

# A Peer Assisted English Learning Program (PAELP) for the University Underachiever

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## Abstract

The problems of the underachiever population have not been targeted in EFL classroom instruction or in EFL survey research, in spite of the importance of English which is a required subject for all students and thus affects the underachievers in freshman and sophomore years.

This paper first describes the problems of schooling for the underachievers which the author has experienced and the English learning difficulties confronted by such students. It goes on to describe an English program for the underachiever based on prevention, Peer Assisted English Learning Program (PAELP) developed by the author throughout a current school year, in which quite a few such students were able to find themselves successful, happy and even welcomed back into a regular class. It focuses, in particular, upon some concrete examples of academic implementation to EFL instruction. Some successful results are reported and the implications discussed in a constructive manner.

## Introduction

Recent evidence that Japanese economy is successful in international markets has promoted careful scrutiny of our system of higher education. The educational authority reform reports have offered sweeping proposals to reform and improve the present circumstances and the quality of higher education in Japan. Many of the suggested changes would result in more rigorous courses of study and higher standards of achievement for students in universities.

Educators realize, however, that the poor ability of many students has generated an academic outcry loud enough to be heard among

universities. Educators who work with underachievers argue that more strict standards will have serious repercussions for the growing number of students who have not succeeded under current standards and are already alienated from formal schooling. Frequently, these students feel that they can not experience success, happiness, and welcome in university. Often, some are uncooperative, apathetic, alienated, and even abrasive to their teachers, peers, and administrators. Some find themselves locked into limited futures because of their underdeveloped skills and abilities.

The author's strong conviction is, however, that these students are not born with negative tendencies ; these tendencies are fundamentally created in their academic situations. It is not surprising that in a university that honors success, competition, and achievement, some of these students will see themselves, or be perceived by their teachers, peers, and administrators, as losers. The author defines such students as the underachievers, not referring to any set of characteristics based on intelligence. According to the author, typically, the underachiever is in the bottom 10% of the class as measured by teacher-constructed reading test achievement. Frequently, such students have failed courses and are behind in acquiring the credits needed to be promoted and graduate. Their attitude and conduct are likely to get them in trouble with their teachers and administrators. The most frequent offenses committed by those students are refusal to do academic work, being late for class, staying away from school, and negligence. Negligence is the most significant problem for the underachiever because it is likely to lead to failing courses, which in turn make promotion and graduation difficult.

Fortunately, there are educators, who understand the needs of the underachievers who face learning difficulties and other problems, and these educators are creating alternative programs for the underachievers that stimulate their intellectual development. It is only rarely that the underachievers are offered alternative programs that provide affectively and intellectually stimulating experiences.

Based on his English program developed for the underachievers, the author is convinced that it is possible to develop methods and experiences which successfully involve the underachievers, that the university can create the kind of climate which does not result in alienation or

indifference, and that it can have a positive impact on EFL teaching /learning environment, socialization, and future career orientation of such students.

The author sees his own program not as narrow skill remediation, but as providing an educational experience that can establish human relationship between teacher and student as well as the social and intellectual relationship between those two.

This paper provides educators, who work with underachievers, with some insights into what kind of methods and strategies are likely to be effective for them when EFL instruction is given in a regular classroom.

### Reasons for the Underachievers

It was practically impossible for the author to obtain data and information regarding the underachiever populations from many universities ; therefore by examining 53 students who, for the past three years, were in the bottom 10% of his English classes as measured by teacher-constructed reading test achievement, the author identified them "the underachievers" in his university. The list below presents some of the reasons given by such students. These reasons are presented in rank order from the most commonly cited to the least-often mentioned :

- \* lack of interest in class
- \* loss of enthusiasm for learning
- \* boredom with class
- \* no motivation to study
- \* lack of desired courses
- \* excessive academic requirements
- \* lack of efforts to study
- \* no goal to achieve in student life
- \* dislike of instructors
- \* poor academic records without efforts
- \* dislike of a particular course
- \* problems with instructors and administrators
- \* attendance problems

