on the floor. This can make peer interaction less effective. Other factors such as lighting, heat, time of day, and even the day of the week can make a difference. Some schools are structured in certain ways to really facilitate learning and some are not. Some classrooms are assigned to serve many different kinds of classes in the course of a day. The teacher has to carry teaching materials every time he goes to class. I know some schools where peer interaction is almost impossible because classrooms are too close. In order to provide some ventilation, often the walls in the classrooms do not go to the ceiling, so noise from surrounding classrooms is a constant problem.

Last, but certainly not least, is the **personal** context, which each teacher and every student brings to the classroom. Personal context includes problems and stress that the teacher and students may be dealing with in their daily lives. Sometimes, students leave home hungry. They do not see what the future holds for them because those who already finished their philosophy cannot find a job or to go to university. They also have to deal with family issues at times. All these issues can affect their behavior and their learning. That is the reason that a teacher needs to have some basic notions of psychology. A teacher may consider himself/herself as a breadwinner, but he/she never knows where his/her influence may reach. Additionally, personal context includes the teacher's attitudes about learning, teaching, students and their own abilities, and the subject matter. Most importantly, a teacher needs to be able to teach students from where they are. A teacher, in order to succeed, must believe in himself/herself, his/her students and the importance of his/her subject. Marva Collins (1982) says, "If you believe in your students, the

only thing you need is a piece of chalk, a blackboard, and a pair of good legs that will stand throughout the day."

I strongly agree with Marva because the students are already linguists. They have already learned their mother tongue. They have the potentiality to learning a second or foreign language. They just need confidence in themselves and this is what the teacher needs to give them by believing in them.

IV. Implications for peer interaction

Regarding peer interaction and the Haitian context, I would like to address some specific issues for peer interaction. I have taken into consideration the primary issues that peer interaction entails. Among these, I would like to mention, first of all, the differences in methodology: where the teacher has to give control over to the students. Next, the role of curricula: are teachers expected to follow an established curriculum; and is there time and space in this curriculum for the addition of peer interaction techniques? Also, is it a problem for younger and older students to interact? Moreover, will tests and assessment affect peer interaction? Furthermore, are large classes and lack of resources a problem for peer interaction? Finally, do teachers have freedom or license to innovate? Do they have such control? Who supervises them? Will these supervisors allow peer interaction?

The list could on and on. But given the scope of this paper, consideration will be given to three of these above mentioned challenges to peer interaction in the Haitian context, namely, older students, difference in methodology, and large classes. Of all the challenges presented by the Haitian educational system, these three are the most challenging.

A. Older Students

One of the greatest problems facing the school system in Haiti is that of students who exceed age limits. This phenomenon, which to a significant degree affects all geographic areas of the country irrespective of the nature of the environment, is the result of two major factors. The first factor is peculiar to the system itself such as late entry into school, repetition, interrupted schooling, etc. The second factor has to do with specific features of the environment such as illness, change of address, or other problems.

A large number of students cannot begin their schooling at the required age because of the limited availability of education in the country. With regard to those who have the opportunity, it often happens that, because of interruptions in their schooling or repeating successive grade levels, they have difficulty completing the two cycles of basic education within the time allowed. They may have exceeded the age appropriate for their present level of achievement or the age appropriate for the two cycles. Thus, it is mainly because of late entry into school and poor academic results that age limits are exceeded.

Many school-aged children are not in school, and there are many reasons for this. Among these reasons is a lack of understanding on the part of many parents of the need to enroll their children in school on time. Also, there are some parents who give priority to the education of boys over girls. Some parents simply refuse to send their children to school because they want to keep them at home to do domestic chores. Others refuse to send their children to school because they need them in the fields for agricultural work. Still others want to keep them at

home because they consider them to be too young to travel long distances to go to school, causing them, as a result, to be far from home at late hours.

Some parents may not have the financial means to send their children to a private school in their neighborhood, which often does not have a public school; so they enroll them in school at a later age. This results in the entry of these children into the first year of school one or two years above the legal age limit. Although these children may cover the first two phases of their primary education without repeating, they will definitely be above the age limit of 11 years at the end of their primary level.

This problem has a negative effect on the efficiency of the system and also gives rise to additional expenses. Children, who have to repeat classes because they fail, use more resources than they would have if they had not been made to repeat. They are required to take additional classes during the summer and these classes are more expensive than regular classes during the academic year.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Haitian constitution of 1987, and the International Declaration on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, March 1990), all grant these students the right to an education. Therefore, everything must be done to ensure that they are provided for, through programs specially designed for them in case that teachers cannot face the challenge of older students in the language classroom.

Socially, older students in the classroom pose a challenge to implementing peer interaction. Younger students want to interact with students their own age. Older students don't really cause a problem to interact with the younger ones, but

the younger ones do. Developing working relationships among older and younger among students is a challenge for the teacher. Chapter three will offer some practical solutions for dealing with older students in the language classroom.

B. Differences in Methodology

According to Webster (1995), methodology is "a system of methods and rules applied in a science." Within methodology itself, there are two distinct concepts, namely, methods and approaches. Methods are fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices. Approaches are language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom. Throughout the 20th century, the quest for better methods has preoccupied teachers and applied linguists, and they have done a good job on that matter. I do not intend, however, to describe the various methods that the language teaching entails because such a task is beyond the scope of this paper. I will deal with some issues for which peer interaction is a challenge such as give control over to students, and changing teachers' minds and practices.

