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PEERS AS KNOWLEDGEABLE OTHERS IN LEVEL I FOREIGN
LANGUAGE COOPERATIVE LEARNING GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study documents the observed and recorded experiences of a high school French teacher and her twenty-three students taking Level I French every day for forty-two minutes in a large, suburban public high school of approximately 2800 students. The Level I French class for this study was heterogeneous across age, grade, ability, and experience levels. The study examines the role of cooperative learning in this heterogeneous environment, and its effect upon student scaffolding and peers as both experts and novices within their cooperative learning groups. The author defines the zone of proximal development and student scaffolding as they relate specifically to second language acquisition, and documents the use of cooperative learning activities and grouping strategies over the course of the three-month study. The study identifies the positive effects of cooperative learning on language acquisition, student scaffolding, and group dynamics. Specifically, it reveals positive academic results in the areas of listening and reading, and emerging skills for many students in writing and speaking. The study identifies the ways in which students were able to scaffold each other’s learning, and areas where they needed additional support from the teacher. The study suggests that differences in age, grade, and ability levels do affect group dynamics. Finally, it suggests modifications to the study, including more group-building exercises at the beginning of the school year and before each cooperative group change, tightly structured cooperative group
activities, and more teacher support both before and during the cooperative group assignments.
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Allow me to introduce you to some of my students. Rhonda is a high school junior who just recently moved to the United States from India. Because English is not her first language, she is enrolled in the English as A Second Language Program (ESL) and she receives extra support from the ESL teacher. She speaks English very well, with a noticeable accent that does not, however, interfere with her ability to be understood by her classmates or me. Rhonda is an avid language learner; she has nearly perfected her command of the English language, and her highly successful experiences with language acquisition enable her to excel in all aspects of French, this new language she is learning. Rhonda is very curious, confident, and outgoing, and she regularly participates in class, asking and answering questions, helping other students, and seeking expanded, more detailed, or additional information on virtually every topic we explore in class.

Two seats behind Rhonda sits Nancy, a vivacious young freshman who is repeating French I this year. She took the same course last year in 8th grade, and received a final grade of B, but both she and her parents felt that she did not really learn much in middle school. Consequently, she is taking the Level I course again in order to be fully prepared for Level II French next year. Nancy is an excellent
student; as she has already studied the content for the course, she does very well on every assignment and assessment, and she eagerly participates in class. She finishes classroom assignments quickly and accurately, and almost never needs more than a cursory explanation of any new material before mastering the information.

Amy sits across the room from Rhonda and Nancy. Like Nancy, she is a freshman who is repeating Level I French. Unlike Nancy, she is repeating the course because she failed it last year. Amy is pleasant in class; she wants to do well and to please me, but she is very lazy and is often unprepared for class. She forgets to do her homework, she does not listen to instructions in class, and she likes to chat with her neighbors about make-up, boys, and weekend plans. Unfortunately, Amy struggles with French and she should be putting as much effort as possible into the course. Despite having had the same course last year, Amy does not understand key grammar concepts, and she experiences difficulty with new vocabulary. Consequently, she falls behind very quickly, and her poor grades on projects, quizzes, and exams reflect her poor study habits and difficulty with the subject.

Jason is another 9th grade student in my Level I French class. Jason took Spanish I in 8th grade, but he failed it, and so he is trying a new language in high school. Jason is having some difficulties adjusting to the more rigorous demands of the high school, and he is struggling in most of his classes, including French I.
He is messy and disorganized; despite my suggestions, he continues to stuff notes, assignments, and essential papers haphazardly into his backpack rather than filing them neatly into a notebook. He forgets to write down homework assignments and test days into his student planner, and so he frequently forgets to complete required assignments and to study for in-class assessments. Additionally, Jason struggles with a second language. Like Amy, he has difficulty grasping basic concepts and learning new vocabulary. Without some help with his organizational and study skills, Jason risks failing a Level I language class for the second time.

Zach sits near Jason. The two boys know each other from middle school, but unlike Jason, Zach did not take a Level I language course in 8th grade because he needed reading remediation and so could not fit a language into his schedule. Zach struggles in French I for some of the same maturity reasons that Jason and many other new freshmen exhibit. Additionally, Zach is several grade levels behind in reading, and he has never been exposed to a second language. Despite his best attempts and help from an older friend in the class, Zach performs poorly in French I and may fail the class without considerable additional help.

Janice is one of three seniors in my class. An Advanced Placement Spanish student, Janice has had several years of a second language, and she has done very well and consequently enjoys learning new languages. Not surprisingly, Janice is an A+ French I student, and she does not have to do much to excel in the course. As French and Spanish are similar, Janice assimilates verb conjugations,
sentence structure, vocabulary, second language reading and listening strategies, and speaking skills quite easily in French I. Because many of the students in the class are new second language learners, I have to devote additional instructional time to concepts (verb conjugation and patterns, gender, adjective agreement) with which she is already quite familiar. As a result, she often looks bored in my class, and I worry that I may be squelching her passion for new languages.

These young language students, many of them first-time world language travelers, are typical of a Level I high school foreign language classroom. Because of the considerable variety of different age and maturity, ability, and experience levels in a typical Level I high school foreign language classroom, language teachers question how to accommodate the academic and social needs of their students. This is a question that the Level I high school language teacher struggles with at the beginning of every new school year, and a question that is not easily answered. Clearly, the “one size fits all” mentality of teaching rarely works with students who enter our classrooms and our language worlds with differences related to learning readiness, cultural background, interests, gender, talents, and learning profile. This is no more apparent than it is in a Level I high school language classroom. Many of my language teacher colleagues resist or outright refuse to teach Level I language because the challenges are so daunting. Yet, Level I language classes in French, Spanish, and German, and increasingly in languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic, continue to be offered at most
high schools. The challenge that faces language teachers is how to deliver language instruction that benefits and challenges learners of all ages and ability levels, as this is the population of students we will continue to serve in our Level I language classrooms.

**My Motivation to Teach French I**

In the United States, the study of a foreign language begins late, usually in middle and sometimes even in high school (Christian, Pufahl, & Rhodes, 2005), with most foreign language study taking place in grades 9-12, “during which time more than one-third (39%) of students study a foreign language” (Cutshall, 2005, p. 22). In American high schools, students taking a first year course in a second language are typically grouped heterogeneously, as first year courses are not tracked for ability levels, and as the students of all ages may take a Level I course in language. Moreover, Level I courses are typically taught under artificial, restrictive classroom conditions, and they emphasize lower order thinking skills. These skills are based on understanding grammatical structures, recognizing and applying verb and sentence patterns, memorizing vocabulary lists, and later, short dialogs and small reading and listening assignments. Indeed, Level I language classes resemble math classes in that students are expected to understand patterns in order to conjugate, and sentence structure in order to put words together. Mastery of such basic skills allows the students to experience success in higher levels of French, just as mastery of basic formulas and operations allows math
students to move into algebra and other advanced math classes. Level I language classes require skills similar to those required in English classes in that students are expected to recognize, memorize, read, and use new vocabulary in context. Students who have good study skills, who can access effective reading strategies, and who have developed a solid basic English vocabulary do well in English classes, and this success often carries over into Level I foreign language courses. Not surprisingly, students who excel in other content areas like math and English, courses with similar structures and requirements, also find success in traditional foreign language classrooms. These students manage to learn under conditions Dewey calls “accidental” rather than those created with “the needs and capacities of the individuals who are learning at a given time” (Dewey, 1938, p. 45). Unfortunately, many foreign language students do not thrive under such traditional conditions; they struggle through one or two years of a foreign language, and then drop the subject before they have had a chance to really enjoy being able to communicate in a second language.

I became a French teacher because I did well in the typical, traditional high school classrooms, and because I excelled in French. After four years of high school French, I was able to engage in meaningful communication activities in the target language, and so I pursued undergraduate and graduate degrees in French literature. I continued to study and then to teach abroad, and I became very fluent
in my chosen second language. In short, I am a high school French teacher today because I enjoyed early success in the language.

My natural inclination is to prefer teaching the upper level high school French classes, those students who are in a fourth or fifth year of study, often enrolled in Honors and Advanced Placement French classes. I relate well to these academically motivated students because they are experiencing the same kinds of success I enjoyed as a high school student. I also relate quite well to teacher “Gary” in Cole and Knowles (2000) when he explains that “the ways in which I am known, the roles I variously hold and play . . . describe elements of and provide minute glimpses into the experiences of life that have . . . influenced my personal and professional perspectives and practices” (p. 19). Indeed, like me, most of my advanced French students will go on to study language in college, and many may also study abroad and continue to use their second language in graduate school and in their chosen professions. While I do need to motivate these students and to plan for meaningful communicative experiences in the target language, the students are intrinsically motivated and most will do well under any conditions.

It is precisely because I prefer the content demands, language expertise, and familiarity with the students an upper level French class assures that I also request each year to teach the Level I French classes at my high school. I mention this because, as I stated before, many foreign language teachers try to negotiate
their way out of teaching the Level I language courses at the high school level. They know that the vast differences in ability, age, and experience of the students who enroll in a first year high school foreign language classroom make this particular course especially challenging to teach. In addition, like me, most language teachers experienced early success with a second language. For these teachers, linguists for whom language has always been effortless and enjoyable, students who start a language late, who struggle, or who are enrolled in language classes with vast differences in ability levels are difficult to teach. Planning for appropriate instruction that includes activities and assignments for students of all levels and abilities is a daunting task, and one that it is most tempting to avoid. However, these Level I high school students obviously need more help and more motivation than most to achieve success in a second language. I request the Level I classes because I want to help these students succeed and to continue with their French studies, and because I relish the professional challenges and growth that result from teaching and learning with the Level I classes.

Because of the challenges associated with Level I high school foreign language classes, I decided that it would benefit both my students and me to pursue a line of inquiry that would allow me to look at the experiences of Level I foreign language students in mixed-ability classrooms. Specifically, I wanted to examine instructional delivery to Level I students, and I wanted to find a way to
use their diversity as an advantage and a commodity to be cultivated rather than as an obstacle to overcome.

One of the most common problems related to the Level I foreign language high school classroom involves teacher planning for instruction that will reach and advance all learners. Students enrolled in a Level I foreign language class at the high school level present a great variety of academic abilities, experiences with language acquisition, ages, grade levels, and expectations for the class. Individuals who might be considered low-ability students are characteristically those who are repeating a Level I class that they failed the year before, taking a different Level I class after having failed Level I in another foreign language, or taking a foreign language for the first time because they had to take remedial classes and so were not permitted to include a foreign language in their middle school schedules. These students are usually underclassmen. High-ability students are often enrolled in advanced foreign language classes in another language, students who have lived abroad, or students who have parents who speak a foreign language. Predictably, a teacher in such a situation feels pressured to gear her instruction to a middle range of student ability (Baker, 1976), thus risking the chance of losing the low-ability students to frustration, and the more able students to boredom.

Beyond initial, whole-class mini-lessons to introduce students to new materials and concepts, I have found that traditional whole-class instruction does
not typically meet the differentiated needs of mixed-ability Level I language classes in our high schools. Rather, such heterogeneous classrooms demand alternative methods of instruction, including small group collaborative learning opportunities, to maximize learning for all students.

**The Question**

Given the heterogeneous nature of my level I French classes, and the difficulties I have had trying to pace instruction so as to benefit and advance all of my students, I decided to use the considerable research on small-group learning and student interaction within the zone of proximal development, to determine:

*What will be the observed and recorded experiences when I use various grouping strategies, including small-group, tutor/novice, and peer dyads to provide appropriate instruction for a heterogeneous, mixed age and ability Level I French language high school course?*

I chose to pursue this line of inquiry because I really believe that my Level I students, though faced with many obstacles, including individual limited capabilities and the vastly different abilities in the group as a whole, deserve to be successful and to enjoy learning a foreign language as much as I did and as much as my more traditional learners do. Certainly my duty as an effective educator was to plan for instruction that could be flexible enough to meet the needs of all of my students all of the time rather than just the best students some of the time. As Dewey explains,
Adaption of the method to individuals of various degrees of maturity is a problem for the educator, and the constant factors in the problem are the formation of ideas, acting upon ideas, observation of the conditions which result, and organization of facts and ideas for future use . . . whatever the level of experience, we have no choice but either to operate in accord with the pattern it provides or else to neglect the place of intelligence in the development and control of a living and moving experience. (Dewey, 1997, p. 88)

I was careful to keep my research question open-ended so that I would be objective during my observations, and open to findings that I had not expected (Hubbard & Power, 2003), given my own experiences with second language acquisition. Nevertheless, I did have some initial hunches about what might transpire when I incorporated various grouping strategies into my Level I French curriculum. Moreover, I felt it would be helpful to me as a participant observer to articulate these assumptions. As MacLean and Mohr suggest, writing about what you expect to have happen – or what you expect to find out – can help you and others see ways to check out those assumptions and question them throughout your data analysis. Identifying assumptions may help you reframe your research question and identify your theories. (MacLean & Mohr, 1999, p. 59)
Specifically, I thought I might see the following positive experiences in my classroom:

- Students with less ability and/or experience with a foreign language would benefit greatly and would perform better on assessments from working with their more able peers.
- Students with more experience and/or greater ability with a foreign language would enjoy opportunities to teach and share their expertise with their less able peers.
- All students would have more opportunities to practice the language in their small groups than they would as a whole class.
- I as the teacher facilitator would have more opportunities to address individual student concerns because all of the students would be actively engaged in their small groups.

Given my past experiences with Level I French students, as well as all of the background literature I had read related to cooperative group work, I also suspected that I might observe the following negative classroom behaviors:

- Students would be drawn to working with the same people during pair work, rather than with different individuals within the cooperative groups.
- Students with less ability and/or experience in a foreign language would not contribute during group activities and assignments.
• Students with greater ability and/or experience in a foreign language would dominate group discussions and activities

• Students with greater ability and/or experiences in a foreign language would resent being “slowed down” by their less able peers.

Certainly I had many variables to consider as I ventured into unknown waters with my Level I French students. I had taught Level I students before, and so I was cognizant of the fact that I held several preconceived notions about Level I students related to their ability levels and motivation to learn a second language. Additionally, I had my own successful high school and college experiences with French with which to contend as I prepared to engage in thoughtful participant research in my own classroom. I knew that this year’s students would present challenges, but also exciting possibilities, just as my Level I students always have throughout my career. This year, however, I felt more prepared than ever before. I had a question with which to navigate my efforts in the classroom, the experiences and wisdom of countless practitioners and researchers who had already tested similar waters, and a research plan with specific activities and assessments to keep my study and my students afloat. It was time to set sail, and I did so with the passion and zest for adventure of an explorer seeking uncharted territory.
LITERATURE REVIEW

First Year Achievement in a Foreign Language Classroom

Historically, Americans have viewed the acquisition of a spoken second language with some skepticism and trepidation. The Committee of Ten, created by the National Education Association in 1890, called a program that emphasized modern languages over Latin “distinctly inferior,” thus stigmatizing the study of modern languages early on in American history (Bernhardt, 1998, p. 45). In the 1920s and again in the 1970s, foreign language learning was considered elitist, especially as more and more attention and resources were funneled to second language programs for immigrants needing to learn English (Bernhardt, 1998). Today, language learning is a peripheral rather than core subject in most public schools, and so continues to be regarded as a marginal subject. In a 2003 report, the National Association of State Boards of Education noted that both the arts and foreign language instruction are at risk of being eliminated from our public schools’ core curriculum (Christian, Pufahl, & Rhodes, 2004-2005). Indeed, many people believe that they are unable to learn or do not need to learn a foreign language and these notions contribute greatly to learner anxiety with respect to a foreign language (Cutshall, 2004-2005).

It is not surprising, then, that many American students, especially those who are low achievers in other areas, approach a first year foreign language class with a great deal of apprehension. In a foreign language classroom, students’
anxiety is more often the product of a response to a classroom situation or event – “situational or state anxiety” - rather than a permanent character trait (Oxford & Ehrman, 1993, p. 193). Depending on their learning style preferences and skill levels, students in a first year foreign language class may experience anxiety associated with speaking a new language in front of peers, writing, or listening activities. Certainly, those students who are learning a foreign language for the first time will experience greater anxiety than those students who have studied other foreign languages, especially more than those students who have experienced success with other languages. Even reading, which might seem safer because it is permanent and students can refer back to it repeatedly, can cause anxiety, especially for students “who have difficulty reading efficiently in their native language due to a learning disability or lack of appropriate reading strategies” (Oxford & Ehrman, 1993, p. 193). This is often the case for my own students who are taking a foreign language for the first time at the high school, having missed the opportunity at the middle school because they needed remedial English classes. Moreover, these same students come to think of themselves as “dumb” or “slow” because they have always been judged by traditionally academic standards such as verbal and analytical skills rather than on their own personal strengths, and so they believe they cannot learn a second language. As Kohn notes, “being ‘smart’ or ‘good in school’ is overwhelmingly associated with a narrow band of verbal and analytical abilities. This is problematic for many
reasons, one of which is that a large number of students whose strengths lie elsewhere almost immediately come to think of themselves as inferior” (Kohn, 1999, p. 251). As Berliner and Casanova (1996) note, “Some students who lag academically need to be recognized for the skills they have that are not usually rewarded in the school setting” (p. 12).

Older first year language learners experience frustration because they are forced to communicate at lower intellectual levels than they are used to in other high school classes, and because they must engage in the kinds of imaginative, playful activities typical of an elementary or middle school classroom (Skala, 2003). In essence, these students feel self-conscious in front of their peers when they are reduced to using simple patterns of communication to perform easy activities or articulate uncomplicated thoughts. Finally, the simple communication patterns and kinds of activities associated with a Level I foreign language may cause students to overestimate their capacity for language learning; indeed, many students overestimate their future performance levels (Skala, 2003), and this may interfere with their acquisition of the new language.

**Cooperative Learning Groups**

While many of our traditional public school classrooms mirror American society in that they tend to reward competitive or individual student accomplishment (Tedesco, 1999), the first year foreign language classroom is ideally suited to a more collaborative approach to learning. First, language is
acquired for the purpose of communication, and communication most naturally takes place in a group setting. Student conversations in smaller cooperative groups tend to relieve some of the “performance anxiety” first year students experience when they are learning to speak a new language (Baker, 1976). Of course, this is only true to the extent that students feel safe and valued in the classroom, that they “know they will not be laughed at or otherwise made to feel stupid” (Kohn, 1999, p. 155) as they take risks in a second language. Teachers can ensure that each group feels like a caring community of learners by allowing the students to meet regularly in their assigned groups, and by encouraging them to collaborate with each other on a regular basis (Kohn, 1999). Indeed, cooperative learning groups that are long-term and have stable relationships are able to “give the support, help, encouragement, and assistance each member needs to make academic progress and develop cognitively and socially in healthy ways” (Johnson & Johnson, 2004, p. 245).

Next, in cooperative situations, each student is successful only to the extent that the other students are successful, and so students will help each other because they are also helping themselves (Johnson & Johnson, 1985). In a first year foreign language classroom, cooperative learning activities succeed because the students must communicate with each other, and this only works when all students are motivated, interested, and successful (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; Szostek, 1994). Indeed, cooperative learning encourages and maximizes oral
communication in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1985), and produces higher levels of interaction among students than is typical in a traditional classroom (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980). The results of the Gunderson and Johnson study revealed that small groups of foreign language students interacted more to learn their dialog lines better and more quickly, that peer teaching was a constant activity in the groups, and that students were much more willing to take speaking risks after they had interacted with their group members. These are all desirable outcomes for a first year foreign language classroom.

Because students are working and communicating together so that each person is successful, cooperative learning boosts students’ self-confidence and belief that they can achieve with effort, thus promoting more positive attitudes about language learning (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1985). Specifically, students working in groups learn to value teamwork (Lim & Jacobs, 2001), and they believe that they are more successful and learn more working together rather than individually (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980). However, Cohen (1994) cautions that the teacher must be careful to assign group tasks that require true interaction; if not, students might work individually and not collaborate at all.

Students in a cooperative learning situation no longer want to beat the other students and get the highest grade; rather, they want to know who they can help and who can help them experience success (Bruffee, 1995). In such
cooperative situations, the students who grasp a concept or skill faster do not feel like they have won, but rather that they can now help their classmates (Kohn, 1999). Moreover, these students understand that they may at times be on the receiving end of an explanation, that “ability is not set for life” (Kohn, 1999, p. 252) and that various roles in groups will change depending on the assigned task. Indeed, students need to understand in cooperative learning groups that “there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; that there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 90). Students who benefit from group study time and group achievement awards score higher on foreign language assessments than do students who study alone, or students who practice in groups but receive individual achievement awards. This was especially true for low-achieving students, most of whom had higher percentages of passing grades with group awards than they did with individual awards (Lloyd, Eberhardt, & Drake, 1996).

Students are intrinsically motivated, feel more accepted, better liked, and supported by their peers when they work cooperatively rather than individually (Johnson, Johnson, Johnson, & Anderson, 1976). Johnson et al. (1976) demonstrated in their study that cooperative groups made fewer errors on assignments and assessments, and had less difficulty following directions and completing tasks independently of the teacher. These results suggest that positive feelings about oneself, others, and learning contribute to more academic success
for all students. Indeed, small-group learning contributes substantially to students’
positive feelings about themselves, their peers, and language learning as a
meaningful experience (Baker, 1976; Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; Szostek,
1994). Such a support system provides assistance and encouragement, and “can
do much to raise the level of learning of the participants (Bloom, 2003, p. 219).
Student self-confidence, self-esteem, positive attitudes about language learning,
and mutual peer support and respect are all qualities that could make a first year
foreign language classroom successful for all students.

In general, students who work in cooperative groups achieve higher levels
of academic success than do students who work individually. An exception was
found in Li and Adamson’s 1992 study (as cited in Oxford, 1997); this study
concluded that gifted secondary students preferred individual and competitive
learning, and thus cooperative learning did not significantly relate to higher
achievement. Szostek (1994) also found that certain cooperative learning models
such as “Student Team Learning,” “Group Investigation,” and “Think-pair-share”
benefited her largely homogenous group of academically gifted Honors French
students. These findings support a belief in the benefits of grouping “designed
especially to meet the needs of talented students” (Kulik & Kulik, 1987, as cited
in Szostek, 1994, p. 254). However, in mixed-ability classrooms such as the high
school Level I foreign language class, and particularly in classrooms with low-
level students, group work is highly recommended (Lloyd, Eberhardt, & Drake, 1996).

**Heterogeneous Grouping**

While many teachers prefer homogeneous grouping of students by ability level, especially in mathematics and foreign language because progress is linear and relies on mastery of previous materials, tracking is not usually possible for Level I secondary foreign language classes, and thus they are usually heterogeneous. Mixed-ability classrooms, though, are ideal for cooperative learning activities. As a matter of fact, large-group or whole-class instruction may be disadvantageous to heterogeneous groups because the students are at such different ability and experience levels (Walberg, 2003). Many studies have shown that students achieve more when they work with high-, medium-, and low-ability students rather than working alone or competitively. Johnson and Johnson (1985) found that both low- and medium-ability students benefit from collaborative learning situations, and Swing and Petersen (1982, as cited in Cohen, 1994) found that low-achieving students benefited from working with higher achieving students rather than with other low-achieving students. Berliner and Casanova (1996) affirm this, stating that “children are as likely to benefit from being accelerated as they are from reassignment to a lower achieving group” (p. 12). However, in the Swing and Petersen study, only average achievers did not benefit from heterogeneous groups, but rather achieved more in homogeneous groups of
average achievers. Interestingly, more competent students reinforce their own knowledge when they rework material and teach it to their peers (Gartner & Riessman, 1994). As Kohn explains, “a student struggling to make sense of an idea may understand it better when it is explained by a peer who only recently figured it out himself rather than by an adult” (p. 154). Furthermore, “the student who does the explaining can achieve a fuller understanding of the subject matter by having to make it understandable to someone else” (Kohn, 1999, p.154).

