

## The Benefits of Group work

Lynda Badache

[lynda.baadache@etud.sorbonne-nouvelle.fr](mailto:lynda.baadache@etud.sorbonne-nouvelle.fr)

Department of English

University of Batna

ملخص

تتركز ورقة البحث هذه على التجربة التطبيقية للعمل الجماعي التي أجريت على طلبة السنة الأولى، قسم اللغة الانجليزية، جامعة باتنة 2003 . ويتمثل الهدف الأساسي من هذه الدراسة في الوقوف على اختبار مدى فعالية العمل الجماعي كآلية تدريس وانعكاسات ذلك على مستوى الأداء الشفوي للطلبة، محاولة لإيجاد كيفية تحسين التحصيل الأكاديمي وترقيته.

وتوضح نتائج هذه الدراسة بأن العمل الجماعي له أهميته البالغة ف بواسطته يتم تحقيق نتائج أحسن لكونه يخلق مناخاً يتسم بالانشراح والراحة النفسية لدى طلبة ولا سيما الخجول منهم، وكذلك الذين يواجهون مصاعب في التعبير عن آرائهم أمام الحضور، مما أفرز روح التعاون والتعامل والتنافس في مختلف الأنشطة التي يتم تناولها في القسم. وتوكّد هذه الدراسة على إمكانية وجود طرائق أخرى بديلة لتألق التعبير الشفوي بكيفية أفضل من الطرائق الكلاسيكية المعهودة.

### Abstract

The present study focuses on the practical experience of applying group work on first year students of English at Batna University “Year 2003” and examines its effectiveness as a teaching technique on students ‘oral performance. Our purpose is to clearly demonstrate the effects of group work on students ‘oral presentation as a special case and then elaborating how group work positively promotes academic achievement.

The conclusions show how Group work can be of paramount importance for students to achieve and obtain better results when working together, creating an friendly atmosphere in which they freely express themselves, especially shy and reticent ones. What is really of value is to show that there might be other better ways to teach oral expression than the classical ones.

## **Introduction**

Newcomers into a foreign language tend to generally encounter and experience many difficulties at all levels. In the case of Batna University, we have noticed that one of the first year students' major difficulties is their lack of ability to freely communicate either with their teachers or with their classmates.

Low performance in the oral aspect of the language, along with psychological and social inhibitions students face, could be cited among those factors which prevent students from the attempt to freely express themselves in a foreign language they do not master.

Hence, we believe that one way out of this situation is the use of a teaching learning technique likely to allow students freely engage in classroom discussions; meet new friends within the group and create a less frustrating climate of learning. This technique will help the foreign language learner to gradually diminish the negative effects of those difficulties and obstacles.

These are some of the reasons which brought us to choose the use of group work as a technique, for some of the objectives that we will mention below.

Our Purpose is to examine the effectiveness of group work as a teaching learning technique as compared to individual learning. This is why we believe that our study requires the use of the experimental Method to evaluate the effects of group work, as a teaching learning technique on students 'oral performance.

The paper is intended to promote students interactions through group work as a teaching technique. It presents three major categories of benefits created by group work learning technique. They are academic, social and psychological advantages; each of these is further subdivided to help the readers focus on specific themes within each category. Specific references are provided to document each benefit

described below to show that more researches have been undertaken on group work as a learning technique than on any other educational paradigm.

We assume that group work learning affords students, at all levels, with enormous advantages that may not be available in the traditional instruction of learning individually, because a group of students can accomplish meaningful learning especially through their discussions, interactions, dialogues....better than any individual can.

**Objectives of the study:**

It is important to try to build an atmosphere where the students will no longer feel shy, where they will voluntarily raise their hands to ask questions and where they will freely voice their own opinions. We believe that group work helps our students to gradually diminish the negative effects of these constraints.

We also try to ease our students and remove their fear and anxiety by much tolerance and praise even in cases of misuse of the language.

Our intention is also to discuss the main effects and advantages of group work and see to what extent it affects students' oral performance.

Furthermore, we attempt to bridge the traditional way of teaching, where the teacher is the sole source of information and knowledge, with the one where students seek information by themselves to learn from each other, especially, when cooperating to understand ambiguous concepts.

**What is group work?**

The concept of the grouping and pairing of learners for the purpose of achieving a learning goal has been widely researched and advocated - the term "Group work" refers to an instruction method in

which learners at various performance levels work together in small groups towards a common goal. The learners are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one learner helps other students to be successful.

Collaborative learning is an educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product. Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs.

### **Hypotheses**

Learners' differences in terms of levels in English proficiency may be partly related to the fact that students have been taught by different teachers using different methods. The same phenomenon, may be linked to psychological and social inhibitions students face, mainly the case of shy or introvert students ,who despite their true competences, find no need of engaging in oral communications.

Bettering students 'oral performance requires mainly overcoming these constraints. Involving them to work in groups is one among the best ways to reach such an aim.

Learners feel more at ease when they exchange ideas and opinions in a friendly like atmosphere.

Group work, as a technique, leads students create intimate climates, where they become closer to each other, where poor students may learn from average or good ones and hence, are eager to take the initiatives themselves and engage in face to face communications, first in the small group and later face the entire class.

## Sampling

The population meant by in this study includes all first year students of English at Batna University. It is neither possible, nor desirable to study the entire population, since, according to Delime & Demoulin (1975), sufficient data can be obtained through the study of a proportion of the population: a sample.

We avoided the use of a random sampling for it is likely to make us fall onto subjects of the same features and characteristics, which are not essential in our work. Moreover, random sampling cannot be used in our work because our subjects should be selected according to certain variables like their previous language knowledge, scores in the English exam, motivation to learn and so on.

Systematic sampling is then, more appropriate for it enables us to classify learners according to a given system and select systematically the ones concerned by the experiment. We can therefore, order students in a descending list from their highest scored, average to the lowest in the oral expression. Students' files are available at the level of the administration and our continuous presence in the department, as a teacher, facilitates the task of obtaining and dealing with students' lists and files. In addition, classifying students according to their previously obtained grades can be considered as a system.

