Cooperative learning in English reading development

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Introduction

Communication is a factor which has been taken into account in ESL classrooms in the last years. Communicative methods have been presented as a means to reach communication in classroom activities. An important methodology to consider in increasing communication in ESL classes is the one known as Cooperative Learning. In Cooperative Learning students need to cooperate among themselves to fulfill a determined task. Cooperation in the classroom facilitates communication in all of the different activities students need to develop (Bassano and Christison, 1988). Many different kinds of activities have been proposed to achieve cooperative goals. Group activities constitute an important tool in cooperative learning. Interaction with peers increases acquisition of knowledge in a second language.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING

According to Calderon (1987), Cooperative Learning is defined as a strategy used to increase motivation and retention. It helps students develop a positive image of themselves and others to give a means for critical thinking and problem solving and to motivate collaborative social skills.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT COOPERATIVE LEARNING.

In using Cooperative techniques it is important for the teacher to consider the following assumptions:

1. When students have not been taught to work with others, they will not begin to cooperate immediately when you put them into small groups. Therefore, Cooperative group skills must be taught like other skills for example in math, writing and reading.

2. Harmer (1993) argue that physical and spatial arrangements of the classroom affect cooperative work. It is necessary that the activities are structured in a way students can cooperate and talk to each other. That is, they need to talk face to face.

3. The keys to successful group work are classmate support and group dynamics since the members of the group can determine how well the group will function.

The responsibilities, the time control, the respect for each other, the low performance are problems to keep in mind and solve with the cooperation and support of peers in the group and through well structured teacher guidance.

STRATEGIES FOR GROUP DYNAMICS.

There are different ways in which students can work in cooperative groups.

Strategy 1. **RESTRUCTURING**. It consists of giving students specific instructions for doing the task. The teacher's participation is minimal and these activities help the students to be ready for future small group and cooperative experiences.

Strategy 2. **ONE-CENTERED**. These activities put one student in the "reflector" for a few minutes. They consist of giving the student individual attention for a limited period of time. The strategies permit the aggressive students to reaffirm their importance in the group.

Strategy 3. **UNIFIED GROUP**. These activities promote cooperation in the group since they begin to think about group goals instead of individual goals. The group success is promoted through praise and positive reinforcement. Thus, the participation of each member of the group is needed, and they cannot move away because the group will not be successful.

Strategy 4. **DYAD**. Through these activities students keep in touch with each other and they begin to feel more comfortable sharing personal ideas and values. As a matter of fact, these activities can be structured for pair work.

Strategy 5. **SMALL GROUP**. For these activities patience, encouragement, and good listening habits are needed. The teacher is only a facilitator since success depends on the group itself. These activities help students develop techniques for group interaction.

Strategy 6. **LARGE GROUP**. In this strategy the activities are similar to small group activities referring to objectives and structure. The difference is in the inclusion of a larger number of students which need more skills among group members in fair group interaction.

STEPS IN TEACHING COOPERATIVE SKILLS.

There are four steps to follow in teaching Cooperative skills.

Step 1. **STUDENTS MUST SEE VALUE IN GROUP WORK.** The students are accustomed to the traditional classroom organization that is, the teacher in front of the class and the students in straight rows watching the teacher. But, if the teacher hopes for a positive reaction from the students to their first experiences in Cooperative Learning, students must understand at least the rationale for this kind of classroom experience which will help them reach their goals.

Step 2. **STUDENTS MUST HAVE THE APPROPRIATE SKILLS.** It is important to give the students the necessary skills for successful group work. For example, getting information and responding to questions are the skills being practiced when they want information from the other members and respond to questions.

Step 3. **STUDENTS MUST PRACTICE THE SKILLS**. The design and setting up of practice situations are the teacher's main reponsibilities for Cooperative Learning. For example gathering information, asking questions and responding to questions.

It is necessary that students practice the skills for enough time so that they can integrate these skills into their daily interactions with their peers.

LEVELS OF COOPERATIVE SKILLS.

There are four levels of cooperative skills which can be categorized in the following way.

1. **FORMING**: these skills are related to the organization of the group and setting behavioral norms. The students can move into their groups quickly and quietly, talk in a moderate way, stay with their groups - during the activity, motivate

participation within the group, use group members' names, and avoid giving any discouragement.

2. **FUNCTIONING**: The objective of these skills is to complete tasks and maintain good relationships within the group. Groups must understand the time limits and how to carry out the activity within the groups, step by step.

3. **FORMULATING**: Through this skill students can develop a deeper understanding of the material being studied and develop better reasoning strategies, as well as achieve maximum retention of the material.

