

Mending the Broken Windows

A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT USING COOPERATIVE
LEARNING METHODS TO TEACH THE CONCEPTS OF SHORT STORIES
WHILE BUILDING A COMMUNITY IN THE CLASSROOM

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING DEGREE AT THE SCHOOL FOR
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By,

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I dedicate this project to my students who participated in it. I sincerely hope that the community that we created together flourishes in the next few years as you work towards graduation. In those moments when you think you are alone, I hope you remember and treasure the relationships that we built. I always will.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the purpose, process and results of using Cooperative Learning methods to study the elements of short stories in an intermediate English as a Second or Other Language high school class. The goal of this project was to create and build community in the classroom to alleviate the pressures felt by at-risk and immigrant students, while also meeting their academic needs. The project was conducted over three months time and was assessed through qualitative and quantitative methods.

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CHAPTER 1

MY MOTIVATION AND PHILOSOPHY

*Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and left in disrepair, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in run down ones. Window breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window breakers whereas others are populated by window-lovers; rather, **one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing.***
(Kelling and Wilson 1982)

The “broken windows” theory is an appropriate metaphor of my feelings and approach toward teaching English Language Learners. As a teacher, I am dedicated to trying to proactively meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of my students. Although it is an uphill battle at times, I will not allow their windows of opportunities to be broken, even though to some it may seem easier to allow “broken windows” to remain broken and only see the world through the unbroken ones. In other words, I will not allow my students or myself to become complacent to the negative influences that affect their lives and their futures. I am resolved to repair the broken windows in my community, thereby allowing light to shine unimpeded through them once again.

Introduction

As an English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) teacher in an alternative high school in Fairfax County Virginia, I serve a diverse population of young adults pursuing their high school diploma. A number of these young adults are immigrant refugees in search of educational opportunities and better, healthier lives. Many have left their parents, children and siblings to attain this new life. Others have been separated from their families for many years and are now finally joining them despite the estrangement. These challenging life changes may leave students vulnerable and in need of unique social and emotional support. If these needs are not met by involvement in a positive community or a family, not only could they underachieve academically but also some students may become involved in more dangerous situations, such as involvement in a gang. Through surveys and interviews, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, and observations, I have identified three specific needs that my students have displayed:

- The need for family;
- The need to make meaningful contributions, belong to and participate in a community;
- The need to receive support from a community with common goals, purposes, and identity.

As an educator, I feel that it is my duty to guide students in positive directions and help ensure that those needs are met. Therefore, in this paper, I will describe how I used Cooperative Learning methods in an effort to “repair our broken windows” and create a positive, nurturing community to fulfill the needs of its members.

My motivation for this project began to evolve when I realized that my students were rapidly becoming gang members. Yet the more I learned about gangster life, the less I could comprehend the appeal. I needed to understand the draw, not only to protect my students, but also to protect myself. According to the Juvenile Justice Bulletin, *Youth Gangs in Schools*, students in public schools from the ages of 14 through 19, with Hispanic, Hispanic-American, African, or African-American backgrounds, low financial incomes and who reside in highly populated areas are most vulnerable to gang recruiting (Howell and Lynch 2000). In other words, these are students from marginalized communities, which is a comparable description of my students.

After hearing statements from my students, such as: “Some people feel they have no choice;” “I joined a gang because I had no parents around;” “The first week I was in this country, my family was called, ‘Fu__ing Mexicans’”, I felt a vague sense of their despair, disillusionment, loneliness, and complacency and I decided that I needed to be a part of the cure for this epidemic. I recognized that people of this age need a community in which to contribute, a place to belong, a forum to communicate with their peers, and strategies to resolve the conflicts that inevitably grow from cultural differences. I began researching the benefits of gang membership and the reasons a young person would join a gang. I could easily explain the dangers of that lifestyle-the crime, drugs, violence, the loss of control of personal decisions and the consequences of leaving a gang once indoctrinated. Yet, despite this, statistics revealed that membership was increasing (Howell 1997). Therefore, there must be an appeal.

Unfortunately, there is. For many young adults in these marginalized communities, gang membership means a support community, a purpose, and a social

group with common goals, which are precisely the voids that they need to have filled. Moreover, realities are clear in a gang. These realities are that rival gangs are not to be tolerated, each member follows a defined hierarchy, and that symbols, colors, and clothing all have clear meanings. “They look for identity and stability in the gang and adopt the subculture customs that are associated with the attachment to and identification with gangs-that includes alcohol and drug use, conflict and violence” (Ebensen 2000). Unlike the ambiguous world a person faces when they immigrate to a new culture, a gang seems safe and understandable.

As evidence of the needs of emigrating students, one can look at immigrants that have successfully assimilated and acculturated into their educational environment. Not all students fall victim to the social pressures of their new and confusing society, and there are several reasons why this is so. One reason for this is a strong family tie. “Immigrants who have strong family ties are likely to benefit and prevail, while those whose families are fragmented or dysfunctional may be at a disadvantage. Even where there is a divorce or separation in the family, if the child has a strong relationship with a family member who could act as a mentor or role model, acculturation will be helped considerably. Family ties strengthen the private identity and language, and this strength can be transmitted to the emerging identity” (Watkins-Goffman 2001). In their confusing new environment, a positive role model to whom a student can relate or upon whom a student can rely may be the key to a student’s success.

Like most people, emigrating students may boost their self-esteem by finding a niche in which to contribute. This may be a religious group, a job, a family or a classroom. “Being good at something always helps adjustment. As an expression of self,

a hobby, or talent can give positive feedback” (Watkins-Goffman 2001). As my students have expressed, many feel misunderstood and as though they are considered unintelligent and worthless because of their lack of language ability. If they are not able to find a positive community in which to contribute, they may seek a more accessible, but potentially harmful one.

As any international traveler can attest, language envelops a great deal of the culture and identity of a society. Therefore, when a person is surrounded by people who speak a different language, a new, shared identity must be formed. As previously mentioned, a hobby or talent that can be displayed may take the place of oral expression. For example, a student may be able to express him/herself through a sport, art, cooking, or music. This may help a person feel more understood and connected to others. If a person can transition well between identities, there is a greater likelihood that he will succeed socially and academically (Watkins-Goffman 2001).

Why Cooperative Learning

Despite my altruistic intentions, I could not focus all of my time dissuading ESOL students from becoming gang members. As a paid teacher, with a contract, I had educational responsibilities to meet, skills to transfer, and of course, standardized test targets to reach. How could I create a learning environment that would nurture a safe, welcoming community, raise self esteem and help my students positively contribute and receive from their learning environment and peers? I found the answer in Cooperative Learning practices.

“Cooperative Learning is an instructional strategy that develops cooperative group behavior through the division of tasks, peer teaching and individual and group

accountability for products. Cooperative Learning explicitly teaches students how to be productive and supportive group members”(Panitz n.d.). It fosters a feeling of belonging and contribution to a community, builds leadership and interpersonal skills, and creates a socially supportive classroom (Panitz n.d.). The type of environment that it cultivates is one where the goal is common, clear, and attainable, which is precisely what my students need. Unlike gang membership, the collective objective is knowledge, not an enemy. The common culture is language and skill learning, not ethnicity nor economic status.

Cooperative Learning, when done properly, inherently includes all students, encourages contribution, requires peer teaching and can only be done as a team. It also encourages the inclination and need that students from all countries and cultures have: the inclination to interact with peers. As any teacher with an overly talkative class knows, students desire interaction with each other. As Dr. Spencer Kagan says in Cooperative Learning, “The desire to express oneself to a peer, a constant problem in a traditional classroom, is channeled in the cooperative classroom toward academic achievement” (1992). What it does not encourage is competition and individualistic learning. Although these are not negatives, I do not believe that individuality is what my students are seeking. I base this on the growing number of gang members in my school.

Dr. Kagan identifies several positive outcomes of Cooperative Learning. One of the most important among these is academic achievement, especially for minority and lower-achieving students (1992). Cooperative learning may reduce classroom anxiety and raise a student’s sense of comfort. This is done by enhancing self-esteem, which motivates students to participate in the learning process. The greater the participation by a student, in a comfortable atmosphere, the higher their academic achievement will be

(Panitz n.d.). Furthermore, if a student finds school to be a positive experience, that student may be encouraged to participate more, resulting in even higher self-esteem. “Students who are actively involved in the learning process are much more likely to become interested in learning and make more of an effort to attend school”(Panitz n.d.). In turn, it could help foster a strong sense of belonging to their school community.

