



**Universitat de les  
Illes Balears**

## Implementing Cooperative Learning Techniques in Secondary School EFL lessons

NOM AUTOR: Luis José Suárez Sánchez

Memòria del Treball de Final de Màster

Màster Universitari de Formació del Professorat  
(Especialitat/Itinerari d'Anglès i Alemany)

de la

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Signatura de l'autor

Nom Tutor del Treball Susana Cortes Pomacondor

Signatura Tutor \_\_\_\_\_

Nom Cotutor (si escau) \_\_\_\_\_

Signatura Cotutor \_\_\_\_\_

Acceptat pel Director del Màster Universitari de \_\_\_\_\_ Signatura \_\_\_\_\_



## **Abstract**

Despite the latest advancements in a great variety of subjects during the last decades, teaching methodologies are still one step behind their counterparts. Cooperative Learning (CL) is an innovative teaching method based on Kurt Lewin's Interdependence Theory which was then extended by Morton Deutsch (1949) and adapted in the 70s and 80s by several scholars such as D. W. Johnson, Maruyama, R. Johnson, Nelson, and Skon. As many scholars propose today's society is in need of a less competitive and more cooperative type of teaching. Contemporary professional careers are more and more often in need of individuals with group work and problem-solving skills, however, these skills need to be taught from an early age and, unfortunately, they are not present in traditionally based teaching methodologies. Therefore, this paper aims to present a general view of what CL is and to propose a set of activities for a specific English as a Foreign Language class, in this case, a 1<sup>st</sup> of ESO class of a Secondary School. The activities proposed are designed as to include a variety of grouping strategies and to provide a scenario where students need to rely on each other to finish their tasks with the purpose of allowing them to feel comfortable and participative, build confidence, and to establish long lasting bonds with their classmates.

## **Keywords**

Cooperative learning; methodology; teaching; EFL

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## 1. Introduction

Cooperative learning (CL) is a teaching method in which students reach the maximum of their cognitive development through the cooperation with their peers (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Students participate in small groups, usually no more than five students, in constant collaboration and always with the teacher's guidance and support. The teacher actively participates in the formation of the groups and their performance, distributes students' roles and functions, and guides them instead of forcing them to join forces in the search of common learning objectives. According to these authors, this teaching method is very demanding for the teacher, who must clarify the objectives properly and coordinate the groups so that the outcome is satisfactory. In addition, the time allotted for the task is variable and the content can be diverse.

Based on democratic ideas, CL enhances students' abilities to dialogue, collaborate, keep an open mind, take into consideration the ideas of others, foster trust in oneself and others, and promotes the conviction that together with others the self is strengthened (Sharan & Shachar, 1988). Students also learn to find in their peers a useful tool to gradually undertake their autonomous learning, strengthening also their intrinsic motivation without leaving aside their individual responsibilities in the work of the whole group.

Cooperative learning is commonly confused with collaborative learning. Both have in common that they are social types of learning based on Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1980). In both, students interact with others to help each other, critically evaluate their own contributions and those of others in a rational and respectful way, and reach group conclusions. However, that reciprocity is not the same in both, neither from the qualitative point of view nor the teachers' intervention. The fundamental difference is the degree of freedom with which groups are constituted and operate. In this sense, collaborative learning gives more freedom to the students since the teacher proposes a topic or problem and the students decide how to approach it (Panitz, 2001). The

process is undertaken under the guidance of the teacher who intervenes only if she is consulted or if she notices a problem in the group interaction. As the previously mentioned author notes, this methodology is believed to be more advisable for higher grades, where students already have a greater degree of responsibility.

On the other hand, in cooperative learning, the teacher organizes the groups carefully, trying to build heterogeneous groups. Furthermore, as Panitz asserts, the teacher distributes students' roles, ensuring that everyone participates as much as possible. CL is therefore much more structured than collaborative learning, ensuring that every student participates more evenly in the task.

## **2. Justification**

Cooperative learning is not such an innovative idea in education. However, until very recently, its implementation has been scarce and it has only been used by few teachers for very limited purposes, such as certain projects or occasional group reports. Research conducted in the last thirty years (Johnson & Johnson, 1987; Kagan, 1992; Panitz & Panitz, 1998; Sharan & Shachar, 1988; Slavin, 1980; Webb, 1982; Zañartu, 2000) has identified that cooperative learning methods can be used effectively in all levels and to teach all kinds of content. Thus, cooperative learning is increasingly being used as the main method to organize the work within the classroom.

Personally, my placement as a teacher in practice in one of the few high schools in Mallorca in which this methodology is being applied has also been important for my decision to conduct this research. Observing how students are able to obtain knowledge by the cooperation between themselves in a relaxed atmosphere has shown me a different concept of what education should be like.

As a student, I have suffered the consequences of an educational system in which the memorization of content was the main aim while leaving aside the

development of important skills and competences which are indeed so necessary for a person's daily life and future career development.

There are many reasons why this methodology could or should be included in the mainstream of school practice. One of them is the extraordinary body of research (Adesoji & Ibraheem, 2009; Aronson & Snapp, et al.,1978; Chen & Tjosvold, 2002; Cohen & Kulik, 1982; De Vries & Slavin, 1978; Durukan, 2011; Duxbury & Tsai, 2010; Gömleksi, 2007; Özsoy & Yildiz, 2004; Panitz, 1999; Tan, Sharan, et. al., 2007; Tarim & Akdeniz, 2008) that demonstrates the advantages of using this type of learning to increase student achievement, as well as to improve their intergroup relations, the acceptance of children with academic difficulties and self-esteem, and so forth. Furthermore, as it is commented in the following pages, it has been demonstrated that students learn to think, solve difficult problems by their own means, and to integrate and apply their knowledge and skills to practical tasks.

In addition, cooperative learning works well in heterogeneous classes. Therefore, it becomes particularly necessary in multicultural classrooms and within those where students present a large diversity in their performance levels since it helps to make that diversity a resource instead of a difficulty. Schools are undoubtedly increasingly heterogeneous; thus, its use is now more important and useful than ever. In addition, cooperative learning benefits the relations between students of different ethnic groups and between special needs' students and their colleagues (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Webb, 1982), which implies another crucial reason for its implementation. Taking into account all this we are convinced of the importance of implementing cooperative work in our schools.

### **3. Objectives**

This paper aims to show some light on what CL is and to propose a set of activities which might be of use to implement within EFL lessons in Secondary School Education. As commented above, cooperative learning is believed to promote beneficial outcomes in multicultural environments as well as to be a useful tool for the insertion of special needs' students within the group and the community as a whole. Therefore, due to my placement as an assistant professor in a high school where one of the variants of this methodology is being used (project work), my intention was to follow their steps and to contribute in the spreading and implementation of this methodology.

After clarifying misconceptions and setting up the theoretical framework, we will be able to better propose a set of activities which could be implemented in a real class.

As we will comment in the following pages, lessons following CL techniques need to be really structured and demand a lot of work from the teacher. Thus, our commitment is to follow some of the most popular CL techniques and at the same time to adapt them to a real class which will be based on one of the classes where I taught during my placement. Specifically, this paper will focus on EFL lessons. In this subject, the interaction between students is very much needed, especially for the improvement of their speaking skills; therefore, the implementation of methodologies which imply cooperation and dialogue seem to be remarkably important.

## 4. Background information

### 4.1. Definition of Cooperative learning

Cooperative Learning (CL) is a learning method based on students' teamwork. It includes diverse and numerous techniques in which students work together to achieve certain common objectives. The responsibility to achieve those objectives is shared among all team members (Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

Before going deeper into the concept of CL, it may be interesting to make an allusion to another concept that has been used lately: collaborative learning. Many authors do not differentiate between CL and collaborative learning and use them as synonyms.

However, other authors do use these terms differently. Zañartu (2000) states that the basic difference between these two concepts is that in CL the teacher needs to plan and structure the task carefully, while in collaborative learning students have much more autonomy and the task needs very little structuring from the teacher. In Panitz (2001), in collaborative learning students are the ones who design their structure of interactions and maintain control over the different decisions that may have an impact in their learning, while in CL it is the teacher who designs and maintains almost completely control over the structure of interactions and the results that they must obtain. Following these authors, the difference between these two types of learning is the degree of structure of the task and the interactions between students.

Kagan (1992) asserts that CL refers to a series of instructional strategies in which the interaction student-student is required for the development of a particular theme or task as an essential part of the learning process. He also comments that CL is founded in the constructivist theory, which grants an important role to the students as actors of their own learning process.

