

**Bridging Activities to Promote Collaborative Work and Improve Language  
Performance in 10 Year-Olds at a Public School in Rionegro, Antioquia.**

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**May 2018**



### **Abstract**

This paper presents an Action Research, AR report on Bridging Activities to promote the collaborative work towards improving Student` English Language performance. The data was collected through observations, my research journal, one survey to students, one interview to the teacher, my teacher`s advisor class observation reports, and some student`s products. The data analyses revealed that when students work in groups and when they are assessed all together, they gain confidence and empowerment in their English learning process. They demonstrated through all of this time that using group work strategies increases their attention, they became more participative, more engaged and motivated toward the classes and now they have more engagement for learning.

*Key Words:* Bridging Activities, Collaborative Work, Group Work

### **Degree Requirement**

This action research project is submitted as a requirement of the bachelor of education in Teaching Foreign Languages (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, in Medellín Colombia.

### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to express my very great appreciation to my research advisor Lina Londoño, for her patience, motivation, enthusiasm, and immense knowledge. Without her assistance and dedicated involvement in every step throughout the process, this research project would not have been accomplished. I would like to thank you very much for your support and understanding over this time.

I would like to offer my special thanks to God, because he gave me the opportunity to live being with me in every step I take, thanks also for putting in my way people who have been my support during the period of study.

I must express my very profound gratitude to my parents, my sister and my boyfriend for providing me with unconditional support, genuine love and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

Finally to my teachers and colleagues, for their support and their time to promote the development of my professional training.

Thank you so much to everyone!

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## Preface

This report is the result of an action research process that I conducted in the Julio Sanín elementary public school from July 2017 to June 2018, which is located in a regular middle-lower class area in Rionegro, Antioquia. Its philosophy suggests the integral development of the students seeking to prepare them to continue their higher education at the university and the work market through a constructivist methodology.

At the very beginning of this experience I noticed a problematic situation concerning the students' lack of parents' attention and accompaniment; that is to say, most of the students from this context do not have a parental or relative support outside classroom for their learning process. Therefore, some students did not do their homework or other learning activities because nobody was taking care of the students' duties. In fact, some students affirmed that their parents did not have time enough time to be aware of their children learning process because of their jobs, or just because they did not know English.

Consequently, as a teacher and after understanding my students' problematic, I proposed to work on diminishing the lack of students' accompaniment through the implementation of Bridging Activities as mini projects to foster collaborative learning and group work; in that way, students were provided with their classmates and teacher support in order to improve their language performance. As a result of this, the implementation was highly satisfactory and it was evidenced an increasing and positive motivation from the students towards group work and collaborative learning, and also an improvement in students' language achievement and performance.

### **Description of the context**

The Institución Educativa Técnico Industrial Santiago de Arma de Rionegro is a public school located in the street 52 42B – 151 in San Joaquín neighborhood in Rionegro, a small city in the east region of Antioquia, where middle and high school levels are taught. This big institution has two different small schools Juan Manuel González Arbeláez located in El Hospital neighborhood and Julio Sanín which is an elementary public school located in a regular middle-lower class area of the city closed to Rionegro`s main park. The Julio Sanín attends children from kindergarten to fifth grade of primary school, most of its population belongs to strata one and two (86.4%), while in Juan Manuel School, the population belongs to strata two, three and four (78%). The philosophy of the entire institution claims to see the student as an integral being, with a high critical and human sense, attitudes, aptitudes and skills. Therefore, its education is based on teaching different skills to students in the technical area, preparing them for work and for being part of the higher education, using a constructivist methodology, through training in the workshops of the different specialties under the guidance of highly qualified personnel.

This institution was born with the idea of teaching to some people from Rionegro an art or a trade that will provide them with knowledge and give them a better future. Moreover, the institution offers technical studies as part of its curriculum such as woodworking, computers, mechanics and technical drawing. Almost all the curriculum and extra classes in the institutions are related to these arts and trades.

Regarding the Julio Sanín School, which is where I am doing my practicum, the school has a good infrastructure with quite big classrooms, hallways, a restaurant, playground, offices, a football field and an auditorium belonging to the city hall, which is

used for public events, etc. However, sometimes the noise is a negative aspect in this context since the Julio Sanín is located in a noisy area because of the traffic of the zone, and also because of the noise produced by children from other classrooms. In fact, the students from this institution are in a stage of their lives (from 5 to 11 years old) in which they are very active. The institution has four floors and it has about 30 big classrooms, most of them being perfectly lit. The building is built in a square shape and children do not have a green area to be able to have contact with nature since it is located in the heart of the city.