Cooperative Learning also promotes a sense of mastery of a subject or skill (Panitz n.d.). If a student feels as though he/she has gained expertise of a skill, he/she may feel confident enough to contribute to the group and perhaps even teach others. Likewise, being responsible for one’s peers’ learning signifies aptitude and competence. This helps fulfill the need to have a purpose and to make meaningful, valuable contributions to the community.

Another positive element is the improvement of ethnic relations among students. As a young white woman, I am often concerned that students will “tune me out” because I may not understand their backgrounds and home life. Because there is some legitimacy in this assumption, I have found that they are more receptive to information when their peers, regardless of race, explain it. As a teacher in a very multicultural education setting, I witness, almost daily, tension and at times, violence rooted in racial intolerance and misunderstanding. Correspondingly, gangs are often formed in Northern Virginia through racial bonds. One of the results that I hope to achieve from this project is a realization among students that learning and community can go beyond race and culture and that a person from an unfamiliar culture may be as supportive and trustworthy as a person from a native land. Perhaps bonds of friendship may be created that would continue beyond the classroom.

These improved relations also may lead to improved conflict resolution skills. “Because students are actively involved in exploring issues and interacting with each other on a regular basis in a guided fashion, they are able to understand their differences and learn how to resolve conflicts which may arise” (Panitz n.d.). These skills are essential in our often turbulent and volatile world.

Cooperative Learning is not a new concept. Evidence of the promotion of cooperation can be found in the Talmud: “In order to learn, one must have a learning partner.” In the 1st century, the Greek educator, Quintillion argued that students often benefited from teaching each other. The Roman philosopher, Seneca, believed in Cooperative Learning as seen in his statement, “Qui docet discet” which means when you teach, you learn twice. Other examples of famous and successful educators that utilized the potential of Cooperative Learning included Joseph Lancaster and Andrew Bell in the 1700’s, Colonel Francis Parker in the 19th century and John Dewy in the early 20th century. However, from the 1930’s through the 1980’s individualistic and competitive learning became more popular (Putnam 1998). Positive interdependence or cooperation became less popular for our work and education environments. Still, there are many reasons why it is becoming more crucial that we all learn how to work and live together. One reason is the growing population. The increase in class sizes in public schools is an indicator of the larger number of people that must coexist. Another reason is the growing diversity of our society (Putnam 1998). Cultures must learn to work and live together, respecting separate identities while simultaneously forming another cohesive and common one.

The Project

Cooperative Learning integrates reading, writing, speaking, and listening while creating a supportive learning and social community. When creating this curriculum, I chose a unit that is essential to my B1 (intermediate) level's success. Students are required to understand the basic literary devices and terms of a short story. They must also demonstrate developed critical thinking skills and be able to relate the themes of the literature to their lives. Because the exploration of literature is often laden with culture and abstract thought, it can be extremely difficult for English Language Learners to explore and understand. However, literature can also be quite enriching for students. Therefore, I felt that this would be an ideal unit to use Cooperative Learning techniques and allow the students to discover this richness together as a community.

The complete development of this curriculum unit, the short story unit, involved several components that are described in detail in Chapter 3. In summary, it began with preliminary and basic Cooperative Learning structures to help the students become accustomed to working in groups. Students studied six short stories, each of which had pre-reading, reading and individual activities assigned. The first 5 stories were studied with Cooperative Learning methods, and the last was done individually. The students were assessed through tests, writing assignments, participation, and group performance. Following each story, the students were given an optional survey about their feelings on the story, how it was taught and learned, school, their classmates, and what they would like to have done differently. I used these assessments and surveys to make improvements to the lesson plans and draw conclusions that can be found in the last chapter of this paper.

It is historically proven and remains known today, that students have social and emotional needs that can only be satisfied through positive interaction. I hope this project will create a forum where students can explore and appreciate learning while building a supportive community that will not only help them academically but also benefit their lives on a deeper level.

CHAPTER 2

THE STORIES OF MY STUDENTS

This project focused on my third period B1 ESOL Language Arts class. The class consisted of seven students ranging from the ages of 18-23 from Ghana, Somalia, Afghanistan, Peru, and Mexico. In addition to being full time students, most of them were also parents and/or jobholders. Their educational backgrounds vary as much as their cultural backgrounds. One commonality between most of them is that their educational career was spent in more than one country which may have contributed to the students' adaptability in using a previously unfamiliar learning method.

This class typifies Bryant Adult Alternative High School, which services both English language Learners and English speakers. Although this is an ESOL class, it is representative of the diversity, age, and class size of most of the classes in this school. In an alternative school, students receive more attention, leniency in matters such as attendance and due dates for assignments, and the class size is comparatively smaller than most American public schools. This school provides special programs for its unique population of ESOL students, pregnant and parenting young women, school board placed

students who were expelled from their base schools, and students returning to school after dropping out. That is to say, it is a school that specializes in education of at-risk youth and it is an ideal setting to implement Cooperative Learning methodology.

At the B1 level a student is expected to express him/herself in writing and orally using academic language. The students and teacher focus on literature, poetry, and research, which prepare the students for higher-level English classes and the Standards of Learning (SOL) exams.

Prior to this project, I interviewed six of my seven B1 students about their feelings on school, learning, cultural assimilation, community and gangs. A copy of the student questionnaire can be found in *Appendix A*. I explained the purpose of these interviews and assured them that their participation would be used only in this project and would in no way affect their grade. Each student interviewed had the option of speaking with me alone or with others present. They reviewed the questions in advance and could opt not to speak to me at all, which only one student chose to do. In a semi-private, casual atmosphere, during lunchtime, the student and I discussed the questions while I took notes. I did not strictly adhere to the questions that I initially gave them, as the discussion often led to other interesting and relevant points.

In addition to the interviews, I also assigned a continuous written dialogue with each student in the form of a journal that was updated every Friday. Each student was given 30-40 minutes to write a response to my entry and to ask me whatever he or she needed to or was curious about. I collected these, responded and then returned them the following Friday. The purpose of these journals was to have a confidential, open discussion where their thoughts and feelings would not be judged or graded. I have

gained deep insights into my students and have found these journals to be an ideal forum for follow-ups of our interviews.

The following stories are summaries of what my students told me. To ensure the privacy of my students, I have used pseudonyms:

Gunther

Gunther is a young Peruvian man who spent his childhood in Argentina. Though born in Peru, family issues took his mother and him to Argentina where he grew up. Because of this move, Gunther's education was interrupted at an early age and he did not have the stabilizing benefits of a father figure. His older brother, who is 4 years his senior and married, moved to the United States 5 years ago. Three years ago, his brother's family invited Gunther to live and study in the United States, while his mother remained in Argentina. At the age of 18, Gunther is independent of his mother, but close with his brother's family. Still, he is responsible for his decisions and often seems lonely and despondent. In journal entries, Gunther writes about finding love and companionship. When asked about his friends, he told me that he has acquaintances, but no real friends.

I interviewed Gunther about his thoughts and feelings on gangs, school, education and community. He explained to me that gangs are negative influences on community, but then shrugged and said, "Some people have no choice." When I inquired about this, he told me a story of a teenage boy who lives in his apartment building. The boy was being approached daily for recruiting. Gunther did not tell me if the recruiting tactics were violent or intimidating; however, he did indicate that the boy had no choice but to eventually give in. According to Gunther, two years ago, one barely saw gangs, but now

the police are a common sight in his neighborhood and it is dangerous to leave at night. When asked if he thought it would be a good idea to relocate to a new apartment, Gunther gave another indifferent shrug and replied, "It's the same everywhere." I continued the interview by asking if he knew of anyone in gangs or if he ever had any gang involvement. I also asked why he thought young people might join gangs. Seeming uncomfortable with the question, Gunther answered that he knew of many people in gangs, but he was not personally involved. He continued by stating this observation about immigrant families, "Some families leave their children in their countries for 8 or 9 years. When they (the children) get here, they are 14 years old, uneducated, unguided, and the parents must work two jobs. That is why they join gangs."

