INTRODUCING COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:
THE JIGSAW METHOD TO IMPROVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND FOSTER
THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS
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# Table of contents

1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

2. Theoretical framework ........................................................................................................ 3
   2.1 Research questions ......................................................................................................... 3
   2.2 Theoretical approaches to cooperative learning .......................................................... 3
   2.3 Cognitive and socio-cultural theories of development ................................................. 5
   2.4 The essential elements of cooperative learning ............................................................ 7

3. Variations in cooperative learning: Aronson’s Jigsaw classroom ....................................... 11
   3.1 Phases and objectives of the Jigsaw classroom .............................................................. 12

4. Context of the experiment .................................................................................................. 16
   4.1 School environment and participants .......................................................................... 16
   4.2 Methods and data collection ........................................................................................ 17

5. Results and analysis of data ............................................................................................... 19
   5.1 Pre-activity questionnaire: Students’ knowledge about CL and classroom dynamics .... 19
   5.2 Pre-activity questionnaire: Group work and individual responsibility ....................... 22
   5.3 Post-activity questionnaire: Jigsaw activity and individual responsibility .................. 22
   5.4 Post-activity questionnaire: Classroom dynamics ......................................................... 24

6. Discussion and limits ........................................................................................................... 25
   6.1 Further developments .................................................................................................... 26

7. Conclusion ........................................................................................................................... 28

8. Bibliography ......................................................................................................................... 30
1. Introduction

Generally, traditional instructional approaches used to focus on memorization, observation, and on the representation of theoretical knowledge rather than on the development of higher-order thinking skills and competencies. However, reform processes are underway on various levels of the Swiss educational system (Gertsch, 2001, p.1). These recent transformations in the paradigm, whose aim is to facilitate the cooperation and harmonization between different levels of education, are putting a strong emphasis on the development of transversal and transferable skills such as collaboration, effective communication, and critical thinking. Nowadays, the goal of education is to motivate students to move from lower- to higher-order thinking skills, such as information gathering, synthesis, inference, analysis, self-evaluation, as well as help learners develop social values and attitudes. These skills can be considered “21st century skills” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8) that learners should acquire over the course of their educational path. In fact, teacher training programs, as well as the different Swiss cantonal study plans1, are focusing on the development of these essential skills by adopting a competency-based approach. Thus, the educational system should provide learners with constructive learning experiences (inside and outside of the classroom), opportunities, and relevant tasks that aim to develop these so-called 21st century skills. Educators should constantly reflect on their individual practice and engage in action research to test new teaching strategies and methods.

Since the 1940s, several studies have been conducted on the impact of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning experiences. The data collected has demonstrated that experiences that require individuals to work together in a cooperative way promote greater interpersonal attraction, foster the development of higher-order thinking skills, and increase students’ classroom participation (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 72, Drakeford, 2012, p. 239). Furthermore, implementing cooperative learning in the classroom has been shown to improve positive interaction among group members, increase individual self-esteem, and foster the development of greater social skills. Even when classroom dynamics are not positive, cooperative efforts have been found to foster greater liking among members of the same group than competitive and individualistic ones. As the relationship among group members improves, so does productivity,

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1 The Piano Quadro degli Studi per Scuole di Maturità (PQS), as well as the different Piani degli studi put a strong emphasis on the competency-based approach (approccio per competenze), which fosters the development of transversal and transferable competencies and capacities.
motivation, feelings of individual responsibility, and commitment to persisting in completing tasks that require higher functioning cognitive abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 73).

The present action research aims at investigating the use of one variation of cooperative learning, namely the Jigsaw Method, to improve classroom environment, students’ attitudes towards each other, and foster the development of higher-order thinking skills. The study was conceived on the base of a series of observations carried out over the course of a two-month period, which had revealed a complex classroom environment in one of my first-year classes, and a general reticence towards class participation and engagement. These issues, as I had observed, posed obstacles to effective communication and collaboration among students, especially during group-work, and was jeopardizing effective teaching and learning practices. To find a solution to this problem, I started implementing small variations to group activities. During the first phase, I employed traditional, informal student-formed groups (where students could choose their own group members); in the second phase, I employed formal, teacher-formed groups (where I assigned students to their group based on their abilities, learning styles, and relationships). I chose to implement variations in group work during my classes to assess whether the type of group (student-vs teacher-formed) could have an impact on the students’ engagement, and whether heterogeneous, formal, teacher-formed groups, which were based on a cooperative learning, could have an impact on the students’ attitudes towards each other and foster the development of higher-order thinking skills.

The present project is a small-scale, qualitative research action carried out in a first-year class of 23 EFL students at the Scuola Cantonale di Commercio in Bellinzona, Switzerland. The participants were introduced to the Jigsaw Method for the first time, and the project was carried out during a period of four weeks. The present project has demonstrated that cooperative learning strategies can represent a solution to unsatisfactory classroom environment and promote positive interaction and collaboration among students. Moreover, the study has showed that during the “Experts” and “Home Groups 2” phases, individual responsibility had increased and that students felt more connected to their “Home” groups during the “Experts” phase. The data collected shows that introducing cooperative learning in the classroom can improve overall group dynamics and foster positive collaboration among group members. The research has also highlighted the numerous limits and difficulties that have emerged during the implementation of this project. Cooperative learning strategies will be employed in the future to deal with a variety of topics to foster the development of higher-order thinking skills which, given the limited time frame for the implementation of this project, could not be thoroughly examined.
2. Theoretical framework

In the first place, this project aims to assess students’ attitudes towards group work. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the impact of cooperative learning on the development of higher-order thinking skills and the ways in which cooperative learning can promote individual responsibility and improve classroom environment. To investigate these aims, pre- and post-activity *ad hoc* questionnaires have been employed.

2.1 Research questions

The research questions at the center of this project can be formulated as follows:

1. *What are the students’ attitudes towards group work?*
   The hypothesis is that students have generally positive attitudes towards group work. To investigate this question, a pre-activity *ad-hoc* questionnaire was employed.

2. *How does cooperative learning modify students’ perception about individual responsibility and positive-interdependence?*
   Given the characteristics of this specific teaching strategy, the hypothesis is that cooperative learning can foster individual responsibility and positive-interdependence. The aim is to investigate how students feel when they are given the opportunity to teach one another and collaborate, assuming a student-centered approach.

3. *Can cooperative learning improve classroom dynamics?*
   The hypothesis is that cooperative learning could improve students’ attitude towards each other and classroom dynamics.

