

From communication to collaboration in TEFL: Groupwork task proposal for the teaching of Business English

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Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el papel del trabajo en grupo en la enseñanza universitaria del inglés para los negocios. Se propone avanzar hacia una teoría cooperativa, tan presente en el nuevo Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Los docentes pueden hacer uso de las dinámicas de grupo y de léxico específico para amoldarse a las preferencias de su alumnado.

Abstract

This paper aims to highlight the role of groupwork in the teaching of Business English at university level. I propose to move onto a cooperative stage, so much claimed for in the new European Higher Education Area. Teachers can make use of group arrangements and domain-specific lexicon to best suit their learners' preferences.

Palabras clave

TEFL
Cooperación
Colaboración
Trabajo en grupo
Práctica oral

Key words

TEFL
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Groupwork
Oral practice

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INTRODUCTION¹

The present paper aims to highlight the role of groupwork in the teaching and learning of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), more specifically, English for Business at university level. The new regulations of the European Higher Education Area

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(EHEA) promote the social and group construction of meanings which can be easily applied to a field like foreign language learning. By means of language exchange and use, we will be not only triggering linguistic mechanisms but also benefiting from principles of cooperation and social collaboration.

For the scope of this paper, we are referring to groupwork as a pedagogical endeavour in which the task objective is meant to be achieved by the collaboration and work of a small group of students in class. In this context, communication and cooperation processes undoubtedly arise, which make it a challenge for both teachers and L2 students.

This paper takes groupworking techniques onto the pedagogical field, more specifically, to the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the Spanish university system. Firstly, I will claim for a pedagogical shift from communicative language teaching (CLT) to collaborative learning practice. These theoretical sections include main notional constructs regarding cooperation, group awareness and group dynamics. My focus is linguistic on the one hand, and interpersonal on the other; in this way, I am combining linguistic and extra-linguistic issues in the TEFL practice. I will also expose some advantages and drawbacks of groupworking in relation to these two aspects.

The second half of this paper is devoted to the description of my own teaching environment at Malaga University, followed by a group activity proposal for a Business English class with university students. The key point in ESP activities is their flexibility and adaptability to a specific context and class group: what I am providing here is a set of tasks, proceedings and measures to be undertaken in groupwork environments, which should be tailored by practitioners according to their own needs.

Groupwork has been always used as a powerful working technique by social workers and psychologists, who have used it to take the best out of their patients and clients: the psychological benefit of sharing and the atmosphere it creates is highly affective and effective. Groupwork therapeutic consequences (Barnes *et al.* 1999: 101) can be well applied to an L2 class. Students' having a voice within their groups makes them freer regarding their oral participation in the classroom; moreover, it makes them more confident since they are sharing their knowledge with peers, who act as closer output evaluators.

FROM COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING TO COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Communicative language teaching tenets can be summarised in the following way: «language is seen as a social tool to make meaning [...]; no single methodology is prescribed [...]; learner expectations and attitudes have increasingly come to be recognised for their role» in their process of learning (Savignon 2007: 211). In opposition to prior pedagogical trends, the communicative approach pleads for the following principles in foreign language teaching:

1. Communicative language teaching perceives language learning as something moving from surface grammatical items towards deeper sentence meaning (Savignon 1983; Gretsch 2009: 334).

2. Regarding school curricula, communicative teaching means considering specific language situations in everyday life, focusing on the meanings required in each of those and on the *process* of construction, rather than on the resulting *product*.

3. More recent definitions of communicative language teaching describe it as «the ability to comprehend and produce speech in real situations in ways that are effective and appropriate in relation to the context,» giving a special focus on the oral side of language ([Moore 2009: 244](#)).

CLT approach gives all language teachers the opportunity of interpreting it in their own way. This freedom in its application leads to much confusion especially regarding the very concept of 'communication'. As Hiep (2007: 195) points out, «although the theory upon which CLT is based upon is uniform, it is broad.» Therefore, far from being something encouraging, it leaves practitioners in a situation of teaching uncertainty. As a step to address this problem, collaboration practices in L2 can be used as a means for effective communication, offering the teaching background to practise the afore-mentioned communicative principles.

When looking at the process of communication more deeply, issues on co-operation inevitably come up: «for communication to succeed, speakers and addressees need to work together and coordinate their individual actions and beliefs in order to build a mutual agreement» ([Fernández Dobao and Palacios Martínez 2007: 88](#)). As a consequence, instead of placing myself within the so-called communicative approach, I will rather make use of that communicative philosophy to enhance L2

oral participation and personal interaction. For this purpose, working in groups in the classroom opens up communication channels, and at the same time it serves as a concrete and measurable teaching tool in the middle of that CLT vagueness.