We concluded the interview with a discussion about how teachers could mitigate the influence of gangs on students. I explained to Gunther my idea of creating a community within our class, so that students would feel that another place could provide them with the support and acceptance that they all need. Gunther seemed very enthusiastic about the idea and was willing to try the Cooperative Learning methods despite their unfamiliarity to him. He also indicated that just the effort one teacher made to try and guide students away from the risks that they face and "be on the same team" might be enough to change one student's mind. I found this to be very validating.

From Gunther, I was able to see a need for a safe, welcoming community or family. He seems to want to find connections with others his age. From his writing and journal entries, he has openly admitted his desire to find a romantic relationship, but he is afraid to speak English with girls his age because he lacks confidence in his abilities. I am hoping this project will build his confidence.

Maria

Maria is a 23-year-old Mexican woman who came to live in the United States approximately 9 years ago. She was very hesitant to talk to me about her initial experiences in the United States, but agreed after my assurance that she could do it privately. Furthermore, I did not use the tape recorder to reassure her that others would not be privy to what she told me. As we began the interview, Maria immediately became misty-eyed and choked up at the thought of recalling her first experiences in the United States. She told me that it was very difficult to speak about the reasons why her family left Mexico. Finally, she was able to express that the reason was “economical”. Because of the emotion that this memory caused, I did not pursue a deeper explanation. Instead we moved on to memories of her first home in the United States, San Francisco.

Maria remembers San Francisco as a warm place, but very different from Mexico. Her family emigrated as a unit. Therefore, Maria does not remember feeling alone or alienated. Yet she does have one memory, which still stings whenever she recalls it. Within the first week of her arrival to San Francisco, her father took Maria and her brother on a bus downtown. After paying the bus fare, the bus driver accused the family of paying for two instead of three people. Due to their limited English, they were unable to explain that they had paid and instead just gave the driver more money. As the family took their seats, they heard the driver distinctly, and with disgust, say, “Fu----g Mexicans!” Maria recollects this with a mixture of humiliation and disbelief.

Today, Maria lives in Virginia with her husband and 4-year-old daughter. From the sentiment on her face and in her voice when talking about them, it is obvious that her family means more to her than anything else. At this time, circumstances are allowing her to finish her education that was interrupted while she was in California. When asked how she views American students, she exclaimed, “I don’t understand. If they already know English, why wouldn’t they want to study? If my English was better, I could earn A’s.”

I later asked her about close friends and she seemed cautious. She only expressed interest in forming a friendship with one other young lady, also in our class. In the past five months, she has observed this woman to be respectful and kind and, therefore Maria is considering asking her to come over for a visit. It is apparent that Maria does not trust many people and is very cautious about who she allows into her life.

Maria did explain that she has only had positive experiences with teachers in the United States. Interestingly, she expected the American education system would be better, but she felt that most teachers were welcoming and patient and covered material more slowly with greater explanation. She expressed extreme frustration at the American “credit” system. For example, her biology class in California was not accepted in Virginia.

Maria’s views about education as well as her desire to master English so she could make A’s demonstrate her need to express her intelligence and make positive contributions. She feels that English is an obstacle blocking her ability to exhibit her capabilities, leaving her intelligence and potential underestimated. This results in lower

self-esteem and great frustration for her. Possibly through this project Maria will feel that she was able to help others and in turn show her true competence.

Allen

This young Ghanaian man only recently emigrated to join his parents in the United States. For approximately 19 years he was living in Ghana with his grandmother and uncle in his parents' absence. He is so mature, unassuming, and respectful that it came as quite a surprise when he began our interview by telling me why he joined a gang in his home country. Allen attributes his gang involvement to a lack of parental guidance. He said that he "had no one to explain consequences to him." Although he would not go into detail about his former gang activities, he shook his head and frowned in a gesture that I interpreted as remorse.

Allen continued his train of thought by expressing his gratitude to his parents and the love and care they give him. They have instilled in him a deep religious faith with which he identifies greatly. He has indicated that he feels a great deal of support from his religious community and his family.

I explained to him about my idea of Cooperative Learning and Allen seemed supportive but indifferent. As a person with respect for authority, Allen consented to the idea because I am his teacher. He seemed neither excited nor uncomfortable with the idea of sharing his learning experience with his classmates. As can be seen by the brevity of our interview, Allen is not forthcoming with his feelings and thoughts. I can only speculate that he is afraid of trusting others and needs to be encouraged to make contributions to his learning community.

Allen exemplifies the successful student with a strong family foundation. He has a network of people that he can trust and from whom he gains support; therefore he does not feel the draw to gang life that he once did. He has indicated several times that he feels loved and safe with his parents and church community. I hope this feeling will be Allen's contribution to the other students.

Layla

Layla is a young Afghan woman who originally fled to Pakistan to escape the war and the Taliban regime. She lived in Pakistan for 4 years with her family and was educated there. A dedicated student, Layla attributes this dedication to the desperate times and lack of opportunities in Afghanistan.

As part of the agreement of an arranged marriage, Layla was brought to the United States to live with her fiancé's family while finishing high school. When asked if she was against the arranged marriage, Layla admitted that originally she was very nervous about it. However, after meeting her betrothed, Layla agreed to the arrangement with happiness.

Layla is a friendly but shy and reserved woman who does not initiate working with others. When asked about getting to know or "hanging out" with students from other cultures, Layla said that she is friendly with other students, but prefers to be with people from her own culture, particularly her fiancé. When asked why, she said, "Because they know our rules and culture and it is more comfortable."

I explained my plan of teaching the short story unit using cooperative methods and Layla seemed indifferent to learning as a community. She indicated that she trusted my decisions as the teacher, but was mostly concerned with learning the material. Layla

did not seem interested in forming bonds with students from other cultures, as she already had a support community among her Afghan family and friends.

This leads to my concern about Layla. I am delighted that she has a support system and I believe that this will contribute to her successes as a student. Yet, if she is planning on living and working in the United States, it is essential that she find ways of forming relationships outside of her Afghan network. I am hoping that through this project, Layla will see the value in relating to people with different backgrounds.

Deena

Deena is a 20-year old Somali woman with high ideals and expectations of her future. Considering her family and country's history, she has an impressively positive outlook on life. From a nation that has suffered devastating turmoil for much of this young woman's life, has only a 25% literacy rate for females, and has no national government or legal system (Federal Research Divisions of The Library of Congress), Deena has very sophisticated perspectives.

Her family history is no less tragic. At a young age, Deena lost her father to natural causes and later, in the early 90's, Deena's older brother was killed as a result of the war. She and her sisters had to escape to Ethiopia, where her grandmother lived, until her mother, who was living in the United States, was able to gain refugee status for her daughters in 2003. Despite this tragic past, Deena feels that she is a lucky person and is very close with her family. I asked her if she felt any resentment toward her mother for not living with them for so many years. Deena emphatically answered, "Not at all. My mother loves us and was trying to get us a better life." She further explained that her mother had a lucrative business in Somalia, which is rare for women, but left it in order

to pursue a life in the United States. Deena has indicated, with a smile, that she is very close to her mother. In fact, Deena said that her mother “can always feel her moods.”

Deena has a consistent educational background and she was able to attend a private school in Somalia where she began learning English. She furthered her English in Ethiopia at school because it was the only common language she had with the Ethiopian people. Deena has a great deal of respect for education and knows that it is her key to a successful future. She feels that she has developed this belief on her own and that it was not instilled in her by her parents but they definitely supported it. She recalls her parents working in Somalia for the sole purpose of supporting the family, but not for fulfillment. Although supporting a family is important, Deena wants to do something special; to help others and gain personal fulfillment. In fact, in other writing assignments, she has said that she would like to be a history or math teacher and one day return to Somalia to help improve the quality of education.

We turned the interview to a discussion about Americans. Deena was surprised by the lack of respect American students showed towards their teachers and their education. When she began at West Potomac High School in 2002, she was the same age as the other students, yet she felt that she was older than them. Deena thought that other international students with whom she attended school also seemed more mature. She followed this up with this statement, “Whoever is serious about their education appreciates it more.” Although she did not elaborate on this, I felt Deena was commenting on how some American students took their education for granted.