2.2 Theoretical approaches to cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is defined as a pedagogical and instructional strategy in which students work together in small, heterogeneous groups to achieve a common goal. The rise of cooperative learning has its roots in the development of the theory of social interdependence. In the early 20th century, one of the co-founders of the Gestalt School of Psychology, Kurt Koffka, proposed the idea that groups were “dynamic wholes in which interdependence among members could vary” (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2013, p. 4), so that even a slight change in the state of one member of
the group could change the state of any other member of the same group. According to Koffka, the glue that binds group members and makes them positively interdependent is a set of common and shared goals. American social psychologist Morton Deutsch, who specialized and researched conflict solutions, took Koffka’s notions regarding group dynamics further and proposed a theory which became one of the most important ones in social psychology. In fact, his findings helped bring conceptual clarity regarding the true nature of group cooperation, competition, collaboration, and conflict. In fact, one of the aims of Deutsch’s The Resolution of Conflict (1973) was to investigate how to turn conflict into a productive process and prevent it from becoming a destructive force. Deutsch believed that if two parties involved in a conflictual situation were put in the condition to develop resolute strategies, all while engaging in cooperative rather than competitive efforts, they would be more likely to develop a constructive environment based on conflict resolution (Coleman, 2011, p. 12).

In A Theory of Co-operation and Competition (1949, 1962), Deutsch theorized that the way in which group members perceive that their goals are related has a strong impact on group dynamics, productivity, and group success. One of the key elements of Deutsch’s theory is that of positive and negative interdependence. In fact, thanks to his findings, he managed to conceptualize three types of social interdependence: positive interdependence (based on cooperation), negative interdependence (based on competition), and the absence of interdependence (based on individual efforts). Positive interdependence is achieved when individuals’ goals are shared and positively related, namely, when individuals perceive that they can achieve their goal if, and only if, the other members of the group also achieve their own goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2015, p. 7). Negative interdependence, or group competition, can arise when a situation is structured in a way so that everyone perceives that he or she can achieve their goals individually, all the while others, who are all competitively linked, fail to achieve theirs. Consequently, no interdependence exists when a situation is structured in a way so that there is no correlation among each individual’s attainment of goals; namely, an individual will be able to reach his or her goal without the help of others (Johnson & Johnson, 2015, p. 7). In this situation, everyone will be focused on their own success and ignore, or deem as irrelevant, the contribution of the others.

The basic underpinning of the social interdependence theory is that the type of interdependence that is constructed in a specific situation can influence how members interact with each other and heavily determine their outcomes. Therefore, if positive interdependence promotes positive interaction, negative interdependence, or the absence thereof, can result in obstruction of success.
2.3 Cognitive and socio-cultural theories of development

In the 1970s, the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and especially his theorization of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), showed that effective and durable learning takes place with and in collaboration with others. The ZPD is defined by Vygotsky as the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. Thus, the lower limit of the ZPD is the level of problem solving reached by working independently. The upper limit is the level of additional problem solving that the child is capable of, given the assistance of an able instructor (Hook, Watts, & Cockroft, 2002, p. 192).

Vygotsky puts a strong emphasis on the importance that social influence and instruction have on cognitive development, which is positively impacted through the interaction with others. The idea is that each individual can perform and accomplish a series of tasks alone; however, in collaboration with others, he or she will be able to accomplish a wider range and number of tasks. The type of task that a person can accomplish alone is an indicator of the level of cognitive development. Vygotsky believed that during the early phases of cognitive growth, children first develop lower mental functions (such as attention and associative learning) and later, through social interaction with peers and other adult figures, they develop higher mental functions such as language, problem-solving skills, and memory schemas (Doolittle, 1995, p. 1). In fact, as a young person learns to complete tasks with less help from others, his or her cognitive skills will develop. In other words, “what the child is able to do in collaboration today he will be able to do independently tomorrow.” (Vygotsky, 1934, p. 210).

Vygotsky further expanded his theory of the ZPD by examining the relationship between cognitive processes and social activities, thus developing the sociocultural theory of development. This theory suggests that effective learning takes place when learners are faced with higher functioning cognitive processes that are usually activated when they work together to find solutions to problems that go beyond their current level of cognitive development. Group cooperation and collaboration both use positive interdependence and effective face-to-face communication to ensure the development of higher-order thinking skills. These theories, the theory of the ZPD and the sociocultural theory of development, represent the base for the success of a series of cooperative learning methods. Namely, by interacting with others and then integrating new information into one’s mental structure, cognition is developed.
However, the tasks that learners are assigned can sometimes fall outside the ZPD, for example, tasks that the learner has already mastered, and can complete on his own, or tasks that the learner would not be able to accomplish even with the help of an external, more experienced figure. The focus of teaching, then, is to design tasks inside the ZPD which the learner cannot accomplish by himself but has the potential to accomplish when provided with structured guidance from external figures (Shabani, 2010, p. 238). The term “proximal”, in fact, suggests that the assistance that is provided to the learner during the development or acquisition of new information falls just slightly beyond his or her current competence. This allows the learner to rely on his or her current competencies and prior knowledge and abilities in order to build upon them. It follows that if the learner is kept in his or her ZPD, while presented with interesting and motivating tasks and provided with the necessary guidance (from peers or teachers), her or she will be able to complete the same task alone by relying on newly acquired strategies and cognitive structures. These theories, which are based on the theory of constructivism, with attention to the contribution that positive social interaction can make, rest on the idea that individuals learn by expanding their individual knowledge, by connecting and sharing it with others, to create and develop new ideas and experience that are “stacked” upon pre-existing conceptions and thus form new understandings (Brame & Biel, 2015).

Vygotsky’s theory of the ZPD represents a strong support for the use of the cooperative learning method in an instructional context such as the classroom. In fact, cooperative and collaborative methods have been widely employed within classrooms to enhance students’ collaboration in preparation for their future transition into the working environment and community in general. On the other hand, language represents the mediating force that lies underneath effective face-to-face interaction. Through language (in this case the use of a second language), and by interacting with others, students are offered the tools and skills necessary to solve problems and develop critical thinking. Through peer-interaction, students learn to provide and listen to

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2 For each age, there is set of cognitive functions that mature in relation to the new information that is acquired with experience, which modifies pre-existing structures and functions to form new ones that can be applied to new situations.

3 The notion of “scaffolding” can be viewed as an instructional method where teachers provide temporary guidance and support to learners when introducing new content through procedural steps (Cooper & Robinson, 2014, p.153). The goal is for students to be able to deal with more complex and unfamiliar tasks once the support is removed.

