

# How Public High School Students Assume Cooperative Roles to Develop Their EFL Speaking Skills

Cómo asumen estudiantes de secundaria de un colegio público roles cooperativos para desarrollar sus habilidades de habla

**Julie Natalie Parra Espinel**

nataliemuymuy84@hotmail.com

**Diana Carolina Fonseca Canaria**

craisycarodia84@hotmail.com

Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Colombia

This study describes an investigation we carried out in order to identify how the specific roles that 7<sup>TH</sup> grade public school students assumed when they worked cooperatively were related to their development of speaking skills in English. Data were gathered through interviews, field notes, students' reflections and audio recordings. The findings revealed that students who were involved in cooperative activities chose and assumed roles taking into account preferences, skills and personality traits. In the same manner, when learners worked together, their roles were affected by each other and they put into practice some social strategies with the purpose of supporting their embryonic speaking development.

**Key words:** Cooperative, English, learning, roles, speaking, skills, work

Este estudio describe un proyecto de investigación llevado a cabo para identificar cómo los roles específicos que asumían los estudiantes de grado séptimo, en un colegio público mientras trabajaban cooperativamente, estaban relacionados con el desarrollo de su habilidad de habla en inglés. Los datos se recolectaron a través de entrevistas, notas de campo, reflexiones de los estudiantes y grabaciones de audio. Los resultados revelaron que los estudiantes en actividades cooperativas escogieron y asumieron roles teniendo en cuenta preferencias, habilidades y rasgos de personalidad. De la misma manera, cuando los estudiantes trabajaron en conjunto pusieron en práctica algunas estrategias sociales con el propósito de apoyar su etapa inicial de desarrollo de habla en inglés.

**Palabras clave:** aprendizaje cooperativo, habilidades de habla en inglés, roles, trabajo cooperativo

## Introduction

The Communicative approach has been considered by many teachers useful to foster classroom interaction; it can allow students to increase acquisition of knowledge as well as language proficiency and self-esteem. Among the methodologies which can be related to a communicative approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) is cooperative learning, which has become a relevant tool for teachers and learners; it can support teachers in providing students with meaningful communicative situations in which they can express their ideas, verify hypotheses, share information and interact among themselves in order to enrich their language and life skills.

In some kinds of cooperative work activities such as numbered heads together, three steps interview and jigsaw (Kagan, 1994), students have the chance to work together assuming specific roles with the aim of accomplishing particular tasks. Our idea by means of this project was that as they played their roles, 7<sup>th</sup> grade students at the “Institucion Educativa Julius Sieber” in Tunja, Boyaca, became aware that they were not only an important support for their own learning but were also a fundamental part of a group.

As we could notice in the initial survey, group work sometimes became a problem because learners tried to choose the person who knew more about the topic thinking that they could avoid their responsibility inside the group. Consequently, there were some pupils who had more responsibility than others. In relation to this statement, by implementing cooperative activities among 7<sup>th</sup> grade students, we sought to help them to take advantage of the abilities that they could have to communicate in English, as well as to work together trying to assume equal responsibilities inside a group for reaching a common goal.

Bearing in mind that cooperative work implies a complex process, we designed activities to involve students in cooperative work in four gradual stages from the easiest to the most complex. First of all, students developed cooperative activities in order to learn their weaknesses and strengths in relation to language skills. Moreover, they identified which roles they preferred to assume when they worked with others. In the second and third stages, they faced team work in itself; it means that they had to put into practice cooperative and collaborative skills. In the last stage, we expected students to consolidate their work showing how they articulated speaking skills with

cooperative work through a theater performance. As students developed the different activities, we as researchers investigated how learners engaged in their development of speaking skill in English as they worked cooperatively as well as how their roles were characterized in cooperative tasks development.

## **Literature Review**

Keeping in mind that the purpose of this research was to identify how the specific roles 7<sup>th</sup> grade students assumed when they worked cooperatively were related to their development of speaking skill in English, this section will contextualize the reader with theoretical elements associated with cooperative learning and the development of speaking skills in EFL, which support the development of this work.

## **Cooperative Learning, Principles and Techniques**

Cooperative Language Learning Method (CLL) is the pedagogical approach in which learners work in groups. This method has been defined by a variety of authors in different fields. To begin with, Johnson and Johnson (2001) define cooperative learning as a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject. According to Slavin (1999), a member of a team can be encouraged to participate if he perceives that the group's benefit also constitutes his/her own gain. To end, Artz and Newman (1990) describe CLL as small groups of learners working together as a team to solve a problem, complete a task, or accomplish a common goal.

Bearing in mind the previous definitions, it is important to explain the pillars which support cooperative learning as a meaningful way for learning English as a foreign language; we need to keep in mind different points of view about language learning. Thus, it is relevant to consider Piaget and Vygotsky's ideas. According to Piaget (1969), language is developed as a symbolic system to express knowledge acquired through interaction with the physical world. He emphasizes that children build their cognitive development when there is a direct contact between children and those different things that they can explore, touch and manipulate. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that language develops entirely from social interaction. It means that language and thought emerge when children are able to interact with others (children

or adults). So, people need to relate to others in order to supply primary necessities and to share with others what they feel or think.

