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IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES OF COOPERATION FOR ENHANCING INTRINSIC
MOTIVATION TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

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IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIES OF COOPERATION FOR ENHANCING INTRINSIC
MOTIVATION TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	3
Abstract.	4
Key words for retrieval	4
Preface.....	4
Context	5
The group.....	6
The Problem.....	7
Research Question.....	8
Theoretical framework	9
Teachers´ Beliefs	9
Social Teaching.....	10
Collaborative and Cooperative Learning	10
Conditions for making cooperative work more productive	11
Motivation.....	12
Main Objectives:	13
Specific Objectives:.....	13
Planning actions	13
Development of actions.....	14
Data Analysis	19
Findings and some interpretations	21
1. Class development.....	21
2. Attitude towards English learning	22
3. Cooperative work conditions:.....	24
4. Improvement	28
Conclusions.....	30
Reflection	30
Bibliography.....	31

Abstract.

This action research paper dealt with how to increase motivation towards English language learning through cooperative work in a public school in Medellín, Colombia. It was necessary to explore the concepts of *teachers' beliefs, social teaching, collaborative and cooperative learning, to understand the conditions and activities that favored English language teaching and learning in this group and motivation* through: Two questionnaires, two interviews, a students' journal and the student-teachers' in class- participant and non participant observations. Conclusions were drawn concerning certain criteria and some strategies to actually increase motivation in this group of teenagers.

Key words for retrieval

Action research, motivation, English language learning, cooperative work and social teaching

Preface

This research project is the outcome of a year of practicum and action research Project required for graduation at the School of Languages at Universidad de Antioquia. Through this report I present a proposal for implementing strategies of cooperation that enhances *intrinsic motivation* towards English language learning in a group of 10th grade students at a public school located in Robledo, a neighborhood in Medellín, Colombia. At the beginning of April 2006, I started formal and informal interviews and observations both with students and the English teacher. The focus was to deepen my perspective related to what and how pupils wanted to learn and how the teacher wanted to approach contents taking into account learners' awareness about the different uses and the applicability English language has in their present as well as in their future. The need to understand music, TV programs and some written

materials; and on the other hand to have better job opportunities and the possibility to communicate with other people were some of the aspects of students concern.

Through different strategies of cooperation I wanted to show students that they can actually learn English with the different abilities and skills they have acquired through their schooling by participating, creating, performing and evaluating different kind of activities as they perceive the results of that learning. In this work, the reader will find the description of the context, the description of 10/03 students, the problem, the research question, main and specific objectives, theoretical support, project time table, planning and developing of actions, data analysis with its methodology, findings and interpretation of the data. Besides, at the end of the paper, there will appear the conclusions, a reflection, and references.

Context

Jesús Rey is a school located in Bello Horizonte neighborhood, in Robledo. Villa Flora, Villa Sofía and Aurez neighborhoods surround it. This school has a special agreement with the Major's office: *Hijas de Jesús Rey*. Nuns administer the facilities, which are their property, and the national government pays the teachers. This is called *comodato*. The core of this school philosophy is the family, which is perceived as the heart of the society. In its philosophy, it is stated that its main goal is to educate human beings for a peaceful society; responsible people who take care of the environment and who have strong moral values. In its mission, it is mentioned that they want to educate reflective and creative learners. Its vision is to become a better institution, where teaching and learning prepare students to be more competent in this society. Rights and obligations are presented and explained in the *manual de convivencia*. Students can easily understand the language used and its layout is clear and well presented. This "*Manual de Convivencia*" represents the expectations of the nuns.

This institution has a total area of 2.425,72 meters. It is divided up into four blocks and a recreation zone, and around the facilities it can be observed many religious images. It also has some resources and materials for teaching English such as, a TV and a VCR in each classroom; six to seven tape players two DVDs and a small library with some English textbooks that can be used by English teachers.

The groups are co-ed, although there are more girls than boys. Students belong to second and third socioeconomic statuses and they come basically from surrounding neighborhoods. The school principal is a nun; her role is both to design and help to build the *Manual de convivencia* and to administer everything that is related to the school resources, teachers and students catholic behavior. Teachers have an assigned classroom and students move to every classroom to attend to their lessons.

The syllabus for English courses in 10th grade fosters the ability to understand, interpret and produce oral and written texts in English, in diverse and concrete communicative situations historically and socially situated promoting at the same time the reflection on the foreign language linguistic system. Performance indicators aim at assessing students on their abilities: to compare, to ask questions, and to extract main ideas, as they explore thematic through lines such as nature, sports, astronomy and earth. Although the school does not have a preset method, all teachers try to foster reading skills since tutors are preparing learners for taking the ICFES test and each teacher has freedom for using his/her own methodology.