- \* strictness of roll call
- \* inability to adjust to university life
- \* poor learning environment
- \* dislike of everything about student life
- \* parent's demand of good academic records
- \* dislike of some physical features of the university
- \* illness (including hospitalization)
- \* demands of a part-time job
- \* dislike of discipline and rules
- \* financial problems
- \* peer problems
- \* extracurricular activities
- \* family problems
- \* transferring to another institution
- \* plan to withdraw for employment
- \* studying abroad

According to the author's analysis, the underachievers with the reasons for their academic performance specified above are potential dropouts who might be discharged from the university before graduation. Some students who were actually withdrawn before completing their required credits are defined as early leavers. Most of them in the university fit into behavior patterns that are classic of dropouts; they exhibited poor attitudes toward the university, were likely to be failing, were behind in academic progress, and had a lower grade-point average. Some were more likely to have slightly better than average grades, and to have a slightly higher than average number of credits. Another group of students, the intellectual elite, see their present attendance at university as irrelevant. While this group of students was closest to completing their academic requirements and often beyond their peers in accumulated credits, they tended to quit the university voluntarily to transfer to another educational setting. The author's data suggest that the great majority of the underachievers in the university, who have normal intelligence, wish to receive a fair share of educational benefits if they are given an opportunity to do so.

### The Humanistic Perspective

In humanistic teaching, particular emphasis is placed upon self-awareness, self-understanding, and self-disclosure (Stevick, 1990). From this perspective, language learning is seen as an activity which involves students as complex human beings, not simply as language learners. Language teaching, therefore, exploits student's affective and intellectual resources to the limit, and are substantial enough to provide students experiences of the fundamental affective and intellectual development that is essential to their life. The humanistic movement is relatively new, and it has had an undeniable impact on language teaching practice. This can be seen, for example, in affectively-based learning activities, alternative learning programs, and of experiential learning.

In practicing his English program of prevention with the underachiever, the author put special emphasis on some person-centered instructions, referring to student interests and needs, interpersonal sharing, and self-awareness which relates to student's motivation to learn the language. The author believes that when the aim of teaching is involved in profoundly enhancing each individual, learning is maximized. He is convinced that educators must be committed to education to equalize opportunities from individual to individual so that human and humane considerations are paramount.

### The Curriculum Development Perspective

In recent years the underachievers have manifested problems that have originated from the existing conventional academic system. These academic problems can not be solved by the university alone, although the educators often blame other educators and the university every time these problems surface. Since the problems of today's underachievers are academic, solving them requires academic changes; shake-off from traditional curricula. From this viewpoint, the author considers that we educators should create innovative curriculum design and supply appropriate education to the underachievers. There must be some

adequate system for increasing success for all these students rather than the current system that rations nurture according to ability to compete. There must be equity in dealing with the underachievers.

Nunan (1988) has suggested that curriculum can be developed through a collaborative effort between teachers and learners, since learners will be involved in decision on content and material selection, methodology, and evaluation. Particularly in person-centered instruction, this differs from traditional, teacher-led approaches which are impossible in helping educators to exploit underachiever's learning potential.

In humanistic teaching contexts, considerable interest in person-centeredness can be drawn for the practical application. This idea seems to be far more appropriate and effective for the underachievers to achieve their affective, interactive, and cognitive demands than in conventional practices. In his English program of prevention of the underachiever, the author stresses the importance of basic elements which underlie person-centeredness. These are ;

- Student involvement in deciding content of their material, in organizing their activities, in developing the syllabus, and in assessing their performance
- Strategies for meeting specific needs and interests of all the students, regardless of their levels of ability
- Strategies for capitalizing on motivation, enthusiasm, and positive feelings of all the students
- Constant establishment of close interpersonal relationships between the author and the students through frequent contacts
- Goal-setting for self-enhancing purposes
- Creation of self-fulfillment of their dreams

The author believes that an innovative curriculum regarding EFL instruction should be the movement toward person-centeredness. In the rest of his paper, the author will describe ways that the underachievers could be educated and the solution of their problems through his person-centered instruction.