Equally important, Kagan (1994) agrees with Piaget's and Vigotsky's theories because he pointed out that there is a better chance of learning when people interact with each other. Rooted in this statement is the need to clarify that cooperative work differs from group work. Despite both of them being seen as pedagogical strategies that promote participation and interaction, there is a difference between "having students work in a group" (Johnson & Johnson, 2000) and structuring students to work cooperatively. Thereby, group work is defined as the way in which students form groups but do not necessarily articulate their work based on what cooperation implies. Furthermore, students many times work drawn solely by their own will and they are not aware that they need to join others to reach common goals. In that sense, this practice does not seem to function because there is not a positive interdependence from group mates to fulfill a task.

In contrast to group work, cooperative work becomes a useful strategy for learners because they can learn from and teach each other inside a group, and thus form relationships with their peers by overcoming shyness, anonymity and isolation. As López and Viáfara (2007) mentioned, "Learners' personal growth is among the positive aspects that emerged from working cooperatively". In their study, some teachers claimed that through working cooperatively their students seemed to start gaining self-confidence, self-esteem and self-motivation. In addition to this relevant aspect, teachers can take advantage of collaborative activities to make the learning process effective. It is a positive aspect that teachers can move from one group to another checking students' task development and simultaneously can perceive students' attitudes and aptitudes in order to provide them feedback. In regard to teachers' points of view about cooperative work, López and Viáfara (2007) could establish that the dynamics of working cooperatively in class led to teachers identifying the development of students' interpersonal skills. Further, learners had the chance to work independently enabling the teacher's control in class to be reduced.

Bearing in mind what cooperation implies, some authors are in agreement with the fact that minimal principles are required to promote Cooperative Learning in students. By this means, we took into account the principles suggested by Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993). These experts focus on developing some key elements

with an emphasis on integrating social skills and academic tasks. They say that five principles are required to carry out collaborative tasks. At first, students need to see that their work benefits group mates and their group mates' work benefits them (*positive interdependence*) so each member must be responsible for helping to complete a task (*individual accountability*). Working together, team mates have the chance to put into practice *interpersonal and small-group skills* to coordinate efforts and solve problems inside the group; moreover, they have opportunities to promote partners' success by helping and encouraging their attempts to develop a shared task. (*Face to face promotive interaction*). Finally, group members need to analyze how they are working e.g. if their group is functioning using collaborative skills or not (*reflection*).

In addition, we applied and adapted some techniques proposed by Kagan (1994) and used in CLL as follows:

**Three steps interview.** In which students perform as interviewers to share information within the group.

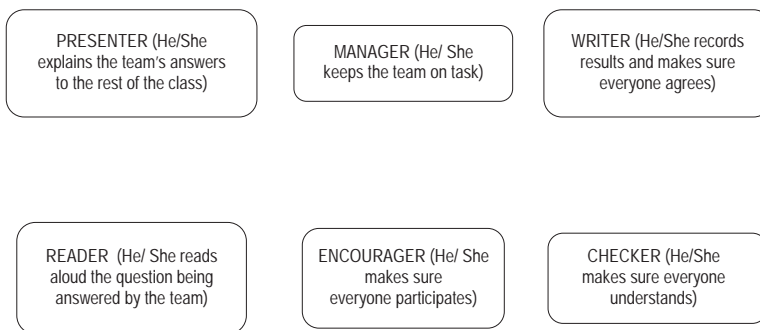
**Numbered heads together.** Where the students on each team are numbered from 1 to 4 and one teammate chosen at random has to answer a question formulated by the teacher.

**Jigsaw.** It is a technique in which each student in a group has a piece of information and needs to combine all the information to put the puzzle together.

**Paired storytelling.** It is a technique in which participants are paired off and assigned different segments of a text. After, they jot down key concepts found in the sections in order to exchange information and relate the story they have read/heard previously.

## Learners' Roles in CLL

As one of the main objectives in CLL is that learners share responsibilities inside the group, there are some common roles that students can assume in cooperative jobs with the aim of being accountable for a portion of a task and making participation equitable among partakers. In diagram 1 there are some roles that team members or learners can play while they are involved in cooperative learning.



**Diagram 1.** Kind of learners' roles in CLL (Kagan, 1994)

## Developing Speaking Skills in EFL

Based on Chastain (1998, pp.330-358), speaking is a productive skill which involves many components. "Speaking is more than making the right sounds, choosing the right words or getting the constructions grammatically correct". Thereby, Thornbury (2005, p. 3) claims that "Speaking is interactive and requires the ability to cooperate in the management of speaking turns". Furthermore, speakers need to use communicative strategies when they lack words, phrases and structures in English. Besides, speakers need to check what they have understood by repeating or clarifying what they have said. In other words, they need to adjust what they say in order to be comprehensible (Hedge, 2000, p. 262). Therefore, it is relevant to know the different activities that teachers can accomplish in order to promote speaking practice inside the classroom. Along the next paragraphs we will mention some of these activities based on Harmer (2009).