4 Not all tasks are suited for cooperative learning groups. This includes tasks which can be completed individually (or tasks which do not require external support), or tasks that only consider one correct answer and which can be easily accomplished individually. The ideal task for a cooperative learning activity should be designed to promote communication in small groups and take into consideration the necessity to develop group problem-solving strategies.
explanations, construct appropriate questions, utilize communication skills such as listening and giving feedback, as well as provide encouragement through positive interdependence and develop important problem-solving skills (Fawcett & Garton, 2005, p.159).

Cooperative learning is not a new idea in education. Despite the many documented benefits regarding this educational strategy, implementing it in the everyday classroom is all but an easy task. Cooperative learning can represent a challenge to many teachers (above all to novices) because it can be perceived as difficult to accomplish, as well as time and energy consuming. Implementing cooperative learning in the classroom requires a lot of preparation and organization on the teacher’s part, and although most of the work is done by the students once the activity has started, the teacher must organize the groups, prepare the necessary material (which must be tailored to students’ needs, abilities, and interests), provide a clear set of instructions and objectives, and engage in constant monitoring of individual and group efforts.

The role of the teacher becomes essential in this type of learning method, not because the teacher represents the sole source of learning, but because her or she must organize the learning experience so that the students can effectively develop the necessary skills. Moreover, teachers must constantly monitor group work as well as evaluate group and individual performance, provide positive feedback to both groups and individuals, as well as suggest improvements throughout the entire duration of the task. Finally, to implement cooperative learning effectively teachers should also understand the nature of social interdependence and the theories of cognitive development that lie at the core of this strategy, as well as be familiar with the essential elements that constitute cooperative work, namely: positive interdependence, effective face-to-face interaction, and individual accountability.

2.4 The essential elements of cooperative learning

It is required for teachers who wish to implement cooperative learning experiences in their classroom to master the essential elements of cooperative learning. First, teacher must adapt their cooperative learning intervention to their students’ needs, according to their level, their abilities, their interests, etc., to the circumstances, the school curricula, and subject areas. Secondly, teachers should also diagnose issues in their own classrooms regarding problems that some students may have in working together, and intervene to increase the effectiveness of the student learning groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, p. 92). Moreover, developing effecting group work to foster the development of skills and competencies cannot be conceived in short-term interventions, and even less if the intervention is de-contextualized, if it does not provide students with clear objectives (for
Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

each phase) and an articulated set of goals, both academic and social, or if students do not understand how to effectively work in groups with their peers. In fact, implementing cooperative learning in the classroom requires more than just putting students together in a group and expecting them to “do the work”. As Johnson & Johnson (2000) argue, “seating people together and calling them a cooperative group does not make them one” (p. 68).

The theory behind cooperative learning entails that students need to work together towards solving a difficult task which requires the effort of every member involved. Cooperative learning differs from traditional group work because it lies its strength in three basic elements that are essential for the effective development of this strategy. The three essential elements of cooperative learning, which are to be understood as the variables mediating the effectiveness of this pedagogical strategy are:

1) positive interdependence;
2) face-to-face verbal interaction;
3) individual accountability.

Positive interdependence acts as the glue-factor in cooperative learning because it accepts that every single individual effort coming from the members of each group can make a difference in the success or failure of the whole group. Each member must also accept that if one individual does not perform accordingly to the task and the pre-established objectives, the whole group will suffer. Particularly, research on the topic of positive interdependence has demonstrated that group membership is not sufficient to produce greater achievement or productivity. In fact, as stated before, traditional group work (usually student-formed and rather informal), in which positive interdependence is not valued enough, does not produce any greater impact on achievement. In fact, “when students are put together in groups but given little structure and few incentives, there are few, in any, positive effects on learning” (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011, p.15). Traditional group work, where developing problem-solving skills isn’t one of the objectives, does not produce positive interdependence. By contrast, being aware that one’s individual performance and effort can positively or negatively affect the success of the whole group can increase individual responsibility and productivity (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 21).

Therefore, it has been demonstrated that individuals achieve higher under positive goal interdependence than when they work individualistically but with the opportunity to interact with others (i.e. informal group work) (Johnson & Johnson, 2008, p. 22). This is, essentially, the key difference between traditional group work and cooperative learning. When students understand the
Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

concepts of positive interdependence and individual responsibility, they realize that their personal efforts are valid and valued, and essential to group success.

Face-to-face verbal interaction is another essential criterion for the effective implementation of cooperative learning. Communication is structured differently in cooperative classes. Because students are learning in collaboration with others, they engage in extensive verbal negotiations that require direct communication (Jacobs & Lee, 1991, p. 2). The teacher’s role at this stage is reversed: the instructor no longer holds the knowledge but becomes the mediator that facilitates effective communication among students and groups. This way, students will be able to engage in real discussion and extend, as well as build their knowledge and thinking strategies. Effective face-to-face communication and interaction among students can be achieved only once each student has understand the importance of sharing ideas with the other groups to achieve a common goal. At this stage, appropriate communication skills can be developed while students interact with each other and share resources as well as information.

Finally, individual accountability (or personal responsibility), can only exist and be effective if the size of the group is reduced to four or five students (the smaller the size of the group, the greater individual accountability will be perceived), which allows each students’ effort to be valued as a key element towards the success of all. Moreover, individual accountability is achieved only if each member of the group has at his or her disposal a different set of resources which creates an urgency for collaboration and interaction with others in the pursuit of a shared goal. Once students realize that their personal performance affects the outcome of the group, then they will feel more responsible towards completing their share of work: “failing oneself is bad, but failing others as well is worse” (Coleman, 2011, p. 55).

Relationships are essential towards effective cooperative learning experiences. Classroom dynamics can make or break the effective implementation of new learning strategies in the classroom. Promoting a healthy learning environment, in which students feel comfortable sharing their opinions and working with their peers, is essential towards the development of effective teaching-learning processes. However, students often feel “threatened” by their peers and do not understand how to work in groups unless group work is taught and promoted within classrooms, simply because not all groups are cooperative, and not all groups facilitate student learning and foster the development of healthy classroom dynamics. Moreover, teachers tend to underestimate the influence that classroom dynamics can play in the relationship among students. Relationships that are built on mutual trust and positive interdependence (between peers and teachers) are bound to work. If group work is to be effective, thus, students need to be able to work together in an environment that is socially inclusive and supportive. Implementing new learning strategies, while
preserving the heterogeneity of the classroom, can foster students’ learning of effective problem-solving skills.
3. Variations in cooperative learning: Aronson’s Jigsaw classroom

The Jigsaw Method, a variation of cooperative learning, is a student-centered pedagogical strategy, developed by Elliot Aronson in 1978, and designed out of necessity to find a solution to a highly critical situation. In 1971, public schools in Austin were desegregated based on court orders. It became clear, at the time, that desegregation was not going to be easy and could not be automatically implemented. According to Aronson’s account of the events, “prejudice in schools was increasing and the self-esteem and performance of minority kids were not improving” (Aronson, 2010). Students from different backgrounds found themselves having to work together for the first time. Aronson and his colleagues had noticed that the newly-formed classrooms were characterized by highly individualistic efforts, competitiveness, and influenced by racial stereotypes.

