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Deisy Juliet Ramírez León

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Opportunities and Challenges that the Implementation of Group Work Activities Bring to
Promote Fifth Graders' Interaction in the English Class

Deisy Juliet Ramírez León
School of Languages, Universidad de Antioquia

Teaching Practicum and Research Advisor
Ms. Carolina Herrera Carvajal
Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

Thesis Advisor
Mrs. Marta Isabel Barrientos Moncada
Magister in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

This action-research aimed at identifying and reflecting about the opportunities and challenges that the implementation of group work activities can bring to promote interaction in a group of fifth graders. It was conducted in a public school in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia with 34 fifth graders. Action strategies included how applying group work activities can promote interaction among students. Data gathering instruments included teacher's journal, checklist, students' reflections, and focus group. Findings referred to participants, including me; as follows: opportunity to apply group work activities helped students make informed and group decisions about the development of the activity and their responsibilities, and allowing students to work in groups gave them the means to share their knowledge and opinions, ask for corrections and give feedback, giving students the freedom to change groups along the process, caused disorganization within the groups limiting interaction with peers.

Keywords: Group work activities, collaborative learning, interaction, roles and responsibilities.

Título del proyecto: Oportunidades y desafíos que la implementación de trabajo en grupo puede traer para promover la interacción en los estudiantes de quinto de grado de la clase de inglés.

Degree requirement

This action research project is submitted as a requirement to obtain a bachelor's degree in foreign language education (English- French) at the Escuela de Idiomas, Universidad de Antioquia, El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia.

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Preface

I am a student of foreign languages teaching program from university in Antioquia, Colombia. I am a teacher interested in understanding how the implementation of group work activities can promote interaction in students so then they can immerse in their own community. My motivation to do this research came from the need to provide students with a space so that they can talk with each other and exchange ideas or experiences about the task that was proposed to them. This research study was carried out from late August to late November in 2023. As a pre-service teacher, I conducted the project in a public school in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia and I was assigned to observe a group of 36 fifth graders. This research project is mainly addressed to educators, who acknowledge the importance of exploring how collaborative group work can enhance students' interaction during their learning process at school.

Deisy Juliet Ramírez León

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Description of the Context

This research project was carried out in a public urban educational institution in El Carmen de Viboral, Antioquia (Colombia). This institution offered primary education from preschool grade (0°) to fifth grade (5°). According to the institution's mission, it aimed to educate people with high human trust. Also, their human potential, sociocultural knowledge and skills that contribute to form the ethical dimension for people, to be capable of influencing and projecting themselves in the region (School handbook, 2021). As for its vision, the school wanted to be recognized as a leading educational organization in the region for its offering innovations in academic and technical programs (Scholing handbook, 2021)¹.

Concerning the class, this project was carried out in a 5th grade and the lessons were one time per week in a 140-minute period. The syllabus for this level was based on the school curriculum proposed by the National Ministry of Education and Mallas Curriculares; each one contained a conceptual structure divided into learning objectives, problematizing questions, and conceptual scope. The competences are divided into three segments: interpretative, argumentative, and productive. Class content was based on a textbook called "Multitareas 5 Libro B" (Greenwich, Norma Ed.) it contained three different subjects Mathematics, Science and English.

Participants in this study were 36 students, their ages ranged from 10 to 13 years old. Some learners used English outside the classroom as they had access to other private classes (Students' personal communication, August 8th, 2023). Furthermore, most learners liked to learn English and they agreed on the fact that learning English can give them opportunities to talk with others, though, they also stated that it could be a frustrating

process due to difficulties to understand it (Students' personal communication, August 8th, 2023). Regarding the Cooperating Teacher (CT hereafter), she held a bachelor's degree in primary Education, she has worked as a primary teacher for about 25 years (CT's Personal communication, August 8th, 2023).

To summarize, after the observation period the major issue that I identified was the lack of spaces for students to work in groups or pairs and interact with one another. This was also combined with the scarce use of contextualized material that could help students learn the target language in a better way. Hence, the possibility to implement group work activities and the use of contextualized material could give students the opportunity to promote students' interaction and develop the ability to work with others.

Statement of the Problem

Group work activities and interaction among students make a huge contribution to learning a language. However, during my observation stage the lack of activities to promote collaborative work and interaction was evident. The absence of these activities was observed through, first, the few opportunities for students to practice the language or to share knowledge with their classmates; and second, the recurrent use of the textbook activities, lists of vocabulary and isolated sentences were done in an individual manner.