Richards and Rodgers (2001), in their presentation of different TEFL methods, try to escape from the inevitable communicative teaching fashion in foreign language instruction. In exchange, they propose the principles and ideas of cooperative learning (among other alternatives) as a dynamic way of constructive communication. As we will see in the following paper section, recent pedagogical trends plead for a socially constructed knowledge which is only acquired in cooperation. Making use of these authors' idea of learning, I will design an interaction environment where L2 is the communication tool, and where peer relations are the physical context in which this learning process takes place.

Collaboration in groupwork as linguistic interaction

Social constructions of meaning have derived into cooperative learning, what becomes the basis for the EHEA. This cooperative behaviour is especially relevant in the class of English as a foreign language for several reasons, as stated below:

1. Research shows that cooperation diminishes anxiety and facilitates an active participation.
2. In order to have an integrated curriculum, we have to abandon an individualist approach in search of a collaborative attitude.
3. Learning autonomy needs interpersonal relations in the classroom (Dörnyei and Malderez 1999: 155). This autonomy perception entered the language teaching arena in the 1990s, when TEFL was conceived as a research activity that could and should bring autonomy into the classroom; it was autonomy, in that case, the object of construction.

According to Douglas (2000: 8), «a group is a miniature social system which reflects the behavioural patterns of the society from which its members come.» This social nature adds some complexity to the whole process of groupworking, and at the same time, it makes group tasks more real and purpose-bound. These social relations

reveal the need for a linguistic tool of interaction (Jaques 1984: 1), which is in this case Business English.

Following Vygotskian principles of human learning, Swan claims that «people do not develop through repetition or discovery methods but through social interaction» (2006: 68). In this framework of human social exchanges, speech is undoubtedly one of the most necessary means for this interaction to happen, and when it is done in the L2, the benefits for learning are remarkable from the very beginning. The function of speech as a social tool for learning is double:

1. On the one hand, speech has an external function, allowing the speaker to express him/herself in order to achieve a communicative purpose; at the same time, speakers are practising their oral skills, both in a productive and in a receptive way (i.e. talking and listening to others).

2. On the other hand, and from an internal point of view, «speech is seen as a tool that provokes metacognition» (Swan 2006: 68). Metacognitive implication encourages learning consolidation by means of personal awareness and autonomy. In this case, this personal awareness is socially constructed (Falchikov 2001: 72) in the group.

This explicit awareness in groups is related to the so-called «intercultural/interpersonal competence» (Göbel and Helmke 2010: 1571). Consequently, linguistic variations are considered from a sociolinguistic perspective. The role of communities of practice is crucial in the development of communicative competences, and new topics on power relations and identity therefore emerge (Norton 2000). The concern for a sociocultural competence even affects the teaching of skills in L2; these are being considered as real «social practice» (King *et al.* 2008: 4), and not as mere skill sets to be learnt. This focus on personal identities and placement within a community of practice enhances the analysis of learners' needs and internal motivations, driving teachers towards more affective domains.

Group constructive processes of learning are so dynamic because «a student revises his or her utterances in response to the reactions of those who are listening» (Reigel 2008: 80). This is the reason why this model can be considered non-linear or multidirectional since interaction takes place in a reciprocal way; bidirectional language exchanges with peers ensure students' active participation that is otherwise hard to obtain. Interpersonal behaviour is what the next section deals with.

Group dynamics

Once I have considered the linguistic interaction taking place in groupwork tasks, I will move onto the physical interaction in group activities. As Swan suggests, by adopting collective techniques of learning, the learning process becomes a transition from the «interpsychological (between individuals) to the intrapsychological (within individuals)» (2006: 66). Apart from being useful routine breakers in the class, groupwork exercises provide that productive ground where students can make real language and content practice.

These interpersonal processes are very much taken into account in sessions of group therapy. Douglas (2000: 5) describes them in detail and establishes a very important distinction «between the group as context and the group as instrument.» When applying this idea to my own teaching situation, I perceive the use of groupwork as both the context in which L2 interactions take place, and also the instrument facilitating those.