Indeed, students are more likely to receive more extensive feedback from their peers in a collaborative group than they are from a teacher who must try to find time for every student in a given class period (Tedesco, 1999). While students certainly benefit from one-on-one help from the teacher, “well-designed but less individually tuned group instruction” benefits all group members when “the varied models and feedback available from peers compensate for the impossibility of the teacher’s fine tuning” (Cazden, 2001, p. 66). The group, then, becomes the support or scaffolding for learning, fulfilling a very vital cooperative role. In a first year, mixed-ability foreign language classroom, the effective teacher relinquishes her role as the only knowledgeable source, and uses heterogeneous cooperative learning groups to nurture students as more knowledgeable others for each other in flexible, ever-changing classroom roles.
Cooperative Group Equity

When the teacher relinquishes her role, she must be sure that student roles are indeed flexible, and that it is not always the same students who assume the roles of “more knowledgeable other” for their respective groups. Because students are more likely to respond to group leaders who are perceived as “good students,” or those who are popular or attractive (Cohen, 1994), teachers must use strategies to ensure that all students are valued. When some students are “always the helpers and others are always the helped . . . this can create a status hierarchy . . . that isn’t particularly healthy” (Kohn, 1999, p. 252). Indeed, such inequality between students is detrimental to cooperative learning. Participation in such groups is unequal; the “smart” kids participate more and their classmates value their ideas and opinions more (Cohen, 1994). Pica and Doughty (1985) found this to be true in their analysis of teacher-fronted versus small group activities. In the first part of the study, the tasks selected for the teacher-fronted and individual group activities did not require all of the students to participate at all times. Because participation from all group members was not necessary to arrive at group solutions, the teacher and several of the strongest students dominated during the teacher-fronted lesson, while the same strongest students monopolized the conversation in the small group activity. Pica and Doughty noted that some of the students did not participate even when they were in small groups “because
they spoke so seldomly or because their comments were ignored by other members of the group” (Pica & Doughty, 1985, p. 245).

**Status Generalization**

Eventually, if the educator allows such “status hierarchy” in her classroom, “status generalization” takes place. As Cohen (1994) explains, this process occurs when higher status students are always expected to take the lead and have the answers, even when the group assignment does not require the skills or knowledge of these highly regarded students. When this happens, those of lower status do not benefit from the resources of the group, and the group itself does not benefit from the ideas and contributions of all of its members (Cohen, 1994). Moreover, the students who perceive themselves to be “dumb” or “slow” as a result of their experiences with the “smarter” students begin to feel a sense of self-loathing. They are reluctant or even refuse to take the lead in group situations because they have been made to feel unworthy of such a task. As Freire notes,

> Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 63)
Teachers can use strategies or “status treatments” (Cohen, 1994, p. 24-25) to ensure that cooperative learning groups are truly collaborative. One such strategy, “multiple ability treatment,” is an intervention whereby teachers assign group tasks that require multiple talents (reasoning, creativity, spatial) rather than just traditional academic skills, and then persuade the group members that they cannot be successful without the abilities of all the group members (Cohen, 1994). Another treatment requires teachers to observe closely students within groups, and to publicly praise “low status” students when they demonstrate competence or skill. Such praise should include what the skill is, what specifically the students have done well, and why the ability is important as a resource to the group (Cohen, 1994). In the end, the students should come to recognize what each individual brings to the group. While some students have more language experience, and some may have experienced better success in other classes in school, every student has something to contribute to the group, and every student must recognize his or her peer’s ability to contribute positively to the group.

Dewey explains the importance of shared group responsibility, stating,

"Control of individual actions is effected by the whole situation in which individuals are involved, in which they share and of which they are cooperative or interacting parts . . . those who take part do not feel that they are bossed by an individual person or are being subjected to the will of some outside superior person." (Dewey, 1997, p. 53)
For cooperative groups to be successful, every student, even those who are operating at lower ability levels, must contribute and must be recognized for their contributions. As Freire cautions, “It is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to reason. Whoever lacks this ability will fail to initiate (or will abandon) dialogue, reflection, and communication” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 66).

**Collaborative Tasks**

Teachers should also be very careful to choose a communicative group task “which compels individuals to negotiate meaning rather than simply inviting them to participate in conversation” (Pica & Doughty, 1985, p. 246). Indeed, Pica and Doughty found that the individual groups conversed much more when they adjusted their 1985 study to include activities for which each group member had only one portion of the whole solution. Each group member had to converse in order to exchange information, and no one could refuse to participate because that would make it impossible to finish the activity. By the same token, no one’s contributions could be ignored because that would prevent the whole group from achieving the end result (Pica & Doughty, 1985).

Two years later, Pica (1987) came to similar conclusions with respect to the effectiveness of information-exchange activities over decision-making discussions to engender equitable student conversations. In this study, Pica found that groups engaged in a decision-making discussion did not have to interact to reach a group decision. Indeed, the stronger students monopolized the
conversations and became the “teachers” for the group, while the weaker students did not participate much and were often discounted. On the other hand, the information-exchange activity in which each student held a piece of the group solution resulted in much more interaction from all members of the group. Pica’s study (1987) suggests that groups of students will truly interact only to the extent that the task they are given is one which “requires that they exchange information, rather than one which simply invites them to do so” (Pica, 1987, p. 16). Berliner and Casanova (1996) affirm Pica’s findings, stating, “Of course, it is not enough just to put groups together and give them a task. The teacher must first help students to recognize that each of them is necessary to the task’s successful completion” (p. 12).

**Peer Interaction in the ZPD**

An essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

Teachers cannot be everywhere at once, but students learning a foreign language need continuous interaction with others to develop communication skills in context. Consequently, foreign language teachers use a lot of cooperative learning strategies, including small-group and pair work, role plays, and
discussion (Wong Fillmore, 1992, as cited in Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996) to facilitate student learning. As such, “language learners are frequently and increasingly each other’s resource for language learning” (Pica et al., 1996, p. 60) and it becomes important to understand the nature of student interaction as a function not only of communication, but also as it relates to student learning. As Vygotsky notes, “Language arises initially as a means of communication between the child and the people in his environment. Only subsequently, upon conversion to internal speech, does it come to organize the child’s thought, that is, become an internal function” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 89). In the foreign language classroom, the students must use the target language to communicate with their peers so that language acquisition occurs as naturally as possible. Fluency in a foreign language is measured to the extent that a person “thinks” in the target language without having to translate everything into his native language first. It follows, then, that the development of language use from communication to “internal speech” cannot occur if the language learner is reluctant to speak the language with others.

Native and Non-Native Speakers

Most studies of interaction in a foreign language classroom have been conducted using English as Second Language learners, and their interaction with each other and with native English speakers. Many of these studies have produced data on interaction from a Vygotskian perspective; these studies have analyzed
student interaction within the zone of proximal development – “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with peers” (Cazden, 2001, p. 63) - and to what extent students are able to scaffold instruction and learning for each other within their respective zones. Pica et al. (1996) looked at negotiation as a scaffolding tool to control input, output, and feedback during interaction between pairs of language learners (L2 learners), and between learners paired with native speakers (NS). Negotiation occurs during interaction between learners when either one signals with questions or comments that the other’s preceding message was not understood or had not been communicated effectively. The learner who produced the misunderstood message responds to his partner’s signal, often by repeating or modifying the message. Thus, pairs help each other learn by providing each other with the input, output, and feedback they need to learn vocabulary and grammatical structures. Pica et al. found that L2 learners, though limited much more than NSs in their ability to provide structured input, could provide each other with feedback in the form of segmentations of each other’s prior utterances, modified as words and phrases. This is encouraging in that this kind of feedback is more helpful to L2 learners than is the recoding and modeling that NSs do, which actually intimidates the L2 learners, who defer to the NS’s expert status rather than modifying the messages themselves. Indeed, the NS may be so adept
at correcting the L2 learner, whether it be by repeating, expanding, or reformulating the L2’s message, that the L2 learner may feel that it is unnecessary to respond with anything more than a “yes” or an acknowledgement that his message had been correctly interpreted. Thus, the L2 learner does not have to continue the conversation or make an attempt to correct his message in the target language (Pica, 1996). Not surprisingly, the results of the research of Varonis and Gass (1985, as cited in Pica & Doughty, 1985) suggest that L2 learners working together are more involved in helping each other understand messages in the target language than are L2 learners who interact with native speakers.

Pica et al.’s study (1996) suggests that L2 learners, virtually equal in an L2 classroom to the extent that they are proficient nonnative speakers, may have greater success than unequal L2 with NS dyads. Van Lier (1998) supports this notion, suggesting that interaction in an L2 classroom is most beneficial for learning when it is “contingent,” that is to say, when utterances are spontaneous rather than planned, and when there are equal rights and duties of participation. Contingent features are features found in normal conversations, where participants play off of each other’s comments, and signal each other if something is not clear (like negotiation in Pica et al.’s study). Van Lier’s analysis would suggest that contingent interaction is more likely when students share similar ZPDs. He suggests that unequal partners tend to have interactions that look like “Initiation-Response-Feedback” (IRF) exchanges or that more closely resemble
traditional teacher-student relationships where the expert takes control of the conversation.

Researchers Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994) question the role of “the more knowledgeable other” in a study of second language learning with adults. They contend that language is learned best when a certain amount of “negative feedback” is provided by an expert or more knowledgeable other who can scaffold learning and guide the learner from a “highly strategic, or implicit, level, and progressively becomes more specific, more concrete, until the appropriate level is reached as determined by the novice’s response patterns to the help” (p. 468). This would suggest that the “negative feedback” provided by a native speaker in the form of recoding and modeling to correct the L2 learner, is perhaps the best way to learn a foreign language within the ZPD. However, many studies suggest that this is perhaps a narrow view of the L2 learner's potential within the ZPD.

Donato (1994) recommends that communicative tasks in which the goal is the sending and receiving of information predetermined by the activity itself be abandoned in favor of activities which are truly collaborative. Donato’s study demonstrates that students in cooperative groups over an extended period of time can work together to negotiate meaning in the target language. In the study, group members were able to construct collectively a scaffold to support each member’s performance. The group started with incomplete or incorrect knowledge, and by
working together they were able to generate the correct or complete information necessary to complete a task. In this study, no one member was more knowledgeable than another. Rather, each group member’s contributions proved invaluable in creating a “collective scaffold” whereby the students were “at the same time individually novices and collectively experts, sources of new orientations for each other, and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving” (Donato, 1994, p. 46).

Interaction Between Second Language Learners

The concept of ZPD is very useful in analyzing student interaction in a L2 environment. Anton (1999) notes that although the ZPD and scaffolding “were originally constructed to describe child development in interaction with adults in first language situations” (p. 305), the notion of ZPD has been extended to include not only novice-expert interaction, but also all L2 learners in collaborative interaction (Anton, 1999). According to Wells (1998, p. 345), “the ZPD as an opportunity for learning with and from others applies potentially to all participants, and not simply to the less skillful or knowledgeable.” Anton’s research reveals that communicative tasks in the classroom are helpful not only for meaning, but also for learning about and internalizing grammatical forms. Research on internalization of language structure (Long, 1996; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1995; all cited in Anton, 1999) reveals that L2 learners working together can negotiate both form and meaning.
Further, these studies maintain that focus on form helps students learn language more readily, which again suggests that L2 learners interacting within their respective ZPDs are not merely communicating but are engaged in meaningful learning and language acquisition experiences.

The reality in most French foreign language classrooms in the United States is that L2 learners will be on equal footing to the extent that there is little or no opportunity to interact with native speakers. Indeed, most American French teachers are themselves nonnative speakers, and so L2 learners spend all of their time in the L2 classroom interacting with these nonnative teachers and with other L2 learners (Pica et al., 1996). But even in these American L2 classrooms, where everyone is an L2 learner and where no one is a native expert, there are still gradations in ability levels. This is perhaps most apparent in the Level I foreign language classroom at the high school level, where variations in age, grade level, and exposure to and experience with other foreign languages and cultural experiences vary so greatly. Given the unique situation a Level I foreign language classroom presents, the issue then becomes to what extent such a situation might be exploited to yield positive rather than problematic results for all L2 learners. Lim and Jacobs (2001) cite Cazden (1988) and Donato (1994) in their research to demonstrate that peers can be engaged productively in the ZPD. Their study analyzed the extent to which pairs of secondary school second language learners of English could provide scaffolding for each other’s learning during verbal
interaction on a dictogloss task. The researchers examined tapescripts from four recorded sessions of one pair of L2 learners during the dictogloss task to determine the number of occurrences of the following scaffolding functions: recruitment of interest, modeling, feedback, direction maintenance, task structuring, pedagogical questioning, questioning for clarification, cognitive structuring, and providing propositional knowledge. Over the course of four sessions, incidents of feedback and questioning for clarification were relatively high, while instances of task structuring and pedagogical questioning remained quite low. Overall, asking for clarification and providing feedback accounted for over 50% of the scaffolding functions, while propositional knowledge, cognitive structuring, and direction maintenance contributed another 30% of the use of scaffolding functions. These results support those of Pica et al. (1996) in that pairs of L2 learners are much less likely to produce output in the form of cognitive structuring, which is “giving explanations that assist by providing explanatory and belief structures that organize and justify new learning and perceptions, thus allowing the creation of new or modified schemata” (Lim & Jacobs, 2001, p. 10), or propositional knowledge, which is “contributing new ideas or providing a segment of text, information or detail recalled from the original dictogloss passage that assists in the successful completion of the phrase or sentence being reconstructed” (Lim & Jacobs, 2001, p. 11). Such output resembles more the
recoding and modeling that native speakers were shown to contribute in Pica’s study, and not the kind of feedback conducive to L2 learning within the ZPD.

Peer Revision

Other specific studies involving L2 learners who do not interact with native speakers have been conducted over the past ten years to determine to what extent L2 learners are able to scaffold each other’s learning within the ZPD. De Guerrero and Villamil (1994) conducted a study to determine how Vygotsky’s notion of the social and cognitive aspects of verbal interaction and the ZPD would play out during peer revision in a second language writing classroom. Their study was conducted with ESL students (Spanish as their L1) enrolled in three sections of English Communication Skills at Inter American University of Puerto Rico. Pairs of students worked together to revise the student’s composition deemed more needy of revision, thus placing that student in the position of less knowledgeable other. Each pair interaction was labeled symmetrical or asymmetrical. During symmetrical relationships, the partners had the same level of regulation, and thus were considered equal partners. During asymmetrical relationships, the partners were at different levels of regulation and thus were considered unequal partners, with one partner taking the role of expert or more knowledgeable other. Interestingly, the researchers found a greater percentage of asymmetrical (69%) than symmetrical (31%) relationships between the partners, suggesting that pairs of students will assume expert and novice roles within the
confines of a L2, nonnative learner classroom, and that they will work within these confines to scaffold each other’s learning within the ZPD.

Not satisfied with their 1994 study, De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) conducted a second study of peer interaction to determine to what extent L2 learners provide mutual scaffolding during composition revision within the ZPD. Using the following definition of the ZPD as a concept for scaffolding, “the difference between the L2 learner’s developmental level as determined by independent use, and the higher level of potential development as determined by independent use in collaboration with a more capable interlocutor” (p. 53), the researchers set out to examine instances of “mutual scaffolding” during peer revision among L2 learners. The researchers chose one dyad’s interaction from the 40 they had used in their 1994 study to examine “the microgenesis of socially based individual revision skills” (p. 55). Most interestingly, researchers De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) found many episodes of “intersubjectivity,” or “the state in which both participants have a shared understanding of the task or situation and are in tune with one another” (p. 59) as a scaffolding technique between the pair of students in the study. Pairs also used “contingent responsivity”, which is reading the partner’s/tutee’s cues and signals, and responding appropriately based on learning, affective and motivational needs (p. 58) frequently in their discussions, a scaffolding technique championed by van Lier

Researchers De Guerrero and Villamil (2000) observed some regression within the ZPD in the analyzed episodes of the L2 dyad. Specifically, two correct uses of language by the writer of the composition were wrongly revised by the reader, and the wrong revisions were accepted by the writer. As the authors and their literature suggest, regression may very well happen when two L2 learners are interacting. At any time, the pair’s grasp of the language being learned might change, thus changing the role of “the more knowledgeable other.” One person’s tone, role, or self-confidence might convince the other to correct something that should not be corrected, and this is just a reality of group work with L2 learners. As Smith (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) affirm, “The context of the situation as well as other cues and patterns of communication, such as intonation, gestures, stress, and pitch are just as important in communicating a given idea as the lexical items (p. 24).

Summary

The issue of second language learning within the confines of a Level I foreign language high school classroom, given its diversity and thus its demand for a new, differentiated style of instruction, is both pressing and daunting. The foreign language teacher in such a setting, often nonnative, is faced with a challenge unparalleled by most standards. She or he must provide a very diverse
Cooperative learning groups are ideal for heterogeneous Level I foreign language classes at the high school. If they meet on a regular basis and are truly collaborative, such groups can provide students with the support they need to take risks in a second language. These support groups help reduce some of the anxiety associated with communicating in a new language. Cooperative groups foster authentic communication and teamwork skills as students negotiate to complete assignments and assessments. Such groups allow for flexible roles, as students take on the role of “more knowledgeable other” for their peers, but also fall back into the role of learner when the task demands skills or knowledge they do not possess. Students working together are able to scaffold instruction and learning for each other within their respective zones. More students experience success and higher levels of self-esteem as a result of collaborative learning.

Heterogeneous grouping is ideal in the Level I foreign language class at the high school level. Those students with higher ability levels are able to teach their peers, communicating successfully with the struggling students in ways in which the teacher is unable to while simultaneously learning the content better as a result of having explained it to others. Students provide each other with necessary support when the teacher is not able to give one-on-one guidance to
each student, and individual students experience the success associated with assuming knowledgeable other roles in the classroom.

While some higher ability students will naturally fill the expert roles more often than their struggling peers, it is important for the foreign language teacher to minimize status generalization in the classroom. By recognizing each student’s contributions to the group, and by assigning collaborative tasks that require the multiple skills of all group members, teachers can minimize or even eliminate the status hierarchy that is sometimes a negative result of heterogeneous grouping.

Students learning a second language in classrooms where they are few to no native speakers must be able learn effectively from each other. Non-native speakers interacting in groups or dyads who use strategies such as negotiation, modifying, recoding, or repeating messages, modeling, and questioning for clarification, are able to help each other with speaking, listening, reading, and writing assignments and activities. Indeed, non-native speakers are often more successful scaffolders because they provide each other with just enough feedback in the form of segmentation and clarifying questions to allow their partners to correct their own messages. Non-native speakers are more equal partners than are native with non-native speakers, and thus their learning conversations are more spontaneous. As such, they must rely on each other more to make their messages understood. These same dynamics are evident when pairs of non-native language learners engage in peer revision during which instances of mutual scaffolding
between the partners results from the partners’ shared understanding of the task, and their ability to exchange helpful feedback in terms both learners can understand.

In truly cooperative groups, tasks are differentiated so that all learners have occasions to be both experts and learners, to both teach and to receive help. Providing students with many different opportunities to interact with all of their classroom peers extends each student’s respective zone of proximal development as they all work together to complete group activities and assignments.
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Setting

I teach French in a large, middle to upper middle class high school of approximately 2800 students in northeastern Pennsylvania. The World Languages Department in my district offers five years of French, Spanish, and German, and three years of Latin. Providing that they do not need remedial literacy classes, students may begin French, Spanish, or German I in eighth grade at one of the district’s two middle schools, and then continue with levels II, III, IV or IV Honors, and V or Advanced Placement at the high school. Students may also begin a second language at the high school, or decide to study additional foreign languages, as Level I courses for all four languages are offered at the high school. Students who decide to take a Level I language class at the high school have a variety of reasons for doing so. Some are beginning late because they were enrolled in remedial classes in eighth grade and so did not have room for a foreign language class in their schedules. Others are repeating Level I because they failed the course or received a low grade at the middle school. Some students, having failed a Level I language course in eighth grade, decide to try a different language in high school. Finally, students who have experienced second language acquisition success can opt to study two or more languages at the high school. The Level I French course I chose for this study is a year-long course which meets every day during period 9, the last period of the school day, for 42 minutes.
Participants

The high school students who participated in this study range in age and grade levels. They are between 14 and 18 years old and in grades 9 through 12. There are 13 ninth grade students, 1 tenth grade student, 7 eleventh grade students, and 2 twelfth grade students. These students differ greatly not only in age, but also in experience. Table 1 displays these differences in ages and experience levels. In addition, one student is an emotional support student, and another student has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Three years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnie</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Passed Level I French in 8th grade with a grade of B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Failed Level I French in 8th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Three years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Two years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Studied Italian in another district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>First year in Level I French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
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<td>Concurrently enrolled in Spanish III</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Three years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Native Peruvian; fluent in Spanish and English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
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<td>First year in Level I French</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roxy</td>
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<td>Two years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Two years of Spanish; no longer enrolled</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Native Spanish speaker; failed French I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Failed French I in 8th grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Concurrently enrolled in Advanced Placement Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Procedure**

On the first day of school, my students completed an index card with home and school information, including parent/guardian contact information, and extracurricular activities and outside interests. On this card, I also asked the students to record any previous experience with French or another world language, and the nature of that experience (other language classes and levels, study or living abroad, bilingual speaker or a language other than English spoken at home). This information served as background information on the students, and helped me get to know them a little more quickly as we moved together into Unit 1 and our first three weeks of French I.

I wanted my students to understand my study and to feel safe and comfortable during the study. To this end, I prepared a script (see Appendix D) to read to my students which invited all of them to participate, and which explained my research study in terms the students could comprehend. This script includes descriptions of all of the various methods I used to collect data from the class. During my presentation, I assured the students that their real names would not be used in the published results. In addition, I articulated that the students’ thoughts and opinions would be kept confidential, that what they communicated to me in speaking and writing exercises would be private. However, I made sure that the students understood that I would be obligated as a teaching professional to refer
them to the proper authorities should they reveal something in their work that was illegal or harmful, or should they demonstrate that they were being neglected or abused (Arhar, Holly, & Kaster, 2001, p. 177).

Importantly, I received approval to conduct my study from the Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSRIB) (see Appendix A), a committee who reviews research proposals in order to ensure the safety and anonymity of research participants involved in qualitative research studies in a variety of settings. Additionally, I secured permission from my principal to conduct my study (see Appendix B), and I sent to students’ homes consent letters for their parents and/or guardians (see Appendix C). This letter briefly described my study, and detailed some of the activities (surveys, journal reflections) in which the students would engage as part of the study. The letter assured the parents/guardians that the data I collected would remain confidential and locked away so that only I would be able to access the information. Finally, the letter informed parents of both their and their student’s right to withdraw from the study at any time during the semester without penalty. I explained that “without penalty” means that the student’s grade would in no way be impacted because he or she decided not to participate in the study. The student would simply be required to complete assignments and assessments, and any data I collected would not include data on that particular student. I did receive permission from the parents and/or guardians of all 23 of my Level I, period 9 French students.
Unit 1: Leçon A

The first unit in French I is an introductory unit that focuses on simple communication skills. Unit 1 is divided into two short lessons. Like many introductory units in foreign languages, Unit 1, lesson A (Unit 1-A) asked students to learn and practice vocabulary and cultural information to perform the following functions:

- Greet others
- Introduce themselves
- Introduce other people
- Ask someone’s name
- Tell someone’s name

In Unit 1-A, students learned about origins of French, French-Canadian, and French-African names, and they chose their own French first names. Next, we were ready to engage in some activities or ice breakers to get to know each other and each other’s names. Our focus was on recognizing, writing, and pronouncing each other’s names correctly.

In addition, my researcher focus for Unit 1 was on my participant observations of the students as they interacted with each other. I recorded observations for each group activity during Unit 1. Also, I collected several samples of student work to begin to monitor the students’ progress in French. My
goal was to collect as much data as possible during the Unit 1 group activities. I then used these data to make decisions about cooperative groups for Unit 2.

During Unit 1-A, the students engaged in the following group activities to get to know each other and to practice the vocabulary and simple structures included in the unit:

- **“Name Tag Grab”** Students wrote their French names on sticky-back nametags that said “Bonjour! Je m’appelle ____________.” I collected the nametags and redistributed them so that each student had someone else’s name tag (not their own and not the person’s to the right of them). I asked students not to say whose nametag they received. Then, each student placed the tag on the back of the person to the right. When I said “Commencez!” students tried to find and grab their own name tags while simultaneously trying not to “lose” the name tag on their backs. To do this, students tried to avoid having others look at their backs. When a student had found his name tag, he grabbed it and displayed it on his chest so that everyone could see it. Students remained in the game until they had found their own name but had lost the name on their backs to the rightful owners. The student who kept the name tag on his back the longest was the winner (adapted from Jones, 1999).

- **“Name Balloon Pop”** Students divided into teams of approximately six students. Each team selected a person whose name was easiest to
remember. That person sat in the middle of the circle of students on the team. The students in the circle received a piece of paper and a balloon (the balloons were all the same color). Each student wrote his French name on the slip of paper, put the paper in his balloon, and blew up and tied the balloon. The balloons were piled together, mixed up, and placed into the circle. The student in the center began the game by selecting a balloon, popping it, and calling out the name inside the balloon. The person whose name was called then selected another balloon, popped it, and continued the process. The first team to pop and read all the names won the game (adapted from Jones, 1999).