Regarding teachers, they all hold bachelor degrees in Elementary Education, and they are in charge to teach every single subject of the institutional curriculum. So, they need to have a multidisciplinary knowledge in order to accomplish such a goal, but the teachers' reality allows us to observe that most of the them are not prepared to teach some classes, especially English classes because of the teachers' low knowledge about what, when and how to teach. In fact, the school is conscious about the necessity of students to learn English with qualified and quality teachers to teach English classes. So, the last year, the institution had a project with Rionegro's Secretary of Education to contract Comfenalco to give the classes; in that moment this institution was in charge of providing the English classes, now the group has an English teacher who gives the English class to fourth and fifth graders.

My classroom cooperating teacher (CT) has been teaching in Primary School for 20 years in different schools of Rionegro, eight of which have been as a Discipline Coordinator at Julio Sanín School. She has a Bachelor Degree in Teaching in Elementary School from the UPB University, and a Master's Degree in Education. At the moment she does not have any contact with English. She knows how to read, write and understand in English because of her family, they lived in the US since she was a little girl, but she cannot speak, she said, she has



a barrier at the moment of speaking because of her parents, if she did not speak English well, they punished her. She loves English and she says, it is very important to learn it now because of the globalized world.

According with class context, the classroom is big, with one wall made of large windows face the street and another facing the school. There are five rows of about 6 or 5 students each. Chairs are in good conditions and there is a chalkboard and a whiteboard. Around the classroom there are some posters, stickers and images. The roof is high and fresh air circulates easily. There is some cleaning stuff in one corner. The teacher's desk is on the opposite corner, just next to the door. There are no TV's, tape recorders or video-beams inside the classroom, nor any kind of digital resource.

Regarding the class syllabus, the teacher claims to follow the institutional "Plan de Área" proposed by the Ministry of Education and adapting by each institution and English teachers. The teacher is in charge to provide all the materials for the class (markers, eraser, didactic material, etc.).

This group is made up of 35 students whose age ranges from 10 to 13. There are 16 female and 19 male and have a beginner English proficiency level. Most of the students belong to lower and middle socioeconomic levels, and in many cases, they are exposed to drug addiction, alcohol abuse and violence within their families. For this reason, they do not have any support from parents, they do not do homework and they do not care do not do it.

The class is very motivated, but sometimes some students fail to pay attention, make noise, and instructions have to be repeated to them. However, students are curious and

cheerful; their participation in class is very interesting. They have the capacity to work in groups and they get engaged easily if something is of their interest.

### **Setting of the problem**

Taking into account what I have been observing and teaching for two years at the Institución Educativa Técnico Industrial Santiago de Arma, Sede Julio Sanín, I could notice that there are some issues concerning the lack of attention and accompaniment from parents to students. Moreover, learners are just exposed to the language 2 hours per week in the English classes provided by the institution.

The institution is located closed to the main park of Rionegro, but almost all students belong to some neighborhoods with vulnerable conditions (strata 1 and 2), their parents work as operators, others work as maids, many of them are unemployed, but they are not at home taking care of their kids; for these and other many reasons, some children do not live with their parents, but they live with their grandparents, others live with other members of the family such as uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters. Gathering information from students, their parents are not engaged with their children process, since they do not have time for them or in most cases, parents don't know English, so they are totally apart from their process. Students do not do homework; they just do what the teacher assigns in the classroom during the English class. Parents do not care if their kids have homework or if they need some materials for the next class. They let their kids do everything by themselves and they put the burden on the hands of the teacher. It means, students are alone, without someone who helps them to do the assignments or who supports them to motivate to learn English for their present and future.

However, students take advantage of the situation and they work very well during the class, they try to do everything before the class ends. According to what I see, they work thoroughly when teacher proposes different things such as books, games, posters, or stories. They like everything related to create. Students love to share their knowledge with others and when they work in teams, they answer properly and happily. In short words, they work better in teams than in pairs or by themselves.

Concerning the English classes, the last year, the classes were given by an external entity Comfenalco, they were in charge of providing students with all the material, textbooks and a teacher, but this year the classes are given by an English teacher who is in charge of fifth and fourth grades. The students show enthusiasm and participate actively in the class. In terms of their language competence, all of them have a very limited to none use of English. In fact, children of this context do not need English Language in their daily lives; this is, to speak it. Even though, most of them are very motivated by the language and they seem very interested in learning.

My interest as practitioner is the implementation of Short Term Projects or Bridging Activities that allow children to work in teams and in a cooperative-collaborative way and to be participants and central players in the process of language learning. These activities are controlled merely in the classroom without sending extra work to the house, because as the accompaniment is so little, then it cannot be applied to send home. Students feel cheerful on working by teams, they develop all their capacities together, and they like to share their knowledge and materials with others. In the group, children already have their teams shaped and they work with those who make them feel comfortable. Students try to help each other

and they show a certain interest on working on short projects and in different activities that bring them together and show their thoughts and results to others.