Johnson and Johnson (1987) emphasize that CL consists on using highly structured student interaction in small groups so that students work together and make the most of their own learning. These authors define cooperation as a methodology in which students work together to achieve shared objectives and also highlight that within the cooperative activities students look for results that are beneficial for themselves and for the rest of the group members.

In the two definitions above mentioned, the authors highlight the interaction that takes place among students to achieve the intended objectives. To get closer to the concept of CL is necessary to know its differences with other forms of interaction within the classroom when approaching learning activities. Examples of such interactions are: competitive learning and individual learning.

#### 4.2. Other types of interaction

Taking into account previous research (Johnson & Johnson, 1987), in a competitive learning situation, students compete with each other to achieve the expected results. This implies that a better performance of a student or group of students entails, necessarily, that the performance of others is inferior. A student will reach the goal if, and only if, the others do not. Therefore, each student will pursue the results that, being beneficial to him, are also harmful to other colleagues with whom they are competing. As the previously mentioned authors note, the maximum reward for a student will be received when he or she shows better results than their counterparts and also when their qualification is substantially inferior.

Johnson and Johnson (1987) propose that in an individualistic learning situation the student focuses only in the accomplishment of his or her task and in the individual achievement of the expected results. Therefore, the fact that a student achieves the objectives or not does influence or depend on the achievement of the rest of their classmates. In this way, each student pursues his or her own benefit without taking into account the interest of his or her classmates. Thus,

reward is determined by the work of each person, without taking into consideration others' performance.

On the other hand, as Johnson and Johnson comment, in a cooperative learning situation the group of students need to work together because the objectives will be achieved if, and only if, each member of the team gets theirs. The team needs the knowledge and work of all of the members. In this learning situation, group achievements are also everyone else's. The reward received by the student, in cooperative learning, is equivalent to the results obtained by the group.

#### 4.3. Fundamentals of CL

After having described the fundamental differences between the objectives of the different learning activities (competitive, individual and cooperatives), the fundamental components of CL are presented in more detail.

There are five basic elements which form CL:

1. Positive Interdependence
2. Individual Accountability
3. Face-To-Face Promotive Interaction
4. Social Skills
5. Group Processing

According to the previously mentioned authors, there is positive interdependence when a student thinks he is bound to others in a way that he or she cannot be successful if the rest of the group members fail and vice versa. The students work together sharing a common objective. In other words, students must perceive that either they succeed or fail together. There are different ways of structuring positive interdependence, for example: the existence of collective rewards, dependence on others' resources, the division of labor, and so forth. These

authors signal the two main necessary steps to implement positive interdependence within the learning groups:

- To formulate goals that aim to establish a positive interdependence among students.
- To supplement and reinforce positive interdependence with respect to their main goals, and to incorporate additional forms of interdependence.

Whenever a team works cooperatively for their first time, their level of cooperation will have a scope inferior to what was expected so that it is necessary to reinforce it with other types of positive interdependence. For instance, promoting interdependence by giving prizes and rewards to those group members who work cooperatively, promote group cooperation, and praise and encourage others to do so.

As for individual accountability, it requires that the teacher makes sure that each student's results are evaluated individually and that these results are communicated to the individual and to the whole group. The whole group needs to know which member of the group is in need of help to finish the task, and also that anyone of them can 'hang' on the work of others. Some common ways of structuring individual accountability are: providing each student with an exam, the choice of a random student to present the results of the whole group, or by making individual questions while group work is supervised.

There is positive face-to-face interaction when students interact between themselves orally, reflecting on how to solve a problem, the nature of certain concepts and the strategies that are being used. They teach what they know to each other and explain the connections between the past and present knowledge. This face-to-face interaction is positive in the sense that students help each other, assist each other, and encourage and support each other in their effort to learn.

For the effective functioning of group cooperation certain social skills are required. Students must possess and be able to use the necessary leadership and decision-making abilities, to generate trust, to be able to communicate, and to be able to manage the conflicts that may arise. These skills must be taught as intentionally and precisely as any other academic skills. Many students may have never worked in cooperative learning situations and, therefore, lack the much-needed social skills to do so.

Group processing involves the discussion of certain topics that may have an influence on the development of the task by the group. Some examples of these topics are: objectives achievement, problem solving, relationship building, and social interaction within the group. At the end of each work session the group analyzes the process by answering two questions:

1. What did each member do that was useful for the whole group?
2. What can be done by each member so that the whole group works even better the following day.

This self-analysis enables the group to focus on its maintenance as a cohesive one, facilitates the learning of cooperative skills, ensures that all of the components receive feedback of their participation, and reminds students to practice their cooperative skills continuously. This whole section is based on Johnson and Johnson (1999)'s work.

#### 4.4. Group typology

Johnson and Johnson (1999) distinguish three different types of groups in Cooperative Learning: The Formal Cooperative Learning, the Informal Cooperative Learning and Cooperative Base Groups.

#### 4.4.1. Formal Cooperative Learning Groups

Formal cooperative learning groups are usually formed in order to last from one lesson to several weeks. These groups are used when students have common objectives for the completion of any type of academic activity. Formal Cooperative Learning groups ensure that students get involved in the intellectual work to organize, explain, summarize or integrate the material within the existing conceptual structures. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (2003) describe the process which the teacher needs to follow when using Formal Cooperative Learning groups.

First, the teacher specifies the lesson objectives clearly. Then, he or she is in charge of the decision making of the group size, students roles, materials to be used, and classroom arrangement. Apart from explaining the task, the teacher also needs to specify the positive interdependence and individual accountability. During the activity, the teacher monitors students' performance and intervenes whenever necessary. Finally, the teacher assesses students and asks the group members to evaluate each other's performance and contribution to the task.

#### 4.4.2. Informal Cooperative Learning Groups

Informal Cooperative Learning Groups are particularly designed for a specific purpose and are usually implemented just during a few minutes of a lesson. They are used during direct teaching (explanations, demonstrations, group exercises) in order to draw the attention of students to the materials they must learn, create an appropriate climate for learning, help students establish expectations about what the activity will be about, ensure that students process the material that is being taught, and to provide closure to the educational situation.

#### 4.4.3. Cooperative Base Groups

Cooperative Base Groups are meant to be heterogeneous, to last at least one semester and with fixed members. Its main objective is to provide an atmosphere where students support, help, and encourage each other in order to succeed academically. Base Groups offer students a scenario where they can establish committed long-term relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

There is no ideal group. The productivity of a group is not determined by the individual contribution of its participants, but by the way they work together. In some cases, it is possible to resort to homogeneous cooperative learning groups to teach certain skills or to achieve certain teaching objectives. However, in general terms, it is convenient to resort to heterogeneous groups whose members come from different circles, have different skills, experiences, and interests. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (2003) assert that students following this type of class arrangement are seen to:

1. Be exposed to a wide range of ideas, multiple perspectives and different methods of problem solving.
2. Generate cognitive imbalances which stimulate learning, creativity and cognitive and social development.
3. Get involved in a more elaborate thinking. Students are seen to give and receive more explanations and to adopt personal points of view to discuss the material. All this increases students' depth of understanding, quality of reasoning and long-term memory.

As regards to class arrangement, it is suggested to accommodate circles of work with complementary interconnected and rotating roles among group members (Johnson, Johnson & Holubec, 2003). These roles may vary depending on the activity and the size of the group. The teacher is in charge of selecting the most appropriate roles for each student according to the learning situation (Slavin, 1980):

- One of the students summarizes the main conclusions or responses generated by the group.
- The inspector makes sure that all the members of the group can intervene and say explicitly how they arrived at a conclusion or answer.
- The coach corrects the errors in the explanations or summaries of the other members.
- The processor's task is to ask the team members to relate the new concepts and strategies to the previously learned material.
- The investigator-messenger gets the materials that the group needs and communicates with the other groups and the teacher.
- Another student writes the decisions of the group and edits the report.
- The animator reinforces the contributions of the rest of team members.
- The observer ensures that the group collaborates adequately.

#### 4.5. Some examples of the most investigated CL strategies

Extensive research has been conducted in regard to CL strategies. Authors have adapted this methodology to different subjects and the results have been varied. Now, some of the most relevant strategies which have been used lately are presented.