Although the quest for better methods has preoccupied many teachers and linguists, many Haitian language teachers are still using traditional, old fashioned methods such as the grammar translation method. These traditional methods are based on the assumption that language is primarily graphic. According to these methods, the main purpose of language study is to build knowledge of the structure of the language either as a tool for literary research or translation.

Teaching within traditional methods is rigid and divorced from the needs of real life, for language is used for self-expression. This kind of teaching develops

docility, passivity and conformity on the part of the students. It does not provide a safe environment for the students to interact with one another. Within these traditional classrooms, the teacher is in charge and controls the learning altogether.

Although seminars are sometimes conducted that demand a student-centered approach, the classroom methodology actually reverted to a traditional teacher-centered method because teachers were unprepared and found it easier to fall back on methods they had been using for a long time.

The problems with the Haitian foreign language teaching are threefold: teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and grammar-centered.

First, teaching is teacher-centered. The language teacher has sole authority in the classroom and therefore should not be questioned, interrupted, or challenged. The judgment of the teacher is final and the students' job is to write down vocabulary words and memorize them after class. For the students, raising many questions would mean disturbing the class and showing disrespect for the teacher. They tend to stay quiet. The notion that the teacher should be all-knowing has not only made language learners afraid to speak up, but also forced the teacher to avoid any error and play it safe by only using the students' mother tongue in teaching or using what is printed in the text.

Second, teaching is textbook-centered. Textbooks have the highest authority. Learning texts by heart is a common practice. Too much emphasis is placed on written documents. For many Haitian students and teachers, books are thought of as an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. Knowledge is in the book and can be taken out of the book and put inside the students' heads.

Third, teaching is grammar-centered. Language is seen as governed by grammar,

just as the universe is governed by sacred laws. The actual use of language is not given much consideration. After spending seven years at the secondary level learning a foreign language, the students cannot hold a five-minute conversation because all that they were learning was grammar. In an EFL context, the students' only contact with the target language is basically the classroom, which in too many cases means the textbook and the teacher.

Moreover, because an English teacher has only two to three hours per week in each class, it is not possible to provide enough time for students to practice in class. Therefore, it is of paramount importance that the teacher allow enough time for students to interact with the language as much as possible.

Another factor working against the reform of English education is test-oriented teaching. The whole process of teaching and learning is also heavily influenced by examinations. The teaching pattern is textbook-based, teacher-dominated and test-oriented, which prevents students from improving their communicative competence using peer interaction. Little or no attention is paid to speaking or listening.

The challenge is to break out of the traditional language teaching to promote language learning in authentic language environments by means of peer interaction. Teachers need to step away from traditional language teaching materials and methods by allowing the students to play an active role in the discovery process through peer interaction. Because teaching within the Haitian context is traditional and teacher-centered, the students do not have freedom in their learning and therefore feel unsafe to interact with one another. There are considerable challenges to overcome so as to implement peer interaction. The next chapter will provide some practical solutions.

C. Large Classes

Large classes are a reality in Haiti and in many other countries, and they pose particular challenges. It is difficult for the teacher to keep good discipline going. He has to provide for more children of different ages and different abilities, who want to learn different things at different speeds and in different ways. Also, he cannot easily give each child the individual attention he needs.

While some Haitian teachers will not routinely have sections with as many as 100 students, many will teach sections that feel large to them. Some teachers simply define large as too many students to learn names by the end of the cycle. Large classes are not necessarily less effective than smaller ones, but they do require more conscious effort and planning.

Because of the special problems scale imposes on the teaching-learning process, it is a good idea for teachers in different disciplines to talk with one another to share effective solutions to the often difficult problems of large classes. These solutions can also be of interest to those who do not teach large classes. Accordingly, they can be the most innovative and effective solutions to common problems. In the large class, for example, students do not have the opportunity to interact as much with the teacher and each other as they do in smaller sections.

Like small classes, large classes work best when students take an active interest in the subject, and when teachers personalize their presentation and respect their students. However, while these basic principles of good teaching apply in large as well as small classes, it is obvious that the number of students in a large

class can magnify some problems that might be much more manageable in a smaller class.

Teachers of large classes commonly have questions about how to handle the impact of so many students on issues like attendance, interaction between and among students, assignments, motivating students, testing, and providing students with helpful feedback on their work. There is no one right way to teach a large class.

In my own observation and experience with large classes, the challenge of peer interaction is primarily one of logistics, i.e., how to organize and manage putting students into groups, and how to keep track of them while they are working. How to design and administer the group task accountability is another challenge. Another consideration is the limitations of space in the room, which affects movement of students, and also noise when all the groups are working. Additionally, classrooms are sometimes too close to one another. When the students start interacting with one another, your neighbor teacher will come and ask you to give him a chance too.

Within the alarming state of education in Haiti, the MENJS must guarantee efficient management and better control of the school system. This would necessarily involve the strengthening of the regulatory role of government, through a redefinition of new education policies and the establishment of mechanisms for ensuring their strict observance. It is, therefore, imperative that a thorough study of the phenomenon of large classes be conducted. This will facilitate the identification

of the factors that must be addressed, in order to establish clear perspectives for solutions

Conclusion

Language teaching in Haiti is teacher-centered, textbook-centered, and grammar-centered. In most instances, the teacher controls the learning. Among the challenges for the implementation of peer interaction, three have been identified: older students, large classes and differences in methodology. In the last chapter, some practical guidelines will be provided for these three specific challenges for using peer interaction as a way to generate knowledge.

CHAPTER THREE

HOW CAN PEER INTERACTION BE ADAPTED TO THE HAITIAN CONTEXT?