In conclusion, taking into account that children are almost alone at home to do the English tasks, I consider we should work with Bridging activities, which is a good tool to work with them since they must do all the work during the class under my own instructions and conditions as a teacher, helper and person in charge of providing all the material for the project to be successful.

### **Research Question**

How the use of collaborative work through Bridging activities can improve Language performance in 10 year olds at a public school in Rionegro, Antioquia?

### **General Objective**

To explore how the implementation of Collaborative Work through Bridging Activities in the EFL class can improve language performance in 10 year olds

### **Specific Objectives**

- Identifying the most suitable Bridging Activities strategies to be used in elementary school children.
- Promoting collaborative work through the use of Bridging Activities to enhance a better language performance among 10 year olds.
- Applying different group work strategies to foster language performance.

### **Theoretical Background**

As it was mentioned in the statement of the problem, through the observations I carried out of fourth grade group, I realized that students prefer to do all their work before finishing the class time because they do not have any support from part of their parents. In fact, they do not do homework just because they do not have help at home. Such a situation was my opportunity to work on two topics that are really interesting: Collaborative Learning and Group Work. I will explain it in the following lines what these two issues have been able to favor my project.

First of all, according to Fried-Booth, D. L. (1986), in her book “Project Work” there are some tasks called Bridging activities that are “small-scale projects that encourage students to experience and use the language as authentically as possible, and they are restricted to the classroom” (p.6). This is, students do not have to do anything outside the classroom, and the class time would be fully exploited to satisfy the students’ learning needs. Moreover, according to the same author, students need attention, someone who controls the activities and an authority person in front of them to be part of their learning process. In this kind of activities, as the students’ parents are isolated from their children’ learning process, the students’ support will be given by the teacher, who is in charge to provide the learner with all the materials needed and to control their learning process.

Second, as Bridging activities are small-scale projects, the author goes on to say that “project work is student-centered and driven by the need to create an end- product.” (p.5). Nevertheless, the most important part of project work is not the product, but the route; this is the process. The reason is that during the process students have opportunities to develop their confidence and independence; besides to work together in a real world environment by

collaborating on a task which they have defined for themselves and which has not been externally imposed. Therefore, since the process of project work requires collaboration and group work, it is arrived to the core of this Action Research. The type of collaboration regarding this point will be based on teacher-student, and student-student interactions; that is group work. Also, another interesting benefit from project work is that it helps students of mixed abilities, and it creates opportunities for individuals to contribute in ways which reflect their different talents and creativity. That way, students gain self-confidence since they can decide how to work on a specific task.

Third, it is important to consider, as stated by Burke (2011) in the study “Group Work: How to Use Groups Effectively”, that “Many students have repulsion to work in groups, but teachers have to give proper instruction about working in groups and to show some advantages to them” (p.88). Here, teachers play another important role. They should encourage students to work with their classmates. In fact, according to the author, group work has been found to be good for students and good for teachers and often, students get better grades. Therefore, if teachers can lead the students to work in collaborative learning, they can get the following benefits:

1. Groups have more information than a single individual.
2. Groups stimulate creativity.
3. People remember group discussions better.
4. Decisions that students help make yield greater satisfaction.

5. Students gain a better understanding of themselves. Group work allows people to gain a more accurate picture of how others see them. The feedback that they receive may help them better evaluate their interpersonal behavior.

6. Teamwork is highly valued by students.

However, the author claims that it is important to take into account that there are also some disadvantages and that some problems can arise. For instance, pressure from the group to accept the majority's decision, individual domination, members who may rely too heavily to do the work, and young students who ask for more time to work. However, a solution is proposed, and it is regarded as "to make every group member aware of the goals and objectives of the group and assign specific tasks or responsibilities to each member" (p.89). That is, to assign students with important roles within the group.

Besides, working on Group work, it is also relevant to take into account some useful stages, according to the author: 1. The teacher must decide that he/she wants to incorporate group work into the class: the teacher decides and negotiates with students the topics to be worked. 2. Teaching the students to work in a group: as it was said before, teachers should encourage and teach students to work collaboratively. 3. Monitoring the groups: this is, reviewing the groups' plan action. 4. Assessing the group: deciding what is going to be assessed and how.