On the one hand, it was reported in the journal the few opportunities for classroom practice and the use of activities that allow students to share knowledge with their peers and to work with others to achieve a common goal or merely to use the language. To illustrate, most classes focused on individual work, copying, repeating, and writing

information from the board or the book to the notebooks, pair or group work activities were limited or nonexistent which inhibited students to share ideas with their peers (Journal entry observation, 1, 2, 3 and 10 August and 5, 6, 7, 14 September 18th, 2022). Only on one occasion, students participated actively in the class when they used the concepts previously taught by using their notebooks and writing the words on the board, permitting them to work and interact with others. I could notice that when they work with others, they started to use the words and spell them easily, they interacted more with one another, they were more creative, and they seemed more confident to use the language (Journal entry observation, August 17th, 2022).

On the other hand, most activities referred to the use of vocabulary and sentence formation which were done individually. One example referred to the times where students posed questions to the teacher about the meaning of some words that were confusing for them or that they forgot, but they ended up still confused because the teacher's answer was "the definition is on the book" or the teacher's responses were not focused on answering their questions and attention was directed to other issues, limiting the options to ask to other classmates (Journal entry observations August 3rd, 10th, 24th, September 10th, 18th, 28th, 2022). Another example was when students were preparing for the "spelling bee" of the school, they were learning the letters in isolation, without making any connection with a sentence, without any pair or group practice where students could use something that helped them to remember the words (Journal entry observations August 3rd, 10th, 17th and September 7th, 14th, 2022).

To conclude, the lack of collaborative work inhibited the learners to have classroom interaction -student-student and teacher-student-. This fifth grade learners did not have the

opportunity to work with their peers and the individual activities used were focused on repetition and memorization of information and did not provide the tools to use the language interactively. Therefore, the implementation of group work tasks embedded in a contextualized activity can offer opportunities for students to work collaboratively, promoting more interactive classes in which students can possibly work with their peers, learn from one another, help each other, share knowledge to achieve a common goal.

Theoretical Background

This section presents a brief conceptualization of the notions that underpin this action research project. In the following paragraphs first, I present the definitions and characteristics of Collaborative Learning (CL). Second, I provide the definition of interaction in the EFL classroom and its relation to collaborative learning. Third, I explain the stages of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as the teaching methodology applied. And finally, I attempt to explain how applying group work activities can promote interaction amongst students.

First, according to Gjergo and Samarxhiu (2011), the definition of Collaborative Learning indicates situations, methods and settings where two or more people try to learn something together and work on a project or task. It is founded on the hypothesis that knowledge can be produced within others and when individuals actively engage in exchanging experiences, playing roles with symmetry, and depend on and are responsible for one another. Similarly, as claimed by Smith and MacGregor (1992), “Collaborative Learning is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual efforts by students, or students and teachers together” (p. 11). In a collaborative

classroom, “the lecture/listening/note-taking process may not completely disappear, but it is integrated with other student discussions and the process of actively learning the course material coexists” (p. 2). We can infer that the students are the priority in the language classroom, the focus is on their learning, and they are engaged in the class discussions and general activities within the material presented in the lessons. Another definition of collaborative learning stated by Udvari-Solner (2012) sustains that it is a process in which students interact in pairs or small groups to notice which are their skills to share and contribute with the other members. Said process is the opportunity for learners to organize, clarify, elaborate, or practice information, expressing ideas that are important, making them active participants in the learning process.

Regarding the characteristics of collaborative learning, some theorists highlight the following attributes: group work, cooperation among students, possibilities for asking questions, mutual support and development of reciprocity, active listening to others, reflection on their learning process, quality formative feedback, critical thinking skills, active learning; and diverse talents and ways of learning (Gjergo and Samarxhiu, 2011, Johnson & Johnson, 1999, Smith & MacGregor, 1992; Udvari-Solner, 2012). Additionally, when doing group work, learners can delegate roles and responsibilities, giving them the opportunity to take decisions and assume responsibilities in the group work process. Consequently, and for the purposes of this project, attention was placed only on one attribute: group work, as a way to promote interaction.

Second, the definition of interaction is worthwhile mentioning. As stated by Seedhouse (2004), interaction is a set of processes among two or more students participating to convey meaning while they sustain their own conversations following a

common goal. Similarly, Bronfman and Martinez (1996) define relationships among classmates as horizontal interaction, involving positions and roles evidenced among students in class. At this way, learners convey meaning through agreements to fulfill the collaborative tasks proposed during the classes. Moreover, these conversations can be practiced in the classroom as a way for students to accept different points of view, encourage conversation and create spaces to participate and share ideas.