**Information gap.** It is where speakers have different bits of information and they can only complete the whole picture, text or puzzle by sharing that information.

**Surveys.** Students can design a questionnaire with a set of questions about any topic and go round the group asking each participant their questions. This activity can be used to get students interviewing each other.

**Student presentations.** Individual students give a talk on a given topic or person. In order for this to work for the individual and for the rest of the class, time must be given for the student to gather information and structure it accordingly.

To close this part, we wanted to mention the study completed by Prieto (2007) because it relates cooperative learning and speaking skill. The purpose of this study was to identify to what extent Cooperative Learning strategies were effective in reaching the desired oral production level of 11<sup>th</sup> graders at *Colegio de Bachillerato Patria*. For achieving this objective, Prieto designed five lesson plans in which she combined CL and speaking strategies. Along the study, she realized that during the development of cooperative activities learners were aware of their responsibility in their speaking process because there were some activities which allowed and encouraged them to speak. Moreover, Prieto could notice that activity by activity students had many elements at their disposal to express themselves and to be successful in communicating. Pupils also understood that practicing speaking was the only way to develop it, obviously using an appropriate input.

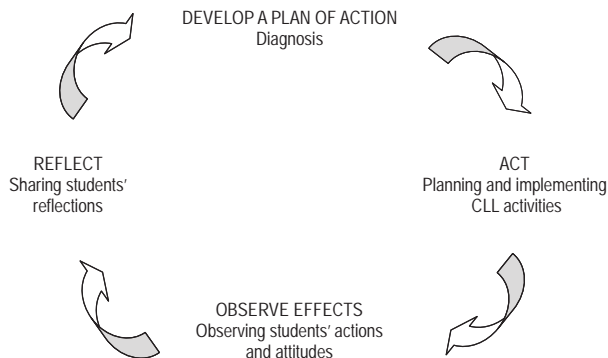
## **Research Design**

In this section we will present the approach and type of research that we followed considering the main purpose of this investigation. Moreover, the setting and population, in which we carried out this work, will be described. Additionally, there is an explanation of data collection techniques and procedures that we used.

## **Approach and Type of Research**

The approach that we used for developing this inquiry was a qualitative one. This approach considers each participant as a social agent. Each participant belongs to a social context that determines his/her ideology. For that reason, participants were grouped according to their interests or characteristics, brought together by a moderator who uses the groups and their interaction as a way to gain information about a focused issue (Delgado & Gutierrez, 1999). Looking at these statements, we studied how a group of students performed when they assumed specific roles while working cooperatively in order to develop speaking skills. In regard to the type of research, this work was framed under the action research (AR) methodology; we followed the stages proposed by Madrid (1998) to implement this kind of research.

To develop a plan of action we designed and applied a diagnostic survey (See annex A) with the aim to identify and examine what happened when students worked in groups and how they practiced speaking inside a group. Then, for acting, we prepared the lesson plans including cooperative activities and developed them with



**Figure 2.** Basic stages of Action Research (Madrid, 1998)

the chosen groups. In regard to the observation we did of the effects of cooperative activities in the classroom, we took field notes and recorded students' teamwork. Finally, we involved students in reflecting upon the implementation of cooperative learning; what is more, we constantly ponder upon what we were doing to support our students' work.

## Setting and Population

The public school we worked with is called "Institucion Educativa Julius Sieber". It is located in the Asis neighborhood, Tunja, Boyaca. This school has primary and secondary education. Primary learners study during the morning while secondary pupils study in the afternoon. For developing this inquiry, we first visited this institution because we needed to collect information for our diagnosis. Due to the fact that we were doing our final practice we had to work with an assigned group. Consequently, we developed our project with a group of 37 seventh graders. They were between 11 and 14 years old and had an elementary English level. There were 15 girls and 22 boys and all were from low and middle social classes. Although we applied our pedagogical strategy to all those students, we selected only a representative number, 8 participants, organized in two groups of four who were chosen at random, to gather information. In consideration of our professional ethics as researchers, we could not reveal the real names of participants involved in this



quest. So, each member received a nickname depending on his/her physical features or personality traits. The nicknames were Sandy, Damaris, Gafitas, Bond, Timy, Pecus, Chistin and Pervertín. In that sense, we explored in depth what happened to their learning process during the implementation of the activities.

At the beginning of working as a team, students were reluctant to work with other partners different from their close friends. For that reason, they sometimes did not collaborate with their group, showing instead a lack of discipline and indifference to help their teammates to achieve the common goal. However, when they started to work together, assuming equal responsibilities, they realized that they could help and be helped by the rest of the participants to overcome difficulties. In addition, they could take advantages of their own skills.

## Data Collection Techniques and Procedures

In order to answer our research question we used two techniques. The first one was related to observation; we used audio recordings as well as field notes as instruments. The second one referred to elicitation; the instrument consisted of interviews. As secondary instruments, we used surveys which contained students' reflections.

