

## COOPERATIVE LEARNING ON THE PROMOTION OF ORAL PRODUCTION

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**LAURA DANIELA MARTINEZ PEREZ**

**ROBINSON GOMEZ TRUJILLO**

**CLASSROOM PROJECT ADVISOR**

**ENRIQUE ARIAS CASTAÑO**

**UNIVERSIDAD TECNOLÓGICA DE PEREIRA**

**FACULTAD DE BELLAS ARTES Y HUMANIDADES**

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## Resumen

Un mundo competitivo como el de hoy, exige tener unas bases firmes y claras en el idioma Inglés ya que este se ha convertido en una lengua franca que permite a los hablantes comunicarse con otras nacionalidades. Por esta razón es necesario articular en las aulas de clase métodos contemporáneos como trabajo cooperativo que ayude a los estudiantes a hablar inglés.

Este proyecto de clase analizó el impacto del trabajo cooperativo, implementando dos métodos: el sabio y resolver problemas en grado primero en la escuela Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, con el fin de ayudar a los estudiantes a desarrollar la parte hablada del inglés.

Los resultados evidenciados en la escuela mostraron que los niños y niñas de grado primero tienen dificultades trabajando en grupos y necesitan la presencia del profesor para mantener la disciplina y el uso del inglés.

Otro aspecto importante es que para mantener a los estudiantes conectados con la clase, el material a utilizar debe ser significativo y creativo. Modelar las acciones que los estudiantes deben realizar también constituye un factor importante, porque a través de esta manera ellos podían entender y comunicar oralmente lo que el profesor les enseñaba, cuando el profesor hacía uso de su lenguaje corporal se evidenciaba una parte productiva por parte de los estudiantes, ellos producían frases y conversaciones cortas en inglés.

**Abstract**

A competitive world as today`s demands good English speaking skills since English has become a lingua franca that facilitates communication among speakers from all over the world. That`s why, it is necessary to articulate in the classroom contemporary approaches like cooperative work to help learners to speak in English.

This classroom project analyzed the impact of cooperative work through the implementation of two methods such as: circle the sage and problem solving tasks in first graders at the Jorge Eliecer Gaitan School in order to help them to develop oral English skills.

The results showed that at the school first graders had difficulties working in groups and needed the presence of the teacher to maintain discipline and the use of the target language. Also, in order to get learners engaged, the material needed to be creative and meaningful.

Modeling constituted the utmost pattern in this project since students could speak. When the educator modeled the language, learners were expected to produce it, and this was evidenced in the fact that students were able to say a few things in English properly.

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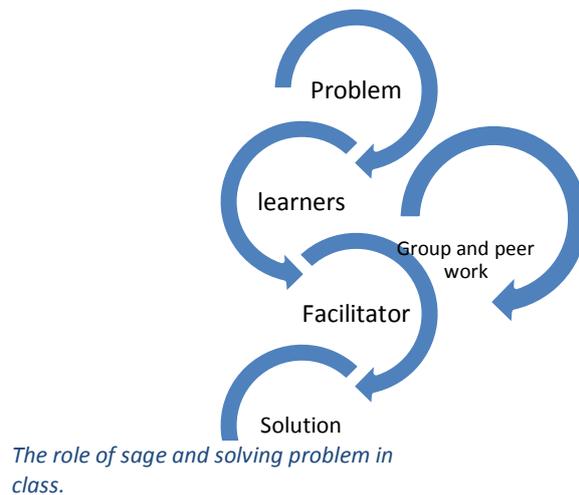
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## 1. JUSTIFICATION

As the English language has become the most used language around the world, there is a relevant necessity on having good language skills. English oral skills requires the articulation of activities within the classroom in which learners active their oral production skill since being competent in a foreign language entails being able to communicate ideas orally and being able to interact with others. Nevertheless, acquiring and developing oral production in English language is a struggle faced by teachers and students at all levels in English teaching institutions in Colombia (Balcárcel, 2003). Hence, as future teachers of English language, it is quite important to provide learners opportunities to develop oral skills at the highest level. According to Castrillón, V. (2010), cooperative learning has become a useful tool to activate the oral production as a result of the fact that the cooperative learning approach emphasizes positive human relationships, collaboration between peers or groups, active learning, academic achievement, equal participation, and equal status of students in the classroom, where the learners encourage and support each other by solving problems, assuming responsibilities for their own and each other's learning process (Johnson and Johnson 1999).

