

TITLE: PETAEL Project: New Paradigm of Developmental Learning and Fully Immersed Peer Mentoring

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary trend of education globalization in the United States is characterized by a growing population of international and cross-cultural students. Although, majority of such students are not native-English users, they are required to conform to the Westernized curriculum approach prevalent in USA, and operate within primarily English-only learning environments. Besides adding increased levels of challenge towards their overall learning process and academic performance, this also compounds several social and psychological issues. Literature reviews indicate that although many educational institutions/ educators are cognizant of these issues, and do take some measures to alleviate ESL concerns, the magnitude of increase in diverse learner population calls for significantly more efforts. This paper proposes the Peers Engaging to Augment English Learning (PETAEL) model, as a viable solution to alleviate one key concern of such learners: writing effectively using English language. It is derived from the concepts of developmental relationships, and is based on the premise that an institutionalized curriculum redesign plan, using readily available peer- mentor based resources, can provide the timely support such learners need. A critical component of developmental relationships is the interaction between mentors and mentees, through which mentees can imbibe the skills of the mentors and eventually become self-sufficient enough to become mentors themselves. PETAEL is different in what matters, because it strategizes how ESL support can become part of the core curriculum within programs, instead of being limited to implementation in English related courses or using out- of- program resources for ESL support, as is currently the trend.

CONTENT

Introduction

The core ideas behind the concept of developmental relationships have been the fulcrum of our societies for centuries, and incidents of its application are found in the histories of several cultures. For example, the ‘Gurukul’ system of education in India is based primarily on the process of close contact and uninterrupted interactions between the ‘guru’ or teacher and the ‘sisya’ or student, wherein learning is bidirectional and caring is a quintessential part of the process (Kashalkar-Karve, 2013). Fast-forwarding to contemporary times, the concept continues to be adopted across institutions and programs, with the advantages of sound research creating more pronounced and well-defined frameworks. Yet, despite these advancements, a closer examination by the author reveals that the benefits accruing through the applications of developmental relationship principles have yet to reach their full potential, particularly in the field of English Language Learning (ELL) and for English as Second Language (ESL) learners. The need for something more revolutionary in terms of using readily available resources to amplify support mechanisms for ESL learners is growing, as English continues to progress as a global means of communication, both in academic and professional contexts. The need is further compounded with the increasing number of international and ESL students within classrooms (Neeley, 2012).

Education globalization combines several approaches including online and distance learning that allows learners to overcome the constraints of geographical boundaries, which is indeed one of the greatest gifts technology has given to the field of education. Another positive outcome of education globalization is the increasing number of on-ground international students

within US. Based on the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Department's Student and Exchange Visitor Program (2015) data, more than sixty one million international students were enrolled in nearly eight thousand nine hundred U.S. schools. This is 14.18 percent more compared to January 2014 data. Besides the cultural and educational implications, this is also an economic trendsetter as the international students rake in a huge profit for the country. In 2014 alone, international students contributed 27 billion dollars to the US economy (Ortiz, Chang, and Fang, 2015). On the other side, however, this situation creates the most pressing issue of communication and language barriers and the challenges they represent for learners. Both written and spoken communication is the key to cross-cultural immersion and a catalyst to form successful developmental relationships. The importance of cross-cultural communication has continued to grow, rapidly morphing the world into a global singularity. Yet, there are still critical issues surrounding the process of cross-cultural language acquisition, particularly for written forms of communication. Perhaps the greatest impact in this regard is seen in the transfer of English writing competencies to non-native English users, given the evolving role of English as a global language (Crystal, 2003; Genc and Bada, 2010). Educators and educational institutions must look towards fresh approaches to provide meaningful support for a larger body of ESL learners to better prepare them to reap the academic, cultural and economic benefits of education globalization.

This paper uses information from literature reviews as discussed below, as well as first hand data to propose a paradigm shift in the overall approach to designing a developmental relationships framework to assist ESL learners. The paper discusses in detail a new mentoring model designed by the author, Papia Bawa. The model named Peers Engaging to Augment English Learning (PETAEL) is designed as a viable solution to assist ESL learners in getting greater command over the language using an intensive and highly peer inclusive curriculum design. PETAEL uses 'active inclusion' of existing classroom assets and offers the potential to increase exponentially the benefits of the developmental relationship approach, with particular application to English language learning. 'Active inclusion' in this context means course curriculum designs that include activities within the course structure to support the needs of diverse students, as opposed to activities that provide support outside of the course structure, like having 'at-risk' students use writing labs etc. for writing issues.