Consistent with her positive attitude, Deena was very complimentary about American people in general. When her family first came to the United States, they had to

live in a family shelter for three months until they could find housing. She did not mention where her mother had been living prior to the arrival of Deena and her sisters. Although the life in the shelter was very difficult and depressing, Deena is grateful to the people who helped them find a place to live, health insurance, and jobs. When asked if she experienced any negative treatment as a foreigner, she shrugged half-heartedly, and said, “Some, but nothing real bad.”

Deena was very interested in the concepts of Cooperative Learning, and she is always enthusiastic about working with other students. With her outgoing personality and natural leadership qualities, she contributes and participates in the class as much as possible. I asked her about spending time and hanging out with students from other cultures and she admitted that she, like Layla, feels more comfortable with students from her own culture. However, she also said that she respects other cultures, is “kind of curious about them” and would like to get to know more students, but does not have the chance. I hope that this project will give Deena exactly that.

Charles

Charles is a 23-year old ambitious young man from the country of Ghana. He is extremely studious and very respectful of ceremony and order. He often speaks and writes about respecting others and particularly those older than himself. In fact, in class Charles will point out another student’s disrespectful behavior to the student before I have the chance to say anything. He does this in an authoritative but benevolent manner to which others students respond positively. I see this as an indication of Charles’s natural leadership abilities.

Charles emigrated to the U.S. with his two younger sisters to reunite with his mother and father, who had been living and working in here for 11 and 20 years respectively, struggling to make a life for their children and for themselves. Charles and his siblings had periodic visits from his parents, but had not lived with them consistently since he was a little child. During his parents' absence, he and his sisters were raised and cared for by his grandmother. When his grandmother passed away, the children were brought to this country. Despite their absences, Charles said that he never felt any anger towards his parents. He felt that his grandmother was an adequate caretaker who provided for him well. I asked him why he thought his parents wanted to live elsewhere and Charles emphatically declared that they felt "life was unbearable" in Ghana. Because of the evident emotion associated with this statement, I did not pursue further elaboration.

I asked Charles about the feelings he had when it was decided that he would leave Ghana for the United States, and I was surprised to learn that this was not his first experience with international travel. Charles expressed that he was not excited at all about the prospect of living in another country because he had already experienced it when he studied in Germany for 6 months. He recalls this experience as very lonely and difficult and therefore did not look forward to the move here. I asked him if these expectations were met and Charles expressed that it has been easier to make friends here than in Germany. Although, he qualified the statement by saying that he has, "many people to hang out with, but no one he would call a friend yet." When asked if he prefers the company of people from his own country or people from a variety of cultures, Charles shrugged and said, "I feel comfortable with either." Again, however, he qualified this by explaining that he would not call anyone a friend yet.

In his journal and in conversation, Charles has expressed impatience in his progress. Since he arrived in this country approximately a year and a half ago, Charles has found a part-time job, enrolled in high school, joined the soccer team and began taking night classes to earn a certification as a nurse's assistant. Yet he is disappointed that his English is not more advanced and he has not earned enough money to move into his own apartment.

I turned the interview to a discussion about gang involvement and my motivation for this project. Although Charles did not know anyone involved with gangs, he felt that the problem could be blamed to a great extent on peer influence. He explained that close friends can persuade others to do things and that this was one reason that he did not have close friends. This is consistent with Charles's former statements and the steadfast manner that I have observed in him. This student has a definite idea of his path to success and will not allow negative influences to change it.

At the time of this interview, our class had already completed several of the Cooperative Learning activities. I asked Charles what he thought of the class in general, the activities, and the other students. I was surprised when his normally serious face broke into a large smile. He said that the class and the students were "one of a kind" and expressed his enjoyment of the activities. He especially liked teaching the other students because "it feels good to let out what you know to someone who does not."

I feel that Charles needs to see himself making positive contributions to others and to a community. Despite my insistence that he is progressing very well in English, and his feelings of frustration are normal, I see him becoming increasingly disappointed in himself. I am hoping that through this project, his natural leadership abilities will

become apparent to Charles, and he will develop pride in himself, trust towards others, and a feeling of belonging to a safe and welcoming community.

These aforementioned interviews support my conclusion that immigrant students have the specific needs that were expressed in the introduction to this paper. Each student displayed one or more of the needs identified. Gunther and Charles both displayed the need to receive support from a community while Layla, Maria, and Deena desire to make positive contributions. Furthermore, all of the students referred to their families and the support that they required from them. Although, these needs and feelings may often be found in students around the world, I believe that students who are culturally assimilating are more sensitive and vulnerable to the absence of support, community and family and these interviews make that all the more apparent and clear.

CHAPTER 3

THE SHORT STORY UNIT

There are three basic types of Cooperative Learning classrooms: Formal, Informal and Cooperative Base Groups. Each type ideally contains and develops five elements: 1) positive interdependence; 2) individual accountability; 3) face-to-face enriching interaction; 4) social skills; and 5) group processing. Although I did not find the element, “individual reflection”, in my research, I added it to the students’ work because I felt that it was important for both them and me to reflect on their accomplishments.

The formal type of classroom involves students working together in particular groups from one class period to another for extended periods of time. The students work towards shared learning goals with specific tasks and objectives. In contrast, informal groups are formed in an ad hoc fashion and are employed for shorter increments of time. For example, a teacher may write a question or questions on the board, and then ask the students to interview the person next to him/her. Afterwards, the students must report their partner’s answers. This may lead into a class discussion on the diverse perspectives of the class. The Cooperative Base Groups are long-term heterogeneous groups with consistent membership. The benefit of this is the creation of a smaller group or community within the classroom community that may be sustained for years throughout a student’s educational career (Putnam 1998). I did not form Cooperative Base Groups due

to my already small class size and the lack of potential that these groups could be sustained long term. Instead, I utilized formal and informal types of learning groups.

The primary focus of this project was the short story unit in which the B1 students are required to study. However, because Cooperative Learning is a new type of interaction for many of the students, I prepared them for it prior to beginning this curriculum unit. I felt that it would be unfair to expect the students to participate in groups without building a foundation of trust and at least a familiarity with each other's personalities. Therefore, several months before I began the short stories, I assigned the students a group paragraph to be written and revised together. I also assigned peer-editing responsibilities to each student, so they could get a feel for assisting and teaching another student which is a crucial component of Cooperative Learning. I did not heavily structure these assignments, but instead allowed the students to decide with whom they would work and how they would divide the tasks. Moreover, we played team building and class building games and had open class discussions about topics, which were significant in their lives such as jobs and relationships, but unrelated to English class. The goal for these activities was to allow the students to experience learning in a non-individualistic setting. After I felt that a foundation had been laid among the group, I began the short story unit.

The short story unit consisted of four actual short stories and two excerpts from novels. The short stories were: Rikki-Tikki-Tavi by Rudyard Kipling, The Revolt of Mother by Amy Wilkins Freeman, The Gift of the Magi by O. Henri, The Lady or the Tiger by Frank Stockton, and the two novel excerpts were: China's Little Ambassador by Bette Bao Lord, and Barrio Boy by Ernesto Galarza. We completed this unit in

approximately three months time and outlines and handouts for each lesson can be found in *Appendix B*.

Goals and Objectives

Objectives for this unit were:

- to understand and identify each story's main and supporting characters, setting, conflict, resolution, theme and literary devices;
- to understand the difference between internal and external conflict and determine which was illustrated in the stories;
- to understand the difference between first and third person point of view and determine which was utilized in the stories;
- to identify, and prove with examples, the stories' themes; and
- to understand, identify and create examples of similes, imagery, metaphors, and foreshadowing.

In addition to the academic objectives, the activities for each unit served one or more of these specific purposes: class building, team building, mastery (of a skill or concept), information sharing and the development of thinking skills.

Class building helps to develop trust among all of the students. I did not want to students to become dependent on any one fellow student, but rather to develop a positive interdependence throughout the class. As a result, if a student met with another student outside this class setting, was asked to work with any other class member, or was asked for help by any class member, the same level of comfort would be present. Class building provides an opportunity for networking that may lead to resources outside the classroom, such as employment or friendship opportunities.