- “Wagon Wheel Introductions” The students formed two circles with the same number of students in each circle, one circle inside the other circle. The students faced each other, and then these pairs of students greeted each other with “Bonjour” or “Salut.” Next, each student introduced himself using “Je m’appelle + his name. After they had exchanged greetings and introductions, I shouted “Changez!” and the outside students moved one to the right to set up new partners. The activity continued until the students returned back to their original partners. For larger classes and/or small classrooms, it is advisable to divide the students into two groups and to do the activity twice (from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002).
At the conclusion of Unit 1-A, I administered a quiz to monitor student progress with the Unit 1-A materials. I used my Participant Observation Checklist (see Appendix E) during the group activities to record data on student interaction.

Unit 1: Leçon B

During Unit 1-B, we continued to get to know each other as we engaged in a variety of activities. The students learned and practiced numbers in French from one to ten, the French alphabet, and several expressions to perform the following functions:

- Introduce themselves
- Greet others
- Say goodbye
- Thank others
- Give and understand telephone numbers
- Ask for and restate information

The students continued to engage in a variety of paired and small group activities, both written and oral, to practice the vocabulary and expressions in Unit 1-B. I continued to collect observations throughout the unit of study using the Participant Observation Checklist (see Appendix E) to record student interaction during the following activities:

- “Ton numéro de telephone, s'il te plait” (see Appendix F) information gap pair activity (see explanation of Information Gap Activities on p. 50).
• "Mots Brouillés" paired activity to unscramble vocabulary words.

• "Telephone Numbers" Each student wrote his telephone number on a piece of paper. All of the numbers were placed into a basket. A volunteer student picked a number and read it aloud in French. When a student heard his own phone number, he said “C’est Moi!” Then, it was that student’s turn to pick and to read out the next number (from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002).

At the conclusion of Unit 1-B, I administered a second quiz to continue to monitor student progress. After a unit review, I administered the Unit 1 Exam, which included the materials from both lessons A and B.

At this point, I analyzed the data I had collected during Unit 1 from the classroom observations and from the students’ performances on the quizzes and the test. Based on these data, I organized the students into cooperative learning groups of 4 students. To the best of my ability based on the data I had collected, I tried to organize the students by ability level, with one high, two mid-high to mid-low, and one lower student in each cooperative group. These students remained together for all of Unit 2. After Unit 2, I reassigned students to new cooperative learning groups of 4 based on all of the data I collected during the Unit 2 activities. These new groups should have remained together for all of Unit 3. Unfortunately, there were some problems (explained in the Story) with the initial
groups I assigned for Unit 3, and so I reassigned students during that unit of study.

Within the groups of 4 students, I varied the ways in which the students worked together to collect data on cooperative relationships between different ability levels and different ages. For example, I organized pairs within the groups in a variety of ways: high with low, mid-high with high and mid-low with low, high with mid-low and mid-high with low. I specified which grouping strategy I used on a given day and during a given activity on each Participation Observation Checklist so that I could refer back and remember to which kinds of relationships my observations and corresponding reflections referred.

In both Unit 2 and Unit 3, the students worked together on the following kinds of activities:

- **Dialogue Practice** (from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002). Units 2 and 3 each contain three dialogs to introduce the students to new vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation in a contextualized manner. After I introduced the dialog to the whole class (by listening to it on CD, and repeating it in a whole-group, chorale-style response), I asked the cooperative groups to work together within a given time frame to make sure everyone could say the lines, thus allowing peers to help each other with pronunciation and meaning (adapted from Gunderson & Johnson, 1980). Additionally, I chose one dialog from Unit 2 (see Appendix G), and
one dialog from Unit 3 (see Appendix H) for students to memorize and present to the class. I encouraged the students to work as a group, and to also practice in pairs before they presented their dialogs to the class. Pairs of students in each group also had opportunities to create and to present their own mini-dialogs from Situation Card prompts (see Appendix I) (adapted from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002) using variations on the vocabulary and expressions from the units. I did not formally grade the dialog practice. I graded the presented dialogs using the Oral Performance Rubric (see Appendix J). Unit 3 culminated in a Restaurant Dialog (described later in the Unité 3-specific activities) that the cooperative groups of 4 performed. During the group work for dialog practice, I used the Participant Observation Checklist – Dialog Practice (see Appendix K).

- Information Gap Activities (from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002). The cooperative groups divided into two pairs of students (prearranged each time for variety in ability levels) to engage in mini-conversations to communicate missing information during activities similar to Ton numéro de telephone, s’il te plait (see Appendix F) from Unit 1. In each pair, there was a Student A and a Student B. The students worked with a grid or worksheet to both provide information and to receive missing information so that both students could complete their
grids. After the pairs had exchanged and recorded the missing information, the two “Student A” students, and the two “Student B” students met to compare the information they had collected (adapted from “three step Interview” activities in Szostek, 1994). There were a total of six Information Gap activities for Units 2 and 3 (see Appendix L), so I was able to collect data on a variety of paired ability levels on the Participant Observation Checklist – Information Gap Activities (see Appendix M).

- **Student Team Learning.** Each week, after I had introduced a new concept or new material for which there were single right answers like language usage and mechanics (Szostek, 1994) to the students, the cooperative groups worked together to master the new material. The students used a variety of materials to assist them in these learning teams, including textbooks, workbooks, and supplemental handouts. I observed the student team learning sessions and took notes on the groups’ interactions using the Participant Observation Checklist – Student Team Learning (see Appendix N).

  In addition to the activities above characteristic of both Units 2 and 3, the students also engaged in textbook and workbook activities and assignments specific to the objectives of each unit of study.
Unit 2

In Unit 2, the students learned and practiced vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural information to be able to:

- Express likes and dislikes
- Invite and refuse invitations
- Ask for information
- Agree and disagree
- Give opinions

In this unit, the students learned vocabulary and cultural information associated with leisure activities and hobbies. They also studied subject pronouns, three adverbs, negation, and the conjugation of regular “ER” verbs, and they used these skills to communicate with each other about their own and others’ likes and dislikes. In addition to the activities mentioned above for both Unit 2 and Unit 3, the cooperative learning groups engaged in the following group activities during Unit 2:

- *Pourquoi en Français?* Within their groups, students divided themselves into pairs of students. For this project, students researched reasons for studying French, and chose a medium in which to present the information. I used the *Participant Observation Checklist – Pourquoi en Français* (see Appendix O) to collect data about the students during this paired activity.
- **Cognates.** Students read about cognates in Unit 2. They worked together in their cooperative groups to translate French sentences using the strategy of cognate recognition. Each French sentence contained at least two cognates (ex: *La rivière est longue* or *Ma pizza est délicieuse*). Each sentence was written on an index card. Five cards were in each of six envelopes for a total of 30 sentences. Each group received an envelope, and they worked together to translate the sentences in the envelope. After two minutes, I said “Changez!” and each group received a new envelope. The activity continued until all the groups had had the opportunity to work with the sentences in all six envelopes. Lastly, I put the correct translations on the overhead so that the students could verify their answers. I used the *Participant Observation Checklist for Cognate Activity* (see Appendix P) to record group behavior as the groups worked together to complete the assignment.

- **Inductive Thinking for “ER” verbs** (adapted from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002). For this activity, each student received a handout with about 15 sentences that use different subject pronouns and a variety of “ER” verbs conjugated to match the subject pronouns. Students worked together in pairs to try to identify verb patterns from the sentences. Pairs worked together until they had figured out the conjugation patterns (the relationship between the subject pronouns and the verb endings), and
could explain the concept to the other pair of students in their group. This paired activity tends to work well because “in an inductive presentation, learners’ attention is focused on structures so that they can hypothesize by themselves about linguistic patterns” (Anton, 1999, p. 308). Further, assistance from peers in the classroom has been shown to be especially helpful during inductive learning activities (Anton, 1999). I used the Participant Observation Checklist for Inductive Thinking (see Appendix Q) to record group behaviors during this activity.

- **Jeu d’Identité** (see Appendix R). Each student received a fill-in form for the Jeu d’Identité activity (adapted from Skaife, 1996). The cooperative groups met to ensure that each team member understood what kinds of people they were looking for (ex: *une personne qui écoute souvent la radio*) and how to turn the statements on their forms into questions to ask their classmates (ex: *Est-ce que tu écoutes souvent la radio?*). Next, all of the students mingled and each student was responsible for filling out his form by questioning his classmates. After a designated time period, the cooperative groups reformed to compare and compile their results. They asked each other questions to find out who they found to fit each category (ex: *Qui écoute souvent la radio?*”), and then they compiled their results. Finally, I asked the groups questions about their findings, and they reported out to the class. I used the Participant Observation Checklist –
Jeud'Identité (see Appendix S) to record my observations and reflections during the entire activity.

At the conclusion of Unit 2, I analyzed the data I had collected over the course of the unit in order to form new cooperative learning groups for Unit 3. These data included my participant observations and reflections, student work, and feedback from the students on a survey (see Appendix AA), and in writing (see Appendix AB).

Unit 3

In Unit 3, the students learned vocabulary, expressions, structures and culture to be able to:

- Ask how/tell how you are
- Ask what time it is/give time on the hour
- Invite/accept/refuse invitations
- Order food and beverages
- Ask for/state amounts in euro dollars

In Unit 3, the students learned restaurant and food vocabulary, the irregular verb “aller,” definite and indefinite articles, time on the hour, numbers to one hundred, and information about the European monetary system, in order to order successfully in a restaurant and to understand and tell time. In addition to the exercises described above for both units, the students participated in the following cooperative group activities in Unit 3:
• *Reading with cognates* (adapted from Fawbush, Theisen, Hopen, & Vaillancourt, 2002). This activity is explained in the Story section. I used the *Participant Observation Checklist – Reading Cognates* (Appendix T) to record my observations during this activity.

• *Peer Composition.* In Unit 3, the students wrote one peer composition followed by one individual composition. The students had three topics from which to choose for their peer composition (see Appendix U), and the same three topics from which to choose for their individual composition (see Appendix V). They had to choose a different topic for their individual composition. I used the *Participant Observation Checklist – Peer Composition* (see Appendix W) The procedure for the peer composition is as follows:

1. Students choose a topic.
2. Students write the first three sentences of each composition together, and then they finish their compositions individually.
3. Students proofread their partner’s composition using the *Peer Editing Rubric* (Appendix X) and circle any errors they find.
4. Students revise their own papers, and then reread and sign their partner’s revised paper.
5. Students receive individual grades for their peer compositions.
- Restaurant Dialog. As a culminating oral performance assessment for Unit 3, the cooperative groups wrote, practiced, memorized, and performed a scene in a French restaurant or café for their classmates. In addition to the script, the students were responsible for any props they wanted to use, including tablecloths, plates, cups, cutlery, food, menus, and music. The cooperative groups served as each other’s audiences during “dress rehearsals” the day before the performances, and these audience members provided feedback on a specific form (see Appendix Y). I recorded all of my observations during the week of this activity on the Participant Observation Checklist – Restaurant Dialog (see Appendix Z).

In addition to the observations and the student work from Unit 3, I also administered the student survey (see Appendix AA) to elicit student feedback about group work. Finally, the students responded in writing to a prompt (see Appendix AB) that asked them to reflect upon their accomplishments, both individually and in their cooperative learning groups.

Data Collection

Participant Observation

As I am the only teacher in my Level I French class, and as I was teaching and managing group and individual work during every class period, I conducted participant observations in my class for the length of my study. While I did not always take notes during an entire class period, I was able to collect observations
from at least one group activity on most days. To ensure that I considered perspectives from all of my students on a daily basis, I created “participant observation checklists” which allowed me to target specific behaviors based on the cooperative activities and assignments I planned. Hopkins and Antes (1985, as cited in Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001) recommend a checklist for classroom observation because of its structure. It is “a list of points to notice in direct observation [and] used to focus the observer’s attention to the presence, absence, or frequency of occurrence of each point of the prepared list” (p. 154).

At the same time, this checklist gave me plenty of room to record any student behaviors, reactions, and comments I had not anticipated. The checklist is in a T-chart format, and so I was able to separate my classroom observations from the reflections on these observations. Finally, the checklist includes a section where I could record vital information about each observation, including the date, the names of the group members, and the grouping strategy I used on that particular day (high student with low student, same ability students together, and age and grade considerations).

I strived to be as objective as possible during my class observations, jotting down only what occurred and not how I felt or interpreted what occurred. I did not add reflection during my observations, but rather reflected immediately after the classes I observed (Hubbard & Power, 2003). As Ely recommends, “As qualitative researchers, we must educate and re-educate ourselves to practice
detailed observation without reading in our own answers, or our biases” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991, p. 54). I was also as descriptive as possible, telling what happened and recording dialogue, accounts of particular events and group activities, and portraits of individual students to create “rich data” from which to draw evidence for my study (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, pp. 114-116).

Field Log

All of my participant observations, organized with dates, group arrangements, and activities, as well as my reflections, were maintained in a researcher log. I also wrote periodic analytic memos to organize my observations and reflections. These reflections and memos served to help me begin to make sense of what I had observed in the classroom. I reflected on the methods I had used to gather data, the activities I chose for the groups, and the different configurations of students within the cooperative groups. I identified emerging themes from these reflections, and I confronted some of my own biases and prejudices about my students. As Bogden and Biklen (1998) recommend, I used the reflections and memos to “let it all hang out” (p. 114). They advise educators to use their reflections to “confess your mistakes, your inadequacies, your prejudices, your likes and dislikes. Speculate about what you think you are learning, what you are going to do next, and what the outcome of the study is going to be” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 114).
Student Surveys and Reflections

In addition to my own observations, reflections, and memos, I also collected students’ comments and impressions from a variety of sources over the course of four months. I administered a survey (see Appendix AA) at the end of each unit of study to gather student reactions to working in cooperative groups. Each of these “attitude scales” measured the strength of the students’ attitudes and opinions about group learning (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001, p. 159). Additionally, each student wrote a reflective journal entry after each unit based on a journal prompt (see Appendix AB) that asked students to evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative group work from a variety of different perspectives.

In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970/2005), Freire emphasizes the importance of contributions, analysis, and feedback from all members involved in education, including teachers, participant researchers, specialists, and, most importantly, the students. The feedback I received from my students on the surveys, and the insights they gave me about their own learning and contributions within their cooperative groups, was very valuable. The students’ analysis of their groups’ successes and failures allowed me to better tailor my lesson plans and activities to meet their needs. As Freire notes, “their contribution is both a right to which they are entitled and an indispensable aid to the analysis of the specialists” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 117).
As an additional check on bias, peers from my teacher research support group critiqued my field notes to make me aware of personal prejudice. As such, I was better able to limit, but not eliminate, any researcher bias during observations (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Indeed, I found that my support group helped me to identify possible bias, which in turn allowed me to move forward with my research (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991).

Student Work

I collected and analyzed a large variety of student work over the course of my study, including quizzes, tests, listening exercises, reading comprehension activities, speaking assessments, compositions, web-based activities, projects, homework, and participation. Each unit of study included a number of such assessments, and so I was able to analyze the quality of each student’s work from their Unit 2 cooperative group experiences, and again from their Unit 3 groups.

Trustworthiness Statement

Potential Researcher Biases

During my study, I tried to be very mindful of the success I have experienced as a language learner, and how that might cause me to relate more easily to traditional learners. Indeed, I was always at or above grade level for language classes. Thus, I never participated in a classroom of students with a wide range of ability levels and experiences with a second language. In short, I have no personal perspective of what it must be like for a new French learner to be part of
this kind of group. Furthermore, because of my success with French, I love everything about it - its pronunciation and inflections, culture, literature, food - and I want, even expect all of my students to enjoy learning French as much as I have enjoyed learning it. I knew that some of my students, especially my struggling Level I students, might not, and, as Ely points out, it is “jolting” for an educator to discover that her students may not hold her values “near and dear” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). Indeed, Ely et al. warns that “findings when studying a familiar setting are frequently not what one expects” (1991, p.166). Their words underscored how important it remained for me to be very open to multiple perspectives from my students as they participated in their cooperative groups.

I am an outgoing person, and I love to learn with others. I like to discuss, to collaborate, and to try out new ideas on others and hear what they have to contribute. As such, I admit to a certain bias related to my research question in that I assumed my students would also enjoy working in groups. I had to be open to the very real possibility that some would not, and for reasons of which I might not be aware or to which I might not be able to relate. During my study, I also strived to be careful about my own assumptions and prejudice, based in part on my past experiences, about my Level I students who are repeating, who failed another Level I language, or who received literacy remediation at the middle school. Generally, I have found these students to be slower, less motivated, and
less organized than my average French students. Nevertheless, I tried to remind myself daily that this is not always the case, and I avoided labeling students as “slow” or “quick” based upon their age, grade level, or previous experiences with a foreign language. Rather, I relied solely on my classroom observations, reflections, and student performance, both formal and informal, to make decisions about cooperative group combinations of students. I knew that to do less would undermine the very essence of my study, and would render its results less valid, thus reducing my opportunity to help my Level I students succeed.

As I began to collect, analyze, and code my data, to look for themes and commonalities, I was aware that my own academic French experiences, my passion for the French language and culture, my enthusiasm for and belief in the power of cooperative learning, and my past experiences with Level I learners, are all lenses through which I would analyze my data. These “layers of understanding” through which I interpreted the data (Ely, 1997, p. 44) helped make this study uniquely my own, as I acknowledged that you “can not divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). Indeed, “observation can never be objective . . . observation comes out of what the observer selects to see and chooses to note” (Ely et al., 1991, p. 53). While it is impossible for me to pretend that my research study was entirely objective, I did certainly heed Ely’s advice, and worked towards collecting, analyzing, and
interpreting data that was not skewed by my biases and subjectivities (Ely et al., 1991). Rather, these same subjectivities, earned over years of rich experiences, helped me “shape and enrich” how I deliver instruction. Moreover, the research also shaped me and allowed me to grow as an educator because I allowed that my “thinking be informed by the data” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 34). In the end, I tried to maintain a sense of “wonder and curiosity, as opposed to one of judgment” (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001, p. 94), and so I was able to view my topic from multiple perspectives rather than from only my preconceived notions about education in the foreign language classroom.

**Strategies to Counter Researcher Bias**

Freire cautions that, “while it is normal for investigators to come to the area with values which influence their perceptions, this does not mean that they may transform the thematic investigation into a means of imposing these values” (Freire, 1970/2005, pp. 110-111). Because I was aware that I was entering into my study with a variety of preconceived ideas about Level I language learners, and because I did not want these ideas to interfere with my study, I included a variety of strategies in my research study to counter any bias based on my background and experiences that would limit my focus. My classroom observations and reflections, analytic memos, feedback and reflections from students, and student performances, all collected over a period of four months, allowed me to fully analyze, categorize, and include all of my students’
potentially very different perspectives (given the range in age, grade level, ability level, and experience) in my study. Because I allowed all of my students’ opinions and feelings about learning a second language to be heard, I protected them both during and after the study. I included all of the students in my level I 9th period class in this study, ensuring their confidentiality and right to withdraw at any time during my study. Additionally, I explained to my students that all of the information that they shared with me would be remain confidential so that we could build a relationship of mutual trust (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). I received approval to conduct my study from the Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSRIB). Additionally, I secured permission from my principal and from all of the students’ parents or guardians before beginning my study.

I built strategies into my study (see Procedures section and the aforementioned section on Data Collection) including daily observations, reflection, analytic memos, student surveys and student written reflections after each unit of study. I also collected and analyzed a great deal of student work over the course of study, including quizzes, tests, listening exercises, reading comprehension activities, speaking assessments, compositions, web-based activities, projects, homework, and participation. I triangulated my methods, collecting three distinct sources of data during my study (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten, 2001). The participant observations, my reflections and analytic memos, the
student surveys, the written reflections, and all of the student work allowed me to
give voice to every student participant, and it ensured that I could be as accurate
as possible in describing my level I French classroom and my students. I recorded
what I saw in my classroom in my observations, and I collected students’ thoughts
and ideas through the surveys and written reflections. Furthermore, the students’
work told me a great deal about their understanding and progress in the course
(Arhar et al., 2001). By including both my own and my students’ perspectives, I
could be as fair as possible about what happened during my study, and I was able
to let my and my students’ words and actions tell the story for potential readers to
interpret (Arhar et al., 2001).

As I read, re-read, and explored my classroom situation and my students’
progress throughout the length of my study, I was able to continuously assess the
conditions for learning in my classroom. Such reflection allowed me to be as fair
as possible at all times, to represent students’ behaviors, comments, and
performances as accurately and honestly as I could (Arhar, Holly, & Kasten,
2001), and to intervene very quickly in the event that there was a problem with an
individual or a group. Such reflection allowed me to act quickly to adapt or in
any way modify my research study to ensure the safety of all of my students.
Storytelling

As I began to write the “story” part of my study, I think I understood the importance of telling stories from a purely intellectual point of view. Indeed, I had read much methodological literature on the subject, and I thought I understood the value of telling the story of my study using dialogue, vignettes, layered stories, and other literary forms not characteristic of traditional research articles. I knew that I wanted to bring my readers into my classroom, and that I wanted the students’ voices to be heard as they embarked on our journey with cooperative learning groups. Certainly such literary forms would enable me to best capture the students and their thoughts and reactions as they participated with their peers in various group activities and assignments.

Yet as I began to tell the story of our first few weeks of school together, I confess that I felt a bit anxious about my writing. I had amassed an enormous amount of excellent data, including a very detailed participation log and some revealing student work, from our first few weeks together. Remembering in detail what had happened at the beginning of the year and beginning to paint the picture, one which would allow my readers to visualize my students interacting as they grew to know each other, should not have been difficult for me. Nonetheless it was, and for reasons that I was not able to initially identify.

I slowly realized that the reason I was having such a difficult time telling my story was because, although I had accepted the idea of narrative writing as an
appropriate vehicle for my story from a theoretical perspective, in practice I simply could not reconcile the idea that this kind of writing was appropriate for a research study. Indeed, I was experiencing some difficulty with “the inclusion of the personal and emotional . . . in the world of academia where emotional and intuitional aspects of research have long been denied, suppressed, and considered suspect if not unworthy (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 53). In short, as much as I enjoy narrative writing and experimenting with literary forms for other purposes, I was not truly convinced that this kind of writing was appropriate for my study.

But then one Friday morning, as I was driving to work at the very uncivilized hour of 6:40 AM, I happened to catch a radio program on National Public Radio entitled “Storycorps: Recording America.” This fine program is an American storytelling project which gathers and features stories from Americans all over the United States. On this particular morning, I listened to Danny and Annie Perasa tell the story of their life and love for each other in Brooklyn, NY. At the time of the recording, Danny was dying from pancreatic cancer, and he and his wife talked to each other and to the interviewer about their incredible marriage, their many joyful memories, and their unfulfilled dreams. At one point, they talked about his funeral, and Danny said that Annie didn’t know who should accompany her into the church. Danny joked that she could walk with him. When the interviewer asked Annie what she had decided, she answered, “With Danny. I
walked into the church with him, and I’ll walk out with him.” I cried so hard I nearly pulled over. I’m crying now as I remember these beautiful, simple words.

From this experience I finally understood why I had to tell my classroom story just as Danny and Annie Perasa had told theirs; from the heart and in their own words. I finally realized why I was using narrative devices like dialogue, layered stories, and vignettes. My job, indeed my responsibility as the recorder, was to allow my students to tell their story from their hearts and in their own words. To achieve this, I needed to “construct stories in ways that bring readers into the settings, characters, actions, dialogue, and events . . . using many of the same devices that other writers of narrative employ” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 64). This was the only way to do both them and the study justice. It was the only way to invite the readers into my world and make my and the students’ experiences and discoveries intimate, just as I had been privileged enough to peek into the Perasa’s world and to share in the intimate details of their life journey together.

Danny Perasa died on February 24, 2006. His story lives on as a result of the Storycorps program and his storyteller’s detailed, faithful account of his life in his and his beloved wife’s own words. I hope to tell my story in the same way; with the students’ words, their thoughts and feelings, and their undying sense of what it means to be part of a larger, more hopeful, and more lasting belief in the power of community.
THIS YEAR’S STORY

Going into a new school year with new students is like going to a party where you do not know anyone, they do not know you, and they may not know each other. Despite these stressful social conditions, you are expected to be personable, interesting, and entertaining. You are expected to learn many different names and the faces that belong to those names rather quickly, and you expect others to do the same. Sometimes a party host will plan games and activities, often called “ice breakers,” to facilitate this process. Ice breakers help guests get to know each other and to feel comfortable talking to each other, and they are designed to be fun and engaging. As I planned for this year’s study in my Level I, period 9 French class, I decided to think like a host, and to incorporate activities into the first three weeks of school that would allow the students and me to get to know each other. Certainly I wanted to observe my students interacting with each other, as I hoped that this would help me to form our first cooperative groups of four for Unit 2.