##### 4.5.1. Learning Together

This is a method which can be applied to a wide variety of subjects. Students are made to work in heterogeneous groups, usually made up of four to six members. The teacher gives the lesson to the whole class, as in traditional methods, and leaves some time for teamwork (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

The main objective is that all team members maintain an active role in the lesson and that they help their classmates to achieve a common goal. All group members work cooperatively in order to complete one unique piece of work. This

material, composed of different exercises about the lesson and its solutions, is both the basis for the group evaluation and it serves as a mean for the students to practice, help each other, and to evaluate themselves and their peers. The reward obtained by the members is group based, the grade will depend on the quality of the material, students' performance in a test or other forms of group evaluation (Johnson & Johnson, 1991).

This method is the least complex of the CL methods and the closest to the pure cooperative model if we compare it to other methods containing more individualistic or competitive elements. However, it poses a great inconvenience. According to some authors, this method does not allow the teacher to know the contribution of each member to the group, fact that provokes a detriment in the students' individual accountability. On the other hand, a study concluded that students' learning achievement is higher when using the Learning Together method as compared to traditional teaching techniques (Özsoy & Yildiz, 2004).

#### 4.5.2. Group Investigation

This is also a method applicable to a wide variety of materials and very useful for students to specialize in a determined task. The students form teams of two to six members. The teacher does not give master classes as in traditional methods, although he or she can occasionally do that. Teachers' main functions are to facilitate resources and to supervise the work of the research groups, as well as training and modeling communication skills. The task must be performed in group and consists on doing a group report on a topic. Each team, according to their interests or previous knowledge, chooses a topic from a unit that is to be seen in class. To ensure individual accountability, each subject is subdivided into as many parts as members the team has and each member has to be responsible for their own contribution. However, in the end, all team members have to coordinate to carry out the different activities that the research project demands: information gathering, evaluation, information synthesis, preparation of the final group report, and presentation to the rest of the class (Sharan & Sharan, 1992).

In this method teachers reward various types of students' contribution to the task: from group work (i.e. quality of the final report and oral presentation) to individual contribution (i.e. individual exams on the contents exposed by all the teams). However, Sharan and Sharan do not only advocate for tangible rewards but they also propose not giving students any reward at all, except the opportunity to continue working in these types of groups, trusting in the attractiveness of the CL methods themselves (Sharan & Shachar, 1988).

As for this method's benefits to students' achievement and motivation, a study was carried out in Singapore in which no significant effects on students' achievement were noted. However, this study found out that students' motivation was increased as compared to the control group which used a more traditional method (Tan & Sharan, 2007).

#### 4.5.3. Jigsaw

Jigsaw is a method applicable to a variety of subjects and it was created by a group of scholars (Aronson & Stephan, 1978). In Jigsaw, students work in heterogeneous groups of six members.

The teacher does not give master classes. Instead, he or she is responsible for dividing the topic to be taught in six parts, each of them unique and indispensable to understand the subject, and to provide the necessary material for each part.

The task is carried out individually, each student receives a part of the task. Then, the student must study individually his or her part, discuss it within the group of experts and then explain it to the rest of the team. The reward received by the student is based on individual performance in exams or by the completion of the task (Aronson, Stephan et al., 1978).

According to a study carried out by Slis (2005) the effectiveness of the Jigsaw method should be assessed not only by students' performance on individual tests but to include group and individual goals. According to this author, students

following the Jigsaw method were not seen to perform better in tests than other students following more student-passive techniques, however, further study should be conducted as to include other possible benefits of this method.

#### 4.5.4. Jigsaw II

In this method, Slavin tried to solve some of the drawbacks of the previous method. For instance: preparing all the materials for each part of the task was excessively time consuming for the teacher, the difficulty to solve the task, the impossibility to divide the subject or task in several parts, or the fact that students become experts of a single part of the theme and sometimes they are seen not to understand the whole picture. These problems are surpassed by the Jigsaw II (Slavin, 1986), adaptation of the Jigsaw I.

In this method, students work in groups of four to five people. The teacher prepares the subject, cuts texts, adds information or writes new material, if needed. The task is meant to be solved in group. All students read the whole task, but each member of the team is given a sub-topic on which he or she should be an expert. After reading the task individually, students discuss their subtopics in the so called “groups of experts”, which are groups formed by students focusing in the same part of the task. Then, students return to their teams to explain their part to the rest (Slavin, 1986). The reward, unlike in the original Jigsaw, is group based on the sum of the scores obtained by all the team members in an individual examination of the subject.

Jigsaw has been used, especially in the history subject, but also in areas of mathematics and written expression; and Jigsaw II is more commonly used in science subjects. A study carried out in 2007 found out that students following the Jigsaw II method were seen to experience better academic results and it posed an improvement in their relations with their classmates and their attitude toward learning English (Gömleksı, 2007). In this case, this method was applied to an experimental group formed by sixty-six engineering students attending an

EFL class. Not only students in the experimental group performed better in their post-tests but they also showed significant positive effects in their attitude scale results.

#### 4.5.5. Student Teams-Achievement Division (STAD)

This method is applicable to a variety of areas and it was created by Slavin in 1978. Students are assigned to heterogeneous teams of four to five members. The functions of the teacher and the characteristics of the task are similar to those described in Johnson and Johnson's Learning Together method (1991), with the difference that each student has his or her own job for the completion of the task.

The reward obtained by each student is measured by the whole group performance. Students' qualification will depend on their improvement from a pre-test to the final test. Thus, grading depends on the improvement of students' previous exam, not in their scores. Following this method, students receiving high or low scores in their previous exams have the possibility to contribute equally to their team's score (Slavin, 1978a). In its origins, STAD was used in the area of language (i.e. punctuation, grammar, and so forth). However, thanks to its flexibility, it has been implemented in many other areas. One of these areas is for instance Chemistry, for which Adesoji and Ibraheem (2009) decided to implement this method in order to gather information about its results in students' achievement and attitude. They carried out a study in Nigeria in which three hundred students participated and their results showed significant positive effects in both areas.

#### 4.5.6. Teams-Games-Tournaments (TGT)

This method is in general very similar to the STAD, with the only difference that the individual test and the team grade are replaced by a system of academic tournaments. As De Vries and Slavin (1978) explain, TGT basically consist on answering questions about the lesson presented by the teacher and worked by

each student in their corresponding team. Each student plays at a tournament table against students of other teams with the same level, taking as reference a previous evaluation. The member of the table tournament who wins more points than the rest receives 6 points, the next 4 and the following 2. In this way, each student, whatever the level he or she has, has the opportunity to contribute a maximum score to their team's general score. For the following tournaments, the three students with higher scores form a new tournament table, the next three form another and so on. The reward is group based on the number of points each member gets in the tournament (De Vries & Slavin, 1978).

Originally, this technique arose in the area of mathematics, but later, due to its flexibility of implementation, it has been used in various areas such as spelling or science. In the field of Economics, a study was carried out in 2011 by Wyk which purpose was to see whether students' achievement was improved when following the TGT methods. Results showed that students following TGT obtained better results at the test final score and their attitude toward the method was also very positive.

#### 4.5.7. Team-Assisted Individualization (TAI)

TAI is a method specifically designed to teach mathematics in the first grades. It was created by Slavin and Leavey (1984). Students are divided into teams of four to five members, formed by pairs or trios belonging to different group levels of mathematical ability, based on a previous evaluation. Thus, a team can be formed by two students with a low level and two other students with a high level. The teacher prepares the lesson for each group, instead of the entire class, using direct teaching of mathematical skills. While the teacher focuses on a group, the rest of the students continue working in pairs on the material provided by the teacher which has been carefully designed to fit their level and that consists of different units.

As the aforementioned authors explain, when a student has doubts in an exercise, he or she tries to solve it first by the cooperation with their group members or with other groups' members before asking the teacher. Thus, the lesson is less teacher-centered, students learn to collaborate and the teacher has more time to solve doubts that cannot be answered by other peers. The reward is group based on the average of the scores obtained by the group members in an individual examination and the average number of units performed by the team every week.

This method, which combines the use of cooperative teams with the individualized instruction in mathematics, emerged in order to offer the advantages of individualized or programmed teaching methods. In 2008, the scholars Tarim and Akdeniz carried out a study in which they compared the results of three different classes of Secondary School students in mathematics following TAI, STAD and the control group. Results showed that both classes using Cooperative Learning techniques had better results on achievement than the control group, TAI being the most effective (Tarim & Akdeniz, 2008).

#### 4.5.8. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC)

CIRC is a specific method to teach reading and writing in the last stages of elementary school. This method was created by Stevens, Madden, Slavin and Famish (1987) and shares some characteristics with those of the TAI. For instance, teams training, teacher functions and the tasks that the students must carry out are quite similar. However, in CIRC, the teacher teaches specific reading comprehension skills such as the identification of main ideas and the students in their teams work in a series of reading and writing activities like reading stories to each other or looking up words in the dictionary. The reward is group based on the average of the scores obtained by the members of the group in an individual examination, the quality of the individual written composition, and the completion of daily activities.

