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Ushering in a Combined Approach to Teaching Development in Rural Haiti

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Current educational obstacles in rural Haiti has negatively impacted the needs of students in the area of teacher development. With the current state of Haiti's educational structure, this article attempts to review the current style of teaching, introduce a new approach, and suggest ways in which the two can unite based on cultural norms. The article includes a practical template for teacher training based on the proposed method.

Introduction

Since the 2010 earthquake in Haiti a staggering 80% of primary and secondary schools have been destroyed, leaving the country's educational system in shambles. According to information published by USAID in 2014, an average of 35% of Haitian youths are unable to read and possess less than four years of education. Although Haiti's constitution states that free primary education should be available to its citizens starting at the age of six; many of its individual citizens fail to enroll their children in public schools. The majority have opted to place their children into private schools that are ill equipped to provide adequate education to its students. This has resulted in children ages 0-14 years (currently 43% of the population) dropping out of school by the time they have entered their secondary level of schooling (Wolff, 2008).

Many variables contribute to rural Haiti's low enrollment and high dropout rates. These educational limitations include a lack of regulation for the opening of private schools, a fractured teacher training program for faculty members on appropriate teaching styles, and the absence of curriculum supervision by the government for schools within the private sector. Haiti's rural educational system suffers from a dearth of consistent empirical data that are needed to demonstrate a reliable method of teaching for these students. This article attempts to propose a combined approach to teaching development that may work for such a unique population.

Current State

Haiti's educational system has been criticized for its lack of support and supervision in rural public schools. This has led to a series of academic gaps, distrust within rural communities, and increased enrollment in private schools. According to Lunde (2009), Haiti has one of the most disproportional number of citizens in private schools compared to other countries. An average of 85% of children enrolled in Haiti's schools attend private schools.

The private school sector is broken up into three categories: for profit schools run by business executives, religious schools, and community non-governmental organizations. Of the three, religious schools (Catholics and Protestants) are more equipped to provide educational resources and structure to students. This is mainly due to the continual financial funding of outside sources and volunteer programs that support the structure of the school. Schools run by business executives and community NGOs seem to be a bit more unstable in terms of structure, consistent funding, and resources. These organizations are able to open schools by renting space, hiring unqualified individuals, and developing teaching resources that do not align with current educational curriculum. In general, a vast majority of those units are not prepared to provide the quality of education needed to ensure academic success within the rural areas. Since the private school sector is not consistently regulated or supervised by the ministry of education in Haiti many of these schools "pop up" and "shut down" without accountability.

A vast majority of schools that last more than two years employ unqualified teachers. Educators are placed in the classroom with little support or academic resources. Rarely evaluated or supervised, teachers have become independent governors of their classroom when dealing with special needs students, learning styles, and classroom management. Low performing

students are not routinely tested nor are they provided the necessary attention within the classroom (Dupoux, Wolman, & Estrada, 2005).

It is estimated that 79% of primary school teachers have no formal teacher training. Of those 79%, 10% are mostly located in rural areas; and have no more than a ninth grade education (Wolff, 2008). The teacher training that is provided is usually unsupervised and teachers are generally placed into classrooms without support. Due to restricted funding, there is a lack of financial enticement to encourage the desire for professional development. The average private school teacher makes US \$225 per year and does not receive incentives for training. With such a rudimentary foundation for teaching, many teachers are left to teach in an abecedarian manner that consists of strict punishments and little rewards. Students are left feeling ashamed of answering a question incorrectly, grades are displayed with students' names to demonstrate success or failure, and corporal punishment has become the focus of corrective feedback within these classrooms.

Not only is supervision and accountability an issue for poor graduation rates in Haiti, an outdated educational structure has also been a source of contention among teachers. Haiti's educational system is foundationally that of France's 19th century system. This system consists of nine years of fundamental schooling starting October and ending in June of every year. The academic rigors for students are demanding. Students are transitioned from a mostly primary instructional language of Haitian Creole to that of total French by the secondary level of education. In Haiti, both Haitian Creole and French are spoken and written, French is the official language but Haitian Creole is more commonly used in everyday speech. When students enter primary school, especially in the rural areas, they are more proficient in Haitian Creole than French. Only 47% of the population above the age of 15 report to being literate in both Haitian Creole and French (Lunde, 2009). Many teachers are not proficient themselves in both languages to instruct students from a fundamental to advanced level. Even though teachers lack this critical requirement, they must prepare students for three cycles of standardized exams during their primary and secondary term.