Getting To Know Each Other

My Level I French curriculum, like the Level I curriculum for many other foreign languages, focuses in the first unit on simple communicative functions such as introducing oneself, greeting others, asking and telling names, and introducing others. As such, it is ideally suited to ice breaker activities that allow students to become familiar with each other. During the first several weeks of
school, the students and I enjoyed numerous games and activities, many of which allowed them to use simple French phrases in authentic situations to learn each other’s names, and to begin to become familiar with each other.

One of the first games we tried was called “Wagon Wheel Introductions.” This game required the students to form two circles, an inner circle and an outer circle, each circle with the same number of participants. The game began with each student from the inner circle facing a peer from the outer circle. The students greeted each other and introduced themselves in French, using “Bonjour” or “Salut” and “Je m’appelle,” and when I said “Changez!” the students in the outer circle moved one person to the right to face a new inner circle student. The game progressed until each inner circle student had a chance to meet and introduce themselves to every member from the outer circle.

Because my period 9 class was so large, I split the class into two groups of 12 students each, with each side of the room representing one group. I asked the right side of the room to stand and form two circles in the center of the room. I noticed that some students on the left side of the room seemed uncomfortable with the idea of the game. Audrey seemed visibly upset, and then Phoebe asked, “Are we doing that thing when our arms get all tangled together?” I soon discovered that some of the ninth grade students who were repeating French I had engaged in an activity the year before in French I at the middle school that involved physical contact. Audrey, Phoebe, and also Bridget told me that they had
not enjoyed that activity. I explained the game, and I assured them that “Wagon Wheel Introductions” would not involve the entanglement of body parts. The ninth grade girls seemed very relieved.

The activity went very well. The first group carried out the activity effectively, and the students enjoyed introducing themselves to the other members of the group. The left side of the room, having benefited from seeing their peers in the first group, were relaxed and very engaged during the activity. In general, there was much laughter, smiling, and joking amongst all of the students. The brief verbal exchange in French and movement associated with this activity really seemed to engage all of the students.

Another ice breaker we played during the first two weeks, “Name Tag Grab” (see Procedures) involved a great deal of movement and physical contact from the students. Not surprisingly, their reactions to this activity were very strong and very mixed. The following short poem captures some of the students’ own thoughts as they reflected on this activity. I also included some concerns I had about the students’ reactions at the end of the poem (see Figure 1).
Name Tag Grab

It was rowdy and loud and disorganized
Amazing, extraordinarily fun
Unique, a needed diversion
And who of course won?
C’est moi, oh, yeah!

You stuck names on your back
It was more like a game
Complicated, frustrating
But where was my name?
I saw no point in doing that!

It’s more fun when we’re moving
Not just stuck in our seats
I enjoy interacting
But is this a good way to teach?
And I don’t like to speak!

I felt crazy, let loose
Chasing others to win
But I felt forced to pursue
Again and again?
I don’t even want to begin!

It was a huge waste of time
No thinking required
It was my favorite activity
Educational, but too wired!
Are they inspired? Just tired?

For whom does this kind
Of activity work?
Who benefits? Who suffers?
Who is nervous? Who thrives?
Appropriate strategy?
Or hopelessly scattered?
These are the kinds of questions
That matter

Who didn’t try?
And Why?

Figure 1. Reactions to ice-breaker activity.
Student Interaction During Group Activities

One of the first cooperative group activities we tried during our first weeks together was a reading activity. The activity required students to skim and scan French birth announcements for information, including dates of babies’ births, cities of birth, and the names of the babies’ parents. I organized the students into groups of four based on where they were sitting, and groups were asked to work together, but to fill out individual grids based on the information they had selected from the reading. Immediately some of the groups worked harmoniously, while other groups experienced problems. In group #1, Barb, Lauren, and Arnie worked together, but John refused to work with his group. At one point, he asked me, “Do we have to list chronologically?” His question was insightful, but he would not share with his group. In group #2, Phoebe and Bridget worked together, but Kate and Audrey worked alone. Audrey was very quiet and preferred to work by herself. Kate seemed intent on engaging me rather than her peers. She shared some personal information with me, explaining that her parents speak some French. She asked, “Is French the same . . . like . . . in Belgium and France?” I explained to her the accent is different. In group #3, Sue, Vicki, Kirk, and Andy worked together, and Vicki seemed to lead the group with some reading strategy suggestions. She explained, “Let’s just list all of the names first. Then we can add the information.” Vicki and Sue are seniors, and both girls are taking advanced level Spanish classes in addition to French I.
In group #4, Bobby, Simon, and Dennis worked quietly together. Simon seemed very, very reticent, and he did not interact at all with his peers. Rather, he just listened, smiled two or three times, but otherwise did not speak at all to his group members. He is a junior, but he did not seem to want or to be able to share with his group.

Bobby seemed easily sidetracked, and tried to engage me in conversation whenever I was nearby. He asked, “Is our (next) quiz going to take long?” Bobby is repeating French I from last year, and he seemed anxious to share with me some of his past experiences. He exclaimed, “Last year my name was Dikembe!” and he asked me if the French stand really close together when they converse, saying he had learned that this was so from last year’s class. Picking up on Bobby’s question, Pete from group #5 asked, “Do they stand really close?” and “Would they be able to tell I’m a tourist?” Pete had been singing to himself, and he had not been getting very far on his task. Unfortunately, he was working with a group of three others, Roxy, Tim, and Joe, who were not collaborating. Bridget, from across the room, asked, “Do we go to France?” I explained to the entire class that we go to France every other year, and told Bridget that, as she is a ninth grade student, she would be able to travel with us in either her sophomore or senior year.

While I wanted our reading activity to be a group effort, I could tell from the students’ responses that some of my Level I students were not amenable to
group work, while others were quite easily distracted from the group task. Bobby, Kate, Pete, and Bridget preferred to chat about cultural differences between French and Americans, and their group peers did not engage them but rather preferred to work alone, having determined that the task could be completed independently. Indeed, every student successfully completed the reading assignment, many without any peer help. Clearly, I would have to try to assign group activities that could only be completed with input from all members of the group. Activities during which the students must exchange information as a condition for finishing an assignment would compel all of the students to interact (Doughty & Pica, 1986).

As the second week progressed, we continued to engage in whole-group and small-group activities, and I was able to collect more valuable information about my new students and their learning preferences and personalities in these different groups. As a class, we practiced recognizing and speaking numbers from one to ten in French. The students were involved, and everyone seemed eager to try their pronunciation of French numbers. I observed less anxiety about French pronunciation than I had ever before with this class; indeed, everyone eagerly participated. I wondered if the students were less anxious about speaking French because their voices did not stand out. Was there something to be said for “safety in numbers” when it was a question of pronouncing new sounds aloud in a group setting?
When I broke the class down into groups, some students resisted. The small-group activity involved a dialogue practice, and while I allowed students to choose their own groups, some students were not comfortable in their small groups. Senior girls Vicki and Sue rushed to work with Paulo, a ninth grade native Peruvian who speaks Spanish fluently and has adapted quite easily to the French language. I immediately assigned John to their group, as I knew that he would refuse to choose his own group. Simon, Arnie, and Joe hung back, waiting for something to happen. I put them together into their own group of three.

Phoebe, Bridget, Kate, and Audrey grouped together, but Audrey worked alone. Again, Audrey seemed to be a loner, and had a difficult time bonding with these other ninth grade girls. In Vicki’s group, everyone seemed to get along, and they worked together to make sure that everyone understood the dialogue. Bobby and Kirk were excited to be working together, but they practiced the wrong dialogue. While these two ninth grade boys seem outgoing and enthusiastic, especially when they are together, they have trouble following directions. Bobby especially was very easily distracted. Like Bobby and Kirk, Tammy, Kathy, Barb, and Lauren needed clarification on instructions before they could begin. Some of the ninth grade students, especially when they worked together without older students, had trouble with directions and with getting started on group tasks. While the ninth grade students seem to like to work together, they may be more successful if they are grouped with older students.
Participation from many of my Level I French students was very encouraging during our first several weeks together. While the students sometimes worked alone when I wanted them to work together, I could usually count on enthusiastic involvement from many of them. One exception occurred during a simple math activity. The activity asked students to solve simple addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division problems, and then to recognize and give answers in French to the problems when I read them aloud in French. Many of my usually enthusiastic students did not participate at all, and I decided to ask them why. They were all refreshingly honest, and seemed eager to share their reasons with me. The following pastiche captures some of the frustration my students felt during this activity (see Figure 2):
EVERYONE WAS TOO QUICK!

I couldn’t understand the numbers.

I’m not good at saying numbers in French.

I had trouble finding the problems when you said them.

I couldn’t find the problems.

I’M NOT GOOD AT MATH

I had my hand up, but you were always looking to the side

I don’t know ...

Figure 2. Pastiche showing students’ reactions to math activity involving number recognition.

During the first three weeks of school, we continued to get to know each other through a variety of name and number games. As the participant observer, I continued to try to group students in a variety of different ways and with different people, to collect data that would help me form our first formal cooperative groups. One day, I paired students together to try an “Information Gap Activity” for which they exchanged telephone numbers for fictitious French people. The activity asks students to give and to understand telephone numbers in French.
During the activity, I heard several pairs trying to help each other with the activity. Quiet Simon asked his partner Bobby “Did you get it?” and he repeated the phone numbers that Bobby had not recorded the first time. Chris and Paulo really tried to keep the activity entirely in French, and I heard Chris ask Paulo to repeat something – “Pardon? Répétez, s’il vous plait?” – just as he had learned to do in class. During the Information Gap Activity, several pairs of students were very lively and enthusiastic, while others were very quiet. There did not seem to be a middle ground as far as level of participation was concerned. Ninth grade students Kate and Bridget were lively, engaged and on-task throughout the activity, and they seemed genuinely excited to be speaking French. Ninth grade boys Tim and Arnie also seemed engaged and on-task throughout the activity. Paulo and Chris seemed very enthused, and they made sure to use only French for the entire activity. On the other hand, Kathy and Tammy were extremely quiet, and I could not tell if they were exchanging the appropriate telephone numbers. When I did hear them, it was obvious that Kathy was having very serious problems with her pronunciation of the numbers. This may have contributed to her reticence with the activity; students are understandably reluctant to speak if they think they are not pronouncing the words correctly, and speaking French can be daunting and embarrassing for students even when they are in pairs or small groups rather than in front of the whole class.
Pacing was an issue during the telephone exchange activity. Seniors Vicki and Sue finished the activity very quickly, while ninth grade students Tim and Arnie, and Bridget and Kate, finished the activity about twelve minutes after the senior girls. These ninth grade students were very engaged, enthusiastic, and on-task throughout the activity, so I could not fault them for fooling around or wasting class time. Rather, these inexperienced language learners simply needed more time to complete the activity correctly. I wondered, Is it better to pair a faster, more experienced learner with a slower learner to equalize the pacing of activities and to give the inexperienced learners a model from which to learn? Or do to learners of roughly the same ability and experience levels work better together and have more success?

Another activity we tried during our first weeks together was called “Mots Brouillés” (see Procedures). This activity asked pairs of students to unscramble new vocabulary words together. I paired the students, as I was still collecting data on student relationships before the all-important formation of our first cooperative learning groups for the school year. John refused to work with anyone for the activity, and he kept his head down for the entire class period. I tried pairing Audrey with senior Vicki because I thought perhaps Vicki would be able to draw Audrey out of her shell and into the activity. Early on in the activity, it was clear to me that this was not going to be the case. There was virtually no interaction between the two girls; rather, Audrey sat silently and looked very worried, while
Vicki quickly completed the activity by herself. Nearby, Dennis and Roxy bantered as they completed the activity together. “We finished first!” exclaimed Dennis when Pete declared that he had finished. Roxy admonished Dennis, declaring, “Stop arguing about who finished first. Nobody cares!” I paired Simon with chatty ninth grader Phoebe. Phoebe seems eager to talk to anyone, and I thought that maybe she would be friendly and engaging enough to draw Simon into conversation and participation during the activity. Rather, the two sat quietly and did not exchange two words during the entire activity. Students like Audrey, Simon, John, Kathy, and Tammy worried me as I began to think about my groups for Unit 2. While my best instincts told me to try to mix these very timid students in with the more outgoing and enthusiastic language learners, today’s class showed me that this grouping strategy is not always effective and does not produce the interactive results that I would like to see for these students.

**Our First Cooperative Learning Groups**

As we sailed into our fourth week together, I decided that I had collected and analyzed enough data from observations and assessments to form cooperative learning groups for Unit 2 (see Tables 2 and 3). As I had 23 students in my class, I decided to form five groups of four students and one group with three students. Based on the above information, as well as information on student interaction that I had gleaned from my observations, I assigned the following groups:
Group #1: Lauren, Vicki, Dennis, Bridget

Group #2: Tammy, Barb, Sue, Simon

Group #3: Audrey, Phoebe, Kathy

Group #4: Bobby, Joe, Chris, Roxy

Group #5: Kate, John, Kirk, Paulo

Group #6: Tim, Pete, Andy, Arnie
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* Numbers represent number of errors in each section of the exam
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The students quickly settled into their new seats with their new neighbors. There was much chatting and laughter as we moved into our new groups, and the students seemed excited to be moving into their spaces. I assigned a partner activity right away, and asked the students to pair off within their groups, and the three freshmen girls in Group #3 to work together.

For this paired activity, Vicki and Lauren in Group #1 immediately partnered together, and they finished very quickly, while their group mates Dennis and Bridget were much, much slower. As the latter two students were the low-achieving students in this group, I decided I might have to watch this group to make sure that the four students worked with each other as much as possible, and that the pairs were not always the same. In group #2, Sue and Simon were paired, but I did not see or hear them exchange a single word during the entire activity. Simon continued to withdraw during group activities, and working with an older, high ability student like Sue did not seem to help. In group #3, Phoebe and Audrey worked together, while Kathy was left to work alone. Kathy seemed to be the weakest of these three girls, and she seemed reluctant to participate during Unit 1, so I thought she would benefit from a smaller, more intimate group of girls her age. It is for these same reasons that I also assigned Audrey to a small group. Phoebe has been very outgoing, and so I thought that maybe she could draw her partners into conversation and interaction. While I was glad to see that Audrey seemed to feel comfortable working one-on-one with Phoebe, I worried
that Kathy might be left out and therefore not receive the additional support that she clearly needed from her group. Finally, in group #5, John eventually joined his group. This particular group might work out very well for him, as the other three group members already seemed very sensitive to his needs.

**Team Learning**

When students were engaged in “team learning” and were trying to master a new concept together, I was able to gather many little snatches of their conversations during their discussions. The following snapshots richly represent the ways in which the students interacted with each other and with me during team learning. While these are just glimpses at what were much larger conversations, they aptly capture the essence of the way in which the students worked together as a whole (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997):

| Sue:      | Look in the text. |
| Tammy:   | Where? I don’t know . . . |
| Sue:      | Here . . . look here for the answer. |
| Joe:      | How do you say ‘I don’t like?’ |
| Chris:    | You put the “ne” here in front of the verb, and the “pas” comes after. |
| John:     | This is SO CONFUSING! |
| Kirk:     | Don’t worry, John, we’ll help you! |
| John:     | I DON’T UNDERSTAND THIS LANGUAGE! THIS IS TORTURE! IT IS NOT FUN! |
| Teacher: | Ca va, John? |
| John:     | Ca va bien, Madame . . . |
Teacher: See, you do understand French. Everyone is just learning. It’s new for everyone in the class.
Kate: John, did you do all of this?

Vicki: You see, you have to match the endings
Dennis: (Laughs) What?
Vicki: The verbs have to match the subject . . . e ending for “Je.”
Dennis: (Looks around . . . laughs) My guidance counselor signed me up for French . . . it wasn’t my idea!

Joe: We need to switch partners . . .
Teacher: What, Joe?
Joe: Are you writing that down? I was just joking!

Tammy: (reads aloud)
Barb: (follows along)
Sue: (silence)
Simon: (silence)

John: I DON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT WE’RE DOING!
Teacher: Why don’t you ask your group for help?
Kirk: I don’t want to help!

Cognates

One of my goals in Unit 2 was to introduce to the students the concept of cognate use as a reading strategy in French. We read about and then discussed the definition of a cognate. Next, I provided the students with examples of cognates, and I asked the students if they could think of some examples of French words we had already learned or were learning that look the same or similar and mean the
same thing in French and English. The students brainstormed a number of good examples, including the words “allo,” “présent,” “pardon,” “arriver,” and “six” from Unit 1. From Unit 2, the Unit we were studying at this time, they volunteered cognates such as “basketball,” “skier,” “musique,” “téléphoner,” “cinema,” “camping,” “les sports,” and “les films.” They had a little trouble with the idea of partial cognates, and so I pointed out some other words that could be considered cognates, such as “étudier” (to study), “regarder” (to watch), and “salut” (hello).

Next, in their cooperative groups, the students worked together to figure out the meaning of short French sentences using cognates as a reading strategy (see Procedures). Each sentence contained at least two cognates, and each group had two minutes to work with five sentences before they had to change and receive a new set of five sentences. The students worked very diligently during this entire activity, and every member of every group was involved in the activity. Some groups chose to work together on each sentence, while other groups opted to work in pairs, and to then collaborate together before recording their translations of the sentences. All of the groups chatted aloud about the sentences, talking through explanations for each sentence. The room was positively abuzz with the students’ eager and urgent conversations. The two-minute restriction on their time, and the competitive nature of this activity, seemed to contribute to the excitement that this activity generated in the cooperative groups.
After each group had had the opportunity to analyze all of the sentences, we went over the meanings together. I put translations on the overhead, and we discussed their answers and any trouble they experienced. Overall, the groups did extremely well with this activity. They were able to understand at least the gist of each sentence, and even when they were not able to translate every word in a given sentence, they were able to figure out enough of it together to understand its general meaning.

Whole-Class Activities

During Unit 2, we tried several whole-group, survey-type activities such as the Jeu d’Identité activity (see Appendix R). During the Jeu d’Identité activity, it was interesting to see how the students interacted with each other as a large group. Joe and John were the first to get up to begin surveying their classmates. Vicki, Sue, and Tammy remained in their seats for the entire activity. Vicki and Sue only asked each other questions, and never surveyed anyone else in the class. They seem increasingly isolationist, and do not seem to want to interact with their cooperative groups. Also, they are starting to show some impatience with the younger students in the class. For example, I have seen them roll their eyes at each other as a reaction to some of the questions that are asked in class. Also, ninth graders Bridget and Phoebe have approached me with a concern about the older girls. “When we say things wrong,” exclaimed Phoebe, “Vicki and Sue make fun of us.” “Yeah,” added Bridget, “I saw her [Vicki] say, ’What, is she
At that time, I assured the girls that I would address the issue. I also tried to explain that there is a very big difference between ninth and twelfth grade, and that these were some of the issues I was trying to address with my study. The girls seemed reassured.

The following two vignettes capture two entirely different perspectives on whole-group survey activities from two very different students, both in ninth grade and both among the higher-achieving students in the classroom. Paulo, however, is very outgoing, communicative, and engaging, while Audrey is very shy and withdrawn during group activities:

Vignettes: Learning Styles

Paulo

*I don’t know if it’s considered a group activity, but I liked it the most. It was the “sondage” (survey). We started walking around the classroom asking each other if we liked or disliked certain activities. I liked it because it was very funny trying to answer it fluently. But we were just learning that and many people got confused. It took us a lot of time because sometimes there were many people who disliked the same activities. But I learned by explaining. I think that I learn when I teach other students because it’s kind of like a review. I try to help others.*
Audrey

I really disliked having to ask people questions, such as where we had to find someone who liked classical music, disliked music of the classical persuasion, who liked McDonald’s, etc. We had to go around the room asking these things in French in full sentences, and had to try to find the one person who liked classical music (who, by the way, was me, so I didn’t have much success in that category!) I disliked this activity because it was thoroughly awkward going up to random people and asking them personal questions, and I wasn’t quite sure how to phrase some of the questions. I generally disliked just about every group activity you put us in, as it required that we work with other people, which I don’t like to do, for I am, as you put it in the mid-semester report, an “independent learner.”

Student Choice

Towards the end of Unit 2, we completed a short research project called “Pourquoi en Francais” (see Procedures). This project asked students to research persuasive reasons for learning French, and then to present the information in an attractive and engaging way (most of the students chose a brochure or a Power Point presentation). For this activity, I decided to give the students the option of working alone, or of completing the project with a partner of their choice. I knew from their comments and their behaviors in class that some of the students were tired of working with the same group of four students, and I wanted to see who
they would choose, as I felt that this information would help me to form our new cooperative groups for Unit 3. Not surprisingly, the students who collaborated well, and for whom this project was enjoyable, performed much better on this assessment, both during research process, and in creating the end product.

Students John, Audrey, Joe, Simon, Arnie, and Paulo chose to work alone. This was very interesting, but not, in most cases, unexpected. After all, John, Audrey, Joe, and Simon had all been very reluctant and even negative about working with others. John had outright refused to work with other students during some group activities. However, Paulo’s decision surprised me. He has always been a very outgoing, helpful, and willing “knowledgeable other” for his peers. Was he getting tired of always being the one to help? Did he believe he could accomplish more, or perhaps achieve a better grade, from working alone?

The students who decided to work alone had varying degrees of success in the computer lab. During our time doing Internet research, Joe was off task for much of the period. Instead of doing research for his project, he repeatedly attempted to go to sites about the war in Iraq. When I intervened, he stopped, but several minutes later he was again trying to look up sites unrelated to our topic. Audrey, Arnie, and Simon seemed to be content, working quietly and efficiently on their own. John, despite his frequent outbursts to me – “Madame! I don’t understand what we are doing!” – found some very valid web sites and did a nice job of collecting information by himself. It seemed that the students who
preferred to work alone during other classroom activities did well on their own for this project.

Predictably, seniors Sue and Vicki paired together and seemed very content throughout the completion of the project:

**Sue:**  *Working with Vicki makes everything more productive and enjoyable. We work well together and can help each other in the project-making process.*

**Vicki:**  *We can work at faster paces and so I enjoy any activity that I complete with her as well.*

**Sue:**  *It was a change of environment to go to the computer lab and do our research as well as an interesting learning experience. I liked learning different facts about French such as: Which countries speak French? Where is French used in the U.S.? What occupations make knowing French and advantage?*

**Vicki:**  *In the future I would like to do more activities this way.*

**Sue:**  *Yes, out of all of the activities we’ve done so far this year, this particular project was my favorite.*

Ninth grade girls Bridget and Phoebe partnered together for this activity. Neither student is strong in French, but both girls are pleasant and friendly.

Phoebe particularly is very outgoing:
Phoebe:  
My favorite group activity so far is making a Power Point presentation on why learning French is important and how it can help us in the future with different careers. I liked it because it made me think of why learning it is so important, and also proved my choice of choosing French as my language.

Bridget:  
There was some fun in learning some of the information.

Phoebe:  
It was fun going to the computer lab and researching for it. I would love to do more projects like that on the computer.

Bridget:  
My partner was a good person to work with. We thought it was a job well done.

As is true for most group activities, there were mixed reviews about the “Pourquoi en Francais” activity:

Lauren:  
I liked doing the brochure.

Chris:  
I didn’t like the brochure project. I felt as if it was completely un-educational and useless. It didn’t teach me anything about the French language or culture that I didn’t know already. It was tedious work, and it was basically all for nothing.
Kate:  
*I liked it because it was a partnered activity and it was active. I also liked it because we got to learn more about the culture of France and the language.*

Kathy:  
*I liked going to the computer lab and finding all of the information on France that I did not know about before. It was interesting learning about all of the countries that speak French, and how many items we have here in the United States that come from France.*

Simon:  
*I did not like the “importance of speaking French” project. It required the use of computers, and it was just difficult.*

It was clear to me from his comments that Simon would have benefited from working with a partner on this project. I wonder if he realized that some of his frustration with the project could have been alleviated with help from a peer.

