How to Promote the Students’ Oral Proficiency in the Ivorian Context of Large Classes with Special Emphasis on Collaborative Learning

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HOW TO PROMOTE THE STUDENTS’ ORAL PROFICIENCY IN THE IVORIAN CONTEXT OF LARGE CLASSES WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Master’s Project Completed By

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This work is dedicated to my father, KONE, Gninlnan; to my wife, KONE, Karidiata; and my children, KONE, Donougo Awa Elizabeth and KONE Tofangui Ahmed Abel who missed so much during my 16 month stay in the U.S.A.
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INTRODUCTION

Ivorian teachers of English often complain about their students' poor oral performance. They contend that when they ask questions in class only a handful of students raise their hand to participate. The majority keep silent. Although increasing efforts are being made to reduce the teacher talking time in favor of the students' talking time, our students still do not fare well in oral proficiency. They are able to manipulate structures but when it comes to using the language to communicate, they are tongue-tied.

In this paper the goal is to find out effective ways that would enhance our students' oral proficiency. To achieve this goal three major components of the students' learning conditions need to be considered. These are the teaching techniques, the large classroom management, and the learning ambience. These components are interconnected. Moreover, they are a prerequisite to the improvement of the students' oral proficiency. With the increase in the numbers of students, it becomes a real challenge for the teacher to increase classroom interaction within the framework of the traditional lockstep teaching.

In the traditional lockstep situation the teacher keeps close control of the students' utterances. S/He is the one who always initiates classroom interaction. We need to create a learning ambience in which one could train students for a more communicative use of the language. Since the implementation of task-oriented activities require pair work and group work, we need to train our students to acquire a more collaborative behavior for these activities to bear fruit. In my analysis I will make a survey of the students' present learning conditions and then reflect upon
ways to implement collaborative learning in the Ivorian large classes. I will also survey the literature on communicative language and present practical examples of task-based activities that could be suitable in the Ivorian context.

I. Analysis of the students' learning conditions

Large classes

We need to clarify the concept of large class in developing countries. In most western countries like the U.S.A. or Great Britain, a class of more than 30 students is regarded as a large class. In the Ivorian context we deal with figures varying from 80-90 students. Students are sitting on fixed benches and desks in several rows with hardly any room for the teacher to move in between them. The teacher is compelled to always face his or her students. In the first two grades of secondary school, classes are divided into two groups, but the teacher still has to deal with 40-45 students.

Learning Ambience

With such large numbers lockstep teaching is the most common aspect of instruction. The teacher tends to spend more time with high achievers and so much the worse for those who lag behind. The learning atmosphere is rather tense which hinders the teacher-students rapport. Such an atmosphere is not apt to lower the students' "affective filter" as Krashen puts it. (Krashen 1981, p. 30) They regard English as just a subject among others in which they aim to have good grades. Such a learning atmosphere favors competitive learning. Whenever they are asked to perform a task, be
it oral or written, they are eager to know whether that task is going to provide them with grades. This attitude reflects the elitist tendency of the Ivorian educational system which aims at the top cream.

Teaching Materials

When speaking of the students' learning conditions we must also mention the shortage of teaching materials. The Ivorian EFL teacher has to rely only on the blackboard, the chalk, the textbook and the students' copy books to fulfill his task. Before the economic crisis, which was due to the dramatic drop of prices of the major products (coffee and cocoa), the students were compelled to have their textbooks before joining school. Because of the crisis the authorities have notified the school administrations and teachers to be lenient with the students who can't afford the textbooks. As a result, a fair amount of students do not have the textbook required. If they are lucky to have a neighbor who is willing to share their books with them, so much the better for them. The teacher has to intervene sometimes to make sure that the books available are shared on a one book for two basis or even a one book for three basis. To the best of my knowledge very few schools have language labs or specialized language classrooms. Schools have neither overhead projectors nor tape recorders. When a teacher wants to teach a lesson which requires the use of a tape recorder s/he manages to use his/her own or borrows one from a friend or colleague. Then s/he must make sure that the batteries are working; otherwise, s/he might be bitterly surprised to realize that the plugs in the classroom are out of use. In most cases there is no single xerox machine in schools. To duplicate their materials teachers have to rely on the sole stencil printing machine.
The Types of Lesson

After this brief analysis of the shortage of the teaching materials we need to make a survey of the types of lessons which are most common in such a setting. For many years the Standard Oral Lesson (SOL) has been the most influential in the Ivory Coast. This type of lesson is based on the study of reading material from either a textbook or a magazine, newspaper, etc. It consists of several stages.

The first stage called warm-up is a kind of ice-breaker which might not be relevant to the lesson itself. The teacher can choose to interact with the students on a particular event which has just occurred in the country or in the town where the school is located (example: a football match, the first rain of the year, etc.). This stage can also be regarded as a transition between the previous lesson, e.g., math or social studies and the English lesson (3 mins.).

The second stage is the teaching of the new vocabulary items contained in the text to be studied. The teaching of these vocabulary items is carried out according to the principle of the 3 "P"s: presentation, practice and performance (5-10 mins.).

The third stage is the teaching of the new structure contained in the text. It is based on the same principle of the 3 "P"s. At this level of practice a lot of drilling occurs which covers transformation drills, substitution drills, question and answer drills, etc.

The fourth stage is the reading of the text first aloud by the teacher, and then silently by the students.
The fifth stage, exploitation, consists in asking comprehension questions to the pupils about the content of the text. During that phase the teachers are expected to make the students' reactivate the new vocabulary items and the new structure he has just taught (10-20 mins.).

The sixth phase consists of letting the students copy in their notebooks the illustrative sentences written on the blackboard during the lesson (5 min.).

This Standard Oral Lesson is noticeably highly influenced by the audio-lingual method. Owing to the opening of our educational system to new methods and techniques, other types of lessons are becoming more and more influential. Listening comprehension lessons and reading comprehension lessons are becoming more popular among the teachers. In terms of frequency, reading comprehension lessons come just after the standard oral lesson.

The new tendency in the teaching of EFL is the use of the language to communicate effectively with a native speaker. Communicative language has been the buzz word of the latest seminars and workshops. During the workshop which took place in Bouake' with the group of facilitators from the University of Massachusetts the stress was put on communicative activities. Since these communicative activities often require group work and pair work we need to teach our students some collaborative skills for these activities to be more effective. Teachers also need to be acquainted with ways to train the students for effective collaboration in class. In the next section we'll have some more insight into what the literature says about collaborative learning and reflect upon its implementation in the Ivorian large classes.
II. How to Enhance Collaborative Learning in Ivorian Large Classes

Collaborative Learning

Definition

In traditional lockstep situations the teacher is the only one to initiate learning by designing controlled activities such as questions, drills, etc. An emphasis is put on individual achievement in a competitive atmosphere. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, stresses cooperation among the students rather than competition. As David and Roger Johnson put it,

"When lessons are structured competitively, students work against each other to achieve a goal that only one or a few students can attain - they either study hard to do better than their classmates or they take it easy because they do not believe they have a chance to win." (David & Roger Johnson 1988, p. 554)

Moreover, collaborative learning makes the students feel responsible for their own learning. As Elizabeth Cohen put it, "When teachers give students a group task and allow them to make mistakes and struggle on their own, they have delegated authority." (Cohen 1988, p. 73).

The Underlying Principles of Collaboration Learning

Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson distinguish five major underlying principles of collaborative learning which are:

- social skills acquisition;
- heterogeneous grouping
- positive interdependence
distributed leadership
and group autonomy. (1984)

Let's analyze these principles and see how they can fit in the Ivorian context.

Social Skills Acquisition

As David and Roger Johnson put it, "Groups cannot function effectively if students do not have and use the needed collaborative skills. These collaborative skills have to be taught just as purposefully and precisely as academic skills." (David and Roger Johnson 1986, p.555). Ivorian students come from communities where notions like sharing and helping are part of the traditions and customs. In villages, for example, farmers help each other in rotation by working from one farm to another. In these communities these social skills are part of the tradition, but in the classroom context they have been refrained by the school system. The students have always been taught to do their own work and not to pay attention to what other students are doing and never to ask for advice from a fellow student while doing an assignment in class. They have also been taught to pay attention to nothing except what the teacher is doing and to keep quiet. (Elizabeth Cohen 1988) Classroom norms need to be changed and social skills like helping, encouraging, reaching agreement, etc. need to be reactivated.