## Program Planning

An effective EFL program involves more than the development of cognitive skills on facts, ideas and thoughts, the utilization of specific approaches for mastering skills, and skill development materials and experiences in some logical order. For the underachievers, the most important of these variables is the teacher. It is the teacher, more than the program, materials, skills sequences, or organizational patterns, that is crucial in a humanistic program based on person-centeredness.

In addition to the role of the teacher, there are other important considerations for the program. Among these conditions – which are developed in this section – are crucial aspects of the affective domain (attitudes and interests, needs, feelings, motivation, values, personal images), ways to establish close relationships between the author and the students, and ways to incorporate the need for a return-to-basics referring to the cognitive domain-knowledge and skills.

Galyean (1979) notes that humanizing and personalizing classes should be given high priority to language learning. In the opinion of the author, the affective function is one of the basics that is badly in need of attention for the underachievers. As the central construct of the author's English program for such students, this section focuses, in the main, on aspects of some components pertaining to humanistic methodology. In his program, the students practiced structures that enabled them to reflect upon their own attitudes and interests, needs, feelings, concerns, values, actions and behaviors, so that each student was able to share these with others. The author's constant attention on all the practice was on these components. The implementation of these components will be discussed in the following.

### 1) Attitude Development and Maintenance

Research on the factors that correlate with attitude development and maintenance is limited ; however, the author views some factors to be established as basic to comprehension of the underachievers. These include ; self-concept, teacher's attitude and behaviors, peer

relationship, intelligence, achievement, instructional practices and organizational patterns, and learning environment. Each area will be discussed below.

Self-concept. There are many ways teachers can affect a student's self-concept positively which, in turn, many affect how he/she feels about the learning situation. In the regular class, the underachievers usually perceived that their English ability was responsible for their negative attitudes ; in such a situation, learning was not effective at all. The author, therefore, changed his behaviors and practices for improving the students' attitudes. Behaviors displayed by the author, which seemed to be significant in influencing the underachievers, are as follows :

- \* Keeping the program atmosphere one of trust by sharing
- \* Accepting the student as a valued person
- \* Engaging in affective sharing with the students
- \* Reducing negative comments
- \* Emphasizing 'aliveness' (Carrying the live exchanges of communication)
- \* Trying to nurture human relations with the students and foster the same thing among the students themselves
- \* Valuing their own feelings, enthusiasm, and ideas through frequent communication
- \* Making the student's success known to others
- \* Trying not to be just a good teacher, but also a supportive adviser

The instructional practices the author considered significant are characterized by :

- \* Minimizing differences among the student's work
- \* Practicing pair or group work as frequently as possible
- \* Comparing the student's progress against him/herself rather than with the pair or the group



- \* Utilizing the interest perspective of each student for self-enhancing purposes
- \* Utilizing student-offered materials from their choices and as to their preferences
- \* Utilizing diagnostic techniques in order to eliminate specific skill weakness

Teacher's attitudes and behaviors. There is little doubt that the teacher is often the most significant force in the development of positive attitudes in learning, particularly to the underachievers. Frequently, the teacher is a stronger motivating factor than the techniques, practices, and materials used.