Two students, Dennis and Tammy, are often absent, and had to do their projects individually because they were not here for class time and computer lab time. Neither of these two students finished the project:

Dennis:  
*The project I least liked was the pamphlet project. I didn’t like it because it required the use of a computer and I do not have a computer at home. I also have no study halls when I can go to the library. So, I had to use my lunch period to work on the project.*
Tammy: The only reason I didn’t like the brochure project was because I could only come up with two ideas on why French is needed. I also had no design for it, and the computer I was going to make it on wouldn’t let me log on. I’m not a big fan of brochures at all. But other than those reasons it probably would have been a good activity for me to participate in.

It was quite frustrating for me to watch students like Dennis and Tammy continually struggle and fail in French I. Their cooperative groups and the many opportunities I offered students to work together would have helped these two students. Unfortunately, they were not in class often enough to benefit from the support system I created for them and their peers.

Information Gap and Dialog Activities

During Unit 2, the students had many opportunities to work in pairs on speaking activities (see Procedures, and Appendixes G, H, I, & L) within their small cooperative groups of four. I encouraged the students to vary the people with whom they worked, and I also assigned partners when I wanted to observe particular achievement levels working together. Specifically, I wanted to collect information on students as they helped each other and scaffolded each other’s learning. I expected that the stronger of the two students in any given pair would
more often serve as the knowledgeable other, correcting, answering questions, and giving feedback to his less able partner.

My classroom observations showed some evidence of this kind of scaffolded help. For example, in group #5, I often paired Paulo, a very high functioning ninth grade student from Peru, with Kirk, perhaps my weakest Level I student. Paulo likes to help other students (see Paulo’s vignette on p. 91), and he was very helpful to Kirk, who struggled with virtually every speaking exercise. As a native Spanish speaker, Paulo has a beautiful accent in French, and is able to easily pronounce and understand French words. Whenever they worked together, Paulo always repeated the sounds and words that Kirk mispronounced, and he was very patient with Kirk’s many questions.

In group #2, I found that Sue, a senior who is also enrolled in Spanish IV Honors and who does extremely well in my class, greatly assisted Tammy, a mid-low ability student who is frequently absent. Instead of giving Tammy answers to her questions about the meaning of words, Sue was very astute about showing Tammy how to find the information for herself using context clues from the dialog. Clearly Sue has advanced reading skills and avails herself of key reading strategies that she has assimilated from studying Spanish. She was very adept at teaching these reading strategies to her freshman partner. As Donato notes, “social interaction is a mechanism for individual development, since, in the presence of a more capable participant, the novice is drawn into, and operates
within, the space of the expert’s strategic processes for problem solving” (Donato, 1994, p. 37).

Unfortunately, more often than not, the pairs of students, when they did work together and were focused during the speaking activities, made little to no attempt to correct or give each other feedback. Rather, most of the pairs I observed and listened to let mistakes go unnoticed. They either did not recognize the errors as such, recognized them but were unable to correct them, or simply did not care enough to help when they heard mistakes being made. Additionally, when I was observing a particular group of students, some of the other groups used my preoccupation as an excuse to fool around. During my observations, I was the one who most often intervened to correct students or to answer questions. When I would ask the students why they had not corrected an error, they either did not recognize the error, or could not correct the error:

**Sue:** *I don’t like these activities because they don’t seem to help anyone perfect their French skills considering while going over them people make the same mistakes they had made previously in class.*

**Lauren:** *Sometimes when we do the “A and B” [Information Gap] worksheets we all make the same mistakes so we can’t correct each other.*

Indeed, many of my students reacted negatively to the small speaking activities. They did not like the idea of speaking French with a peer, and most of
them were more enthusiastic when we rehearsed dialogs or practiced speaking exercises as a whole group (see p. 7).

**Tim:** *I dislike the little pieces of paper we get with questions for your partner and yourself. I would rather listen to songs and watch the movie.*

**Audrey:** *I disliked having to do those “Student A and Student B” conversations. I disliked it because what you were asking us to do was somewhat confusing, and I was often paired up with people whom I do not know or like.*

**Vicki:** *Sometimes it was frustrating to complete the small speaking exercises. It was hard to focus.*

Not many students believed that the speaking activities did help them. Those who did thought it was because they were able to hear and correct each other:

**Pete:** *I enjoy the group activities where we talk to each other. I like it because it helps with pronunciation. You also get to hear mistakes of other people which helps you to not make the same mistake.*

**Roxy:** *I like any of the speaking activities. I like them because it helps you develop and understand the language. Also when you speak in a group you can correct how each other speaks. I also helps in pronunciation.*
Clearly my Level I students needed me to scaffold their instruction more before they could help each other. In pairs, most of my students seemed unable to provide each other with the kind of support and feedback that would make activities such as these small speaking activities more meaningful and more helpful for pronunciation.

**Cooperative Learning Groups for Unit 3**

I assigned new cooperative groups as a result of the data I had collected over the course of Unit 2. These data included the participant observations and my reflections, the survey I administered (see Table 4), the students’ comments from the written reflections, and the students’ academic status as of the end of Unit 2 (see Table 5).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1: Being part of a group helped me learn</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>#2: Others in my group helped me a lot</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>#3: I would like French better if I was not in a group</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4: I would have earned better grades working alone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5: I am learning when I teach other students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6: I helped others in my group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>#7: Other people in my group helped me</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8: I would prefer to continue work in groups most of the time</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>76%</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>GRADE</td>
<td>GRADE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arnie</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>74%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>95%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirk</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>97%</td>
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<td>Paulo</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>98%</td>
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<td>Pete</td>
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<td>Phoebe</td>
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<td>Roxy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>94%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>97%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>71%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>82%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>99%</td>
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</table>
For our new Unit 3, I assigned the following:

Barb, John, Kathy, Pete

Lauren, Phoebe, Bridget, Kate

Simon, Audrey, Joe, Arnie

Vicki, Sue, Chris, Andy

Paulo, Dennis, Tammy, Roxy

Bobby, Tim, Greg

Kirk transferred to another high school, and so would no longer be participating in the study. Greg was a new student who was enrolled in my period 5 French I class, but who opted into period 9 as a result of a scheduling conflict.

**Teacher Scaffolding**

In our new groups, I introduced the new vocabulary for our first lesson in Unit 3. As a whole class, we listened to the new vocabulary on the CD, and then we repeated the new vocabulary together. Next, we listened to the new dialogue. After we had heard the dialogue, I stopped the CD and we discussed the dialogue. I wanted to be certain that everyone understood the dialogue before we repeated the lines together. Next, we repeated the dialogue with the CD. Then, I asked several different stronger students to repeat each line of the dialogue in an attempt to make sure that everyone had heard the pronunciation correctly. Essentially, I used the stronger students as models to reinforce the native speaker on the CD, and to further guide the other students as they practiced the new words and
sounds. As Vygotsky suggests, “using imitation, children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under guidance of adults” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). I hoped to see evidence of this kind of imitation on the part of my students, especially as they moved into their small groups.

Once I felt that everyone in the class had had the opportunity to hear and to repeat every line in the dialogue, I introduced a scaffolding strategy that I hoped would help them when they began to practice the new lines in pairs. Basically, I explained to them how important it was for them to help each other with pronunciation, and I suggested that if they heard their partner pronouncing something wrong, that they should correct the partner by repeating the word or phrase correctly. Further, I suggested that if the pair could not come to an agreement on how something should be pronounced, that they should raise their hands and I would intervene to model the correct pronunciation. Finally, I modeled polite ways in which students could repeat or correct pronunciation for their partners.

**Student Scaffolding Does Not Hold Up**

I observed two pairs during this activity. In one group, Lauren, a high-ability student, paired with Bridget, a mid-low student. I wanted to see if Lauren would be able to take the teacher’s place and be a resource for her partner. Unfortunately, what I had hoped would happen did not occur. While the girls were very focused and engaged during the entire activity, they never corrected
each other or stopped to provide each other with feedback. Instead, they just rushed through their lines. When they got stuck on pronunciation, they immediately asked me for help. I do not know whether it was because I was nearby and accessible, or if they just would not or could not help each other.

In another group, I listened to Joe and Audrey practice the new dialogue. At one point, Joe pronounced “Comment vas-tu?” incorrectly (he pronounced the “s” on the word “vas,” a common mistake for French students). Audrey did not correct him, but rather simply read her next line. When I asked her, she admitted that she did know that Joe had pronounced “vas” incorrectly, and she corrected him by repeating the correct pronunciation of the word. However, she only did so because I prompted her.

Unfortunately, while I was busy with Lauren and Bridget, and Audrey and Joe, some of the other pairs of students took advantage of the situation to fool around and to wander off task. When I asked them to continue with the activity, most of them complied, but some pairs seemed unable to remain focused without constant reminders from me.

Even with some additional scaffolding from me prior to the activity, it was clear to me that my Level I students were not comfortable speaking French, much less attempting to correct each other. Indeed, speaking a second language is an intimidating and anxiety-ridden experience for many new learners: “Instead, there are cold, metal sounds bouncing off her teeth, the act of translation cooling the
passion of the thought . . . she finds that her efforts create a glistening wall, icy
with dangerous foreign sounds and echoes of the unfamiliar tomes of strangers”
(Dowdy, in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 12).

For these students, I decided that it might be best to provide teacher
feedback to the pairs of students by circulating around the room. Then, as the
pairs began to self-correct or to correct each other, I could reduce or even remove
my help and begin to let them function independently. As Ohta (1995, as cited in
De Guerrero and Villamil, 2000) notes, in language acquisition, Vygotsky’s
concept of ZPD can be defined as “the difference between the L2 learner’s
developmental level as determined by independent language use, and the higher
level of potential development as determined by how language is used in
collaboration with a more capable interlocutor” (p. 53). Initially, then, I would
serve as the “more capable interlocutor.” Eventually, the more capable students,
with “scaffolded mediated assistance” (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000, p. 52) from
me, would begin to assume the roles of more capable interlocutors during group
activities. Eventually, I hoped I would begin to see evidence of progress from all
students.

Cooperative Group Dynamics

Early on in Unit 3, I was obvious to me that I had made some mistakes
when I formed the new groups. Audrey was miserable in her group, and she
always worked unhappily alone. During one class, she asked me, “Why do you
hate me?“ She smiled as she said it, so I knew that she was not serious about me hating her. However, I also knew that she did hate her group, and that she wanted me to do something about her situation.

At the end of one class period early in Unit 3, Simon was the last person in the class at the end of the period. He had gone to the lavatory towards the end of the period and so was still retrieving his personal possessions after the bell had rung. I seized upon our opportunity alone to ask him, “What will it take to get you to speak in this class?!“ He smiled shyly at me, replying, “I’m quiet in every class” to which I responded, “That’s why I put you with Audrey.” He answered, “Yeah, but she’s so quiet I can’t hear anything she says.” He added, “I like to watch the others. They say funny things.” Clearly Audrey and Simon were not interacting well together within their group, and both continued to work alone.

John was routinely very mean to Barb, the student in his group who was most willing to help him. I had decided to put John into a group with Barb because, a few weeks earlier, I had observed them chatting about comic books. Barb showed John her superhero folders, and he was really excited to talk to someone who shared his passion for comics. At one point, he complained to her about school being a “pain” and “torture” to which Barb cleverly replied, “You should write a song.” John had chuckled appreciatively at her witticism, and they seemed to bond as that class period came to an end. However, now it seemed that John was giving Barb a hard time, and his unwillingness to get along was
affecting the dynamics in that group. Barb, however continued to be one of the most patient students with the troubled John.

Greg was not doing well in his group of 3 with fellow ninth grade boys Bobby and Tim. He seemed extremely unfocused and tended to fool around a lot or not to participate during group activities. Bobby and Tim continued to really struggle in French, and Greg may have been frustrated or simply uninterested in working with and helping them. During one class period, I used Dennis’s absence from class to move Greg to another group in Dennis’s place. He performed much better as a result of this move, and really rose to the challenge of working with his more competent peers Paulo and Roxy. For example, Paulo modeled the correct pronunciation of “limonade” for Greg and he repeated it successfully. Then, Greg mispronounced the word “jus” (predictably, he pronounced the “s”) and Roxy corrected him by repeating the word without the “s” sound. Greg seemed to be a student who really benefited from working with more knowledgeable peers. Bobby and Tim, in turn, might benefit from working with stronger students rather than with students their own age.

Some of our group troubles continued as we moved into the second part of Unit 3. In the group of Audrey, Simon, Joe, and Arnie, Joe and Arnie had started working with their neighbors, the group of Bobby, Tim, and Greg, whenever I assigned a small-group or paired activity, leaving Audrey and Simon to work
alone. Moreover, Bobby and Tim paired off with Joe and Arnie, leaving Greg to work alone or to opt out of participating at all.

Paulo seemed always willing and quite able to help the students in his group. He would often pair with Dennis when Dennis was actually in class. Paulo was able to help Dennis during some activities. Unfortunately, his help sometimes went unnoticed by Dennis, who continued to be quite apathetic to any learning. Paulo might be more useful to a struggling student who is actually trying to learn the language. However, I was reluctant to abandon Dennis, a student who required a great deal of extra support.

The group of girls, the three freshmen Kate, Phoebe, and Bridget, and one sophomore, Lauren, undoubtedly loved being together in one group, but they giggled a lot, were easily distracted and off-task, and missed instructions and explanations. As Andy noted to me, “Kate should be separated from her friends. She does not pay attention and asks questions about what we just covered!”

The group of Vicki, Sue, Andy, and Chris functioned quite efficiently, and I was reluctant to split that group. However, given the many problems in the other groups, and the many students who needed help, I wondered if perhaps there wasn’t too much talent and maturity concentrated in one group?

**Cooperative Group Changes**

As part of my study on grouping strategies in Level I French, I had certainly wanted to keep my students in their cooperative groups for all of Unit 3.
Proponents of cooperative group learning stress the importance of long-term, stable groups and regular group meetings and activities for the academic and social development of all students (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Kohn, 1999). However, given all of the problems and obstacles to learning that I had observed during the first half of Unit 3, it was clear that I would have to reassign new groups for the duration of the unit and of the study. Based on my classroom observations, student feedback, and student interaction during group activities, I assigned new cooperative groups as follows:

Joe, John, Barb, Tammy  
Sue, Celine, Simon, Bobby  
Roxy, Greg, Kathy, Chris  
Audrey, Bridget, Arnie, Andy  
Paulo, Dennis, Kate, Lauren  
Phoebe, Tim, Pete

**Peer Writing**

One of our first activities in our new groups was the peer composition (see Procedures and Appendixes U & V). The students were clearly not at all used to writing with a partner, and I observed a lot of initial confusion and some resistance to the assignment. Several students commented to me that they “didn’t want to write the first several lines together.” “Couldn’t we just write our own stuff, and then have someone look at it?” I insisted that the pairs write the first
three lines together. I emphasized that those three lines should be exactly the same for both partners. The following short pastiche captures some of the students’ frustration and trepidation about writing together:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear of Peer Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are you sure?</strong></td>
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*Figure 3. Pastiche showing students’ reactions to writing together.*

After I had allayed the students’ fears concerning peer writing, they settled down and began to write. After the pairs had written their lines together, they finished their compositions separately, and then they proofread each other’s work. The peer editing rubric was somewhat useful to the students. Paulo greatly assisted his partner Phoebe, making suggestions that vastly improved Phoebe’s level of writing. Phoebe had been having trouble with verb conjugations, the use of negation with verbs, and sentence structure, and Paulo was able to offer much-needed assistance to help her move beyond her low level writing skills. Paired students Chris and Kathy also worked well together. Like Paulo, Chris was a
successful student, and he was able to provide Kathy with guidance during the writing process and again when she made her revisions.

However, many of the students simply wanted to finish the activity, and so they did not utilize the rubric (see Appendix X) to its fullest extent. Mayher, Lester, and Pradl (1983) note that “school writing has only the teacher as its audience . . . teachers are required to evaluate, and this function frequently supersedes all other feedback from teachers to students about their writing” (p. 3).

I had thought that incorporating a peer editing component into the writing activity would make it more meaningful for the students, but, in most cases, it did not seem to matter to the students. The students were not convinced that their “writing serves a real purpose” and that it had “a real audience” (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983, p. 3). I had failed to provide teaching “organized in such a way that reading and writing are necessary for something” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 117). Indeed, several students did not even bother to turn in the follow-up individual composition (see Table 11), a fact that attests to their apathy towards the writing assignment.

Writing and peer editing is another area that may very well require advance instruction in the form of lessons, modeling, and guided practice before the students are successful on their own. Such scaffolded help should be tailored to meet the needs of individual students, and, like all such help, can be removed as the students become more comfortable with this kind of writing process. I
would have the opportunity to test my theory as the students and I moved into the restaurant dialog, a culminating activity for Unit 3.

**Reading Success**

While the peer writing activity was not as successful a collaborative effort as I had hoped, the cooperative groups worked quite successfully with a reading assignment that involved the continued use of cognates as a successful reading strategy. Individually, students read a short scene, which takes place in a café. Then, they made a list of all the words they found in the text that are cognates. If the French word was not spelled exactly the same, or was a partial cognate, the students wrote the English equivalent next to the French word. After the students had created their lists, they paired up within their groups to compare their answers, adding and making changes to their own lists. Finally, the cooperative groups of 4 compared and discussed all of the individual lists. From these lists and their discussions, the groups compiled a final comprehensive and accurate list of all possible cognates in the reading.

All of the groups worked very on the reading activity. Because they were all accountable to their groups, each student (with the exception of Dennis) worked quite diligently on his individual list. As the groups knew that they would receive one grade based on their collective efforts, the students took the assignment seriously, and they eagerly shared their own results in order to create the most comprehensive lists that they could manage from their individual efforts.
As a whole, the students were quite successful with this and with previous reading activities. Most of the students seemed more at ease with this type of reading activity, where they are asked to receive information, rather than with speaking and writing exercises, where they had to produce the language. Like the children to which Stubbs (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) refers in his study, who “understand many things their parents say to them long before they can actively produce the same items” (p. 77), my Level I students were much more adept at understanding the French language than they were at producing the language.

**Group Interaction – Restaurant Dialog**

Towards the end of Unit 3, we began to work on the restaurant dialogue (see Procedures). As this assessment demanded a great deal of group time and effort, I wanted students to have many opportunities to meet in their cooperative groups.

On one of the first days with this activity, many of the groups seemed to function well together. Vicki, Bobby, Sue, and Simon interacted effectively, though Sue and Vicki were clearly in charge. The girls assumed the lead for the writing of the dialogue, and Bobby and Simon sometimes helped out with a line or an idea. Simon quietly wrote down the lines as the group created them, ostensibly to be sure he had his own copy of the dialogue from which to practice.

Paulo, Kate, and Lauren worked very well together, and seemed to collaborate on every idea. Paulo and Lauren are both very strong students, two of
the top four students in the class, and Kate is also an A student (she just has to
work much harder than her group buddies to earn her grades), but no one student
tried to assume control of the group. Paulo tried to draw Dennis into the group
collaboration, but he preferred to do absolutely nothing and just bother his
neighbors in the other groups. While Paulo has been the only successful partner
for Dennis, even he no longer seems to have any positive effect on this troubled
junior.

In the group of three students, Pete, Tim and Phoebe worked quietly and
efficiently together. Each student made a copy of the dialogue for him/herself as
the group collaborated on the lines together. The two ninth grade students, Tim
and Phoebe, seemed to be more serious about the activity, while junior Pete, ever
unfocused and easily distracted, seemed content to passively follow their lead in
this group.

Juniors Chris and Roxy worked very well together and seemed to be on
fairly friendly terms. They may know each other outside of school. This was
positive for them, but detrimental to freshman Kathy, who worked quietly beside
but apart from her older peers. She could really benefit from their more capable
skills in French, but she seemed reluctant to break into their little group, and they
did not prove adept at making her feel welcome. The other ninth grade student in
this group, Greg, was absent today.
Tammy, Barb, and John collaborated together. Tammy played the role of secretary and copied the dialogue lines for the group as Barb and John helped create the dialogue lines. Joe sat and sulked, and commented to me that his group was “dysfunctional.” Later, he complained that I had “assigned all of the rejects to his group.” John retorted, “I resent that, you jerk-head!” It is not surprising that Joe receives social and emotional support in a pull-out special class every day.

Andy, Audrey, and Bridget worked separately on different aspects of the dialogue, and Arnie was absent. As Audrey was absent yesterday, she copied the dialogue the rest of the group had already worked on. Bridget worked on her own dialogue lines, and Andy worked on prices for food items from an authentic menu I had provided to him.

After about 20 minutes, some of the cooperative groups started to lose focus. Chris and Roxy were drawing, and they seemed to be having a competition. Chris asked, “Madame Swann, whose picture is better?” Joe continued to look annoyed and refused to participate in his group. Chris came over to talk to him, and Joe commented, “He’s trying to smuggle me out of this group!” Barb commented to John, “He [Joe] doesn’t like you very much!” and John concurred. Then Barb commented that Joe was such a “negative person” and she advised Joe to “be happy every day like me!” This comment annoyed Joe even more. I
insisted to Joe that he participate with his group, or risk failing the assignment, and he reluctantly began to help his group with dialogue ideas.

Vicki and Sue finished writing their dialogue quickly, but opted not to rehearse it. Instead, they decided to use their extra time to socialize and chat with each other. Simon sat quietly alone, and Bobby joined in the girls’ discussion about universities. This was unfortunate, as both Bobby and Simon could have benefited from the group’s speedy writing, and extra time for speaking practice. However, despite several suggestions from me that they use their class time wisely, the group assured me that they would learn their lines on their own and know them for the performance.

Andy, Audrey, and Bridget finally seemed to be working as a group rather than individually, and they engaged in rehearsing their dialogue lines. Chris, Roxy, and Kathy good-naturedly began to practice their lines after I admonished them to do so. Tim, Phoebe, and Pete continued to work slowly but surely. They were still struggling to write their dialogue after the other groups had nearly or completely finished and the bell signaling the end of class rang.

**Layered Perspectives**

As work on the restaurant dialogue continued, I continued to observe the students as they engaged in their cooperative learning groups. From his group of three, Pete commented, “*We’re making beautiful music together!*” This group seemed to function very nicely together. Socially, they made great strides together
in a class replete with very different personalities. Academically, they did struggle a bit. Here is what these three had to say about their experiences writing the restaurant dialogue:

**Layered Story: Phoebe, Tim, and Pete**

**Phoebe**

*We laughed and laughed and laughed some more. But sometimes we worked! No, seriously, we did work. Me, Tim, and Pete actually did work sometimes. And it’s so good to be in a group with these guys. I’m not being sarcastic.*

*So, how did I help with the dialogue? Well, I mostly contributed paper when they needed some. It’s sort of my thing to do since I have a whole notebook of it. I also helped them pronounce words.*

*These guys are very kind and funny. Tim is really sweet and kind. Pete brings all the laughs (but you probably already knew that). So, all in all, I love this group.*

**Pete**

*I guess I made an OK contribution to my group. If they needed me, I did what I had to to help get something done. Phoebe and Tim are very nice and generous for putting up with me. They helped me when I needed help. I benefited from being in this group. I had a really fun time!*
Tim

This group is one of the best groups I’ve been in all year. They helped me to pronounce words, and they helped me study my lines. Pete was actually very helpful, and so was Phoebe. We were very productive in our group.

While most of the groups (with the exception of Joe and his group) seemed to me to be getting along, I realized from their student reflections that what I had observed on the outside was not necessarily what was going on in some of these students’ minds. The next layered story includes me as a participant to “reflect the diverse ways through which experience is interpreted and constructed” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul, 1997, p. 80):

Layered Story: Creative Differences

Madame Swann

Andy, Bridget, Audrey, and Arnie seemed very compatible. Often, their strategy was to divide the work up on any given day, and to spend the first fifteen or twenty minutes working individually on their assigned tasks. Then, in the second half of the period, these four students would come together to rehearse their parts for the dialogue. I was glad to see Audrey participating in her group, as she has been reluctant to work with others all year. Bridget is one of my weaker students, eager to learn but someone who clearly struggles with basic language acquisition skills. She seemed to be getting the support she needs from her group, and especially from stronger students Andy and Audrey. Freshman
Arnie, who has struggled to remain focused during group activities, appeared to be on task with this group, and I was glad to see him modeling the behavior of older student Andy. Overall, I was very pleased and proud of this group.

Bridget

You know, I really didn’t work as well with this group as I did with my previous one. I did not feel as though I was an important part of this group because we were not great communicators. We were definitely not a group that liked working together or even talking. There was nothing that anybody in my group did that would have helped or hurt me. We just weren’t a good match. And Andy was not interested in doing anything within our group.