Elizabeth Cohen proposes a series of activities that might help in the training of students for collaborative skills. One of these activities is
entitled, "Broken Circles":

The class is divided into groups of 3-6 persons. Each person is given an envelope with different pieces of the circle. The goal is for each person to put together a complete circle. In order for this goal to be reached there must be some exchange of pieces. Players are not allowed to talk or to take pieces from someone else's envelope. They may only give.

Instructions to the Participants:

Each of you will be given an envelope containing two or three pieces of a puzzle, but don't open it until I say so. The object of this game is to put these pieces together in such a way that each member of your group ends up with a complete circle. There are a few rules to make the game more fun.

1. This game must be played in complete silence. No talking.
2. You may not point or signal to other players with your hands in any way.
3. Each player must put together his or her own circle. No one else may show a player how to do it or do it for him or her.
4. This is a giving game. You may not take a piece from another player, but you may **give** your pieces, one at a time, to any other member of your group, and other group members may give pieces to you. You may not place a piece in another person's puzzle; players must compete only their own puzzles. Instead, hand the piece to the other player, or place it beside the other pieces in front of him or her.

Now, you may take the pieces out of your envelope and place them in front of you, colored side up. This is a group task, and you will
have 15-20 minutes to make your circles.

Remember, the game is not finished until each of you at your table has completed a circle. When all of you have finished, raise your hands. (If one group finishes before the others, suggest that they try to discover if there are any other ways they could put the pieces together to form different circles).

(Graves and Graves 1985 as quoted by Elizabeth Cohen 1988, p. 159)

After this exercise, Elizabeth Cohen proposes that the teacher hold a feedback session with the whole class during which he and the students discuss the rationale behind such a game. During the feedback he should ask how the students felt about the experience and what they have learned. S/he should allow them to come to conclusions without having to lecture to them on what they are supposed to learn through the experience. (1988)

Follow-up activities need to be done to reinforce the social skills.

On the other hand, Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson have categorized social skills as either task skills or maintenance skills. They posit that both types must be practiced consistently if the group is to maintain itself as a positive, effective unit. (1984)

Task Skills

According to Pat Wilson and Dee Dishon task skills focus on content. The major ones are sharing information and ideas, and checking for understanding. As far as checking for understanding, our Ivorian students need to be familiar with phrases needed to ask the speaker to clarify his
point. They need to be conversant with phrases like, "What do you mean?", "Do you mean that...", "I didn't get your point.", "It looks like...". Some body language might indicate that the listener is checking for understanding. For example, raising eyebrows, scratching the head and leaning forward. Giving ideas and keeping track of time are also helpful task skills. As Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson put it, "If none of the group members perform task skills, the group flounders and fails to meet its subject matter objective. The consistent use of these skills helps the group work effectively to create a high-quality product." (Dishon & Wilson 1984, p. 55)

Maintenance Skills

According to Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson, maintenance skills are of several types among which we can distinguish checking for agreement and encouragement. Our Ivorian students also need to encourage each other with phrases like, "We can do it." "Let's go!" or "Keep after, you are almost there.", or "Let's try it again." Body language can also be an effective method of encouragement. Leaning forward to a fellow student, smiling to him/her, nodding and making eye contact with him/her can be very supportive. Other maintenance skills such as addressing group members by name, sharing feelings, responding to ideas are also necessary for the group to achieve cohesiveness. (Dishon and Wilson 1984)

Getting the student to be conversant with social skills is the first step. The second step, according to Dishon and Wilson, is to process these skills. They recommend a series of strategies for processing the skills
after every cooperative group work. By setting up processing experiences
the teacher can allow the students to analyze and evaluate their social
skill behavior. (Dishon and Wilson 1984) In the case of the Ivorian EFL
content the teacher could hold a feedback session in which the students
could speak about the social skills they exhibited during one particular
activity, or which social skills were suitable for a given exercise: "We've
just seen that the acquisition of social skills is one of the major
principles of collaborative learning. Let's now analyze the principle of
heterogeneous grouping.

Heterogeneous Grouping

Most of the literature on collaborative learning suggests that students' grouping should be made on a heterogeneous basis. As David Johnson puts it, "...teachers should use heterogeneous groups where students of
different ethnic backgrounds, sexes, levels of ability, and social classes
will work together." (David and Roger Johnson 1986, p. 558) In the Ivorian context the students' large classes offer scope for heterogeneous grouping. However, the problem with the Ivorian student grouping lies in the management of the groups within the physical constraints of packed classrooms where the students can hardly move between the rows of benches. Nevertheless, some suggestions could be made for this grouping to be effective.

As the students are all sitting on benches in twos, pair work would be the easiest form of grouping. Although the students can't face each other over the desk, interaction is still possible if they are sitting side by side. Group work on the other hand, is the most challenging.
In the present lockstep situation, setting up groups of four students would be desirable. The first four students sitting on the first two benches in the row could compose a group and the second set of four, another group and so on.

The first problem facing the teacher is how to make the group work effectively if they are all facing the blackboard. If they have to face each other over the desk, two members of the group would have to turn sideways inward which is a bit uncomfortable because the front of the desk does not allow them to stretch out their legs to face the other two members who are sitting more comfortably. The other alternative would be to have the group stand up and face each other over the desk whenever the task does not require them to remain seated.

The second problem is to group the students on a heterogeneous basis. Before he gets to know his students quite well, I would suggest that the teacher forms the groupings as suggested earlier without having to move any student from his original seat. When he knows them better he could reshuffle the groups taking into account all the criteria of heterogeneity. Once he has made these groups, they could remain permanent for the rest of the year. Every time the students have class they enter the classroom joining their groups. The teacher could then keep in his notebook the sequential order of all the groups thus composed of four from group 1 to group 20. (If the class is composed of 80 students.) The members of each group will get to know each other better and build a sense of community.

To have heterogeneous groups the teacher must bear in mind a number of parameters which are the students' academic and societal status.
The Students' Academic Status

While making groups, teachers should make sure that students who are doing well are mixed with low-achievers. This allows low-achievers to learn from their peers. In the particular case of oral skills, poor speakers need to receive help from good speakers. Good speakers could encourage those who find speaking difficult by reporting the group's activity to the whole class.

Societal status

Apart from the academic status, the societal status needs to be taken into account as well. Elizabeth Cohen reports, "Classrooms exhibit one other kind of status that will affect the student participation in small groups. In the society at large, there are status distinctions made on the basis of social class, racial ethnic group and sex." (Cohen 1986, p. 27) The Ivorian classes, if there are no obvious status differences on tribal grounds, they do exist at the level of gender. Indeed, in most classes boys tend to outnumber girls in such a way that girls often feel intimidated when working with boys. In classrooms they tend to sit together and in most cases participate less in lessons which require oral interaction. This attitude could be attributed to the status of women in the male-dominated communities composing the Ivory Coast. The teacher must bear this in mind when composing groups. S/he must make sure that girls are assigned responsibilities within the group which might enhance their self-esteem. A girl, for example, might be designated as the group's
reporter, or recorder. After students' heterogeneous grouping, we need to reflect upon another principle of collaborative learning which is the principle of positive interdependence.

Positive Interdependence

David and Roger Johnson define positive interdependence in these terms: "the perception that one is linked with others in a way that one cannot succeed unless the others do (and vice versa) and, therefore, that their work benefits one and one's work benefits them is referred to as positive interdependence." (D. R. Johnson 1986, p. 555) Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson go further, saying that positive interdependence is the relationship between members of a cooperative group. According to them, students in a cooperative group succeed if every member of the group succeeds. They are positively interdependent because in order for everyone to be successful, they must care about whether or not all the group members are successful. (1984) Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson suggest a certain number of strategies that teacher might use to promote positive interdependence. We'll focus on these strategies that are actionable in our Ivorian context.

They suggest that the teacher limit the resources, e.g., giving fewer materials than there are group members to force them to share. For example, instead of passing out four identical work sheets per group, s/he could pass out one per group.

The other strategy is the strategy of jigsawed materials. It refers to dividing up the work on materials so that each group member does a part. No one has everything that is needed to complete the task. One example of jigsaw task would be to divide a text into four different parts. Each
member of the group makes a summary of what he has to the whole group, and the group gets together to compose a summary of the whole story.

Now let's shift gears to another principle of collaborative learning which is the principle of distributed leadership.