To remove competition, which was hindering effective education, Aronson and his colleagues created the “jigsaw technique of education” (O’Malley, Halley, Eshleman & Vijaya, 2011, p.194) which strived to create a classroom environment based on motivation, cooperation, and deprived of racial hostility.

For this socio-pedagogical experiment, Aronson gave his students a difficult task which required them to work together cooperatively to ensure the success of the whole group (for example, preparing for an upcoming test). This specific type of cooperative learning, as the name “jigsaw” suggest (from jigsaw puzzle), aims at dividing blocks of knowledge into smaller and more manageable “chunks”. Aronson divided his class into groups of five students each referred to as “Home” groups. Each student in the “Home” group was then assigned a chunk of knowledge they were supposed to master and become experts of before teaching it to the rest of the students in their groups. During the intermediate phase, referred to as “Experts” groups, students studying the same topic would meet to discuss and share their ideas, work together on the topic, and complete activities that would then allow them to teach the content of their chunk to the rest of the members of their initial group.

After the “Experts” phase, students would return to their initial “Home” groups to teach other students about they had learned about their topic of expertise. This phase is crucial because it fosters the development of the abovementioned central elements of cooperative learning, namely, face-to-face interaction and individual responsibility. This intermediate phase is what differentiates traditional, informal group work from cooperative learning groups. In fact, during this phase each student becomes responsible for the education of the rest of his or her “Home” group and is assigned a central role in the cooperative activity. Moreover, students are aware that they are working in a student-centered approach based on the active construction of knowledge.
Aronson argues that the benefits of the Jigsaw classroom are many. In the first place, this strategy allows students to learn new material in a more efficient way. Even more importantly, the Jigsaw method can foster the development of higher-order thinking skills as well as social skills such as listening, engagement, and empathy. In fact, by giving each member of the group an essential part to play in the academic activity, group members must work together as a team to accomplish a common goal; each person depends on all the others. No students can achieve his or her goal (learning the material, getting a good grade) unless everyone works together well as a team. Group goals and individual goals complement and bolster each other. This “cooperation by design” facilitates interaction among all students in the class, leading them to come to value each other as contributors to their common task (Aronson, 2002, p. 216).

Although Aronson’s intervention was designed to face a highly problematic situation, this strategy was implemented in various school and to a variety of school levels, regarding a wide range of topics to meet different learning objectives. In fact, the Jigsaw classroom is compatible with many teaching methods and styles and can produce long-term gains.

### 3.1 Phases and objectives of the Jigsaw classroom

To effectively implement the Jigsaw strategy in the classroom, the teacher needs to choose an appropriate topic that takes into consideration students’ levels, abilities, learning styles, and interests. Then, the teacher needs to set a clear and transparent set of objectives and divide the activity into phases so that each student is aware of the work that needs to be done, both individually and during the collaborative phases. Moreover, if it is the first time that students are working in cooperative learning groups, it is advisable to explain and remind students about the objectives for each phase and the cooperative expectations for each assignment. Secondly, the class needs to be divided into groups of maximum five students: the smaller the group size, the greater the positive-interdependence. In small groups students will be able to engage in effective face-to-face interaction and be able to evaluate their and their peer’s work more efficiently. Thirdly, the teacher needs to develop and assign homework and tasks which take into consideration students’ pre-existing knowledge about the topic and design activities that can be completed both individually (Phase I), as well as with the support of other group members (Phase II and Phase III).
The Jigsaw Method, as developed by Elliot Aronson, considers three key phases:

1) Phase I: Home Groups 1 – Individual learning phase;
2) Phase II: Expert Groups – Collaborative learning phase (reciprocal teaching);
3) Phase III: Home Groups 2 – Cooperative learning phase.

Since the class was quite large and heterogeneous, I decided to organize students into five subgroups: three groups of five students and two groups of four students. The groups have been chosen by the teacher considering the students’ abilities, learning styles, and relationships, that is to say, I arranged the groups so as to have students who don’t usually work together during informal group work, working together on the same chunk (see Figure 1: C and Cbis in Group 2, D and Dbis in Group 3, and D and Dbis in Group 5). During “Phase I: Home Groups I”, each group received the necessary material which covered each chunk. The objective of this phase was for students to examine the material at their disposal, talk to each other and decide which member was going to tackle which chunk of knowledge. Once each member was assigned his or her chunk, the teacher asked each group to complete a list by indicating the names of the students next to each chunk. Then, each student began working individually gathering and synthesizing the necessary information from a range of different materials regarding the topic of expertise.

During Phase II, students who dealt with the same topics were asked to organize themselves into “Experts” groups. The objective of this phase was for each student to speak to other experts of the same topic to share information and complete the missing elements, or talk about any difficulties they had encountered during the individual phase of the activity (Phase I). If, during the previous phase, students worked individually on a different task, this time around students worked together on the same task. Students were also asked to choose a spokesperson for their expert group who was responsible for completing a worksheet which was then collected by the teacher in order to verify student’s progress and investigate any difficulties that the students might have encountered in the process. In fact, on their worksheet students were asked to write down any issues they might have encountered during this specific phase of the activity.

Finally, Phase III represented the coming together of the project where students were reorganized into “Home” groups (“Phase III: Home Groups 2”) to share information with the rest of their group members. During the first part, each student had at his or her disposal five to seven minutes to talk about his or her chunk to the other groups members and share the information. The other classmates, had to complete their worksheet with the necessary information regarding the
other chunks. At the end of the Phase III, each member could complete their worksheet with all the necessary information.