As the aforementioned authors comment, the CIRC method and the TAI also share some characteristics. Both follow a specific sequence. First, students are asked to form small and heterogeneous groups, then, they practice the contents provided by the teacher during a specific time, and finally students are evaluated by means of an exam and other forms of evaluation. Students cannot proceed to the exam until all team members are ready and willing to take the exam. Lastly, since students work with materials appropriate to their levels of reading and mathematics, respectively, they have the same opportunities to contribute to the team's success. This method was tested by Durukan (2011) on Secondary School children, showing positive results on reading, comprehension, and writing skills. Thus, this author goes as far as conclude by acknowledging the benefits of CIRC in language acquisition as compared to the traditional method.

#### 4.5.9. Constructive Controversy

It is a specific method usually employed to study controversial issues and was created by Johnson and Johnson (2000). The students work in groups of four members, subdivided in two pairs. One pair has to be "in favor" and the other "against" the given topic. The teacher does not give master classes, as in other traditional methods. His or her main functions are to prepare the materials on both postures and to supervise the work of the teams.

As these authors comment, the task has to be carried out in group. At the end of the session, the team must write a group report that collects, in the best way possible, the thoughts of all the members. In order to do so, first, each pair works on their own material and, subsequently, they share that information with the other two members of their group, exposing orally the relevant points or refuting some arguments. Then, students change their roles, if a pair of students was previously "in favor" now they have to be "against" the given topic.

Finally, the whole team reaches a consensus. The reward is group based on the performance of each member in an individual examination that requires

knowledge of both positions. This method requires, among others, higher reasoning skills so its use may be limited with very young students (Johnson & Johnson, 2000). Thus, as Chen and Tjosvold (2002) assert in their study, the teams which followed the Constructive Controversy method rated themselves as open-minded, innovative, and loyal to a higher degree as compared to their counterparts following more independent goals.

#### 4.6. Benefits of CL

CL is an instructional strategy that employs a variety of motivational techniques to make teaching more pertinent and to develop higher levels of responsibility in students. Some research has been conducted over the years in order to obtain information regarding the benefits of CL strategies in this matter. The basic rules of motivation in the classroom emphasize the need to propose challenging, friendly and novel activities that promote the students' interest and sense of responsibility. The well-developed instructional strategies of CL offer many of these benefits to students (Panitz, 1998).

The definition of CL, as a motivational strategy, includes all situations in which students work as a team to achieve specific learning objectives and, for the successful achievement of the objective, demand their positive interdependence. Panitz (1999) sees intrinsic motivation as a key element of teaching and learning. Furthermore, as the author points out, intrinsic motivation is beneficial for myriad of students since it helps them develop positive attitudes, secure commitment, develop competencies and to increase the significance of learning.

According to the below mentioned authors, the implementation of CL is seen to benefit students at various aspects:

- Cognitive growth
- Motivation
- Achievement
- Social abilities

#### 4.6.1. Increment of learners' cognitive growth

CL produces an important impact on students' development of their thinking skills (Webb 1982). Students engage in their own learning process instead of being the teacher's passive listeners. The work of the students in pairs (also in groups of three or in larger teams) constitutes a very effective form of interaction. When students work as a couple, everyone listens while the others argue their views on the problem. The two develop their skills for problem solving, to formulate their ideas, to discuss them, to feedback and respond immediately to questions and comments. As Webb (1982) comments, this aspect of cooperative learning does not impede discussion within the whole class. On the contrary, these discussions are greater and better with students thinking and analyzing their ideas before discussing them with everyone. In addition, the teacher can link discussions that occurred internally in the teams asking about each of the members' statements or clarifying the concepts or questions raised by the students.

Cooperative learning encourages high levels of performance. In addition, as Cohen and Kulick (1979) comment, students' critical reflection is enhanced as well as their memory and interest in the subject. This creates a positive cycle because it raises students' self-esteem, producing a change in their motivational level and performance (Keller, 1983). Students share their individual and group success with their team, thus enriching their self-esteem.

#### 4.6.2. Promotion of students' motivation

One more benefit of CL is that it increments students' self-esteem, motivating them to participate in their own learning process (Johnson and Johnson, 1989). Learning cooperatively results in a higher level of achievement for all participants according to Slavin (1987). This author notes that students, by helping each other, become a supportive community that raises the level of individual performance. As Webb (1982) points out, the effects of CL result in an increase in students' self-esteem.

Cooperation increases the degree of students' satisfaction in regard to their learning experience since it actively engages them in the design and implementation of class procedures and course contents (Johnson & Johnson, 1990). Teams, or effective working groups, become owners of the process and their results when individuals are encouraged to work together toward a common goal, often defined by the same team. In addition, as the previously mentioned authors note, this aspect is especially useful for students who have a history of academic failures.

Moreover, CL is seen to reduce students' anxiety levels against new and unfamiliar situations that students might face in the classroom (Duxbury & Tsai, 2010). In a traditional classroom, when a teacher addresses a student, he or she becomes the focus of the attention of the entire class. Thus, the whole class is aware of any mistakes this particular student might make, resulting in a high degree of stress for the student. However, in an CL situation, when students work as a team, the spotlight is distributed within the team. In addition, the group product can be reviewed before presenting it to the entire class, reducing the chances of making a mistake, as Karweit and Slavin (1981) assert. The error can thus become a teaching tool instead of being a public critic to the student who committed it.

Johnson and Johnson (1989) propose that CL develops positive attitudes in both the teacher and the students. Besides, in a cooperative system the level of involvement that all participants reach is very intense. Teachers learn a lot about their students' behavior because they have many opportunities to explain their actions and views to the teacher. There are many possibilities of communication that are constantly encouraged. Teachers have more opportunities to explain the reason for the rules that are being applied, and the system also allows students to have the opportunity to participate in the establishment of class rules and procedures. The empowerment produced by the multiple interpersonal interactions develops very positive attitudes in all the parties involved in the CL.

Moreover, CL gets students involved in the learning process because it generates a learning environment in which they feel respected and committed to each other. As Cohen and Willis (1985) assert, CL produces a very strong social system of mutual support. In addition, CL techniques take advantage of social interaction to facilitate the learning processes and, the activities that the team develops, stimulate their involvement in the learning process.

#### 4.6.3. Increment of learners' achievement

As Johnson and Johnson (1989) comment, CL promotes a higher level of learning and acquisition, as compared to other passive forms of learning in which there exists an acceptance of the information provided by an external expert. This kind of traditional methods do not only diminish quality in learning, but often promote feelings of powerlessness and dependency. In a typical classroom there is very little time for reflection and discussion, especially for the individual errors or mistakes of the students. In CL sessions, students continually discuss, debate and clarify their understanding of the concepts with the teacher and their peers.

Panitz and Panitz (1998) propose that CL raises student and teacher achievement expectations. As this authors comment, taking responsibility on their own learning allows students to become aware of their own skills. Moreover, by proposing achievable goals to the teams and facilitating their interaction, teachers generate high expectations on their students, which become self-fulfilling prophecies when the students dominate the cooperative approach. Students learn to work as a team and demonstrate their skills through various methods of evaluation.

#### 4.6.4. Increment of students' social abilities

CL is seen to get students involved in their learning process as it generates a learning environment in which they feel respected and committed to each other. According to Cohen and Willis (1985), CL produces a very strong social system of mutual support. The techniques used in CL take advantage of social interaction to facilitate the learning processes and, the activities that the teams develop, stimulate their involvement in the learning process. Furthermore, as these authors comment, the teacher plays a very active role in facilitating the learning process. He or she interacts with each student while moving around the classroom and observing interactions between the students. In addition, teachers can propose individual or group questions, helping them in the reflection and understanding of the concepts learned.

In addition, as Kessler and McCleod (1985) comment, CL develops in students a natural tendency to socialization in the professional field. Students, very often, act spontaneously and comment on the difficulties they face outside the classroom environment, explaining their experiences with their family or friends. This opening allows teachers and students to talk about these problems in a non-threatening way due to the more informal characteristics of the teaching situation. This idea poses a great possibility for communication on a personal level, which is considered as a secondary benefit of the CL according to Kessler and McCleod (1985).