The author considered certain attitudes and behaviors conducive to positive learning attitudes in the underachievers. These include :

1. To value each student as an independent learner and respect his/her efforts in attempting to become a better learner
2. To enjoy each student and to enjoy producing enthusiastic learners through their needs and interests
3. To permit each student to freely express his/her complaints, frustration, and dislikes even though they are directed toward the author
4. To allow each student to devise unique ways of reporting on materials and practicing activities
5. To listen to their conversations, note their creative topics, and observe free choices of learning attitudes
6. To convince each student he/she need not be afraid to make mistakes
7. To believe that each student can achieve some measure of success
8. To change methods and materials whenever the student's progress indicates the methods and materials being used are not producing the desired results
9. To be aware of the effects that their nonverbal behaviors have on the students

10. To encourage the students to have a friendly talk about various problems through common topics

Some underachievers did not like to learn English, and at times were reluctant to participate in activities although they were frequently responsive to the author's suggestions and advice. The encouragement in their learning of English is one of the author's most difficult tasks.

Peer relationship. Students often wish to work together in peer groups, draw on each other's strengths, and assist each other in completing a task. This method encourages supportive relationships, good communication skills, high-level thinking abilities, and promotes interests in learning. In peer group work in the author's program, the underachievers were responsible for their own learning and for assisting each other in attaining a common goal. In the process most of them learned to appreciate the following :

- \* a feeling of mutuality
- \* a sense of self-worth
- \* sharing of responsibility for learning
- \* respect and trust within the peer group
- \* self-confidence (reducing negative attitudes)
- \* improvement of regular classroom behaviors
- \* confidence about their ability to interact and work with other students
- \* stronger motivation to achieve
- \* better class attendance
- \* a positive self-esteem

Learning environment. The type of classroom atmosphere and the physical environment the teacher establishes may be conducive to the strengthening of interests in learning. In fact, classroom collections (in the author's office) of many different kinds of English books, magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets were really motivational at

the underachiever level. Such collections suggested to the students that English learning is important and interesting. The collections were an excellent stimulus for giving them a chance to start learning English, because they were all within the interest range of the underachievers. The author provided them with adequate time for browsing, pleasure reading, or silent reading since interests in English learning may often be promoted through voluntary participation. The students were given opportunities to share various topics common to each other. They voluntarily established a discussion group and discussed topics. Peer recommendations were also powerful forces in developing interests. In addition to books, magazines, and newspapers, phonograph records, CD's, radio and TV programs, films and film-strips, cassette tapes, and slides and pictures were effective. All of them, which were available in the author's room, did trigger a desire and motivation to learn English through topics related to their needs, hobbies, problems, experiences in their life, academic goals, and future career.

Interest-based peer grouping. Peer grouping based on common interests is necessary to promote their interests in learning English. Particularly for the underachievers, this type of grouping was effective. Although the achievement levels of each student were quite low, motivation came from sharing a common interest in learning English. They worked harder than in their regular class, they experienced success, and they felt good about themselves. One disadvantage to this group lay in the easy change or waning of interest in any given topic, so that the author had to continue to provide advice, suggestions, and assignments as frequently as possible, which involved considerable time and energy in preparation. In reality the author had to provide books and learning material covering many different levels of interest for each student. The experience in establishing such interest groups was to put together the students with multi-age levels, freshmen to seniors, thus providing a family-type of experience in the university. The older students with enthusiasm for specific areas were to help the younger ones and were

to serve as models for them. The author believes that this experience is needed in learning how to cope with everyday and adult life.

## 2) Study Skills

English is a required subject in the liberal arts and important to all the students. English is a difficult and unattractive subject for the underachievers. In reality all of them are having a lot of trouble and experiencing boredom while learning English. To aid each underachiever to be able to attain an acceptable level of mastery or proficiency, study skill instruction is very important. The author has realized the significance of study skill instruction through the day-by-day contact with such students.