A sampling technique selecting learners classified in such an order would give us the opportunity to have a group of mixed abilities. This can raise our chances to have a heterogeneous group of diverse characteristics and abilities and thus, diminish the risk of bias resulting from selecting students randomly.

The selected group would, then, consist of 36 out of a population of 300 first year English students chosen from six groups of 36 to 40 learners classified in a descending order of their grades in oral expression.

The selected sample, which comprises these 36, is then subdivided systematically into a control group of 18 learners and an experimental group of 18 other learners. These latter are subdivided into four subgroups of three to five members each.

Mixing students with different abilities, different gender, and various ages, and cultural backgrounds, quiet and talkative ones will form our designed sample.

**Methodology:** Choice of the method:

Investigating the effect of group work on students' performances requires the use of an experimental method. The experiment will evaluate the significant effect of students 'oral performance when working in groups and, compare them to those who study in a classical way.

The experimental method is the most appropriate and adequate in our work for it enables us control all essential factors .It is mainly used in natural and physical sciences, and recently it has been of great use in social and human sciences, and hence, in the field of education.

Experimental methods have obtained satisfactory results when the design is carefully used, and since it includes experimentations, the researcher is supposed to obtain the same results in case he repeats the experiments every two or three months. In our case, we hope that, at each time, we will point out a constant progress in students 'oral performance.

We do, still, acknowledge the usefulness of other methods like the historical and the descriptive ones. Yet, we have avoided their use for the following reasons:

The historical method has been defined as the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events, so it does not

suit our work for the simple reason is that we are concerned with showing the real and present effects of group work. Moreover, the descriptive method is concerned with a description of facts.

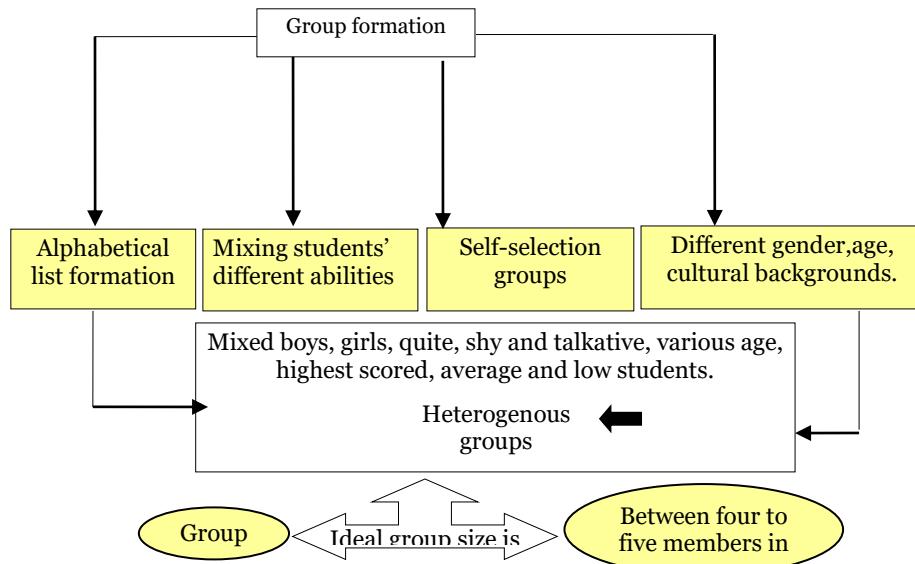
The experimental method was chosen because of the need to check and ensure whether working in groups has really an effect on students 'oral performance as well as achievement. However, some problems and difficulties may be encountered when dealing with this method. We can mention the extraneous variables like sex, age, motivation and intelligence, which may be operating during an experiment and thus affect the outcomes of the experiment. Nevertheless, these are factors still controlled when conducting the experiment by creating heterogeneous subgroups; taking into account these factors.

### **Group grading**

Group grading is probably the biggest challenge that we faced when used group work as a technique. One reason why it is difficult is how to grade members of the group? Do we assign them the same grade or grade them individually, taking into account the fact that in some activities for instance 'oral presentations', students work as a group while they are to be graded individually. The latter may lead to competition within groups; consequently, subverts our aim to clearly demonstrate the spirit of collaboration within groups.

We suggested grading the contribution of each student on the basis of individual or groups' evaluation of each members' work. When the same grade is assigned (oral presentations) the bulk of the mark is allocated to the group with 50% for the written report. 30% oral performance (presentation) 10% for peer assessment and consists of each groups agreed mark for each group members. The final 10% is the individual efforts including participation, answering students 'questions and explaining.

### Group Formation:



Fugure....

The groups can be formed according to different parameters; we can form groups using the alphabetical order, mixing students 'abilities, groups of different gender, age and cultural backgrounds. They can also be self selected as it is mentioned in the figure above. Our groups were formed by mixing boys and girls -even if the vast majority of students were female-, quite, shy and talkative ones, various age, highest scored, average and low students. While, our group size contained three to five members in each group because larger teams have difficulty in keeping everyone involved<sup>1</sup>.

### Reasons to use Group work:

We assume that group work learning affords students, at all levels, with enormous advantages that may not be available in the traditional

<sup>1</sup>- Claude Romney CL1-Teaching Stories: **Advantages of Collaborative Learning**; <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/Newsletters/Currents/Vol3.6/Benefits.html>

instruction of working, learning individually, because a group of students can accomplish meaningful learning especially through their discussions, interactions dialogues ...better than any individual can.

### **I. Academic Advantages:**

There are some educational reasons for requiring students to participate in group activities. Group work enhances student understanding. Students learn from each other and benefit from activities that require them to articulate and test their knowledge. Group work provides an opportunity for students to clarify and refine their understanding of concepts through discussion and rehearsal with peers.

Many, but not all, students recognise the value of their personal development at group work and of being assessed as a group member. Working with a group and for the benefit of the group also motivates some students. For instance, group assessment helps some students develop a sense of responsibility: 'I felt that because one is working in a group, it is not possible to slack off or to put things off. I have to keep working otherwise I would be letting other people down'.