Arnie

I was kinda the smart person in my group. But, most of the people in my group helped me and each other. Well, except for Audrey who is very quiet. Why? I don’t know. But everyone else is nice. This group was cool, and I benefited from being in it.

Andy

My role in this group was pointless. I did the brunt of the work and everyone else was just clinging to me. Not to be egotistical, but I feel that my prior knowledge of Spanish gave me a huge advantage and that I should have been placed in a more educated group. I was held back in this group because I had to stop my own progress and try to help the others.
Audrey

I did not really contribute much to the group or to the dialogue. Except for paper . . . I’ve ended up contributing quite a bit of paper. You see, I was not important because nobody in our group was important. As I’m sure you’ve observed, the people in my group don’t exactly jump at the chance to work together - at all. Most of the time, in fact, they pretend as if they’ve suddenly become deaf and dumb when you suggest working together. We are a sad, pathetic little community over here.

Let’s see, how did the others in my group help me to become more successful? Well, I can’t say I haven’t learned anything. From Arnie, I’ve learned – umm – actually, nothing. But, I have learned to make nasty, snide comments from Andy. And, I’ve learned from Bridget how much the average article of clothing from the Bon-Ton costs, and why exactly Justin Timberlake is incredibly gay. Oh, did you mean French? No, they haven’t helped me at all in French.

So, have I benefited from this experience? I’ve learned how to make people cry with less than ten words, and how to beat the after-Thanksgiving rush at the mall. So no, I haven’t learned anything helpful. Can’t say it hasn’t been bundles of fun, though.

Students Bridget, Arnie, Andy, and Audrey taught me a great deal through their words and their reflections. As Freire explains,
Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-students and students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 80)

While I was very unhappy and quite unsettled to learn that these four students were so mismatched and unwilling to work together, I understood that I had been provided with some very profound insights into the nature of cooperative groups.

After approximately one week working together on their dialogues, the students performed dress rehearsals of their skits for their peers. The students who were watching served as evaluators, and they provided feedback as a group to their peers using a “group feedback” form (see Appendix Y). The dress rehearsals were informal and went very well, and all of the groups provided their classmates with at least one positive comment, and one area for improvement. The groups received all of the feedback from their peers, but most of the groups just glanced at the forms and then threw them away at the end of class. I had hoped that they would use the feedback to help them with some last-minute improvements to their skits, and I made this expectation clear. Still, there was nothing in the grading rubric to oblige them to use the feedback, and most of the groups just did not take their classmates’ comments seriously.
At last, the big performance day arrived! The students were nervous as they readied themselves in their groups, and most of the students opted to use the several minutes before the performances began to run through their lines one last time. Predictably, the groups who worked well together throughout the writing and rehearsing process also performed well together. Sue, Vicki, Simon, and Bobby performed well, as did Paulo, Lauren, and Kate, and Chris, Greg, Kathy, and Roxy. The groups who did not work well together, specifically Joe, John, Barb, and Tammy, and also Arnie, Bridget, Audrey, and Andy, were much more tense and ill-at-ease during the actual performance of their skits.

As we approached the end of Unit 3 and also the end of the study, I think that both the students and I had learned a great deal about ourselves and our learning preferences and areas for growth. More importantly, I think many of us gained valuable insight into our own preconceived notions about learning a new language. Having collaborated with peers of all ages, experience levels, and abilities, the students were more reflective about their contributions in small cooperative groups. Having closely observed the students as they worked, I became intimately close to their fears, their concerns, their moments of joy, and their many successes. Having taken their words, their reflections, and their suggestions seriously, I involved my students in the entire study process and we became closer as a result of that trust. Their involvement in the study, and their reactions to and reflections about the many different activities and assignments
we tried in our small cooperative groups, helped me make necessary adjustments to my study as it evolved. Furthermore, my students’ participation provided my study with “an additional safeguard: the critical presence of representatives of the people from the beginning until the final phase, that of thematic analysis” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 117).
METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Analysis of Participant Observations

Immediately after each class period during which I had observed and made notes on the *participant observation checklists*, I recorded some initial reflections for what I had observed. It was quite convenient for me to record my early thoughts and ideas immediately after class, as this Level I class met every day during last period, which allowed me time at the end of my day for quiet, uninterrupted reflection.

Every several days, I typed up my *classroom observations* and the *corresponding reflections*. I typed all of the observations first, and then added the reflections at the end of each entry in bold. This method worked very well for me, as it allowed me to keep what I actually observed separate from my interpretation of what I observed. Also, at the beginning of each entry, I recorded the observation date with the times I began and ended my observation, the composition date, and the activity or activities I observed that day. These entry headers allowed me to periodically go back and re-examine what had happened with earlier activities as I planned my lessons and activities throughout the study. The headers also organized my observations in such a way that they were very accessible and helpful to me as I recreated my classroom and my students for telling the story.
Analysis of Student Surveys and Student Reflections

I administered the student survey (Appendix AA) at the end of Unit 2 and again at the end of the study with the conclusion of Unit 3. In order to best utilize the data from the surveys, I created two tables (see Tables 4 and 10) to display the students’ reactions to the eight survey statements. To compliment this quantitative data, I also pulled individual comments about each statement and recorded those separately under each statement number. I included the student’s name and the survey page number for each student quote so that I could include not only the reactions but the students’ words both in my story and in my analysis of the data.

In addition to the surveys, I also asked the students to respond to a writing prompt (see Appendix AB) at the end of Unit 2, and to a second writing prompt (see Appendix AB) at the end of the study. I included many of their thoughts about group work from these reflections through various literary vehicles sprinkled throughout my story.

Analysis of Student Work

My students completed numerous different assessments in Units 2 and 3, which I collected, graded, and analyzed for student progress and for areas of concern. I decided to create tables to display important student results in a succinct and manageable manner. These tables were helpful to me as the researcher. As Wolcott advises, “display formats provide alternatives for coping with two of our most critical tasks, data reduction and data analysis” (Wolcott,
2001, p. 129). The tables would also be helpful to my readers, as “displays can often reduce a great deal of data and make them more readily graspable and memorable . . . figures sometimes say more than words” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 194).

I analyzed the unit quizzes for four different areas: acquisition of vocabulary, use of structure, knowledge of culture, and speaking (when applicable). I also created tables for the students’ results on unit exams (see Tables 1, 6 & 7). These tables also show the number of errors each student made in each of the applicable skills areas. These results show the students mastery of the content we studied over the course of Units 1, 2, and 3.

Additionally, I constructed tables to show the students’ results for various projects, including the restaurant dialog for Unit 3 (see Table 9) and the “Pourquoi en Francais” project for Unit 2 (see Table 12). The results on these tables reflect the number of points each student scored out of four possible points for each designated area on the project rubric used to score the project as a whole. Finally, I constructed tables to show the students’ success with peer versus individual compositions (see Table 11). This table highlights the differences, if any, between the students’ achievement working with a cooperative group partner versus working alone to complete a written assignment in French.
Analytic and Methodological Memos

Once a week (or more often if necessary due to the volume of classroom observations and reflections), I wrote an analytic memo about my observation entries. As I analyzed my field notes, including observations and reflections, I was able to reassess to what extent my observations were factual. Also, I was able to better ensure that those observations accurately helped me to interpret what I observed in a very timely manner.

These analytic memos were crucial to my study, as they helped me be introspective about my own biases and data collection procedures. Moreover, they allowed me to be more reflective so that I could better react to any problems in my study. Once I had identified a problem, I was able to quickly adjust groups and make changes in the classroom, thus moving the cooperative groups of students in the right direction based on the feedback I received. As Dewey (1938) reminds us, all educators must “survey the capacities and needs of the particular set of individuals with whom he is dealing, and must at the same time arrange the conditions which provide the subject-matter or content for experiences that satisfy these needs and develop these capacities” (Dewey, 1938, p. 58).

Serving as conversations with myself “about what has occurred in the research process, what has been learned, the insights this provides, and the leads these suggest for future action” (Ely, Azul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991, p. 80), the memos helped me to remain open and objective to what I was
observing (emerging trends or themes in my data), and helped make sure that I allowed all of my students’ voices be heard. In essence, such ongoing reflection helped me “keep a sense of uncertainty and a willingness to question in the forefront of [my] teaching” (Ladson-Billings, in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 118).

As Ely comments, these memos “allow for speculation and integration. They allow us to look back so we can check our beginning assumptions, analysis, and conceptual frame, and they allow us to look forward so that we can create direction for our work” (Ely et al., 1991, p. 81).

In order to assess my progress with data collection, as well as the methods I was using to collect data, I wrote a mid-study data assessment methodological memo, as well as several other smaller methodological memos. These memos allowed me to measure how well the collection of data was progressing, what methods were working and which ones needed to be adapted, and what kinds of data I would need to continue to collect based on some preliminary emerging themes. These memos were very useful to me as I planned my lessons, groups, and assignments, and they kept me focused on what I needed to observe and collect from my students.

In order to keep abreast of how my own beliefs, experiences, and assumptions were coloring my observations and reflections in the classroom and in the students’ work and words, I also wrote an analytic memo to analyze my own and my students’ use of figurative language. Purposefully searching for such
language allowed me to become more cognizant of my own biases, as “the metaphorical concepts we live with and think through in our every day lives may structure the ways in which we orient ourselves in our research studies” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 116).

Not surprisingly, much of my own uses of metaphor and simile were neatly tucked in the pages of reflection, where I attempted to make sense of what was happening in the cooperative groups and in the students’ work. In addition, many of the things the students said in the classroom and in their reflections were also replete with colorful language. This particular analysis proved particularly useful to me as I continued to challenge my own preconceived notions, and as I began to tell my students’ stories through a variety of literary modes. “Metaphor gives shape to the analysis and writing and our beliefs give impetus to the metaphors that we find, imagine, and create in the first place” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 117).

**Coding**

Several weeks after I started my study I began to code the various data I had begun to collect. I started with the participant observations, and jotted one or two word codes, which are labels to identify “meaning units” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 162), in the margins of the typed entries wherever I discovered a theme or focus in my observations and reflections. As I wrote various analytic and methodological memos to myself, I coded those items.
Certainly I collected, analyzed and coded the students’ work. I constructed tables (see description above) to display the students’ achievement in various language acquisition skills areas. From these tables, I wrote memos about what I was seeing from the student work. I then coded these memos in the same way I had been coding the participant observations for the themes and focus areas that emerged from the data on student work. After I administered the Unit 2 survey, I analyzed the results and constructed a table (see description above and Table 4) to display these results. These tables, as well as those I created to help analyze the students’ work, helped me visualize, sort, and categorize my data for coding. Using the tables, I was able to find discrete links between the quantitative data and the qualitative data in my observations, memos, and student writing (Wolcott, 2001).

I also pulled student comments for each survey statement, and I organized the statements under their appropriate statement numbers. With each comment I included the name of the student who had made the comment and the survey page number where I could find the comment. I then coded these comments in the same way I had been coding the classroom observations and the student work. Lastly, I coded the students’ written reflections at the end of each unit of study, again to identify emerging themes in my data.

I continued to code the observations and reflections, and to construct tables for and code student work and survey results, throughout my study. As dominant themes began to emerge from my data, I used these themes to make
decisions about how to continue to collect my data, and why I was collecting particular pieces of information (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997). Not only was coding as a strategy helpful to me as an organizational tool for my findings, but it also gave me daily insights into my classroom. These insights allowed me to react quickly and effectively to problems with the cooperative groups and their assignments. By continually analyzing the various pieces of data as I collected them, my study was useful to me as a cyclical process rather than simply an end product (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997).

With about one month left in my study, I began to organize the codes from my data into an alphabetical index of codes. This index contained each code name, the field log page numbers where I had identified that code, and other codes that I determined were related to that code. This index was immensely useful to me as I organized my codes into meaningful categories, identified preliminary themes, and began to think about my research question in terms of what I was finding in my classroom.

**Themes and Bins**

From the index of codes, I was able to identify and group together related codes into categories called bins “into which the coded data can be given an initial rough sort” (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997, p. 162). Next, I gave each bin a title that thematically connected the related codes (see Figure 4). My graphic organizer allowed me to visualize what I was seeing in my classroom and in my
students. From this graphic representation of my research question and the thematic codes, I was able to prepare *theme statements* that guided the organization and analysis of my research findings.
RESEARCH QUESTION
What will be the observed experiences when I use various grouping strategies, including small-group, tutor/novice, and peer dyads to provide appropriate instruction for a heterogeneous, mixed age and ability Level 1 French language high school course?
FINDINGS

A given moment of expression will differ from an earlier moment, if they have changed their perception of the objective facts . . . . The important thing is to detect the starting point at which people visualize the ‘given,’ and to verify whether or not during the process of investigation any transformation has occurred in their way of perceiving reality. (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 107)

Freire’s words captured the fundamental goal of my research study and set the tone for the themes I discovered as I analyzed my data from my study. The students began their journey with me in Level I from various starting points. Their ages, grade levels, and past experiences with second language learning all contributed to the ways in which they initially perceived the course, and learning a new language. The cooperative groups I arranged during our journey invited the students to investigate the study of French with a variety of different learners, and from a variety of different perspectives. The transformations that occurred during our exploration are captured in the themes that emerged from the data. The ways in which cooperative group learning affected language acquisition, student scaffolding, group dynamics, and classroom instruction are all important focus areas over which this fundamental goal of transformed student perceptions in the Level I high school French classroom arches.
Language Acquisition

The data from student work, student surveys and reflections, and classroom observations suggest that students are more comfortable with and adept at understanding a second language than they are at producing the language. The students in Level I French experienced more success with reading and listening exercises and assessments, and experienced more difficulty when they were required to write and to speak the language. Moreover, when they did engage in speaking exercises, the students were more apt to communicate in words and questions rather than in whole thoughts.

During the study, I regularly assessed my students for knowledge of vocabulary, mastery of grammatical structures, listening skills, and speaking. Not surprisingly, the students were initially better at understanding French than they were at producing the language. As Stubbs notes, “speakers have asymmetrical linguistic systems: they can perceive and understand linguistic distinctions which they do not (or cannot) themselves make” (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, pp. 77-78). Indeed, the comprehension of a second language always precedes the production of language, which is why second language students need language input in a variety of forms (examples in reading and listening exercises to see and hear the structures) before they can be expected to produce output in the form of writing (words, sentences, lists, paragraphs, and compositions) and speech (words,
sentences, short dialogues, interviews, spontaneous conversations, and presentations).

During small group reading activities, I observed that very few students had trouble reading authentic texts to extract information. Engaged in the activity involving reading French birth announcements, almost every student was able to complete the activity without help. Indeed, the students did not have to interact much to complete the assignment, and while they read at different paces, every student finished the assignment and found all of the required information (see Story, pp. 74-76).

Group time for reading with cognates produced similar results. In Unit 2 (see Story, pp. 88-90), the students collaborated together to comprehend sentences with vocabulary they had not necessarily studied. The students successfully deciphered the French sentences using their knowledge of cognates as a strategy for reading in a second language. Together, they had no trouble understanding the sentences I had provided for them on index cards. While individually they were not always accurate with their interpretations, as cooperative groups they were able to make sense of every sentence they analyzed.

Cooperative group learning was successful again for a second cognate reading exercise in Unit 3 (see Story, pp.113-114). The goal for each group was to compile a list of at least twenty cognates from their individual efforts with a reading that takes place in a café. All but one group found more than twenty
cognates together. Tim, Pete, and Phoebe found nineteen. In each group, the final list was more comprehensive than any one person’s individual list, and even the highest achievers in the class – Vicki, Sue, Paulo, and Lauren – gained from the collaborative experience. Like the students in the Donato (1994) study, these groups of students created a “collective scaffold,” working individually as cognate novices but collectively as reading experts, to fully complete the task (p. 46). Certainly the lower achievers – Bobby, Kathy, Tim, and Tammy, for example – were exposed to more examples of cognates in the reading from their group discussions than they would have been individually. The opportunity to collaborate with students of higher ability benefited these lower achievers and improved their results (Berliner & Casanova, 1996; Swing & Petersen, 1982, as cited in Cohen, 1994).

On their surveys and in their written reflections, the students commented about the feedback they received from their cooperative peers. Their reflections reveal how valuable it was for some students to hear French in their small groups before they began to produce the sounds, words, and eventually short sentences in the target language:

- “It was helpful hearing other people speak” - Barb
- “It helped me pronounce words and with verbs” - Lauren
- “When you hear other people speak you speak better” – Roxy
- “It is easier to speak the language when speaking with other people” – Roxy
The students’ ability to read French texts successfully, especially with the strategy of cognate use, is borne out in their assessment results. On the reading with cognates portion of the Unit 3 exam (see Table 6), sixteen of the twenty-one students who completed this section had five or fewer errors. Their listening skills, like their reading skills, were also sharp. On the Unit 3 exam, all but 3 students made fewer than 5 errors on the listening portion of the exam. Freshman Tim made 5 errors, and Dennis and Joe received no credit for this section because they cheated.

Speaking activities proved more difficult for most of my Level 1 students. During the Information Gap and Dialog activities (see Story, pp. 97-100), I observed that most pairs of students were unable to correct or give feedback to each other during speaking practice. Even when they recognized mistakes being made, they did not, in most cases, have the linguistic capability to make corrections or offer suggestions. In essence, most of the students, like the students in Stubbs’ study, were able to recognize “linguistic distinctions” (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, pp. 77-78) but could not produce these distinctions.

When the students were able to scaffold each other’s learning during speaking and listening exercises, the feedback they provided was often in the form of prompts, questions, or requests for information to be repeated. I observed many instances of students asking their partners to repeat information, which then
<table>
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</table>

* did not complete

Numbers indicate number of errors for each section
Total number on points for each section in parentheses in each column
prompted the partners to repeat the information, often single words or even sounds, until the message had been successfully communicated (see Story, pp. 80, 97-98, & 108). While these students were not linguistically capable of the level of modeling and recoding necessary to consistently correct errors in structure and pronunciation, they were able to give each other enough feedback in the form of segmentations (sounds, words, and parts of sentences), questions, or comments to signal to their partners that they had understood. This, in turn, prompted the partners to repeat information until the message had been successfully communicated.

Pica et al. (1996) and Lim and Jacobs (2001) uncovered similar findings with second language (L2) learners. In their studies, the L2 learners paired together experienced more success and more progress with their skills than did L2 learners who were paired with native speakers (NS). The L2 learners were able to provide each other with enough structured input in the form of segmentations, questions, or comments to prompt communication. The L2 students who were paired with NSs were much less likely to expand upon or reiterate messages because their NS partners had already done such a thorough job of repeating, expanding, or reformulating the L2’s message.

Essentially, my students, working within similar ZPDs (in that they were all first year French 1 students) were engaged during paired activities in contingent interaction during which the students were able to use their limited
resources to manage simple conversations. Van Lier’s (1998) discussion of equality and symmetry between pairs of L2 students during classroom conversation support these findings (see Literature Review, pp. 30-31). Although the students’ conversations were not very sophisticated, and were at times structurally inaccurate or plagued by pronunciation errors, the students benefited more from being obliged to communicate with each other rather than with the teacher, or an advanced or native speaker – someone whose skills would have been beyond their Level 1 ZPDs.

Producing language on the Unit 3 exam (see Table 6) proved more difficult for many of the students. On this same exam, nine students made 10 or more errors, and eight students made between 7 and 10 errors, in the structure sections, where they had to conjugate an irregular verb, produce definite and indefinite articles, and choose between definite articles and subject pronouns to complete sentences.

Results similar to those from the Unit 3 exam are evident from other assessments. For example, on the Unit 2 Exam (see Table 7), 22 of my 23 students scored perfectly on the listening portion of the exam, while only Barb answered one question incorrectly on this section. Many more errors occurred during the speaking portion of the exam, where 19 of the 23 students had between
Table 7
Student Work: Results from Unit 2 Exam

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Vocabulary (25)</th>
<th>Structure (35)</th>
<th>Listening (10)</th>
<th>Culture (15)</th>
<th>Reading (15)</th>
<th>Speaking (10)</th>
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* did not complete

Numbers indicate number of errors for each section
Total number on points for each section in parentheses in each column
one and three points deducted from their scores. Additionally, on the structure portions of the exam (see Table 7), students made errors in grammar and structure usage. The majority of errors occurred on the two sections where students were asked to conjugate regular ER verbs. Like the youths in the experiment cited by Stubbs (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002), unable to “produce the surface grammar of the target sentence” (p. 78), nine of my students had two or more conjugation errors, and three had ten or more errors (see Table 7). Many of these same students, specifically, John, Bridget, Dennis, Kathy, and Pete, had trouble with ER conjugations on an earlier Unit 2-A quiz (see Table 8). However, these same students had no errors on the listening or input/comprehension part of the exam.
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Numbers indicate number of errors for each section
Total number on points for each section in parentheses in each column
Lastly, results from the restaurant dialog (see Table 9) reveal that all but three students received the full credit of four points in the comprehension section, which measured their ability to understand what others said to them during the dialog. Fourteen of these same students scored at least one point lower in the fluency section of the rubric, which measured their ability to produce language with proper intonation and without hesitation.

From the classroom observations, student work, and student reflections, one can conclude that the majority of the Level I students were at the understanding level of Bloom’s taxonomy with respect to second language acquisition at the end of Unit 3. Some had moved into application of their knowledge, while others still needed additional support to make that transition into higher thinking skills. Still, the fact that most of the students were demonstrating an ability to understand the French language this early in the school year was encouraging. My analysis of the assessment results was very useful, and helped me to see where the students were and where they needed to move to be successful in Level I French. As Stubbs cautions, “we must therefore be very careful before we equate the inability to use a particular grammatical form with the inability to understand it or the concept which underlies it” (in Delpit & Dowdy, 2002, p. 78).
Table 9

Student Work: Results from Restaurant Dialogue

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* did not do
Student Scaffolding

The data from this study reveal mixed results as to the relative success of student scaffolding in cooperative learning groups. During group assignments, some of the stronger students assumed expert roles and did help their novice partners succeed. Indeed, both the high ability students and the lower achievers recognized the value of group work. However, the students did not or perhaps could not always help each other, and this failure may be attributed to ineffective grouping strategies, minimal second language experience, and lack of student motivation.

The cooperative groups in this study were designed to provide students with ample opportunities to receive the appropriate input from me and from their peers, to hear, see, and produce the language in an intimate and non-threatening environment. Small groups provide stable working relationships for students (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Kohn, 1999) and relieve some of the “performance anxiety” first year students experience with a new language (Baker, 1976, p. 45). Cooperative learning is designed to maximize communication in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1985) and encourage interaction amongst all students (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980), thus providing students with the input they need to experience as they attempt to produce language. The cooperative groups were especially important in this Level I class; with 23 students, it was impossible for me to provide the constant practice and guidance that many of these students
needed to succeed. The input and feedback the students received from their peers compensated to some extent for my inability to be in all places at once (Cazden, 2001; Tedesco, 1999).

The students’ ability to understand French was evident in their student work and assessments (see aforementioned section). Additionally, some of the students showed mastery of knowledge application in the form of speaking and writing in their work. These students also demonstrated mastery of content usage during instances of peer interaction in small groups throughout the study. Senior Vicki, a student who was also enrolled in Advanced Placement Spanish during this study, showed early signs of content mastery and leadership ability. In Unit 1, she was already taking the lead with reading strategy suggestions for her group (see Story, p. 74). During Unit 1 dialogue practices, Vicki’s group always worked very well together, as she could be counted on to provide support and guidance to her peers. Also in Unit 1, I observed junior Simon repeat phone numbers to help his partner Bobby understand and record numbers during a telephone number exchange activity. During this same activity, Chris and Paulo provided each other with excellent support and feedback as they strived to keep their conversation entirely in French (see Story, p. 80).