As for the relation of interaction with collaborative learning, Johnson and Johnson (1999) consider that two of the benefits of group work are to improve relations with peers and to increase student interactions. They also describe a set of five criteria to successful collaboration when performing group work activities, which imply a certain level of interaction in the classroom. These criteria are:

1. Positive interdependence: Team members must understand that they have mutual responsibilities, because they depend on each other to accomplish their task.
2. Individual accountability: Team members make each member stronger; for this criterion, the performance of each group member is assessed individually.
3. Face-to-face promotive interaction: Team members encourage each other by providing feedback, assisting and praising each other.
4. Group processing: Team members reflect on the process used to complete a task and discuss ways to improve the effectiveness of the process.
5. Social skills: Team members require effective use of interactional skills, such as questioning, providing feedback, and reaching consensus.

For the purposes of this action research, I intend to identify the opportunities and challenges that group work activities can bring to promote interaction. Therefore, I focused

my attention on the various types of interactions when doing group work activities by adapting some of the criteria proposed by Johnson and Johnson (1999). The idea of interaction as, (a) how learners interact by delegating roles and responsibilities, and how they fulfill them; (b) how learners help, support and encourage each other with the language or any other difficulties ; (c) how learners discuss to try to solve problems, complete tasks and activities; and (d) how learners reach consensus and make decisions together.

Moreover, when developing group work activities as part of collaborative learning, Gillies (2004) recommends two types of groups formation: structured and unstructured. In structured groups, the learners are taught to interact appropriately, to assume individual responsibility for a common goal, to complete their own tasks for the betterment of the group, to think critically, and to reflect on their learning. Students in unstructured groups tend to not act cooperatively and are frequently off-task on more occasions than their peers in structured groups. Hence, the structured type of grouping was used in this context, that is why the implementation of a teaching approach that allows this organization was needed.

The third aspect that is important to mention deals with the teaching approach implemented in this action research which was Project-Based Learning. Stoller (2002) set a group of features that describe working with projects in which the focus is placed on content learning rather than on specific language targets, real-world subject matter and topics of interest to students can become central to projects. PBL is student centered, cooperative rather than competitive, it leads to the authentic integration of skills and processing of information from varied sources, mirroring real-life tasks, culminates in a final product, it is potentially motivating, stimulating, empowering, and challenging.

This approach also provides an organization of the class which permits students to work in groups and interact with one another. For this organization, Stoller (2002) proposes a ten-step cycle when developing a Project, which are the ones applied in this action research project. The steps are: Agree on a theme for the project, determine the outcome, structure the project, prepare students for the language demands of information gathering, gather information, prepare students for the language demands of compiling and analyzing information, compile and analyze information, prepare students for the language demands of the presentation, present of the final product and evaluation of the project.

Finally, the idea of applying group work activities to promote student-student interaction is based on the conception of providing spaces for students to try to solve problems or tasks and complete class activities by helping each other; by delegating roles and responsibilities; and by making decisions together. In this way, students might have more opportunities to discuss the different dynamics when working in groups, and how they can relate to others.

Research Question

What opportunities and challenges can the implementation of group work activities bring to promote fifth graders' interaction in the English class?

General Objective

To analyze the opportunities and challenges that the implementation of group work activities can bring to promote interaction in a group of fifth graders.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the types of interactions that students have when helping each other in the development of the tasks.
2. To identify the actions that this group of students take to solve a task or a project.

Action Plan

The action plan was designed based on the 10-steps cycle for PBL proposed by Stoller (2002), and applied in a period of three months. These steps allowed to structure the group work activities and provided a coherent line of work during the research. The first action consisted of students making decisions about the tourist places they were going to develop for the project. During the second action, students decided on the way they wanted to present the outcome of the project, which was a Big Book. The purpose of these first two actions was to provide students with opportunities to make decisions based on their preferences. The third action was about structuring the project where students organized the groups and different roles were assigned to each member of the group. The fourth action was preparing students for gathering information from a variety of sources and the different places they could collect data from. The fifth action was preparing students to select the most relevant information that they needed to present in their projects. The sixth action was preparing students for analyzing information. Here, students were going to negotiate and come up with agreements regarding the process of building their product using the most relevant information collected. The purpose of these three steps was to provide spaces for students to prepare the final product. The seventh action was analyzing and organizing the information selected and writing the first draft. The eighth action involved students in the process of presenting the information. They needed to create the Big book, using materials

such as pictures and the information worked on previous classes. In the ninth action students shared the Big Book in front of the class. The purpose of these two steps was to create spaces for students to give final details and show their projects to their classmates. The tenth and last action consisted of students evaluating the project where they had the opportunity to reflect on the process and self-assess.