As Johnson and Johnson (1984) pose, the main contribution of cooperative learning is the training of the social skills that students will need to work and develop a successful professional life. In our contemporary society and education, the development of competencies for cooperation is extremely valued. Teachers' questions to team members about what behaviors or techniques are better for them to do their tasks, and their individual contribution to their team success or failure, students become aware of the need for a healthy, positive, and real support from their peers and teachers (Panitz, 1998).

Cooperative learning encourages the interaction of students at all levels (Webb, 1982). Research has shown that when very skilled students work with less skilled students, they both benefit. Working in group activities helps students understand differences and to learn how to use them for their own benefit instead of just thinking about them as sources of conflict.

## 5. Didactic Proposal

The following part of my dissertation contains a didactic proposal for an EFL Secondary School classroom. These activities are designed as to follow the same theme, using different types of groups, and some of the most widely used methodologies within CL. In addition, some comments about the methodologies being used will refer to the theoretical background section in order to have a better understanding of the activity itself and CL in general.

### 5.1 Justification

Apart from learning theoretical concepts, the acquisition of a new language, in this case the English language, provides the students with the opportunity to develop a set of abilities or competences which will be of key importance in any other contexts of their lives. Through the completion of activities which imply the reception (input) and production (output) of both oral and written texts included in the standards of learning, the specific communicative competences and the key general competences of each stage are covered (LOMCE 8/2013, de 9 de desembre).

The activities developed for this proposal follow the theme of “Real-life Superheroes”. This theme includes topics related to famous superheroes from the cinema but it also highlights the importance of daily-life superheroes such as doctors, police officers or firefighters. This is considered a topic that responds to the interests and needs of the students, playing also a fundamental role in the cognitive-emotional development of children, so important at these ages as a fundamental basis for the acquisition of learning.

In addition, this proposal is committed to continue with the change of methodology that is being held at some of our public and private schools. Unluckily, these changes are usually propelled by individuals who, using their own funds and time, are willing to use methodologies that advocate for a type of

learning where students cooperate, become the main protagonists of their own learning, and acquire competences very much needed for their future careers and daily lives. As commented in the previous section, the figure of the teacher is rather a guide who helps the child throughout the learning process.

The procedures used for the proposed activities, even though not specifically developed for EFL or ESL teaching, can serve as models from which teachers can adapt and shape their lessons with the purpose of improving the educational process. The following didactic proposal has been designed as a guide of the steps that are to be followed when using these procedures. Our focus has been placed on the type of groupings and the processes to be followed rather than the material covered. The reason behind this decision is that these procedures can be included in any lesson plan and for any topic or area covered, therefore, the content of the activity becomes irrelevant.

## 5.2 Context

These activities are aimed at first of ESO students. The materials covered are those taken from the first of ESO curriculum, in this case, we cover the third module which was programmed to be taught during my placement at the Secondary School IES Antoni Maura, entitled “Real-life Superheroes”. In this module, students will learn grammar structures such as the Present Simple and Wh-Questions as well as vocabulary related to daily routines and free time activities. The activities are also conceived for a split class of 15 students which form a heterogeneous group, including high and low ability learners, immigrants, and curricular adaptations.

I decided to create this unit for this level due to the following reasons. First, I think that first of ESO lessons can be more challenging for the teacher than higher levels since, even though the contents might seem obvious or easy to explain, the teacher is required to be resourceful and entertaining in order to keep the attention of the students. In addition, I also think that the explanation of concepts

using simple vocabulary instead of the one that we are used to at university requires a lot more effort from the teacher.

The methodology that I have used for this unit is a student-centred approach where the student is the protagonist, not the teacher. In addition, in every lesson plan there is a main activity which covers one particular skill. I structured the activities so that input skills (reading and listening) are practiced before output skills (speaking and writing) since we strongly believe that students' cognitive processes to produce an output are much more complex and require of a previous training (Swain, 2000). Moreover, in every activity students will practice all their skills and will have plenty of room for participation. Following Cooperative Learning strategies, the arrangement of the class will be different from traditional lessons, placing students in groups so that the amount of time that they participate in class is augmented.

### 5.3 Time

The proposed activities are designed as to be developed over nine lessons, which are comprised within a single unit following a main theme. These activities can be used either as the main activity or as a complementary one. Every activity will have a different duration which will depend on the type of groups formed and other factors including: students' abilities, students' motivation and interest, and teachers' decision.

In table 1 below we find the students' timetable. This table has been included since it is important to be conscious about the time of the day in which a lesson is taking place since students might react differently towards the activities proposed depending on various factors.

**Table 1***1<sup>st</sup> of ESO timetable*

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Math	Geography	Physical Ed.	Geography	Math
Spanish	Music	Physical Ed.	Music	Geography
Biology	Spanish	English	English	Biology
Tutory	Math	Catalan	Arts	Spanish
Projects	Catalan	Projects	Projects	Catalan
Projects	English	Projects	Projects	Arts

#### 5.4 Main learning objectives

The main objective of these activities is that children learn to work cooperatively, developing values such as respect, mutual help, and teamwork; thus, achieving the development of adequate social skills, while reaching new and meaningful learning.

In addition to this general objective a series of educational objectives have been proposed in relation to both cooperative learning and the specific project, which are based on the general objectives collected in the organic law 8/2013, 9<sup>th</sup> of December (LOMCE 8/2013, de 9 de desembre).

The linguistic competence of the subject both in the target language and the mother tongue entails being able to reflect on diverse matters in a foreign language. In this case, this is achieved through the exposure to written or spoken texts helps the student to acquire a more global view of the world and consequently to understand better their own cultural background. Besides, the production of such texts is also of key importance to improve the students' ability to articulate ideas and concepts related to their own or other people's feelings, and the world around them.

Learning English as a foreign language is paramount for the process of acquisition of new knowledge in any field as it is nowadays the vernacular language of technology and the preferred language for international business and cross-cultural communication (Sharifian, 2009). Incorporating activities in class which make students collaborate with each other, participate in the lesson, and engage with the material is of key importance to enhance their willingness to seek for new knowledge by themselves.

Furthermore, activities which require doing research using an online search engine also promote the development of independent work and the selection and arrangement of relevant information. Students might have a broad knowledge of the new technologies but it is the teachers' role to take advantage of these abilities they have and focus them towards a more educational purpose.

Both in our classes and outside we have become a multicultural society. For that reason, students must develop the necessary abilities to get along with people from other cultures. By the introduction of both oral and written texts where culturally different views of a topic are presented, we can make students reflect on them so that they can reach conclusions about their contribution to our cultural richness.

In addition, students must be prepared to get adapted to the new circumstances of the job market which require a different attitude towards employment. Having an entrepreneurial mindset is nowadays an alternative to enter the job market, especially when there is a shortage of job offers. Activities such as the elaboration of project works enhance students' abilities to take risks, planning, and team work (Stoller, 2002).

## 5.5 Methodology

### 5.5.1. Cooperative Learning

As commented on the theoretical background, CL is a teaching methodology which has been proven to benefit students' motivation and achievement. Even though many experts support this idea, according to my personal experience during my placement at a Secondary School and the experience of my tutor and other colleagues, its implementation in Spanish Secondary Schools is scarce and often from teachers' individual action rather than curriculum based.

Cooperative learning as a methodological strategy in teaching allows educators to emphasize the importance of the interaction between the student and the contents or materials learned, in addition, it poses various cognitive strategies to orient such an interaction effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

It can be inferred from the previously mentioned authors that the cooperative work in the classroom has effects on the academic performance of the participants. It develops their autonomy, increasing the responsibility of the students for their own learning and encouraging autonomous research. In turn, CL also decreases the dependence of students on their teachers.

Furthermore, collaborative learning is based on the development of socio-affective relationship among students. It requires and promotes the exchange of information, interaction, tolerance, and acceptance. Thus, encouraging students' motivation, self-esteem, responsibility and autonomy. For the development of students in this sense it is necessary to establish charitable goals for themselves and the other members of the group, seeking to maximize both individual and team learning.

### 5.5.2. Organizational aspects

CL learning techniques, as opposed to collaborative learning, always require a well-organized grouping in order to achieve the best results (Zañartu, 2000). Students are sometimes reluctant to form groups with some of their classmates and normally stick to their friends or the ones they already have been working with. In my opinion it is important, in all cases, that the teacher designs the groups since, depending on the type of exercise or aspect taught, he or she must be able to decide which grouping is best for the pupils depending on various factors.

In this proposal, the students of 1<sup>st</sup> of ESO class from the Secondary School IES Antoni Maura have been taken as a model for the organization of these activities and, therefore, as an example of how the aggrupation of a heterogeneous group may be carried out.