#### **1. Group work develops oral communication skills.<sup>1</sup> (Yager)**

When students are working in small groups, one member verbalizes his /her answer while the others are listening, asking questions, and making comments about what they heard. Therefore, classification and explanation of one's answer is a very important part of the collaborative process and represents a higher order thinking skill.

A consequence of having students work together in small groups is that they speak with one another and directly engage in specific language use that is why students must develop their ideas of what

---

<sup>1</sup>- Yager, S., Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R., (1985), "Oral discussion groups-to-individual transfer and achievement in cooperative learning groups", Journal of Educational Psychology, 77(1) pp60-66

they are presenting, and orally communicate with their peers. Hence, they will -of necessity- acquire new terms, vocabulary, expressions and new information.

When students work in groups, orally express themselves, three benefits may occur: First, weak students working individually are likely to give up when they get stuck, working cooperatively in small groups, makes them keep going on, yet the more advanced students faced with the task of explaining and classifying ideas to weaker/ less able students often find gaps in their own understanding to fill them in. Second, instead of individual thinking about a matter in isolation, a group will often look at a problem from a wider perspective and consider many more suggestions than one person thinking alone would. Third, by discussing various aspects of any topic and questioning all the students in the group who can participate in actually giving their opinions and eventually know that others are counting on them.

**Nelson le Gall.**<sup>1</sup> points out that: « Through encouragement from the group to try new, more active approaches and through social support social reward for even partially successful efforts, individual students in a group come to think of themselves as capable of engaging in interpretation » In fact, encouragement is very important and necessary for students to keep them going on and enhance their classroom participation.

## 2. Group work develops higher level thinking skills (Webb).<sup>2</sup>

Students working together are engaged in the learning process instead of passively listening to the teacher presenting the information;

---

<sup>1</sup>- Nelson-LeGall, S., (1992) "Children's instrumental help-seeking. It's role in the social acquisition and construction of knowledge", in Lazarowitz Ed. Interaction in Cooperative groups: Theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning, p120-141, NY,NY: Cambridge University Press

<sup>2</sup>- Webb 1982), "Group composition, group interaction and achievement in small groups", J 74(4) pp475-484 Journal of Educational Psychology

they represent the most effective form of continuous interaction. They may develop valuable problem solving skills by formulating their ideas, exchanging and discussing them, receiving immediate feedback and responding to questions and comments by their partners. In a group work, the teacher is able to observe and assess individual students' thinking and how they are learning through their responses.

According to **Roberta Dees**<sup>1</sup> "Although it is not clear which components of group work learning are responsible for improvement in higher-level thinking, attempts have been made to identify the components. One conjecture is that dealing with controversy may be such an element."

**Smith, Johnson, and Johnson**<sup>2</sup> studied sixth grade students who worked on controversial issues. They found that for students engaged in controversy, "the cognitive rehearsal of their own position and the attempts to understand their opponents' position result in a high level of mastery and retention of the materials being learned. » **The Johnsons** have developed a cooperative method called "structured controversy" where students study and defend one position and then switch with another group which has taken the opposite position. **Slavin**<sup>3</sup> emphasizes that "Students will learn from one another because in their discussions of the content, cognitive conflicts will arise, inadequate reasoning will be exposed, disequilibrium will occur, and higher quality understandings will emerge".

---

<sup>1</sup>- Roberta Dees, (1991), "The role of cooperative learning in increasing problem-solving ability in a college remedial course", Journal for Research in Mathematics Education v22 n5 409-421

<sup>2</sup>- Smith, K., Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., (1981), "Can conflict be constructive: Controversy versus concurrence seeking in learning groups", Journal of Educational Psychology, 73(5) 651-663

<sup>3</sup> - Slavin R.E (1992), "When and why does cooperative learning increase Achievement? Theoretical and empirical perspectives", ppm145-173 in Hertz-Lazarowitz and Miller (Eds.) **Interaction in Cooperative Groups**, NY,NY: Cambridge University Press

**3. Group work creates an environment of active, involved exploratory learning Slavin (1990)**

Group work is by its nature an active method of teaching. Thus, the entire focus of collaborative learning is to actively involve students in the learning process. Whenever two or more students attempt to solve a problem or answer a question, they become involved in the process of exploratory learning; they interact with each other, share ideas and information, seek additional information, make decisions about their final draft and orally present it to the entire class.

The collaborative process enables the teacher to move around the class in order to observe students interaction. An opportunity is created whereby the teacher can talk to students directly or in small groups. Teachers may raise questions to help direct students or explain concepts.

**4. Cooperative discussions improve students' recall of text content Slavin and Tanner <sup>1</sup>**

When students read a text together, explain the concepts to each other and evaluate each others' explanations they engage in a high level of critical thinking. They frame the new concepts by using not only their own vocabulary but also by basing their comments upon their previous knowledge. Thus they construct a new knowledge base on top of their existing one. This process leads students 'deeper understanding and greater likelihood mainly as they will retain the material longer than if they worked alone.

**Johnson & Johnson** <sup>1</sup> found that engaging in discussion over controversial issues improves recall of important concepts. **Ames and**

---

<sup>1</sup>- Slavin, R.E., & Tanner, A.M., (1979), "Effects of cooperative reward structures and individual accountability in productivity and learning", Journal of Educational Research v72 n5 p294-298

**Murray**<sup>2</sup>found that discussion of controversial ideas among pairs of non conservers on Piagetian conservation tasks improves their recall of content material.

**Dansereau** <sup>3</sup> (1985) has developed a structure called "cooperative scripts" where pairs of students read a section of text and then one serves as a recaller and summarizes the information while the other student listens for any errors, fills in omitted information and thinks of ways in which both can remember the main ideas. He found that while both students learned more and were able to recall the information longer than students working alone, the recaller learned the most.

The level of discussion and debate within groups is substantially greater than when an entire class participates in a teacher led discussion, in which they receive immediate feedbacks or questions about their ideas, formulate responses without having to wait for long intervals to participate in the discussion (**Peterson & Swing**)<sup>4</sup>.They construct a new knowledge based on their own interpretations, and their existing base. This process certainly leads to deeper understanding and greater likelihood, consequently, will retain the material longer than if they worked individually mainly for students who are actively involved in the learning process. Engaging in discussion over controversial issues improves recall of important concepts.