Distributed Leadership

When students are involved in groups each individual member needs to be assigned a definite role for the group to work effectively. These roles may vary depending on the task, but the most recurrent ones are: the summarizer who restates the major conclusions or answers at which the group has arrived (Johnson 1986, p. 558); the reporter, who reports to the whole class what the group has come up with; the recorder, who keeps a comprehensive record of the group's resolutions; and the facilitator whose task is described by Elizabeth Cohen as follows: "The function of the facilitator is limited to seeing to it that everyone participate, keeping the group on task and away from irrelevances, or making sure that the group makes clear decisions in the time the teacher has allotted." Further in her analysis, she summarizes the facilitator's role saying, "The facilitator helps the group to give everyone a chance to talk; give reasons for ideas; give different ideas; listen to each other's ideas. According to David Johnson, assigning student's roles is an effective method of teaching them collaborative skills and fostering interdependence. (1986) (Depending on activities there may also be an observer, a time keeper, a task keeper.) In the Ivorian large classroom the teacher could give each group a lapse of time to decide who should play which role in order to gain time.
The last principle we need to reflect upon is the principle of group autonomy.

Group Autonomy

Collaborative learning aims at empowering the groups to solve their problems. As Dee Dishon put it,

Cooperative learning is based upon the belief that student groups are more likely to solve their problems if they are not 'rescued' from these problems by their teacher. When students resolve their problems with a minimum of teacher input, they become autonomous and self-sufficient. (Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson 1984, p. 12)

To be more autonomous, they need to have decision-making skills. According to Elizabeth Cohen they must learn to discuss in groups and, somehow, reject, accept, and synthesize in such a way that everyone will agree. (1986)

The Teacher's Role in Collaborative Learning

In the traditional lockstep situation where all the classroom activities are highly controlled, the teacher is like an orchestra conductor who monitors the students' interaction and gives feedback. In a task-oriented activity his role changes; he stops being a direct supervisor. As Elizabeth Cohen puts it, "Group work changes a teacher's role dramatically. No longer are you a direct supervisor of students, responsible for insuring that they do their work exactly as you direct. No longer is it your responsibility to watch for every mistake and correct it on the spot." (1986) Most of the literature suggests that the teacher moves around to offer help when needed. For Elizabeth Cohen, teachers should not intervene every time a group gets stuck and answer every question coming from
individuals because s/he is around to solve all the problems. The students will not rely on themselves or on their group. (Cohen 1988) In other words, too much supervision is not desirable. David Johnson, on the other hand, suggests that the teacher offer some assistance during the task. As he puts it, "In monitoring the learning groups as they work, teachers will wish to clarify instructions, review important procedures and strategies for completing the assignment, answer questions, and teach task skills as necessary." (1984, p. 554)

Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson, on the other hand, distinguish two types of behaviors--the intervening behaviors and the interacting behaviors. As they put it, teachers with intervening behaviors break into groups (whether they are asked for help or not) to settle arguments, tell students what to do, remind, threaten, give advice and praise. These teachers believe that without teacher intervention to motivate and remind, students will not be successful. On the other hand, there are teachers who believe that students are capable of solving their problems independently; those teachers adopt interacting behavior. (1984) Pat Wilson and Dee Dishon go further, saying that the short outcome with intervening behaviors is that students return to the task, complete the work, and receive the award. The long-term outcome is that they become dependent on the teacher to convince them to keep busy and use social skills. With interacting behaviors the short outcome is that students often spend time at first settling arguments, and deciding how to work together. The long-term outcome is that they learn to work things out for themselves. They start to work quickly without relying on the teacher's reminders. They experience a sense of ownership for the success or failure as a group. (1984) All these
points of view expressed by the three authors aim at emphasizing the
teacher's role as a facilitator of the students' learning.

In the case of the Ivorian context of larger classes where the teacher
can hardly move around, David and R. Johnson state that s/he use student
observers who could gather information on the appropriateness of activities
within the group. S/he could provide them with checklists which could guide
them about what to observe. S/he could hold meetings with them to be sure
they know their tasks. After reflecting upon the teacher's role in
collaborative learning we need to speak about one of the conditions for a
successful collaborative learning, which is discipline and classroom
management.

Discipline and Classroom Management

In the lockstep situation the teacher can always exert his/her authority
by having the students engage in a single activity at the same time under
his strict control. For example, if the whole class is performing a drill,
each individual student feels compelled to follow in case the teacher
singles him out to respond. In the case of group work or pair work the
teacher can't have a close control of each individual student's behavior.
Some students, especially those at the back of the class who know that the
teacher can hardly reach them, take advantage of large numbers to mess
around to anything. Can anything be done in this situation?

Positive Environment

According to Nolasco when speaking about discipline, we tend to think of
sanctions, but we must bear in mind that sanctions occur only when
discipline has been breached. (1988) He substantiates saying, that the key
to discipline in the creation of an atmosphere which breeds motivation and
cooperation. (1988) Nolasco also believes that convention and routines are
the heart of discipline. (1988) As he put it, "Conventions and routines
are important factors in creating a productive working environment, and a
well-organized teacher is a source of confidence and security for his
students." (Nolasco 1988, p. 22) He gives a series of behaviors the
teacher must have to keep order and discipline during group work:
- The teacher should prepare the material s/he needs for a
lesson and order and arrange it for quick and easy
distribution to groups and individuals.
- S/he should train the class how to attract attention.
- S/he should have routines set for giving out and collecting
written work, work sheets, materials, etc.
- S/he should make sure that the students are engaged in
productive activity as soon as they enter the classroom.
- Particularly with large classes s/he must have a system
of numbering or marking the materials s/he issues so that
s/he knows exactly who has what, if s/he needs to collect the
material(s) again. (1988)

Speaking of discipline, Harmer also thinks the teacher's attitude and
behavior are essential to maintain order. As he puts it, "The behavior and
attitude of the teacher is perhaps the single most important factor in a
classroom, and thus, can have a major effect on discipline." (Harmer 1983,
p. 210) Some of the attitudes Harmer suggests are the same as those listed
by Nolasco but he goes further emphasizing that the teacher should
establish a code of conduct which s/he and his/her students must respect. Once the code has been established the teacher has to be consistent to it. (1983)

Developing Responsibility

According to Nolasco teachers should involve students in every aspect of classroom management in order to increase student involvement. As he put it, "Involvement is important for the maintenance of discipline and helps develop the responsibility needed to make communicative language learning a success." (1988, p. 26) According to Nolasco teachers should:

Make students responsible for developing their own working environment. This might include bringing in posters and decorating the classroom. (1988)

In the Ivorian teaching situation where there are no specialized classrooms for English lessons the students could be asked to bring some materials such as pictures or posters but the teacher should collect them at the end of the class for the next lessons.

Instructions
The teacher's instructions for communication activities must be clear for the students. As Nolasco puts it, "Poor instructions are a major source of problems in any teaching situation in that they leave the students confused and uncertain. In large classes the problem is magnified because once the students have embarked on a task it is very difficult to rectify any misunderstandings." (1988, p. 27), When the task is very complex the teacher demonstrates with one of the students or asks two or three students to demonstrate the type of behavior expected from the class
at large. The teacher should maintain eye contact with the whole class while giving instructions. (1988)

III. Classroom Interaction and Oral Proficiency

In the traditional lockstep situation, in spite of the Ivorian teacher's willingness to give more chances to the students to speak, he fails to do so because of the large numbers of students. He very often works with high achievers and low achievers lay behind. Moreover, during a question and answer session the teacher interacts with one student at a time and the rest of the class listens. By implementing group work and pair work he gives more chance to the students to speak. Elizabeth Cohen illustrates this by saying: "Cooperative tasks are an excellent tool for still one more cognitive teaching goal: the learning of language and the improvement of oral communication. This is particularly so in bilingual classrooms and for students who need to improve in oral communication active practice is essential. (Cohen 1988, p. 13) If the Ivorian students are more involved in group work and pair work this will increase their interaction among peers. As Ellis put it, "Interaction consists of the discourse jointly conducted by the learner and his interlocutors, input is, therefore the result." (Ellis 1985, p. 127) Elizabeth Cohen goes further saying:

If the instructor of a classroom where children need to increase oral proficiency in English sets up a series of tasks that stimulate children to talk to each other, using new vocabulary associated with an interesting task, the possibility for active language learning can be greatly enhanced.