Development of Actions

The development of actions in this project was modified by time constraints due to school academic and extracurricular activities that affected the course of actions previously established. Hence, I had to modify the classes every week because the class time was shorter, almost all the classes lasted 60 or 70 minutes instead of 100 minutes.

To begin, I introduced the topic “Places in town” by showing the students some videos about familiar places. Then, students participated by saying the activities and the information and what they could remember from those places. Their ideas were collected so students could agree on a final place for the project. I collected all those ideas and wrote them down on the board and they had the opportunity to revise the information so they could agree on selecting different places for the Big Books.

Later, I showed students a video about how to do a Big Book and students proposed materials and initial roles for the team members. Next, I asked the students to establish the groups and think about the roles and responsibilities for each member. They selected their classmates and confirmed their participation in the group work.

The following action focused on collecting information. Students brought some information to select the most relevant aspects and analyze if that information was helpful to guide a person in a map. They also identified the activities they could do in the places.

Action five, 'students' gathering information,' six, 'preparing students to compile and analyze the information', and seven, 'The analysis of information' were done at the same time. I asked the students to read the information and made a short description of the place. Students started to talk in their groups and select the most relevant information and they made a short description of the places.

Action eight I explained to students how to do a presentation of the Big Book and gave them some guidelines. Some students decided to make a short presentation in front of their classmates and the others started to practice in their groups.

Action nine 'presentation of the final project' and action ten 'evaluation of the project' could not be carried out due to multiple changes in the development of the activities such as the changes in the members of the groups and some class cancelations.

The data was collected through teachers' journals, a checklist, and students' written reflections. The journal was written and codified weekly; the students' reflections were transcribed and codified as well. The checklist was used to analyze students' group work and interactions in a quantitative manner.

Data analysis

Data was analyzed by following the stages proposed by Burns (2010): Assembling the data, coding the data, comparing the data, building interpretations, and reporting the outcomes. I assembled data and stored it in different folders. To assign sub-codes and codes

to the data I followed the strategy of 'process-coding' proposed by Saldaña (2015). Then, I organized the codes and subcodes in an Excel chart identifying categories to understand the codes easily. After that, I compared the categories to find similarities and contradictions and propose themes. Later, I built the interpretations making a contrast with the theory to corroborate the findings. Finally, I reported the outcomes in a written report.

Findings and Interpretations

This study aimed to analyzing the opportunities and challenges that the implementation of group work activities could bring to promote interaction in a group of fifth graders. The analysis of the data resulted in two opportunities and one challenge. On the one hand, the first opportunity was related to how group work activities helped students make informed and group decisions about the development of the activity and their responsibilities. The second opportunity referred to the fact that allowing students to work in groups gave them the means to share their knowledge and opinions, asked for corrections and gave feedback. On the other hand, the only challenge found referred to how giving students the freedom to change groups throughout the process, caused disorganization within the groups limiting interaction with peers. In the following paragraphs I explained each of the above findings.

Opportunities

Group Work Activities Helped Students Make Informed and Group Decisions about the Development of the Project and their Responsibilities

Data demonstrated that giving various possibilities of group work activities promoted interaction that helped students to clarify various aspects around the exercise and

they were able to make decisions by discussing the content and the topics to be included in the project. These discussions referred to steps to develop the project; leading them to reach some agreements to improve the exercise, therefore making informed group decisions. To exemplify, as reported in the journal, when selecting the topic for the project, some students had the following interactions:

[...] another one said, “es que yo creo que es más fácil sobre la Torre porque tiene cosas nuevas, y es más turística” and another replied: “pero el Paseo del Ángel también tiene muchas cosas nuevas”. [...] Then, their final decision was “profe pues hicimos una votación sobre los dos lugares [...]”. (Journal entry #1, August 22nd, 2023)

This excerpt showed that during the development of the activity, in the first stages, the interactions revolved around deciding the place they selected based on their previous knowledge and about what information was more important to look for. Therefore, students could make informed decisions by discussing reasons, considering what others thought and how they could make progress in the development of the activity, and voting. According to Udvari-Solner (2012) when working collaboratively, if students discuss about the information and the general steps regarding the project, making decisions and voting, hence, students are organizing, clarifying, elaborating, and putting into practice information. Likewise, based on one of the criteria to assess students' interactions related to group processing proposed by Johnson and Johnson (1999), the members of some of the groups reflected on how to complete the task and discussed ways to improve the effectiveness of the process.