Teambuilding, like class building, also develops trust among the students, but in smaller groups. Enjoying learning as a team develops loyalty to others and reveals

teammate strengths and weaknesses so the teammates know how to support each other. It also fosters enthusiasm for learning, which in the long run leads to more efficient academic work (Kagan 1992). Most of the team-building activities used in this project were content-related and served the dual purpose of uniting the teams and practicing the lesson.

Mastery activities develop confidence in a skill or concept that is essential to a student's academic success. Unlike drills, worksheets, and memorization exercises, in which students have little interest, mastery activities develop a high level of skills through peer support and tutoring, simultaneous interaction, frequent correction opportunities and immediate feedback. The activities that I used in this project also appeal to a variety of intelligences and learning styles, which makes the information more accessible to everyone. For example, the "Mix, Freeze Groups" activity is appropriate for students who prefer a musical, kinesthetic, or an interactive style of learning.

Information sharing or jigsaw activities are essential to developing teams and positive interdependence. With information sharing each student must contribute information in order to receive information, producing a feeling of need and of being needed. As students teach each other information, they are realizing their own capabilities, the perspectives of others and the importance of communication. Sharing information among teams is central to class building, higher level thinking, and participation of all students. Traditionally, in a teacher-centered classroom, one student speaks and the teacher responds. During information sharing activities, all the students are participating and at least half the class is speaking simultaneously (Kagan 1992).

This is an ideal situation for a language class where oral communication is an essential skill.

The development of thinking skills not only helps with academic success, but also with life skills and access to future learning. Thinking skills such as analyzing, predicting, synthesizing, and applying are all necessary in the daily lives of all people. With the extremely rapid growth of information and technology systems, our students need to develop a high level of thinking skills in order to understand this ever-changing part of society and compete in the job market. “Increasingly we move away from defining educational success exclusively in terms of the quantity of information mastered. Instead, to a large extent, we define educational success as the ability among students to generate questions, combine, categorize, re-categorize, evaluate, and apply information” (Kagan 1992).

Pre-reading activities

To introduce each story, the students completed 2-4 pre-reading activities. These activities were assigned to activate prior knowledge of a subject, and help students recognize their own opinions, feelings, and perceptions and those of their classmates. These pre-reading activities also helped to interest the students in the various themes of the stories. The pre-reading activities used were prediction, interviews, “Mix, Freeze Groups,” and team and class discussions.

Prediction is an excellent pre-reading activity that promotes thinking skills and activates schema. This activity was used in China’s Little Ambassador, Barrio Boy, Rikki Tikki Tavi, and The Revolt of Mother. In China’s Little Ambassador, Barrio Boy, , and The Revolt of Mother, the students analyzed the title and the illustrations to

determine the plot and the theme of the story. I recorded their answers on the board and later could see who had made the best guess. To introduce Rikki Tikki Tavi and The Gift of the Magi, the class was divided into groups of two. One student was assigned to read the first two pages and the other student was assigned the last two pages of the story. Then, through discussion, cooperation, and information sharing the team predicted what might have happened in the middle of the story. This led to an overall class discussion.

Interviews were used in the stories of Rikki Tikki Tavi and The Revolt of Mother. Students asked and answered questions relating to the story, which tapped into their experiences or opinions. Each student interviewed two other students. Later, with the entire class, I asked each student to read the answers of their interviewees and explain how those answers differed from or were similar to their own. I also asked the students if any of the answers surprised them or offered them another perspective to consider. Since many of those answers did surprise them, this activity not only helped the students examine their own feelings, but it also helped them to appreciate perspectives other than their own; ones that may not have occurred to them previously. Additionally, commonalities became apparent between the students and they created connections that otherwise may not have been established. Ultimately the interviews served as class builders and promoted thinking skills. Following the interviews, I felt that the students were more enthusiastic about the stories and seemed more comfortable working together on subsequent activities.

“Mix, Freeze Groups” was another pre-reading activity meant to activate schema and also encourage mastery of a concept and class building. This was used to set the theme in The Revolt of Mother and to review the concepts of similes in The Gift of the

Magi. In this activity, the students were asked to individually complete a task of finishing a sentence with their own thoughts or knowledge. The sentence starters were constructed to help the students to understand the theme of the story, which is often a very difficult concept for ESOL students to grasp. Then they walked around the room, greeting each other while I played music, which made the activity more entertaining. They did this until I called, “Freeze” or stopped the music, and then they shared their answers with the person nearest to them. After the activity, we discussed their answers and the answers of their classmates. I asked questions such as, “Did anybody’s answers surprise you? Were there any answers that you did not understand for which you would like an explanation? What do you think the theme of this story is? What do you think it was about?” By asking this last question, the students were also given the opportunity to practice their prediction skills.

Team discussions were used throughout the unit as a pre-reading, reading, and individual activity. As my class was small, the teams were no larger than 3 people. Fortunately, this helped students to feel less intimidated about speaking in front of a larger group and many seemed less self-conscious about expressing themselves. Team discussions helped to promote thinking skills, team building and mastery when used as a review tactic before the final test of a story. I would give them various questions; both introspective and content-related and we would discuss the answers as a class.

Reading activities

Following the pre-reading activities, the students read the stories and performed several tasks to help them it or to teach others various concepts within the stories. The activities varied from story to story. This made the learning more enjoyable and appealed

to several types of learning styles. The reading activities included a class debate, jigsaw, story maps, dramatization, paraphrasing, “one stays, one strays”, “connecting with the characters”, and “plot profiles”.

The class debate was assigned on The Revolt of Mother. In this story, there were two very clear sides to the conflict. Each student was assigned one of the main characters and as a team generated several reasons why that character was in the right in the conflict. Each student on the team was asked to think of one reason why their character was right and why the other character was wrong. However, not all students were required to speak during the debate as some students were very anxious about speaking in a large group. They were also given ten seconds to give an opening argument and then the teams were given time to defend their character’s motives. This activity promoted teambuilding and thinking skills and it helped the students interact with the story and the characters, as well as with each other.

Barrio Boy and China’s Little Ambassador were studied primarily in a jigsaw style. The class was divided in half and each team was assigned one of the stories. As a team, they developed their own comprehension questions and also answered questions that I had given them. This developed mastery of the plot, theme, and point of view of the stories, and promoted teambuilding and thinking skills. In addition, the teams composed a list of character traits for their story’s main character. Later, each team member partnered with a member of the other team. Acting as an expert for their story each student explained the plot, theme and point of view. They also compared the lists of characteristics to find similarities and differences between the main characters. This led to another activity in which the two students designed a Venn Diagram of the two

characters. The pairs of students presented their diagrams to the class. The Venn Diagram activity was also assigned during the study of The Gift of the Magi. This further enhanced thinking skills, team building, class building and information sharing.

For the purpose of analyzing the literary elements of the short story, the students filled out a story map for Rikki Tikki Tavi, The Revolt of Mother, The Gift of the Magi, and The Lady or the Tiger. To properly complete the story maps, the students needed to understand the following concepts: main and supporting characters, setting, point of view, conflict, resolution, theme, and various literary devices. Instead of burdening each student with the responsibility of mastering all of these concepts simultaneously, I assigned 3 different teams a section of the story map. They became experts on their section, completed it, and then taught it to their classmates in an oral presentation. The completed story map was posted on the bulletin board as a display of their collaborative efforts. As this curriculum unit progressed, the students gradually took more responsibility in completing a story map until during the final story, The Lady or the Tiger, they were able to complete it independently and confidently.

Dramatization was a fun and active tool to enhance the students' learning, class building, and thinking skills. In both The Revolt of Mother and Rikki Tikki Tavi, the students created and dramatized a new ending to the stories. This facilitated an understanding of the concept of cause and effect, because they created alternate outcomes to events of the stories. Since this was a creative activity that required movement, speaking and acting out the feelings of another person, this activity also appealed to the kinesthetic and emotional learners in the class.

Paraphrasing is an activity that was used in The Gift of the Magi and The Revolt of Mother. Not only was this useful in class building, but it also improved their listening skills. I posed a question to the class and asked them to write their answer. Then the students divided into teams of two and interviewed each other about their answers. After one student verbally answered the question, their partner would paraphrase the answer back to the first student. If the first student was dissatisfied with the answer, the partner was to try again. After the activity, I asked the students how it felt to have someone actively listen to them.