**Audio recordings.** Hubbard and Power (1999, pp. 95-96) claim, "When teachers do transcribe tapes, they often choose snippets of conversations to illustrate key points in their research". Thus, audio recordings provided us information about how students developed their speaking skill when they worked in groups. We took out some chunks from this instrument for getting detailed evidence on specific aspects such as pronunciation, repetition and spelling as well as how pupils used the target language to relate to their peers as they interacted orally with them. So, we used audio recordings by placing small tape recorders within groups in those cooperative activities in which students had to read, to expound upon ideas, give opinions or when learners had to discuss a specific topic in order to come to an agreement.

**Field notes.** In order to report what we observed during the activities, we made use of field notes. Burns (1999, p. 87) remarks, "Notes or field notes are descriptions and accounts of events in the research context which are written in a relatively factual and objective style". Subsequently, we employed this instrument each session in which cooperative activities took place, for twelve weeks approximately. It meant

that we wrote our impressions as researchers about collaborative skills. Furthermore, we included our impressions about learners' actions, attitudes, and even some English words that participants used in team work; we also described how students interacted among themselves as they assumed specific roles in groups. During the development of the activities we both wrote some key words, quotations and expressions that learners had said and after each class we as researchers shared our impressions with the intention of complementing our notes and writing in a more objective perspective what we observed along the activity.

**Interviews.** A semi-structured interview (Bell, 1999) was used to explore the teachers' implementations of cooperative learning in their lessons. That is why we used semi-structured interviews in which we as researchers had a general idea of where we wanted the interview to go. We brought a set of questions as the basis for the interview but we asked the participants other questions that helped us to delve deeper or to obtain more information about team work.

For gathering accurate information, after each class one of us chose one team member of a base group in order to ask him/her what he/she perceived about group dynamic, partners' attitudes toward roles and how he/she practiced speaking with his/her peers. Moreover, one of us started the interview as a spontaneous conversation in order to give students the confidence to answer the questions without pressure.

## **Pedagogical Design**

We designed our pedagogical strategy based on the analysis of the diagnosis survey that we applied at the beginning of this inquiry. Also, we took into consideration the Cooperative Language Learning principles proposed by Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec (1993). The activities were integrated to the course syllabus as a sequential process which involved the following stages: sensibilization, a reading task, "The Origin of Emeralds", organizing a script and achieving a big team goal, a "role play" based on the reading.

In the first stage we carried out basic tasks or activities in order for participants to become aware of the real meaning of cooperative work: **sensibilization**; for this stage, students were chosen at random to organize groups of four and to develop a team task. In the second, students worked together to read "The Origin of Emeralds"; they

interacted orally to discuss what they read or found in the text and became familiar with unknown vocabulary, among other activities. The third phase consisted of organizing and completing a short script about the story that they read in the previous stage. The last stage was the consolidation of the process: the presentation of a theater play. That is, our participants were able to show how they articulated speaking skills with cooperative activities, as well as everything they did during the process in which they prepared the performance of the story. In Table 1 you can see the different activities and techniques which were applied in each stage of this study. Additionally, the reader will see the roles that emerged during cooperative tasks.

**Table 1.** Activities, techniques and roles applied in CLL

Phase	Activity	CLT technique	CLT roles
Sensibilization	Describing animals	Random organization of groups	Monitor, Painter, Dictionary guide, Writer and Presenter.
Reading task: “The Origin of Emeralds”	Baseboard	Paired storytelling Numbered heads together	Monitor, Drawer Writer, Checker, Dictionary guide, Spinner, Speaker.
Organizing a script	Characters, description, Crossword puzzle	Three steps interview, Jigsaw	Interviewer , Writer Interviewee, Reader, Monitor, Organizer
Role play	Rehearsal	Partners	Monitor, Organizer, Time-keeper, Encourager, Presenter.

In Annex B, you can see an example of a complete lesson plan that we followed in order to carry out the different cooperative tasks.

## Data Analysis

This section describes the process followed to analyze the information we gathered for answering our research question based on the nature of the information that we collected by means of tape recordings, interviews, and field notes as well as surveys which contained students’ reflections.

For analyzing our data we based our work on the grounded theory. This approach invites the investigator to read the data several times in order to detect similar themes or patterns (Freeman, 1998). For starting this procedure, we got a general overview of all the instruments and then began by looking at interviews in relation to how roles were characterized in cooperative tasks and how students engaged in their speaking practice while cooperating. Then, we made the transcription of each one of them in order to learn the students’ perceptions about how they used the target language inside a group, how they assumed specific roles and how the group was functioning. After that, we used different colors to identify some common patterns about team work, roles and speaking. To corroborate what we found in the interviews, we continued by analyzing students’ surveys, our field notes and tape recordings of students’ oral interaction in groups; we constantly contrasted the information in these instruments. It is important to clarify that along the following discussion of the analysis, we will use the following explicit codes to illustrate the evidence: (S’I= Students’ Interviews, FN= Filed Notes from researchers, TR= Tape Recordings and SR= Students’ personal reflection).