This graph can illustrate how cooperative learning helps students to solve problems.



Cooperative learning initiates when the learners are exposed to a problem and they have to analyze a possible solution. Then, the learners are asked to discuss in groups or in pairs about the problem; the facilitator will monitor students' discussion and will intervene in order to support them. Finally, the learner will come up with an alternative to solve the problem, which most of the times, has to be explained orally to the whole class in order to foster oral production.

Based on previous observations carried out at public schools in Pereira, it is shown that this current approach is relatively common in isolated classroom activities to reinforce certain topics, but it is not a pattern that is remarkable used in a complete lesson; in other words, there is not connection with the activation of oral production and the rest of activities developed in a foreign language scenario. Therefore, activities in which learners work cooperatively, think in group, discuss and construct knowledge from each other must be implemented in the classroom. Taking into account Cotter's (2007) ideas on the matter, the language lessons should consider some conversational activities which help learners promote their oral skill such as: role play, question-and-answer activities, class discussions, problem solving, games, and other group activities.

This classroom project was a wide platform and a way in which both participants and practitioners were benefited. Learners coped with innovative and dynamic settings where they could incorporate relevant interaction patterns; this provided them with

enough support to be able to convey meaningful messages in a foreign language. Similarly, this project gave the practitioners a background and experience, where they tried out the different language teaching input received at the Licenciatura program.

On the other hand, this classroom project gave teachers a wide view about what kind of sceneries were the most suitable for a generation in which learners are eager to learn in a way they can enjoy it. This project was an educational means through which English teachers can be aware of the importance of Cooperative learning as a way to increase opportunities for students to produce and comprehend the target language, so much of the value of cooperative learning lies in the way that teamwork encourages students to engage in such high-level thinking skills as speaking.

Thus, this classroom project sought to promote learners' oral communication skills. Also, it explained some issues that were not yet fully addressed in the implementation of cooperative learning in EFL teaching in Pereira such as: teamwork, pair work, debates and dialogues. Based on Richard's (2006) contributions, this project focused on the incorporation of new and innovative methods rather than those traditional methods in which the teacher was only the person in charge of transmitting knowledge. For this project, circle the sage and problem solving tasks were developed throughout the practicum sessions in an elementary school located in Pereira city.

## **2. Objectives**

### **2.1 Learning objectives**

Encourage cooperative activities in first graders at the Jorge Eliecer Gaitán School to improve learners' oral skills.

### **2.2 Teaching objectives**

Analyze the impact of the implementation of a cooperative approach in first graders to promote oral skills.

### 3. Theoretical framework

For the development of this classroom project, the terms social constructivism, constructing knowledge, speaking skill, solving problems tasks, circle the sage and modeling will be explored in order to understand better what is expected to be found.

#### Social constructivism

The utmost concept in this classroom project is social constructivism, developed by Vygotsky (1978), who argues that it is the mixture of sociological issues and theories of knowledge which take place in social environments. People create interpersonal relationships to construct knowledge from each other; hence, people may have a learning platform in which they share a culture of shared goals and meanings. The ones who belong to that scenery constantly learn about how to be part of that culture and how to interact with the social components or patterns required by it. Vygotsky (1978) defines social constructivism as “a sociological theory of knowledge that applies the general philosophical constructivism into social settings, where in groups construct knowledge for one other”.

In the same fashion, Derry (1999), explains about the huge importance that the culture, contexts and social settings have in the way that people understand and interpret what happens in the society to construct knowledge based on their own and other experiences. Also, Derry refers to three specific assumptions or premises:

1. **Reality:** the reality is constructed through human activity and interactions, where the members of those groups create and establish their own properties of the world. For the social constructivist, reality cannot be discovered: it does not exist prior to its social invention.

2. **Knowledge:** it is a human product as well, and is socially and culturally constructed. People create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in.

**3. Learning:** this is considered as a social process. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities; such as: school, family and external input.