Similarly, data also revealed that some groups were able to take decisions about changes to be made regarding the materials and information to use. They started to make

the changes and resolved these steps of the project by adding extra material or reducing costs. The reflections in the journal indicated how students made those decisions,

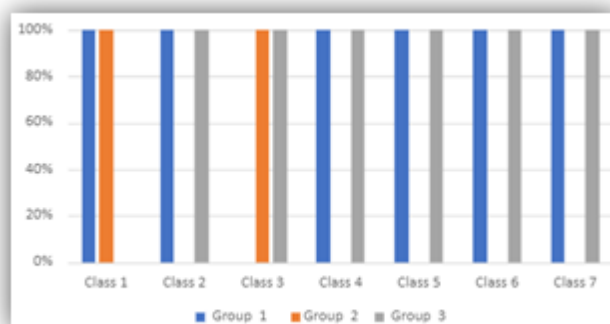
[...] profe es que vamos a hacerlo así pequeño porque es más fácil porque no nos da para comprar cosas entonces estamos mirando que podíamos hacer (Journal entry #4, September 12th, 2023)

This piece of evidence confirmed how students were able to make changes to the materials and adapt the work to their possibilities, either economical or practical; they also made decisions about how to progress during the development of the project.

Moreover, data from the checklists revealed how students were able to make decisions together during the process. Figure 1 shows the frequency in which group 1 and 3 had more interactions, while group 2, only discussed these aspects in the first classes. In general, these groups were working together and to make decisions.

Figure 1

Learners can take decisions together



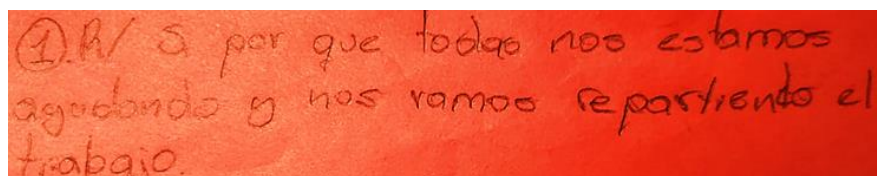
Note: Representation of how often these groups made decisions together as a group, decisions regarding different aspects and during the development of the project.

We can infer that in terms of group work, learners had more chances to discuss about the aspects related to the different steps of the project, what needed to be solved and how they reached consensus and made decisions together to successfully complete the tasks and activities, which was something that was never done in this group before the implementation.

By the same token, the analysis of students' written reflections showed that activities in groups helped them with the process of assigning their roles, and students acting according to their roles. They could also clarify doubts or make changes to these roles and adapt the roles to their abilities, which was reported in the journal as well. To exemplify, figure 2 shows a written reflection responding to the questions related to their role and the activity that students must fulfill.

Figure 2

Student written reflection #4 September 12th, 2023



① R/ S. por que todos nos estamos ayudando y nos vamos repartiendo el trabajo.

Besides, as reported in the journal, when choosing the roles for the project, some students discussed and delegated roles based on their talents

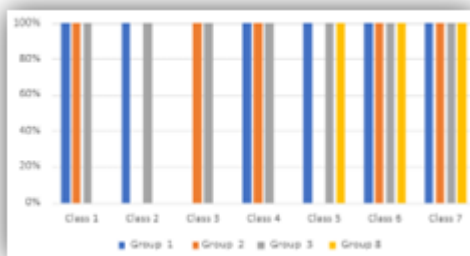
[...] Some students said “profe vea, y pensamos que más vamos a hacer porque en el grupo sabemos quién va a dibujar y esas otras cosas, a él le gusta dibujar, yo escribo y ellos son los de la información, además entre todos traemos los materiales. (Journal entry #1, August 22nd, 2023)

This evidence proved that when students had the opportunity to select their teammates, their roles and the possibilities for their participation, they became more confident to fulfill those responsibilities to do a good job. In addition, as Gjergo and Samarxhiu (2011) suggested, roles helped them to have responsibilities that could be assigned or needed, in this case, most of the groups decided to work in the aspects they liked and helped other team members when it was necessary.

Additionally, in the checklist analysis, it was evident that most groups fulfilled their responsibilities and complied with their roles. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate that four groups, in different stages of the process showed signs of discussing issues about their roles and responsibilities. Regarding roles assignment, groups 1, 2 and 3 had more interactions, while group 4 discussed these issues at the end of the process. Then, when complying with each of their roles, groups 1 and 2 showed more interactions while groups 2 and 4 had less or zero interactions.