ESL Learner Groups and Challenges

A brief overview of ESL learner groups and the specific challenges they face is essential to fully grasp the value and magnitude of need for intensely immersive peer mentoring frameworks such as PETAEL. Broadly, the ESL learner population within the United States can be divided into three large groups based on their backgrounds and heritage- relationship: *Immigration Based, Native American, and International*. Historically, the first groups of the USA's ESL population came from the Native Americans, who encountered the earlier settlers looking to this land as an escape from the oppression they were facing from the British regime (Independence Hall Association, 2003-2014). In time, the United States also became the host to several immigrating communities, prominent among them being the Spanish-speaking people who migrated to this country from different areas of the world like Mexico and Europe. The Mexican population in the United States has doubled during each decade since 1970, and they are now dispersed throughout the country (Rosenblum, Kandel, Seelke & Wasem, 2012, summary). In addition, the increasing number of international students makes the United States a rapidly growing population of 'cultural melting pots'. This situation highlights the importance

of evaluating the issues of cross-cultural communication, as the immigrants as well as Native Americans struggle to adapt to the Westernized curriculum policy that seeks to assimilate rather than accommodate such learners.

Perhaps the greatest challenge faced by ESL learners is their placement within ill-structured domains of academic expectations of the dominant culture. Multilingual students present diverse approaches to reading, writing, and critical thinking, often based on the patterns of their home languages and cultures, which may be different from those with which English speaking faculty and students are familiar (Krampetz, 2005). Another critical factor is the cultural unawareness of the faculty who are rapidly being thrown into a situation that they were not historically prepared to face. Historically, the globalization of the field of education is a relatively new occurrence, but it has been increasing exponentially year after year. This has given birth to a situation wherein most faculty and instructors have had little to no time to increase their own cultural awareness to the extent required by the cultural rigors of this evolving situation. Due to education globalization, this issue is becoming increasingly pronounced, as more and more foreign students seek to enroll themselves in courses offered by the United States and Europe, attracted by the perceived value that credits and degrees from such courses/institutions may provide for them. In the majority of the cases, such learners enroll in courses led by faculty who may have little to no exposure to the international community. Despite having the best intentions, the lack of cross-cultural interaction also creates a lack of empathy for one another on part of both students and faculty alike (Ruggs and Habel, 2012; Gelb, 2012).

The findings of Jones's (2008) study indicates a critical flaw in the American educational system where certain assumptions carried by faculty and administrators can lead to blind spots, both in the way research on the broader subject of cross-cultural learning is conducted, as well as the way in which American college curriculum across disciplines are designed. Jones (2008) points out that the 'industrial model of education' is still at the center of curriculum designing in American educational institutions, which does not take into cognizance the expanding ecosystem of 21st century learning. "Globalization has led to the creation of an international educational standard based on these Western models, but these models do not seem to mesh with what students' have learned culturally" (Jones, 2008, p.37). The curriculum design process in the USA is focused more on standardization, which pays little to no attention to cultural differences within learners creating language inequalities within K-12 and college level learners. This issue is aggravated by the continued prevalence of problematic processes such as the usage of a 'drill and grill' curriculum (Nussbaum, 2002; Nagel and Guest, 2008; Wright, 2015). To make a case in point, most Native American students in the USA are required to attend schools and colleges that follow a Westernized curriculum that focus more on amalgamation, rather than recognition, of cultural differences. This situation forces such students to compromise and negotiate ways to exist within academic environments based on Western values and expectations (Garcia and Shirley, 2002; McCarty and Lee, 2014). The situation is further compounded by the attitude people have in general towards cross-cultural elements in that "variation of outlook, perspective, and manners are largely dismissed as trivial encumbrances untangled at a personal level" (Jones, 2008, p.37). Some social injustice elements could be related directly to learning English language. The challenges faced by ESL learners, both indigenous and migratory, are enormous and warrant serious attention. This paper introduces one tangible solution to these challenges, while preparing the groundwork for future application and research of this solution.