---

<sup>1</sup> - Johnson & Johnson (1979), "Conflict in the classroom: Controversy and learning", Review of Educational Research, v49 p51-70

<sup>2</sup> - Ames, G.J., & Murray, F.B., (1982), "When two wrongs make a right: promoting cognitive change by social conflict", Developmental Psychology v18, p894-897

<sup>3</sup> - Dansereau, D.F., (1985), "Learning strategy research" in Chipman & Glaser (Eds.) Thinking & Learning Skills: Relating Instruction to Basic Research Vol. 1 Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum

<sup>4</sup> - Peterson, P., Swing, S., (1985), "Students cognitions as mediators of the effectiveness of small-group learning", Journal of Educational Psychology 77(3) pp299-312

**5. Group work encourages students' responsibility for learning (Baird and white).<sup>1</sup>**

Promotive interaction, a foundation principle of cooperative learning, builds students' responsibility for themselves and their group members through reliance upon each others' talents and an assessment process which rewards both individuals and groups. In addition, Students can assist each other and take different roles within their groups (such as reader, recorder, time keeper ...etc).The students' involvement is created and thus produces an environment which fosters students' maturity and responsibility for learning. In this context, the teacher becomes rather a facilitator instead of a director and the students become eager and motivated participants instead of passive followers.

**6. Group work provides training in effective teaching strategies to the next generation of teachers (Felder)<sup>2</sup>**

As discussed earlier, new teachers are likely to teach using the teaching style they have been exposed to during their education in which the primary focus is on the assessment process involving individual grades. As group work is concerned, it requires that students present their final work orally to the entire class, being asked some questions by the other students, and hence, answer in front of the entire group. Therefore, the fact of having so many oral presentations, facing the audience, playing the teachers' role, may be of great advantage and benefit for students as it is a sort of training.

During the group work process students were asked not only to assess themselves but their groups as well as the class procedures.

---

<sup>1</sup> - Baird, J., White, R. (1984) "Improving learning through enhanced metacognition: A classroom study", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA 1984.

<sup>2</sup> - Felder, R.M., (1997). e-mail communication from felder@eos.ncsu.edu page <http://ww2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/rmf.html>

Teachers can take advantage of students' input to modify the making - of groups or class assignments, manage the lectures and even the group work itself, according to immediate students' feedback. Thus, Students, who participate in structuring the class, assume ownership of the process because they are treated like adults, and their opinions and observations are not only respected but taken into consideration.

#### **7. Group work promotes higher achievement and class attendance (Hagman and Hayes).<sup>1</sup>**

Students who develop personal professional relations with teachers by getting to know them, and who work on projects with their teachers in classroom, achieve better results because of their classroom attendance. On the other hand, teachers, who get to know their students, understand their problems can often find ways of dealing with those problems. They have a great advantage in formulating ways of assisting their students. In addition, students are often inspired by the teacher who takes the time to get to know them, encourage them to aspire for a better performance. According to<sup>2</sup>**Felder** additional benefits occur in that students' grades are improved, they show longer retention of information, transfer information better to other courses and disciplines and have better class attendance. There is a strong positive correlation between class attendance and success in courses which may help account for the improved performance. **Johnson & Johnson**<sup>3</sup> went to say that there is a strong positive correction between class attendance and success in courses which may help account for the improved performance.

---

<sup>1</sup>- Hagman, J., Hayes, J. (1986) "Cooperative learning: Effects of task, reward, and group size on individual achievement" Technical report 704, Scientific Coordination Office, US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Sciences, ERIC document #278720

<sup>2</sup>- Ibid 1997.

<sup>3</sup>- Johnson & Johnson (1990), "Using cooperative learning in math", chapter in Cooperative Learning In Math", p24 Neil Davidson ed,

Students need to do real work together in order to promote each other's success by sharing resources, helping, supporting, encouraging, and applauding each other's efforts to achieve. It is said there are important cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics, which can only occur when students promote each other's learning. This includes explaining orally how to solve problems, teaching one's knowledge to others, checking for understanding, discussing concepts that are being learned, and connecting present with past learning. Especially, if each of those activities, can be structured into group task directions and procedures. Doing so ,helps ensure that cooperative learning groups are both an academic support system (every student has someone who is committed to help him or her learn) and a personal support system (every student has someone who is committed to him or her as a person). It is through promoting each other's learning" face-to-face "that members become personally committed to each other as well as to their mutual goals.

#### **8. Weaker, less able students improve their performances when grouped with higher achieving students <sup>1</sup>Cohen**

In studies of collaborative seat work, **Swing and Peterson**<sup>2</sup> found that:"Students of low achievement, benefited from participation in groups, heterogeneously composed on achievement in comparison to participation in homogeneously low-achieving group. Students of average achievement benefit from their interaction with others of higher or low achievement".

---

<sup>1</sup> -Cohen, E.G"Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups", **Review of Educational Research** Spring 1994 vol 64 #1 pp1-35

<sup>2</sup> - Peterson, P., Swing, S., (1985), "Students cognitions as mediators of the effectiveness of small-group learning", **Journal of Educational Psychology** 77(3) pp299-312

**Burns.**<sup>1</sup> suggested that with group work, there are explanations, which come from the entire group member rather than from the individual; they can propose or suggest ideas, opinions to their peers prior to formulating a final response and then release their presentations in an informal setting. If a group response is the product, then the entire team or group becomes responsible for the answer. That's why, group work may therefore, create a safe atmosphere, where students can freely express themselves and explore their ideas without the fear of failure or criticism. In contrast to a lecture format where an individual student responds to a question in front of the entire class without much time to think about his /her answer; such a situation may shake the learning environment.