The group

10/03 is a class where there are forty students, twenty-nine females and ten males. They sit in six different rows and in seven lines. The board, a TV and a VCR in a bureau is in front of them as well as the teacher's desk. In this classroom's walls there are posters, maps, pictures

and portrays in English. Chairs seem to be very good, clean and organized. The classroom looks into the side where the school limits with the street. That is why there is much noise outside and this, some times, affects the classroom peace and students' concentration. The classroom normally remains clean and there is very good light that come throughout the windows. Related to their language learning process I can say that they are used to be taught in English and then to translate into Spanish. Most of them refuse to even listen or to speak in this foreign language and they always wait until the classmates who know a little bit more about it, translate or explain them what they are supposed to perform. During the class, they always speak in Spanish to ask for material, to organize groups, to arrange the different step of an activity or to carry it out.

The teacher states that she follows an eclectic method and the activities she plans for this group are aimed at exploring basically the written and reading language, because the standardized tests become an issue for the school accountability. She usually makes students explore the texts that appear in a local newspaper where the most significant pieces of news are translated into English or some articles from the web. With these pieces of writing learners need to answer in groups to the questions who, what, when, where, how and why of the topic and then she tries to find out the best strategy for students to understand the information. She adds that it is necessary that the learner has aptitudes for learning English.

The Problem

Many times when you get into 10/03 classroom at Jesus Rey High School, you feel and observe that students are not enough motivated toward English learning, since they accomplish other activities, speak most of the time in Spanish, they do not pay attention to the teacher, they just copy what they have to do from other classmates or they study other subjects

during the foreign language class. All this was found out after having observed them for more than three months with a non-participant observation.

Learners are aware that they have an important role in motivation when they know that English is very important for their lives in their present and future and they have also clearly expressed in their interviews and observations that they have not received enough explicit information from their teachers about the importance of the foreign language learning. They expressed that they find English class difficult, boring and also they have some personal feelings towards the teacher, or the topics they have to learn. It is important to mention that neither the feeling towards the teacher nor the topics will be addressed through this project.

Besides, since students expressed in a questionnaire and an interview that they find easier to accomplish the tasks when they are asked to work in groups for exploring written texts and performing other kind of activities such as games, dialogues and even teacher's explanation; I will explore different ways to implement strategies of cooperation, that have an impact on motivation and attitudes about the English language learning in this specific institution. These strategies will point to the way I plan my lessons based upon students' likes, school syllabus and my own beliefs which I will explain later.

Research Question

Because of the situations explained above I want to explore the following research question:

How can students' intrinsic motivation towards English learning be fostered, through implementing cooperative learning activities and strategies in 10/03 at Jesus Rey high school, during the second semester of 2006?

Theoretical framework

Teachers' Beliefs

I feel that, in order to understand the way I teach, I need to be clear about, how I conceptualize, understand and approach my work and what the principles behind my teaching are (Golombek 1998, Roberts 1998). To start, I present the sociopsycholinguistic paradigm as a stance that includes both the social and individual psychological aspects of language learning which are essential to explain the main concepts that support this project. This is an approach with principles (Whitmore & Goodman, 1996) in which language is used as a vehicle for communication, reflection and education; learning is universal, because all people are able to “think symbolically” and they have a common need to communicate; the teacher becomes a means to support learners’ ownership of their own learning; curriculum is built from an integration of all diverse aspects of the curriculum and at the same time about themes and inquiries; and there are social principles that deal with teachers who take into account cooperative “learning communities” and who create an environment in which it can exist a “shared involvement”; with a language that should be brought from “the outside world” into the classroom by linking learners’ own life experiences with the one shared in the classroom.

Teachers of English as a foreign language may find in the *Principles for success* Freeman and Freeman (1998) the path that will allow them to implement the principles described above and understand that learning proceeds from whole to part and it should engage students in social interaction; lessons should be learner centered and have meaning and purpose now, developing both oral and written language, supporting student’s first languages and cultures and showing faith in the learner to expand students’ potential. That is why I believe students learn English when they are in a safe context, in which they are motivated, they can also participate, take risks and have errors and mistakes without feeling the pressure or the

embarrassing of the mistake. Besides, learners should be in an environment in which they know why English is important for and how they will be able to use it in their present as well as in their future life. Finally, I have always considered that the four modes, speaking, listening, writing and reading are important to be developed as a whole. However, taking into account our situation of living in an EFL context, I consider necessary to give students more opportunities to use oral language within the classroom.

Social Teaching

In the sociopsycholinguistic paradigm, the principles for success and in my own principles the social aspects of language learning and teaching appears as a root that supports interactions as a means for meaning construction. Gabriel Salomon (1998) explains that in social learning students go from an individual or close work to a social, collective, participatory process of knowledge activation that constructs and emphasizes context, interactions, and situatedness learning. At the same time, all this helps the learner in different aspects such as: thinking about some critical conditions learning deals with, activating group mediation from an individual learning, creating a social mediation that constructs participatory knowledge and a group mediation done by cultural scaffolding following the theories of Vigotsky (1978).