According to Siemens (2005), social constructivism in the classroom is assumed as a social process in which the learners learn when they work in group in order to understand the different social events that occur in the society so that they can create meaning based on those experiences; building up a model of interaction for learning activities which increase the learners' participation. The teacher's role goes beyond to teach or share information; on the contrary, the teachers develop pedagogical practices that seek a balance of group work and individual work that provide opportunities for students to construct their knowledge collaboratively and individually. Also, the prior knowledge and existing experiences that students bring with them into the classroom serve as an essential foundation by which students are able to independently construct their own knowledge. Siemens (2005) assumes that Constructivism assumes that students learn as they work to understand their experiences and create meaning.

### **Cooperative learning**

Considering that this is one of the methods used by the socio-constructivist theory, this section will present the definition, characteristics, and some strategies of this method. Kagan (1994) defines cooperative learning as a teaching layout in which the learners get in pairs or small groups to work together in order to reach a particular and common goal established by the teamwork or the facilitator. Thus, through this cooperative scenery the learners are engaged in certain social situations in which they have to work in group, increasing their thinking skills, introducing the sense of social direction so that students find other students someone to work with rather than someone to beat.

For decades, cooperative learning has been implemented in EFL classrooms as a means of fostering positive student interactions and increasing the development of speaking skill. For this reason, Robert Slain (1995), states that cooperative learning emphasizes learners' interaction in pairs or small groups to work together for an educational and instructional aim, in this case oral production. In this kind of learning,

the teacher's roles is as a guide, tutor or facilitator rather than being the one who provides information or knowledge, but providing learners activities which are based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning called by Richards (2006) as communicative language teaching; namely, teaching is focused on handing learners tools which allow them to produce language for real communicative purposes rather than grammatical elements or just lexical units.

Johnson and Johnson (1999) outline five characteristics typical of cooperative learning. In this particular project, the participants were children whose ages range between 6 to 8 years old.

- Students work together in small groups containing two to five members.
- Students work together on common tasks or learning activities that are best handled through group work.
- Students use cooperative, pro-social behavior to accomplish their common tasks or learning activities.
- Students are positively interdependent and activities are structured so that students need each other to accomplish their common tasks or learning activities.
- Students are individually accountable or responsible for their work or learning.

Consequently, Cooperative learning has been found to be a successful and current teaching strategy at all levels. Johnson and Johnson (1999), underlines the huge and positive impact that this teaching approach has in the development of oral production, and in the creation of interpersonal relationships. This learning focuses on the creation of groups in which the learners work together in order to optimize and maximize their own and partners' learning process. Namely, the learners not only learn from their own social experiences; but from other experiences and knowledge.

According to David and Roger Johnson (1999), some of the strategies that cooperative learning uses are the jigsaw tasks, the three minute reviews, and literature circle, circle the sage. The latter strategy aims to activate prior knowledge by identifying the students in the class who has an advanced knowledge of the topic that is being covered in the lesson. These students are called the sage and they are going to support the other classmates in the development of the tasks. The sage students are

located in some part of the class with the purpose of helping other classmates. After identifying the sage students, the group is divided in small subgroups in which there is a leader; that leader is going to look for a sage student and she/he will receive some explanation given by the sage student. Then, the leader returns to the subgroup and shares the information that was previously explained and if there is some disagreements they whole class will solve them. Roger and Jhonson argue that the main purpose of circle the sage strategy is to give learners the opportunity to interact and come up with some ideas that will help them to improve oral performance and social skills.

Problem solving tasks was the other strategy implemented. This strategy is designed based on two. Firstly, through task based learning, language learning happens through meaningful interactions in authentic language situations. Secondly, this strategy works on the assumption that learning happens through shared ideas and knowledge construction through collaborative problem solving group work Murcia, M. (2001).

On the other hand, Brown (1994), who has studied as well the concept of oral production, suggests that it is a process carried out through the interaction between people, which is based on the construction of meaningful messages where ideas, perceptions, and points of view from people are conveyed to others in order to communicate. This interactive process seeks to receive information from the interlocutor and produce an immediately response to the receptor. In addition to this, in learning sceneries speaking skill requires that learners not only know how to produce the linguistic competence (grammar, lexical units, phonemes, etc.), but also that they understand when, why, and in what ways to produce language (sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences). Finally, speech has its own skills, structures, and conventions different from written language.