#### **9. Group work addresses learning styles and differences among students (Midkiff & Thomasson<sup>2</sup>)**

Students working in groups utilize each of the three main learning styles: **Kinesthetic, Auditory** and **visual**. For example, a material presented by the teacher is both **auditory and visual**. Students working together use their **kinesthetic** abilities mainly when using their hands. Verbal and auditory skills are enhanced when students discuss their answers together. Visual and auditory modalities are employed as students present their work to the whole class (oral presentations). Each of these learning styles are addressed many times throughout a class in contrast to the teachers' lecture format which is mainly auditory and occasionally visual.

Understanding the diversity that exists among students of different learning styles and abilities is a major benefit of group work.

---

<sup>1</sup>- Burns, M. (1984), "**The Math Solution**". Marilyn Burns Education Associates publishers, reprinted in "**Cooperative Learning in Mathematics**" Neil Davidson editor, 1990

<sup>2</sup>- Midkiff, R.B., Thomasson, R.D. (1993), "A Practical Approach to Using Learning Styles in Math Instruction", Springfield, Il: Charles Thomas Pub.

Students observe their peers in a learning environment, discuss problem solving strategies and evaluate the learning approaches of other students. Often behaviours which might appear as odd when taken out of context become understandable mainly when the opportunity is presented to students to explain and defend their own reasoning.

**10. Group work is especially useful in foreign language and second language courses where interactions involving the use of language are important.**

Brufee<sup>1</sup> emphasizes the idea that learning takes place when individuals move from the society which they are familiar with to the society which they wish to join by learning the vocabulary, language structure (Grammar) and customs unique to that society. This is true in academic societies that have their own vocabulary and customs. Working in groups is an ideal way to facilitate the acquisition of language and to practice the customs of debate and discussions that occur in a particular academic field such as Mathematics or Psychology or even History. Moreover, the fact of interacting collaboratively with the teacher in and out of class also facilitates the reaculturation process.

**II Social advantages of group work**

Group work is useful for encouraging social interaction for isolated, rural and international students with local students, and is therefore an important mechanism for supporting the transition of first year students into university study.

Group Work promotes social interactions; thus students benefit in a number of ways from the social perspective. By having the students

---

<sup>1</sup>- Brufee, K., (1993), "Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence and the authority of knowledge", Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press

explain their reasoning and conclusions; cooperative learning helps develop oral communication skills.

### **1. Group work builds more positive heterogeneous relationships.**

A major function of group work learning, we experienced was team building. This is accomplished through a variety of techniques used throughout the duration of the semester. During the first few weeks of group work class, warm-up activities, getting to know class members' names, and practice exercises help acclimate students to cooperative learning.

The current educational system rewards students' achievement by separating students of different abilities rather than encouraging students to utilize their abilities to help each other. Group work then fosters students' interaction at all levels (**Webb**)<sup>1</sup>

Research has shown that when students of high ability work with students of lower ability both benefit. The former benefits by explaining or demonstrating difficult concepts which he/she must understand thoroughly in order to do so, and the latter benefits by perceiving a concept explained or modeled by a peer.

### **2. Group work develops social interaction skills:**

A major component of group work learning elaborated by Johnson and Holubec <sup>2</sup> includes training students in the social skills needed to work collaboratively. Students do not come by these skills naturally. By asking group members to identify what behaviours may help them work together and by asking individuals to reflect on their contribution to the groups' success or failure, students are made aware

---

<sup>1</sup>- Ibid, Pp 266-276

<sup>2</sup> - Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., Holubec, E.J., (1984), "Cooperation in the Classroom", Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co.

of the need for healthy, positive and helping interactions when they work in groups (**Cohen and Cohen**)<sup>1</sup>.

The students' level of tolerance and acceptance of other student viewpoints is increased, a skill which no doubt is beneficial in real life situations where one also often has to be prepared to compromise.

When students work in small groups, they generally become more involved in classroom learning activities and as they spend more time learning and sharing group tasks. They tend to learn and form close friends at the same time whether inside or even outside classroom. Therefore; friendship makes them feel more at ease and comfortable; the fact that raises the quality of their learning. Hence, everyone's understanding and knowledge are enriched by their working together; mainly first year students who are the encouraged to work closely together and need to form friends.

**Felder**<sup>2</sup> went to say that there is a significant benefit to group work, which is not always apparent because it takes place outside the classroom. If groups are continued long enough during a course they will get to know each other and extend their activities outside the class. This includes meeting on campus for meals, coffee, forming study groups, getting together at each other's homes in the evening and weekends to work on projects or study for exams. Students exchange phone numbers and contact each other to get help with questions or problems they face. Students are able to make new friends and establish study groups easily within group work learning.

### **3. Group work helps teachers change their roles from their being the focus of the teaching process to becoming facilitators of the**

---

<sup>1</sup>- Cohen, B.P., Cohen, E.G. (1991) "From groupwork among children to R & D teams: interdependence, interaction and productivity" in E.J. Lawler (Eds.) Advances in Group Processes vol 8 pp205-226 Greenwich,CN:JAI

<sup>2</sup> Felder, R.M., (1997). e-mail communication from felder@eos.ncsu.edu <http://ww2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/rmf.html>

**learning process. They move from Teacher-centered to Student-centered learning, Hertz-Lazarowitz.<sup>1</sup>**

Cooperative learning paradigms represent a philosophy of life as well as a learning strategy. It says that whenever people get together in groups their purposes are best served when they work together collaboratively to reach their goals versus using competition among group members to address problems. Cooperative learning paradigms embody the learning community philosophies. Our current educational system, however, is based upon competition among students for grades, admission to scholarships, and above all social recognition. In order to change this paradigm, Group learning structures will need to be introduced at the earliest learning situations and used throughout each student's learning career. In order to accomplish this change in student behavioural attitudes teachers will need to adopt a new role. They will need to step down from the podium and switch from lecturing to facilitating student interactions in class. There are many varieties of group work learning structures including Problem or Project Based Learning, collaborative learning, cooperative structures, to name a few. Teachers need not be locked into one approach, which may or may not suit their particular personality type.