Collaborative and Cooperative Learning

EFL classrooms would gear towards a more relevant understanding of the uses of language if they are organized around the ideas from the sociopsycholinguistic and social teaching approaches because through everyday interactions students and teachers would give life to language; therefore cooperative and/or collaborative learning may be alternative perspectives to be considered. *Collaborative work* is described as a strategy in which all members of the team “respect and highlight individual abilities and contributions to the process and end

product and there is a sharing of authority and acceptance of responsibility among the members for the groups actions” (Panitz, 1996). This is funded in a consensus reached by the whole group and there is not competition among the members themselves. *Cooperative work* is described by this same author as “a set of processes which help people interact together in order to accomplish a specific goal or end product”. It differs from the former since “it is more directive than a collaborative perspective and there is a governance and closely control by the teacher”.

With a better understanding of what the cooperative work requires and through which activities I can carry it out; scholars from Howard Community (2001) provide definitions that frame and name the activities I have implemented. I can also say that many of the elements that this group of authors proposes as core of this kind of work have been taken into account for creating and carrying out my class events for instance: Positive Interdependence (sink or swim together), Face-to Face Interaction, Individual & Group Accountability and Interpersonal & Small-Group Skills. There are also some additional aspects, such as: feelings among the members, similar likes, ideas or positions towards certain topics or themes that are necessary to have in mind when a teacher organizes group work, especially cooperatively.

Conditions for making cooperative work more productive

Stahl (1994) mentions that there are some elements that should be kept in mind to make this kind of class work more productive and at the same time to make students have higher academic test scores, higher self-esteem, greater numbers of positive social skills, fewer stereotypes of individuals of other races or ethnic groups, and greater comprehension of the content and skills since these are the major reasons for using cooperative work. The first aspect should be, *a clear set of specific student learning outcome objectives*, in which students

know in advance the purposes and results they have to achieve when the academic period has finished. Another one is *all students in the group "buy into" the targeted outcome*, in which they should feel that the objectives the teacher is proposing them are also theirs and that “everyone in the group needs to master the common set of information and/or skills”. Besides, there should be a *Clear and complete set of task-completion directions or instructions*, here, the teacher should state and describe in very clear and precise terms what students should do and then learners can feel that they are fulfilling their tasks. Teacher creates *Heterogeneous groups* taking into account students’ academic abilities, ethnic backgrounds, race, and gender. *Equal opportunity for success* should be considered by the teacher since he should create groups that have the same opportunity and ability to achieve the goals. This process should be accompanied of praising or prizes for individual performances without taking into account the group the pupil is in. *Opportunities to complete required information-processing* requires that each student “complete a number of internal information-processing tasks aligned with targeted objectives” that will help him/her to work in groups better and to assign *Sufficient time* to accomplish and to finish the task assigned.

Motivation

I understand students’ motivation as their willingness, need and desire to participate in a specific classroom activity. The principal elements of this motivation are optimism, enthusiasm, curiosity and interest (Harris 1991, and Lumsden 1994). According to these authors, there are two kinds of motivation: Extrinsic and intrinsic. The former is when student perform tasks or activities in order to obtain rewards or prizes and the latter is when aspects such as curiosity, desire or challenge push learners to perform a task on their own.

Burke, C and Short, K. (1991) states that when we deal with motivation, there are some elements that should go hand by hand and that are developed by working on some axes. The first is motivation, which deals with the curiosity, internationality and sociability elements, as it was mentioned previously; all these concepts are interrelated and they make students be invited to take risks, to reflect and to work with others, these, at the same time, have also some functions such as, reduce tension, increase reflexivity and make knowledge be more connected. The three axes and the nine concepts are closely related in a dual process in which, as I just mentioned, one should affect the others.

Main Objectives:

1. To implement activities and strategies of cooperation in fostering motivation towards English.
2. To evaluate the impact of cooperative games, competitions, discussions, and journal entries to enhance students` intrinsic motivation to English language learning.

Specific Objectives:

1. To implement cooperative activities that will articulate students` interests the syllabus with the student-teacher methodology
 2. To compare students` progress in language proficiency after having implemented the kind of strategies mentioned above.
 3. To write some guidelines for cooperative learning derived from this project to share with other colleagues at Jesus Rey high school
- Planning and Development of Actions

Planning actions

The followings were the actions planned to find out how the implementation of cooperative work in this group influenced intrinsic motivation towards English language learning:

Organizing groups according to common interests (future as professionals and personal experience); promoting interactions in the groups through some roles like, a person who looked up words in the dictionary, an editor or a presenter. These roles were assigned, sometimes, by the teacher and other times by students themselves. However, the activities carried out in class were always proposed and guided by the student-teacher. There was a journal in which they wrote their reflections about the process of working in groups, interviews and questionnaires as well to evaluate the process

Development of actions

Although the development of actions was a process that lasted more than five months, I want to summarize what I did in the following chart. This organizer helped me to articulate the school syllabus for English in 10th grade with this project. On it, I present the grammar, topics, the purpose and resources, and the activities of each one of the actions I implemented in 10/03 during the second semester of 2006.