Techniques of study skills-their time for study, taking notes, organizing and scheduling, preparing or writing reports, organizing, remembering, reviewing, memorizing, and preparing for examinations, which can be categorized as English learning skills, must be incorporated into lesson plans everyday. Study Skills were taught and practiced in a particular area concerning actual materials in English. This motivated each student to learn English, because they could see that the skills really were useful. The rate which the underachievers learned various study skills varied with individual students. The underachievers seemed to be at a slower rate in mastering the study skills than average or above average students. The study skill instruction was effective in raising their desire to study to a voluntary response level. A few skills which were used in English reading instruction were as follows :

Selection skills. These skills, which are basic to higher levels of critical reading, can help students learn how to derive meaning from what they read. All printed materials may have some kind of organization; topic development, classification, time order (sequence), comparison-contrast, or cause-effect. Following these patterns enables students to learn to look for key words in sentences and key sentences in paragraphs, and select main thoughts and supporting details. Using to these skills, the author provided the

underachievers students with various practice experiences of the skills to help them understand printed materials. In fact some underachievers were able to deal with author opinions, viewpoints, and biases to reconcile these with their own thinking.

Organizing skills. Organizing skills are important for students to learn when they need to sort and classify objects into categories. The author used the following skills in organizing information to increase comprehension and result in better understanding of English reading material.

1. Selecting the sentence that best expresses the main thought of each paragraph
2. Selecting the sentence that contains supporting ideas
3. Putting whole ideas into outline form
4. Summarizing paragraphs
5. Completing outlines
6. Writing a reaction to what is read

### Choice of Teaching Style

For many years the author has been interested in finding out how to help the low-ability English learners. Of particular interest to the author have been the forgotten bottom ten percent, those he calls underachievers, because these students typically have experienced great difficulty and frustration in learning English in a conventional teacher-led instruction.

Let's take an honest look at some of the current realities of the English teaching/learning scenes. Students can usually pursue instructional goals in three ways : competitively, individually, or cooperatively. In a competitive setting, students work against each other and their performance is compared. Some students experience failure in this setting, resulting in loss of self-confidence, self-esteem, and sometimes in negative feelings toward their teachers, higher-achieving peers, or administrators. There are many teachers who are unwilling to

demonstrate a variety of ideas and techniques necessary to improve the performance of underachievers, and what is worse, they ignore them in English teaching. Most of these teachers are simply satisfied to continue their conventional practices in highly competitive classrooms. Their teaching methods cause student isolation, loss of confidence, interest, motivation, individuality, and even produce hostile climates. In fact the underachievers take it for granted, in such a learning environment, that most of them have no desire to study English and that studying English is a boring, painful, and distasteful task. In the highly competitive and learning-imperative environment, the underachievers are compelled to take English courses merely to fill a graduation requirement, ordinarily by simply accumulating a certain number of passing credits in English, not by enjoying studying English or by demonstrating proficiency until graduation. The teachers do not give the underachievers a feeling that they can achieve, be motivated and encouraged to learn English.

In contrast to most university English instruction mentioned above in which individual students compete with each other, and in which most teachers have not been interested in finding out how to help the underachievers, the author designed a program rich enough and versatile enough to accommodate a broad range of learning needs, interests, and learning styles. This program is one of the teaching styles which involves combination of individualized instruction with cooperative learning (Slavin, 1987). Following are brief explanations of this approach.

Peer Assisted Learning English Program (PAELP) was carefully structured to maximize the possibility of academic success, self-confidence and self-esteem, and provide skills in dealing with personal and social problems faced by the students at school and in their relations with peers. In matters of attendance, the students must make up the time and some lost ground toward promotion and graduation. Assignments must be done and, generally, they must be done correctly before credit is given; follow-through by the author on this standard was a high priority item. Program participation in discussions or in peer group assignments was mandatory; the students were never permitted to become self-seeking. Reading was emphasized by having the students read at least once a week, usually in a few newspaper articles that most interested

them, and by having them write at least once a month, in a diary that described their own daily personal experience. All of these standards were designed to build student self-confidence in their ability to perform academically and succeed by graduation.