### **III .Psychological advantages**

**Group work enhances students 'satisfaction with the learning experience**

By their very nature, students find satisfaction with activities which value their abilities and indulge them in the learning process. Effective groups assume ownership of a process and its results when

---

<sup>1</sup> Hertz-Lazarowitz, R., Kirkus, V., Miller,N., (1992) "An overview of the theoretical anatomy of cooperation in the classroom" p3-4 in Hertz-Lazarowitz Ed. **Interaction in Cooperative Groups: The theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning** NY,NY: Cambridge University Press

individuals are encouraged to work together toward a common goal, often defined by the group. This aspect is especially helpful for individuals who fear from failure. (Turner & Zeigler)<sup>1</sup>

**Good and Brophy's.**<sup>2</sup> Theory of motivation suggests that motivation increases with expectations of success and higher valuation of rewards. They believe that Group work can emphasise these strategies by containing elements which increase students' enjoyment and encourage intrinsic rewards. Such elements are opportunities for active response, use of simulations, emphasis on immediate feedback, interaction with peers, creation of finished products, and practical use of project outcomes.

**Group work builds self esteem in students (Johnson & Johnson<sup>3</sup>**

Collaborative efforts among students result in a higher degree of accomplishment by all participants as opposed to individual, competitive systems in which many students may ignore. Competition fosters a win-lose situation where superior students reap all rewards and even recognition, yet mediocre or low achieving students reap nothing. In contrast, everyone benefits from group work environment. Students create a friendly atmosphere by helping each other in doing so. They build a supportive climate, which may increase the performance level of each member. This in turn leads to higher self esteem in all students.

**Classroom anxiety is significantly reduced (Kessler, Price and Wortman<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> - Turnure, J., Ziegler (1958), "Outer-directedness in the problem solving or normal and retarded students", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology , 57 pp379-388.

<sup>2</sup> - Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E., (1990), "Educational Psychology" 3rd Ed., NY, NY: Longman

<sup>3</sup> - Johnson & Johnson,(1989) **Cooperation and Competition Theory and Research**". Edina, MN: Interaction Book

In a traditional classroom, when a teacher calls upon a student he/she becomes the focus of attention of the entire class. Any mistake or incorrect answers become subject to security by the whole class. Such experiences produce embarrassment and anxiety in many students, while in group work situation, when students work in small groups, share their tasks, however the focus of attention is diffused among the group and when an answer is presented to the class it presents the work of the entire group members. Speaking in front of a small group with which they are familiar, rather than in front of the whole class, is also less stressful. Therefore, no single individual can be held up to criticism. In addition, the group members produce a final product which they can review before presenting it to the whole class. Thus, diminishing prospects that mistakes will occur at all. When it happens that a mistake is made, it becomes rather a teaching tool instead of a public criticism of an individual student.

Small groups created a safe environment for students to take risks and make mistakes. We noticed that a student is more likely to ask a question or take a risk in a group of four than in a class of thirty-six.

**Group work encourages shy students to participate in classroom activities:**

By its nature, group work is an active method of learning, which creates a lively enjoyable and friendly atmosphere of sparking discussions, exchanging ideas, respecting others' points of view. This friendly atmosphere makes all students, especially shy ones, feel more comfortable and at ease, eager to participate more with their peers in small groups than in a large class as they can be observed too.

---

<sup>1</sup>- Kessler, R., Price, R., Wortman, C. (1985), "Social factors in psychopathology: Stress, social support and coping processes" Annual Review of Psychology 36 pp351-372

Therefore, it is very helpful to identify students who are shy in encouraging their participation in non -threatening ways.

**Data Gathering tools and Treating:**

Next to the information obtained from results, other ways of collecting data about students will be used: the questionnaire and the observation technique.

Our study requires using mainly the observation grid to obtain a continuous observation in the classroom. The questionnaire will help us to collect students 'own perceptions and opinions about group work as a teaching technique. These instruments are especially selected for their usefulness, their practical use and for they complement each other.

The two groups begin shortly after the beginning of the academic year and continue throughout the whole year. In the experimental group, students will be given the previously mentioned activities to be achieved in each group of at least four or five students, boys and girls, in order to observe their oral performance and behaviour.

The same teacher will teach both groups, after dividing the classroom into two groups, with the experimental group; the teacher will give activities to be performed in groups or what we call a team - work. With the control group, he/she will only give the same activities but to be done by each student alone. In other words, to have an individual work as opposed to the group work.

Authentic techniques are of great importance in teaching the oral expression and permit the teacher to have immediate and thorough observations of how students help each other, accept or reject each others' ideas and thoughts and how they interact as members of a group.

With the control group, the teacher will use the same activities followed by the experimental group, the only difference being the individual aspect of the work.

### I. Observation grid:

During the first weeks, students were introduced to a variety of activities as an introductory work, rather a kind of a pretest and training task. Although we cannot assess all learning outcomes in group work, yet, we can assess students' learning by observing them and through peer evaluation. Therefore, we were observing and recording what and how students do while they work together to complete a task, and taking their feedback to assess both their work and understanding.

The first activity that was introduced to our students was listening. So before turning the tape on, we asked our students some warm up questions aiming at making them feel at ease and try to make them relate their prior knowledge with the contents of the tape they would be listening to (what is called pre-listening). The selected tape is entitled «Day by Day». It contains a variety of very interesting topics for instance:

Family photos School crossing guard On the subway	Father's day  Getting a loan  Saturday night
Do it yourself	Valentines' day Jury duty The big snow Leaving the hospital
At the bank Family night Hunting for antiques A visit to the dentist	The paper boy

While students were listening to the tape, we used pauses and told the ones working in small groups that every student will be asked to respond. This leads all the members of the group to listen attentively and carefully, since they are asked to fill some blanks and answer some listening comprehension questions. According to the results obtained, we notice that students when working in small groups were unaccustomed in sharing their work with their peers. This is quite clear, because students used to be rewarded for individual efforts, and collaboration may not come naturally or easily for everyone in the starting activity. However, they almost find that working in groups, as lively and innovating. Their participation varied between low, medium and rarely high depending on student's understanding. Students were listening attentively, yet some of them did not participate in classroom mainly those shy, reticent ones. The obtained average in this activity is 12.27, which is considered as a good starting. After listening and filling the required blanks, we asked our students to take roles in what they have been listening to in a form of a conversation.