However, group arrangement entails complex psychological procedures that the teacher has to be aware of. I believe that in order to get the maximum benefit from groupwork activities, group dynamics has to be carefully planned and studied (Alger *et al.* 1998: 39). In this case, students' L1s will be taken into account to ensure linguistically mixed groupings. Moreover, learning preferences are also a decisive point regarding group results; therefore, groupings should contain mixed abilities to certify richer interactions and roles. Bearing in mind these considerations, student groups can be made according to different criteria:

L1 criteria: in multilingual groups, the teacher mixes up students' L1s to ensure the use of English as a lingua franca in the course of the activity.

Learning preferences: practitioners take into account students' learning styles (e.g. oral, written, synthetic, analytic, etc.).

L2 level: the mixing of high-scoring and low-scoring students in a group facilitates the improvement of weaker learners, while strong ones reinforce their knowledge when explaining it to other peers.

Random grouping.

Co-operative learning involves face-to-face interaction and a certain degree of individual responsibility to achieve the group aims and objectives (Falchikov 2001: 50). The conjunction of members' responsibilities results in the so called «group ethos» (Douglas 2000: 46). This ethos or group philosophy is what creates the group working environment and it clearly depends on the members' personalities (Jaques 1984: 24). All this evidences that teachers cannot control everything that is going on in their class, and that is part of the complex and rewarding teaching task.

Advantages of groupwork

Linguistic advantages of groupwork are obvious in an EFL class. Learning in a group context «helps students to acquire specific professional skills» (Jaques 1984: 188). In this case, the advantage of group practice in L2 is two-fold:

1. Since the majority of them will be teachers of English, groups offer the best opportunity for practising their oral English as well as their speaking-in-public techniques.

2. Moreover, we cannot forget about the very nature of Business English, which encourages to share and use language as in real-life situations.

In the context of Spanish undergraduates, most of them share the same L1. According to Yule (1996: 5), «most people within a linguistic community have similar basic experiences of the world and share a lot of non-linguistic knowledge,» something the teacher should take advantage of when designing specific group tasks.

Regarding their interpersonal dynamics, learners will be experiencing new and enriching learning roles. As Falchikov (2001: 20) describes it, working together «enables each student to play the role of tutor and tutee, and thus reap the benefits derived from teaching, and being taught.» This idea relates to the previous concept of bidirectional communication described above, and which enhances the real use of L2 in cooperative contexts: we need a reciprocal process which is possible and comes naturally in group conversations.

Consequently, their motivation rises and so does their academic performance. «Pedagogical advantages include active and participative learning, the incorporation

of potent and proximal modelling and demonstration» (Topping and Ehly 1998: 13) and a higher metacognitive perception of students' own learning progress.

On a more affective side, feelings of respect and tolerance increase with this kind of groupwork practices. Task division in the group implies that every member is equally important. This has a clear positive consequence on their self-esteem too, which will help to improve their confidence in their oral performances.

Drawbacks of groupwork

Sharing a common linguistic background (in this case, Spanish as their L1) is certainly a serious inconvenient when we expect students to use L2 in their interaction. Linguistically speaking, this process of group inquiry could be improved by mixing Spanish natives with foreign Erasmus students². This linguistic mixture is possible nowadays with the increasing number of exchange students coming to Spanish universities; however, most subjects and groups still have major predominance of native speakers of Spanish.

As far as groupwork drawbacks are concerned, it is worth noting that inexperienced teachers in the field of group working «may feel that a collaborative learning class is desperately out of control» (Bruffee 1993: 31). It might seem so if the intended interaction is taking place in the groups, and that would have to be considered as a complete success. In fact, when both students and teacher understand and accept this new learning environment, all their anxiety disappears.

Furthermore, a clear task structure and goals are required. If the teacher does not provide them, learners will receive unclear and confusing messages. Even though everything cannot be under control, at least task aims and steps must be clear enough from the very beginning; otherwise, there is a high risk of students feeling lost or doing something else, not related to the class task.

On the contrary, considering groupwork seminars as lecture extensions is a well-known danger (Jaques 1984: 71). In some cases, groupwork is used just as doubt solving time, or even as a continuation of a lecture, where no new learning opportunities are created. On a more individual basis, the teacher cannot provide

² Malaga University is popular in Spain for taking in many foreign students within the European Erasmus programme.

full personal attention to particular group members. A common purpose is needed to keep members united; otherwise, members can feel competitive and individualistic.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A SPANISH UNIVERSITY EFL CLASS: STATE OF THE ART

Issues on groupwork were researched for the first time back in the 1960s (Falchikov 2001: 67). Surprisingly enough, half a century later, we find very few instances of groupworking in most of Spanish public universities. The reason for this groupwork shortage can be found in earlier stages, since Spanish university students come from a strong individual working tradition. Even the physical arrangement in primary school classes is not prepared to carry out these types of activities, since students sit all in parallel rows. Once they become university students, they also find their desks in rows fixed to the classroom floor so that nobody can move them. The learning environment and infrastructure predispose to master classes, where students interventions (and especially peer co-operation) is a difficult task. Spanish learners simply cannot share their work because they are not used to do that while learning.