For validating the findings obtained from the instruments, we used methodological triangulation which combines dissimilar methods such as interviews, observations, and physical evidence to study the same unit (Merriam, 1988, p. 69). Similarly, we took into account researcher triangulation e.g. “the use of several researchers” (Janesick, 1994, p. 215). Our study implied that each one of us analyzed data from our own perspective and then compared our points of view in order to enrich the process. Gathering patterns and constantly reducing information, we came up with categories and sub categories, as follows:

**Table 2.** Categories and subcategories found along the data analysis

Categories	Subcategories
1. The emerging dynamics to choose and assume roles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying personality traits in relation to attitudes toward roles.</li> <li>• Discovering our skills to know the role that each person can take to learn together.</li> <li>• Becoming tolerant of our preferences in constructing a role.</li> </ul>
2. Using strategies to support an embryonic speaking development while cooperating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building confidence</li> <li>• Practicing language</li> </ul>

## 1. The Emerging Dynamics to Choose and Assume Roles

The first category we found refers to the process participants followed for the assignation of the functions members of groups would perform.

From the beginning of the study, we encouraged cooperative learning in students by involving them in assuming specific roles while they worked on their teams. Data revealed that students spent some time organizing themselves which implied three specific aspects: exploring their abilities, their preferences and knowing each others' attitudes and aptitudes with the objective of negotiating and selecting among themselves the roles they would take. The next section discusses each of the three topics previously named.

**Identifying personality traits in relation to attitudes toward roles.** It refers to how students tried to discover and make others realize their own and their peers' behaviors and attitudes when they had to develop a specific assignment in a cooperative task. It meant that those personality features that participants had were relevant for considering if someone was suitable for a role in the group or not. Hence, students' personalities became a crucial factor in how to organize the groups which were going to work along the term.

Bearing the previous in mind, we could evidence along the process that when students had to assume roles, there were some of them who felt worried because they did not know if the roles that they or their partners would assume could be suitable for them. For instance, one student mentioned: *"Pervertín cuando empezamos con lo de los grupos él era muy indisciplinado, yo no sé por qué lo escogieron de monitor"* (*Pervertín, when we started with the groups he was very undisciplined, I do not know why he was chosen as monitor*) (Timy, S'I # 2, line 50). As we could see in the previous example an undisciplined person was not considered the best option for being the monitor. In contrast we found that sometimes teammates saw in other partners the best characteristics to assume a specific responsibility; as evidence of this situation we took the following example: *"Abora si me han dejado a mi de monitor y entre el grupo nos ayudamos, Y dicen que yo soy buen monitor, los ayudo a los 3, a los compañeros, yo los ayudo y ellos me ayudan"* (*Now, they have left me as monitor and among the group we help each other, they say that I am a good monitor, I help the three, my partners, and they also help me*). (Timy, S'I # 2, Line 61).

**Discovering our skills to know the role that each person can take to learn together.** It means that when collaborative work was promoted, certain talents

participants had were essential to foster cooperation in the group. Then, most of the students were able to realize that they were good at developing assignments depending on the different activities. Indeed, some pupils not only were conscious about their own abilities, but also were able to identify their peers' knacks. Through the information that we gathered, we could evidence that when students had to make decisions in relation to the participation that they wanted to have in a task, teammates usually looked at participants' strengths in order to fulfill a shared goal effectively. The following excerpts exemplify the point:

*"Timy me dice que escriba porque yo tengo bonita letra"*

*(Timy tells me to write because I have nice handwriting)* (Pecus, S'I #8, line 24)

Another example from an interview:

*Teacher-researcher: ¿A Bond siempre le gusta mirar en el diccionario?* (Does Bond always like to look up in the dictionary?)

*Gafitas: Pues, nosotros lo escogimos porque a él le gusta buscar en el diccionario y busca rápido las palabras.* (We chose him because he likes to look things up in the dictionary and finds the words quickly). (Gafitas, S'I # 7, lines 18- 20)

Additionally, we noticed students themselves highlighted their skills to assume a role. Example, *"Sí, a mi me gusta más escribir para captar bien las cosas y decirlas mejor"* (Yes, I like to write to understand things well and say them better). (Damaris, S'I #6, line 60). Students most of the time said that they wanted to perform certain chores or particular activities because they knew that they were good at doing that. Hence, it helped the group to work quickly to complete assignments. Look at the following example:

- *¿En todas las actividades de grupo ha asumido el mismo rol?* (Have you assumed the same role in all the activities?)
- *Sí, escribiendo.* (Yes, writing)
- *Porque soy muy rápida para escribir y pienso muy rápido y desarrollamos más rápido.* (Because I am very fast at writing, I think faster and we complete the activities quickly). (S'R, Student's Reflections)

**Becoming tolerant of our preferences in constructing a role.** According to our findings, roles were characterized taking into account students' preferences. We

noticed that when students were involved in structuring groups there were some participants who expected to perform according to what they preferred. So, some learners tried to express what they liked and expected to do it in those situations in which they felt comfortable. Thereby, teammates exercise some values as tolerance and respect because when a person expressed to his/her partners the responsibility that he/she wanted to assume, his/her peers were free to accept or not accept that choice. The following is a clear example:

*Teacher-researcher:* Por qué cambió el rol de monitor? (Why did you change the role of monitor?)