The material	Activity	Aim	Time allotted
Listening :Day-by day Oral skills practice tape)	Pre-listening While listening Post –listening	Warm -up	30 minutes
Songs :(Michael Jackson,Celine dion)	Try to fill the blanks (write the lyrics)	Warm –up Usually we learn easily through music)	30 minutes
-Baby traffic Kuwait and-British hostages Palestine and Israel hooth Birthday	Video excercise\	May stimulate discussion after presentation and hence increases students' participation	40 minutes
Games	Word classification Word association	Stimulates students'critical thinking.	45 minutes
Beauty and the	Short story	Encourages students to orally	30

Beast		perform a work.	minutes
Oral presentations.	Expose, novels, free topics, issues.	May stimulate and spark discussion and debates.	30 minutes
	Discussion and debate	Discussion refers to a diverse point of view, emphasizes participation, dialogues, communications. Exchange ideas, opinions, information and experiences	15 minutes

**A sample of one of our activities done in classroom is mentioned below.**

Activity: Listening day by day:

Oral skills practice Book + tape (Dean Curry) 30 mns

Experimental group

Week: I

	Working in groups					Oral participation					Oral presentation					Listening					Average out of 20						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5			
Z.Sofia			X							X													X		12/20		
Z.Djalila				X						X													X		11/20		
Y.Fatima				X				X												X		X				11/20	
Y.Kassim			X							X													X			17/20	
H.Adel				X						X													X			12/20	
Z.Meriam				X						X													X			14/20	
C.Zineb			X							X													X			13/20	
K.Fateh					X					X													X			9/20	
B.Abdelali			X								X												X	X		10/20	
Z.Soumaya			X							X													X			17/20	
Z.Hind				X							X													X			15/20
S.Sihem					X						X													X			14/20
L.Lila			X							X													X			12/20	
T.Dounia			X							X													X			10/20	
T.Soraya				X							X												X	X		10/20	
B.Mouna				X								X												X			11/20
S.Salim				X						X														X			12/20



Criteria	Rating			
	E	S	A	N
Listen attentively.			<b>x</b>	
Take part in group discussion		<b>x</b>		
Participate in classroom			<b>x</b>	
Ask questions			<b>x</b>	
Offer suggestions and ideas that connect with others ideas.				<b>x</b>
Respect each others point of view			<b>x</b>	

### **Oral performance: students 'oral presentations**

Criteria	Rating			
	1	2	3	4
Students clearly identify the topic			<b>x</b>	
Explanation is presented in a sequence that is easy to follow		<b>x</b>		
Information is relevant and accurate		<b>x</b>		
Includes interesting details or features.			<b>x</b>	
Use grammatically correct English with few mechanical mistakes.		<b>x</b>		
Answers most questions from other students			<b>x</b>	

### **Key:**

1=excellent (E), 2=satisfactory (S)  
 3= average (A), 4=not evident (N)

### **Results**

### **Results:**

We have encountered many students who are almost unable to communicate orally in the target language and are extremely uncomfortable when trying to speak. They also understand very little of what we say to them during classroom explanations and directions.

One of the most positive results that emerged from group work learning was that students created a friendly, safe atmosphere; which enabled them to freely express their ideas and opinions orally. Furthermore, reticent, shy students, who rarely participated in classroom, often feel more confident in expressing themselves in front of the entire class after they have already practiced, expressed and discussed their opinions in their safer and smaller audience.

- The opposite sex started to be accepted whether from girls or boys 'part.
- Students' better understanding and retention of the applied activities
- Students' progress and improvement in the mastery of the oral aspect of the language was observed mainly when giving oral presentations.
- Increased enthusiasm and motivation to learn in groups.
- Students' participation in classroom activities has increased.

### **Pre-test**

$$\text{Exp} = X_1 = \sum X_1 = 221/18, \quad X_1 = 12.27$$

N1

---

$\Sigma X_2$

$$\text{Cont} = X_2 = \frac{153/17}{N_2} \quad X_2 = 09$$

### **Post test 1:**

$$X_1 = \sum X_1 = 214/18, \quad X_1 = 11.88$$

N1

$$X_2 = \frac{\Sigma X_2}{N_2} = 181/17, \quad X_2 = 10.64$$

Post test 2:

$$X_1 = \frac{\Sigma X_1}{N_1} = 258/18, \quad X_1 = 14.33$$

$$X_2 = \frac{\Sigma X_2}{N_2} = 172/17, \quad X_2 = 10.11$$

The above are results of our pre and post tests of both groups: the experimental and the control one. The results showed that the experimental group X1 had an increasing progress mainly during the second post test.

### Conclusion

The advantages of group work are multiple, varied and impressive. The fact that group work benefits students in many ways; does it benefit teachers through the sharing of ideas, brainstorming and critical thinking? Effective cooperative teachers are continually modifying their activities and adopting new structures to deal with different classroom situations and populations. This is an aspect of group work learning which can be especially rewarding to teachers. Who would not like the previously mentioned quite good things to happen in one's class?

From this research study, it can be concluded that collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas. However, both methods of instruction were found to be equally effective in gaining factual knowledge. Therefore, if the purpose of

instruction is to enhance critical-thinking and problem-solving skills, then collaborative learning is more beneficial.

For collaborative learning to be effective, the instructor must view teaching as a process of developing and enhancing students' ability to learn. The instructor's role is not to transmit information, but to serve as a facilitator for learning. This involves creating and managing meaningful learning experiences and stimulating students' thinking through real world problems. The findings showed that the experimental method of applying group work as a teaching technique is likely to result in the cooperation and good performance in students' speaking. What is really of value is to show that there might be other ways -that is better ways -to teach than the classical one. This was an attempt of applying group work learning in the Oral expression Module in the Year 2003; we wish it will hopefully be useful for other teachers and students.

### **Main conclusions:**

In this study, the findings showed that the experimental method of applying group work as a teaching technique is likely to result in the production of a good performance in students' speaking.

Students, when working in small groups, create an intimate atmosphere; where they could share ideas, exchange information, encourage each other and above all learn from each other since each student provides at least a positive contribution. All these factors may enhance students' thinking, better performance and achievements.