#### 5.5.2.1. Grouping of students

As commented during the previous chapter, these activities are designed for a specific group of students in which we find: low and high ability students, students who need curricular adaptations, and immigrants who have not yet adapted to the new environment. For the grouping of these students three different types of groups will be employed:

- Base Groups
- Formal Cooperative Groups
- Informal Cooperative Groups

First of all, Johnson and Johnson's Base Groups will be designed at the beginning of the scholar year (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). These groups will be formed by students with different types of learning intelligences, cultural backgrounds, grades, and so forth. The intention with this first type of grouping is to have heterogeneous groups in which students will be able to profit from their

groupmates' strengths. The main intention is to create an atmosphere where every student has the opportunity to demonstrate their value within the group and also to be able to lean on their groupmates when they are in need of support. This type of grouping will be used as a regular basis, i.e. students will be seating with the rest of their group at the same table and they will regularly resort to that group when participating in group activities. Obviously, there will be occasions in which other types of groupings will be necessary.

For a better organization, each member will be responsible for a specific function within their group, dividing the teams into:

- Spokesperson: he or she in charge of speaking on behalf of the team and encouraging team members to work.
- Secretary: he or she completes the evaluation sheet and is in charge of controlling the tone of voice so that it is possible to work in a relaxed atmosphere.
- Responsible of the material: he or she is responsible of bringing and collecting the necessary materials to perform the task and for others to use it carefully.
- Assistant: he or she helps any member who needs it, and in the event that any group member is missing, he or she assumes their function.

To make it easier for each member to remember what their function is, we can distribute collars in which their functions are written as well as using posters where the responsibilities of each member are listed. It is important that all students learn how to perform all the functions so that each one of them can be swapped from time to time.

The second type of grouping that will be employed for the proposed activities will be the Formal Cooperative Group (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). As commented in the Theoretical Background, this type of grouping usually lasts from one day to several weeks. In this case, Formal Cooperative Groups will be formed for one of

the activities proposed which is meant to have a duration of one week. This activity will be designed as a short project. The purpose of using this type of grouping is for the students to move from the comfort zone of their usual group and for them to learn to cooperate with the rest of their classmates. In this case, we can form either heterogeneous or homogeneous groups depending on the learning objectives proposed by the teacher.

Finally, a last type of grouping will be used for specific and short activities, Informal Cooperative Learning Groups (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). During the lesson there will be certain activities in which this type of grouping might be the best option. For instance, heterogeneous groupings depending on students' learning intelligences might be positive for the realization of a short activity.

#### 5.5.2.2. Classroom Distribution

Classroom distribution is an important organizational aspect which must be planned carefully as to make the most of the CL methodology. For the proposed activities there will be specifically designed spaces for the students to plan, organize, and execute their activities.

First, there will be an area called as the Assembly. There, all the students will have the opportunity to speak their thoughts and to listen to others' opinion, respecting their turns and the classroom norms. Groups will meet at the Assembly whenever they need to plan an activity or project or when there is an issue regarding cooperation or behaviour within the group.

Finally, we need a working area for each group. Each group will meet at their working tables, where they will work together in the elaboration of the proposed activities. This organizational aspect is important specially when using Base Groups since it helps to use time more efficiently.

### 5.5.3. Motto of our class

Students should feel part of a team as they all pursue a common goal. To do this, we will create a representative motto, for example: "Hand in hand together we can".

## 5.6 Activities

The activities designed have been distributed in two blocks: initial or motivating and main activities. Different types of grouping will be used, allowing students to benefit and learn from the interaction with the rest of their classmates. All of the activities are based on the interdependence and the cooperation among the students for the completion of these activities and the grade received will be based on the average of each group, bearing in mind their degree of commitment, compliance, cooperation, and participation.

### 5.6.1. Initial Activities

These activities, although might not be considered as CL strategies, have been included as introductory activities with the purpose of building confidence and increasing the very much needed motivation for the activities to follow. The proposed activities have been adapted from the following source: [lifeder.com/dinamicas-motivacion](http://lifeder.com/dinamicas-motivacion).

- Elektra's (Marvel Superheroine) bare wire:

The objective of this game is to encourage team spirit. In addition, this activity helps students gain concentration and avoid group dispersion.

The total time allotted for this activity is about thirty minutes. Students sit forming a circle. Once everyone is seated, a member of the group is asked to leave the room while the rest of the class, who are still sitting on a circle, hold their hands.

The teacher explains that the circle they are forming is like an electric circuit inside which there is a bare wire. The student who left the room will have to discover who the bare wire is by touching the head of any of the others that are sitting on the circle. Then, the teacher tells those who are sitting on the circle that when the student who left the room approaches them, whether or not the wire is stripped, they must shout "Elektra, Elektra" and scream all at the same time with all their strength, making the other student jump with fright.

This dynamic will help the group to overcome any crisis that might arise during the development of the activities. Besides, it can also increase students' coordination, sometimes broken by their lack of concentration and commitment.

- Doctor Strange's message from the future:

The objective of this game is to encourage group cohesion, motivate students and achieve a better knowledge among all the members of the group. For the realization of this activity, all students but one will sit on a chair. The student without a chair will be Doctor Strange and his or her duty consists in remaining in the centre of the class and to shout the following sentence:

- "I bring a message from the future for everyone who has..." And then he or she mentions any article, superpower, or anything related to superheroes they come up with.

Then, all those who have the article, superpower or any other thing mentioned by Doctor Strange will have to swap their seats. The one who runs out of seat goes to the centre position and occupies the place of the previous Doctor Strange, repeating the same dynamic. This dynamic can be used at the beginning of a lesson but also during a moment of recess, in the middle of a lesson or as a final activity. It does not only benefit students' social abilities but also allows them to practice the vocabulary learnt in class.

### 5.6.2. Development of activities

This section describes step by step the main activities proposed. Once the dynamics of each activity become natural for the students, their usage and implementation with different contents will require less effort and preparation from the teacher. However, it is advisable especially for the first time we use these activities to prepare them in advance and to explain clearly and with examples the duties of each group member.

It is essential at all times to attend to some general guidelines that we must take into account to deal with the diversity of our students, respecting the principle of the individualization of teaching.

Among other measures, the proposed activities will be adjusted to the needs of each group, modifying some of them by broadening, shortening or reinforcing certain parts. In addition, the teacher will use different methods for the explanations, and he or she will adjust the activities to the rhythm of the class, and the knowledge of each group.

Furthermore, we must acknowledge the specific educational needs of every single student and to provide the necessary educational support. In all cases we will have to be aware of the personal situation of our pupils, their characteristics, and necessities in order to carry out an adequate educational attention to them. The teacher will make the necessary curricular adaptations, taking into account the necessary didactic material and the coordination with the support staff.

For the development of the activities we will need three types of resources:

- Material resources: Firstly, we find materials contributed by the students in relation to the realization of the activities as well as the material elaborated by the teacher: work sheets, and other materials created for the development of the activities. Secondly, the rest of the material needed

is formed by all the resources of the classroom and high school: computers, books, writing materials, and so forth.

- Personal resources: students themselves stand as a personal resource to learn since, through these cooperative learning activities, what we pursue is that students learn from each other by helping others and sharing their knowledge. It is also important to remember the role of the teacher acting as a guide throughout the process, as well as the family being a fundamental resource.
- Space resources: These activities will be developed mainly in the classroom but we can also use other spaces like the patio, computer room, library, and any other available spaces.

#### 5.6.2.1. Jigsaw

When it comes to cooperative learning techniques, Jigsaw is probably one of the better known and most widely implemented. Additionally, as indicated in the Theory Background section, studies indicate that the use of this strategy increases positive educational outcomes and reduces racial conflict (Gömleksı, 2007).

Just as in a jigsaw puzzle, each piece is essential for the completion and full understanding of the final product. If each student's part is essential, then each student is essential. And that is exactly what makes this strategy so effective.

The jigsaw strategy is a remarkably efficient way to learn the material. More importantly, the jigsaw process encourages listening, engagement, and empathy by giving each member of the group an essential part to play in the academic activity. It can be used effectively in any core academic area (Gömleksı, 2007).

However, in this activity the main focus will be on grammar. The reason is that grammar is possibly the most difficult area for many students and also for teachers since, apparently, there is little room for innovation when learning grammar and teachers often rely on drilling or teacher centred lessons when introducing a grammar point.