*Pervertín:* No, me cambiaron porque yo casi no apoyaba en nada. (No, they changed me because I almost did not support anything)

*Teacher-researcher:* Y ¿Quién decidió cambiarlo? (And, Who decided to change you?)

*Pervertín:* Eh, todos. (eh, everyone.) (Pervertín, S'I # 4, line147)

Similarly, we could evidence that team members thought assuming roles and working together implied that a person had to fulfill some criteria. They considered collaboration, companionship, friendship, responsibility and respect as important tools for developing chores while joining forces. Then, when a participant was not considered to be a good candidate for performing a specific role, her/his partners tried to give him/her another task which he/she could assume better. During the interview some students came up with answers like this:

*Teacher-researcher:* ¿Cómo le pareció la actividad de hoy? (How did you feel about today's activity?)

*Timy:* Ja, Ja, bien, si me gustó. Por lo que eran entrevistas entre los personajes de la leyenda. Pero la verdad, hoy no estuvimos organizados más que todo la culpa la tuvo Pervertín porque él no quería ser el que entrevistaba ni el entrevistado. (Well, I liked it since the interviews were over the characters of the legend. But the truth is, we were not organized because of Pervertín. He did not want to be either interviewer or interviewee.)

*Teacher-researcher:* Y entonces ¿Cómo hicieron si a él le tocaba entrevistar? (Then, How did you do if he was in charge of interviewing?)

*Timy:* A Pervertín si (risas) no le gusta así hablar, Es que a él le da más... es como pena hablar para el público. Entonces como él sólo quería escribir y buscar en el diccionario le

dijimos, Pervertín ayúdenos con escribir, como él era Are entonces de paso iba escribiendo lo que él iba contestando. (Pervertín [laughs] does not like to speak so, it is like he feels embarrassed ... when talking to the public. Then as he just wanted to write and look things up in the dictionary we told him, Pervertín, helps us to write, as he was Are, he was writing what he was answering). (Timy, S'I # 5, line 14- 16, 40 -41)

In the example presented above, the monitor realized that Pervertín could perform neither interviewer nor interviewee because he did not achieve the role's expectation. Nevertheless, their partners were able to discover that he liked performing other roles as writer and dictionary guide in which he felt comfortable. Consequently, Pervertín could also contribute with a portion of the task

## 2. Using Strategies to Support an Embryonic Speaking Development While Cooperating

This category attempts to describe the atmosphere that students created within the group when they worked together and those different aspects related to the way in which students put into practice the target language at a very basic level. It was evident when participants used utterances, short sentences and expressions interacting with peers.

**Building confidence.** It is related to the environment that students created when they shared ideas, opinions and experiences with other partakers. At the beginning of the process, we could notice that students felt reluctant to establish any level of conversations with their peers. Most of them pointed out that they did not trust other team members to express words or expressions which implied the use of the foreign language (*FN, researchers*). However, when they remained in the same groups for at least three months, some learners showed more interest in interacting orally in English with their teammates. Likewise, since they got to know each other better while they worked as a team, some pupils started to reveal relaxing attitudes such as making jokes with their peers, encouraging each other to participate in the given tasks or supporting partners in what they were doing. Through this attitudes students felt comfortable and the group dynamic was more enjoyable and effective.

The following example characterizes the confidence built up among participants to encourage or motivate partakers to join a task as well as to support what they were



saying or doing; some students used special words to congratulate peers' work when necessary:

*Timy*: Venga le pregunto la quinta. Where did he appear? (Come, I'll ask you the fifth question. Where did he appear?)

*Pecus*: River Magdalena. (Magdalena River)

*Timy*: Muy bien, mocoso. Ahora estúdiéselo bien (Okay, brat. Now study it well.) (Timy said that expression to encourage his partner to speak) (FN, researchers)

In the previous example, Timy, who was the monitor of the group, often used words like: *Hágale, ay no importa, dígalo, rápido, hable duro, bien* (*Do it, never mind, say so, fast, speak up, very good*) to animate partners inside the group to participate.

Likewise, we realized that writing was a tool for students to prepare their speaking. As a meaningful consequence in speaking, learners started to ask other members inside the group to clarify their doubts about what the meaning of a word was, how to write specific words and how to pronounce them accurately. In that manner, learners broke down some barriers for being understood as well as being able to understand what other partners wanted to say as is evidenced in the following sample:

*Damaris*: (writer)¿Qué es *beautiful*? (What is *beautiful*?)

*Timy*: Bonito o bonita (Nice or pretty).

*Damaris*: ¿Entonces *long* es pelo? (So, is *long* hair?)

*Timy*: No, largo. (No, long).

(TR Chunks)

In this excerpt we could highlight that most of the time students felt the necessity to clarify what they did not know or understand; by this means, they trusted what the other partners advised them.

**Practicing Language.** It involves those different strategies that students used for understanding or verifying information. Along the implementation of cooperative tasks, some pupils adopted repetition and pronunciation as tools for promoting peer interaction. Indeed, we could identify that; when the fellows worked

in small groups, they had more opportunities for practicing what they heard from other partners. Then, when a teammate was able to internalize a word or expression correctly, he/she could perform as a model because his/her partners could probably repeat what he/she was saying. For example:

*Chistin:* Ahora pintémoslo blue and yellow. (Now let's paint it blue and yellow.)