The activity was organized into one lessons of 45 minutes (“Phase I”), one lesson of 45 minutes for “Phase II”, one lesson of 45 minutes which was needed to complete “Phase II”, and one lesson of 90 minutes for “Phase III”. In between “Phase I” and “Phase II”, students were assigned homework to complete at home. The homework consisted in completing their individual task so that during “Phase II” students could be prepared to share their information with the other experts. Before the beginning of the project, students were asked to complete an ad hoc questionnaire regarding their attitudes towards group work (at this stage, students had not been yet introduced to the concept of cooperative work) and their attitudes towards classroom environment. After explaining to students what cooperative learning was and giving them some background knowledge regarding the topic and the modalities of action, I told students what the didactic project was going to consist of. Moreover, students were also introduced to the concepts of cooperation, individual accountability, and positive-interdependence. The teacher focused on the importance of these aspects of cooperative learning so that students were aware of the underlying implications of the activity. Since students were not familiar with the above concepts, it was useful to ask students to explain these concepts to each other in their L1 so that everyone was aware of the importance of these aspects and I could test if anybody had some background knowledge regarding the topic. Only one student was familiar with the concept of cooperative learning and said he had used it once in middle school.
Figure 1 – The Jigsaw classroom: Phases and groups
4. Context of the experiment

The starting point of this project was the need to address an issue regarding negative classroom dynamics and overall passivity, which was hindering effective teaching and learning outcomes, through the implementation of a cooperative learning method to foster positive interdependence and collaboration among students. The first part of the project was carried out through observation, classroom discussions, and a pre-activity questionnaire to assess students’ perception and attitudes towards classroom environment and group work. This research project should be considered a pilot study, whose aim was to investigate theories of cooperative learning in the EFL classroom. It does not constitute a representative or exhaustive investigation of cooperative learning methods because the time which was dedicated to this project was not enough to collect exhaustive results. Moreover, the sample of the participants and the hours that have been dedicated to the investigation and implementation of the activity were limited. Therefore, the results presented in this project should not be regarded or considered as the norm.

4.1 School environment and participants

This action research was carried out with a group of first-year EFL students (level B1)\(^5\). Students had been previously informed regarding the nature of the project and agreed that it would represent a valid solution to the aspects and issues that they themselves had raised during a group discussion regarding classroom environment and group dynamics. A brief overview of cooperative learning had also been provided to students one week before the implementation of the project. Students had access, through the school’s Moodle SCC platform to a document regarding the phases, activities, objectives, as well as a timeline of the duration of the activities and the different materials which had been gathered by the teacher prior to the beginning of the activity. The present action research was carried out by using a qualitative approach and aimed at a first-year group of EFL students of the Scuola Cantonale di Commercio of Bellinzona, Switzerland. All students had attended English classes in the previous two years as part of their compulsory school curriculum. The students’ main language is Italian; however, they are all exposed to other languages such as

\(^5\) According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), constituted by the Council of Europe, level B1 corresponds to the ability to express oneself in a limited way in familiar situations and to deal in a general way with non-routine information.
German and French. Only one student out of 23 was familiar with the idea of cooperative learning because he had used it in one of his classes in middle school.

4.2 Methods and data collection

This study is based on an action research method. This type of research action involves the teacher seeking to find solutions to problems that have been observed in the classroom. The implication of this type of research are twofold. Firstly, the teacher becomes the investigator that seeks to find a solution to a problem that has been observed within the classroom. Secondly, the action research has its roots in concrete problems and has practical purposes. In my case, the project was born out of necessity to find a solution to a problem regarding classroom dynamics and engagement. The main objective was to improve the overall quality of the educational process by focusing on classroom dynamics and proposing an activity that would involve student working in groups towards the same goal. Action research is born from observation of classroom dynamics and response to activities, followed by a reflection on the problem and the planning of an effective activity that would seek to improve the current situation.

The sampling of the study consisted of 23 EFL students (15 females and 8 males), between the age of sixteen and eighteen, who attended their first year at the Scuola Cantonale di Commercio, in Bellinzona during the 2017-2018 academic school year. The class is very heterogeneous, comprising of students with different backgrounds, mixed abilities, learning styles, levels of proficiency and motivation, as well as interests. Most students have shown interest with respect to the English language; however, motivating them to work together cooperatively has not always produced satisfying results regarding the level of engagement and participation. In fact, when asked to work together during informal group work, students tend to work with the same partners and even in informal group work, the higher-achieving students tend to do most of the work, while the lower-achieving ones did not show development of skills or motivation. Also, there has not been any increase in participation, even following informal group work, regarding those students who usually do not participate in classroom discussion. Stimulating students to participate spontaneously in group discussions has also been a challenge throughout the academic school year. Nonetheless, the class has shown interest in experimenting with a new method of learning and agrees in taking part in the experiment.

All students took part in the experiment; however, only 22 students out of 23 completed the pre-activity questionnaire. To increase motivation and ensure the correct development of the activity, students were previously informed about the activity and provided with a clear set of
instructions and objectives. At the end of the introductory part of the experiment, students showed interest and willingness to take part in the experiment.

The activity that has been proposed was aimed at stimulating students’ interest and motivate them to work cooperatively towards achieving a common goal. The project was organized around an activity in which students had to work together to successfully plan a school trip to Dublin, while implementing knowledge about travelling abroad, which they had previously acquired through their textbook and activities assigned by the teacher throughout the year. This activity was based on the concepts described in the previous chapters regarding Vygotsky’s theories of cognitive development. Namely, students had a pre-existing set of knowledge and skills but were presented with an activity which required them to work cooperatively to solve a problem. In this scope, by choosing this type of activity, the teacher hopes to stimulate students to work together on a task that would be motivating to all student and thus, would allow them to work together at a high efficiency.

Through the survey, students could highlight the positive indicators that contribute to a good classroom environment, as well as the drawbacks that they perceived in their classroom from the beginning of the year to that point. In terms of positive indicators regarding classroom environment, students highlighted: quiet and relaxed environment, silence, discipline within the classroom, active participation and being able to express opinions freely. As far as classroom dynamics are concerned, students highlighted the importance of collaborating with others and being able to get help, mutual support, socialization among all students even during debates and classroom discussion, being able to listen to each other, and help each other, as well as sharing of information.
5. Results and analysis of data

In the following chapter, results regarding students’ attitudes towards group work, variations in group dynamics and students’ perceptions of individual responsibility, as well as their attitudes during the second and third phase of the didactic experiment will be examined. The data collected has been distributed in the following graphs. In the following graphical representations of the data collected, interesting information regarding the two phases of the Jigsaw activity have emerged. As mentioned earlier, the data was collected through pre- and post-activity questionnaires submitted to students before and after the didactic project. The questionnaires only took into consideration the student’s gender; whereas in both questionnaires students’ anonymity has been preserved.

5.1 Pre-activity questionnaire: Students’ knowledge about CL and classroom dynamics

Figure 2 takes into consideration students’ pre-existing knowledge regarding cooperative learning. In order to effectively implement cooperative learning in the classroom, students need to be aware of the essential elements that constitute this teaching-learning strategy. Moreover, students need to understand the difference between formal cooperative learning groups and informal group work. The pie chart below shows that most the students did not know the definition of cooperative learning and tend to confuse cooperative learning with informal group work.