Very often in the Spanish education system, groupwork has been perceived as an opportunity for doing competition activities in the classroom. However, some studies demonstrate that competition can easily destroy the essence of groupworking, which is antagonist by nature (Falchikov 2001: 51; Sharan and Sharan 1992: 5). Competition sometimes triggers disconnected individualism, forgetting about the sense of belonging to social groups. Competition activities are frequently used in L2 learning environments: student motivation increases, class rhythm speeds up and these tasks are particularly useful to retain certain lexical items.

In my opinion, perceptions of competition and cooperation may have cultural roots. Spanish students are familiar with class competition and they enjoy it, but they are not so acquainted with working co-operatively. My aim is to introduce practices of groupwork at university level, trying to bring in some cooperation philosophy into students' way of working. This groupwork proposal matches some of the EHEA principles, as stated by Räisänen and Fortanet-Gómez (2008: 15-16), and Fleming (2009):

- Preparing students for the labour market.
- Introducing innovations in classroom methodologies and teaching approaches, i.e. collaborative learning.
- Supplying enough strategies to arise students' awareness on their own learning processes.

The kind of oral communication that I want to foster in my English for Business classes is one related to business exchanges, using as much specific terminology as possible. Apart from their written exercises, oral goals will be better achieved if they are worked on in oral cooperation. In this case, I am also taking advantage of my students' age and English level to improve their management and interpersonal skills.

Contrary to university students' advantageous age and context, we have some implicit barriers regarding learners' oral participation. Oral interventions in the EFL classroom are not popular in Spain. Many students do not feel ready enough to do so. Their lack of speaking confidence may be due to the fact that not even their teachers have that confidence, and therefore they have not received enough oral input in their English classrooms since primary education.

In my opinion, groupwork can be a good technique to take some first steps towards oral intervention in the class. Psychologically speaking, it is always safer to expose your opinions under the shelter of peers rather than doing it on your own. Therefore, my purpose here is to increase students' talking time in English by creating learning opportunities for using L2 in interaction.

A COMMUNICATIVE TASK FOR ENGLISH FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES: A PROPOSAL

Practitioners have to face some difficulties for groupwork real implementation. The whole framework of groupworking in an EFL classroom is hard to apply to some particular Spanish contexts for the following reasons:

1. Firstly, and following Douglas's (1991: 11) criteria of groupwork development, there might be some clashes at the level of recognition of what working in groups implies. The sequence processes of forming a group, establishing interaction norms and going through the process of brain storming require specific formation for both teacher and students.

2. Secondly, once these steps have been undertaken and these problems overcome, the teacher needs to keep the group task alive. Stagnation and spiralling phenomena (Douglas 1991: 11) can occur, turning the group exercise into complete group failure. It is the lack of formation in group dynamics what remains as the weak point in the teachers' case.

3. Finally, regarding Málaga university students, their lack of experience in group activities is their main handicap, and the solution for this is repeated practice.

For all those reasons, all members of the Spanish educational community perceive learner-centred sessions as too challenging. Groupwork is not considered as an excellent way of creating learning opportunities; it is perceived as an exercise that actually deviates students from their curriculum-sequenced learning process.

The solution to this apparently hopeless situation is not easy. As Douglas (1991: 16) himself indicates: «the honing and refining of groupwork skill is a long-term process in which experience in a variety of group settings as well as time is very necessary.»

In the next section, I am providing task ideas for English Philology students enrolled in a Business English course. Their specific setting and background have been taken into account to personalise the whole activity. The key for success in groupwork exercises is to contextualise the activity objectives according to learners' needs.

Participants' role in groupwork

As it has been already mentioned, learners obtain much more opportunities to get involved in meaningful oral exchanges by means of groupwork. However, applying learning theories to a real learning environment is always a very difficult task (Swan 2006: 73; Falchikov 2001: 84; Jaques 1984: 13). Principles and theories of language learning have to be reconciled according to our most suitable preferences, and that requires time, pedagogic formation (Sharan and Sharan 1992: 152) and a careful analysis of what our students need to acquire the necessary competences and objectives to pass the course.