The basic premise of this program was that the students can move ahead at their own pace in peer groups of three to four members. First, the students were interviewed and placed in an appropriate point in an individualized program. The students worked independently according to their own level and pace, and did their own assignments. Then the students met in peer groups, where they exchanged papers, they read to one another, checked comprehension, helped each other collect information, to complete their own homework assignments, and to improve their own past performance. The author provided assistance or follow-up discussion if the peer group members were unable to help each other. This program emphasized interdependence among peer groups so that they could share any work and exchange any information. They took quizzes individually, covering all of the topics when they determined they were ready. These quizzes were not competitive. Individual improved scores were recorded when a current quiz score exceeded a past score. Both individual students and peer groups that reached a certain criterion level or had a higher improvement score than a past one received reward certificates.

In addition to working with peers, the author's role in PAELP was to introduce major concepts using direct instruction prior to the students working on their individualized units. At times the author did whole peer group instruction on such skills as critical thinking, problem-solving, self-evaluation procedure, maximum use of the university library, good communication, and supportive relationships.

### Characteristics of PAELP

There were some characteristics that contributed to success with the underachievers. The following list of these characteristics is provided to help prospective educators begin the task of constructing a program for underachievers and to work toward success in their program with this

type of student.

**Program Size.** The program was small : ten to twelve students. In general they were divided into three groups. Management of such a small-sized program was more flexible, more personal, and more efficient. The author was more responsive to the needs of students. Meetings to plan activities, projects, and assignments were easily arranged. The students could undertake an individual task and group tasks with a feeling of mutuality, and felt a need to do their own part for the benefit of each group member as well as the entire group. Frequent verbal interchange easily took place between the students and the author. Each student learned to take personal responsibility for learning material and to master certain material with support and assistance in attaining the mastery level which the author determined through discussion with an individual student and the entire group. Critical to the success of this program were such skills as knowing how to communicate effectively and how to develop respect and trust within the group. They learned such skills through author's guidance in how to follow as well as to lead. When responsibility for learning was shared, students encouraged each other to complete the assigned task. They knew how to ask for assistance when they needed it. Each student realized that spending even a short amount of time with the author in such a small program was much more beneficial to the student than spending longer periods of time in regular class. The major focal point of the program was the individual conference : the author could meet often with the student on a one-to-one basis to discuss the material the student had been studying, to check studying skills, and to discuss school life and future career.

**Program Autonomy.** This program created its own identity by having a unique name, PAELP, called only among the underachievers and by having its own space and facility for making arrangements for various activities in order to establish a positive learning environment. Autonomy was evident in this program. Admission and dismissal, material offerings, independent study, cooperative learning, unique credit arrangements, criteria for success, and group processing were controlled.



Program autonomy was important because it gave the author a sense of program ownership. The author felt empowered and had control over important factors that allowed him to be effective with students. The author had the mandate to take initiative and respond to students in ways that were either not usually practiced, not considered appropriate, or not possible in the regular class. PAELP has empowered the author with both the authority and the responsibility to solve a number of problems other teachers have not been able to solve.

Teacher expectation. The author assumes that a competent and prospective teacher can be effective in educating all the underachievers, and that being effective with these students is perceived as an academic and social necessity. The author is optimistic that those who have failed and become disenchanted can be turned around.

In PAELP, there was the extended role of the teacher. Some students brought to PAELP problems that might have originated in the campus or the community but nevertheless interfere with the student's success in the university. The author often helped the students think through their problems, and occasionally to be an advocate for the individual who was in conflict with their peers, teachers, parents, and their university.

Through an experience of PAELP, the author was able to consider it necessary for teachers to have high academic expectations about student success. It was clear from his realistic judgment of the academic abilities of individual students. For some students, passing a high-school-graduate level English reading was a high expectation. For others, it was reasonable to expect some tasks at a sophomore level English reading or writing.