How PETAEL is Different in What Matters

The primary focus of most curricula is to include peer-to-peer activities piecemeal, specifically for the subject being taught. There is no precedence of courses utilizing totally immersive peer mentoring for the sole purpose of helping ESL students improve their writing. Given the significance of English as the primary medium of instruction, it is logical to argue that this subject demands greater intervention, and this is also substantiated by learners. In relation to a classroom project, Bawa, Song, and Zhang (2015) conducted a survey of 26 ESL background students from Purdue University to gather data about the kind of support participants believed will be most helpful for their writing challenges. Out of all the options provided, a majority of participants (69%) selected ‘group or paired activities working with native English users’. Peers can play a significant role in mitigating cross-cultural learning issues for ESL learners, since in many cases peers may be both the compendium of prior knowledge and the generator of new knowledge within a singular learning environment. *Thus, if educators could adapt a curriculum design strategy that inculcated the extensive use of peers to help mentor peers in English language skills even in non-English courses, it might lead to a significant improvement in ESL performance since learners would be receiving extensive rehearsals of the subject matter across programs, and not be limited to learning English in Liberal Arts Programs or English language courses alone.* PETAEL is different because its vision is EXTREME IMMERSION of peer to peer learning to PROMOTE ENGLISH language skills. This is different than current conventions in which peer activities generally relate to the core subject a course is teaching. PETAEL calls for *creating a parallel curriculum framework*, using the peer resource repository to create a learning environment that will help ‘English language handicapped’ students to become increasingly proficient in writing skills. For example, using the PETAEL model in a two year Associates Program of 30 credit hours of 10 courses of 3 credit hours each, ‘at-risk’ students can get exponentially more information and practice related to English writing in each course, as opposed to the conventional study plans where only one or two English language courses are available to them.

The process will also create ‘ripple and cascade effects of learning’. The wider immersion of ESL learners in the language learning process will create a cascade effect for acquisition of skills pertaining to English competencies, due to the greater levels of rehearsal and retrieval. As the ESL learners become more proficient in the language, they will mature into possible mentors for other entry level skill holders, creating a ripple effect. It is also very likely that such mentors will be more motivated to pay it forward, based on the positive outcomes of their own competencies. Literature reviews support the theoretical framework of this contention.

Vygotsky (1978) propounded the concept of Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD and defined it as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p.86). In simple terms, there are certain tasks learners can do without help, but there may be other tasks for which they will need help from teachers and/or peers. The learning levels within which learning occurs as the result of an interaction between the learner and the ‘more accomplished other’ (be it peer, teacher, parent, mentor, etc.) is referred to as ZPD. Hogan and Tudge (1999) discuss Vygotsky’s theory of Peer Learning and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) by first describing the theory’s framework as a “sociogenetic process by which children gain mastery over cultural tools and signs in the course of interacting with others in their environments” (p. 39). These peers that learners react with are usually more knowledgeable, and thus have the competence to

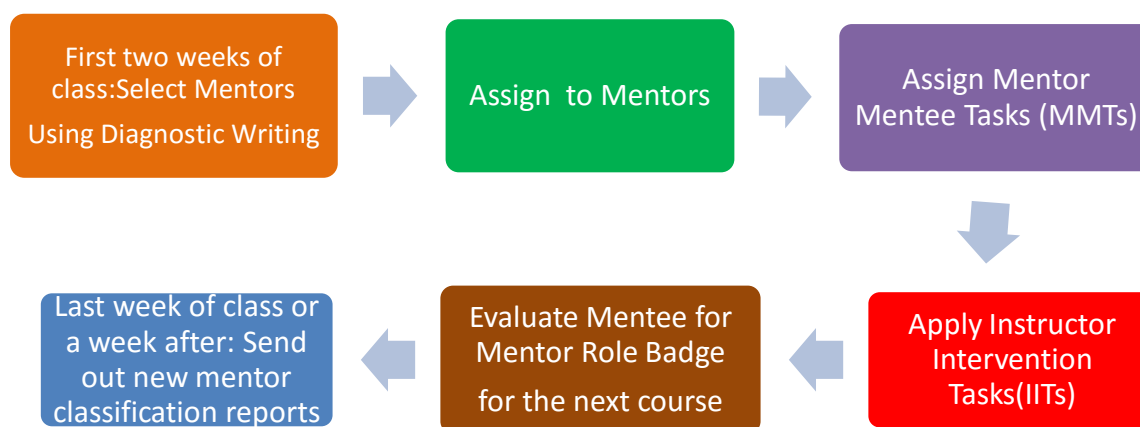
use strategies and culture specific tools that may help learners to better understand the materials. This process of peer interaction can impact a child's development as "interaction between the child and a more competent other is said to effect development if the interaction occurs within the child's zone of proximal development" (Hogan and Tudge, 1999, p.39). The argument Hogan and Tudge (1999) present is that this application of Vygotsky's theory to collaborative problem solving requires "an interweaving of different aspects of development, involving the individual and the cultural-historical as well as the interpersonal, and focusing on the processes of development themselves" (p. 40). Simply placing children in proximal zones may not be enough. They further elucidate that "the greater the extent to which partners are involved in the task, treat it as a joint endeavor, and come to a shared understanding, the more likely it seems to be that children will learn" (p 61). PETAEL is built on the principle that peer engagement can better serve learners' needs when including not only ZPD, but also expanding the scope of leaning environment beyond ZPD boundaries. This process can help peers learn, as well as combat the dangers of regression if learners are placed within uncongenial circumstances like peers who may not possess the desired level of language competency, or tasks that may not be conducive to learning in this specific context.