In a like manner, Cotter`s (2007) ideas on the matter, places, oral skill as a human interaction to exchange information, negotiate meanings, support ideas, and face oral defenses. In EFL classrooms, to achieve a high range in proficiency the learners must know certain linguistic elements before to produce correctly speech, which are learnt in formal learning environments through different input; such as: grammar books, dictionaries, reading, and all those materials that provide the learners an alternative to

learn. Cotter also displays some principles to carry out a meaningful speaking activity such as: giving a meaningful warm up activity through the use of dynamic material, present and provide the adequate material for the language lesson such as: vocabulary, the target grammar and the topic chosen, hand learners time to practice the language for real purposes using strategies like role plays and oral presentations which encourage learners in an active learning as the center of the learning process.

To articulate the two methods chosen for this project and help learners speak in English, modeling approach was implemented in the lessons. With the continual reform of teaching and learning methods, teachers are required to organize the lessons and create english - teaching- enviroments in which learners are the center of the learning process. Therefore, with the limitation of the students´ vocabulary, grammatical rules, and language use, teachers have to simplify their teaching language with the help of modeling.” Modeling is expressing how one feels by the way one sits, stands, moves, etc rather than by words” ( Oxford advance learner´s English dictionary 2001).

British council defines modeling as a model or an example of the target language, the teacher shows learners to help them notice language patterns, or to encourage them to imitate. This could be a sentence, a model of an intonation pattern, or an entire text, such as an example of a writing genre. Other authors state that this instructional strategy allows students to observe the teacher’s thought processes. Using this type of instruction, teachers engage students in imitation of particular behaviors that encourage learning. According to social learning theorist Albert Bandura, “Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do”.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Context**

This classroom project was carried out at a Public elementary school called Jorge Eliecer Gaitan located in the Alfonso Lopez neighborhood in Pereira city. There were 700 students and 10 teachers at school. The learners belonged to a middle social status. Learners were exposed to the English language two hours per week. There were not specialized teachers on English language teaching to conduct this subject to the students at the elementary school. For this reason, the in-service teacher was in charge of teaching this subject. The institution had a library and an interactive room. Most of teachers at schools were Licenciados. At this school, English classes were being oriented by implementing estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas guía 22 as the Ministry of education demands.

### **4.2 Participants**

In order to set the participants of this classroom project and with the purpose of getting the necessary input about how learners interacted with cooperative learning approach and how it helped learners developing oral skills, one group with a total number of twenty three students was the population of this classroom project. The implementations were carried out with a first grade. The students' ages ranged from 6 to 8 years old, and all of them lived in Pereira city. Regarding students' level at English, it was evidenced that learners had not basis of English language since they were not able to greet in English, follow instructions and they did not manage basic vocabulary very well. In terms of learners' attitudes towards the language lessons, students were motivated to learn English, probably because it was the first time in which they received a class totally in English and they were also exposed to a different way of learning. On the other hand, this classroom project also included the participation of two pre-service teachers, who were in 9<sup>th</sup> semester in English, and the ones in charge of conducting such implementation and for providing learners the most suitable conditions in which the learning process could be more successful.

### 4.3 Design

This classroom project focused on the articulation of cooperative activities in a group of first graders to enhance learners' oral skills. The activities implemented were designed by the practitioners and the other strategies such as: games and puzzles were adapted from materials already created. On the other hand, estándares básicos de competencias en lenguas guía 22 were a fundamental part in this process since it provided us those parameters to be followed in the incorporation of the skills in the language lessons.

First of all, learners were prepared for the tasks with an effective warm-up such as: Games, matching exercises, drawing and role plays. Then, in the presentation stage, the vocabulary and implicit grammar selected for the lesson were presented by modeling and repetition. Finally, learners needed to practice the new material and input into real context. For this, two methods were implemented, which circle the sage and problem solving tasks were proposed by Johnson and Johnson (1999). The first one implied activities in which learners were asked to get in small groups, they must number each other, in each group was a sage who knew something new, the sage had to explain to the group what he or she knew, his partners must pay attention, ask, and take notes; then, the groups spread, it means, number 1 with number 1, number 2 with number 2, and so on. In the new groups, each participant must talk about what they knew. The second one had to do with activities in which learners were given a situation and looked for a solution together using the input received in the lesson. For example, the teacher put on the board the picture of a famous character, the personal information of this person was studied previously. Teacher said to learners that person forgot who he was. So learners got in couples, and teacher designed to each couple to ask for information to help that person. For instance, a couple has to ask another group, where is he from? Then, each couple shares its answers.