In chapter two I mentioned three main factors that are challenges to peer interaction in the Haitian public school context, namely, older students, differences in methodology, and large classes with very tradition-oriented students and teachers. In this third and last chapter, the overall purpose is to demonstrate in very specific terms how to overcome these barriers and how to incorporate peer interaction in the Haitian public schools context by providing some guidelines.

A. Older Students

The ability for people to get along with one another in society depends a great deal on the kind of interaction they had with one another during their school years. It is of paramount importance that students develop skills in interactional exchanges in order to be successful both in their studies and in life. In order to achieve this goal, teachers need to provide them with opportunities for meaningful communicative behavior when their classes are made up of learners of different ages.

As mentioned in chapter two, older students seem to be uncomfortable having younger students in the same setting as they are. The reaction of younger students is sometimes a handicap for the older students, who have different language learning skills, levels, speeds, and even interests than younger students

have. By way of contrast, having older students in the classroom is not altogether negative. They can be a benefit to younger students due to their experiences.

"Learning is a social activity" according to constructivist theories of learning (Bruner, 1966). Therefore, learners need to situate their learning in relation to their life experiences and previous learning, and to share their learning process with others accordingly. Motivation to learn is also important to gaining and maintaining attention in the classroom. Students will be more motivated if the environment is inclusive and respectful of their background knowledge, levels, needs, interests and aspirations. Engaging students of different ages in large classes and getting them to engage with each other is hard, but there are ways in which this can be done effectively.

Older students are afraid of making mistakes in front of younger ones. Speaking a foreign language in front of younger students is often anxiety provoking for them. Sometimes, extreme anxiety occurs when they become tongue-tied or lost for words in an unexpected situation, which often leads to discouragement and a general sense of failure. Older students, unlike the younger ones, are much more concerned with how they are judged by others. They are very cautious about making errors in what they say, for making mistakes would be a public display of ignorance. We, as teachers, have the responsibility to help our students understand that mistakes, in this context, are steps toward learning. He who has never committed any mistakes hasn't really tried anything worthwhile.

Placing socially unskilled older and younger students in a group and telling them to cooperate, does not guarantee that they have the ability to do so effectively.

In general, we are not born instinctively knowing how to interact effectively with others. Interpersonal and small-group skills do not magically appear when they are needed. Students must be taught the social skills required for high quality collaboration and be motivated to use them in peer interaction.

Groups consisting of older and younger students need to describe what member actions are helpful and not helpful in completing the group's work and make decisions about what behaviors to keep or change so as to facilitate cooperation. Such processing enables students to focus on maintaining good working relationships among themselves, facilitates the learning of cooperative skills, motivates students to respect themselves and others, provides the means to celebrate the success of the group and reinforce the positive behaviors of group members.

All knowledge is social in nature. Learning occurs in a context of social interactions leading to understanding. On a positive note, older students in the classroom can actually be an advantage because they are most likely to provide scaffolding within the social interaction that is often provided by the teacher. They also help with keeping discipline in the classroom. It is advantageous for the entire class when both older and younger students put away their differences and see themselves as human beings who come together to talk and listen and learn from one another.

When a student understands a concept well enough to explain it to a peer, whether it be an older one or a younger one, he or she really comprehends. Also, helping others builds self-confidence. Teaching others requires one to engage in

higher level processing in order to internalize the information to the degree necessary to attempt to instruct another. We remember best the ideas that we attempt to teach others. As John Amos Comenius put it, "He who teaches others, teaches himself "(Rodgers 1988:3).

Scaffolding is an important instructional tool because it supports students' learning. It helps students to understand that they can teach and learn from others. This leads to collaboration, which is an important life skill. Learning in this type of socially constructed environment leads to students taking responsibility for their own learning and respecting their own and others' thinking.

When I asked the whole class why they liked helping each other, four of my students at the Riverside Language Program in NYC, who ranged from ages 22 to 45, answered:

a. I like to work with other people because it helps me learn to cooperate.
b. We get to share ideas together. We learn new things from others, and we can also give ideas.
c. I agree. It's fun helping out others. People help me because I help them.
d. When I work with others, they help me understand.

In Haiti, the problem of older students in the classroom is the product of the Haitian educational system itself. It cannot be eliminated as we wish. Hence, we need to find ways to cope with it. The best solution would be to have two different kinds of schools, but we know to finance even one, the government depends on external aid. Therefore, to deal with the problem of older students in the classroom, the following thirteen practical guidelines will prove essential. These

guidelines have to do with developing working relationships among students, which is where the various features of cooperative learning come into play.

1. Motivate students from the beginning of the academic year about the importance of working together. I used to tell my students that in our classroom, we are soccer players, not tennis players. Our success or our failure depends on our cooperation. Motivation is a powerful tool. Whether or not you are a great teacher and whether or not you have the best materials and texts, or just the basic resources, a student will learn only if he or she is motivated enough to do so. Peer interaction with older students in the classroom will work best when students are motivated.
2. Establish guidelines, norms and rules for how to work together. Students can have a voice in establishing these rules.
3. Emphasize the use of skills necessary to collaborate with others. For example, focus on turn taking by putting a pencil or something in the middle of the group, and only the person holding the pencil can talk. Then, everyone else must take a turn before that person can talk again.
4. Discuss the idea of learning from one another before doing any group work, and students can talk about both advantages and disadvantages.
5. Stress that in life we seldom get to choose whether to work alone or with others, or with whom we must collaborate. Many jobs involve working with others. Remind students that they are now provided with the opportunity to practice this collaboration.