There are other theoretical principles relevant to PETAEL concepts that also tie in with ZPD. Specifically, these are the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and Socio Cultural Theory (SCT). In simplest terms, SCT and CHAT can be said to correlate, as both build on concepts of social interaction as means of meaningful learning interventions. In the context of synthesizing literature for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Aimin (2013) describes SCT as a theory based on the premise that "the development of human cognitive and higher mental function comes from social interactions and that through participation in social activities requiring cognitive and communicative functions, individuals are drawn into the use of these functions in ways that nurture and "scaffold" them" (p. 162) and concludes that "the knowledge of SCT can also be useful for teachers to discover and create ways to set up tasks and activities which can allow for the facilitation of language learning" (p. 167). Roth, Radford and LaCroix (2012) describe CHAT as a "cross-disciplinary framework for studying how humans purposefully transform natural and social reality, including themselves, as an ongoing culturally and historically situated, materially and socially mediated process" (n.p). The premise of PETAEL is that through intensive social interaction situated within native and cross-cultural parameters, learners can transform their natural and social reality of being 'language handicapped' individuals and become well-equipped coaches for future ESL counterparts.

Applying the PETAEL Model

Below is a diagram (designed by Papia Bawa) of the basic process of PETAEL followed by a point- by- point chart highlighting critical aspects of the process. The core idea is to insert the framework in ALL or at least in a majority of courses for an entire program. Thus, for maximum benefit to accrue this should be an institutionalized approach. Using peer to peer activities that focus on addressing English language issues within the ESL student population of the course, and providing scaffolds to ESL students in all courses will help generate better performance overall. A unique feature of this model is the scope provided for mentees to graduate as mentors for the subsequent courses, based on their overall performance with respect to writing. It is suggested that at the end of a course, instructors divide mentees into four classifications indicated by achievement badges: *Excellent, Mid-Level, Novice and Neutral*. The purpose is to identify mentees' status in terms of their readiness to become mentors, a role that

they can adopt for the next course in their program. The idea is to create a perennial cycle of training for the learners to make them self-sufficient enough to become trainers for new and ‘at-risk’ peers. Besides the enormous benefits to the mentees, the model will benefit mentors and instructors as well. Instructors will benefit from better student performance in terms of writing, as well a more engaged and motivated set of learners. Mentors will benefit greatly from their experiences as teaching makes for perfect learning. Besides, they will also benefit from opportunities to exhibit leadership, self-reflect, enhance interpersonal communication skills, and learn from cross-cultural exposures. Students’ communication styles are shaped by their culture and ethnicity (Gay, 2001, Janzen, 2008). Components of communication like “feedback mechanisms” (Gay, 2001, p. 65), have great effects on the classroom participation and academic performance of ethnically different students. Shaaban and Ghaith (2005) maintains that group work of culturally diverse students can be more positive and beneficial than homogeneous grouping. The PETAEL process is flexible and instructors can tweak the framework to suit the specific demands and unique situations of their teaching process. The hypothesis is that as long as the active and total peer immersion is kept intact, the benefits are bound to accrue.