From the Cooperative Learning: Reading Activities book by Jeanne M. Stone (2000), I adopted the structure “one stays, one strays” and used it in the study of The Gift of the Magi, China’s Little Ambassador, and Barrio Boy. In this activity teams of two students created comprehension questions about the story and then split and regrouped into new pairs. They used their previously created questions to test the knowledge of their new partners. If the partner was unable to answer the question, the first student had the opportunity to teach the other student the information. This activity applied information sharing, thinking skills and teambuilding.

“Connecting with the characters” is an activity that is found on page 54 of the Cooperative Learning: Reading Activities book by Jeanne M. Stone (2000). Students chose their favorite character from the story, The Revolt of Mother, and wrote the name next to the characteristics on the worksheet that they felt correlated to that character. Next, the students made comparisons between the character and people with whom they are familiar such as themselves or their best friends. After recording their thoughts, a continuum was constructed in the classroom and the students stood on the line to show

how they felt about each statement. Next I asked a few students to explain their answers. For example, to the statement, “Sarah is like my best friend” a student could stand on the “a lot” section of the continuum and I would ask the student to explain why the character, Sarah, is a lot like the student’s best friend. This activity helped the students draw connections from the characters to personal experiences. Furthermore, it facilitated class building, thinking, and communication skills.

“Plot profiles” (Stone 2000) is another kinesthetic activity that improves mastery of a concept, thinking skills and information sharing. It was employed in the study of Rikki Tikki Tavi. Each student was given a “plot profiles” worksheet. As a class, they identified and wrote the events of the story on the numbered lines provided. In teams of three, each group decided on and marked the most and the least exciting event. They continued in this fashion, numbering the events in order of excitement and importance to the story. Following that, the teams plotted the plot on the graph provided; the climax of the story was at the top of the graph. When all of the teams were finished the classroom became a model of the graph and each student became a representative of one event in the story. Negotiation of where each student should stand on the graph led to discussion about the importance of each event.

Individual/ Independent activities

To assess the absorption of the material, several independent activities were also assigned. For each story a vocabulary and final comprehension test were administered. Additionally, individual comprehension questions were assigned daily for several purposes. One of these purposes was to “warm-up” the students at the beginning of each class so they were focused on the story and mentally prepared for new material. Other

purposes were to test the understanding of the story and to help the students reflect and relate to what they had already learned. This helped them draw connections to the new ideas and activities. Finally, for some of the stories, a 3-paragraph essay was assigned. To relate to experiences of the main characters of China's Little Ambassador and Barrio Boy, the students were asked to write a narrative essay about their first day in a U.S. school. For Rikki Tikki Tavi, a persuasive essay helped organize their thoughts on the snakes' perspectives. An expository essay was assigned on the use of theme in The Gift of the Magi to reinforce this new concept. These essays are an integral part of the B1 curriculum and further enhanced the students thinking and mastery skills.

Lastly, the class studied The Lady or the Tiger, which was taught using traditional, teacher-centered methods. Although there were some commonalities in this lesson plan to the others, pre-reading, reading, and post reading activities and class discussion, the students did not interact with each other or cooperate to learn. I provided all of information needed to ensure success on their test and assignments; however, they did not utilize each other's strengths and weaknesses or turn to each for support. I felt that it was important to have the students experience learning in this way so they would be able to clearly distinguish their feelings on Cooperative Learning methods.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, I believe this was a successful and worthwhile project. There were many anticipated and non-anticipated positive results along with various aspects that needed improvement. I have come to numerous conclusions as a result of this project and gathered evidence for my conclusions in three ways: my observations during the activities, the written and verbal reactions from my students, and their quantitative and qualitative assessments during and after each story. The details of each are described below and include how I may use this evidence to revise the project for future classes.

My observations

I began this project in December of 2004 with preliminary interviews and improvised Cooperative Learning structures to create a foundation for the upcoming academic portion. During the initial interviews, detailed in Chapter 2, the students seemed unenthusiastic and even anxious about the prospect of using group structures and interdependence to learn this essential curriculum unit. I believe they were apprehensive about trusting and relying on peers to gain academic skills. Only one student, Gunther, seemed to understand the impact that positive peer interaction could have on other students.

The students accepted that they were to teach and learn from each other early in the project; however, when given the choice of with whom to work, they naturally gravitated towards others with common language and cultural backgrounds. In particular, Layla, from Afghanistan, had no cultural commonalities with others in the class and would ask to work alone. Because of this, I see this is an area for improvement for future classes. I must design interesting and fun ways to assign and assemble the teams. When I did assign teams, it seemed as if the students were either suspicious of why I grouped two or three certain people or that it was negotiable with whom they were to work. It will be necessary to address this issue as well.

In January 2005, after the winter break, the class studied China's Little Ambassador and Barrio Boy, the first of the short story lessons. The activities, while conducted in Cooperative Learning style, mirrored the type of activities that could be found in most classes. For example, there were worksheets of questions that had to be answered by each student. This was purposely done to ease the students into an unfamiliar learning style with familiar activities. I believe that this was an effective way to acclimate the students and I will repeat it in the future. Students studied this story with a jigsaw or an information sharing technique and they participated willingly.

In contrast, although the second story, Rikki Tikki Tavi, was also studied using the jigsaw technique, I found that the students had difficulty resisting knowing all the information. This lesson plan contained a prediction activity wherein half the students were asked to read the beginning of the story and half were asked to read the end. Then, in collaboration, the teams needed to predict the events in the middle of the story. It took much convincing to dissuade the students from reading the middle of the story before

discussing it with their partners. I was not certain whether this was because of curiosity, fear of getting the wrong answer, or competition for the correct answer, but their inclination was to read both sections and draw their own conclusions. I do feel that this was a positive sign that the students trusted themselves; still one of my goals was to produce trust amongst their peers. In the future, I will stress the importance and reward of not reading ahead and assure them that there would be no consequences for predicting incorrectly.

The more times the students repeated an activity, the more trust was built between them. For example, when studying The Gift of the Magi, the prediction activity assigned during Rikki Tikki Tavi, was repeated and the student's were more willing to follow instructions, which showed that they had built more trust. This willingness may also have been attributed to the attainment of the necessary skills needed to complete the activity. This willingness was also observed during the Venn Diagram activity in China's Little Ambassador and Barrio Boy and later in The Gift of the Magi and The Lady or the Tiger and the story maps that were implemented with all of the stories. By the end of the unit, the students were confidently and independently completing the story maps with accuracy. I believe that these learned skills could be attributed to peer teaching. The familiarity of the activity promoted trust in themselves and trust in their classmates.

One of the most successful activities was the class debate. The students seemed to have a great deal of enthusiasm for this activity. Of all the activities, I observed the most teamwork exhibited during the class debate. The students readily and passionately defended positions with which they did not actually agree and even laughed about the outcome of this mock competition. One of the unexpected results of the class debate was

the display of respect that the students showed to one another. Even in the most heated moments, the students still said, “Excuse me,” when one wanted to add a comment and began other statements with congenial phrases such as “ I understand why you feel that way, but...” and “That was a good point, however...”. Not only was I extremely proud of their speaking and reasoning skills, but I also observed marked improvements in their social skills. I realized that this was partly a result of the timing of the activity. Since the debate took place the mid-point of the project, students had had time to build respectful relationships for each other. This is a detail that I will remember and repeat in the future; the class debate should only be done after the class has had time to build respect and trust.

Another successful activity was the “Mix, Freeze” groups. The students seemed to find this exercise entertaining and helpful in understanding concepts such as similes and metaphors. Since this initially was done towards the beginning of the unit, it was an ideal method of releasing tension, creating interaction, revealing personality’ and starting verbal dialogue. Many students have expressed and I have observed nervousness in speaking in front of the class due to their lack of English skills. I found that even the most apprehensive students participated in this activity with eagerness. Because it called for equal participation and contribution by all students, everyone was both giving to and receiving from their community. Therefore, this activity should be assigned towards the beginning of the unit, as it is an excellent class builder and a fun way to introduce the uniqueness of this type of learning as well as the personalities of the classmates.