The very same proposition applies to teaching foreign languages in
secondary schools and to speech classes where the instructor is trying to increase skills in oral communication. (Cohen 1978, p. 14)

In the next two sections we will discuss two approaches that both aim at improving oral skills but in different ways: the audio-lingual approach and communicative language teaching.

Audio-lingual Approach

For many years the audio-lingual approach has prevailed in the Ivory Coast under the guise of the standard oral which we already described in the first section. Through pattern drills, transformation drills, substitution drills, question and answer drills, etc., this method aims at enabling the students to use the target language communicatively. In order to do this, teachers believe that their students need to overlearn the target language, to learn to use it automatically without stopping to think. (Diane Larsen-Freeman 1986, p. 43) This method is also characterized by the memorization of dialogues introduced by the teacher. Diane Larsen and Freeman define the teacher's role as being similar to that of an orchestra leader who controls the student's language and behavior. S/he is also responsible for providing the students with a good model for imitation and students' responses are positively reinforced. (1985).

For example, with the teacher of the structures including under or on:

During the presentation stages the teacher attracts the students' attention and puts the book under the table and says, "Look, the book under the table." Then he will ask the students to repeat the model several times (Practice) and then he will ask the students, "Where is the book?" The students will answer: "The book is under the table."
As Diane and Freeman put it, "Most of the interaction is between teacher and student and is initiated by the teacher." (Diane Larsen and Freeman 1985, p. 43) Although this method focuses on oral/aural skills, after several years of its implementation in the Ivory Coast our students still don't fare well in oral proficiency. In the next section we are going to have a look at what the literature on communicative language teaching proposes to enhance the students' learning.

**Communicative Language Teaching**

As defined by Joshua Boyd, Communicative Language teaching is the approach that emphasizes the use of language to communicate as opposed to a focus on language form. (Joshua Boyd 1986, p. 3) This approach has several characteristics which we are going to analyze. The first characteristic is to focus on language function rather than structure.

- **Language Structure and Language Function**

As Littlewood put it, "A Communicative Approach opens up a wider perspective on language. In particular it makes us consider language not only in terms of its structures (grammar, vocabulary) but also in terms of communicative functions that it performs." (Littlewood 1981, p. viii) To illustrate his point he gives a series of examples too. According to him a sentence like, "why don't you shut the door?" is obviously interrogative on the structural point of view. The speaker might actually want to know why his friend does not shut the door. On the functional point of view it may be regarded as a request, a complaint or a plea. (Littlewood 1981, p. 1)

Another example could be that of a teacher who is annoyed by his students who keep messing around. He might say, "Why don't you keep
quiet?" which is a question on the structural basis but an order in its functional meaning. Littlewood goes further saying, "whereas the structure of the sentence is stable and straightforward, its communicative function is variable and depends on specific situational and social factors."

(Littlewood 1981, p. 2) A given structure may express several communicative functions. On the end a single communicative function can be expressed by several structures. Example, "close the door, please."; "Could you please close the door?" or "Excuse me, could I trouble you to close the door?" All these sentences express a request. Other authors also emphasize language function over structure. Dulay and Burt point out that much of the material that has been available in the past has focussed largely on language structure rather than content, ignoring almost completely that in normal speech the attention of all participants is on the message and not on its form. (Dulay and Burt 1975, p. 31 as quoted by Joshua Boyd 1986, p. 1) As Joshua Boyd put it, too much preoccupation with language structure creates language that is unnatural." (Joshua Boyd 1986, p. 1) For example, in question and answer drill, if the teacher is writing on the blackboard and asks his student, "what am I doing?" and they answer, "You are writing on the blackboard." This type of interaction sounds unnatural because he and his student already know what he is doing. In a communicative situation, a speaker does not ask his interlocutor about what they both already know. Apart from this emphasis in functional meaning, Communicative Language Teaching also focuses on social meaning in communication situations.
Social Meaning

The type of language we use to convey a message may differ depending on the kind of relationship we have with the listener. Littlewood gives the example of a hostess who would just say "Ready?" to her guests to tell them that dinner is ready in an informal situation (e.g., among friends) but the same hostess would say, "Ladies and gentlemen, dinner is served." in a more formal situation. Among friends we tend to be more informal in our speech (Littlewood 1981, p. 4). He goes further saying, "In general the use of informal speech not only reflects but also accelerates the development of personal relationships. A foreigner may, therefore, be hindered in forming such relationship if he is unable to adapt his speech to the increasingly familiarity and informality of a friendship." (Littlewood 1981, p. 5).

Understanding and expressing social meaning is one of the characteristics of Communicative Approach. This approach also values the use of language for a purpose.

Using Language For a Purpose

Communicative language teaching puts the emphasis on the use of language for a purpose. As Jeremy Harmen put it, when two people are engaged in talking to each other, we can be fairly sure that they are doing so for a reason. Speakers say things because they want something to happen as a result of what they say. The speaker may want to charm his listener, he may want to give more information or to express pleasure. He may decide to be rude or to flatter, to argue or to complain. In each of the cases he is interested in achieving this communicative purpose - in other words
being successful at what he wants to convey. (Jeremy Harman, 1983, p. 41)

In communicative language teaching task-based or task-oriented activities emphasize the use of language for a purpose. Nolasco made a synopsis of these task-based activities as follows:

- information gap activities where a student may have a piece of information which the other one does not have.
- opinion gap activities on some issue of concern
- affect gap activities where students exchange feelings and emotions
- reason gap activities where students justify the action they took. (Nolasco 1988, p. 3)

All these activities will be discussed in detail in the following session when dealing with their practical implementation in the Ivorian context. They all aim at the students' involvement in the learning process. They all increase interaction among students. As Penny Ur put it, "When a group is given a task to perform through verbal interaction, all speech becomes purposeful and therefore, more interesting." (Penny Ur 1981, p. 12) This brings us to shift_gears to the issue of motivation, which is one of the components of communicative language teaching.

Motivation

Communicative activities should be highly stimulating for the students to actually learn by doing. According to Penny Ur, student motivation and performance are dependent to a large extent on the interest and enjoyment
generated by the activity. (1981). A special emphasis must be put on the choice of the task. At this point Penny Ur substantiates saying, "If the task is too difficult, the group is discouraged before it begins, if it is too easy, students are quickly bored. There has to be a combination of challenge and ensured success. The task must be hard enough to demand an effort on the part of the group members, but easy enough for it to be clear that success is within the\textquoteleft grasp." (Penny-\text{Ur} 1981, p. 15)

The subject matter must also rouse the students' interest. At this level two tendencies are mentioned by Penny Ur. One school stipulates that the subject should be within the range of the students' daily experience to stimulate their interest. The other school posits that the more imaginative and exotic the subject, the more excited and stimulated the students. (1981) As far as the Ivorian students are concerned, it would be deniable to bring about topics related to their cultural background. Nonetheless other topics with an exotic tone may also broaden their horizons. It is up to the teacher to make a comprehensible balance between both tendencies.

Don Byrne, on the other hand, believes that a good source of motivation would be to find out ways demonstrating to the learners that they are making progress in the language all the time. This could be done by repeating an activity from time to time such as a game or discussion so that they can see for themselves how much language they can use. Another way to enhance motivation would be to show the learners how to make the best use of the little they know. (1976) Don Byrn goes further, saying: "Sometimes they (students) cannot express an idea because they do not have the precise language they have in mind. They need to be shown how to get
around these difficulties through paraphrase and alternative expressions."

(Byrne 1986, p. 11) After motivation, the other aspect of communicative language teaching we need to analyze is feedback.

Feedback

As Littlewood put it, "Feedback provides learners knowledge of how successful their performance has been. The concept of success is, however, not absolute, it is determined by the focus or purpose of the activity."

(Littlewood 1981, p. 90) Suppose the learner asks a question: "Where you went last night?" He may be informed by the teacher that the correct form is: "Where did you go last night?" This feedback would be structural. If, on the other hand, the utterance is left uncorrected and the interlocutor responds saying, "I went to the cinema." He would be providing communicative feedback which would show him that his utterance has been understood as intended. (1981) Littlewood once more made it clear that:

In communicative activities, the teacher will need to provide communicative feedback. Again this need not exclude structural feedback altogether. However, the teacher must be aware that excessive correction will encourage learners to shift their focus from meanings to forms. For this reason, he may often withhold structural correction or postpone it until after the activity."