After passing the *diplome de fin d'etudes fondamentales*, a primary studies assessment, students then choose from classical or technical oriented high school (*lycee*) for four years (Salmi, 2000). Once completed teachers must then prepare students for the *bac* exam which qualifies students for university. Such demand to pass Haiti's high stake assessments have left many teachers to instruct in the traditional behavioristic way. Assigning a significant amount of content to remember and requesting the student to demonstrate specific answers when conditioned; this has become the standard instruction style in rural Haiti. Students are continuously surrounded by a series of practice sessions infused with rewards and punishments to motivate student learning. Rarely are they involved in critical thinking, inference generation, or collaborative strategies. With such realities in place, how can rural Haiti amend its approach to teaching when a series of obstacles in teaching development contends to curriculum outcome demands?

Haiti's National Curriculum for L'Ecole Fondamentale

Literacy can be defined as the ability to read and write. Writing provides the opportunity to expand cognitive expressions when oral skills are limited. It can be the measurement of a student's vocabulary, comprehension, and ability to process information. When looking at the Haitian educational ladder writing effectively is a strong indicator of passing high stakes government assessments. Haiti's National Curriculum is used to guide and assess a student's academic progress in both the public and private sector. Focusing in on literacy skills at the primary level (L'Ecole Fondamentale), students are guided through:

- alphabetic principle
- letter identification
- phonics,
- reading comprehension,
- vocabulary
- grammar (usage, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling)

“Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them to understand it metalinguistically and/ or process it in comprehension and/ or production so that they can internalize it” (Ellis, 2006, p.84). Traditionally grammar has been taught as a presentation of grammatical structures and then the practice of that presentation.

Culturally, a strong foundation in grammar is necessary for Haitian students. Students use fundamental principles to build on skills needed to ultimately pass *diplome de fin d'etudes fondamentales*. The grasp of the skills presented at the primary level determines progression to taking and passing the *bac* exam as well as career outcomes. Thus making the focus on grammar essential to both teachers and students within the classroom.

Behavioristic Approach

Behaviorism associates learning to the change in form or frequency to an observable performance. The performance received is followed by prescribed reinforcements designed to encourage or discourage future responses. A behavioristic approach to teaching can be constrained to the principles below (Ertmer & Newby, 1993):

1. Environment and stimuli are very important.
2. Memory and repetition is a major factor.
3. Strong emphasis on reinforcements and its impact to performance.
4. Students are reactive to conditions.
5. Learning is teacher centered.
6. Criterion reference assessments are mostly used to measure performance.

An empirical study conducted by Long (1983) suggested that instructed learners of grammar progressed more rapidly and achieved higher levels of proficiency. Finding from the

study ultimately suggested that grammar teaching was beneficial but only when it was taught in a way that mimicked the natural process of language acquisition (Long, 1988). When reflecting on Haiti's behavioristic approach to teaching, one can see that the student's knowledge or ability to fully process the information are not reviewed for proficiency. Instead the student is set within drill-like practice environments where implicit knowledge of language structure is not truly learned. For instance, students are taught to memorize and transfer information when generalizations are made. Situations or lessons that have common elements allows the student to use memorized information to respond to an instructional cue. Thus, the use of practice strengthens the student's readiness to respond when called upon (Schunk, 1991).

Within the Haitian system, this approach is well received by teachers because of its condition to outcome equation. Teachers are able to present drills to students and an expected outcome should be consistent to that of their peers. This approach provides teachers lacking training with a basic outline for instruction. There is not much room for differential instruction or critical thinking, which is ideal to a teacher lacking pedagogical foundation.

Communicative Approach

According to Kachru (1989), the goal of the communicative approach is to improve student's communicative competence, which consist of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). The communicative approach allows real world interaction within the classroom, enabling the teacher to customize the learning process for students and permitting students to interact based on their linguistic proficiency levels. Language learning becomes less about reproduction and more organic learning takes place.