Another interesting feature regarding group work and collaborative learning, as it is explained by Laal, M., Naseri, A. S., Laal, M., & Khattami-K., Z. (2013) in their work "What do we achieve from learning in collaboration?" is that when working on collaborative learning (CL), students have something in common: A goal. The goal implies three ways of

interaction: working together toward a common goal, competing with the other toward a goal, and working individually toward a goal different to others' goal. Also, they all together have to complete a task, to solve a problem or to create a product. Similarly, Matthews, R. S., Cooper, J. L., Davidson, N., & Hawkes, P. (1995) in their article "Building bridges between cooperative and collaborative learning" state that collaborative learning is a method in which students team together explore a significant question or create a meaningful project.

However, Laal, M., & Ghodsi, S. M. (2012) in their article "Benefits of collaborative learning" claim that working collaboratively goes beyond working together: It is much more of that, it is to have interaction, is to have self-confidence to trust in others too, is developing social skills and to have responsibility to work with others and to get a final product.

Therefore, the core of CL is to develop social skills. Also, the authors agree in saying that students can have higher achievement and productivity and more support as a result of learning in groups.

Fourth, as the teaching strategy for this Action Research is related to Bridging Activities, which are "mini projects", and also developing collaborative and group work learning, it is mandatory to think about how to group learners. It is decided to work on small groups. According to the text "Group Work in the Classroom: Types of Small Groups", since there are different kinds of small groups, the teacher has to think about what kind of small group should be used depending on the size of the class, the length of time, the classroom's physical features, and the nature of the group task. Even if the article proposes many kinds of small group organizations, for this Action Research, just three of them are implemented:

1. Circle of voices: Similar to a debate in which students are given a theme that they have to explore by talking one by one, respecting others' turns. The group is divided into



small groups that are assigned with different topics, and after that, the entire group has a general discussion.

2. Jigsaw: The entire group is divided in smalls groups of four people, and each person of every group has to become an expert on a topic or subtopic. Then, each member of a group is numbered, for example, student 1, student 2, and so on. After that, all the students 1 integrate a new group in order to share their knowledge. At the end, the initial groups also known as Mixed Groups are reintegrated and each student shares their subtopics' understanding with the group.

3. Learning themes: Students work in groups and the group can be subdivided in smaller groups in order to discuss a theme, and then, share it with others.

Nevertheless, to work on groups and collaborative learning it is important to consider some other aspects. According to Melbourne Child Psychology & School Psychology Services, Port Melbourne, (2017) in their work "How to Facilitate Group Work in the Classroom" teachers need to think about the objectives that students are required to reach through group work. That is, teachers have to ask themselves some questions to clarify what they want and what they expect students to do with the activity. The authors provide some tips or questions to take into account when implementing group work, as considering the space, designing the groups based on the task and skill levels, providing instructions, managing the time, modeling useful language for the task, monitoring your students' performance, and also, self-evaluating your own performance as facilitator.

Nonetheless, it is advisable not to confuse Collaborative Learning with Cooperative Learning because, as claimed by Kato, Y., Bolstad, F., & Watari, H. (2015) in their work

“Cooperative and Collaborative Learning in the Language Classroom” although both approaches work on pair or group activities in the language learning classroom, they have different pedagogical aims to be pursued. Moreover, Matthews, R. S., Cooper, J. L., Davidson, N., & Hawkes, P. (1995). In their work “Building Bridges between Cooperative and Collaborative Learning.”, related to cooperative learning, say that students “are individually accountable for their work, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed” (P.36). This is every member of the group is assessed in an individual way, while in collaborative learning students are assessed as a group, without taking into account individual performances.

Finally, it is recognized that both approaches have some commonalities; for example, the teacher acts as a facilitator on the learning process, students have an active role, both approaches can be implemented through small-group activities, which can develop higher-order thinking skills and enhances individual abilities to use knowledge; and both approaches can foster students’ abilities to reflect their assumptions and articulate their ideas in a small group. This clarification is important because of their multiple similarities, as claimed by Kato, Y., Bolstad, F., & Watari, H. (2015) “the two terms interchangeably have obscured their respective merits in foreign language education” (p.22) Therefore, it is recommendable to learn what each approach promotes in order to know which of them is more suitable for specific teaching and learning purposes. In fact, if teacher is aiming to foster social skills or motivate students through tasks, it is better to use Cooperative learning; but if the teacher focuses on learning outcomes and students are autonomous enough to be responsible of their work, it is more suitable to use Collaborative learning.

### **Action Plan**

From my experience, an action plan is a useful guide that presents in an organized way the possible actions and strategies to be implemented in a research study. In that way, an action plan provides the researcher with reminders of what is going to be implemented and when it is going to be developed. This action plan is derived from my observations and interventions to a fourth grade at Julio Sanín School in Rionegro. In the following lines, I will refer to the teaching and learning strategies I consider suitable and relevant to overcome the lack of attention and accompaniment from parents to students, which is my research problem.