Douglas (2000: 132) provides some clues on how to apply theory to practice: those theoretical principles and knowledge «have to be useful and adapted to the needs of those who work with it.» Learners' needs have been identified as the starting point in any teaching context recently, especially in English for Specific Purposes areas in higher education (Molle and Prior 2008; Dunworth 2008).

In an educational group, «it is always important to consider how people learn» (Preston-Shoot 1987: 14). In fact, our classroom methodology should be closely linked to our students' learning preferences. Therefore, groupwork might be more suitable for those who like social interaction and have a more extroverted personality. On the other hand, regarding more introverted students who prefer to work on their own, teachers have to be careful when planning group arrangements and assigning roles.

When looking at my own context, the roles of both teacher and students have to be redefined. In this new definition I am implementing groupwork as a novel teaching practice in an EFL Spanish university classroom. My role, therefore, would be the one of designing, providing and monitoring useful group tasks.

These tasks have to be complex enough in order to contain sufficient workload for all group members. During the task, the teacher has to provide scaffolding and also to «give status to students' own constructions» (Swan 2006: 79). Furthermore, the instructor has to be ready to solve any possible conflict arising from clashing opinions. More than ever before, teachers are developing here their roles of mediators, facilitators and guides in the process of learning.

Summing up the teacher's role in one concept, he/she becomes an actual researcher. Little by little, and by means of testing and evaluating their own hypotheses, teachers come to find the materials and tasks that suit their groups most, according to their students' needs.

On the other hand, students have to carry out the task they are given by applying former theoretical concepts freely, exposing their ideas to other members of their groups orally. Consequently, the issue of «commitment» (Douglas 2000: 9) arises, since that is what brings energy and dedication into a group. Having more committed learners means dealing with more aware students regarding their own learning processes, and that is exactly what the EHEA is trying to promote: a) cooperation; b) reflection/autonomy; c) ICT use; d) active participation; e) communication; f) authenticity.

As Piepho (1981: 45) claims, this groupwork practice demands and, at the same time, triggers «learners' willingness to involve themselves actively in communication» on the basis of its own interactive nature. Each person's actions and contributions have direct results in the group. Each member will be in charge of something to account for. I am providing now some keys for groupwork that can be adapted and contextualised depending on the teacher reality.

Setting and warming up

The students I am working with are aged between 21-23, and they are doing an English Philology degree at the University of Malaga. As I mentioned above, they are used to groupworking only if some competition factor is involved; the aim now is to open them to new uses of groupworking, mainly to the linguistic and interpersonal ones.

In order to have an overall perception of what students think and feel about groupwork, I carried out a brief informal survey to see their opinions about it, their experiences so far and their future expectations. Here you have a selection of some of the learners' judgments about practising oral L2 in groups:

Student 1: «Esta asignatura es muy útil, pero no tenemos suficiente práctica oral, y todos venimos con un nivel oral flojo, que convendría mejorar en clase.» [This is a very useful subject, but we do not have enough oral practice. We all have a low oral level, which should be improved in class]

Student 2: «En un futuro, vamos a tener que usar este inglés de los negocios en un negocio, con lo que estaría bien ensayar esas situaciones en la clase.» [We will use this business English in action in the future, so it would be good to practice real-life situations in the class]

Student 3: «A mí se me quedan mejor las cosas en los juegos que hemos hecho en grupos.» [I learn/retain things better when we play in groups, as we have done]

In this Business English class, groups normally consist of four/five people each, a number that can be considered as ideal in terms of discussion and decision-making (Bruffee 1993: 32). After doing the necessary group arrangements, I provide learners with clear and general instructions on the task procedure from the very beginning:

they will be doing internal groupwork first, and then presentation of their outcomes to the rest of the groups in the classroom.

Douglas (2000: 77) describes the importance of giving students clear rules. Most peer and group talk can be little helpful especially if students are not used to it. Very little exploratory talk comes out when learners do not know how to do it effectively. However, if they are given clear instructions, they will be able to use classroom vocabulary to illustrate their points; after the group discussion, they can expose it in front of their peers, who will ask them questions about their arguments. This process of giving directions, group debate and subsequent oral presentation is a multiple process that aims to enhance:

1. Internal consensus within the group, whose members have to reach agreements regarding the task objectives.
2. External validity, when students present their ideas to the rest of their colleagues in class.