SCHOOL SYLLABUS		EVENTS FOR THE PROJECT	
		PURPOSES AND RESOURCES	ACTIVITIES
Grammar	Topics		
Simple structures in present and future.	Writing and speaking reasons for learning English	Reasons for learning English: Handouts, photocopies and files downloaded from Internet.	Micro project: Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Brainstorming (Spanish) in groups of four students. ✓ Thinking about the present. ✓ Thinking about the future, ✓ Looking up words in the dictionary ✓ Large group sharing Roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Look up words in the dictionary ✓ Editor ✓ Presenter
Passive voice	Science fiction:	Extract: Men in space from Cambridge U.	Activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Reading and

Present perfect	Outlining: topic sentence Paraphrasing	Press Selecting main idea and Paraphrasing	understanding in groups of four students. ✓ Selecting main idea ✓ Paraphrasing Roles ✓ Two students looking up in the dictionary ✓ Writers ✓ Editors
Present	Song Festival	Lyrics: MY HUMPS from Black eyed peas (Sts choice) Main idea: Talking about appearance	Activities ✓ Brainstorming about vocabulary connected to the song. ✓ In pairs filling in blanks. ✓ Group discussion about how appearance is dealt in the song
Frequency adverbs	Routines	Personal experience	Activity ✓ In pairs: copy what the other person has done during this year
Nouns as modifiers	Anticipation	Enlarged images from: Mysteries of Harry Burdick. By Chris Van Allsburg	Activities ✓ Large-group sharing of reading strategies such as: Anticipation, and predicting. ✓ In small group anticipating the topic and general ideas about a text given through numbered heads strategy Roles ✓ Two students looking up in the dictionary ✓ Writers ✓ Editors
Vocabulary	Reading Strategies: Looking up in the dictionary	Competition	Activities ✓ In groups of four students look up words in the dictionary, ✓ Create sentences ✓ Make up words with suffixes and prefixes.
-----	Connectors and referents	To talk about connectors of: Addition, contrast based upon a given text, <i>Making the right choice</i> from <i>English is fun 9</i> . Students' text book	Activities ✓ A general class Brainstorming and discussion for using connectors, referents and definitions ✓ In pairs, students will write an example of 10 connectors from each

			sub-category
Writing strategies	Referents Anticipation Contextual Clues Paraphrasing Writer intention. Use of the dictionary Topic Sentences.	Students choose their topics Each student will write his/her own text. In groups students will help each other.	<p>Activities in groups</p> <p>Brainstorming:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Through mind map ✓ Outline ✓ List of ideas ✓ Thinking aloud ✓ Free writing. <p>Drafting</p> <p>Conferencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ With peers and student-teacher, to think about different topics and ideas for students' text. ✓ Structure and cohesion ✓ Conventions <p>Editing Activities Individually Publishing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Presentation

The first drawback I faced during the implementation of this research project was related to time, since many of the lessons I have planned were not carried out because of extracurricular activities, teachers' meetings and even national strikes. For instance, in the last part of the year there were some activities I could not develop such as: contextual clues, topic sentence or writers' intention because there were two weeks in which there were not classes due to some of the situations I just mentioned.

I also used journaling was a throughline process in which students created their own booklets with their own formats to reply to prompts such as: How has the work in groups helped you to increase motivation towards English language learning? What positive and negative aspects does the work in group have? How could you solve the different difficulties you have had while working in groups? How has the English class changed? and How has that transformation influenced your attitudes towards English learning? I suggested these entries in order to explore their feelings, ideas connected to the cooperative work, their motivation about

the coming to this class. Students also used a section named optional to express their ideas about other issues of their interest. I collected the journal two times with 6 entries, although the initial idea was to hand it in three times with a total of nine entries. I can say, learners took it seriously and they answered what they thought. Besides, most of what they wrote, helped me to perceive and understand the process they had with me as a teacher, the problems or positive aspects of working cooperatively, the way of solving those problems, the feelings they had towards working in groups and to what extent they liked or not the classes, the activities I planned and implemented and the transformation the class experienced

The activities I implemented were connected to literature about EFL group teaching events (*HCCTR, 2001*). The first activity I implemented, that was related to students' professional future was based on the *think pair-share* that involves a three step cooperative structure. During the first step learners thought about *why English is important in their present and what/why they will need English in their future careers and professions or for taking tests or traveling abroad*. Pupils paired up during the second step and exchanged thoughts. This grouping was created under the criteria of similar likes about what apprentices would like to study or work in the future and what they actually use English for in their present. In the third step, the pairs shared their responses with other pairs, other teams and the entire group.