First, it is important to highlight that my interventions will be done by following the theoretical basis of Collaborative Learning and Group Work, specifically, through Bridging activities. Bridging activities are small-scale projects that allow students to work in group and collaboratively in order to reach a specific learning goal; that is, students can support each other. Additionally, for this kind of activities, the teacher's accompaniment is crucial since they are in charge to provide the students with the instructions, material, and help when needed. Thus, I will focus on the support that students will receive from the teacher and classmates as a way to mitigate the lack of parents' accompaniment mentioned above.

Therefore, I will start by informing the students' parents about my research project through a consent form. This consent form will serve two objectives: to inform parents and students about my Action Research Project, and to ask the parents to allow their children to participate in my project for data collection and data analysis. However, if some parents do not agree with signing the consent, their children will be involved in class, anyway, but their data cannot be used for data collection and data analysis purposes.

Then, regarding Bridging Activities, from January to May 2018 I will identify the most suitable ones, taking into account the syllabus requirements, in order to enhance pair and group work. In February, I will ask the students to form their project teams aiming to work from the very beginning in a final project; this is, the final project will be constructed over the semester. Subsequently, in May, students will present their final projects. It is relevant to mention that through all their learning process, from January to May, students will perform ongoing development Bridging Activities.

### **Data collection plan**

For this Action Research, as sources of data collection for further analysis and from my perspective, it would be useful to implement two instruments: a survey for the students and an interview to the teacher. Concerning the survey, I will apply it in May 2018 in order to know students perceptions about the Bridging Activities, for instance, how they felt about working in pairs and in groups, if they like it or not, and what activities were more enjoyable for them, or maybe, if they consider that some of them were boring. Regarding the interview to the teacher, it will be conducted in May, too, aiming to know the teacher's perceptions about the Bridging Activities to be implemented during this Action research. In addition, I will use my journal notes as a source of data collection since in it I will write all my reflections on the work on Bridging Activities implemented in the English classes; that is, how this teaching-learning strategy could help me to answer my research question. In that way, I will have three sources of information, and also the perspective of the three different participants of the research in order to triangulate the data.

### **Development of Actions**

As I mentioned in my Action plan, I planned to implement some teaching-learning strategies at the place where I am doing my practicum; all that with the objective to overcome some difficulties related to students' learning support. Such strategies were conceived by following the theoretical principles of the Collaborative learning and Group work. Specially, I decided to use Bridging Activities, which are small-scale projects, and which foundations concern the theoretical concepts I have just mentioned, including a final project that was intended to be designed over the semester. In addition, as data collection instruments I decided to use my journal since it contained useful information about the development of the Bridging Activities in order to answer my research question and to determine some results of this Action Research. Moreover, I decided to conduct an interview to my cooperating teacher and a survey to my students in order to know their perceptions about my action strategies. This section is a detailed description of the dynamics of my Action plan implementation and the emergent concerns and difficulties of this experience.

First of all, regarding the Bridging Activities, I had planned to implement a considerable amount of them in order to cover all the topics and competences required by the English syllabus of the institution. However, it was not possible to develop all the activities I had in mind because of the time. Time was always a limitation. In fact, when initiating my practicum, I could teach my classes four hours per week, but as a result of some changes in the schedule, the English class was reduced to two hours per week, one hour on Thursday and another hour on Friday. Moreover, it was impossible to count always on sixty-minute lessons because as the class was after the break, sometimes the students had something else to do before starting the class, for example, to collect the garbage. Besides, before starting the

class, it was required to roll the list, and it could take ten or fifteen minutes. Also, it is important to consider that last year I was the only homeroom teacher of the course, but this year I was just the practicum student so that sometimes the current homeroom teacher took part of the class time to give important information to the students, what also diminished my time for teaching. In that way, the class time was easily reduced to 45 or 40 minutes per lesson. Nevertheless, despite the time constraints, the students could work on Bridging activities every two weeks approximately.

Second, referring to the Collaborative work and the formation of the groups for working on the final project, the students had already decided the members of every project team since last year, but as expected, some of them had to be reintegrated; that is, some new groups appeared according to the necessity. However, it was impossible to work in groups all the time because of the class dynamics, and especially because of time constraints. For instance, there was not enough time for children either to move the chairs to form the team, or every group comes to an agreement on how to work.

Third, although we could form the groups intended to work on the final project, it was impossible to work on such final project because of the class dynamics. Therefore, we had to work on small projects every fifteen days, approximately, depending on the students' learning process. In the same way, it is important to highlight the student's motivation and willingness to work in groups and collaborate each other, although sometimes some students were not so disciplined, especially boys, but it was not anything impossible to manage.