(Littlewood 1981, p. 91)

As the activities go on, the teacher may go around the classroom and jot down the students' errors and at the end of the activity organize a feedback session with the whole class to correct these errors. Penny Ur points out that, "What the group has done must be displayed or related to in some way, teacher and class; assessed, criticized, admired, agreed with or even listened to with interest." (Ur 1981, p. 23) She substantiates this by saying that feedback can be organized in several different ways, by
giving the "correct" results, by getting the groups to assess their own success, by simply asking groups to read aloud, display or play back their results, etc. (1981)

We need to clarify a number of points before proposing task-based activities aiming at improving the students' oral proficiency. The speaking is not going to be taken in isolation. All the other skills (writing, reading and listening) contribute to reinforce it. Most of these activities are based on integrated skills. As Don Byrne put it:

If we are looking for sources of talk whether guided or free, it is apparent that many of these will come from reading and writing activities...Through reading the learners can also greatly expand their receptive knowledge of the language, especially in the often neglected area of vocabulary. Similarly a writing activity done collaboratively in pairs or small groups, will be accompanied by a good deal of talk - talk that is needed to get something done. (Don Byrne 1976, p. 72)

Because of the shortage of teaching materials we want to find out ways to make the most of the existing textbooks to enhance the students' oral skills. As Nolasco put it,

"Teachers of large classes often have to cope with limited resources such as shortage of suitable textbooks and often print materials, in addition to physical problems of having large numbers of students in classrooms with rows of heavy desks which are impossible to move. Many of these problems can be overcome and any classroom can be made communicative using the resources which are normally available in any country. (Nolasco 1988, p. 81)

IV. Communicative Activities Aimed at Improving Oral Proficiency

After having seen how we could prepare our students to be conversant with collaborative learning, we need to prepare some of the communicative
activities that might give them the opportunities to reactivate their collaborative skills. Because of the shortage of teaching materials we have decided to build upon what already exists. To do so we need to find out ways to make the most of our existing textbooks by building up activities that might enhance our students oral proficiency. This does not exclude the possibility for teachers to devise activities which are not only related to the textbooks. Since the series, English for French-Speaking Africa covers only the first cycle of the secondary school (from first to fourth grade), the second cycle teachers could devise activities either built upon the texts they choose to work on or from other sources. Since we want to build upon what already exists, some aspects of the existing types of lessons could serve as a springboard for more communicative activities. In the Standard Oral Lesson, for example, some manipulative drills could be turned into contextualized drills. Reading comprehension lessons and listening comprehension lessons may also offer room for communication activities.

How to Make the Most of Our Texts

The textbooks which I am going to take examples from are the three books of the series, English for French-Speaking Africa. The activities I propose are along the line of the communicative continuum. They vary from controlled to freer practice of the language. Some of the activities are adapted from some of the exercises which are proposed at the end of every lesson. Others are built around the topic of the text.

Information Gap Activity
In the beginner's book, *I want to Speak English*, at the end of the second lesson, the teacher could inspire himself with exercise no. 4, page 5 to devise an information gap activity. The students could work in pairs to fill in the class timetable. Each of the students could have a sheet on which the class timetable is reproduced in an incomplete form. Student A would have some information on his sheet which student B does not have. By asking questions to each other, they could practice the structure on Mondays, on Saturdays, etc. "A" would ask "B": What do we have on Saturdays at 9 o'clock? "B" would answer: "We have math on Saturdays. (See Student A’s sheet and Student B's sheet)

**STUDENT A’s SHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>History</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Physics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Art</td>
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<td>Physics</td>
<td>Math</td>
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<td>Geography</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT B's SHEET

Monday      Tuesday    Wednesday    Thursday    Friday    Saturday
French      French      French       Physics     Geography

History    Math

Physics

Biology

PT

Chemistry

Through the activity the students could practice the structure On Saturdays, on Tuesdays, etc.

Cued Dialogues

In the same beginners book on page 24, Lesson 12, the main theme is around Ali's bad work at school. The teacher could devise a communicative activity based around the interaction between Ali and the Headmaster. The students could work in pairs, one being Ali's father and the other the
headmaster. The interaction could be built around Ali's marks at school. Student A could be given a list containing Ali's marks and Student B would have a list of cued questions about Ali's marks. Example:

**Student A:** You are Ali's father and you want to know Ali's marks in the different subjects taught at school. Ask the headmaster about the marks using how much. For example, How much did Ali received in Math?

**Student B:** You are the headmaster; you know Ali's marks. They are bad, share them with Ali's father, saying He has 3 or 4, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student A</th>
<th>Student B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Math 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>English 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>History 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Physics 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This activity, which is a kind of cued dialogue, is adapted from Littlewood (1981, p. 14). According to Littlewood, cued dialogues are built on the basis of a series of cues. These cues specify the communicative function
to be expressed, but otherwise leave the learners to create the interaction themselves. (1982)

Using the same context, another activity could be built around Ali’s father giving orders to his son after having read his bad school report. The teacher could ask the students to work in pairs and write down some orders given by Ali’s father to his son to improve his school work using must. They might come up with sentences like:

You must work harder at school.
You must learn your lessons every day.
You must listen to your teacher more carefully.

All these examples are rather controlled. In higher grades, the teacher could devise activities which require the learner to be more creative.

Most of the textbooks in use in the Ivory Coast contain a lot of pictures which could be used to promote oral practice in a communicative way. Most of the texts in the series are always backed up by pictures which could be used for communicative purposes.

Detecting Differences

In the first and second form books some of the pictures used to support texts are nearly identical, the teacher would ask the students to work in pairs to discover their differences through oral interaction. He could ask student A, for example, to hide the picture on his right and just look at the picture on his left and student B, could hide the picture on his left and just look at the picture on your right. The students should not look at each other’s picture. The teacher should make sure that they actually hide one of the pictures. These activities would allow the beginners to
reactivate some of the structures, including such prepositions: in, on, under, behind, in front of, between, etc. They could use the expressions of place: like on the right, on the left, left-hand corner, right-hand corner, etc. These expressions could be used in descriptions. But the students would need to ask each other questions: How many mango trees are there in your picture? How many people are under the mango tree? There can also be a combination of statements and questions. For example, "I have two glasses in my picture. How many glasses do you have in your picture?" (See Appendix)

**Picture Stories**

In the fourth form books there are several picture stories that could be used for communicative activities.

Since most of these picture stories are composed of six pictures, the student could work in groups of four. The first two members of the group could work on the first three pictures and describe them and the other two could work on the last three pictures. Then, the group at large could get together to compose the whole story and the group's reporter could report to the whole class their version of the story. This activity could be done by keeping the same sequence of the pictures as they are in the book. (See Appendix)

Another way would be for the teacher to reproduce these pictures and meddle them. The group at large could discuss in order to reorder them to build a sensible story. the group's reporter could tell the whole class about their version. The three activities described are adapted from Penny Ur, 1981.
At the end of the fourth book, there are several texts intended for reading comprehension. Some of these texts could be used for effective oral communication. Dealing with the text entitled, "Driver wins N1000 on lottery" the teacher could organize the students to do a kind of role-play. He could tell them to work in pairs. One student would play Ogundare, the taxi-driver and the other would play the part of Ogundare's wife. Both discuss what they could do with the money of the lottery. Then each pair could share with the whole class what they have come up with. (Activity adapted from Nolasco 1988) (See Appendix)

Collaborative learning can be regarded as an alternative to the teaching of EFL in Ivorian large classes. Indeed, if the students acquire social and collaborative skills, they can use the skills to perform task-based activities. Through these task-based activities geared to group work or pair work, the student could learn by doing without the teacher having to always initiate their learning. Processing social skills is not the only prerequisite for effective collaborative learning. Other conditions also need to be fulfilled such as heterogeneous student grouping and the creation of a productive learning environment. Through collaborative learning, the teacher delegates authority to the students but his/her role as a facilitator of their learning remains essential.