One of the least successful activities was the class discussion. I believe that the lack of participation was due to the fact that it too closely resembled common classroom

scenes, which are teacher centered. When I posed questions for discussion, the students may have felt that it was a test of their knowledge of the material and that they might have been penalized for incorrect answers. Despite assurances that this was not the case, I could feel more anxiety for these activities than any others. Another possibility for their hesitation may have been that they had to answer in front of the entire class. As I expressed earlier, many students did not feel confident in their oral communication skills and therefore did not want to speak. One way to alter the dynamics of the class discussion may be to ask for a discussion leader or facilitator. If the teacher were not the one leading the discussion, perhaps the students would be more inclined to participate. Also, I intend to change the physical environment of the class discussion possibly by having the students sit on the floor, on top of the tables, or in a circle. I hope that the physical change will break the association to traditional, teacher-centered classes and created a more relaxed atmosphere.

By March, I noticed less hesitation to form groups, a better rhythm within the groups, and a friendlier and more cooperative atmosphere. There was more laughter heard while the group assignments were conducted. I truly believe if students are relaxed and enjoying themselves, they are more receptive to information. I saw more greetings and inquiries into each other's well being and other aspects of life that were unrelated to academics. I overheard conversations about seeing each other outside of school and advice about after school jobs. One female student opened a discussion about relationships and asked the young men their perspectives.

It seemed that a community was formed and I hope this will go a long way in fulfilling these students' social and emotional needs. Although, I know that the students

learned and mastered a great deal of academic skills, I feel that a greater goal was reached. That goal was strong interpersonal connections and trust in people with unfamiliar cultures and social confidence.

Students' reactions

Throughout the duration of this unit, I asked each student to complete four different questionnaires, usually following a story. In these, I asked several questions related to the activities, learning experiences and how they felt learning from and contributing to a community. I noticed a significant difference in the students' feedback as the project progressed. These were some of the quotes from the first questionnaire:

- "I feel okay working with others, but I prefer working independently. And the reason is I like to concentrate on the work that I am doing."(Deena)
- "I feel more comfortable to do something with myself than to get ideas from others." (Layla)
- "I think I can understand the story reading by myself than with others." (Layla)
- "I would like to try more of the types of lessons in the future, because I think it would help me to improve my English." (Stefany)

These quotes illustrate the students' lack of enthusiasm and trust in this type of learning.

The second questionnaire revealed more openness and readiness for Cooperative

Learning methods, although, some students remained skeptical. These are from the second questionnaire:

- "It makes me feel so proud that I can also teach or explain things to others. I am so happy of that."(Allen)
- "As the saying goes, 'Opinions are like noses, everyone has one.' It helped me to gather views and opinions from others." (Charles)
- "I was ready for the test, but not well-prepared."(Deena)
- "I don't know if I helped them, but I know they helped me." (Ariadna)

In the third questionnaire, the students seemed excited about and encouraged by the work that they had done together and the relationships that they had formed. I observed students, who had revealed to me in writing that they had significant apprehensions about speaking in front of the class, giving presentations, answering questions and offering to

read aloud. I credit this to the trust, community, and positive interdependence that had been built. These quotes are from the third and fourth questionnaires and greatly illustrate this point:

- “It was good for me to hear others ideas because it helped me to understand my own.” (Allen)
- “(I’m being honest) Now I do not feel so nervous, like the first time. It is also helping me to feel more confident.” (Maria)
- “It makes me feel great that I am progressing in my English.” (Gunther)
- “I feel more familiar now (in school).” (Layla)
- “I feel wonderful because I come to school and learn.” (Stefany)
- “I feel better anytime we work together as a team. I think my ideas really help others.” (Charles)
- “I feel really good because I didn’t have any friends before. I met Maria in this class and now we become close friends.” (Deena)

Interestingly, students also indicated that they do prefer to have time to work individually. I attribute this to the need to process what they learned from their peers. In the future, I plan to incorporate more time for my students to think and work independently. Furthermore, I feel that an explanation of the value of processing would be important so the students will understand why they feel the need to work alone at times. I am concerned that they may interpret this time as a rejection from their peers and for their point of views.

Through journal entries, I was able to investigate and confirm my observations and interpretations of their feedback. I found the students to be progressively more open and forthcoming in their journals and in class. One of the greatest examples of this was Layla. Originally she requested to work alone and indicated in her interview that she preferred to only interact with peers from her culture. When I began this project, Layla was concerned only with learning the concepts that she needed to pass her class and standardized tests. Nevertheless, I have seen an eagerness grow in Layla to interact and orally communicate with other students. About a month into the project, I asked the class what element they would like implemented into the class that I was neglecting. In other

words, I asked, “What can I do to make the class better for you?” Layla actually requested more verbal interaction to improve her speaking abilities and to learn more about others’ idea. This testified to the strength of this project because one of my goals was to facilitate an interest in communication with peers from various cultures.

Assessment results

To qualitatively and quantitatively assess the results of this methodology on the students learning, the students were tested and/or assigned writing tasks at the end of each story. Although, the writing assignments were given letter grades, they were equal to the following: **A= 95, B+=92 B=88, B-=85, C+=82, C=78, C-=75, D+=72, D=68, D-=64, F=63.**

The unit began with the participation of 6 students; however, one student joined the class mid-way through the project. This is reflected in the scores.

	<u>China’s Little Ambassador and Barrio Boy</u>	<u>Rikki Tikki Tavi</u>	<u>The Revolt of Mother</u>	<u>The Gift of the Magi</u>	<u>The Lady or the Tiger</u>
Test scores:	76,94,92,100, 86,100,91 (91.3)	84,73,88,95, 66,70,91 (94.5)	81,94,93, 79,78,89,84 (85.4)	100,97,100, 86,91,95,87 (93.7)	82,97,94, 85,82,95,97 (90.2)
Writing assignment scores:	85,85,95,75, 95, 88 (87)	95,95,82,82, 95,85 (89)	n/a	n/a	95,92,75, 92,92,95,95 (91)
Class Average:	89.2	91.75	85.4	93.7	90.6

This table reveals that the students progressed and were able to apply the material that was presented to them. The average test score was a **B** or higher for each story and with the exception of The Revolt of the Mother, the students were able to maintain this level of high achievement throughout the curriculum unit. Furthermore, I observed

improvement in their writing assignments in the areas of creativity, organization, and grammar. However, the students displayed a difference in motivation and attitude when writing the essay for The Lady or the Tiger. I believe they were less motivated to write about this story because the assignments entailed less personal interaction while studying this story. In the future, I will assign a writing task for each story to be completed prior to the test. I feel that when the students were able to creatively explore, organize, and record their thoughts, they mastered the skills necessary for the test to a higher degree.

From my observations, from the students' reactions and feedback, and from the assessment results, I conclude that the three needs indicated in Chapter 1 were met and the academic objectives and learning targets were reached. The class formed a community where the students felt safe, important, and welcome, while at the same time attained valuable scholastic skills. Attendance and participation were higher in this class than in any of my other classes and I feel that a new culture based upon learning and sharing has been identified.

I realize that the long term or life-long results of this project cannot be determined at this time. However, I do believe, that this type of learning, done on a larger scale, could have a significant, positive impact on the social and educational development of English Language Learners. In fact, I believe that Cooperative Learning techniques could and should be utilized in any classroom with a mixture of cultures, regardless of the common language. I further believe that if students of any age, culture, or background are given the common purpose of attaining knowledge through personal contribution and positive interaction, they will not only rise to the challenge, but also carry that behavior into their daily lives, the lives of others, and the world beyond.

Appendix A

Student interview questionnaire:

What is your name?

Where are you from?

How long have you been in the United States?

What was your motivation for coming here?

What did you expect to the US to be like before you came here?

How was it different from what you expected?

How long have you been in the United States?

Do you feel that the American culture is welcoming to people from other countries?

How long have you been formally studying English?

How do you feel about American students your age?

Do you prefer to hang out with students of your own culture or are you comfortable with a mix of cultures? Why?

Are you involved with gang activity or have friends that are involved with gangs?

Why do you think people join gangs?

Is there anything that teachers could do to stop you from joining a gang?

How do you feel about your classmates?

How do you feel about learning?