Fourth, concerning the interview to my cooperating teacher, there was a difficulty because as she is the coordinator of the institution, most of the time she was totally busy. Therefore, it was impossible to have the perspective of my cooperating teacher regarding my

Action research. Then, I had to conduct the interview to the homeroom teacher. Nonetheless, I consider that the homeroom teacher's opinion was totally useful since she was the one who could observe all my action process, and in that way, she could do relevant contributions for the information gathering and for the analysis of the results of this Action Research.

Finally, the survey to my students was also possible to conduct. It was totally important to reflect on and to design understandable and easy questions for them. That is, it was not an easy work since it required considerable revision. Related to students, they were really willing to answer the survey, and most of them understood the central idea of every single question. From that survey I could obtain crucial information about my implementation and the success of my research project.

### **Findings and Interpretations**

Through all this action research process it was possible to come up with different issues concerning the use of Bridging Activities in a group of children at a public school setting. In the following paragraphs such findings will be analysed and discussed.

#### **Motivation and Engagement**

The most important finding is related to a high students' interest for mini projects. After analysing the data collected through the practitioner's journals, the interview to the cooperating teacher and the survey to the students, and after triangulating all the data and identifying common categories and concepts in the three sources of information, it was evidenced that Bridging Activities, which are presented as mini projects, are an effective teaching-learning strategy to promote collaborative work and improve language performance. Prove of this can be seen in the Journal entry, March 16th 2018 "They did a very good job. I

heard some very good comments about these activities, they liked them because they were very fun and practice for them to learn English.”

### **Group Work and Collaborative Learning**

Besides, students' products were analyzed to know and define the influence of the collaborative learning and group work in their language achievement. First of all, through the implementation of collaborative work, it was possible to foster the students' attention to the English classes since in each group every student had an important role aiming to accomplish the task goal, and also it was possible to fill the gap related to students' accompaniment since they were supported each other and they were provided with the teachers' help to develop the different activities carried out during the semester. Hence, as stated by Laal, M., & Ghodsi, S. M. (2012) in their article “Benefits of collaborative learning”, working collaboratively promotes interaction, arises self-confidence to trust in others, and develops social skills; this is, as affirmed before, students are integrated in and accompanied by a little community: the group and the teacher. This was proved in the journal entry, March 16th 2018, “They answer very well when they work in groups; they work in a real team. They loved this activity because they had a very good participation, everyone worked in groups and they achieved the goal.”

Similarly, it was observed that students had a considerable preference for working in groups since they asked it in classes when they had to work individually and in pairs. Therefore, it is concluded that students' positive motivation towards group work and collaborative learning in this context was evident, too, as proved in:



“I made this activity by individual since I wanted to identify if this group answered well in front of an activity by themselves. I could notice that students asked between them some words and so, they asked me all the time if they could do the activity in groups”. (Journal entry, March 2nd 2018)

This fact corroborates the words of Fried-Booth, D. L. (1986) when stating that small-scale projects encourage students to experience and use the language; this is, students are involved in the activities because the nature of the small-scale projects is attractive for them. In contrast, different to what has affirmed by Burke (2011) referring to the students' repulsion to work in groups (p.88), in this context, as stated above, group work and collaborative learning were very engaging strategies since with them the students felt comfortable with and supported by others members of the group facilitating the understanding of the activities' goals and the accomplishment of the tasks.

Besides, students showed a huge interest to learn what I proposed in class, but always connected to what was stated and recommended by the school syllabus. In that way, I realized that in this context it is allowed to use different methodologies to teach, but without omitting the requirements of the educational policies makers of our country. I considered it very relevant to plan all the classes and to know what kind of Bridging Activities to use with my students.

### **Active or Dynamic Activities**

Subsequently, it was also evidenced that students like dynamic activities; that is, activities in which they can move or in which they can use their creativity to get a final goal. Thus, they preferred classes different to the traditional classes in which they are generally

looking at the whiteboard and writing what is there, or repeating teacher's utterances. That is another reason for which they liked Bridging Activities: they can do something funny for them, as stated in:

“I heard some comments about they did not like the grammar, they prefer games, playing and different activities. So, I changed the activities for more fun activities than written, filling the blanks, answer questions. I proposed activities such as dialogues, role plays, competitions on the board; we did a mini project” (Journal entry, April 13th 2018)

Moreover, they liked very much group work and collaborative learning because most of the times they could shape the groups themselves without the teacher's intervention, as proved when the students answered that they prefer to shape the groups themselves (Students' survey, May 21st 2018).