![Figure 2 - Student’s pre-existing knowledge of CL](image)

**Q2: I know what cooperative learning is (lavoro cooperativo).**

Out of 22 students who managed to complete the pre-task questionnaire, more than 80% of the students were not sure about the definition of the term “cooperative learning”; 64% of them
answered *not entirely*, while another 18% provided a negative answer to the statement. The 4 students out of 22 who answered positively to the statement, were then asked to provide a definition of the term “cooperative learning”:

**Q2: I know what cooperative learning is (lavoro cooperativo):**

1) lavorare con altre persone per conseguire un risultato comune;
2) it means that we can work in group;
3) it means that the classroom work together to learn and understand the topics;
4) collaborate for have a good idea.

Moreover, when asked about the frequency in the use group work during other classes, 14 students out of 22 answered *almost never* to the question “How often do you use group work during other classes”; while 8 students answered *sometimes*. Regarding their attitudes towards group work in other classes, to the question “I want my teachers to use group work more often during their lessons”, 14 answered *agree*, 4 students answered *strongly agree*, 4 answered *disagree*, while 1 student strongly disagreed with the statement.

Students were then invited to answer a series of questions regarding the way they perceived classroom environment and group dynamics concerning their own class and the relationship among students. The answers that were provided to these questions revealed that students do not perceive that a collaborative environment was characteristic of their classroom. The answers that were provided seem to agree on the fact that students wish they could collaborate more with each other to create a positive learning environment. In fact, they highlighted collaboration and cooperation as the main indicators of a positive and healthy working environment. To the question **Q21** “Quali sono, secondo te, gli indicatori di un buon clima di classe, students answered as follows:

1) il fatto che tutti possano esprimere il proprio parere o la propria personalità senza il timore di essere giudicati;
2) ascoltarsi e aiutarsi;
4) partecipazione attiva da parte di tutti;
5) collaborare e rispettarsi a vicenda;
6) un clima favorevole;
7) lavoro a gruppi al fine di conoscersi meglio;
8) risultati;
9) più collaborazione e aiuto nei casi di bisogno.
Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

Figure 3 - Histogram of classroom dynamics pre-activity

Q4: I get along with all the people in my class.
Q5: I like working with everyone in my class.

To the question Q22 “Come giudichi il clima di classe che si è sviluppato fino a questo momento”, students seemed to agree on the fact that the classroom environment was not a positive one. The issues that were raised concern the following points:

1) clima teso;
2) c’è troppa distanza e poca collaborazione;
3) assenza di dialogo tra diversi compagni di classe;
4) troppa competività tra compagni, siamo tutti in disaccordo;
5) la classe non è molto unita.

Figure 3 considers students’ attitudes towards each other. As we can see, almost half of the class (red bar, Q4) says that they do not get along with all the people in their class, 2 students answered strongly disagree to the statement “I get along with all the people in my class”, while 12 students said that they agree with the statement. On the other hand, I also took into consideration the students’ attitudes towards working with each other. As demonstrated by the students’ response to Q5 (blue bar), 12 students agree with the statement, while 6 said that they do not like working with everyone in their class. The interesting point here is that students’ attitudes towards each other, in this case positive attitudes, do not necessarily mean that they like working with each other during group work.
5.2 Pre-activity questionnaire: Group work and individual responsibility

![Bar chart showing students' attitudes towards group work and individual responsibility.]

Figure 4 - Students’ attitudes towards group work and individual responsibility

Q14: When I work in groups I feel less responsible for the results than when I work alone.

5.3 Post-activity questionnaire: Jigsaw activity and individual responsibility

![Bar chart showing students' attitudes towards individual responsibility during the “Experts” part.]

Figure 5 – Students’ attitudes towards individual responsibility during the “Experts” part

Q9: I felt responsible towards my “Home group” during the “Experts” phase
The interesting information emerging from the above chart is that 64% of student say that they feel less responsible for the outcome of the result when they work in groups compared to when they work alone. As discussed earlier, group work tends to foster greater liking among group members; however, cooperative learning forces students to work together towards the achievement of a common goal rather than separate goals. Figure 5 takes into consideration student’s attitudes towards individual responsibility. In the pre-task survey (see Figure 4), it emerged that students tend to feel less responsible for the outcome of their activity when they work in informal (and not cooperative) groups, namely, when students are seated together and given an activity to complete in groups. Usually, during informal group work, each student works individually and has the possibility of interacting with the other members of his or her group. Moreover, in informal group work, students are not given a specific role or objective to fulfill during the activity. Social interaction is a characteristic of both types of group work, formal and informal; however, in formal, cooperative group work, each member has a specific role within the group and is held accountable by the others, which means that in cooperative learning groups each student is responsible for the success, or failure, of the whole. By contrast, in informal groups, group roles are not assigned and students generally work individually on completing a task which can be easily completed without the support of others.

The hypothesis was that students would feel less responsible during traditional group work, which has been confirmed by their response to Q14 in Figure 4. An interesting result that has emerged in the post-activity questionnaire is that following the implementation of the “Experts” phase, students’ attitudes towards individual responsibility had increased. As we can see in Figure 5, feelings of individual responsibility have increased during the Experts phase of the Jigsaw activity, as demonstrated by the students’ response to Q9. During the “Experts” phase (Phase II), in fact, each member of each group was responsible for gathering and sharing information with the rest of the experts before returning to the “Home” groups and helping the rest of the members completing the task. Clearly, because students were aware of the responsibility that they have towards their “Home” group members, their feelings or individual accountability have increased.
5.4 Post-activity questionnaire: Classroom dynamics

![Bar chart showing student attitudes towards classroom dynamics.](image)

**Figure 6 – Student’s attitudes towards classroom dynamics**

*Q12: The cooperative method promoted a better classroom environment*

The first research question aimed at investigating the impact of cooperative learning on classroom dynamics. As discussed above, the starting point for this research action was an unsatisfactory classroom environment which was hindering effective teaching and learning practices. As we can see from the response to *Q12* above, most the students agree on the statement that the cooperative learning method promoted a better classroom environment. 11 students answered *agree* to the statement, while 9 students answered *strongly agree*. This response is an interesting indicator of the effectiveness of cooperative learning experiences in improving classroom environment. However, this can only be applied in relation to the specific activity that students were asked to carry out. Moreover, the topic that was chosen for this activity managed to capture students’ interest and motivation. This result should not be interpreted as the norm, nor should the cooperative learning method be interpreted as a cure-all strategy which can foster a positive working environment even after the activity.
6. Discussion and limits

Cooperative learning has revealed itself a very effective and stimulating teaching strategy; however, during the development of this project several difficulties have arisen. The difficulties that arose during the preparation of the activity concern the amount of time and work that the teacher had to invest prior to the experimentation of the activity. Although one of the goals of this activity was to develop higher-order thinking skills, the experiment did not last enough to observe relevant improvements in cognitive competence or in the development of higher-order thinking skills. Moreover, it was not possible, at this stage, to measure whether the skills and competencies this activity was aiming to develop have been achieved or at least improved. However, the students managed complete the activity and each group came up with a final product, which demonstrates that they did in fact utilize problem-solving skills to deal with the activity; the capacity in which these skills have been employed, however, could not be thoroughly examined at this stage.