4. **FERMENTING**: It is considered the highest – level skill for cooperative groups. This involves helping learners explore the material they have been exposed to more completely.

BENEFITS FROM USING COOPERATIVE TECHNIQUES.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT. Omagio (1978) found that students learned best when they had cooperated during their learning. And the students who competed, got good results in a cooperative-based program. When the students feel they are contributing to the group, they feel successful academically. This improves self-steem and it represents an outcome of Cooperative activity.

READING AND COOPERATIVE TASKS

According to Goodman (1970) reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game. Readers must first recognize a multiplicity of linguistic signals (letters, morphemes, syllables, words, phrases, grammatical cues, discourse markers) and give some order to those signals by means of their linguistic data processing mechanisms.

The reader selects what makes sense, what has some meaning. It is a guessing game because for getting meaning, students should process language, infer meaning, decide what to retain or what not.

SCHEMA THEORY AND BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN READING.

The readers construct meaning, decide on what to hold, and infer a writer´s message by means of what is known as **schema theory**. It means that a text does not have meaning by itself, it is the reader who brings information knowledge, emotion, experience and culture to the printed word. The students use their background information when addressing a text.

TYPES OF TEXTS.
- Non fiction
- Reports
- Editorials
- Essays, articles
- Reference (dictionaries, encyclopedias)
- Fictions
- novels
- Short stories
- Jokes
- Drama
- Poetry
- Letters
- business
- Greeting cards
- Diaries, journals
- Memos (interoffice memos)
- Messages (phone messages)
- Announcements
- Newspapers
- Academic writing
- Short answer test responses
- Reports
- Essays, papers
- Theses, books
- Forms, applications
- Questionnaires

- Directions
- Labels
- Signs
- Recipes
- Bills (and other financial statements)
- Maps
- Manuals
- Menus
- Schedules
- Advertisements
- Commercial Personal (want ads)
- Invitations
- Directories (telephone, yellow pages)
- Comic scripts, cartoons

STRATEGIES FOR READING COMPREHENSION

The strategies students use when reading are very useful and important for students to develop appropriate, and efficient comprehension strategies. The eight most important strategies proposed by different authors are:

1. IDENTIFYING THE PURPOSE IN READING.

For efficient reading to take place it is necessary to identify the purpose in reading something. If you know the purpose of a reading task you know what to look for and what information to discard. When you teach a reading technique be sure your students know the purpose in reading a text.

2. USE GRAPHEMIC AND PATTERNS TO AID IN BOTTOM-UP DECODING

(for beginning level learners). It is important to practice the relation letter – sound with beginner students. If they know this relation and do not have to guess when reading, reading speed and comprehension can improve.

Example: Short vowel sound in VC patterns (bat, him, leg, wish, etc).

- Long vowel sound in VCE (final silent) Patterns (late, time, bite, etc).
- Long vowel sound in VV patterns (seat, coat, etc).
- Distinguishing hard **C** and **G** from soft **C** and **G** (cat vs city, game vs gem, etc).

3. USE EFFICIENT SILENT READING TECHNIQUES

(from intermediate to advanced levels). At beginning levels, students try to read aloud so, let them do it with intermediate and advanced students, it is a good idea to give some clues on silent reading:

- You don´t need to pronounce each word to yourself.
- Try to visually, perceive more than one word at a time, preferably phrases.
- Unless a word is absolutely crucial to global understanding, skip over it and try to infer its meaning through its context.

4. SKIMMING.

Quickly running one's eyes across a whole text (an essay, article, or chapter) to get the gist. Skimming gives readers the advantage of being able to predict the purpose of the passage, the main topic or message and possibly some of the supporting ideas. You can train students in skimming by giving them, for example, 30 seconds to look through a few pages of material, have them close their books and tell you what they learned.
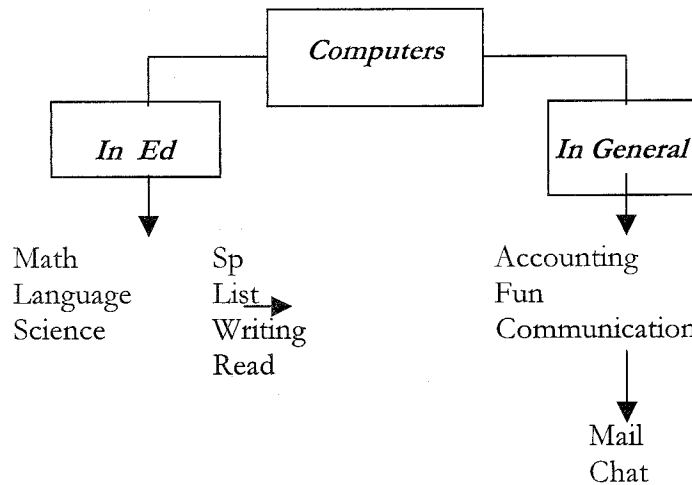
5. SCANNING.