The mentioned above is supported by Castrillon's (2010) research study on the matter, who explains that the activation of cooperative activities within the language lessons help learners to increase their oral skills since learners have an equal participation and opportunities to practice. The utmost principle in this implementation

was cooperative work, which is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning Johnson and Johnsons (1999).

#### 4.4 Implementation

The following materials and resources were used for the execution of this classroom project: pictures, colorful flash cards, handouts, costumes, board, markers, posters and tape recorders. They were used to present and review vocabulary, introduce specific topics, draw learners' attention and elicit information. For the classroom project some pedagogical principles were taken into account: **meaningful context**: games, interactions, role plays, and exercises. **Authentic material**: to expose learners to real life. **No grammar terminology**: grammar was implicit. **Immediate feedback and reward**: the facilitator was around giving feedback to the learners. **Language via Social Interaction and Participation**: learners learn the language by using it with other people.

The aspects mentioned above were analyzed based on the input received at the Licenciatura program and in the teaching practicums and helped to see the impact of new approaches over learners rather than traditional methodologies in which students translate from Spanish to English.

Games, implicit grammar, authentic material were useful to present the target language before learners could interact with the language and other people. This last principle was evidenced through constant monitoring of students' performance and students' interactions during the classes.

## 5. Professional development

The first learning objective for this classroom project was to find out the impact of cooperative learning over first graders to promote learners' oral skills. The input of this implementation was the information collected through the observations, reflections, and evidences such as: videos, photos, and learners' output. After analyzing the information collected, the following results can be reported:

The educators faced different challenges in order to achieve the set goals of this classroom project since they needed to find out several principles and alternatives to help learners to comprehend the target language and develop learners' oral skills focusing on cooperative learning approach. For the development of the implementation, the vocabulary was presented through the use of colorful flashcards, costumes, posters, body language and modeling. Then, the vocabulary was put into practice; namely, the learners used it in context. For instance,

What color is the sun?

So learners must answer with complete sentences;

The sun is yellow.

Work grouping was a challenging situation since students expressed disagreement on working with their pairs they showed a big difficulty to work in groups arguing that they don't like some of their pairs; another possible cause is their age and the developmental stage in which they were because kids at their age still have problems to work in groups and have developing their empathy for others or they start to develop empathy. It is evidenced when they were asked to develop circle the sage, the teacher chose one learner to be the sage, and he or she had to carry some specific information to be shared to the rest of the group. This probably occurred because learners were afraid of making mistakes, did not have the necessary input to speak in the target language, or needed more practice.

Both of us agreed that time was downside in the implementation due to that the two methods were barely included four times. Two lessons per method. Learners did not get use to work in groups, they were always sitting in lines, most of learners did not

want other people invading their room hindering the success of the activities inasmuch as the educator spent a lot of time grouping the team work, convincing learners to work in the assigned group, dealing with classroom arrangement issues. Also, there were missed classes because of institutional meetings, school events, holidays, and the practicum did not start as it was scheduled since there were some inconvenient with the agreement. Before learners could speak in English, they needed time to put into practice the vocabulary taught, the grammatical components explored implicitly through examples and repetition drills.

## **6. Lesson planning**

Both of us, the observer and the teacher who implemented agree that lesson planning is quite important in the classroom since it provides learners opportunities for active learning, coherence with the activities; that is to say, how to link an activity with another one or how to bring an activity into completion before another one. As the one who guided the lessons, I found out that lesson planning constituted an essential principle in the implementation given the fact that it addressed the gap between teacher preparation and standards because the better prepared you are, the more likely you will be able to handle whatever unexpectedly happens in the lesson and it gives a sense of direction in relation to the syllabus. As observer, I figured out that planning provided tutors a map or route about how language lessons must be guided, what kind of elements need to be included in order to guarantee a meaningful learning. **See appendix 1**

## **7. Activities implementation**

Practitioners agreed that the cooperative approach provided as teachers a different view about how teaching settings work nowadays, where the protagonists of the learning process are the learners since the educator is seen as a guide, who monitors carefully how well the groups are functioning; determine what skills are lacking, both related to the subject matter and to the interaction. Also, we agreed that modeling was quite important in the language lessons given the fact that this instructional strategy allowed to engage students in imitation of particular behaviors that encouraged learning.