Another limit had to do with students’ attendance, which wasn’t always consistent during the lesson which had been allotted to the activity. This was one of the anticipated problems that I had to take into consideration before implementing the activity. To prevent this problem, I created five online forums, one for each group, using the Moodle SCC platform provided by the school. Each group had at its disposal an online forum which students (during the “Experts” phase) could use to communicate outside of class time. Unfortunately, these forums have not been exploited. One explanation could be that students used other mediums of communication during the activity (for example, their mobile phones and chat apps). However, I believe that online forums, and ICTs in general, could represent a valid support for this type of strategy. Firstly, an online forum would allow students to communicate with each other in the target language even outside of the classroom. Secondly, the online forum would allow the teacher to monitor and keep track of the progress of each group and each member (frequency and quality of group and member interaction, for example), while being able to take note of any problems or issues that might have arisen during the activity.

A third limit, which I had also anticipated, given the nature of the activity and the students’ language proficiency at this level, was the use of the L1 (in this case Italian) during group work, which was very frequent during “Phase II” and “Phase III” of the activity. Since these two phases required students to communicate and share information with each other, while trying to complete the tasks within a given amount of time, a certain degree of urgency was attributed to the communicative act, and a lot of students resorted to their L1 to share key information with other experts, during “Phase II”, and their group members, during “Phase III”. Moreover, I realized, once
the activity had been completed, that the nature of the task that students needed to complete during “Phase III” was of pedagogical nature, and not purely linguistic or communicative. Harmer argues that when one student is explaining something to another, he or she tends to use the L1 since it is a habit which will also occur without encouragement from the teacher, and therefore represents an entirely natural thing to do, especially at elementary and intermediate levels (2001, p. 131). Solutions to this problem need to be further investigated. As I have stated before, this activity requires the teacher to constantly monitor and keep track of both group and individual efforts. Obviously, monitoring group and individual efforts simultaneously was nearly impossible. One possible solution to this problem could be the presence of more than one teacher in the classroom during the development of the activity. Another solution to consider in the future is to choose appropriate tasks which students at this level would can complete in English. Nonetheless, I tried to motivate students to use the target language as much as possible throughout the whole duration of the project.

However, the pre- and post-activity *ad hoc* questionnaires and the consequent elaboration of collected data has shown interesting results regarding students’ attitudes towards individual responsibility and positive-interdependence. During the “Experts” phase, in fact, students’ attitudes towards individual responsibility had changed and increased, which seems to confirm the initial hypothesis regarding their involvement in the activity and the amount of responsibility they felt during “Phase II”. Moreover, the data shows that students’ responsibility towards their “Home” group had also increased, and this was given by the fact that each group shared a common goal and that each student had understood that individual accountability was an important aspect to keep in mind throughout the development of the activity.

**6.1 Further developments**

As mentioned earlier, the amount of classroom time that I could dedicate to this activity was not enough to observe any effective improvements in the development of higher-order thinking skills. However, the activity did seem to improve classroom environment and dynamics. Moreover, I have observed considerable improvements in class participation and engagement in the lessons that followed this specific activity. I did, in fact, observe an increment of classroom engagement and participation. I am aware that such variations could be due to external factors and not intrinsically linked to this project. However, I do believe that cooperative learning can represent a valid strategy to deal with unsatisfactory classroom environment. I would also argue that implementing cooperative learning methods in a first-year classroom could promote the students’
attitudes towards each other and foster the integration of students with mixed abilities and backgrounds. On the other hand, implementing this method in more advanced classes, such as third and fourth-year classes could further foster the development of important social and cognitive skills. Moreover, this method could be applied to other areas of languages teaching, such as literature, vocabulary, and even skills such as reading and writing.

Finally, cooperative learning can represent a valid method which can be used to vary classroom practice. Moreover, I found it very stimulating because at this age, adolescents tend to be very sociable and active, therefore, the Jigsaw Method has revealed itself very effective in increasing classroom participation and engagement among students while allowing them to work through problematic situations and tasks to develop the necessary critical thinking skills. However, cooperative learning does not represent a cure-all method. Although this project was conducted on small scale, I will continue to consider cooperative learning as a valid strategy to vary classroom practice.
7. Conclusion

The present project was born out of necessity. During my first year of teaching EFL students, I set out to find a teaching strategy to deal with classroom issues which were hindering effective teaching and learning processes. The starting point for this project was a series of teacher-observations regarding the way students worked and interacted with each other during group work. The initial gathering of information led me to the formulation of a series of hypotheses regarding effective strategies which could be employed to deal with said classroom issues. Upon further investigation and comparison of various teaching strategies and their effect on educational practices, I decided to choose and implement the cooperative learning method, which had been widely tested and researched by teachers across all school levels to attain a range of objectives.

Promoting a student-centered classroom which focuses on the active construction and elaboration of knowledge, as well as positive classroom dynamics, has always been a goal which I strived to achieve in my classes. Paying close attention to how students work, how knowledge is acquired, and how they interact with each other within the group is a must. By paying attention to what is being taught, to the information that is being conveyed, and by observing individual and group strategies, while considering various learning styles and abilities, is what constitutes, in my opinion, a good teaching practice. Since this type of strategy does not focus on “lower” cognitive skills, such as memorizing chunks of information or completing gap-filling exercises, it is often harder to accomplish and it inevitably demands more time and effort, both from a teacher’s and from a student’s perspective.

Student’s learning goals can be achieved through a variety of strategies and methods. For example, teachers may organize the classroom and the activities proposed to promote individualistic, competitive, or cooperative efforts depending on the type of objectives that have been set. Cooperative learning represents a versatile strategy which can be used for a variety of purposes. For example, it can be used to teach specific content by breaking down material into smaller chunks of knowledge and redistributing them among all members of the classroom. Cooperative learning can also be used to help students process information together. Moreover, it can be used to promote the development of social skills and to teach students to employ problem-solving strategies and methods which can be of assistance in view of academic progress (Johnson & Johnson, 2000, p. 68).