6. Start with random grouping at first to see what happens, so that the students all get to know one another. They can form groups with whomever they wish. At a certain period or at mid-term, form more heterogeneous groups according to past achievement and background, age, level, whichever way you see will work best. Teachers are their own best resources. Remember that teaching, in a way, is like driving. You cannot really stay home and say this is the way you are going to drive on the road. You react according to the present situation.
7. Form groups of older age students together and younger ones together. That is the way they normally sit if seats are not assigned. At times, a combination of both works better.
8. Move students forward and backward one row during the course of your class. again, this may cause another problem because older students may be taller than the younger ones. The teacher needs to work out a way of moving students so that different students have the chance of working with each other during the cycle. While moving students around poses some problems, it helps classroom discipline by preventing small disruptive groups from forming.
9. Inviting students to group themselves according to such criteria as birthday months, clothes colors may help them overcome whatever makes them hesitant to work with one another.
10. Weaker students may stop learning because they do not understand. Stronger students may dominate by gaining most of your attention and by giving all the answers. Sometimes the stronger students may stop learning and get bored because they find the work too easy. It is a big challenge to keep all students

motivated so that all succeed. So, Plan activities where the weaker students complete just one part, and the stronger ones complete the whole learning activity. Encourage the stronger students to help the weaker ones. You may find them very enthusiastic about taking on this role.

11. Prepare students for cooperative tasks, and assign students to specific, meaningful and manageable tasks.
12. Let students know how much we have learned from them. This will motivate them to believe they can learn from one another. Perhaps students don't know that they can learn from one another, especially with very traditional students who think that the teacher is the provider of knowledge. We can give our own examples of learning from peers and ask students for their examples. The use of activities such as jigsaw, in which information sharing is required, helps emphasize the benefits of sharing with others. While students are in their cooperative groups, the teacher is circulating among them--not back at the desk, if s/he has one, marking papers. S/he makes himself/herself available to help groups that get stuck.
13. Cultivate a positive and pleasant attitude. Teachers need not love their students but respect them for who they are. Students are much more eager to learn when they see that we, as teachers, respect them. Words such as lazy or stupid may make it difficult to get students motivated and disciplined.

It is obvious that more and more workplaces are now team-oriented. These workplaces are composed of people of different age levels working together to achieve a goal. Therefore, students of today who will become workers of tomorrow

need to know how to interact with others, regardless of age differences, to increase productivity and enjoyment in learning and working. Thus, peer interaction prepares them for the tests they will face outside the school. The suggestions and guidelines provided above are obviously not intended to be exhaustive because there are no instant recipes. However, they should begin to illuminate the ways whereby a teacher can cope with older students in the language classroom. If our goal as teachers is to provide students with the tools they need to be successful in the real world, then the first step toward reaching this goal is to help them learn to work with people who are either older or younger than themselves.

B. Differences in Methodology

The period from the 1950s to the 1980s has often been referred to as the age of methods, during which a number of methods and approaches for language teaching were proposed. By the beginning of the 1980s, these methods in turn came to be overshadowed by more interactive views of language teaching because methodology must link both theory and practice. This section is not intended to describe these various methods because such a task is far beyond the aim and the scope of this paper. On the contrary, I do intend to address teachers personally in the paragraphs that follow since the majority of Haitian students cannot speak English after spending seven years learning it. It is necessary for us as teachers to try other approaches and techniques that will afford students the opportunity to communicate in the language.

Here are some characteristics of the typical Haitian language classroom. The teacher is the sole authority in the classroom. The students do as he/she says.

Students can learn only what the teacher knows. Most of the interaction in the classroom is from the teacher to the students. The teacher is the knower and the provider of knowledge.

From a bird's eye view, this kind of atmosphere cannot provide a good environment for learning to take place. Therefore, if we want our students to be able to communicate in the target language, we need to try other methods, approaches and techniques. One technique we can use as much as possible in the language classroom is peer interaction because students, once they have been given a piece of information, can interact between and among themselves to generate knowledge. This technique is centered on the students and on the learning, and it will produce positive results.

Our goal as teachers is to enable students to communicate in the target language because language is for self-expression. We need to facilitate peer interaction in the classroom by establishing situations likely to promote communication. We need to let students be responsible managers of their own learning and develop their own inner criteria. Caleb Gategno (1970) once commented on his way to teaching languages, "I don't teach languages, I involve students in the right activities pertaining to the linguistic situations, and they end up functioning in the language." After presenting the lesson, we need to establish situations, by means of activities, that prompt communication between and among students. The students, who are already linguists, will end up owning the language. One of the reasons for which students sometimes are not interested in learning languages is because they don't feel they are learning to do something useful with

the language. Giving them the opportunity to begin using the language in the classroom setting will surely motivate them.

We cannot provide our students with all the knowledge and the skills they will need in their active adult lives. Therefore, we should not and cannot dominate the learning. On the contrary, we need to allow the students to take ownership of the process. We do this by setting the right atmosphere for the learning to effectively take place. If we want students to speak the target language, we need to make sure that we, teachers, use it as the channel of teaching in the classroom. Language learning cannot be carried out with constant use of the students' native language. It is impossible to learn a language within another language. That is why after spending more than seven years learning English, most Haitian students cannot hold a five-minute conversation in the target language.