## **8. Classroom management**

As observer, I can say that the educator could control the classroom because he used different strategies such as tone of voice, which allowed learners to understand what the teacher was saying and to call learners attention, the way how learners were treated due to the fact that teacher treated learners with respect and friendly without being permissive, but showing authority. Regarding with the rapport, there was a close emotional bond among learners and the facilitator that helped learners to feel comfortable in the classroom and feel as part of the classroom.

## **9. Giving instructions**

Giving instructions was an essential part in the development of the tasks and activities since the effectiveness of the class depended on how learners understood the instructions. The tutor did not give the instructions in English; they were given in the learners' mother tongue. According to C. William Schweers (n.d), using L1 facilitates the understanding of the target language due to the fact that L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learners are then willing to experiment and take risks with English.

## **10. Cooperative learning approach**

Cooperative activities are fundamental in current teaching scenarios as a result of the fact that learning a language requires real interaction. However, the facilitator figured out that this worked when learners had a tutor or mentor who was giving constant feedback. On the contrary, the learners were talking to their partners and the output was not the expected one.

Cooperative learning is seen as a way of fostering positive human relationships and learning since grouping provides learners an equal participation and status in the classroom optimizing their learning process Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Kagan (1994). Nevertheless, team work with children was complex as a result of the fact that

learners tended to talk too much with their partners. Classroom management was affected due to the fact that there were not established rules for an effective development of the lessons. In terms of monitoring, the facilitator gave constant feedback, but it did not guarantee that learners were talking in English and doing other issues. At times, learners were not willing to work with other partners because they had their own group study what hindered the tasks and the classroom atmosphere.

### **11. Academic growth**

The teachers could activate the different input received at the Licenciatura Program about how to teach English, how to plan, how to develop strategies to guide the language lessons and make a balance between these theories and what really happens in public institutions. Also, we could put into practice our language in terms of: pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary inasmuch as there were some words we did not know how to pronounce or write and which we needed to look for. Most importantly, we could articulate all these linguistic components to improve our writing skills since one of the most important aspects of academic writing is making use of the ideas of other people. This is important as you need to show that you have understood the materials that you have studied and that you can use their ideas and findings in your own way.

Team work is another important factor in human relationships. This provides us with tools for every day communication and interaction. Therefore, this classroom implementation was a platform to reinforce practitioners' interpersonal relationships inasmuch as we had to share and ideas and opinions and work cooperatively, but at the same time we had to respect each other points of view and develop leadership skills.

This implementation also provided teachers an excellent opportunity to grow professionally. Teachers today have a much larger role than just educating students. We are sometimes parents, nurses, social workers or counselors. Children face many more problems in the world than just trying to learn. They are coming to school tired, hungry, dirty and wounded. Emotionally wounded from possible the parental guidance they

receive before coming to school or it might also happen for the lack of this guidance. In the past, the school used to be a place to learn to read, write and understand arithmetic, and now it is a place to learn values formerly taught at home. Now we must teach honesty, empathy, responsibility and respect. When we were children, teachers were held in near reverence. Now we are merely glorified babysitters.

## 12. Students' responses

At the beginning of the lessons, learners were very quiet and unwilling to participate in the activities proposed for the lesson. If learners were asked something, they preferred to see around the classroom from side to side avoiding educator's questions. This probably occurred because it was a new experience for students learning English, there was a new teacher and learners had expectations about how the classes were going to be guided and they had a low language level proficiency.

### Observation

Learners were shy; they did not participate in the activities specially in speaking because they needed educator's motivation before they could develop the activity. **See appendix 2**

The educator and the observer agree that after some classes learners displayed a positive attitude towards the language lessons given the fact that they were willing to participate in the different activities. This is shown when learners raised their hands to answer; or ask questions about the taught lesson, when they sang, and learners' participation in teamwork activities, learners wrote when they were asked by the teacher and they liked when teacher talked in English, but when students felt lost, they asked teacher to talk in L1 in order to understand the lesson. In general, learners were well behaved, organized and attentive. This could happen because the in service teacher was very demanding and strict or learners felt confident or comfortable as a result of the fact the head teacher was not there.