After having given examples on ways to make the most of our textbooks we need to concentrate on other activities proposed by the literature. The first group of activities will be geared to enhancing conversational skills.
Conversational Skills

According to R. A. Wingfield, many teachers of English are surprised how incapable their pupils are of sustaining a conversation even if their proficiency in other aspects of communication are quite reasonable. (1978)

According to Wingfield the main reason for this is that during our teaching too much emphasis is put on the questions and answer type of interaction to the detriment of responding to statements. As he put it, a listener may react to a statement to agree politely or to disagree, to associate himself/herself with the statement, to express doubt, surprise, unconcern, etc. His method to teach students how to respond consists in writing a sentence on the blackboard and asking the students to respond to it to express one of the above mentioned functions. For example, if he writes He drinks too much. He would then ask his students to disagree politely and they would say: Oh, I don't think he does. Or he would ask them to express surprise. They would say, Really! The responses given by the students have been learned before through drilling. This activity which is highly controlled is the first step which aims at preparing the students to work in groups and practice. The group leader would issue a statement and ask one group member to respond. Although this activity is not very communicative it can pave the way to the cued dialogues we dealt with in the first group of activities.

Nolasco and Arthur, on the other hand, propose more communicative ways to enhance conversational skills. As they put it, "Being able to speak reasonable, correct and even fluent English is one thing. Being able to
engage in on-going, interactive, mentally satisfying conversation is another." (1987, p. 3) According to them, conversations have many functions which include the exchange of information, the creation and maintenance of social relationships such as friendship, the negotiation of status and social roles, as well as dealing on and carrying out joint actions. (1987)

The activities they propose are of three major types: controlled activities, awareness, and fluency.

Controlled Activities

According to Rob Nolasco and Lois Arthur, the use of controlled activities help students develop confidence as well as the ability to participate in and maintain simple, commonly encountered conversations. (1987) The activities we will deal with are geared to meaningful grammar practice. Speaking of these controlled activities, Nolasco and Arthur said:

As we are interested in developing conversation it is possible to concentrate our practice of grammar on forms which are commonly employed in conversation, and to make such practice meaningful by building in some element of personalization, individual investment, and information exchange into the task.

The Best Years of My Life

Level: Elementary and Above
Time: 10-15 minutes
Aim: To give students practice in the simple past forms.
Preparation: None
Procedure: 1) Ask the students to list five particularly personal...
significant dates on a piece of paper.
2) When they have done this divide them into pairs and ask them to exchange information using the following basic model which you should introduce before they start:
   A: I remember 1976. It was the year I had my accident. Do you remember it?
   B: Yes, it was the year I . . .
      /No, not really.

3) Go through a few examples with the whole class.

Acknowledgement
Mario Rinvulucr & Christine Frank, Grammar in Action. (Pergamon Press, 1983)

If Only:
Level: Fourth or fifth form in the Ivorian System
Time: 10-15 minutes
Aim: To give students practice in hypothetical would.
Preparation: Identify an area in which your students are able to list a number of complaints or recommendations.

In the case of the Ivory Coast the teacher could ask the students to list their complaints and recommendations in relation to their school life.

They could say for example:
   o I wish we could start school at eight in the morning.
   o If only they would be fewer papers.

The students could work in groups to come up with a common list for the group. And then the group would share their findings with the class.

(Adapted from Nolasco [1987]) These controlled activities are similar to the ones Littlewood calls precommunicative activities. According to Littlewood these activities aim to help the learner develop links with meaning that will later enable him to use this language for communicative purposes. (1981),
Awareness Activities

According to Lois Arthur and Nolasco, students need to become aware of what native speakers do in conversation if they are themselves to achieve conversational competence in the target language. (1987). To achieve this goal both authors point out that teachers should devise activities that promote:

- the ability to "sound English" by drawing attention to critical elements which can usefully be imitated, e.g. weak forms;
- development of the ability to interpret what is being said, and so facilitate interaction in the target language;
- a feeling for what is appropriate in conversation, and the effect it is having on the listener, in order to minimize problems in interaction;
- awareness of strategies used to further conversation so that there may be consciously adopted if desired;
- awareness of the target culture.

(Nolasco & Arthur 1987, p. 54)

The first awareness activity we selected is entitled by Nolasco, as Encouraging noises.

**Encouraging noises**

**Level:** Elementary and above  
**Time:** 15-20 minutes  
**Aim:** To make students sensitive to expressions which encourage the other speaker to continue.

**Preparation:** Select an audio tape that contains examples of this type of expression. Make photocopies of the following task sheet for the class. Add other items or distractors if necessary.

**Task Sheet:** Listen to the extract of people talking. Make a tick (√)
next to each of the expressions in the list whenever you hear one of the speakers using it.

Really? _______ Does He? _______
Is that right? _______ Is it? _______
That's nice. _______ Yes. _______
How interesting. _______ I see. _______
Uh huh. _______ Mmmmmm. _______

These expressions are often used to encourage the other speaker to say more. Is this true of the speakers you have been listening to? Listen again and check your observations with a partner and with your teacher.

Procedure: 1. Introduce the task so that the students get some idea of what they are looking for.
   2. Give out a copy of the task sheet to each student.
   3. Play the tape two or three times before focusing on the specific expressions in context.

Remarks: It is easy to find examples of such expressions in "Have You Heard?" . . by Mary Underwood, (1979).

In our context of large classes and shortage of materials the task-sheet could be reproduced on stencil and then printed. The students could work on the task sheet individually and then in pairs.

The second awareness task is "Keep Talking".

Keep Talking

Level: Elementary and above
Time: 10-15 minutes
Aim: To make students sensitive to the way in which fillers can contribute to an impression of fluency.

Preparation: Select a suitable audio tape and make copies of the following task sheet for the class.

Task Sheet: Listen to the extract. Somebody is talking about something that has happened to them. Which of the following expressions does the speaker
use in order to gain time to think of the next bit of the story, but also to keep talking, so that the listener knows that the speaker has not yet finished speaking:

Er. erm . . . __________ Anyways . . . __________
Well, . . . __________ So you see, . . __________
So, . . . __________ You know . . . __________
And then . . __________ Know what I mean? __________

Which one does the speaker use most often? Compare your observations with a partner and then with your teacher.

Procedure: 1. Introduce the task and give out a copy of the task sheet to each student.

2. Play the tape two or three times, and if necessary, focus on the inappropriate use of certain fillers, for example, "you know".

Remarks: Any native speaker who is asked to tell a story or anecdote will produce a share of examples similar to those in the list. Another rich source is What a Story!, by Mary Underwood (1976).

Other awareness activities are proposed by Nolasco and Lois Arthur (1987). They cover areas such as encouragement strategies, repetition strategies, body language, etc.

The third set of activities are Fluency Activities.

Fluency Activities

According to Nolasco and Arthur, in the traditional lockstep teaching it is the teacher who initiates language exchanges and the students' task is to respond to the teacher, and the teacher judges whether or not his performance is acceptable. In fluency activities, however, the burden is placed on the student. It is the student who initiates what he wants to
say within the framework or set of guidelines. In fluency activities feedback can be delayed because the teacher is expected to keep a low profile in order to allow the students to become involved in using the language beyond the level of individual isolated sentences. (1987).

Emotional Match

Level: Elementary and above
Time: 20-25 minutes
Aim: To get students to talk about fears.

Preparation: Make photocopies of the following task sheet for your class.

Task Sheet: Answer the following question by putting a tick (✓) in the appropriate box:

- Are you afraid of insects? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you afraid of the dark? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you afraid of death? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you afraid of flying? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you afraid of strange dogs? Yes ___ No ___
- Are you afraid of ghosts? Yes ___ No ___
- Do you become very nervous when you take exams? Yes ___ No ___

Join a group of five or six students and compare your answers to the questions. Is there anything you are all afraid of? Is there anything nobody is afraid of? Find out why people are afraid and help them if you can.

Procedure: 1. Tell the students that they are going to do a quiz to see what they are afraid of.
2. Give the task sheet and allow them about five minutes to complete the task on their own. Elementary students may need help with the vocabulary, and visuals, may help.

3. Set up the group work and give the students about ten minutes to discuss their answers. Make sure they try to make helpful suggestions.

4. Get feedback from each of the groups.

Exchange

Level: Elementary and above
Time: From 20 minutes upwards
Aim: To encourage students to find out about each other by asking questions.

Preparation: None

Procedure: 1. Ask your students to take a large sheet of paper and write down the following:

   a. three dishes
      - your favorite dish;
      - a dish you hate;
      - the most unusual dish you have ever tried.
   b. three books
      - the first book you can remember reading;
      - the name of the last book you read;
      - the name of a book you will always remember.
   c. three places
      - your favorite holiday place;
      - a place you really want to visit;
      - a place you want to forget.
   d. three hobbies
      - something you enjoy doing;
      - a hobby you want to start doing;
      - a hobby you would never want to start.