It is quickly searching for some particular piece or pieces of information in a text. Scanning exercises may ask students to look for names or dates, to find a definition of a key concept, or to list a certain number of supporting details. The purpose of scanning is to extract certain specific information without reading through the whole text.

6. SEMANTIC MAPPING CLUSTERING.

When students have to deal with texts that have a heavy amount of information that is difficult to remember, it is a good idea to develop maps or clusters of ideas. Meaningful clusters help the reader to give an order to what the text presents. These maps can be done individually or in group work.

Example:

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                        ┌──────────────┐
            ┌───────────┤  Computers   ├───────────┐
            │           └──────────────┘           │
      ┌─────┴─────┐                           ┌─────┴──────┐
      │   In Ed   │                           │ In General │
      └─────┬─────┘                           └─────┬──────┘
            ▼                                       ▼
      Math        Sp                          Accounting
      Language    List ▶                      Fun
      Science     Writing                     Communication
                  Read                              │
                                                    ▼
                                              Mail
                                              Chat
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7. GUESSING. Guessing is a very important strategy to practice when reading.
- Guess the meaning of a word
- Guess a grammatical relationship (ex: pronoun reference)
- Guess a discourse relationship
- Infer implied meaning (between the lines)
- Guess about a cultural reference
- Guess content messages.

Practice it so students develop successful, reasonably accurate guessings. This is possible if students use the clues available to them.

8. VOCABULARY ANALYSIS. It helps guessing when students do not know immediately a word. It is possible then to analyze the components of a word.
- Look for prefixes (co, inter – un,) etc.
- Look for suffixes (-tion, - tive, etc) part

of speech.
- Look for grammatical contexts that may signal information
- Look at the semantic context (topic) for clues.

After observing the different characteristics of reading comprehension, we can say that this is a very complete and ample skill which requires a lot of classroom practice. With cooperative activities in mind, it is also possible to say that reading can be developed through the use of Jigsaw reading: a technique from cooperative learning methodology.

Activities such as jigsaw reading, strip stories, and spot the difference fall into the category of cooperative activities (Jacobson, 1988).

JIGSAW TECHNIQUE

Jigsaw is a technique used when applying

cooperative learning methodology. Groups are organized to cooperate and complete a task (Cohelo, 1988).

Jigsaw has been classified as a human relation technique. This technique was created to promote better relations among the races in integrated schools (Omaggio, 1978). Students feel the need to communicate among themselves and they need the cooperation of one another to develop problem solving activities.

This jigsaw technique has been presented as a jigsaw puzzle in which each student in a group has a piece of information and needs to combine all the information to put the puzzle together. Therefore, cooperation, speaking, and listening are of great importance; in other words, students need to communicate to obtain the puzzle as a complete and solved set, as a result.

In jigsaw groups each student depends on the others. Each student studies and learns something. Students have to teach or tell their peers in their groups the main ideas and important details about what they have learned. In the groups students analyze the information which can be useful to complete a task. Students apply and develop their presentation and questioning skills. It is very important for each student to give clear information. Students are motivated to explain and ask because at the end of the activity all the information shared in the group will help each student to complete a task or quiz (Coelho, 1988). In this way, it is possible to observe that students have a clear purpose for communicating.

Students need to follow some steps until they are ready to develop jigsaw activities. Some activities used to motivate students to cooperate and work in a jigsaw activity

can be word puzzles in which each student in a group has a clue to complete the puzzle. Once the puzzle has been completed, students decide polite and unpolite forms for requesting information and take into account the polite ones for future group work.

To organize jigsaws, Coelho (1988) presents the importance for the teacher to divide students into heterogeneous groups. The topic for class is divided into subtopics. A sub-topic is given to each group. Each student in the group learns about that sub-topic. The teacher gives each group material which contains enough information about the sub-topic. When each group has known the information required for that sub-topic, the teacher forms new groups in such a way that one student from each former group becomes a member of the new group. The former groups are known as Expert Groups and the latter are known as Jigsaw groups. In the jigsaw groups students share information about the subtopics that they have learned in the expert groups. This information shared by the students in each jigsaw group will help everyone build up a knowledge about the general topic of class.

In the jigsaw groups, students have the opportunity to expose what they know about their sub-topic and make questions about the sub-topics that the other students in the same group expose.