The second event I carried out was focus on the use of passive voice and at the same time, on out-lining as one of the first steps for writing a text. The strategy I used was built from the *Round Robin Brainstorming* strategy that dealt with a class, which was divided into small groups (4 students) with one person appointed as the recorder. Students received the reading: *Men in Space* and they were given time to think about ways of outlining the main ideas. After

the "think time," (*HCCTR, 2001*), members of the team shared responses with one another round robin style. It means everybody gave an answer and all members of the team decided which proposal was better. The recorder wrote down the answers of the group members. This activity was done until they finished with the reading.

To explore nouns as modifiers, I implemented the *Numbered Heads* strategy in which the grouping was done at random to encourage students to work with peers they were not used to working before. Each pupil was given a number from one to four. Students worked together in order to anticipate what the text was about. I called out a number (two, for example) and each two provided the answer. Associated to grammar exercises such as: *connectors, referents, frequency adverbs, present perfect and passive voice* I used the *team-pair* solo tactic in which students created and completed sentences first as a team, then with a partner, and finally on their own.

Finally, the competition about looking up words in the dictionary was an activity that although was not based on one of the strategies for cooperative work, it was very successful and students took advantage of it for knowing each other better and to perceive who were the classmates they could work better with. It was carried out in groups of four and there were not established roles but everybody contributed in one way or the other from looking up in the dictionary, copy the sentences in a paper or making up the sentences that were also required for this exercise.

The song festival, the dialogue about physical appearance and personal experiences through the year were some activities that did not deal with cooperative work but allowed individual and pair evaluation in order to perceive students' improvement and accountability.

Data Analysis

For this action research, there were used four different data gathering instruments: two multiple-choice questionnaires, two interviews, observations and journals; with the aim of having students and teacher's perspective for approaching the information and at the same time to triangulate it in order to find recurrent issues.

In the first questionnaire, there were 39 students and in the second there were 35 from 10/03. Some questions changed from the first to the second one because the first aimed at exploring student's ideas about their language learning process while the second was intended to confirm and to come to conclusions about learners' attitudes, expectations, process and goals with cooperative work in the English class

I selected a group of ten students for participating in two interview sessions in which five liked English and five did not, according to what they had answered in the first questionnaire. This was a trustful quantity to find trends in learners' opinions since the group had a total of forty students. This focus group was the base for the two interviews. However, only half of the group participated in both events. In the first, I replicated the questions used in the first questionnaire in order to deepen on students' ideas and to further explore learners' opinions and feelings. In the second, two more students were also invited to participate in the activity since they showed a great passion towards the English class. This second interview allowed a better understanding of students' answers and ideas expressed in the second questionnaire.

The class observations allowed me to have a systematic recording of what I was noticing on students' attitudes and behaviors while working in groups and their process with language learning; In my journal, I was able to reflect on the way I was perceiving class management and mood and the adjustments needed in order to improve or to achieve what I have proposed by working in groups.

The students' journal helped me to have a wider evidence of what I have found in the previous data gathering instruments and, students had the chance to express what they were thinking and feeling towards cooperative work in narrative.

After triangulating the information of the four different data gathering instruments and having found some patterns, I came up with the following categories

<i>CATEGORY</i>	<i>DEFINITION</i>
<i>1) Class development</i>	The activities implemented, The interactions among people themselves, topics, language and materials.
<i>2) Attitude towards English learning</i>	The Use of the language, Reasons to study English in the present and the future and, The challenging aspects this language presents concerning: grammar, writing, reading, listening and vocabulary.
<i>3) Cooperative work conditions:</i>	Positive interdependence, Face-to-face interaction, Individual & group accountability, Interpersonal & small-group skills and, Group processing
<i>4) Improvement</i>	How the English class changed , how Intrinsic motivation was increased and to what extend there were an improvement in students' achievements .

I will focus the findings and interpretations of data taking into account the order and the information presented in the chart above

Findings and some interpretations

1. Class development

An evident aspect that appeared in the second questionnaire, teacher, students' journal and the second interview was that students liked the activities implemented. This happened since there was a little change about the activities they were used to do. For instance, in the second interview, pupils mentioned: What they liked the most about the activities during this project was "listening by filling in blanks" and "listening comprehension", "presentations", exercises such as "games and competences", and two students mentioned "Cooperative work and journaling". In the first questionnaire, the events learners liked the most were: games (87%), work in groups (59%), teacher's explanation (56%) and listening activities (49%), while in the second the events were: work in groups (58%), listening (40%), competences and games (31%). With this variety in the class events, students could observe that the class was not monotonous and they expressed this in the second questionnaire with a (49%) and also in the second interview as it will be seen below.