Timing is another important factor (Douglas 2000: 30), determining whether the task will be carried out successfully or not. The next step in task development is contextualising students as much as possible; some studies show that providing enough foreknowledge about the task itself maximises students' final results (Yoshimura 2006).

Inspired by Bruffee (1993: 41-43), I normally ask learners some controversial questions throughout the whole task process in order to generate some possible debate. Teacher's questions are an excellent resource to develop students' discussion skills (Sharan and Sharan 1992: 27).

Task contents

Prior to this groupwork session, students receive out-of-class readings. These readings are the theoretical part of certain book units (Mascull 2002), together with chapters from other books such as Marler and Mattia (1995).

Mascull's coursebook does not claim to be within the CLT paradigm, however the author makes clear that it not only covers business vocabulary but also important business communication skills. Surprisingly, and probably in order to be accessible to

all student sectors, Mascull assures that the book can be used for self-study, group-study, with or without formal instruction. From my point of view, groupwork is the necessary learning condition to practise some business skills such as oral communication.

The contents that we are going to work with in class are divided into different business situations, each of them requiring a specific lexicon and discourse (e.g. finding a job, company types, business phone calls, production processes, etc.). Each group is given a certain task, all of them related to the processes of CV writing, job hunting and job interviews. These activities focus on general interests rather than on individual problems, though students may find solutions to their content or procedural problems through groupwork practice. This makes the exercise appealing, motivating and meaningful for their real life, something they continuously demand in English for specific purposes lessons. The tasks are the following ones:

Group 1: They are responsible for the very first step in the process of getting a job: CV writing. All together, they have to design a professional CV on given transparencies/slides to show to the rest of the class. They all have their own CVs with them, previously designed and worked on in class. This group is given several real CVs to analyse the different sections and models they find in them.

Group 2: They have to undergo the process of surfing the internet (wifi connection is available in all rooms) trying to find language schools and/or private centres where they can work in the future. They have to base their search criteria upon notions of working conditions and required working experience.

Group 3: In this case, they are performing a role-play in which one of them is being interviewed for a post in a language school. Each group member performs a role, and then they present their short role-play to the rest of the class.

As far as timing is concerned, the time for this session is 60 minutes. After a warming up of about 10 minutes, each group works for another 20. Group presentations follow, of about 7-8 minutes each, with subsequent group comments and questions.

Student assessment and activity evaluation

Giving feedback while the group activity is taking place helps learners to re-direct their interventions or to know whether they are on the right track. Feedback must be given «with sensitivity and judgement» (Jaques 1984: 53), that is, being descriptive rather than evaluative, so that the feeling of offense is diminished. In this way, teachers are also encouraging dialogue rather than blocking it.

There are several elements highly visible to the teacher, such as: students' ease in cooperation; students' participation; students' use of the sources at their disposal.

Teacher's feedback, as an instance of external group evaluation, would complement students' internal evaluation of their own groupwork. For that purpose, anonymous evaluation sheets will be given at the end of the task. These contain simple questions evaluating group members' linguistic behaviour in L2 as well as their co-operative behaviour. The function of these evaluation sheets is both self-evaluative and orientative.

In an attempt to be self-critical with my teaching practice, I do an activity evaluation to check the validity of this practice with my students. Issues such as «time» and «familiarity» with the activity are some of the things to evaluate (Kiely 2009: 105), some time after the activity has taken place.

CONCLUSIONS

«CLT should not be treated as a package of formulaic, prescriptive classroom techniques» (Hiep 2007: 200). On the contrary, it leaves teaching interpretation to the teachers themselves, and we have to take advantage of that by applying it to our own contexts. The flexibility offered by groupwork and cooperative tasks is the perfect scenario to combine and adapt students' needs and task objectives.

In doing so, the role of the teacher becomes the one of a researcher. Implementing, observing and then re-applying groupwork techniques is the pedagogical cycle a teacher has to follow for a successful teaching.

When we examine students' need for L2 practice, as well as their explicit desire to have real oral exchanges in class, we realise how important groupwork is in

the acquisition of both specific and general competences. In my case, I want to use groupwork as a collaborative setting where students employ English to communicate among themselves and then to make individual oral presentations about their group findings for the rest of the class.

A group is the perfect environment to put all individual work into practice in a collective way. It does not suppress personal work but it can be considered as the following step once the individual goals are achieved, and also the means to achieve them. In fact, in order to communicate their personal ideas to the group, some organisation and configuration of their own ideas is required first (Sharan and Sharan 1992: 13-14). Individual and collective needs, work and interests are combined to construct a successful L2 learning environment.

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