This is by no means prescriptive, since a universal methodology that fits everyone does not exist. Teachers need to examine the context in which they teach to find out what is best for them. But I believe that since students have already acquired their mother tongue, they have the ability inside themselves to acquire a foreign language. We just need to provide them with the opportunity to do so. Paulo Freire's Participatory Approach reflects my thinking in this area. He said, "my greatest gift lies in not giving you a gift"(Auerbach 1999). Learning is not a gift that the teacher can give, but what the students achieve by themselves. It is very tempting when students ask for something or an explanation not to just say it, but we need to try not to give them gifts that rob them of chances to participate in directing their own learning. Caleb Gategno (1976) notes, "Don’t do for students

what they can do for themselves," and Confucius (qtd. in Fenel 2001, p. 132) adds, "Instead of giving a fish, teach them how to fish." Our responsibility as teachers is to encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning.

This said, there are certain points that we need to bear in mind in order to accomplish this. First, students learn a language through using it to communicate. They don't learn it through memorizing vocabulary words and grammar. They do need vocabulary words and grammar, of course, but this is not the reason for which they are learning the language.

Second, authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities. We teachers need to realize that we have been using traditional methods that do not give students control of their own learning, We need to give over control to the students. Peer interaction is one good way to do this. The learner must take at least some of the initiatives that give shape and direction to the learning process. McGarry (1991) says, "Students who are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work, by being given some control over what, how and when they learn, are more likely to be able to set realistic goals, plan programs of work, develop strategies for coping with new and unforeseen situations, evaluate and assess their own work and, generally, to learn how to learn from their own success and failures in ways which will help them to be more efficient learners in the future."

Third, learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error. Students will probably not use the correct language while interacting. But at

least they will use their muscles. Gategno (1976) says, "If the students use their muscles to learn languages, they will remember what we teach."

This said, we need then to break out of the traditional ways of language teaching to promote language learning in authentic language environments by means of peer interaction. We need to step away from traditional language teaching materials and methods by letting the students play an active role in the discovery process through peer interaction. It is obvious that students have not learned the way we have been teaching. Then it is logical that we teach them the way they learn. These are some suggestions that are in no way prescriptive. But the language learning environment will be much better if these suggestions are taken into consideration. Meanwhile, the quest for better methods and techniques for language teaching and learning goes on.

C. Large classes

Even for the most experienced teachers, teaching large classes is challenging. Needless to say that using peer interaction within large classes is even more challenging. What makes the matter worse is that there is no best way to use peer interaction in teaching large classes. Hence, everyone of us as teachers needs to develop the approach that works best for us. We are our own best resources. However, there are some ideas that do work well for many teachers that we may want to adapt to our way of teaching.

This section does not seek to be a complete treatise on incorporation of peer interaction in large classes. But language learning cannot occur if the students do not play an integral part in the process. Students learn by doing, not by watching

and listening. Therefore, this section is intended to provide a variety of excellent ideas and strategies that can make a large class a positive and rewarding experience for both teachers and students.

Teaching a large class effectively using peer interaction is hard work. As previously mentioned in chapter two, the challenges of cooperative learning strategies are challenges of logistics: noise when all groups are working together, and the limitation of space in the room, which affects movement of students while interacting with one another. However, if we make the necessary logistical arrangements far enough in advance, peer interaction in large classes can come close to being as educationally rewarding as in small classes. Our satisfaction may be even greater in the large classes. After all, many teachers can teach from 15 to 30 students effectively, but when we do it with 80 or even 100 or more, we know we have really accomplished something.

In spite of these real and understandable issues, peer interaction, as a way to generate knowledge, is not impossible to initiate in large classes. My experience teaching large classes leads me to believe that it is not really the large class that matters, but the teacher's approach. The following list of strategies has been developed from personal experience with large classes. By following these strategies, a teacher will find peer interaction in large classes a rewarding experience.

Strategies

1. Begin each class by letting the students know what you are going to talk about and why at the presentation phase. Then have them summarize to each other

what you have just said. At this time, write your agenda on the board based on their answers.

2. Learn students' names, and encourage students to learn their classmates' names. Students are more likely to be engaged in group activities if they are addressed by name rather than by being pointed at. People are very proud of their names. Walk into the classroom from the back, looking at notebooks for names that can be used later. Using names establishes an atmosphere of mutual interest and responsibility. On the first day, issue name cards to every student in the class. Ask them to write their names on one-half of it and bend it in two so as to stand on the bench or desk by itself. When students know that we know who they are, they are often more motivated, and they believe that they are important to us.
3. Learn to build rapport with your students by recognizing the individuality of each student and providing them with access to you. Motivate them to build a learning community among themselves because if they don't swim together, they will sink together.
4. Instead of providing answers, use peers to offer support and feedback. They will enjoy doing it, and at the same time, they will increase their understanding. We need to encourage discussion, interaction, and involvement because students learn best by doing
5. Value and give credit to students' contributions. There are two kinds of people: those who do things and those who get the credit. Always strive to belong to the first group, and teach students to do likewise. This will facilitate peer

interaction in the sense that students will be very interested in contributing ideas.

6. Help students to form study groups in and outside the classroom and to use them effectively. Demand that each group member teach his/her peers the material he/she has studied.
7. Many students may have had little or no experience with small group discussion, and most of those who have experience have never been taught how to do it well. As a result, there will be conflict sometimes while students work in groups. Help them resolve a conflict, but don't settle it for them.
8. Provide opportunities for students to talk to each other in smaller, unsupervised groups so that they get to know each other and become comfortable with sharing ideas. The point is to encourage interaction that is not under the watchful eye of the teacher and helps students to become comfortable with each other.
9. Do not monitor discussion groups too closely. While we teachers may be part of a discussion group, we need not take the responsibility of monitoring it. We should provide clues but let students find their own way out. They will learn better this way.
10. Encourage students to contribute materials for the course. This does not mean that we give over total control to the students. On the contrary, their participation will motivate them to learn better. It is still our course and our responsibility to inform the students what they will study, how they will be expected to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, and what our

standards are for performance. But the responsibility is theirs to read, study, participate, and perform.