### Observation

Learners changed their attitude towards the classes because they were willing to work in class (raised their hands, brought tasks), there was a relationship between educator and learners, they had fun and learnt at the same time through the dynamic activities. **See appendix 3**

From this piece of evidence, it is seen that one student showed negative attitudes towards the lessons due to the fact that this learner constantly stood up of his chair and then, he started hitting some classmates without apparent reason, if he was asked something he never answered despite educator's attempts to help him to participate by giving him extra material such as worksheets (crosswords, matching and coloring) that

had the specific vocabulary to express their opinions. Especially for him, teacher cheered him up, but he did not answer to these activities he preferred to stay in his chair drawing and playing with objects around his desk. We do not understand the reasons of his behavior. However, the last three classes, he started working in class; he did the homework; he did not hit his partners and participated in some activities like answering some vocabulary.

#### Observation

X student did not work class, all the time he was hitting his mates. Educator provided him strategies to help him, but he did not pay attention to them.

Based on the description mentioned above, we will analyze the impact of cooperative learning which was the utmost principle in this implementation over learners to develop their oral skills. When learners were asked to make groups, most of them formed the groups with the people closer to them and if the educator asked them to get together with other partners they refused to do that and did not want to work, especially girls, so that; the teacher did not forced them and implemented strategies to group learners such as: numbering learners or giving learners animals; the ones with the same animal or number must get together. Doing this, learners got together without any inconvenience.

First grade learners did not know how to work in group. Many theoreticians emphasize the importance of including cooperative learning approach in the classroom since through this approach, learners work together in groups to achieve a specific or common goal Johnson and Johnson (1999), Kagan (1994) and Brown (1994). Nevertheless, we believe that children in first graders are not able to work in groups effectively given the fact that they do not have enough team work skills. In the group in which the implementations took place students were not accustomed to work in groups, if the teacher was not monitoring the groups they talked to each other about issues not related to the activities proposed and some learners played.

The learners did not speak in English when they were working in groups. This refuses when Castrillon (2010) says that cooperative learning helps learners to increase their oral skills. This occurred because the practitioner did not take into account that Castrillon worked with university learners, so that their level was higher and a deep

reflection about how cooperative learning worked in first graders was needed. Based on this, both of us agree that learners could not develop their oral skills when working in groups. This probably occurred because learners were at pre-production or silent period stage according to the stages of second language acquisition Kristina Robertson and Karen Ford (2008). In this stage, learners may have up to 500 words in their receptive vocabulary, but they are not yet speaking. Some students will, however, repeat everything the teacher says. They are not really producing language but are repeating. Another possible cause was that learners did not have enough time to internalize the vocabulary and the models to speak given the fact that there were some missed classes because of holidays and institutional meetings and children needed to repeat language items many times to remember them. Besides, we did not follow the standards to develop the lessons properly.

In the previous paragraph, we argued that when working in groups learners did not speak in English not only for the reasons mentioned above, but for students' distractions and misbehaviors. However, when modeling the expected language to learners, they could say some words and sentences in the target language. Modeling became the utmost principle in this implementation. This strategy is used so that students can first observe what is expected from them, and they feel more comfortable in engaging in a new assignment, Albert Bandura 1977. Modeling occurred when the teacher demonstrated students the task they were expected to do on their own. After articulating modeling in the lessons, learners could have a better idea of what they had to do and they started to speak in English based on the model the teacher provided to them. To achieve this, students were exposed to a set of activities in which the educator showed learners the kind of language they were expected to use. For instance, after presenting the vocabulary the teacher put it into practice by showing learners a picture so that learners had to describe it taking into account the model given by the teacher:

Teacher: what does she do?

For example, I am an English teacher.

Children: she is a singer.

By doing this, learners grasped the conveyed message easily.

Based on this, both of us agree that all children require instruction, but some children need substantial amounts of truly high-quality teaching to produce alongside their peers in the target language. It is important to mention the children's main necessity is to have more models, explanations, and demonstrations of how speaking is accomplished. They do not want to have more assignments without teacher-directed instruction, yet much of the work children do in school is not accompanied by any sort of instructional interaction or demonstration as the British council stated.