Connected to the development of the class, seven of the seven students expressed in their second interview that after the implementation of the cooperative work in class, there were some aspects that appeal them to be part of it. For instance, the student-teacher motivated them with constant help and explanations, different strategies in a wider variety of activities that raised their curiosity and interest therefore classes were more dynamic and funnier. They also replied, in the first questionnaire, that at the beginning they wanted to modify materials, activities, topics and homework in a (100%), while in the second there were a (66%) of the class who answered that nothing should be changed. This was also supported in the interview when six of the seven students said that "Everything was positive" and they did not see

anything that should be changed. I also registered in my journal that learners showed a positive engagement on the class events because they participated more, with more enthusiasm and willingness (Page 64). All what it was mentioned above deals with the aspects mentioned by (Harris 1991), and (Lumsden 1994) as the main elements in pupils' motivation.

2. Attitude towards English learning

In the second questionnaire, the teacher and students' journal and the last interview students found out new reasons for studying English and they maintained those they had previous to the implementation of this project such as, entering into the university, having better job opportunities or taking mandatory tests for their graduation. Students realized they were "Better informed" to make some "Connections between this foreign language and their future lives". Moreover, they understood that this language is not that difficult; also that they can take advantage of some strength they have got in writing, reading, speaking and listening to learn about the others by means of group construction. Students' conclusions what Harris (1991) and Lumsden (1994) evidence when they mentioned: Willingness, need and desire to participate in a specific classroom activity as the key elements in motivation and when Solomon (1998) explained that learning deals with, activating group mediation from an individual learning, creating a social mediation that constructs participatory knowledge and a group mediation done by cultural scaffolding.

The image learners had towards English was positively modified in six of the seven students interviewed and five of them like it more than before since they have always liked it. They also mentioned, in the second interview, that there was a "Better understanding of topics and contents in the English class", the lessons "Were not monotonous" and there were "More strategies" to learn and practice English. The last questionnaire also showed this increase in

students' attitude when they answered that it was improved in 21% from the first to the second questionnaire to finish in a total of 74.28% of the whole group of students.

When they were given the options about the aspects they need English for in their present, for instance, to be able to listen and to understand music, to travel abroad or to meet people; most of learners gave less value on the ones of the present and they gave more value to the ones related to their future such as to pass to the university or to grow professionally. This may happen since messages they get from their parents and teachers make them to be in a constant pressure for being ready for their future, or may be choices were not enough to identify those reasons. In the second questionnaire, pupils replied that they need English for entering into the university (86%) and growing up as professional (83%); in the second interview this pattern also appeared when five from seven students found new reasons for studying English, mentioning "They will be able to study in an undergraduate program easily".

In the second interview, students mentioned that, "English had become easier and more understandable" when they tried to carry out any single activity in this second language. The second questionnaire supports this idea with 66% of students saying English was "Less difficult" from the first to the second questionnaire. Learners also mentioned that still, they feel that some skills are challenging. For instance, in the second questionnaire pupils responded, writing 60%, showing this that they still had problems when they try to organize coherently a text or a composition; 40% considered listening as the difficult aspect since they did not understand many of the details of a dialogue or a presentation when they listened to it; and 34 students found grammar as the difficulty, because they had a lot of grammar corrections when they wrote a test or paper. However, they also said in the second interview that they did different exercises to solve these problems by: "asking Julian if they had any

doubt” and “more practice”. As it was perceived here, increase in pupil interest to learn and to practice this second language and the reduction in the idea that English was difficulty were important aspects that made students change their opinion about this language. Both elements are identified and mentioned by Harris (1991) and Lumsden (1994) when they explained motivation as the willingness, need and desire students have to participate in a specific classroom activity

3. Cooperative work conditions:

In the second questionnaire, teacher and students’ journal and the second interview, learners showed that almost all of them liked to work cooperatively. The positive aspects pupils mentioned in both their journal and in the interview were at the same time connected to the literature of Panitz (1996) when they mentioned: “Cooperative work produces better results”, everybody “helps and contributes to reach and accomplish a goal”, there is a “better understanding”, people learned more; and with the Howard Community College's Teaching Resources (2001) when learners said: cooperative work makes “the work easier” “the classmates who know more can help the others by union and collaboration” and there is an easier “development of activities”. About the negative ones, pupils said that “Cooperative work is always the same because there are some people who do not work, it is difficult “to come into an agreement”, some people “do not have responsibility”, and “there are some who are selfish”. Besides, Salomon (1998) explains in his *social teaching principles* that in social learning students may face these negative situations since cooperative work is always develop in a social construction framework. Moreover, apprentices expressed in the second interview that they could solve those problems by “Dialoguing and telling the truth”.