There was a more uniform set of expectations regarding behavior. Attendance, punctuality, completion of assignment, and demonstrating responsibility and fulfilment were expected of every student who participated in the program. Rules on these matters were enforced firmly and fairly. Of special interest was the expectation that the students of the program would try to get more positively involved in the regular class activities than other regular students. While the academic and behavioral expectations were unique and great, all the underachievers

commented that they found studying in the program much more satisfying and enjoyable than learning in the regular course.

Peer Culture. According to the PAELP students, the single most valued characteristic of the program was the family atmosphere. Most of the students volunteered that they liked and enjoyed the program because they felt comfortable and settled with their peers who had the same troubles during university life. In the program there was an accepting and encouraging but not uncritical atmosphere. There was also much conversation, discussion, and criticism offered in a constructive manner. The students saw this as quite different from the attitudes they encountered in regular classrooms. Many students reported that they really could care about the people in their groups.

Cooperative learning was a characteristic of this program. Most of the students reported that they found this aspect of the program very important in learning. They did not prefer the competitive, self-centered, and teacher-led atmosphere they found in many regular classes, because they have not been successful in such classroom. The cooperative effort encouraged each student to admit need for help and seek out a peer or teacher for help. Some of this cooperative spirit was promoted through two to three students' learning together. The emphasis was always on such cooperation and sharing.

Another important characteristics of the program was the supportive peer relationship that developed concerning the rules and goals of the program. The students tended to believe that the rules, goals, and requirements were in their interest, so that these made the task of the author much easier. PAELP played an important role in establishing and maintaining a positive set of attitudes among the students through mutual support.

Voluntary Component. Cooperation and sharing can foster initiative and responsibility in the underachievers. Moreover, the attraction for the underachievers of experiencing mutuality can be a powerful incentive to participate fully and voluntarily in the program. PAELP utilized the voluntary components through the program activities and after successful completion of these components, the students

progressed to promotion and graduation. PAELP impressed on the students that they needed to establish an attitude of voluntary learning which convinced potential students they were competent and reliable.

In the operational phase of the program, there were some techniques, some of which are related to humanistic methods of teaching, utilized for making the best of the voluntary components.

- \* Some activity was individualized so the students could work independently at their own pace.
- \* Some activity was self-imposed and clearly achievable.
- \* Some activity was designed to stretch the students beyond the basics toward problem solving, abstract thinking, and critical thinking.
- \* Some activity was designed to help the students work with each other to be able to have a broad range of opportunities for success.
- \* Some activity dealt with social responsibility and social issues (Parker, 1985).
- \* Some activity was reinforced with attendance check, skill achievement drills, credit achievement drills, and competency test.
- \* Some activity was extremely concerned with a sense of challenging, hopefulness, support, accomplishment, and a positive view of self.

### Conclusion

Research conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1987) has reported an increase in academic achievement when cooperative learning is used in college level classes as well as with all age levels in a variety of subject areas. Newmann and Thompson (1987) point out, however, that cooperative learning approaches may be less acceptable to secondary students, and that students at this age are less responsive to rewards and other forms of recognition. Since their previous high school experiences taught them to value individual achievement and to be competitive for passing university entrance examinations, cooperative learning approaches have not been in wider use in university language classes. The

major reasons may be that university teachers have not understood such approaches, have doubted the results claimed for them, have not had the time, the energy, or the means to devote to them, or simply have been satisfied to continue their traditional practices, hoping for the best.

Given these constraints, the author did implement cooperative learning in his university. It took a considerable amount of time to teach cooperative skills and to orient the underachievers in order to get them accustomed to their new learning environment and to replace it with an attractive, supportive one by giving them a feeling that they could achieve through group processing. They learned by cooperating not competing. When peers helped each other with learning tasks, they felt that each student could receive a fair share of educational benefits.

Based on his study, the author is convinced that it is quite possible for the university to develop courses and experiences that successfully involve the underachievers and to create the kind of climate that does not result in alienation, boredom, negligence and hatred for those students and teachers. The author believes that we educators will be able to make a difference in the lives of the university underachievers.

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