The present research action has highlighted the positive outcomes of the use of the cooperative method in the classroom both reading students’ attitudes towards groups work and individual responsibility. Moreover, interesting results have emerged regarding the improvement of
classroom dynamics. In a world which is increasingly demanding young people to be able to innovate themselves, to look for creative ways of dealing with problems, to be able to engage in effective communication, cooperation and collaboration, as critical thinking and problem-solving skills become central competencies that can separate those who are prepared from an increasingly complex environment (school and work environment) and those who are not. Implementing cooperative learning methods in the classroom can represent an effective strategy to promote the development of these skills. Asking ourselves which strategies and techniques are the most effective ones is not the right question. What teachers need to ask themselves is which specific technique can be best employed for a specific type of goal. There is no universal best teaching practice (Bransford et. al, 2000, p. 22); there is, however, a wide selection of techniques and it is our job to be able to find the ones that work among the numerous alternatives.
8. Bibliography

Volumes


**Online articles**


Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom


**Online resources regarding the activities:**


Chunks and corresponding material:


Appendices
Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

2017-2018 PEAN ING 1M

Questionnaire 1

Modalità: Anonimo

1. Sex*
   ○ Female
   ○ Male

2. I know what "cooperative learning" means (apprendimento cooperativo)*
   ○ Yes
   ○ Not entirely
   ○ No

3. If you answered "Yes" in Question 2, give a definition of Cooperative Learning using your own words.

4. I get along with all the people in my class*
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree

5. I like working with everyone in my class*
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree

6. I prefer working in groups during a difficult activity*
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree
7. I prefer working alone during a difficult activity*
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

8. When I work with other students I understand information better*
   - Strongly disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly agree

9. I understand information better when another student explains it to me*
   - Strongly Disagree
   - Disagree
   - Agree
   - Strongly Agree

10. When I work in groups I feel relaxed*
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

11. When I work in groups I feel more accepted than when I work alone*
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

12. I always make contributions when I'm working in a group*
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree

13. Working in groups is less stressful than working alone*
    - Strongly disagree
    - Disagree
    - Agree
    - Strongly agree
14. When I work in groups I feel less responsible for the results than when I work alone*
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

15. Group work makes learning new information easy*
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

16. Group work makes learning new information fun*
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

17. Group work helps me socialize more*
- Strongly agree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

18. I enjoy the material more when I work with other students*
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. How often do you work in groups during other classes?*
- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Always

20. I want my teachers to use group work more often during their lessons*
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
21. Quali sono, secondo te, gli indicatori di un buon clima di classe?*

22. Come giudichi il clima di classe che si è sviluppato fino a questo momento?*

23. Quali sono, secondo te, gli aspetti sui quali bisognerebbe lavorare al fine di creare un buon clima di classe?*
2017-2018 PEANING 1M

Questionnaire 2

Modalità: Anonimo

1. Sex*
   ○ Female
   ○ Male

2. I enjoyed working with other people during this activity*
   ○ Strongly Disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly Agree

3. The cooperative method made learning new information more fun than traditional group work*
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly agree

4. I felt connected to my "EXPERTS" group*
   ○ Strongly disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly Agree

5. I felt connected to my "HOME" group*
   ○ Strongly Disagree
   ○ Disagree
   ○ Agree
   ○ Strongly Agree

6. The cooperative method helped me socialize more*
   ○ Strongly Disagree
   ○ Disagree
Introducing Cooperative Learning in the EFL Classroom

Pervanic Anita

☐ Agree
☐ Strongly Agree

7. The cooperative method allowed me to talk to people I usually don't talk to*
  ☐ Strongly disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly agree

8. Every member in my group contributed to the success of the entire group*
  ☐ Strongly Disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly Agree

9. I felt responsible towards my "HOME" group during the "Experts" part*
  ☐ Strongly disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly agree

10. It is easier to understand information explained by another classmate than explained by the teacher*
  ☐ Strongly disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly agree

11. I would like to use the cooperative method in other classes, too.*
  ☐ Strongly Disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly Agree

12. The cooperative method promoted a better classroom environment*
  ☐ Strongly Disagree
  ☐ Disagree
  ☐ Agree
  ☐ Strongly Agree

13. I felt relaxed during the "Experts" phase of the activity*
  ☐ Strongly Disagree
14. I was able to cooperate with my "HOME" group without any problems*

- Nessuna scelta
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

15. I was able to cooperate with my "EXPERTS" group without any problems*

- Nessuna scelta
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

16. I think other students can contribute to my learning experience*

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

* = campi a compilazione obbligatoria

Invia le risposte
Annulla
Return to: Questionnaire 1
School trip to Dublin (Ireland)

June, 4th to June, 8th 2018

ROUND TRIP – TRAVEL

(_________________)

Outward journey (list every step)

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**Return trip (list every step)**

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Total:
BOARD (food, where and when to eat)

Together (Group meals)

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Total per person:

Total for one week/person
## STAY

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**Total per person:**

Rooms arrangement (number of rooms + list of students)
SIGHTSEEING

Write booking when needed.

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Total per person:
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<th>booking</th>
<th>CHF</th>
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TOTAL PER PERSON FOR ONE WEEK IN DUBLIN (all included): CHF ___________
Abstract

Anita Pervanic
SUPSI DFA
Diploma di insegnamento per le scuole di maturità - Anno accademico 2017/2018

INTRODUCING COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE EFL CLASSROOM:
THE JIGSAW METHOD TO IMPROVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND FOSTER THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS.

Traditional instructional approaches used to focus on lower-order thinking skills rather than on the development of higher-order thinking skills and competencies. Recent developments in the educational system require schools to equip young learners with new skills and competencies. The educational system should provide learners with constructive experiences that aim to develop the so-called 21st century skills. Studies conducted on the impact of cooperative learning experiences show that experiences that require individuals to work together cooperatively can foster the development of higher-order thinking skills, as opposed to competitive and individualistic experiences (Johnson & Johnson, 1990, p. 72). The present action research was implemented in an EFL classroom at the Scuola Cantonale di Commercio in Bellinzona, Switzerland and aimed at investigating the use of one type of cooperative learning method, namely the Jigsaw Method, to promote positive classroom environment, improve students’ attitudes towards each other, and foster the development of higher-order thinking skills, as well as social competencies such as effective face-to-face communication, positive interdependence, and individual accountability. Data was collected through a pre- and a post-activity ad hoc questionnaire. The results show that implementing a cooperative learning method in the classroom can improve overall group dynamics, foster positive collaboration among students, and increase individual responsibility.

Keywords: cooperative learning; cooperation; group work; EFL; skills; competencies; group dynamics; teaching strategies; teacher practice; research action.