Figure 3

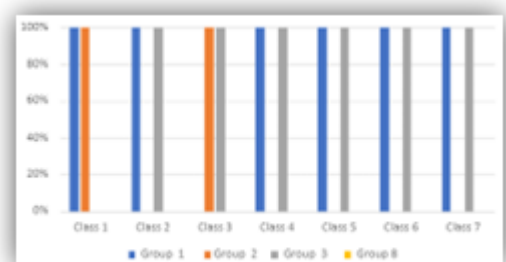
Delegating roles and responsibilities



Note: Frequency rate when assigning roles and responsibilities.

Figure 4

Complying roles and responsibilities



Note: Frequency rate when fulfilling roles and responsibilities.

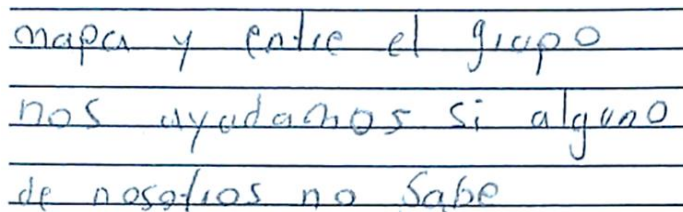
These pieces of evidence corroborate that when students work in groups and have the opportunity to select their teammates and roles, it can significantly increase their confidence to interact, share ideas and complete tasks effectively. According to Bronfman and Martinez (1996), allowing students to take responsibilities based on their preferences, they can better contribute to the group's work. This collaborative process encourages students to feel in control of their learning, creating a more successful and satisfying environment, and improving their interactions.

Allowing Students to Work in Groups Gave them the Means to Share their Knowledge and Opinions, to Ask for Corrections and to Give Feedback

Data demonstrated that group work activities promoted collaborative learning when students exchange their ideas and opinions about the topic, make clarifications in different aspects and provide feedback during the project cycle. As evidenced in the written reflections, students expressed their thoughts about the topic they selected and how this selection helped them share ideas and opinions during the process. The following excerpt gives account of this fact.

Figure 5

Students' written reflection #3, September 5th, 2023



mapa y entre el grupo
nos ayudamos si alguno
de nosotros no sabe

This excerpt revealed that students could identify the abilities that could help them perform during the development of the project, therefore creating spaces for other types of interactions. Additionally, they expressed how they could cooperate during the improvement of the activity, accepting that the other students could assess their work and support it. A possible explanation for these types of interactions deals with the opportunity that students have to complete the task when receiving prompt feedback and when they share knowledge. As Johnson and Johnson (1999) stated, when doing group work, the members use their interactional skills, such providing feedback for helping each other and become aware of their faults during their process.

Additionally, data analysis revealed that group work activities helped students have a clear view of the work they had to accomplish, they interacted easily and clarified a doubt because the members felt more confident asking classmates for help them. To illustrate, these interactions appeared in the journal entries when the members of two groups helped other groups to understand the topic. They had the following interactions

[...] ¿que mas es lo que va aqui?- and then they answered “creo que esta bien hasta ahi”. I noticed that they were confused but other group helped them. They started to explain which is the information they needed to include, they said: “Por ejemplo este es el park, located near to: __ and the __ named: __ y en the park I can __ que es el puedo y asi llenando esos espacios es mas sencillo el ejercicio”. So they made the changes and solve the doubts, then they started to make the description of the place taking into account the most relevant information and the explanation from their classmates. (Journal entry #2, August 29th, 2023)

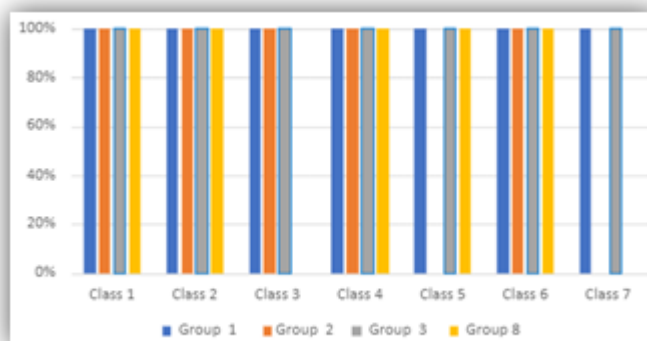
This excerpt revealed that when students from different groups helped each other along the process, this can help both groups to understand and advance during the task, and this creates beneficial interactions and cooperation resulting in students becoming active listeners. It was also evident that students were able to accept the feedback given, therefore

improving the development of the project. As Johnson & Johnson, 1999, said regarding collaborative learning to promote cooperation among students, mutual support, active listening and formative feedback helps during their collaborative learning process.

To compliment, the analysis of the checklist supported this fact. As Figure 6 shows, groups 1, 2, 3 and 8 exhibited a high percentage of interaction when classmates needed any help with the development of the project and almost on all sessions they were discussing and helping one another.