MMT: Mentor Tasks	MMT: Mentee Tasks
Get to Know activity in Group spaces: once placed in groups students identify their roles and acknowledge them in the group discussion forum. By the end of the week they share the following in the forum: Mentors: what strengths you bring as an English writer, what strategies you want to use to provide feedback on English related issues to your Mentees	Get to Know activity in Group spaces: once placed in groups students identify their roles and acknowledge them in the group discussion forum. By the end of the week they share the following in the forum: Mentees: what specific issues do you feel you have with English? Be specific in terms (eg: I am weak in punctuations)
<i>Mentors may extend timeline for feedback based on the volume of the item being reviewed. However, such extensions should NOT be more than 4 days beyond the designated deadline as per the timetable.</i>	<i>Note: Each mentee may submit ONLY 1 item for review per session. Ideally, such drafts must be submitted NO LATER than five days before the due date to give ample time to mentors and mentees to benefit from the process. However, this is negotiable between mentor-mentee</i>
Using the timetable, mentors will submit the review of the draft within the forums in respective group spaces.	Using the timetable, mentees will submit the draft of the assignment of choice (the one they need most help with) and most imminently due in the course. Please do so within the forums in the respective group spaces.

Mentors will do follow up exercise to check if the improvements were made and to what degree/level. Mentors will send a brief note to instructors.	Mentees will also submit the revised version of one piece reviewed earlier.
Mentors and mentees will complete MMT satisfaction surveys	Mentors and mentees will complete MMT satisfaction surveys
<p>Mentors will focus on providing feedback on grammar, syntax, structure and organization ONLY. The focus should be threefold:</p> <p>For the initial document, provide close reading feedback, showing errors and how to improve/correct them. In essence, proofread the work.</p> <p>For the remaining, provide enough guidance to the mentees that helps them improve their English writing skills. Point out the areas of concern and what the issues are. Then select resources from within the course or outside and direct Mentees to them. There is a list of PETAEL resources available that you may select from.</p> <p>Follow up with mentees for 2 documents to check if and what levels of improvements were made to the final versions. Make brief notes and send them to the instructor</p> <p>Note: Mentors will need to proofread the first session's draft submitted by mentees.</p>	<p>Mentees must ensure that their draft quality indicate their best efforts to write it. Note that this is NOT a free proofreading resource, but rather a resource that will help learning through feedback and rehearsal. Thus, mentors will not proofread any work other than the first session's submission. Learn from it and use the skills to draft future pieces.</p> <p>Mentees will need to submit at least 2 documents that display improvements in English usage based on feedback received.</p> <p>Mentors must display sincerity and provide meaningful feedback that will help the Mentees to improve their English language command.</p> <p>Meaningful feedback means a combination of the following: (i) point out clearly what the areas of concern are (ii) identify the concern category like punctuation, run-on sentence, structure, etc. (iii) provide suggestions to improve or correct issues (iv) provide good resources to assist Mentees (v) be available to answer tutee questions if any.</p>
Instructor Intervention Tasks (IIT)	
Introduce students to PETAEL via announcement Conduct diagnostic activity and select mentor-mentee based on assessment using rubric by second day of week 2	Allot mentor-mentee groups, set up group spaces with appropriate forums, introduce students to respective responsibilities as per MMT and associated grading protocols. Set up a review timetable featuring when should submit assignment drafts and when mentors should submit feedback
Visit group spaces at least once during the week to ensure compliance via gentle reminders. Ideally, use any day from Thursdays through Saturdays so that students have had reasonable time to complete activities	Administer periodic MMT satisfaction survey
Set up New Mentor Classification Rubric Set up PETAEL Resource center	Assign grades
New Mentor Role Classification Badges	
Excellent	Mid-Level
Novice	Neutral

The enormous inroads the educational world has made into the global arena makes it imperative to research if a new educational approach that maximizes peer interaction and immersion will result in greater benefits in terms of student engagement, motivation and better performance outputs. For the model to be fully successful, it needs to be treated as a 'formal

plan' as stipulated by Geneva Gay (2002), and the push must come at a higher administration level. However, even if it is adopted only by some courses, the benefits will continue to accrue.

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