From my point of view as well as from the authors Urdan and Pajares (2001), we are a very social and cooperative culture and for adolescents, classmates influence in the desire and the form in which they want to learn and approach knowledge s it is also evidenced in a recurrent comment from students journals when they mentioned that “Collaborative work happens since we feel better when we help and receive knowledge and ideas from others”. Besides, sixty three percent of the students mentioned this issue in their journals, the second interview and the second questionnaires, and even I wrote about it in my journal (p.59 and 68) with almost the same quotation: “Students always work cooperatively even if most of the times the activity proposed by the teacher is individually”

Grouping students according to their likes or similarities while some other times it was necessary to create the teams based on how the roll was called or on students belonging to the same “corte”¹ was the best form to confirm the value of work in groups. Through this process of organizing teams based on different criteria, students were able to have an active role in the diverse teams they worked in, based on the strengths or weaknesses about English language they had. This is also an important element for working cooperatively based on social teaching, mentioned by Panitz, 1996 and Solomon, 1998 and expressed in learners´ second interview and journals and also in my own journal entries (page 20).

Important elements of cooperative learning proposed by David and Roger Johnson (2001) appeared during the whole implementation of this research project, such as: First, *Working cooperatively is also a successful teaching strategy*; something students mentioned in the interviews and journals when they said: “People who knew more could help the others, everything and everybody helped”, in some groups everybody “gave a hand and contributed”;

¹ School period equivalent to three months

and in the second questionnaire when they replied that there was enrichment an easier work 66% and 94% had liked to much to work cooperatively. This appeared in my own journal as well on pages 48, 59 and 68 when I said: “Learners worked until the activity was well completed by learning more about interesting things and sharing different ideas”.

Second, *Union and collaboration* were also mentioned in students` second questionnaires when 63% said that everybody helped and contributed. In the journals, pupils answered that “There had been a better distribution of the amount of work”, “a lot of union, collaboration, sharing of ideas and comments” and “learning”. This *union and collaboration* also appeared in my journal when I wrote that “most of the groups worked together and they achieved what they had planned (page 59).

Third and fourth, *solving problems through learners` dialogue and sharing* emerged in learners` journals, in the second interview, in my journal page 48 and in the second questionnaires when 43% of learners replied that there was a better understanding. This was accomplished by discussing concepts or ideas for carrying out the work and connecting their previous knowledge with the new one. Although, sometimes, it became a problem when the members of the groups “did not come into an agreement”, “there were selfish people” or when there was “lack of collaboration” as students said in the second interview.

And fifth, *Improvement of their final results and the good grades both in individual or group work* were as well named in learners` journals, the second interview and even in the second questionnaires when 77% of students said that they had got better results. This happened creating small groups (4 people), giving them individual tests and observing the work and improvement of each one of the groups` members.

However, some of these situations David and Johnson proposed were seen as difficulties and students themselves perceived them and expressed it in both the second questionnaire and in the second interview. For instance, in the interview they said: “All students were not responsible to learn or to help other teammates”; there were some people who “did not contribute” or who did not have “good relationships with others”. This was also expressed in the second questionnaire in answers like: Some people do not work (66%) or it was difficult to come into an agreement (43%).

I could also say there was an increase about *interpersonal & small-group skills* (HCCTR, 2001), perceived and expressed by students in their journals and second interview when they said: “There was communication; many people could perceive some classmates had similar likes or ideas for their future and many people understood that there were not fix roles in the groups”. Besides, learners mentioned, in the interview, the ways they could solve problems while working in groups. For instance: “Telling the truth, dialoguing speaking and listening” while working in groups. There was also *group processing* (HCCTR, 2001), since when learners were asked in the second interview, and in their journals about the way the cooperative work was carried out, all of them said that the work in groups “had been positive, helpful, they had achieved their goals and it can become a very easy way for learning”. Moreover, when they were asked in the interview about continuing with this kind of work, they answered positively and they will propose teachers to do it by presenting the positive aspects, mentioning that “Tutors can take advantage of each student’s strengths and explaining them that four heads think and analyze better than one”. Even the cooperating teacher mentioned in one informal talk we had that after this research process, she will take the risk of promoting cooperative work since she identified new strategies to do it.