The role of the teacher while students work in the jigsaw groups is one of a guide. He can supervise that each student in each group works and cooperates with the others. In our Spanish speaking classrooms, it is important for the teacher to check that students are interacting in English. It is important for the teacher to give some questions to guide the discussion

in each jigsaw group. Opinion questions about the general topic can be useful for increasing communication in the groups (Cohelo, 1988).

Once students have finished the work in the jigsaw groups, the teacher can conduct feedback about the general topic. After the feedback, students can take a quiz or develop a written task to assure that they have understood the topic.

In jigsaw reading activities, students in the expert groups receive texts about sub-topics of a general topic. In jigsaw groups students talk about the information they have read to complete the information about the general topic. Therefore, the general topic will make sense when students have discussed and shared all the information acquired in the expert groups. Geddes and Strutridge have written a book known as *Reading Links* in which they present reading jigsaw activities.

Although, it is possible to find published material for the jigsaw classroom, the teacher can create his or her own materials. For example, the teacher can choose an article from a magazine or newspaper and adapt it for class. He or she can divide the topic into sub-topics, type the content of the sub-topics to be handed out to the students in the expert groups. Then, the teacher prepares some questions for the jigsaw groups (Cohelo, 1988). The use of audiovisual materials, for example a picture, can help students to understand the content of the reading. The advantage here is that each teacher can use the vocabulary and structures that students know and those which are going to be learned or acquired during the activity.

CONCLUSION

From the methodological point of view, activities applying jigsaw techniques seem to be useful for developing cooperative learning through communication. In ESL classrooms these activities represent a tool to be used by the teacher to develop the four main skills needed in learning a second language. Students involved in these kinds of activities can feel free to speak and interact with their peers. Group work diminishes anxiety levels in students, and at the same time students have a purpose and a desire to communicate. These facts about jigsaw activities allow teachers to use them as real communicative activities in ESL classrooms.

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APPENDIX

The teacher divides the class into groups of three or four students. Each group receives a paragraph from the reading that appears in this appendix. Each group reads the text and then the teacher mixes groups, so one student from each group forms a new group. Each student in the group has a different information piece that he or she has to share with the rest of the group to develop the jigsaw actitivity.

As a reward for his successful voyage of discovery, the Spanish sovereigns granted Columbus the right to bear arms. According to the blazon specified in letters patent dated May 20, 1493, Columbus was to bear in the first and the second quarters the royal charges of Castile and Leon -- the castle and the lion -- but with different tinctures or colors. In the third quarter would be islands in a wavy sea, and in the fourth, the customary arms of his family.

The earlist graphic representation of Columbus's arms is found in his **Book of Privileges** and shows the significant modifications Columbus ordered by his own authority. In addition to the royal charges that were authorized in the top quarters, Columbus adopted the royal colors as well, added a continent among the islands in the third quarter, and for the fourth quarter borrowed five anchors in fess from the blazon of the Admiral of Castile. Columbus's bold usurpation of the royal arms, as well as his choice of additional symbols, help to define his personality and his sense of the significance of his service to the Spanish monarchs.

● *Book of Privileges*
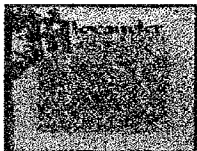
The **Book of Privileges** is a collection of agreements between Columbus and the crowns of Spain prepared in Seville in 1502 before his 4th final voyage. The compilation of documents includes the 1497 confirmation of the rights to titles and profits granted to the Admiral by the 1492 contract of Santa Fe and augmented in 1493 and 1494, as well as routine instructions and authorizations related to his third voyage. We know that four copies of his **Book of Privileges** existed in 1502, three written on vellum and one on paper.

All three vellum copies have thirty-six documents in common, including the Papal Bull *inter caetera* of May 4, 1493, defining the line of demarcation of future Spanish and Portuguese explorations, and specifically acknowledging Columbus's contributions. The bull is the first document on vellum in the Library's copy and the thirty-sixth document in the Genoa and the Paris codices. The Library copy does not have the elaborate rubricated title page, the vividly colored Columbus coat of arms, or the authenticating notarial signatures contained in the other copies. The Library's copy, however, does have a unique transcription of the Papal Bull *Dudum siquidem* of September 26, 1493, extending the Spanish donation. The bull is folded and addressed to the Spanish sovereigns.

JIGSAW READING ACTIVITY

WHO DISCOVERED AMERICA?
Read the article below. Form groups of three students. Read the text and comprehend it in a very precise way because later you won't have the information in the text and you have to share this information with a new group of classmates to do the exercises in this handout.