In this activity we want our students to engage on an amusing activity in which they will be the ones in charge of their own learning with the hope of increasing their retention and also their attitude toward grammar learning.

Step 1: We start by forming teams and assigning a leader. In this case we will use Base Groups. Each group should be formed by four or five students. Taking into account the 1<sup>st</sup> of ESO group of students that I had during my placement, the Base Groups would be the following:

- Group 1: Daniela, Joan, Assiv, and Pedro.
- Group 2: Marc, Toni, Antonio, and Alexandra.
- Group 3: Manuel, Mali, Rebecca, and Jessica.
- Group 4: Raquel, Kevin, and Fernando.

In this case, students have been grouped in a heterogeneous way. In each group we find: high ability learners (Daniela, Marc, Manuel, Fernando), low ability learners (Joan, Antonio, Rebecca, Raquel), students with excellent social abilities (Daniela, Marc, Jessica, Fernando), and students with problems related to behaviour or adaptation (Assiv, Kevin, Antonio)<sup>1</sup>.

Step 2: There are eight parts of speech and each student will become an expert on two of them. The leader should help the group members to choose their 2 parts of speech. Students will choose from the following: noun, adjective, verb, adverb, and so forth. For instance, Daniela would be the leader of group 1. She

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<sup>1</sup> These names do not correspond to the real names of the students.

would help the rest of the group to choose one of the parts of speech. Examples of these parts of speech related to the main topic would be the following:

- Noun: crime, truth, justice, speed, weight, metal...
- Adjective: magnetic, fast, strong, invisible, indestructible...
- Verb: to fly, to rescue, to fight, to break, to run...
- Adverb: extremely, incredibly, amazingly...

Step 3: Students are to find out the following about each part of speech:

- Definition
- 10 examples
- Rules about using the part of speech
- Unique qualities about the part of speech
- Use two examples of a part of speech in a sentence and underline the part of speech.

Step 4: Once the students have found out the information about the two parts of speech, we set up four stations in the room (noun, verb, adjective, and adverb). The experts need to talk to each other and make sure that they have their information correct.

Step 5: Students go back to their original group after the two expert group sessions. Each expert then shares what he or she learned. It is important to have group members take notes.

Step 6: After each group member or expert has presented, we ask students to study their notes for a quiz over the information on the following day.

#### 5.6.2.2. Team-games-tournament

For this activity we will use two types of grouping strategies. First, we will use Base Groups since, as we are about to mention, the first part of the activity

requires a more heterogeneous type of grouping. As the activity develops, we will use another type of grouping which is the Informal Cooperative learning group. This second type of grouping will depend on students' abilities, grouping those with higher scores together as to make the activity more challenging to them and not so demanding for those with lower levels of achievement.

Step 1: To begin with we need to select an instructional topic and present it to the students. In this case, we are dealing with Wh- questions, adverbs of frequency and vocabulary related to real-life superheroes. Since students will be answering questions about a certain topic, first we will introduce a reading about superheroes (see Annex 1). Students will be allotted a certain time to read the text depending on the difficulty and extension of the reading, in this case students will have 20 minutes.

Step 2: Then, we need to develop a list of questions on the topic and number them. Next, we cut out small pieces of paper and number them so that the total matches the number of questions that you we developed for the topic (e.g. if we have 35 questions, we create small pieces of paper with numbers 1-35 on them). Finally, we give a set of questions to one student in each group. He or she reads the questions as their corresponding numbers are drawn from the pile.

Step 3: Team Game phase. Firstly, we place students in heterogeneous groups of 4-5 (Base Groups) and we have them review material during this "team" phase by selecting a number from the pile. Groups must be equal in size. Next, we give each group a "Titanic Team Identity" (e.g. The Avengers) and each student a Name Identity (e.g. Superhero 1). Students must answer the question that matches the number they selected from the pile. For example, if a student selects #22 from the pile and question #22 is "What are the main differences between Marvel superheroes and real-life superheroes?" that student is challenged to answer that question. If he or she cannot come up with an answer, a teammate can "steal" the question. Teams share knowledge during this phase of the lesson. (i.e. teach their teammates).

Step 4: Infinite War phase. We place students in new groups made up of individuals from each of the "Titanic Teams" tables (step 3). All "Superhero 1" go to Table 1 (these might be lower achieving students) while all "Superhero 2" (higher achieving) go to Table 2. In the "War" phase, students are placed in homogeneous groups with students of similar ability and compete against one another. For every question a student answers correctly, he or she earns a point. One person at each "War" must keep scores for every individual at the "War" table.

Step 5: Students return to their Team Game tables and report their scores. Team scores are compared and the winning team earns a reward.

Step 6: Students take an assessment. The scores for each Team are compiled and averaged. Finally, we offer "bonus points" for the team that earns the highest average and/or "improvement points" to the team that improves its average the most over previous assessments.

#### 5.6.2.3. Group investigation

This type of activity is designed as to be developed during class time and part of it is to be completed at home. The time allotted to its completion is the duration of the didactic unit and its evaluation will consist on the presentation of the material to the rest of the class. In order to reinforce the concentration and attention of the students during their classmates' presentations, a questionnaire will be handed out at the end of each presentation for the audience to complete.

Step 1: The teacher sets up a confrontation with an interesting phenomenon. This could take the form of a surprising story, an unexpected experimental result, an intriguing video, a mysterious visitor to the classroom, etc. In this case, a teacher from other class will dress up as Doctor X and make a sudden appearance into the class, interrupting the lesson and telling the students that he needs them to

create a real-life superhero to join the X-Men. Then, students will have to create their own superhero by using the language learnt in class.

Step 2: Students are divided into small groups. The members of each group engage in a discussion and decide which aspects of the real-life superhero of their choice they would like to explore in depth.

Step 3: Students plan their investigations. Typically, one student agrees to research one aspect that he/she finds interesting, another student chooses another aspect, and so on. The group develops an overall plan to coordinate the efforts of individuals and to look for reliable information sources. The group also develops a time line for project completion. During this time, the teacher monitors the students, encouraging team work and praising those who lead their groups.

Step 4: Students carry out individual research and regularly share their results while periodically readjusting their overall plan.

Step 5: When the research is about to be completed, students agree on the most important findings and decide how to demonstrate their new knowledge. In this case, this takes the form of a presentation to the class or to some other audience. But it can take other forms (e.g., multimedia shows; roundtables; production of a publication; poster, art production, and so forth). The nature of the demonstration is limited only by the imagination of the students.

Step 6: The group receives feedback and questions from the audience. As commented above, the audience receives a questionnaire to check their attention and also the clarity of the presentation.

#### 5.6.2.4. Team-Assisted Individualization

TAI, as its name indicates, combines cooperative learning and individually-paced instruction. In cooperative learning, small and heterogeneous group of students

learn together at the same pace and are finally rewarded by the teacher based on performance of the members. Such a setting allows students with higher abilities help those students who struggle. On the other hand, in individually-paced instruction, students work on their own material and at their own pace. Students either grade their own work or the teacher grades it when they finish. When a sufficient part of the task is complete are correct, they may move on to the next exercise (Slavin & Leavey, 1984).

Step 1: In this activity we will resort to Base Groups since we need a heterogeneous type of grouping in which students with different degrees of performance are placed. Thus, the same groups as in the first proposed activity (Jigsaw) will be used.

Step 2.1: Students will work on a certain number of problems and grade one another's work. For this activity, students will be handed a set of "fill in the gap" exercises where they will need to put into practice what they have learned about Wh-questions, adverbs of frequency, and daily life activities of real-life superheroes.

Step 2.2: Then they take a short online quiz using "Quizlet". The quiz is created and graded by a teammate and then reviewed by one of three student monitors. These monitors will be chosen at the beginning of the class either by volunteering or by degrees of achievement and will be trained previously by the teacher in how to create a "Quizlet". In this case, the students selected by the teacher will be: Daniela, Marc, and Fernando. During this step the teacher will offer guidance or advice in case further explanation about the topic is needed as well as monitoring the whole process.

Step 3: After the student monitor approves the quiz, he or she hands out a final test and scores it after completion. Students are also rewarded for positive scores on their work.

#### 5.6.2.5. Constructive Controversy

For the realization of this activity it is necessary to equip our students with the necessary resources in order to organize their ideas, present them to the rest of their classmates, and to defend their positions against other students' views.

Since this proposal is aimed at 1<sup>st</sup> of ESO students, first, we will need to introduce the topic by presenting various materials where different opinions and positions of the topic are presented. Besides, the teacher will have to guide the different stages of the activity as well as to provide students with the necessary language to express their ideas in case they cannot do it by themselves.