The survey #1 results from Unit 2 (see Table 4, p.101) reveal that 14 of the 20 students who completed the survey believed that being part of a group helped them learn. Twelve of these students believed they learned by teaching
others, 15 felt they helped others in their group, and 13 believed that others had helped them. After Unit 3 (see Table 10) the same survey revealed similar results. Seventeen of 21 students believed that they had helped others in their group, while 14 students felt that others had helped them. However, only 11 of the 21 believed that they learned while teaching, and only 12 felt that they learned by being part of a group.
Table 10  
Results of Survey #2: End of Unit 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>% Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1: Being part of a group helped me learn</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2: Others in my group helped me a lot</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3: I would like French better if I was not in a group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4: I would have earned better grades working alone</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5: I am learning when I teach other students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6: I helped others in my group</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7: Other people in my group helped me</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8: I would prefer to continue work in groups most of the time</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific student comments in both surveys also revealed considerable information about peer scaffolding within the cooperative groups. After Unit 2,
students made the following positive comments about working in their cooperative groups:

- “When you work with people it helps you understand more” – Roxy
- “I learned by explaining” – Paulo
- “I learn a lot better being in a group” – Kathy
- “You learn more from kids sometimes than teachers” – Tim
- “I liked having other opinions and help” – Barb
- “When I correct someone it helps me remember, too” – Lauren
- “Yes, it’s like a review” – Paulo
- “I learn a lot when I teach other students” – Kathy

After Unit 3, the students said the following about their cooperative groups

- “Yes, they helped correct me” – Phoebe
- “I can learn from others” – Kate
- “Sue and Vicki helped me a lot” – Bobby
- “When I need help, my group helps me” – Sue
- “It’s better to talk out what you think” – Bobby
- “Sometimes it helps to say stuff again” – Vicki
- “Teaching people helps in learning” – Sue
- “If they needed me, I helped them” – Vicki
The students’ reactions to working collaboratively with peers are not surprising based on the research related to cooperative learning. Much research has demonstrated that faster students want to share their knowledge and to assist their peers (Bruffee, 1995; Kohn, 1999), and that low-achieving students particularly do better with more capable peers in small groups (Berliner & Casanova, 1996; Cohen, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 1985; Lloyd, Eberhardt, & Drake, 1996). For example, Tim and Kathy commented that they had learned more from “kids” rather than “teachers,” and by “being in a group.” Their comments mirror those of Kohn as he explains that a “student struggling to make sense of an idea may understand it better when it is explained by a peer who only recently figured it out himself rather than by an adult” (Kohn, 1999, p. 154). Generally, students begin to appreciate teamwork when they work together (Lim & Jacobs, 2001), and they are positive about language learning when they are given opportunities to interact together (Gunderson & Johnson, 1980; Johnson & Johnson, 1985). Additionally, the comments from strong students like Paulo, Lauren, Vicki, and Sue reveal that they intuitively realized what the research has already revealed; namely, that they learn the material better themselves when they explain it to others (Gartner & Riesmann, 1994; Kagan, 1992; Kohn, 1999). The positive comments from some of my Level 1 students, and the overwhelming number of students who believed that being part of a group helped them learn (see Tables 4 & 10) certainly support the research on cooperative learning.
Unfortunately, for every example of peer scaffolding in the cooperative groups, there were also examples of collapsed scaffolds, and students’ inability or unwillingness to help each other learn in their cooperative groups. During many of the speaking activities, the students did not correct each other, or attempt to give each other feedback (see Story, pp. 99-100). Even after I provided the whole class with scaffolding in the form of a lesson on how to provide feedback during speaking activities, the students still did not produce much evidence of this behavior (see Story, pp. 103-106). However, given the difficulty many new language learners experience when the endeavor to produce rather than just understand the target language (see Findings), it is not perhaps all that surprising that these students experienced less success when they attempted to scaffold each other’s learning during speaking activities.

During the peer writing activity (see Story, pp.110-112) some of the students did not take the job of editing each other’s compositions very seriously, and their feedback was superficial and, in many cases, useless to their partners. Exceptions were found with Paulo and Phoebe, as Paulo edited Phoebe’s paper and helped her make many corrections. Phoebe earned a 10/10 on the peer composition, but then failed to turn in an individual composition. Students like Phoebe, as well as Chris, Roxy, Arnie, and Pete clearly benefited from the peer composition, as they had difficulty following through on individual assignments (see Table 11).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Peer Composition (10)</th>
<th>Individual Composition (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bobby</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Ex</td>
<td>Ex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arnie</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lauren</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicki</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*did not complete
Numbers indicate total points received of a total possible ten points
Students John, Bridget, Kate, and especially Audrey and Kathy, did better with peer help than they did alone. Kathy, like Phoebe, benefited significantly from the peer writing activity because she was paired with Chris, a stronger student who took his job as expert reader seriously. Both girls were freshmen and really struggled a great deal during both units. Both girls benefited consistently from small group work, and their comments on the surveys (see above) support this observation.

Struggling students like Kathy and Phoebe benefited greatly from the peer writing activity because they were paired with higher level students who assumed the role of more knowledgeable other during the writing process. In general, the peer writing and revision process greatly assisted my struggling students who worked with higher ability students willing to take on roles as experts. These findings mirror those in the De Guerrero and Villamil study (1994). In this study, the researchers found that 69% of the paired student relationships were asymmetrical because the students assumed expert and novice roles to successfully complete a peer revision activity. Like some of my students, the students in the De Guerrero and Villamil study assumed their appropriate roles in order to best scaffold each other’s learning (see Literature Review, pp. 35-36).

Often the students’ inability to scaffold each other’s learning could be attributed to ineffective grouping arrangements. For example, whenever the groups of four were permitted to choose their own partners for a paired activity,
the groups paired off exactly the same. Frequently, the top two students in the group would pair off, leaving the two lower-ability students to work together. During the telephone number activity in Unit 1, seniors Sue and Vicki finished their exchange quickly and successfully, while paired ninth grade students Tim and Arnie, and Bridget and Kate, finished their exchanges much more slowly and with more difficulty (see Story, p. 81).

In Unit 2, I observed that top students Vicki and Lauren would often team up, leaving their struggling partners Dennis and Bridget to work together, often without much success (see Story, p. 86). In the group of three freshman girls, stronger students Audrey and Phoebe paired together and did not include Kathy, the weakest of the three girls (see Story, p. 86).

However, when I paired the students together, making sure to pair a higher student with a lower student, I did see more evidence of student scaffolding. During the team learning activities (see Story, pp. 87-88), I observed students Sue, Vicki, and Chris providing structured input for their partners. Throughout the various paired speaking activities (see Story, pp. 97-98), Paulo and Sue were able to provide their partners with models to help them form simple sentences in French. As they worked on their restaurant dialogues (see Story, pp. 114-115), Vicki and Sue provided leadership and support for their group during the writing process, and students Paulo, Lauren and Kate worked well together, and even managed to provide support for struggling student Dennis.
Comments from both of the surveys I administered revealed some negative reactions to helping and being helped in cooperative groups:

- “Sometimes none of us knew the answer” – Lauren
- “They helped, but they seemed to not want to correct a lot” – Barb
- “They helped me but we often had the same problem” – Lauren
- “I never teach them” – Phoebe
- “I didn’t want to over-correct” – Barb
- “I like the idea of the cooperative groups, but I’m not sure if they’re benefiting anyone because no one makes an effort to participate and to take it seriously. I think maybe they would work better with a higher level of French rather than beginners” - Sue

Where student scaffolding collapsed, the evidence from my observations and from the students’ feedback, suggests that the failures to help each other may have been the result of a lack of experience with the language, as well as a lack of initiative on the part of some of the students. Group dynamics seemed to play a large role in the relative success or failure of the groups to help each other. Predictably, the groups that got along well also were better able to help each other, while the groups with collaborative problems were not able to provide support for each other.
Group Dynamics

Throughout the study, the various cooperative group relationships were both positively and negatively influenced by the students’ ages and ability levels. Some of the negative interaction within the groups may be attributed to individual learning preferences. Additionally, the students were affected by status hierarchy and the impression that some students were more important or more valuable than other students. The data suggest that group-building exercises prior to units of study might alleviate or even eliminate some of this uncooperative group behavior.

During Units 2 and 3, I observed both positive and negative interaction during small group activities. Certain shy, withdrawn, or socially immature students like such as John, Audrey, and Simon, were very reluctant group members, and many times they refused to interact with the other students on their teams. The older students, especially Sue, Vicki, and Andy, were sometimes impatient with the younger or less experienced students in the class, and they did not hide their disdain, which made some of the younger students uncomfortable. However, Vicki and Sue did prove to be extremely helpful to low-ability student Bobby. This may have been because he was a junior and a little more mature than the 9th grade students.

Often I observed that groups of younger students had difficulty focusing. Bobby and Kirk were easily distracted when they worked together (see Story, p.
and Tammy, Kathy, Barb (ninth grade) and Lauren (tenth grade) also needed extra clarification on instructions because they were not listening (see Story, p. 77). Greg, Bobby and Tim (ninth grade boys) did not work well together, and Greg performed much better when he was moved out of that group (see Story, p. 108). Freshmen Kate, Phoebe, and Bridget, and sophomore Lauren, loved working together during Unit 3, but they were very easily distracted and hence distracted others in the class (see Story, p.109). On the other hand, the older students seemed to work well together. Seniors Vicki and Sue, and juniors Andy and Chris functioned very well during Unit 3 (see Story, p. 109), and Andy expressed much discontent when he was moved to a group of younger students (see Story, p. 120).

Clearly there was a connection between the level of interaction and cooperation in the groups, and their performance on assessments. During the “Pourquoi en Francais” project, certain pairs got along very well, while other students expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the project (see Story, pp. 92-97). Those who enjoyed their partners and the project, or who enjoyed working alone, scored well on the project, while those who struggled alone or who did not enjoy working on the project did not do well. Partners Sue and Vicki, Phoebe and Bridget, Kathy and Barb, and Kate and Lauren, all enjoyed the activity and received a 60/60 on the project (see Table 12).
Table 12

*Student Work: Results Pourquoi en Français Project*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Requirements (4)</th>
<th>Content (4)</th>
<th>Visual Elements (4)</th>
<th>Written Elements (4)</th>
<th>Deadline (4)</th>
<th>Total (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>No language experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barb</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridget</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Failed a Level I language** |                  |             |                     |                       |              |           |
| Bobby         | 2                | 3           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 48        |
| Tammy         | *                | *           | *                   | *                     | *            | *         |
| Tim           | 4                | 4           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 57        |

| Previous language experience |                  |             |                     |                       |              |           |
| Andy          | 4                | 3           | 2                   | 4                     | 4            | 51        |
| Arnie         | 3                | 3           | 2                   | 4                     | 4            | 48        |
| Chris         | 3                | 3           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 51        |
| Dennis        | *                | *           | *                   | *                     | *            | *         |
| Greg          | 2                | 3           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 48        |
| Lauren        | 4                | 4           | 4                   | 4                     | 4            | 60        |
| Pete          | 4                | 4           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 57        |
| Paulo         | 4                | 4           | 4                   | 4                     | 4            | 60        |
| Roxy          | 3                | 3           | 3                   | 4                     | 4            | 51        |
| Simon         | 2                | 2           | 1                   | 3                     | 4            | 36        |
| Sue           | 4                | 4           | 4                   | 4                     | 4            | 60        |
| Vicki         | 4                | 4           | 4                   | 4                     | 4            | 60        |

*did not complete
Audrey and John, two students who preferred to work alone, also received the maximum number of points for this project. On the other hand, partners Chris and Roxy, who viewed the project as “uneducational and useless” (p. 95) did not receive full credit. Simon, Dennis, and Tammy worked alone but all three would have been more successful with a partner. Simon received a low grade, and Dennis and Tammy did not complete the project.

Some of the groups who worked well together also scored well on the restaurant dialogue (see Table 9). Paulo, Kate, and Lauren worked collaboratively (see Story, p. 114-115), and they all received the highest score on this assessment. Vicki and Sue, taking charge and working closely with Bobby and Simon, received top grades and helped their partners receive excellent scores (see Story, p. 114). Chris and Roxy, working closely together (see Story, p. 115) received the maximum number of points, and their partners Kathy and Greg also received excellent scores. These findings are particularly important for Bobby and Kathy, two low ability students whose performance in class demonstrated that they probably would not have scored well if they had worked alone.

However, despite their excellent interaction and positive feedback about working together (see Story, pp. 117-119) Phoebe, Tim, and Pete did not do well on the restaurant dialogue (see Table 9). Their slow pace and lesser ability negatively affected their achievement, despite the positive nature of their collaboration. Also, the lack of collaboration in the group of Barb, Tammy, John,
and Joe (see Story, p. 116) affected their performance on the dialogue (see Table 9). Finally, the failure on the part of Audrey, Arnie, Andy, and Bridget to cooperate (see Story, pp. 119-121) affected all of their grades. Not one student in this group received full credit; Arnie suffered the most with a score of 42, and the other three received average scores on this assessment (see Table 9).

Interestingly, many of the same students who interacted well and seemed to enjoy working with their peers in the small cooperative groups did not enjoy the whole-class activities, while those who baulked at small-group activities seemed to enjoy the interaction the larger group offered. During the Unit 2 survey activities (see Story, p. 90), group leaders Vicki and Sue refused to interact with the others in the class. Joe and John, two students who routinely refused to work with or caused problems for their small groups, eagerly participated in both the survey activities and the earlier, whole-group ice breaker activities. Joe commented in his Unit 2 written reflection (see Appendix AB) that he thought the Name Tag Grab (see Story, p. 73) was an “amazing, extraordinary group activity.” Simon, another student who seemed extremely withdrawn and uncomfortable during most small group activities, gave similar positive feedback for the Name Tag Grab. Simon commented that he “really liked the activity where we ran around the room trying to find our name tag on each other’s back because I like interacting with others.”
Of course, some students remained true to character throughout the study. Paulo, one of my most helpful and outgoing students, enjoyed both the small-group and whole-class activities, while Audrey, arguably the shyest and most reserved student in Level 1 French, disliked all group activities (see Story, pp. 91-92).

The failure of some groups, certain combinations of students, and even individual students, to interact amicably and to scaffold each other’s learning suggests that group-building exercises at the beginning of the school year, as well as before each cooperative group change, would benefit the students and make cooperative group learning more successful. Such team-building activities might better ensure that students quickly develop the kind of stable cooperative group relationship that enables them to support each other emotionally and cognitively (Johnson & Johnson, 2004; Kohn, 1999). In addition, such team-building activities might eliminate some of the “status hierarchy” (Kohn, 1999, p. 252) I observed with my groups of my students. When the ninth grade students seemed reluctant to work with the older students, some of their anxiety may have been attributed to feelings of inadequacy, unworthiness, or self-depreciation (Cohen, 1994; Freire, 1970/2005). This was especially true for the students who believed that the older students were making fun of them (see Story, pp. 90-91). As they internalized the older students’ opinions, they became “convinced of their own unfitness” (Freire, 1970/2005, p. 63) and were understandably reluctant to work
with these older students. Appropriate group-building exercises, then, might eliminate some of this “status generalization,” whereby the students do not benefit from the contributions of all of its members, to which Cohen (1994) refers. Students who have opportunities to build healthy, mutually respectful relationships prior to working in their small groups would be much more apt to recognize each student’s ability to contribute positively to the group (see Literature Review, p. 25). As Kagan (1992) notes, “When there is a positive team identity, liking, respect, and trust among team members and classmates, there is a context within which maximum learning can occur” (p. 4:2).

**Classroom Instruction**

While the lessons and group activities for my study were designed to be engaging, effective, and collaborative, the data I collected over the course of the study suggest that the individual learning styles, type of collaborative group assignment, and level of teacher scaffolding, influenced the effectiveness of instruction during the study.

Certainly each student’s learning environment preferences affected the achievement levels for the cooperative group members. For example, Paulo loved the whole-group survey activities, while Audrey hated these same activities (see Story, pp. 91-92). This is not surprising in that the observational and student survey data clearly show Paulo to be extremely outgoing and interested in helping
others in his group, while Audrey repeatedly expressed her dissatisfaction with group work both during classroom observations and in her comments on surveys and in written reflections.

Students Paulo and Audrey performed very well on the Pourquoi en Francais project (see Table 12) during which both students elected to work alone. This suggests not only that Audrey seemed to work best alone, but also that Paulo worked well both collaboratively and independently. On the other hand, students Simon, Joe, Tammy, and Dennis chose to work alone but did not do well on the project (see Table 12). Clearly these students would have benefited greatly from having a partner to compliment their learning strengths. Such partnerships allow each student to contribute to the successful completion of the project, and create the kinds of positive working relationships I observed with partners Vicki and Sue, Phoebe and Bridget, and Lauren and Kate (see Story, pp. 94-96), all of whom received perfect scores on this assignment (see Table 12).

A learning styles checklist or inventory administered prior to an activity like the Pourquoi en Francais project would have helped me to strategically pair students with skills that would compliment each other, thus setting the stage for pairs of students to be as successful as possible by capitalizing on each person’s unique strengths. Such a “multiple ability treatment” (Cohen, 1994, p. 25) would have helped ensure that cooperative group activities were truly collaborative. Indeed, this kind of intervention would also have been useful prior to the
restaurant dialog oral performance assessment. Because the assignment was lengthy and involved reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, it demanded a variety of abilities and talents. Helping the students to recognize their own and each other’s unique strengths may have eliminated some of the negative interaction and status hierarchy present in the group of John, Tammy, Barb, and Joe, and especially in the group with Audrey, Bridget, Arnie, and Andy (see Story, p. 116, & pp. 119-121). Had they been able to appreciate and listen to each other, they may have performed better on this oral performance assessment (see Table 9).

While learning styles inventories and the multiple ability treatment as strategies or “status treatments” (Cohen, 1994, pp. 24-25) to diffuse status hierarchy amongst the groups might have worked for a project like the Pourquoi en Francais or Restaurant Dialog, it would have been impractical for the many short reading, speaking, and listening activities the student completed in their small groups. Nonetheless, these shorter assignments sometimes suffered from much of the lack of collaboration that characterized the longer assignments. Specifically, the birth announcement reading activity (see Story, pp. 75-76), the “mots brouillés” assignment for Audrey and Vicki (see Story, p. 81-82), and even the information gap and dialog activities (see Story, pp. 97-100) are all examples of group assignments that in reality could be completed individually and without the kind of interaction I had hoped to see from the students. For the cooperative
groups in Level I French to be truly collaborative, some of the assignments would have to be modified to compel students to work together. Such assignments would be designed so that they could not be completed without information from each student, and thus the students would have to listen to and respect each person’s contribution to the finished product (Berliner & Casanova, 1996; Donato, 1994; Pica & Doughty, 1985; Pica, 1987).

Another component that might have increased the level of student participation in and commitment to their assignments and their groups is the extent to which the students felt the activities mirrored real life activities. The peer writing activity (see Story, p. 112) may not have been engaging enough to the students who needed the most motivation because it seemed silly or purposeless and therefore not worth doing (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Even in a Level I foreign language class, the writing assignments should be as useful to the students as possible, and should ideally have a “real audience” other than the teacher and the other students in the classroom. I had anticipated that because I had incorporated a peer writing and peer editing component (see Appendixes U & X) into the assignment, the students would write for their peers and would be more accountable. Unfortunately, even the knowledge that their peers would be reading the compositions was not enough to motivate some of my students.
Additionally, many of the Information Gap activities and dialog practices were somewhat contrived based on the thematic unit vocabulary, and so the less academically motivated students did not put forth the effort required to do well. Indeed, when I was occupied with or observing a particular group, some of the less ambitious students used the opportunity to fool around or to do something other than the activity assigned (see Story, p. 99 & p. 105). As Doughty and Pica (1986) note, “the teacher’s absence can limit the amount of modification which takes place when the students interact” (p. 321), and this is particularly true when the activity does not truly require the students to interact or to exchange information in the target language. During the Information Gap activities, because the students could simply restate the information in English, or point to the information for their partner to copy onto his grid (see Appendix L), they did not interact as much as I had hoped they would (Doughty & Pica, 1986). Moreover, the writing of the restaurant dialog was a contrived activity that was not relevant to their personal experiences. These students are unlikely to have to write a script for a skit in their “real” lives, and so the writing was not natural, not “a task that is necessary and relevant for life” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 118). Had the restaurant dialog assessment been structured as a spontaneous conversation in a café setting rather than a written and memorized script, the students may have been more engaged in the activity. Effectively, they would have been able to draw upon their common past experiences ordering in real restaurants to help shape their current
experiences ordering in a simulated French classroom café. They would have been more likely to transfer their knowledge of expressions and appropriate ways of interacting with restaurant personnel to the target language. As Dewey (1938) remarks, “Different situations succeed one another . . . . As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world” (p. 44). Thus, the act of communicating with peers to order a meal and be understood would no longer be viewed as a meaningless school assignment, but rather as a natural activity, and one that is necessary in any language in any part of the world.

The various data I collected over the course of this study suggest the need for some changes in the way I should construct teacher scaffolding as a support for the cooperative groups both before and during assignments. After I had decided that the many of the students did not know or understand how to correct or to give each other feedback during the small group and paired activities (see Story, p. 87), I decided to try a mini-lesson at the beginning of Unit 3 that I hoped would help students to scaffold each other’s learning as they engaged in dialog practice (see Story, p. 92). The observational data I collected after that mini-lesson suggest that teacher scaffolding up front had only limited success (see Story, pp. 92-93). In Level I language, then, it might be important for the teacher to provide ongoing support during the lessons, and to pull back that support as
groups begin to self-correct and to function independently of the teacher scaffolding. Such support would look like the second language scaffolded help that Aljaafreh and Lantolf (1994, p. 468) describe. The help would be graduated (appropriate to each learner’s ability and designed to help each learner reach his potential ability), contingent (offered to the learner when needed, and removed when the learner begins to function independently), and dialogic (conversational between the more capable and less capable individuals).

Summary

The data from this study offer some encouraging results related to the use of peers as knowledgeable others in cooperative learning groups. While most of the Level I language learners in this study were understandably at the comprehension level with respect to the new language, the more experienced, higher ability students demonstrated the ability to apply their skills in the more advanced areas of writing and speaking the language. As such, these students became the more knowledgeable or expert students within the cooperative groups. Those students with the ability and the desire to share their knowledge and skills were successfully able to help their peers maximize their own language potential with respect to their individual zones of proximal development. Teacher scaffolding in the form of mini-lessons and guided assistance contributed to some group success with respect to group assignments.
When the cooperative groups were not successful, the data suggest that ineffective grouping arrangements, poor group dynamics, and inappropriate collaborative group activities are all factors that contributed to failed cooperative group learning. The research seems to support modifications to the study to diminish or eliminate these negative factors, including more teacher-arranged groups and pairs, team-building activities to build group morale and mutual trust, and better designed lessons and collaborative group activities to ensure true collaboration and scaffolding between group members.
THE NEXT STEP

Cooperative group learning in a first year, second language class at the high school level is successful to the extent to which the teacher is willing to devote the time necessary to ensure that those collaborative groups function in ways that lend them the stability necessary to ensure long-term, mutually supportive roles within their groups (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). Furthermore, the groups need activities designed to demand involvement from all group members. These tasks should not be activities that can be completed alone (Berliner & Casanova, 1996; Donato, 1994; Pica & Doughty, 1985). Lastly, the groups need teacher scaffolding in the form of mini-lessons at the beginning of each unit, and ongoing support during each unit’s group activities, to ensure that each group receives the attention it requires to enable all students to perform at their maximum potential with respect to their individual zones of proximal development.

Team Building

The Level I French high school students did not always collaborate to the extent I would have hoped for during this study. Still, I do believe that cooperative heterogeneous groups would benefit all of my Level I French students, the many students who struggle as well as those with high ability. Cooperative learning has consistently promoted higher achievement than competitive learning, and benefits both the lowest achieving students, who benefit
the most, and also the high achieving students who “generally perform as well or better in cooperative classrooms than they do in traditional classrooms” (Kagan, 1992, p. 3:1). But, high school students in general are not used to working closely in cooperative groups. Kagan (1992) notes that “approximately 85%” of his undergraduate students “had never been part of a learning team in the classroom” (p. 1:1). Thus, when I introduce cooperative groups to my Level I French students next year, it will be advantageous for me to spend a considerable amount of time with teambuilding activities designed to build the trust necessary for teams of students to work together. While such a great amount of time spent on teambuilding exercises might worry educators who feel that it would take away from time needed for the curriculum of study, Kagan (1992) reminds them that “what appears like time off task can be viewed as a very important investment in creating the social context necessary for teams to maximize their potential” (p. 4:2). He further cautions that “when teambuilding and classbuilding are neglected, especially in classrooms in which there are preexisting tensions, teams experience serious difficulties” (pp. 4:2). As the Level I language classes at the high school, because of the disparity in ages, grade levels, and ability levels, often experience the kinds of tensions to which Kagan refers, it would behoove me to devote more time at the beginning of next year to such groupbuilding activities. Many excellent examples of teambuilding activities I can use next year, including ideas for getting acquainted, creating team identity, creating a feeling of mutual support
within the teams, and developing synergy, are included in Chapter 8 of Kagan’s Cooperative Learning (1992).