4. Improvement

According to the second questionnaire, the teacher and students' journal and the interviews, I identified what Short and Burke (1991) stated as the key elements of motivation, which are: *curiosity, internationality and, sociability*. *Curiosity*, stated by students themselves in their interviews when they mentioned "We are performing a wider variety of activities", "We are studying different topics that increased our interest about English", when they also answered in the second questionnaire that their motivation had been increased in 21 % from the first questionnaire to the second and when I wrote in my journal "I am feeling my students are more motivated and they are looking for new and different ways of presenting their works as well as new information that supports what they already know about the topic or thematic" (Page 58). *Internationality* when they said, in their interviews, "I would want to work more in English because it is not that difficult", "English has become more understandable and accessible to be studied" and when 66% of learners answered in the questionnaire that it had become easier. And *sociability* that is developed, above, during all the subsection that dealt with cooperative work its benefits and positive aspects. Additionally, the proficiency level students felt and showed was higher than before when they said, in their interviews, "I think I have better pronunciation and fluency", "I can organize ideas better when I have to make a presentation or a test" and "I understand more details when I listen to an English conversation". I also perceived the same improvement in the way students wrote and spoke when they presented their papers and presentations since they became more accurate, coherent, and with less grammar and spelling mistakes related to the topics and vocabulary covered in class and in previous courses such as: simple and perfect tenses, adverbs and nouns, vocabulary connected to social issues, personal information and events that happened all around the world. All this derived that at the end of the year, learners' motivation was

increased, the results about grades were much better than in the previous school periods, the class changed for better, students showed more responsibility and desire of working about their homework, class tasks and oral and written activities as I stated in my journal (page 58).

A helpful experience I had, as well, during the implementation of this action research project was the positive attitude students had towards English class at the end of the year. This was increased in 26% from first to second questionnaire, increasing learners' motivation in (46%). They showed this improvement by working in class and by doing homework, papers and activities much better each time.

Students also answered positively and the results were much better, not only about the language proficiency level but also in the 3rd and 4th school period since only one student failed the subject and most of them got an excellent grade in their final report. This was also mentioned by the students when they said that results were much better (77%), "There were more activities, more dynamism, strategies and cooperative work, different rhythms, better atmosphere, sessions were more welcoming and students had a major willingness to work", "There was not fear and a better explanation by the tutor" and also in the interviews when learners mentioned, that "They learned more" than before because in previous courses "there was a situation that did not favor their learning": "Previous teacher gave them all the information while now they have also to study by themselves";. This appeared as the result of a process also explained by, Harris 1991, Lumsden 1994 and Burke Short 1991 when they mentioned that when there is a clear and systematic process by using cooperative work learners take risks, reduce their tension and make that knowledge be more connected.

Conclusions

All the different combinations in grouping --*Students likes, similarities, future plans and numbers of the list*- allowed students to have a wider variety of interaction with different peers, understanding that these practices consent to different rhythms in the classes. Besides, Students understood that they needed to gain confidence in order to have a more active participation in those group and class activities

The activities created and implemented articulated learners' likes, ideas, concerns, plans and interests with the school syllabus and the student-teacher methodology and beliefs, through cooperative work since there was an improvement of students' motivation and desire to learn English by working cooperatively, sharing ideas, reducing the amount of work and learning more.

Suggestions

Derived from the objectives, I want to provide some guidelines that make cooperative work more productive not only for the English teacher in 10/03 but also for the rest of English teachers that work at Jesus Rey high school. It could be done since these strategies allow teacher to use them with learners in different grades and language level at the same institution, of course taking into account group differences and making some arrangements (done by each teacher that tries to implement it). These guidelines will appear below in the **Appendix 1**

Reflection

There were positive and negative aspects in both my practicum and the elaboration of this research project. Related to the positives I can say that students changed their attitude towards learning English by working in groups, they improved their language proficiency level and the results they got were much better. Connected to the negatives, I can say there were problems

with time as I mentioned previously. This taught me a lot what actually happens with class preparation and implementation in public institutions of course, this also affected my performance as researcher since some of the instruments were not applied in the way I wanted to do it and the construction, development and typing or tabulating and analyzing of all those instruments consume a lot of time, energy and ability.

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Appendix 1

The strategies mentioned below for making cooperative work more productive should be used in any single activity learners perform in groups. They should take into account the way students learn and approach knowledge and that they have to be articulated with the teachers' methodology and the school syllabus as well. These strategies are:

- ✓ Find students' interests, needs and likes by applying instruments such as, games, questionnaires or interviews that serve for this purpose.
- ✓ Daily class activities should be created taking into account students' needs, likes and the way they prefer learning.
- ✓ Class events should be as diverse as possible, always trying to practice more than one skill at the time
- ✓ The interactions and the relationships among the different actors that converge in classroom should be lead and embraced by friendship, respect, responsibility and work
- ✓ Grouping should change from time to time.
- ✓ Teams should be created according to students' likes or similar interests.
- ✓ Groups can also be created taking into account people who work in the same groups in other subjects.
- ✓ All members' handwriting should appear through the paper in most of the texts.
- ✓ The *leader* is in charged of organizing, distributing the amount of work among the team members and suggesting the roles of the other students. The *writer or presenter* takes notes of group results and the *checker* verifies and corrects the information either in oral or in written activities.
- ✓ The leader, the writer / presenter o the checker, at random, should be responsible of presenting the whole group results
- ✓ Students should have the option of performing different roles in the different groups they work in.