Step 1: First of all, we present our students with a controversial topic. In this case, the topic chosen has to do with real-life superheroes. An example of a possible topic could be “Nurses should not be considered real-life superheroes”.

Step 2: Teacher asks students to place themselves on a line depending on where they stand on this issue: strongly disagree or strongly agree. Then, the teacher hands out various materials for the students to read where different views of the topic are presented. For instance:

- Material 1: A text where nurses are crudely critiqued.
- Material 2: A video where nurses are presented as a crucial part for the health care system.
- Material 3: A chart where data and poll results related to nursery care are shown.

Step 2: Students at the extreme ends take a few minutes to develop their position. At this point, the teacher introduces some useful prompts or phrases that they can employ to expose their opinions. For instance: “I strongly disagree with your argument because...” to introduce a counter argument.

Step 3: The students that strongly agreed with the statement present their argument to the class.

Step 4: The students that strongly disagreed with the statement present their argument to the class

Step 5: The class votes on which argument was the most persuasive.

Step 6: An extension of the activity is to ask if students want to change where they stand on the line.

#### 5.6.2.6. Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition

Although CIRC was created as a learning method to teach reading and writing at elementary school levels, I personally believe that it can be easily adapted and implemented in any EFL lesson. For this activity, we will use Informal Cooperative Learning groups. The purpose of this type of grouping during this activity is to promote relationship establishment among all of our students. Some of the grouping factors that we will follow to group our students in this case will be: students that do not work together regularly, students seen to have behavioural problems, students with learning deficiencies.

Step 1: Students are presented with a text about Real-life superheroes (See Annex 2). The class group is divided into groups of four students (student 1, student 2, student 3, student 4). For instance:

- Group 1: Daniela (student 1), Toni (student 2), Rebecca (student 3), and Fernando (student 4).

Step 2: Daniela reads aloud the first paragraph to students Toni, Rebecca and Fernando.

Step 3: Toni, Rebecca and Fernando must listen actively to what Daniela is reading at that moment.

Step 4: Once Daniela has finished reading, she passes the witness to Toni who will be in charge of explaining, commenting or summarizing what was read by the her. For instance:

- Daniela reads: "Most of us have heard of a neighbourhood watch - but this man is taking his citizen's duties to the next level".
- Toni reformulates what Daniela has just read: "we all know what a neighbourhood watch is, but this man is doing much more than that". He can also comment on what was read: "I do not know what a neighbourhood watch is".

Step 5: Rebecca and Fernando, who have also listened carefully, will decide if what was explained, commented or summarized by student 2 is correct or not. If they do not agree, they will give their personal opinion and will present it for further evaluation.

Step 6: Toni is now in charge of reading the next paragraph of the text and Rebecca is in charge of explaining it.

Step 7: Fernando and Daniela are now the ones who decide if the explanation given by Toni is correct or not.

Step 8: The process is repeated until all the students have read, explained and valued each part of the text.

It is important to emphasize that the activity does not only serve to work reading aloud, oral comprehension and oral expression. This basic cooperative activity can be extended to other formats such as presentations, film scenes, pictures, grammar points, etc.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper I wanted to emphasize the need to make us aware that we live in a plural society and that aspect is reflected clearly in our classrooms. If we imagine for a moment a classroom in any place in the world, it would be unimaginable to find two equal students. Taking this into account, I consider unthinkable that a teacher is able to carry out a unique educational practice (i.e. difficulty of the activities, methodology, resources, evaluation, and so forth) that as to meet the needs of the students. In spite of all this, the Spanish educational system has carried out, in many occasions, homogeneous educational practices that have not been able to respond to these differences.

With the realization of this paper I try to convey that we must pursue a type of school that manages to respond to diversity, understanding the differences between people as something positive that enriches and makes us grow.

The school model for which this goal is chosen is that of the inclusive school, turning the classrooms into a place where diversity is catered for, where educators strive for quality education and equality for all students, avoiding any kind of exclusion, and where all are accepted regardless of their differences.

Therefore, the first step in achieving an inclusive educational system is to restructure the methodological and organizational processes of our classrooms. In this sense, the commitment of cooperative learning, as an ideal methodology is to attend to the different needs of our students. In addition, this teaching method supports that cooperation among students is a fundamental tool in order to achieve learning through common effort, dialogue, affection, interpersonal relationships, and so forth.

Throughout this paper, the main characteristics that determine cooperative learning have been defined as basic elements that should guide the teaching practice. It has also been highlighted that the implementation of this teaching practice promotes great results since the acquisition of learning is much richer when achieved through the students' own efforts and collaboration.

In addition, this proposal is based on the basic principles that govern this teaching methodology, helping us to clarify and complement the theoretical content, while providing a model for those teachers who want to implement this kind of learning in their classrooms. Also highlighting that this type of learning is fundamental at an early age for children to settle good bases of cooperation, help, and dialogue.

These and many other aspects that have been analyzed throughout this paper in relation to cooperative learning, pursue that their implementation in the classrooms help us achieve the ultimate goal: to build more just societies based on equality between all, and to avoid individualism, competitiveness, rejection, marginalization, and exclusion.

To finish, I would like to emphasize how the elaboration of this paper has helped me to strengthen even more the model of education which I want to follow as future teacher of English. A model which promotes a cooperative education between equals, seeking the dream of building a better future society.

## Annex 1

### The Hero Who Was Going To Save the World

Toto was a totally normal boy, and was paddling in the sea one day when a sea urchin stung him. At that precise moment, when he was rubbing his foot, he was simultaneously attacked by an octopus, a mosquito and a parrotfish, while being whipped by the tail of a platypus and having a seagull poop on his head....

From such an unlikely confluence of events there could only emerge a new superhero, with impressive superpowers:

Superpower Ultra Man!

Such were his powers that he immediately thought he should not waste them on little things, and Superpower Ultra Man began hunting danger and threats to the world, so he could save us from the worst of the worst.

But the more he searched with his super-sight, the more he travelled the world with his hyper-velocity, and listened to the skies with his multi-frequency digital hearing, he found no one trying to conquer the galaxy or attempting to blow up the planet. He couldn't even find some villain planning to drain the seas or plunder a mountain. It seemed as though everyone, the good and the bad, were busy with much more mundane things, and they only had normal problems. So, Superpower Ultra Man spent his days bored, exploring the skies in search of missions impossible that were deserving of a superhero of his caliber.

He got so very bored that when they offered him a television program to do, to demonstrate his abilities, he accepted, though he would only get the chance to rescue a few dozen people.

And when, finally, his moment of glory arrived, about which every superhero dreams, his demonstration turned into a complete disaster. Superpower Ultra Man was so used to thinking of things on a grand scale that he didn't know how to grab and rescue a single person.

He did everything to the max, without controlling his strength or his speed, so the whole thing ended up as a painful mix of blows, bruises, scratches, shouts, broken bones and torn clothing. Hurt and half naked, the "saved" ended up calling the

superhero everything under the sun, amid the loud laughter of the public and journalists...

It's possible that no superhero had ever been so embarrassed. And ever since that day, any time someone refuses to do something because they consider it to be beneath themselves, everyone remembers the case of Superpower Ultra Man and says:

- "Don't be such a Superpower Ultra Man; if you never learn how to do the little things, you'll never know greatness."

## Annex 2

### Real life superheroes transform into masked vigilantes to protect citizens of America

Most of us have heard of a neighborhood watch - but this man is taking his citizen's duties to the next level. They're regular men with jobs and families and responsibilities who somehow have enough energy at the end of the day to journey into America's neediest neighborhoods to do what they can. But what does being an urban crime-fighter involve and why do the 'real-life superheroes' feel a need to put their lives at risk?

Phoenix uploads clips of the vigilantes' brave work to his YouTube channel, and the short videos have now topped over 800,000 views. Part of the attraction for fans and admirers of the couple are the outfits that they do their crime-fighting work in. But it's not a latex fetish that makes them squeeze into those tight suits. Phoenix explained: "We are basically a citizen eye witness group. If we see a crime, we run to the victim, see if they want to press charges, at that point we go after the bad guy, catch him, and either hold them in position or dial 911 and wait until the cops arrive." "When I see someone being a victim of crime, I'm not just going to watch it," he adds. His side-kick and wife Purple Reign emphasizes that they are definitely not vigilantes and have lawyers who instruct them on how to intervene in a crime legally. Phoenix added: "Any time you see something wrong, you need someone to stand up and say that is wrong."

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