Figure 6

Learners helped each other in any regard and provided feedback to others



Note: Frequency rate when providing comments to one another.

Additionally, data analysis demonstrated how students helped each other to complete the task by reflecting about the information they needed to add when they were collecting the information. To illustrate, this interaction was reported in the journal.

[...] I notice that they can help the other groups, they can contribute with the information and work better [...] the members of group 2 said to group 1 “Bueno, según esto lo que les hace falta es poner el name del lugar, el founded by y la información adicional y eso va justo aca debajo”. Groups 2 responded “ahh bueno, entonces eso lo puedo hacer yo, pero ¿y qué más

faltaría?, then the group 1 replied “Pues eso sería parte del step 2 y el 3 que está en la hoja guía y también lo que quieren poner del lugar eso puede ser información extra también” (Journal entry #4, September 12th, 2023)

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), students can develop social skills when they help their team members and when they provide feedback during the process which are necessary for effective group functioning and effective use of interactional skills.

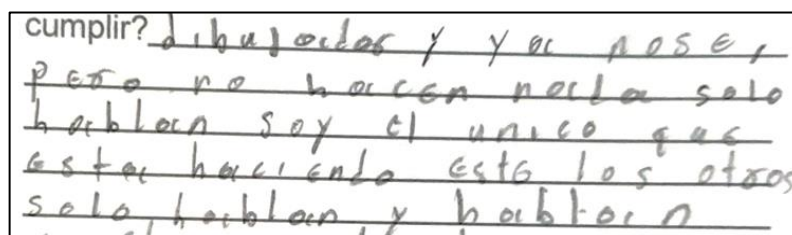
Challenge

Giving Students the Freedom to Change Groups along the Process, Caused Disorganization within the Groups Limiting Interaction with Peers

Data analysis demonstrated that when students had the freedom to change among groups without regulation or limits, it created numerous problems within groups, hence students could not perform their role and the groups' work lost the viability. Moreover, students in some of the groups did not perform their role and they did not use the time that they had in class to complete the tasks which affected the advancement of the project. To illustrate, this lack of organization was identified by students when they responded to the questions related to how they accomplished their roles and their responsibility, some participants expressed on the written reflections

Figure 7

Students written reflections, class #3, September 5th , 2023



cumplir? dibujarlas y ya no se,
pero no hacen nada solo
hablan soy el unico que
esta haciendo esto los otros
solo hablan y hablan

Similarly, disorganization was reported in the journal when students were changing groups, disagreements, lack of communication and unwillingness to do their parts was evident, as follows

[...] Some of the students of the big group expressed: *profe es que como ellos no hacen nada yo me puse a hacer todo con ellos dos y los dejamos que hicieran lo que quisieran para no ponernos a discutir además nosotros tres trajimos todo y estamos haciendo las cosas, ellos al inicio daban ideas y ya después no hacían nada.* (Journal entry #6, September 26th , 2023)

This excerpt demonstrated that when students changed groups freely, they did not develop their role as part of the group, instead they tried to fulfill all the activities that they have to develop in an individual manner. Changing groups frequently and without permission did not allow adaptability to the group, and even though students knew how these changes could affect the process of the group work, they changed groups anyway.

Moreover, the analysis of the checklists also corroborated the fact that changing groups constantly hindered students' roles and responsibilities. Figure 8 shows how groups 4, 5 , 6, 7 and 9, had difficulties developing the project during most of the classes, as they did not know or did not have clear organization regarding who was in charge of certain tasks.

Figure 8

Learners can delegate roles and responsibilities



Note: Representation of the lack of organization when delegating roles and responsibilities.

According to Gjergo and Samarxhiu (2011), establishing effective communication strategies, that facilitate interactions between learners during their work or task, is key to fulfill the roles and work responsibly. Nevertheless, in this group of fifth graders, it was not possible to identify an effective communication as students could not work in the same groups, leading to students not accomplishing their roles. This generated a lack of collaborative work, therefore some of the projects were incomplete.

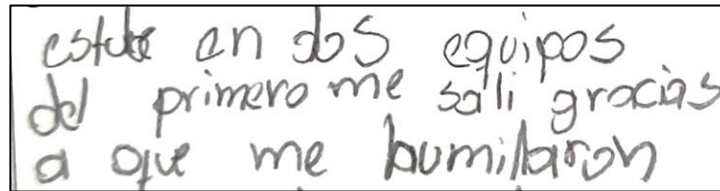
Data also demonstrated that when students moved from one group to the other at any time of the process, the dynamic of the groups shifted and behavioral problems, and mood changes started to appear. It also was evident that they did not resolve their disagreements and ended up just changing groups when any difficulty arose or having heated discussions. As reported in the journal entries, I reflected on students' misbehavior when they changed groups.