Appendix B

Short Story unit:

(Excerpts from novels)

Stories: China's Little Ambassador by Bette Bao Lord

Barrio Boy by Ernesto Galarza

*Split the class in half. One half will read CLA, the other will read BB. Each team will become experts on these stories. Later they will interview each other to learn about the other story.

Pre-reading:

1. Write a paragraph: What did you think would happen on your first day in an American school? They are to write about what they predicted would happen before they came to school on the first day.
2. By looking at the pictures and the title for each story, what do they think the story is about? They are to discuss this with their team members. (Thinking skills) (Teambuilding)

Reading activities:

1. Read the story individually and write three questions about what they read. They will be used to start discussion with their teammates. (Teambuilding) (Thinking skills)
2. Read the story out loud with their teammates. (Teambuilding) (Mastery)
3. Ask the team the questions that they created. (Thinking skills)
4. Answer the questions about their story. (attached) Point of View and plot may need to be discussed. (Mastery)
5. Write a list of traits about the main character of their story. (Mastery)
6. Write a paragraph about what actually happened on the first day of school. (Thinking skills)

Jigsaw activities:

1. Pair up with someone from the other team. Each team will have a different story to read. They will read the story to each other and then discuss it. (Thinking skills) (Teambuilding)

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5. @ @ 8 N@ 4 bout the first day of school to their peer.
(Teambuilding)

Individual activities:

1. Read the other story.
2. Vocabulary quiz about both stories. (attached)
3. Write a paragraph about how you feel about school now.
4. Using the writing process, write a 3 paragraph essay about your first day of school. They are to use the 3 previous paragraphs as their prewriting activity.
5. Final test on both stories. (Attached)

Short story unit

Rikki Tikki Tavi by Rudyard Kipling

Pre-reading:

1. Interview two classmates: a. what would you do if someone threatened your family? b. How do you feel about snakes? c. what is the relationship between mongooses and snakes? d. Do animals have emotions? (Class building)
2. Answer the question: What was the bravest thing that you ever did?
3. Class discussion about the question. (Class building)

Team reading activities:

1. In pairs, one person reads pages 1-3, and the other person reads pages 5-6. Together they predict what happened in the middle of the story. (Teambuilding) (Thinking skills)
2. In groups of four, the students become experts in one part of the short story map. Once they have decided on an answer, the group break into 4 new groups and the “experts” help their new group complete the story map (attached). (Information sharing) (Mastery) (Teambuilding)
3. In the new teams, they role play a new ending to RTT. (Teambuilding) (Mastery)
4. Plot Profiles (Mastery) (Thinking skills) (Information sharing)

Individual activities:

1. Vocabulary quiz (attached)
2. Individual comprehension or perception questions to be used in class discussion:
 - a. What does it mean to predict?
 - b. Who are the main characters?
 - c. Who are the supporting characters?
 - d. What is the external conflict of the story?
 - e. How was the conflict resolved?
 - f. Describe one of the characters in paragraph form.
 - g. What was the author’s message to the reader?

(Thinking skills) (Mastery) (Class building)

3. Write a three paragraph essay describing 3 events in the story from the snakes’ point of view. (Thinking skills)

Short Story Unit

The Revolt of Mother by Amy Wilkins Freeman

Pre-reading:

1. Looking at the title and pictures, what do you think the story is about? Discuss this with a teammate.
2. Mix, Freeze Groups ([Mastery](#)) (68):
Courage is.....
Something that scares me is.....
Someone that scares me is.....
Marriage is.....
The role of a wife is.....
The role of a husband is.....
The best thing about marriage is.....
3. Prediction: From the sentence starts, what do you think this story is about? ([Thinking skills](#))
4. What is the difference between an internal and an external conflict? Listen to a partner and paraphrase their answers. ([Thinking skills](#)) ([Mastery](#)) ([Class building](#))

Team Reading activities:

1. Connecting with the characters ([Class building](#)) (54)
2. Class debate about whom was right, Sarah or Adoniram. Assign each student a side to argue. Each student is responsible for a point for their character and a point against the other character. ([Class building](#)) ([Thinking skills](#))
3. Dramatize a new conclusion for this story. ([Class building](#)) ([Thinking skills](#))
4. Class Discussion question: What is the theme of this story and how do you know?

Individual Activities:

1. Test about the story. (attached)

Short Story Unit:
The Gift of the Magi by O. Henry

Pre-reading activities:

1. Mix, Freeze Groups with Similes (Class building, Mastery):
 - a. A sunrise is like a _____.
 - b. A child is as _____ as a _____.
 - c. A family is like a _____.
 - d. My day was as _____ as _____.
 - e. A beautiful woman is like _____.
 - f. A handsome man is like _____.
2. Answer the question for a class discussion: What is the best gift that you ever received? (Class building)

Reading activities:

1. Class discussion: How is the marriage of Bella and Joe in The Gift of the Magi different from the marriage of Sarah and Adoniram in The Revolt of Mother?
2. In pairs, one person reads pages 45 and 46. The other reads page 49. Together they try to predict the middle of the story. (Thinking skills) (Teambuilding)
3. In the same pairs, they create questions about the story. In a “one stays, one strays” activity, the teams regroup with new partners and ask each other the questions. (Team building) (Information sharing) (Thinking Skills)
4. In these pairs, create a Venn Diagram comparing either Sarah from The Revolt of Mother and Dell from The Gift of the Magi or Adoniram to Jim. (Thinking Skills)
5. Pair up with someone from the other teams. They are to explain the plot of their story in their own words. Each student must paraphrase it back to their partner. (Class building)

Individual activities:

1. Individual comprehension or perception questions to be used in class discussion:
 - h. What does it mean to predict?
 - i. Who are the main characters?
 - j. Who are the supporting characters?
 - k. What is the external conflict of the story?
 - l. How was the conflict resolved?
 - m. Describe one of the characters in paragraph form.
 - n. What was the author’s message to the reader?
2. Test on the story (attached)
3. 3 paragraph essay: What is the theme of The Gift of the Magi? Give examples to prove it.

Short Story unit

The Lady or the Tiger by Frank Stockton

Pre-reading:

1. Word splash with vocabulary words. The students use the words to guess the plot.
2. Answer the question: What is true love?
3. Answer the question: What is sacrifice?
4. Class discussion about the questions.

Reading activities:

1. Read the story together and individually.
2. Class discussion of the similarities and differences between stories and characters.

Individual activities:

1. Story map
2. Questions on pages 58 and 59 in the book.
3. Venn diagram comparing Dell from The Gift of the Magi to the princess.
4. vocabulary list
5. vocabulary quiz
6. 3 paragraph essay (student may choose one of the following):
 - a. Compare the inner conflicts between the princess and Della.
 - b. What do you think happened in The Lady or the Tiger?
 - c. What would you have done if you were the princess?

Appendix C

Reflection questions for Rikki Tikki Tavi

Did you feel that you were prepared for the test?

What lessons (the story map, making predictions with a partners, the interviews) helped you prepare and why?

Do you feel that you understood the story better because you worked with others? Why or why not?

Do you feel that any friendships have come out of this class yet?

How do you feel about that?

Do you feel that you helped others to understand this story better?

If so, how does that make you feel?

If not, what could you have done differently?

Do you feel that the teacher participated enough in the lessons?

What would you like the teacher to do differently?

Reflection questions for The Revolt of Mother

These questions will not be graded with your test:

Did you feel well-prepared for this test?

Did you enjoy learning about this story? Why?

How do you feel that the other students helped you learn this story?

Do you feel that the activities that you are learning in this class are helping you in other classes? In what ways?

How do you feel that you helped others learn?

How do you feel about school?

Reflection questions for The Gift of the Magi:

1. How do you feel learning as a team?
2. What particular activity did you feel helped you learn?
3. Do you feel that you contributed to other students' learning? If so, how do you feel about that? If not, do you feel that others helped you learn?
4. Do you wish you had more time to work alone? Why?
5. Has this class and activities helped you in any other classes?

Reflection questions for The Lady or the Tiger

1. Do you believe that you learned about short story concepts?
2. How do you feel about school and learning?
3. Do you feel that you contributed to other students' learning? If so, how do you feel about that? If not, do you feel that others helped you learn?
4. You studied all the other stories with your classmates. How did you feel about studying this story independently?

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