The communicative approach has essential guiding principles that distinguish themselves from the behavioristic approach to teaching; as cited in Demirezen (2011) those guiding principles include, but are not limited to:

1. The emphasis of function over form.
2. Role playing and dramatization that is encouraged in different social contexts to assess student problem areas.
3. Errors that are allowed and seen as a natural outcome to the development of communication skills.
4. Prioritizing student's needs and ensuring that materials and objectives meet student's level and interest.
5. Teachers acting as facilitators, and using questions and answers that focus on dialogue instead of yes or no answers.
6. Authentic language and materials that are taken from real world context and therefore provide real world learning. Topics are also theme based.

Due to the lack of resources and funding this approach alone maybe a bit more problematic than that of the behavioral approach for Haitian teachers. Not only will it take a bit more planning effort, according to Genesse (1987) the communicative approach alone will not

yield high levels of grammatical competence. Nevertheless, we do know that the communicative approach provides students with more of a holistic and tailored style of learning.

The Combined Approach

The dilemma with teaching grammar and content area materials in this context is balance. The behavioristic approach provides the structure needed to reinforce presented materials while the communicative approach provides the student the ability to explore the knowledge obtained. Literacy development can only be expanded if these two approaches are integrated into the rural classroom. This can only be done if set principles are reviewed and practiced. According to Watts-Taff & Truscott (2000) grammar and other content areas can be meaningful when:

1. Language and thought are socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1987).
2. The integration of reading, listening, speaking, writing, and critical thinking are emphasized (Au, 1998).
3. Language is used meaningfully (Au, 1998).
4. Students are allowed to make mistakes, take risks, and experiment (Wells, 1986).
5. Modeling and scaffolding are used to direct instruction (Roehler & Cantlon, 1997).

Educators can demonstrate these principles by providing students with the opportunity to be instructed not only through teacher led lectures but through scaffolding, authentic vocabulary activities, processing of background knowledge, read aloud and associated peer discussions, all while providing opportunities to practice communication within the context of real world situations.

In an environment where teacher centered instruction is frequent and dropout rates are consistently increasing, the combined approach provides the opportunity to have students expand their thinking beyond the classroom. Teachers are able to integrate and demonstrate grammar skills in a manner that merges their current teaching style with that of their students' levels. It is believed that this approach will balance the drills and repetition with facilitated authentic learning. Both student and teacher will have the opportunity to develop critical skill scenarios that exemplify standards set by the national curriculum.

Professional Development

The presentation of this combined approach is crucial when dealing with a fractured teacher preparation system. Administrators with inexperienced teachers can provide workshops and tie an incentive to a mandatory assessment (see sample workshop in appendix). By doing this administrators will see a steady increase in student achievement and teacher engagement (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2011). This link to reward will encourage teachers to participate in this necessary training and provide rural schools with preliminary instructional accountability.

Not only will incentives provide an increase of professional development attendance, classroom materials and resources will also impact turnout. With many rural schools undersupplied of materials and curriculum extension resources, workshop providers are

encouraged to provide teachers with needed tools. Workshop items are not required to be expensive or extravagant. Handouts detailing extension activities tied to curriculum standards, notepads, grade books, bags filled with chalk, classroom manipulatives, laminated posters, lesson plan books, classroom pens, pencils and paper will assist in implementation of workshop goals. Demonstration of material use will also secure correct execution of desired approach and increase teacher use of educational theory and pedagogy.

Conclusion

Though cultural expectations of teaching can provide a significant obstacle to change within teaching style, it can happen at a smaller scale. As an individual who travels to Haiti to conduct teacher trainings in rural areas, it is imperative to find an effective solution to bridge the instructional gap that is so evident within the classrooms. While the need for change at the national level is apparent, small scale changes in teaching approaches can provide the same effect with regards to students learning outcomes. The impact of instructional shift will lead to push back from teachers in terms of curriculum outcome demands. Since the majority of teachers at the private school level are not trained they are unable to grasp how to incorporate authentic classroom activities that are not drill based. Teachers often relay the uneasiness they feel about the combined approach and its effectiveness in teaching the required standards.