**Cooperative Projects**

The activities I designed for this study, while interesting and engaging on paper, were not always collaborative enough to yield the level of interaction I had hoped for from the cooperative groups. In future studies, I would design speaking activities that would require all group members to exchange information. Such activities would be created to require participation from all of the group members as a condition for completing the assignment. As Pica (1987) observes, “an activity centered on the necessity for information exchange facilitates participation in social interaction in which learners strive to make sure they understand each other’s productions and work towards making their own output more comprehensible” (p. 16). Additionally, I need to think about creating longer projects for the cooperative groups so that they have more opportunities to collaborate over an extended period of time rather than in the five to ten minutes required to complete most of the information gap and dialog practice activities. Finally, I must be careful to structure the activities I design to ensure equal participation from all of the group members. I can do this by structuring the task so that each person is responsible for a portion of the work, by providing awards only to groups in which everyone was involved, and by making sure that each
group member is assigned a specific, important role in the group (Kagan, 1992, p. 15:3).

**Teacher Scaffolding**

While my study was designed to determine how well my Level I students would perform in cooperative groups if they were encouraged to scaffold each other’s learning, the data from the study indicate that the students need more support from me both before and during group activities. There are typically several students in any given year who have had success with other foreign languages, but many Level I French students are beginners or students who have struggled with second language acquisition. Even the higher ability students are still first year French students, and as such need much support from me. In French, this is especially true for pronunciation. If I want future Level I students to be successful scaffolders in their small groups, I will need to prepare more specific lessons designed to teach the students how to support each other during learning activities. The students need to be taught how and when to correct each other, and how to give each other feedback, both positive and critical. Further, the students need this kind of instruction for each kind of cooperative group activity, including speaking, reading, and writing assignments.

During cooperative group activities, I need to be aware of the groups that are struggling, and I need to intervene with the appropriate amount of support based on the students’ needs. As I observe the groups beginning to function
independently, I also need to withdraw that support. Certainly this is difficult to monitor in a class with many different groups, and so I will need to carry a classroom chart or other note-taking document that allows me to chart each group’s progress both during a given class period and also over time. These notes will help me monitor each group’s progress, and will allow me to see where I need to scaffold student learning, and how much support to give.

I look forward to using cooperative learning groups in future Level I classes. With the changes and improvements that I’ve outlined above, I believe I will see more success for all of my Level I French students. This is vitally important, as the Level I language classes at the high school level will continue to be heterogeneous across age, grade, ability, and experience levels. Cooperative learning has been shown to be very effective “across all age levels, subject areas, and almost all tasks” (Kagan, 1992, p. 3:1), and I believe that it could transform what are perceived obstacles in the Level I foreign language classroom into assets for all language learners.
REFERENCES


Ladson-Billings, G. J. (2002). I ain’t writin’ nuttin’: Permissions to fail and demands to succeed in urban classrooms. In L. Delpit & J. K. Dowdy (Eds.), *The skin we speak: Thoughts on language and culture in the classroom* (pp. 107-120). New York: The New Press.


RESOURCES


Appendix A

MORAVIAN COLLEGE

July 12, 2005

Deborah A. Swann
218 W. Fairview Street
Bethlehem, PA 18018

Dear Deborah A. Swann:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has approved your proposal: Peers as Knowledgeable Others in Level 1 Foreign Language Cooperative Learning Groups. Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

It is requested, however, that you consider the following points before continuing your research.

Subjects’ rights to withdraw from the study without penalty should be clearly communicated in the Informed Consent forms. Specifically, it is necessary to further explain what is meant by “any aspect of the class,” ensuring that grades will not be impacting by decisions regarding participation in the study.

The faculty sponsor indicated on all consent forms should be your MEDU 702 instructor. Please be certain to provide the correct name and telephone number.

Please note the committee’s preference that, whenever possible, data is not stored on school grounds.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

Copies of this letter have been sent to you through e-mail and campus mail. Please retain at least one copy for your files. Good luck with the rest of your research.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board
Moravian College
610-861-1415 (voice)
medwh02@moravian.edu
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Principal

Dear [Name],

I am completing a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. In my graduate classes, I have learned a great deal about the most effective teaching methods and strategies for my classroom. For example, a great deal of research supports the use of student cooperative learning groups in the classroom. Studies show that students learn and retain more information, perform better academically, have more self-esteem, and feel more positive about school and learning when they are able to learn with each other in cooperative groups. Cooperative learning will be my focus this semester in Level I French as I conduct a systematic study as part of the requirements of my Master’s degree program. The title of my research is Peers as Knowledgeable Others in Level I Foreign Language Cooperative Learning Groups.

As part of this study, students will be asked to participate in cooperative learning groups for a variety of activities. In these groups, they will learn new material; practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing French; study for quizzes and exams; and work on group projects. They will take interest surveys to learn about their own and others’ learning preferences, and they will reflect on their group experiences in journal entries and a final anonymous survey. The study will take place from the first week of September 2005 until December 23, 2005.

I will collect and code the data from this study, and will hold it in strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data, and I will present my research results using pseudonyms – no one’s identity will be revealed. I will store the data in a locked filing cabinet in my classroom. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular activities and take all of the assessments. These activities and assessments include quizzes and tests, oral performance assessments, participating in all classroom activities, completing homework assignments and projects, including group projects. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions and concerns. If you agree to allow me to conduct this research in my classroom, please sign below.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

I agree to allow Mrs. Deborah Swann to conduct her action research study in Level I French between September 7 and December 23, 2005.

[Principal/Signature] 9/7/06 Date
Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction at Moravian College. In my graduate classes, I have learned a great deal about the most effective teaching methods and strategies for my classroom. For example, a great deal of research supports the use of student cooperative learning groups in the classroom. Studies show that students learn and retain more information, perform better academically, have more self-esteem, and feel more positive about school and learning when they are able to learn with each other in cooperative groups. Cooperative learning will be my focus this semester in Level I French as I conduct a systematic study as part of the requirements of my Master's degree program. The title of my research is *Peers as Knowledgeable Others in Level I Foreign Language Cooperative Learning Groups*.

As part of this study, students will be asked to participate in cooperative learning groups for a variety of activities. In these groups, they will learn new material; practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing French; study for quizzes and exams; and work on group projects. They will take interest surveys to learn about their own and others' learning preferences, and they will reflect on their group experiences in journal entries and a final anonymous survey. The study will take place from the first week of September 2005 until December 23, 2005.

I will collect and code the data from this study, and will hold it in strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data, and I will present my research results using pseudonyms — no one's identity will be revealed. I will store the data in a locked filing cabinet in my classroom. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time not to participate in this study. However, students must participate in all regular activities and take all of the assessments. These activities and assessments include quizzes and tests, oral performance assessments, participating in all classroom activities, completing homework assignments and projects, including group projects. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of the class.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research can be directed to me, Deborah Swann, or to my advisor, Dr. Joseph Shosh, Education Department, Moravian College, 610-861-1482, jshosh@moravian.edu.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

I agree to allow Mrs. Deborah Swann to conduct her action research study in Level I French between September 7 and December 23, 2005.
Appendix D

Informed Consent Script for Students

This semester, I will be doing some research in your French I class. I’m doing a study on cooperative learning groups and how effective they are in helping you learn French. I’m doing this study as part of the requirements for my Master of Education degree at Moravian College.

So, what’s a cooperative learning group? Well, this semester you will be assigned to two different groups, one for Unité 2 and one for Unité 3. Throughout each unit, you will work with your group on a variety of activities, projects, and other assessments. After each unit, I will ask you to write a journal entry about your experiences with your group, and at the end of the study in December, I will ask you to fill out an anonymous survey so that I can get some feedback from you about cooperative learning groups and how well they worked.

You don’t have to participate in this study, and you can withdraw from the study at any time, but you will still do all of the work that everyone else is doing. Not participating will in no way hurt your grade.

If you have any questions about my study, you can talk to me. Or, maybe you want to talk to someone else. The principal, [Name], and your guidance counselors are all aware of my study and how I am going to conduct my research, so you can certainly go to them with your questions or concerns.
## Participant Observation Checklist for Unité 1 Group Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Ton numéro de téléphone, s'il te plaît?

A

It's almost time for your school's French club meeting. You and your partner volunteered to call and remind all the club members. Each of you has a list with certain members' telephone numbers. Ask your partner for the numbers that you don't have. As you hear your partner's answers, complete the chart. Follow the model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nom</th>
<th>Numéro de téléphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zakia</td>
<td>01.17.18.12.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>01.14.08.13.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandre</td>
<td>01.02.10.15.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Véro</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>01.19.05.11.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeanne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christophe</td>
<td>01.19.05.11.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modèle: Zakia?
C'est le zéro un, treize, seize, zéro neuf, douze.

Ton numéro de téléphone, s'il te plaît?

B

It's almost time for your school's French club meeting. You and your partner volunteered to call and remind all the club members. Each of you has a list with certain members' telephone numbers. Ask your partner for the numbers that you don't have. As you hear your partner's answers, complete the chart. Follow the model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nom</th>
<th>Numéro de téléphone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zakia</td>
<td>01.13.16.09.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexandre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Véro</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeanne</td>
<td>01.17.05.18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christophe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modèle: Nadine?
C'est le zéro un, dix-sept, dix-huit, douze, zéro neuf.
Jérémy wants to ask Sophie out. To find out what Sophie likes to do, he asks her friend Martine some questions.

Jérémy: J'aime bien Sophie. Elle aime faire du sport?
Jérémy: Elle écoute de la musique?
Martine: Oui. Elle aime beaucoup le rock et le reggae. Elle aime un peu le jazz.
Monsieur and Madame Paganini are having lunch at a small café on le boulevard Saint-Michel in Paris. The server arrives to take their order.

Serveur:  
Bonjour, Messieurs-Dames. Vous désirez?

Madame Paganini:  
Je voudrais une salade et un jus de pomme, s'il vous plaît.

Serveur:  
Et pour vous, Monsieur?

Monsieur Paganini:  
Je voudrais un steak-frites et une eau minérale, s'il vous plaît.

Serveur:  
Et comme dessert?

Monsieur Paganini:  
Je voudrais une glace au chocolat. Donnez-moi aussi un café, s'il vous plaît.
Student A begins the conversation and Student B responds. Continue alternating questions and answers.

A

It's Friday and you are waiting for the bus after school. You see a friend whom you approach.

1. Greet your friend and ask how things are going.
3. Ask what your friend likes to do.
5. Say that you do one of the activities your friend mentioned.
7. Accept the invitation.

B

You are looking for someone to do something with this weekend. A friend comes up to you at the bus stop Friday after school.

2. Greet your friend and say that things are going well.
4. Name two things that you like to do.
6. Ask if your friend would like to do the activity he or she likes with you tomorrow.
8. Say you'll see your friend tomorrow.
Use the following criteria to evaluate recorded assignments. For assignments where comprehension is difficult to evaluate, you might want to give students full credit for comprehension or weigh other categories more heavily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension</strong></td>
<td>Complete</td>
<td>Generally complete</td>
<td>Somewhat complete</td>
<td>Incomplete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker consistently uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.</td>
<td>Speaker usually uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.</td>
<td>Speaker sometimes uses the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.</td>
<td>Speaker uses few of the appropriate functions and vocabulary necessary to communicate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total comprehension</strong></td>
<td>Speaker understands all of what is said to him or her.</td>
<td>Speaker understands most of what is said to him or her.</td>
<td>Speaker understands some of what is said to him or her.</td>
<td>Speaker understands little of what is said to him or her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehensibility</strong></td>
<td>Usual comprehensible</td>
<td>Sometimes comprehensible</td>
<td>Seldom comprehensible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listener understands all of what the speaker is trying to communicate.</td>
<td>Listener understands most of what the speaker is trying to communicate.</td>
<td>Listener understands less than half of what the speaker is trying to communicate.</td>
<td>Listener understands little of what the speaker is trying to communicate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>Usually accurate</td>
<td>Sometimes accurate</td>
<td>Seldom accurate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker uses language correctly including grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Speaker usually uses language correctly including grammar, spelling, word order, and punctuation.</td>
<td>Speaker has some problems with language usage.</td>
<td>Speaker makes many errors in language usage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fluent</strong></td>
<td>Moderately fluent</td>
<td>Somewhat fluent</td>
<td>Not fluent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker speaks clearly without hesitation. Pronunciation and intonation sound natural.</td>
<td>Speaker has few problems with hesitation, pronunciation, and/or intonation.</td>
<td>Speaker has some problems with hesitation, pronunciation, and/or intonation.</td>
<td>Speaker hesitates frequently and struggles with pronunciation and intonation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Participant Observation Checklist

**Dialog Practice**

**Group members:**

**Date**

**Time**

**Grouping Pattern:**

**Grouping Strategy:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students use strategies to help them learn the dialog?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Do students help each other with pronunciation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do students correct each other when mistakes are made?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Are students on task during dialog practice?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. When given choice, do the same students always work together?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do certain students take longer roles in the dialog? Shorter roles?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other observations**

**Reflection**
Appendix L

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nom</th>
<th>Activité</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michèle</td>
<td>nager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>nager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloé</td>
<td>écouter de la musique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aïcha</td>
<td>danser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damien</td>
<td>jouer au tennis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valérie</td>
<td>skier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clément</td>
<td>skier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model: Michèle?
Elle téléphone.
Participant Observation Checklist
"Information Gap Activities"

Group members: ____________________________
Date ___________________ Time ______________
Grouping Pattern: _______________________________________
Grouping Strategy: _______________________________________  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students help each other understand task?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Do students help each other with pronunciation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do students correct each other when mistakes are made?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do pairs ask each other to repeat information they do not understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Do students repeat/rewrite information to help their partners understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Do students use English during interaction? Why?</td>
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<td>7. Do students actively compare answers at end?</td>
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</table>

Other observations

Reflection


Participant Observation Checklist
“Student Team Learning”

Group members: 
Date 
Time 
Grouping Pattern: 
Grouping Strategy: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students work together in one group?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Do some students take the lead? Who?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do students correct each other when mistakes are made?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do students ask for clarification when they do not understand?</td>
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<td>5. Do students repeat/reword information to help their team members understand?</td>
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<td>6. Are students engaged? Animated? Frustrated?</td>
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<td>7. Do students refer to textbooks and other printed sources?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other observations</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
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Appendix O

Participant Observation Checklist
“Pourquoi en français?”

Group members: ____________________________

Date __________________ Time __________________

Grouping Pattern: Heterogeneous groups of 3 students
Grouping Strategy: By interest/learning preferences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students divide work equally? Is each doing his fair share?</td>
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<td>2. Are students thinking aloud/explaining?</td>
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<td>3. All students on task during group time?</td>
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<td>4. Students excited during group work?</td>
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</table>

(Question #2 adapted from Johnson and Johnson, 1996 as cited in Gaith, 2002)

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Appendix P

Participant Observation Checklist
"Cognate Activity"
Unité 2-A

Group members: ____________________________
Date ___________________ Time ___________________
Grouping Pattern: Groups of 6 students
Grouping Strategy: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students understand task?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Are students thinking aloud/explaining?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Are students challenging each others’ reasoning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Students engaged during entire activity?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection</th>
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(Questions #2 & #3 adapted from Johnson and Johnson, 1996 as cited in Gaith, 2002)
Appendix Q

Participant Observation Checklist
"Inductive Thinking"
Unité 2

Group members: ____________________________
Date ____________________________ Time ____________________________

Grouping Pattern: Pairs to Groups of 4
Grouping Strategy: Similar ability levels in pairs teamed with another pair at end of activity

<table>
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<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students understand task?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Are students thinking aloud/explaining?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Are students challenging each others’ reasoning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Students engaged during entire activity?</td>
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<td>5. Do students take turns? Does one lead?</td>
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<td>6. At end of task, does one student or pair dominate during explanation of verb concepts?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Other observations

Reflexion

(Questions #2 & #3 adapted from Johnson and Johnson, 1996 as cited in Gaith, 2002)
JEU D'IDENTITÉ

Identifiez...

une personne qui écoute souvent la radio

un étudiant qui aime la musique classique

une étudiante qui déteste la musique classique

une étudiante qui parle espagnol

un étudiant qui étudie l'informatique

une étudiante qui regarde le football à la télé

une personne qui habite dans un appartement

une étudiante qui mange souvent chez McDonald's

un étudiant qui travaille après l'école

une personne qui joue du piano
Appendix S

Participant Observation Checklist
"Jeu d'Identité"

Group members: ____________________________

Date __________________ Time __________________

Grouping Pattern: __________________________

Grouping Strategy: __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students help each other understand the task?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Do student help each other formulate questions?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do students correct each other when mistakes are made?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do students ask for clarification when they do not understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Are all students' information used at the end of the activity?</td>
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Observations during whole-class activity

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<th>Observations</th>
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Appendix T

Participant Observation Checklist
"Reading Cognates"

Group members: ____________________________
Date ____________________________ Time ____________________________
Grouping Pattern: ____________________________
Grouping Strategy: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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Français I
Peer Composition (20 pts.)
Unités 2-4

You and your partner will choose one topic from the list below. You will each write a composition in French about your chosen topic. Follow the guidelines below:

TOPICS

- Compare and contrast your school schedule and activities to that of an imaginary French high school student. Include information about courses, days of the week, times, lunch, homework, and outside activities.

- Write a letter to an imaginary French pen pal in which you talk about your likes and dislikes. Introduce yourself, and include hobbies, sports, music, foods, and school subjects in your letter. Include the use of ne...pas to talk about dislikes, and adverbs (bien, beaucoup, un peu) to talk about how much you like/dislike the things you mention.

- Write a letter to your French friend in which you talk about what you are going to do this weekend (use the verb Aller + Infinitives to talk about what you are going to do). Include what you are going to do, where you are going to go, and with whom you are going. Express how you feel about your weekend activities.

GUIDELINES

1. Agree upon one topic for your compositions. Then, write the first three sentences of your compositions together.

2. Finish your compositions individually. Compositions must be at least nine-ten sentences long. Make sure you include everything your topic asks for in your composition.

3. Proofread your partner’s composition. Using the Peer Editing Rubric (attached), check your partner’s work for vocabulary, organization, comprehensibility, and grammar. Circle any errors you find so that your partner can correct them.

4. Revise your own composition using your partner’s suggestions.

5. Reread your partner’s composition, and sign your partner’s revised paper.

6. Turn in your composition with the Peer Editing Rubric for an individual composition grade.
Français I
Individual Composition (20 pts.)
Unités 2-4

You will choose one topic from the list below. The topic may not be the same topic you wrote about for your peer composition assignment! Write a composition in French about your chosen topic. Your composition must be 9-10 sentences, and should include everything in the topic.

TOPICS

- Compare and contrast your school schedule and activities to that of an imaginary French high school student. Include information about courses, days of the week, times, lunch, homework, and outside activities.

- Write a letter to an imaginary French pen pal in which you talk about your likes and dislikes. Introduce yourself, and include hobbies, sports, music, foods, and school subjects in your letter. Include the use of ne...pas to talk about dislikes, and adverbs (bien, beaucoup, un peu) to talk about how much you like/dislike the thinks you mention.

- Write a letter to your French friend in which you talk about what you are going to do this weekend (use the verb Aller + Infinitives to talk about what you are going to do). Include what you are going to do, where you are going to go, and with whom you are going. Express how you feel about your weekend activities.
Appendix W

Participant Observation Checklist
"Peer Composition"

Group members: ____________________________
Date ____________________________ Time ____________________________
Grouping Pattern: ____________________________
Grouping Strategy: ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEHAVIOR</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>EVIDENCE</th>
<th>REFLECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do students work together?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Does one student take the lead? Who?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Do students correct each other when mistakes are made?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Do students ask for clarification when they do not understand?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Do students take proofreading seriously?</td>
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</table>

Other observations

Reflection


Chapter __________

I. Content: Look for the following elements in your partner's composition. Put a check next to each category when you finish it.

1. Vocabulary
   Does the composition use enough new vocabulary from the chapter? Underline all the new vocabulary words you find from this chapter. What additional words do you suggest that your partner try to use?

2. Organization
   Is the composition organized and easy to follow? Can you find an introduction and a conclusion?

3. Comprehensibility
   Is the composition clear and easy to understand? Is there a specific part that was hard to understand? Did you understand the author's meaning? Draw a box around any sections that were particularly hard to understand.

4. Target Functions and Grammar
   Ask your teacher what functions and grammar you should focus on for this chapter and list them below.

   Focus: ____________________________

II. Proofreader's checklist: Circle any errors you find in your partner's composition so that he or she can correct them. See the chart for some examples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incorrect form of the verb</th>
<th>Incorrect form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>aime</strong></td>
<td>J'aïnes le cinéma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>intelligentes</strong></td>
<td>Mes amies sont intelligentes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject - verb agreement</td>
<td>Elles vont à la plage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>Il a seize ans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Il aime la glace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition words (if they apply to chapter)</td>
<td>d'abord, ensuite, après, enfin, etc...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accents and Punctuation</td>
<td>Je fais du vélo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Explain your content and grammar suggestions to your partner. Answer any questions about your comments.

Peer editor's signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________
Restaurant Dialogue
Group Feedback

What we really liked about your performance!

Creativity  Script/lines  Characters  Props/Costumes  Music

Other __________________________

Comments (be specific!)

Areas for improvement before the big performance!

Pronunciation  Timing  Memorization  Eye contact  Gestures

Other __________________________

Comments (be specific!)
Participant Observation Checklist
"Restaurant Dialogue"

Group members: ____________________________
Date ___________________ Time ___________________
Grouping Pattern: ____________________________
Grouping Strategy: ____________________________

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Being part of a group helped me learn</td>
<td>2. Others in my group helped me a lot</td>
<td>3. I would like French better if I was not in a group</td>
<td>4. I would have earned better grades working alone</td>
<td>5. I am learning when I teach other students</td>
<td>6. I helped others in my group</td>
<td>7. Other people in my group helped me</td>
<td>8. I would prefer to continue to work in groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please rate the statements below by choosing the category that best describes how you feel about each statement. Your answers are very important, and will help me plan future lessons and activities. Also, please make comments under each statement.
**Student Reflective Journal Prompts**

*End of Unité 2*

Please write a two-paragraph essay on the group activities you worked on for Unité 2. In the first paragraph, describe one group activity or project that you really liked and why you liked it so much. In the second paragraph, describe a group activity or project that you disliked and why you did not like it.

*End of Unité 3*

Being a member of a group is a very important and responsible role, both in school and in the “real world.” In a three-paragraph essay, please discuss your role in your group. In the first paragraph, describe your contributions to the group, and why you were or were not an important part of the group. In the second paragraph, comment on how the other people in your group helped you be more or less successful. Finally, in a concluding paragraph, discuss whether or not you benefited from being in a group. If you did, how did you benefit? Academically? Socially? If not, why not? Why do you think you didn’t benefit from being in a group?
Unit 1 Sample Lesson Plan

Objective: Students will practice greeting each other, introducing themselves, and asking for each other's names.

Materials:
C'est À Toi! Level I textbook
C'est À Toi! Level I CD

Procedure:

1. Listen to and repeat Unit 1-A dialogue in textbook.
2. Practice dialogue in small groups.
3. Read culture section in textbook about the ways in which French people greet each other.
4. Practice the French handshake.
5. Do communicative activity in textbook during which pairs of students practice shaking hands, greeting each other, asking each other for the new French names, and answering.
6. Do “Wagon Wheel Introductions” as described in Methods, p. 48.

Related ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language Education:

Communication - Communicate in Languages Other Than English
Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Cultures - Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.
Appendix AD

Unit 2 Sample Lesson Plan

Objective: Students will understand and be able to recognize cognates. Students will be able to use cognates as a reading comprehension strategy.

Materials:
C'est À Toi! Level I textbook
C'est À Toi! Level I CD

Procedure:

1. Students read about cognates in the textbook.
2. Students practice new Unit 2 vocabulary with the CD and textbook pictures. Students discuss the meaning of the new vocabulary using cognates as a strategy.
3. Do “cognates” activity as described in Methods section, p. 55

Related ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language Education:

Communication - Communicate in Languages Other Than English
Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Comparisons - Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture
Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Communities - Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World
Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.
Unit 3 Sample Lesson Plan

Objective: Students will continue to recognize and to use cognates to help them read and understand texts entirely written in French.

Materials:
C’est À Toi! Level I textbook
C’est À Toi! Level I CD

Procedure:

1. Review the definition of cognates with the students.
2. Brainstorm examples of cognates from Unit 3
3. Do “reading with cognates” activity as described in Methods section, p. 58.

Related ACTFL National Standards for Foreign Language:

Communication - Communicate in Languages Other Than English
Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Comparisons - Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture
Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Communities - Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World
Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.