### **Language Performance Improvement**

Regarding the improvement of language performance, through the students' products and the observations of the class dynamics, it was noticed students' English achievement and improvement thanks to the partners and teacher support. Besides, as students could rapidly forget what was taught in previous classes, the fact of using activities to review last sessions was a success for students to remember previous topics. This is proved in the journal entry, February 23rd 2018, “I reviewed about some personal information and they had to practice the topic with a small speaking activity about it between one person and another (pair work ), they worked very well”. Moreover, concerning the positive impact of the content of each Bridging Activity, it was meaningful for since it was connected to students' real life as

affirmed by Matthews, R. S., Cooper, J. L., Davidson, N., & Hawkes, P. (1995) when saying that collaborative learning allows students to explore together significant question or create a meaningful project, as proved through the students' answer in which the most of them stated to prefer topics related to their real life (Students survey, May 21st 2018).

### **Drawbacks**

Finally, it is important to mention that some inconvenient regarding the implementation of the Bridging Activities occurred. First, even if the students paid attention to the teachers' instruction, sometimes their concentration during the development of the mini projects was affected by some disruptive behaviors; this is, the indiscipline can bother their learning process, as claimed by them when saying that when they worked in groups some classmates were not behaving, not doing what they were supposed to do (Students' survey May 21st 2018). Therefore, it is relevant to keep in mind that for more effective results regarding Bridging Activities, it is crucial to promote a good learning environment that allows the students to be engaged in their mini project activities. Besides, as the students' range of age of the course was very varied, some activities and their content were not interesting to those older students, to whom some activities seemed childish like, as stated by the homeroom teacher when talking about the discipline issues and the kind of activities and content used (Cooperating teacher's interview, May 21st 2018).

Consequently, it is important to consider all the possible situations that can affect the students' learning process, as the difference between students' ages that could derive in different preferences and ways to learn, since it is crucial for teachers to be aware of the students' interests and learning when planning the lessons.

### Conclusions

From this action research experience, I can conclude that the goals of the project were reached; this is, it was possible to identify the most suitable short term projects strategies, to apply different group work strategies to foster language performance, and to promote a cooperative and collaborative work through the use of Bridging Activities or Short Term projects in the context. In that way, I could explore that using collaborative work through Bridging Activities can improve my students' language performance. In fact, the main findings of this research, as stated above in the finding and interpretations section, were that the students' interest and motivation towards mini projects as Bridging activities was considerably high and positive, which could foster their language achievement. Moreover, it was shown that collaborative learning and group work as a strategy to overcome the students' lack of support in their learning process was effective since they felt encouraged by the other members of the group of work and the English teacher. Besides, it was noticed that students are most engaged in an activity when its content is related to their real world and daily life; that is; the learning process is meaningful for them since it is not isolated from a familiar context.

In the same line, the implications from these results regarding teaching and learning are related to the students' necessity for learning support in order to reach the English learning goals. In fact, as a considerable amount of students of public school are children with lack of accompaniment by their parents, it would be considerably useful that teachers in similar context look at group work and collaborative learning as ways to overcome such difficulty, since it was evidenced that others' support encourages students to do their best; in fact, it is important for students to feel that someone else is interested in their learning

process, and that someone is taking care of their language achievement. Moreover, through this methodology students can learn to share with others and to be part of a group where each one is engaged in a common goal that benefits all the members of the community. Besides, collaborative learning and group work is a way to fight against selfish perspectives that make the human being to feel self-sufficient when by nature, we all are social beings and need the others. Thus, I consider that is the reason why Laal, M., & Ghodsi, S. M. (2012) stated that the core of the collaborative learning is to develop social skills; now, I strongly believe it.

However, one concern is still present in my mind, and it is concerned with the disconnection of the parents' from their children educational process. Such situation is highly worrying for me since I consider that a parent should take care of every aspect and experience of their children's life; it is a matter of love and responsibility. Therefore, one question arises: what and how the school can do to promote and enhance parents' accompaniment to their children? because it is a reality that we, as teachers, often need the parents' support to reach the course goals since sometimes we need to leave some extra-activities that should be made outside the classroom and we need someone to encourage the children to do them in a proper manner. Besides, there are considerable occasions when children need to reinforce at home the contents taught in the classroom, but there is nobody helping the child, what is going to happen with that child's learning process? In conclusion, parents' accompaniment, from my perspective, is totally relevant.

### **Reflections**

I have to say that this action research project and this time as teacher practitioner have been an opportunity for me to better understand school dynamics of our context. Through this

experience I could learn that teaching and learning go beyond the classroom, and that we as teachers have to face considerable shocking situations that we never expected, but that can help us to develop more effective strategies for teaching and learning; that is, for our educational practices. Specially, regarding the action research process, it led me to be aware of the fact that we can improve our context if we are engaged in identifying problematic situations for working on changing them while seeking our students' and own benefit; in short words, making it a better place to teach and learn.