When traveling to Haiti and inspecting classrooms and resources one can see the deficits in the way students are taught. When reviewing teacher's experiences, many individuals reveal that the behavioristic approach is used mainly to fulfill assessment requirements, vocabulary, and control classroom disruptions. The prevalent attitude seemed to be that teachers are the gatekeepers of knowledge and the students are the recipients. It is evident that the lack of communicative interaction within the classroom creates a fear amongst students who do not meet the norm.

The proper training and review of how the communicative approach combined with traditional behavioristic teaching can benefit student success in rural Haiti is imperative, and it will start the dialogue needed to address adjusting grammar and content area teaching philosophies. By providing literacy development training using these two approaches to teaching, educators will see an increase in success among students who are lagging. Haiti has a variety of fragmented layers within its educational systems but a current review of teaching approaches can alter the outcome of future educational attainment for students across rural regions.

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Appendix

Example of a Rural Haiti Professional Development Agenda Combined Approach to Teaching Literacy Specific Standards: Grammar

Workshop Goals

- Participants will review Haiti's National Curriculum for the primary level, focusing on literacy standards
- Participants will review their primary teaching style
- Participants will learn about the various learning styles and that of potential students
- Participants will focus on behavioristic and communicative learning approaches and how combined approaches can be integrated within the classroom
- Participants will develop a lesson plan that will align curriculum requirements and combined approaches when teaching grammar.

7:45 – 8:00 Refreshments & Casual Conversation

Participants will be asked to sit according to grade level categories
(K-2; 3-5; 6)

8:00 – 9:30 Welcome, introductions, workshop orientation

Session 1

Present goals for the workshop
Present and discuss the essential question
Introduction or review of a lesson plan

Brainstorming Activity

Objective: Participants will work their grade level group (K-2; 3-5; 6) to establish common barriers encountered within their classrooms when trying to address multi skill levels in teaching grammar. They will also share successful strategies in which they have found to work.

Materials: Questions

Flip Charts – markers - post it notes
Power Point slides for Introducing Activity
Lesson Plan Template
Suggested Lesson

9:35 - 10:35 Plugging in Haitian Curriculum Standards

Session 2

Objective: Participants will review Haiti's Educational Standards and learn how to effectively demonstrate them on their lesson plans. They will also understand the importance of making sure their objective, essential question, standards, and student needs all coincide.

Materials: Copy of Haitian Educational Standards
Power Point slides introducing curriculum alignment
Lesson Plan Template
Suggested Lesson

Application Activity

Objective: Using the lesson plan template participants will continue to work with their grade level groups to address the lesson suggestion with Haiti's standards.

Materials: Lesson plan template
Haiti Educational Standards

10:45 – 11:45 **Teaching Style**

Session 3 *Objective:* Participants will review their primary teaching style based on the mini lesson plan developed
Participants will learn about the various learning styles and that of potential students

Materials: Teaching style resource sheet
Learning style check list

Application Activity

Objective: Using the lesson plan template participants will continue to work with their grade level groups to address potential gaps within their current lesson plan.

Materials: Lesson plan template
Combine approach resource sheet

12:00 – 12:30 **Lunch** (*provided by administration*)

12:45 – 1:15 **Application**

Session 4 *Objective:* Participants will focus on behavioristic and communicative learning approaches and how combined approaches can be integrated within the classroom.

Activity: Working together groups will develop a clear lesson plan based on two standards making sure to address each component of the combined approach

Materials: Sample grammar lesson plan focusing on combined approach
Grammar based extension activity suggestion sheet

1:20 – 2:30 **Make a Plan & Use Your Resources**

Session 5 *Objective:* Participants will develop a lesson plan that will align curriculum requirements and combined approaches when teaching grammar.

Materials: Workshop resources

2:35–3:20 **Share New Lesson Plan and Discuss Potential Outcomes**

Session 7 *Objective:* Apply the workshop content, resources, and tools to classroom practice. Selected participants will share their lesson plan to the whole group.

3:25–3:30 **Wrap Up, Questions and Evaluation**

Author Note

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