11. Listen, learn and adapt while the students are interacting. There is no single prescription for making all groups effective. Groups have individual characters with various learning styles, and we will need to adapt our style to theirs.
12. Make sure that each student has an opportunity to talk in class during the first two or three weeks. The longer a student goes without talking, the more difficult it will become for him or her to interact later with his or her peers.
13. Periodically divide students into smaller groups with a specific goal such as a question to answer or a problem to solve, and then ask each group to report back to the larger group.
14. Assign roles to the students, or let them choose their roles once the groups have been formed. When a student knows that he or she has a definite responsibility, he or she is more likely to play that role more efficiently.
15. Give students study questions in advance to help them prepare for tests and hold review sessions before examinations. If the exam has five sections, for example, divide the class into five groups, and have them prepare the exam by themselves based on what they covered during the cycle. The teacher makes the necessary adjustments.
16. Invite students to share their knowledge and experience. Help students realize that they each bring different kinds of talent and expertise to the course, and encourage them to apply them during their interaction.

17. Define technical terms, words or expressions with which the students may not be familiar only as a last resort. If a student can explain a term to the group, it is much better.
18. Vary the teaching and learning activities in a large class, and attempt to actively involve students during the majority of the class time.
19. Be aware that students in large classes are more reluctant to ask or respond to questions, and it is often very difficult to hear student questions and responses. Paraphrase or repeat all student responses, or invite students to discuss questions in their respective groups, and have one person report or bring a question that they did not understand to the whole class. Ask other groups if they did not find answers to that particular question.
20. Distribute handouts and materials after class, rather than during class time, in large class situations. Let each group assign someone to collect handouts.
21. Do not waste the first precious minutes of your lesson in taking attendance. Take attendance while the groups are interacting. As peer interaction requires that the students interact with one another for the major part of the class, there will be enough time to take attendance.
22. Move around the classroom during group sessions. Standing behind a desk or in front of the class all the time emphasizes the distance between the teacher and the class. Moving into the aisles and around the room makes the class seem smaller and encourages student involvement.
23. Elicit student feedback about the course. Have students meet in groups to provide feedback about the course. Working in groups gives students a chance

to discuss the material, to become more comfortable with each other, and to participate in a less intimidating classroom situation.

24. Mix ability groups. The more able students in the group can help the others to master the work, the better the learning atmosphere will be for both students and teachers. In some other occasions, use same-ability groups. We can leave the groups of faster students to get on with the work on their own while we give extra help to individual students in the slower groups. In some situations one formula is more appropriate than another is.
25. Establish a code of behavior that is created by the teacher and the students together. It should state clear basic rules of conduct that students understand such as: work quietly; talk, but not loudly; students who have finished their tasks can help others to finish theirs as well. The students can write these norms on a poster and place this poster where everyone can read it easily. If the classroom is used for different purposes, then we need to make sure that we put the poster in a safe place after the class.
26. If possible, use the environment outside the classroom. It offers a new and different space when students get noisy or bored, and helps to reduce overcrowding. Set up outdoor activities clearly and carefully and monitor them. Appoint responsible group leaders who can help maintain discipline. They can also give out and take in work for the groups, and explain what groups must do.
27. Make use of group leaders or monitors. Appoint faster or disruptive students. This gives the teacher the opportunity to move around the classroom to see

what progress students are making and where they get stuck. We can give advice, encouragement and extra individual help where it is needed.

28. Make the classroom a safe learning environment, and teach students to be considerate of their peers. Students will not contribute to a discussion if they are afraid that they will be ridiculed for what they say.
29. Encourage students to avoid yes/no questions, but instead ask why or how questions that lead to discussion, and when students give only short answers, ask them to elaborate.
30. When it is possible, set up the room for discussion. A circle works best, especially if the group can sit around a table. If we only have benches in our classroom, each bench can be a group. As time goes by, we will need to ask students to change place so they can have an opportunity to work with as many students as possible.
31. When classrooms are too close to each other, we need to be mindful of how and when to have group work. Talk with fellow teachers, and find out when their students are taking notes, for example. Tell your colleagues that this particular activity is going to take just a few minutes and be honest. Discuss the matter with the school administrator because in no way can a language classroom be a silent one if the students are practicing and learning the language.
32. Help students to learn to provide positive feedback for participation. If a student is reluctant to speak up and then makes a contribution that just lies there like a dead fish, that student is not likely to try again. It is a good idea to build on

what the student has said, add an insight, and ask others how they would respond to what the student said.

33. Teach students good communication skills. Help them to cultivate empathy, which is the ability to listen to someone without any judgmental attitude. Smiling and nodding are often positive signs that someone is listening.
34. Move from one group to another. Be careful not to get into private conversations with one or two students, which excludes the rest of the class. Where we stand or sit affects whether the entire class feels included. So we may need to move away from one student to bring the rest of the students into the discussion.
35. Use small group discussion assignments and have a reporter from each group share with the whole class.
36. Know and respect each student as an individual and do not use intimidation. We need to challenge our students but we also need to offer appropriate support.
37. Arrange seats that support heterogeneous groups of four, or two pairs of students. Set the climate by preparing students and providing teambuilding and icebreaker activities. While engaging in cooperative learning activities, each student holds a job for which he/she will be later held accountable. Tasks within the group need to be shared equally, and by all group members.
38. When forming groups, keep the size of the group small. The smaller the size of the group, the greater the individual accountability will be.