*Bond:* NO, red, color yellow, yellow and red.

We also noticed that team members learnt some expressions that the teacher often used during her classes. Indeed, students who internalized those words and expressions could use them as tools to achieve a better functioning of the group. It reveals that most of the time when students worked as a team, there was frequently someone in the group who felt the need to transmit what the teacher had said to others. The following example illustrates this point:

*Teacher:* Don't worry, that's ok. (She said to the whole group)

*Pecus:* That's ok (He said to the rest of his partners with a mocking accent). Thank you, thank you, thank you. (TR Chunks)

The monitor repeated the words **quickly** and **that's ok** after the teacher said them. He used these expressions inside the group in order to make his partners work faster but at the same time for encouraging them to develop the tasks more efficiently. (FN, researchers)

## Conclusions

This research was meaningful because it helped both students and teachers to understand the importance of cooperative work. Students could increase not only oral skills but also the quality of their participation in the development of a task.

Cooperative learning demands certain abilities, characters and values that students need to cooperate inside a group. In that sense, students could explore not only their abilities and preferences but also learn about each other's attitudes and aptitudes in order to negotiate what to do in a specific task and how to effectively complete it.

For characterizing the roles in cooperative learning, teammates usually looked at participants' strengths in order to fulfill a shared goal effectively. Indeed, during the

development of the activities some students discovered their own abilities and were able to identify peers' knacks.

By assuming roles teammates could put into practice some values such as tolerance and respect because when a person expressed to his/her partners the responsibility that he/she wanted to assume, his/her peers could choose to accept or not accept that choice. Moreover, partakers considered collaboration, companionship, friendship, responsibility and respect as the main qualities for assuming roles and working together.

Concerning how students' speaking practice emerged when they worked on specific cooperative tasks, the team learning atmosphere that students created inside the group was meaningful not only for students to establish conversations with their peers but also to make the group dynamic more enjoyable. These public school seventh grade students, who were not used to speaking English spontaneously in class, started to use words, expressions and short sentences. They usually mixed Spanish and English, but those pieces of language were used meaningfully. They involved mainly two strategies to encourage their own and their group's speaking skills: repetition and pronunciation.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

Cooperative activities provide learners another option for exploring and learning social skills. It means that if students are able to recognize what they can do inside a group, they can probably discover what they can do in society.

Taking into account that teachers have to assume a lot of responsibilities with their students, cooperative learning becomes a useful tool for them to carry out classes. It helps teachers to manage lessons by lowering stress and making it more efficient by means of monitors in small groups.

When using cooperative techniques it is necessary for teachers to select and adapt them taking into account students' needs, interests, language level, previous knowledge and the real environment in order to make the language learning process meaningful as well as useful.

Similarly, some techniques such as numbered heads together, three steps interview, and jigsaw motivated students to participate and to speak in English due to

the fact that they had to follow a process and frequently share ideas in order to show a final product.

We realized that when students assumed specific roles, they shared equal responsibilities and helped other members inside the group to consolidate knowledge. In that sense, they felt that they were important inside the group and that their ideas were valuable.

We noticed that when students worked together they had more opportunities for practicing the speaking skill. However, speaking development is not so spontaneous; this takes time and requires everyday practice. Then, teachers cannot expect that students who have never been used to speaking English would start speaking English from the start in cooperative groups.

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## The Authors

**Julie Natalie Parra Espinel** holds a B.A. in Modern Languages from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Tunja, Boyacá. She belongs to RETELE research group that stimulates autonomous learning among 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester students. She has been an English teacher in different schools in Tunja, Boyacá.

**Diana Carolina Fonseca Canarfa** holds a B.A. in Modern Languages from Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia, Tunja, Boyacá. She has been an English teacher in different schools in Tunja, Boyacá. Her main interests in the language field have been how to develop students' speaking skills and ELT methodologies.

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## Annex A: Diagnosis Survey

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA  
FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN  
ESCUELA DE IDIOMAS  
TUNJA

La presente encuesta tiene como objetivo determinar los puntos de vista de los estudiantes en relación con el trabajo en grupo y las habilidades comunicativas que se desarrollan en las clases de inglés. La información suministrada por cada estudiante es de carácter confidencial, y será usada exclusivamente con propósitos académicos e investigativos.

Escoja la opción con la que más se identifique.

1. ¿Le gusta el idioma inglés?
- a) Mucho  b) Poco  c) Nada  d) Me es indiferente

2. ¿Le gusta hablar en inglés?
- Si  No  ¿Por qué? me gusta hablar

3. ¿Considera que hablar en inglés es importante? Justifique su respuesta.
- Si  No  es un gran proyecto para

4. ¿Le gusta participar en la clase de inglés?
- Si  No
- ¿Por qué? me da pena

¿Cómo? Marque con una X

- Pasar al tablero  Responder preguntas  
 Leer  Preparar diálogos y/o monólogos

Otra: trabaja

5. ¿Con que frecuencia participa en la clase de inglés?
- a) Siempre  b) Usualmente  c) Algunas veces  d) Nunca

¿Por qué? porque disfruto la respuesta

Me gusta trabajar	Mucho	Poco	Nada
Solo			X
En grupo	X		
Por parejas	X		
Cuando el profesor le pregunta a usted			X
Cuando el profesor le pregunta a todo el grupo		X	

7. ¿Cuáles cree usted que son las ventajas y desventajas de trabajar en grupo?