Moreover, regarding my students and my teaching practice with them, it was really interesting to realize that I could do something for them in order to improve their academic lives. In fact, it was so rewarding to see that I could be so responsible regarding my students' processes and learning needs; that makes me feel a better teacher, and allows me to appreciate more my profession. Likewise, I could notice that I was not only teaching, but also learning. I learned many things from my students and my cooperating teacher, so I understood that teaching is interaction and sharing of different knowledge and experience, both from the teacher to the students, as from the students to the teacher. In summary, this experience enabled me not to be afraid of difficult school contexts since I could learn that I am trained to face different situations, and also during the situations I can find a possible solution.; that is, what I do not know, I can learn it along the way. The most important point is to be very willing to do something that can have a positive impact in our teaching contexts.

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## Appendix A

### Interview to the homeroom teacher

1. ¿Cree usted que el enfoque de mini-proyectos a través del trabajo grupal que la practicante está utilizando ayuda a los estudiantes en el aprendizaje del inglés?
2. ¿Qué opina de las temáticas y contenidos seleccionados para el trabajo en las clases de inglés con el grado 4?
3. ¿Considera que a través del uso de este enfoque se está cumpliendo con los objetivos del plan de área? ¿Qué puede decir al respecto?
4. ¿Nota algún cambio significativo en las dinámicas de la clase de inglés desde que están a mi cargo? En caso de respuesta afirmativa ¿Cuáles?
5. ¿Qué puede decir de los estudiantes con respecto a su proceso de aprendizaje mediante este enfoque?
6. ¿Qué recomendaciones me puede brindar?
7. ¿Qué dificultades encuentra usted al momento de trabajar en grupo?
8. ¿Encuentra usted alguna dificultad en cuanto al acompañamiento de los padres con los estudiantes?
9. ¿Alguna opinión o aporte en cuanto a mi desempeño en las clases?

## Appendix B

### Survey to students

#### Encuesta a los Estudiantes

A continuación encontrarás preguntas sobre tu clase de inglés. No se trata de un examen con nota, sino de que des tu opinión sobre tu profesora y tu clase de inglés para que puedan mejorar. Te pido que respondas con la mayor sinceridad y confianza. No te preocupes por tus respuestas porque todas serán buenas y nadie se enterará de lo que escribas porque no vas a escribir tu nombre en la Encuesta.

Si no entiendes alguna pregunta o alguna palabra, pídele a la persona que está a cargo de la encuesta que te explique. Muchas gracias por tu colaboración

1. De las formas que hemos utilizado en clase el año pasado y este para aprender inglés, ¿cuál te agrada más?
- a. Estudiar las páginas del libro
  - b. Trabajos en grupos (juegos, competencias, mini proyectos)
  - c. Trabajos individuales

2. De las actividades en grupos que hiciste con tus compañeros. ¿Cuál recuerdas con más agrado?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="radio"/> a. Poster sobre los animales<br>(Zoológico) | e. Juegos en grupos para recordar los números del 1 hasta el 100         |
| b. Tarjeta del día de la mujer   | <input checked="" type="radio"/> f. Hojas de papeles con frases          |
| <input checked="" type="radio"/> c. Mini proyecto del día de la madre        | g. La actividad del monstruo   |
| d. Actividad sobre las partes de la casa                                     | <input checked="" type="radio"/> h. Actividad grupal "Mis juguetes"      |
|  | <input checked="" type="radio"/> i. Crear un reloj para aprender la hora |

3. Al momento de trabajar en las clases de inglés en pequeños equipos, los principales problemas fueron:

- a. Los compañeros se demoran mucho para ponerse de acuerdo
- b. No todos los compañeros son juiciosos en el trabajo
- c. Las tareas y actividades son muy difíciles de realizar
- d. Unos compañeros manipulan y dan órdenes todo el tiempo
- e. Algunos compañeros se la pasan haciendo otras tareas o jugando y no realizando las actividades de inglés.

4. De los contenidos de las clases de inglés, las que más me agradaron fueron:

- a. Las que se relacionaban sólo con nuevo vocabulario.
- b. Las que se relacionaban con la vida real
- c. Las que se relacionaban con otras materias de estudio como ciencias, matemáticas, sociales, etc.

5. La manera de trabajar con otros que más te agradó y que te dió mejores resultados fue:

- a. Trabajo en parejas
- b. Trabajo en grupos conformados por la profesora
- c. Trabajo en grupos conformados por nosotros los estudiantes