Christopher Columbus

Man and Myth

After five centuries, Columbus remains a mysterious and controversial figure who has been variously described as one of the greatest mariners in history, a visionary genius, a mystic, a national hero, a failed administrator, a naive entrepreneur, and a ruthless and greedy imperialist.

Columbus's enterprise to find a westward route to Asia grew out of the practical experience of a long and varied maritime career, as well as out of his considerable reading in geographical and theological literature. He settled for a time in Portugal, where he tried unsuccessfully to enlist support for his project, before moving to Spain. After many difficulties, through a combination of good luck and persuasiveness, he gained the support of the Catholic monarchs, Isabel and Fernando.

The widely published report of his voyage of 1492 made Columbus famous throughout Europe and secured for him the title of Admiral of the Ocean Sea and further royal patronage. Columbus, who never abandoned the belief that he had reached Asia, led three more expeditions to the Caribbean. But intrigue and his own administrative failings brought disappointment and political obscurity to his final years.

In Search and Defense of Privileges

Queen Isabel and King Fernando had agreed to Columbus's lavish demands if he succeeded on his first voyage: he would be knighted, appointed Admiral of the Ocean Sea, made the viceroy of any new lands, and awarded ten percent of any new wealth. By 1502, however, Columbus had every reason to fear for the security of his position. He had been charged with maladministration in the Indies.

The Library's vellum copy of the **Book of Privileges** is one of four that Columbus commissioned to record his agreements with the Spanish crown. It is unique in preserving an unofficial transcription of a Papal Bull of September 26, 1493 in which Pope Alexander VI extended Spain's rights to the New World.

Much concerned with social status, Columbus was granted a coat of arms in 1493. By 1502, he had added several new elements, such as an emerging continent next to islands and five golden anchors to represent the office of the Admiral of the Sea.

- *Columbus' Coat of Arms*
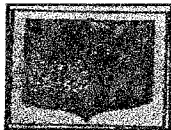
Quiz

Complete the Key.

Identify the numbered places on the map below. Write your answers on the lines provided.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Quiz.

7. An _____ looks for history in the ground.
8. A _____ knows a lot about the world.
9. A _____ goes to live in a new place
10. A _____ agrees to pay for or support someone else
11. A _____ studies the weather.
12. A _____ studies the different people of the world.
13. A _____ reads maps and guides ships on a voyage.
14. A _____ spends a lifetime studying.

What Do You Think?

1. Did Columbus discover America? Give reasons for your opinion.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Why are the native people called "Indians" ?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

True or False?
Write **T** if the statement is true, **F** if the statement is false.

1._____ The Vikings came to North America to search for gold.

2._____ The native people came from India.

3._____ The native people are Amerindians.

4._____ John the Skillful was hired by the king of England to find new lands.

5._____ Columbus was working for the king and queen of Spain.

6._____ The European were looking for a way to get to the East.

7._____ Columbus made some mistakes.

8._____ The native people were the first people in America.

9._____ We can study history only through written records and documents.

Complete the Sentences.

Complete each of the sentences with a word from the list below. Use each word only once.

scholar   archeologist   mariner   expert
anthropologist   geographer   navigator   ancestors
settler   climatologist   explorer   descendants
trader   sponsor

1.   A _____ is a sailor.

2.   An_____ is someone who knows a lot about something.

3.   An _____ travels to new places.

4.   Our _____ lived before us.

5.   Our _____ will live after us.

6.   A _____ is someone who buys and sells things.

PERSONAL EVALUATION: WORKING IN GROUPS.

Now that you have been working in groups for a while, spend some time thinking about how well you work in a group. This self-evaluation form will help you to think about your group skills.

Directions: Read each statement below. Then circle the number that best represents what you did in your group.

Yes, often   No, not at all
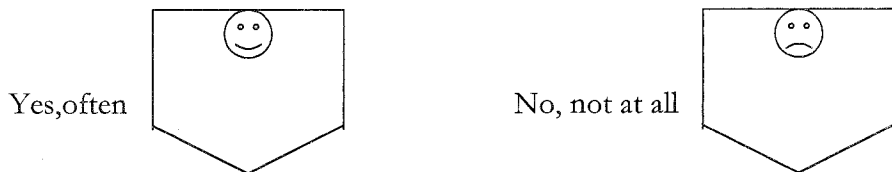
1.   I talked to everyone in my   5   4   3   2   1   0
     group today.

2.   I listened to everybody in   5   4   3   2   1   0
     my group today.

3. I encouraged and praised others in my group.

    5   4   3   2   1   0

4. I explained to someone who didn´t understand.

    5   4   3   2   1   0

5. I asked for an explanation when I didn´t understand.

    5   4   3   2   1   0