39. Have students teach what they learned to someone else. When all students do this, it is called simultaneous explaining. There is a pattern to classroom learning. First, students learn knowledge, skills, strategies, or procedures in a cooperative group. Second, students apply the knowledge or perform the skill, strategy, or procedure alone to demonstrate their personal mastery of the material. Students learn it together and then perform it alone.
40. Use the jigsaw activity. In this activity, each group member is responsible for learning a specific part of a topic. After meeting with members of other groups, who are experts in the same part, the experts return to their own groups and present their findings. Group members are then quizzed on all topics.
41. Incorporate "think-pair-share," which is an excellent strategy to use in large classes. It requires interaction between and among students. This is how it works. The teacher poses a problem or asks a question. Each student considers the problem/question and writes down some ideas/answers. Students join with one another for discussions. Then they give one answer that they agreed upon.
42. Have students evaluate each other. Divide the class into pairs. Partners exchange written work or observe each other's oral presentation. They give each other feedback and work together to identify what was good, what needed improvement, and how it could be improved.

Hints for Better Learning Groups

Below is a checklist adapted from Bowen and Jackson (1985-6) of things groups can do to function better. If you find it appropriate for your class, you can distribute it to your students.

I. Before the group begins:

a. Expect to learn, to enjoy, and to discover.

b. Team up with people you don't know.

II. As the group begins:

a. Make a good first impression.

b. Build the team.

c. Do something that requires self-disclosure.

d. Take interpersonal risks to build trust.

e. Establish team goals as appropriate.

f. Start thinking about group processing.

III. While the group is in existence:

a. Work at increasing self-disclosure.

b. Work at giving good feedback.

c. Get silent members involved.

d. Confront problems.

e. Apply lessons from class work.

f. Work on issues in the group even if they appear at first to be just between two members.

g. Don't assume you can't work with someone just because you don't like or respect them.

h. If the group can't solve a problem, consult the instructor as a group.

i. Regularly review your data.

j. Vary the leadership style as needed.

IV. Wrapping up the group:

a. Summarize and review your learning from group experiences.

b. Analyze the data to discover why the group was more or less effective.

c. Provide final feedback to members on their contribution.

d. Celebrate the group's accomplishments.

Large classes are a reality in Haiti, and they pose particular challenges. They are even more challenging with peer interaction. However, if we put these strategies into practice, we will be able to maintain discipline in the classroom, accommodate the various learning styles of our students, and above all, students will be able to take responsibility for their own learning. These are not the best or only ways to teach and learn in large classes using peer interaction, but if a teacher has not used these techniques before, he/she may want to try them with his/her class.

While large classes pose some logistic challenges, they have advantages. When there are many students in a class, they can share many different ideas and interesting life experiences. This stimulates the students and enlivens those parts of our lesson where students can discuss and learn from each other. During project work, students can learn to share responsibility and help each other. This also brings variety and speeds up the work. When we consider all these advantages and we use some or all the strategies outlined above, large classes then will not become a burden, but a rewarding experience for both the teacher and the students.

Conclusion

Cooperative learning in general and peer interaction in particular have many positive and affective features that encourage language learning. Peer interaction is not a choice but a necessity particularly for language learning today. I even wonder what elements of learning would occur without interaction. It is beneficial for both students and teachers. It helps teachers take responsibility of the students while the students are taking responsibility of their learning. Peer interaction increases learning because it is generally agreed that students remember about ninety per cent of what they teach other students.

A community of learners interacts more if they can relate to each other on a personal and social level. The students need to cultivate a friendly attitude and trust toward each other. Social interaction among peers is important to learning because it allows learners to establish a personal connection to other students and to the teacher.

When students interact with one another to learn the language, they provide mutual guidance, and serve as scaffolding to help each other accomplish learning tasks that might otherwise be too difficult. They also find a direct relationship with a real audience from which they can get meaningful feedback, provide generous support for learning and caring, thus, making the world a better place to live.

Since techniques such as modeling by the teacher and repeating by the students do not really provide real situations for learning to take place, teachers

need to use this powerful technique to help students take responsibility for their own learning within their school community.

While it may seem difficult at first for teachers to initiate peer interaction in the language classroom with traditional students with a history of more competitive and individualistic language learning backgrounds, it is worth the effort to give it a shot. In the long run, I strongly believe that students will be enthusiastic and thrilled by the power of working in pairs or groups as a way to generate knowledge.

The challenges of older students, differences in methodology and large classes will be overcome when the teacher puts in place the prerequisites which contribute to the success of peer interaction and learning groups such as positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, group processing and individual and group accountability. When the right atmosphere is built in the classroom to motivate students right from the beginning, even working with around one hundred students with different learning styles, peer interaction can be an effective tool to generate knowledge.

It is my dream that my dear fellow Haitian language teachers, after reading this paper, will step away from traditional language teaching methods by letting the students play an active role in the learning process through peer interaction. As for me, the quest for better methods and techniques for language teaching and learning will still be my preoccupation. My mission as a language teacher consists of five essential qualifications of a world teacher; namely, vision that encompasses the world, mastery of the subject taught, knowledge of my students, aptness at teaching, and a life that embodies the teaching. I am committed to helping my

students develop a positive attitude toward each other and toward learning, so as to become autonomous learners.