2. When they have done this, ask each student to find a partner he or she does not know well and exchange sheets. They should ask each other questions about any of the information that is of interest to them. Suggest a few questions such as these if necessary:
- Why do you like...?
- What is ...?
- Tell me about...

They need to go through the whole sheet.

3. After about five minutes ask the students to change partners.

4. End the session by asking the students if they have found out anything interesting about the others in the group.

**Remarks:** The technique can of course be adapted to any material, but it should be used sparingly. Once or twice a year is enough.

The first set of activities we dealt with were geared to promoting conversational skills. The second set of activities are **problem-solving activities**.

**Problem-solving Activities**

According to Littlewood, in problem-solving activities learners must not only share information, they must also discuss or evaluate this information in order to solve a problem. (1981). Comparing these activities with more controlled ones, Littlewood said:

- The range of communicative functions that occurs is further widened. In particular, learners will now be involved in going beyond surface facts, in order to analyze, explain and evaluate them.

- This further increases the unpredictability of the interaction. More and more frequently, learners will need to explore their repertoire in order to express ideas for which they have not been specifically prepared.

- There is more scope for disagreement and negation. Learners, therefore, have to manage the interaction more skillfully at the interpersonal level. For example, by learning ways of interrupting or disagreeing without offense. (Littlewood 1986, p. 33)

Littlewood proposes a series of activities among which the jigsaw text.
Jigsaw Text

A printed story may be cut into paragraphs or sections. Each learner within the group (or group within the class) must summarize one section and perhaps, answer questions put by the others. The whole group or class must then reconstruct the story through discussion.

As Littlewood puts it, there are two levels of language involved: the language of the original text (which can be directly controlled by the teacher) and the less predictable language needed for discussion (1981).

Reaching a Consensus

Learners are asked to imagine that they are going on a three-day camping trip in the mountains. Each person can carry only 25 pounds in weight. Groups must decide what they will take from the list below and be prepared to justify their decisions if they are later challenged by other group members.

LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 lb. sleeping bag</td>
<td>6 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. pillow</td>
<td>1 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 oz. swimming suit</td>
<td>8 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 oz. toothpaste</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. flashlight</td>
<td>1 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 oz. plate, fork, knife, spoon</td>
<td>12 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 oz. towel</td>
<td>6 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 lb. water container (full)</td>
<td>6 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 lb. 3-day supply of food</td>
<td>3 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 lb. fishing rod</td>
<td>3 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 lb. pack</td>
<td>3 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 oz. small book to record what you see</td>
<td>6 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 oz. soap</td>
<td>4 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. pot to cook in</td>
<td>1 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 lb. rain jacket</td>
<td>1 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 oz. insect repellent</td>
<td>12 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 lb. extra pair of shoes</td>
<td>3 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 lb. camera</td>
<td>4 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 lb. extra set of clothing</td>
<td>2 lb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 oz. matches</td>
<td>1 oz.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16 ounces = 1 pound (lb.); oz = ounce; lb = pound
1 lb = 0.454 kg (Littlewood 1981)

This activity can be regarded as an effective way for EFL students to be more conversant with the American and British system of weight measures.
Read and Think

Littlewood also suggests that the multiple choice questions in reading comprehension be discussed in groups to find out the most appropriate answer.

Yinka woke up. He felt very sleepy. "Where am I?" he thought. "This bed isn't mine." He turned his head slowly and saw the long rows of beds in the morning light. He could hear the snoring of a dozen other people, and the little noises outside of people waking up and going to the well. "Where am I?" and then he remembered.

He and Olumide had run out of school and gone to the old man's garden. For months they had been stealing from that garden. The old man was so slow that he could only throw stones at them. He couldn't run after them. That day Yinka decided to climb a mango-tree, and shake its branches so hard that they could collect as many mangoes as they could carry.

But the old man and his son were waiting for them. Olumide ran off like lightning but Yinka saw he was about to be caught. He jumped out of the tree, hit his shoulder against a branch, slipped and fell heavily on his left leg.

"Thief!" shouted the old man as he rushed at him. "Talk now, thief. I've caught you today." He held up his hand but he didn't hit Yinka, for the boy was lying on the ground unconscious. And when they got
him to hospital, they found his leg was broken.

As the sun came through the shutters of the hospital ward, Yinka thought sadly of his silly adventure, and he wondered how long he would have to stay in this awful hospital.

**Multiple choice questions**

Yinka was awakened by  
- the morning light
- the noises made by people outside
- the pain in his leg
- the hospital nurse

Yinka decided to climb up the mango tree  
- to pick more mangoes
- in order not to be seen by the old man
- to select the biggest mangoes
- to see how far he could climb

The discussion involved in trying to find out the right answers could enhance more interaction among the students. Penny Ur also proposes other problem-solving and discussion activities which could promote oral proficiency.

**Combining Elements into a Story**

The group is given three or more incongruous elements and asked to make up a story or coherent passage of prose which included them. EX: paper, afraid, foot, slaw, seventy-five, lion, telephone, happily, green, dance, milk, actor, grandfather, eye, snake, move, go away. Usually, words are used, but sets of cut-out magazine pictures may serve well or better. The
advantage of pictures is that they can include far more detail and action than simple words. Their disadvantage is that they cannot depict abstracts. (Adapted from Penny Ur, 1981)

In the Ivorian context the teacher could involve the students in the collection of pictures from the local newspaper or magazines such as "Fraternite' Martin" or "Ivoire Dimanche". Another activity is entitled:

What Will You Need?

The group is told it is facing some sort of fairly elaborate operation and has to make a list of the equipment needed and/or jobs to be done. These operations could range from making a cake to preparing for a hiking trip. If the group is asked to prepare a list of what they will need for a sea picnic, they could copy on the blackboard what they have come up with and share with the other groups.

The last two activities we've just seen are among those Penny Ur calls brainstorming activities. As she puts it,

Brainstorming is the technique whereby members of the group let loose a hail of possible solutions or suggestions, in random order as they occur to them; it can be followed by the processing of this material into an order and shape which will constitute the eventual answer(s) to the original problem (organizing). (1981, p. 5)

Neville Grant, on the other hand, proposes another problem-solving activity that might also be feasible in the Ivorian context.

Each student receives two hand-outs -- one, a plan of a flat; the other, with various items of furniture drawn on it to the scale. The students cut out the pieces of furniture, and decide in pairs where they can place them.
This practice language like:

- Let's put the chest of drawers next to the bed.
- No, if we do that, there won't be room for the wardrobe.

Later, different students could explain their solutions. (Adapted from Neville Grant, 1987) After having proposed a series of activities geared to conversational skills, discussion skills and problem-solving skills, we need to address another technique which also aims at enhancing oral practice, i.e. role-play.

**Role-Play**

G. P. Porter Ladousse defines role-play in these terms: "When students assume a "role", they play a part (either their own or somebody else's) in a specific situation. "Play" means that the role is taken on in a safe environment in which students are as inventive and playful as possible." (1987, p. 5) According to Littlewood, through role-play:

- Learners are asked to imagine themselves in a situation which could occur outside the classroom. This could be anything from a simple occurrence like meeting a friend in the street, to a much more complex event such as a series of business negotiations.

- They are asked to adopt a specific role in this situation. In some cases, they may simply have to act as themselves. In others, they may have to adopt a simulated identity.

- They are asked to behave as if the situation really existed, in accordance with their roles. (1981)

Penny Ur, on the other hand, says:

Role play exercises are usually based on real life situations; hence, the speech they require is close to genuine discourse, and provides useful practice in the kinds of language the learners may eventually need to use in similar situations outside the classroom. (1981, p.2)

According to Landousse, role-play is an effective technique for
increasing classroom interaction because of the following factors:

- A wide variety of experience can be brought into the classroom. Through role-play we can train our students in speaking skills in any situations.
- Role-play helps many shy students by providing them with a mask. The students are liberated by role-play as they no longer feel that their own personality is implicated.
- Through role-play peer learning is encouraged and the responsibility for the learning process is shared between teacher and students. (1987)

Ladousse goes further suggesting points to remember when setting up a role-play. According to him, the teacher should begin with pair work rather than group work. Pair work makes self-conscious students feel more comfortable with the task.