[...] then other students told me that they are changing the group because they could not agree on the things they have to do. Another one said: “No, profe es que yo traje todo y ellos no trajeron las cosas que tenían que traer y ellos no son muy responsables entonces me cambié de grupo” [...] (Journal entry #2, August 29th, 2023)

Additionally, to the question related to how students felt when changing groups, figure 9 presents one of their answers

Figure 9

Students written reflections #6, September 26th, 2023



estaba en dos equipos
del primero me sali gracias
a que me humillaron

This evidence revealed that students changed groups because they did not feel comfortable with their peers due to a lack of commitment to completing tasks and the way they treated each other was disruptive and unassertive, as they made decisions without thinking about their classmates' needs. Therefore, the students opted for changing their groups instead of trying to address and solve the aforementioned inconveniences.

Moreover, the analysis of the checklists confirmed the lack of problems solving skills and lack of communication when students changed groups, leading to an increase in disruptive behavior which also affected the development of the project in these particular groups. Figure 10 shows the different interaction students had when trying to solve the problems which could have helped them complete the activities. In the first class, most groups had good interactions as it was the first time working together, but as classes passed by and students started changing groups the interactions changed.

Figure 10

Learners try to solve problems to complete the activity



Note: Difficulties for students to solve problems or communicate within the groups

According to Gillies (2004), group work activities shall be developed implementing structured or unstructured grouping. The intention for this group of students was to use structured grouping which worked for some groups contrastingly data revealed that some of the groups became unstructured. This issue prevent these groups from acting cooperatively and were frequently off-task on more occasions than their peers in structured groups. Moreover, Udvari-Solner (2012) sustains that collaborative learning is a process in which students interact in pairs or small groups to notice which are their skills to share and contribute with the other members. However, the freedom to change groups constantly did not permit students to accomplish the group work purpose.

Conclusions and Implications

This action research had the purpose of analyzing the opportunities and challenges that the implementation of group work activities could bring to promote interaction in a group of fifth graders. From the data analysis two opportunities and one challenge resulted, namely the opportunity to apply group work activities helped students make informed

group decisions about the development of the activity and their responsibilities, it also gave them the means to share their knowledge and opinions, ask for corrections and give feedback, and giving students the freedom to change groups along the process, caused disorganization within the groups limiting interaction with peers.

In addition, this research project entailed a major implication for teachers' practice in this context. Teachers should create a set of systematic strategies in which they can put limits and boundaries when applying the first step of project work, to reach grouping organization consequently the objectives are met. In that sense, when promoting group work to enhance interaction, attention must be paid to the grouping strategies and students' organization and roles distribution to ensure positive interactions. It is an invitation to, help students acquire conflict resolution skills.

This project provides a better understanding of the effects that the implementation of group works activities have to promote interaction. It also contributes to identifying relevant factors related to the strategies used to promote interaction and collaborative learning. Nevertheless, further research on these issues need to be conducted involving different settings to elucidate to what extent Collaborative Learning through group work activities can improve students' social skills, communication skills, tolerance, conflict resolution skills.

Reflection

Reflection is a part of the teachers' role. Hence, this writing has as purpose to evaluate my process in terms of my research and teaching process, my academic experience, and my role as student at the university. I would like to cite one of the authors

that supported my research, Johnson and Johnson (1999) “consider that two of the benefits of group work are to improve relations with peers and to increase student interactions”.

During the process at school that was the first time that I face that situation and context, I could say that students have the ability to create groups and start to make connections and interact between them, but they did not have the ability to solve problems or conflicts that appear along the process, that is why teachers and students need to have more tools like enough information in terms of abilities for solving conflicts and knowledge of the reality of the classroom, without the idealization of the perfect class and perfection in the group work , permitting learners during their experience to pay more attention to the abilities to manage different circumstances. Regarding the teaching process, it was really enriching because teaching implies a combination of abilities, strategies, and theory, they complement each other and cannot be taken as isolated domains. That is why, when research was applied in a real context, you realize that some things were not as expected, that there are situations that could not be managed and gets out of control for many reasons, some information that do not adapt to all the circumstances, and you need to put some limits to manage the class, also you tend to idealize avoiding some issues you did not consider. However, simultaneously, you can see that there are some groups that did a good job and can help other groups and help the teacher to understand the dynamic of this task.

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