As a skeleton gains muscles and organs, I realize that my personal approach to teaching has developed and grown. Writing this paper helps me remember what I learned in the MAT program during the academic year at SIT. My research, and the research of many others, helps me to take into consideration this very important factor often neglected in teaching; namely, the context in which teaching takes place. There is a good deal more that I have yet to unpack from this experience, and I know that my awareness will not manifest itself until one, two, three or even ten years down the road. This paper represents the re-vision of my past teaching experiences, an articulation of the beliefs and practices I now hold, and my hypotheses and plans for my future teaching career.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Auerbach, Elsa Roberts. *Making Meaning Making Change*. McHenry, IL: Center for Apllied Linguistics and Delta Systems, Inc. 1992.

Bowen, D. D., and Jackson, C. N. Curing those 'ol 'Omigod-Not-Another-Group-Class' blues. *Organizational Behavior Teaching Review*, 10(4), 21-23. 1985-6.

Bruner, J. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: The hidden agenda. In B. Rogoff J. Wertsch (eds.). *Children's learning in the "Zone of proximal development: New directions for child development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 1984.

Bruner, J. *Toward a theory of instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1966.

Caleb Gattegno, 1976. *Freeing the Students,* from The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages. Pp. 1-14. 1976.

Caleb Gattegno, 1970. *Excerpt from What We Owe Children*: The Subordination of teaching to Learning. Pp. 115-121

Canale M, *From communicative competnece to communicative language pedagogy*, in J C Richards and R W Schmidt (eds), Language and communication, 2-27. London & New York: Longman, 1983.

Canale M and M Swain, *Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing*, in Applied Linguistics 1, 1-47 (1980).

Cohen, Elizabeth. *Designing Group Work*. Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom. New York: Teachers College Press, 1986,1994.

Course Documents. ICC for Language teachers, MAT Programs. SIT, Brattleboro, VT, 2003.

David and Roger Johnson. "Cooperative Learning." [Online] 15 October 2001. http://www.clcrc.com/pages/cl.html

David and Roger Johnson. "An Overview of Cooperative Learning." [Online] 15 October 2001. http://www.clcrc.com/pages/overviewpaper.html

Friedeman, Matt. *The Master Plan of Teaching*. SP Publications, Inc. 1990.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Company. 1970.

Gardner, H. *Frames of mind*. New York: Basic Books. 1983.

Haiti. Ministry of National Education, Youth and Sports. *Directorate of Planning and External Cooperation.* Annuaire statistique des ecoles fondamentales et secondaires d'Haiti. Port-au-Prince: Author. 1998a.

Howard Community College's Teaching Resources. "Ideas on Cooperative Learning and the use of Small Groups." [Online] 15 October 2001. http://www.howardcc.edu/profdev/resources/learning/groups1.htm

Constitution of the Republic of Haiti. Title III. Basic Rights and Duties of the citizen. Education and Teaching. Chapter II, articles 32-34, section F. http://www.haiti.org/constitu/title03.htm#secF (25 February 2005)

Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of December 1948. http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/index.htm (25 February 2005).

United Nations Children's Emergency Fund. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/stats_popup5.html (22 March 2005).

Johnson, UW., Johnson, H., Stanne, M,, & Garibaldi, A. Impact of group processing on achievement in cooperative groups. *Journal of Social Psychology, 130,* 507-516. 1990.

Johnson, David W. and Roger T. Johnson. *Learning together and alone: Cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. 1991.

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. *Learning Together and Alone* (3rd Ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall. 1991.

Johnson, D. & R. 'Cooperative Learning'. University of Minesota, College of Education Development. http://www.clcrc.com/pages/cl.html. (28 November 1999).

Kagan, Spencer. "Kagan Structures for Emotional Intelligence." [Online] 15 October 2001. http://www.kagancooplearn.com/Newsletter/1001/index.html

Kagan, S. *Cooperative Learning*. San Juan Capistrano, CA. 1994.

Kagan, S. *The Structural Approach to Cooperative Learning*. Educational Leadership, 47, p. 12-15. 1994.

Kolb, D. A. *Experiential Learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 1984.

Marva C. and Civia T. *Marva Collin's Way*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc. 1982, 92.

Matthews, M. *Gifted students talk about cooperative learning*. Educational Leadership,*50(2)*, 48-50. 1992.

McCarthy, C. Learner Training for Learner Autonomy on Summer Language Courses. 2002.

McGarry, Dee, *Learner Autonomy 4*: The Role of Authentic Texts. Dublin: Authentik. 1995

Pierre, F. *My English Textbook*, Joël Château, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. 2001.

Richard C. Weber, *The Groups: A Cycle from Birth to Death*, by Larry Porter, pp90-119. Reading Books for Human Relations Training, edited by Lawrence Porter and Bernard Mohr, copyright 1982.

Richards, Jack C. and Rodgers, Theodore S., *Approaches* and Methods in Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Roenshine, B., & Stevens, B. Teaching functions. In M. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (3rd ed.) (pp. 376-391). New York: Macmillan. 1986.

Sheri Spaine Long. Cuban perspective through the eyes of Pepito, Foreign / Second Language Education, Edited and submitted by Sheri Spaine Long, Associate Professor of Spanish, UAB. Haitian *English Teaching News, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.* 2002.

The Holy Bible. New International Version. Zondervan Bible Publishers. 1987.

Vygotsky, Lev Semenovich. *Thought and language.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1962.

Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in society. The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1978.

Vygotsky, L. S. *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 1989.

Webster, D., *New Webster's Dictionary and thesaurus of the Englisg language*. Lexicon Publications, Inc. 1995.

Wood, D., Bruner, J., Ross, G. *The role of tutoring and problem solving*. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 17, 89-100. 1976