The teacher should keep the activity short until the students are used to it.

S/He should not devise a role play that is too difficult or too emotionally loaded until his/her students are used to this activity.

S/He should always have a follow-up activity up his/her sleeve for the group that finish the role-play before the others.

S/He should set a strict time limit and make every attempt to stick to it. (1987)

Ladousse also suggests that the teacher use role cards where the instructions to the participants are clearly stated.
Example

Meeting a friend:

Role Card A: You are walking down the street. You meet a friend. You ask how the person is and suggest having a cup of coffee.

Role Card B: You meet a friend in the street, you ask how that person is and agree to have a cup of coffee.

Examples of role-play

Story role-plays

Students role-play the characters in a story they have just read.

Level: Elementary upwards
Time: 20-30 minutes
Aim: To use ideas from fiction to broaden the scope of the role-play.
Language: This will depend on the scene and the story, but can be predicted by the teacher.

Organization: Pairs, or small groups, according to the number of characters in the story.

Preparation: Either you or your students decide on a story. This may be a short story, a fairy story, an extract from a novel with dramatic content, or simply a textbook story. Once a decision has been made, you will need copies of it for the class.

Warm-Up: Ask the students to discuss the characters who will appear in the role play. What are their qualities and faults? How do they behave? etc.

Procedure: 1. Divide the class into pairs, or small groups, depending on the number of characters in the story.

2. Distribute the story to all the students and ask them to choose the character they want to play.
3. When they have studied the character for a few minutes, ask them to turn over their story sheets, and improvise the scene.

Remarks: This type of role play activity is one of the most common in textbooks. However, it is one of the most difficult to use with students who are not used to the technique of role play, because there is no specific reason for interacting. Teachers may find it easier to start with information role plays, or decision-making role plays in which a more structured task is offered to the students. The following are situations you might like to use: *(Ladoussse, 1983)*

**To a pen-friend**

Role Card A: You are meeting an Australian pen-friend to whom you have been writing for several years. This is the first time you have ever met and you are feeling rather nervous.

Role Card B: You have flown to London from Australia to meet the pen-friend you have been writing to for several years. You have never met him or her before and you feel a little apprehensive about the meeting.

**A hotel lobby**

Role Card A: You are in the lobby of a hotel abroad after a busy day trying to find clients for your company's product. You want a relaxing evening. You do not want to talk to any one.

Role Card B: You are in a hotel lobby and think you recognize the person who has just come in. You try to get into conversation with him or her to find out where you have met before. *(Gillian-Peter Ladoussse, 1987)*

Littlewood proposes other examples of role-plays.

**Example 1:**

Two learners play the roles of a prospective guest and a hotel and the hotel manager (s). Student A: You arrive at a small hotel one evening. In the foyer, you meet the manager(ess) and:
- ask if there is a room vacant
- ask the price, including breakfast
- say how many nights you would like to stay
- say what time you would like to have breakfast.

Student B: You are the manager(ess) of a small hotel that prides itself on its friendly, homely atmosphere. You have a single and a double room vacant for tonight. The prices are £8.50 for the single room; £15.00 for the double room. Breakfast is £1.50 extra per person. (1981)

Games

Guessing Games

According to Friederike Kliffel the basic rule of guessing games is as follows: one person knows something that another one wants to know. How this is done is determined by an additional set of rules. †1984 He goes further saying that the thing to be guessed differs greatly from game to game. It can be something one player is thinking of, an object seen only by one person, a word, an activity, etc. (1984) Penny Ur, on the other hand, says guessing is one of the simplest and most well-known brainstorming activities that exist and is very easily transformed into a group discussion game. (1981). As the person guessing has a real urge to find out something, guessing games are true communicative activities. They are generally liked by students of all ages because they combine language practice with fun and excitement (Kliffel 1984).

Example

What's in the box?
Aims: Skills speaking

Language: Questions explaining the use of an object without knowing its name.

Level: Intermediate

Time: 10-30 minutes

Procedure: Each student work with a partner. One student writes down the name of an object on a piece of paper and hides it. The other student has to guess by asking the first student questions about its color, its function, or its appearance. When the other student is quite sure his partner has guessed the object correctly, he tells him the name and it is the second student's turn to hide a name of an object and have the other guess. (Adapted from Kliffel 1984)

Example: Actions

In the simplest version the known mimes something, which may be as straightforward as reading a newspaper, or as complicated as carrying out repairs on a car. Then the guesser has to say what he is doing. This activity can be carried in pairs.

Another variation would be to take a picture and give a hint as to the subject performing the action (a boy or a dog, etc.) and let the others guess.

What is My Country?

In this guessing game a student picks up a card which has the name of a
country and then his partner has to attempt to discover the country by asking a series of questions. (Martin Bygate 1987)

According to Don Byrne, guessing games can be very effective for classroom practice. They can be equally effective for pair work, too. He goes further to suggest that after having done a guessing game with the class, the teacher should ask students to go on practicing it in pairs. In this way he can be reasonably sure that they will not make a lot of mistakes. (1987)

Other Communicative Games

Describe and Draw

One student has a picture which the other cannot see. The second student has to draw an identical picture (in context, but not style) by listening to his partner’s instructions and/or asking questions.

Stage 1: Students are told that they are going to work in pairs.

Stage 2: Students in each pair are given the letters A and B.

Stage 3: Each student A is given a picture which s/he is told not to show to student B until the end of the game.

Stage 4: Students are told that B must draw the same picture as A: A should give instructions and B should ask questions where necessary.
Stage 5: When B thinks that s/he has completed the picture s/he should compare his/her work of art with the original to see how successful the activity was. (Harmen 1983)

In this section we've tried to cover a whole range of communicative activities from information-gap activities and problem-solving activities to role-play and games. We don't pretend to have covered all types of activities that might enhance our students' oral proficiency. The main criterion of selection of these activities is their feasibility in the Ivorian context of large classes.
CONCLUSION

We need to take into account several parameters if we want to improve our students' oral performance. We must create learning conditions in which the students should learn how to communicate effectively in the foreign language. To achieve this goal we must enhance peer interaction aimed at using the language for a purpose by designing task-based group work and pair work.

However, we must not take for granted that our students will indulge in pair work and group work without any initial preparation. They need to be carefully trained in collaborative skills. To be able to train our students for effective collaborative learning we need to bear in mind some of its major principles, i.e. social skills acquisition, heterogeneous grouping, positive interdependence, distributed leadership and group autonomy. Once the students have been trained to cooperate effectively, they can tackle "task-oriented" activities.

Owing to the shortage of materials which characterize our students' learning conditions we felt the need to explore ways in which we could use the existing textbooks to design these activities. Indeed, our first cycle books contain topics, texts, and pictures that might cater for more communicative activities geared to the improvement of the students' oral performance. The first set of task-based activities is related to how to make the most of our text books. The second set of activities ranges from conversation skills activities to problem-solving activities, role-play and games. We felt the need to emphasize the teaching of conversational skills to our students because we realized that they are more conversant with a
question-and-answer type of interaction but not with responding to statements.

The use of group work and pair work might create some problems of discipline. To curtail this problem a certain number of conditions need to be fulfilled, i.e., the creation of an atmosphere that breeds motivation and cooperation (Nolasco 1988) and the involvement of the students in every aspect of classroom management.

Collaborative learning can be regarded as an alternative to the teaching of oral skills in the Ivorian large classes for several reasons. First, it increases peer interaction and urges the students to feel more responsible for their own learning. Second, the responsibility for the learning process is shared between the teacher and the student.
4 Make some sentences; use your time-table:

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<tr>
<td>Ali</td>
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<td>has</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>at eight o'clock</td>
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<td>Art</td>
<td>etc.</td>
<td>at half past ten</td>
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<td>etc.</td>
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A Lagos driver received a cheque this afternoon for N 10,000 after winning the lottery for the month of August. Mr. Ogoundare has bought a lottery ticket every month for the last two years, but this is the first time he has won anything.

Mr. Ogoundare, who earns N 35 a month, was delighted to receive the cheque. "At last I’ve got my money," he said. When he was asked what he would do with the money, Mr. Ogoundare, who is the father of seven children, said he would first get a nice house built for himself and for the members of his family. "Now I shall be able to have my children properly educated," he said with a smile.

When he was asked if he would leave his present job, Mr. Ogoundare said he would think about that, but for the moment he would stay where he was.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