Other evidence of the superiority of the experimental method was observed in classroom. The experimental group was better organized and exhibited much more cooperation, motivation and increased classroom participation than those of the control group who tend to be isolated and rarely provide some classroom participation and contribution in discussions.

In our view, assessment in group work should not involve assigning grades; however, the emphasis is on assessing learning outcomes. Individual accomplishment in the group work itself should be assessed so that members 'contributions to the groups are accordingly evaluated.

Although group work offers enormous benefits when it is effectively implemented, yet, some problems and limitations may arise during the work.

The value of this study is to show how students can achieve and obtain better results when collaborating together; creating an intimate atmosphere in which they freely express themselves, especially those shy students who find greater difficulties when interrogated by their teachers or simply by one of their classmates. They feel frustrated and unable to do like other students do and this is mainly due to their cultural backgrounds.

Hence, working in groups may be also of paramount importance for those poor or less able students because it enables them to work and even participate in classroom, become motivated and eager to learn.

**References**

- **Ames, G.J., & Murray, F.B.**, (1982), "When two wrongs make a right: promoting cognitive change by social conflict", *Developmental Psychology* v18,
- **Baird, J., White, R.** (1984) "Improving learning through enhanced Metacognition: A classroom study", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA 1984
- **Brufee, K.**, (1993), "Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence and the authority of knowledge", Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press
- **Burns, M. (1984)**, "The Math Solution". Marilyn Burns Education Associates publishers, reprinted in "Cooperative Learning in Mathematics" Neil Davidson editor, 1990
- **Cohen, B.P., Cohen, E.G. (1991)** "From group work among children to R & D teams: interdependence, interaction and productivity" in E.J. Lawler (Eds.)
- **Cohen, E. (1986)** Designing Group work:NY,NY: Teachers College Press
- **Cohen,E (1994)**, "Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups", *Review of Educational Research* Spring 1994 vol 64 #1
- **Dansereau, D.F.**, (1985), "Learning strategy research" in Chipman & Glaser (Eds.) *Thinking & Learning Skills: Relating Instruction to Basic Research* Vol. 1 Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- **Dees, R.L., (1991)**, "The role of cooperative learning in increasing problem-solving ability in a college remedial course", *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education* v22 n5 409-421
- **Felder, R.M., (1997)**. e-mail communication from felder@eos.ncsu.edu <http://ww2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/rmf.html>
- **Gillian Brown, Kirsten Malmkjaer, Jhon William.** "Performance & competence in second language acquisition" Cambridge University Press1996
- **Good, T.L., & Brophy, J.E., (1990)**, "Educational Psychology" 3rd Ed., NY,NY:Longman
- **H.O Hartley,E.S Pearson** "Biometrika tables for statistics, Vol.1,Cambridge University Press, 1954
- **Hagman, J., Hayes, J. (1986)** "Cooperative learning: Effects of task, reward, and group size on individual achievement" Technical report 704, Scientific Coordination Office, US Army Research Institute for the Behavioral Sciences, ERIC document #278720
- **Hertz-Lazarowitz, R., Kirkus, V., Miller,N., (1992)** "An overview of the theoretical anatomy of cooperation in the classroom" in Hertz-Lazarowitz Ed. *Interaction in Cooperative Groups: The theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning* NY,NY: Cambridge University Press
- **Janke, R. (1980)** "Computational errors of mentally-retarded students" *Psychology in the Schools* 17
- **Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., Holubec, E.J., (1984)**, "Cooperation in the Classroom", Edina, MN: Interaction Book Co.

**Johnson, R. T., & Johnson, D. W. (1986).** Action research: Cooperative learning in the science classroom. *Science and Children*,. NY: College Teachers Press

**Johnson, R.T.&D.W (1989),** "Cooperation and Competition Theory and Research". Edina,MN: Interaction Book

**Johnson, R.T.&D.W (1990),** "Using cooperative learning in math", chapter in Cooperative Learning In Math", Neil Davidson ed, 1990

- **Kessler, R., Price, R., Wortman,C. (1985),** "Social factors in psychopathology: Stress, social support and coping processes" Annual Review of Psychology 36
- **Midkiff, R.B., Thomasson, R.D. (1993),** "A Practical Approach to Using Learning Styles in Math Instruction", Springfield, Il: Charles Thomas Pub.
- **Nelson-LeGall, S.,** (1992) "Children's instrumental help-seeking. It's role in the social acquisition and construction of knowledge", in Lazarowitz Ed. Interaction in Cooperative groups: Theoretical Anatomy of Group Learning, NY,NY: Cambridge University Press
- **Peterson, P., Swing, S.,** (1985), "Students cognitions as mediators of the effectiveness of small-group learning", Journal of Educational Psychology 77(3)
- **Slavin, R. E. (1989).** Research on cooperative learning: An international perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 33(4),
- **Slavin ,R.E.(1990),** "Cooperative Learning-Theory, Research and Practice", Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall
- **Slavin, R.E., & Tanner, A.M., (1979),** "Effects of cooperative reward structures and individual accountability in productivity and learning", Journal of Educational Research v72 n5
- **Smith, K., Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R.T., (1981),** "Can conflict be constructive: Controversy versus concurrence seeking in learning groups", Journal of Educational Psychology, 73(5)
- **Turnure, J., Ziegler (1958),** "Outer-directedness in the problem solving or normal and retarded students", Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology , 57
- **William Littlewood** "Communicative language teaching" Cambridge language teaching library Published in 1981-1999
- **Yager, S., Johnson, D.W., Johnson, R., (1985),** "Oral discussion groups-to-individual transfer and achievement in cooperative learning groups", Journal of Educational Psychology, 77(1)
- **Widdowson H.G** "Teaching language as communicative " Oxford University Press 1978.1979
- **Webb, N.M., (1980),** "An analysis of group interaction and mathematical errors in heterogeneous ability groups", British Journal of Educational Psychology 50
- **Webb, N. (1985).** Student interaction and learning in small groups: A research summary. *Learning to Cooperate, Cooperating to Learn*,