VENTAJAS	DESVENTAJAS
que cuando alguien entiende nos puede explicar a todos	que nos ponemos a hablar sobre todo lo que pasa gente

8. Enumere de 1 a 3 según su preferencia (1 indica la mayor preferencia y 3 indica la menor preferencia). En la conformación de grupos de trabajo prefiere:

- a) Escoger su grupo de trabajo 1
- b) Que el profesor conforme los grupos al azar. 3
- c) Que el profesor escoja los grupos de acuerdo con su criterio. 3

Explique porque el No 1 es de su mayor preferencia. Porque es con la persona que yo más entiendo

9. ¿Cuáles cualidades considera usted que debe tener una persona para trabajar en grupo?

que entienda y que participe con todos nosotros y sea muy amable

10. Me siento cómodo cuando en la clase de inglés me comunico:

- a) Oralmente                      b) Por escrito                       c) Ambas                      d) Ninguna

¿Por qué? Porque por escrito puedo repasar y así mismo la profesora me explica y no hace repetir

11. ¿Cuáles de las siguientes dinámicas de grupo le gustaría que se implementaran para fortalecer su comunicación oral en la clase de inglés?

Debates  Dramatizados  Diálogos  Narraciones

Proponga otra: entonces otro para proponer

¿Por qué? porque

## Annex B: Sample of a Lesson Plan

UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA Y TECNOLÓGICA DE COLOMBIA  
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES  
ENGLISH PRACTICE  
LESSON PLAN: 04

**SCHOOL:** JULIUS SIEBER      **GRADE:** 7A      **DATE:** OCTOBER 13, 2009

**PRE- SERVICE TEACHERS:** Diana Carolina Fonseca, Julie Natalie Parra

**STANDARD:** To describe characters who are involved in a story using simple sentences.  
To answer questions about different characters using simple sentences.

**TOPIC:** Myths

**LANGUAGE:** Simple Past tense (Yes/no and Wh questions)

**FUNCTION:** Describing and introducing characters' general aspects

**TIME:** 4 hours

### Achievement Indicators:

- ♦ To describe a character based on a model.
- ♦ To ask and answer questions with simple sentences in past tense.

Procedures	Communicative activities	Resources	Assessment
<b>Warming up:</b>	Students will listen to a recording about the description of a character. Then, the teacher will ask them what they understood about it. (General aspects)	Tape recorder	The teacher will verify what students understood from the recording depending on the answers they give.



Procedures	Communicative activities	Resources	Assessment
<p><b>Presentation</b></p>	<p>The teacher will draw different rectangles on the board. Next, she will write in the upper left corner the number of the different tables from 1 to 8. Each table will have some incomplete sentences that students will have to complete according to what they understand from the recording. Students will listen to the recording once, twice or thrice if necessary.</p>	<p>Tape recorder</p>	<p>The teacher will ask students for specific details from the text in order to verify comprehension.</p>
<p><b>Guided practice</b></p>	<p>The teacher will give students a piece of paper with the description of a character. This description will have some blanks; then, students will listen to the recording twice in order to complete the blanks (They will listen to the recording thrice if necessary).</p> <p>The teacher will stick on the board the poster with the description and the blanks. Next, she will ask students which are the missing words and she will write them on the poster.</p> <p>The teacher will write some questions on the board and the students will answer them based on the information that they have in the paragraph. Students will copy them in their notebooks.</p>	<p>Tape recorder Poster Markers Set of copies</p>	<p>The teacher will check that all the students copy the sentences in their notebooks.</p>

Procedures	Communicative activities	Resources	Assessment
<p><b>Creative practice (Cooperative work &amp; three steps interview)</b></p>	<p>The teacher will explain to students what the activity is about. Based on the text, “The Origin of Emeralds” and the groups that the teacher organized before (Base groups), each participant inside the group will choose a character and, using the description as a model, write a short description of his/ her character.</p> <p>Then, the teacher will give groups a list of questions which are related to a character in the story. Students will discuss and analyze the different questions in order to understand them.</p> <p>Next, each student inside the group will choose one of the following roles: interviewer, interviewee, writer and reader.</p> <p>The interviewer will ask the questions that the teacher gave her/him. The interviewee will answer the questions using the information that he/she has in his/her description. Two students will perform as writers and they will have to pay attention to the interviewee’s answers and they will have to take notes of each one of them.</p> <p>One student at random will introduce the character.</p>	<p>Tape recorder Worksheets Pencils</p>	

**COMMENTS:** \_\_\_\_\_

**TUTOR’S SIGNATURE:** \_\_\_\_\_