### **13. Linguistic outcomes**

This implementation sought to create an innovative environment for learning by articulating a cooperative approach to develop learners' oral skills in the classroom. In terms of language, learners were expected to talk about physical appearance, give personal information, and describe people and things. To achieve this, the vocabulary was presented in such way that learners could have fun; besides, learners could interact with real objects, visual aids and teacher's demonstrations.

When learners were familiarized with the input and models given by the educator, learners produced short statements in the target language. Learners were constantly exposed to the language by listening to the teacher and repeating lexical units and grammatical components. For that reason, the teacher got learners used to greet and ask for information or clarification in English, so that the teacher made a big remark on using of the target language in the classroom as an example: when learners talked in Spanish, educator pushed them to say the phrase in English by modeling the way to say it.

In terms of learners' language competences, we can say that learners showed significant development on the different language skills. Learners were able to greet and say good bye, identify basic vocabulary such as: colors, family members, some professions, animals and ask for permission: can I go to the bathroom? In relation to the set goals for this implementation, learners could not speak when working in groups because some learners did not want to work with other partners or most of them started talking. However, when the teacher articulated modeling in the lessons, learners repeated the expected language, so that when students were asked to describe a picture, they could do it. Also, learners could answer to questions such as: what does he do?, what's his/her name? Making mistakes, but understanding what they were asked.

The material design had a positive impact over first graders. The use of realia like costumes in the English classes was highly positive since learners had the opportunity to interact with pieces of reality and learn to use the language in real life. It is also an advantage given the fact that children in this stage are very visual and understand the world in a concrete form not in an abstract form as grown up children

Cameron. L (2001). For instance, learners grasped the vocabulary better when it was presented through costumes rather than writing the words on the board

Games played an essential part in the development of the activities for the implementation. Learners were exposed to a set of activities in which they played and learnt at the same time. These activities were articulated in order to create a context in which children's attention was focused on the completion of a task without realizing that language items were being practiced. As a result, language learning took place in a context that children could directly relate to. For example, learners made a semicircle and teacher threw a ball, the one who let the ball fall down got a penance. The penance was to answer the question "who is she and what does she do?". By doing this learners helped each other to answer that question.

At the beginning of the language lessons, learners displayed low language proficiency since they were only able to recognize some colors, numbers and fruits. Throughout the process we could notice that learners improved in every skill and it is evidenced when students were able to identify professions, describe things and people, react after some commands such as open you notebook, listen, stand up, be quite, use and respond to some greetings and farewells, identify and relate content by matching and relating the image with the written form of the words.

## 14. Conclusions

This classroom project was set out to explore the implementation of cooperative work to develop oral skills in first graders in a public school in Pereira city. Basically, this implementation sought to articulate activities and strategies based on cooperative work to help learners to produce orally in the target language. After implementing this approach and relating it to theory, we can conclude as teacher and as observer that:

First at all, the learners in an early age display difficulties working in groups since they are get used to work individually at the Jorge Eliecer Gaitán School where the implementation took place. They need the presence of the teacher to maintain the use of the target language in the classroom and disciplinary issues.

Second of all, team work in first graders to promote oral skills is challenging because of students` age and the stage they are passing through. They are starting to develop empathy with others; so that they at this age have strong difficulties to work in groups.

Thirdly, Learners get engaged when the material presented is playful, creative, and meaningful such as: colorful flashcards, costumes, realia (real objects) and posters. These materials can be used to introduce new vocabulary or to ask students to tell a story based on the pictures shown in the flashcards. They give learners interesting and challenging speaking practice. Additionally, students can remember the vocabulary easily because they can see the image. Using flashcards, first graders will be able to understand the new vocabulary in without the need of translating it.

To conclude, before teaching English learners should be trained in how to work in groups and help each other in order to help learners develop their empathic abilities, and try to find a solution to a problem in the group; also develop skills such as the need to accommodate the views of others and learn from each other.

## **15. Implications**

This classroom project can provide educators or teachers in development a new view of how oral skills can be articulated in the classroom. Throughout this process, both of us as an observer and as a teacher learnt that cooperative approach is quite important to create interpersonal relationship, in which students should learn to listen carefully to comments, opinions, suggestions and criticisms from other members of the group and learn to “re-think” their own judgments and opinions, when and if necessary. Effective interpersonal communication means that a group of members can communicate with each other on a regular basis and are careful to ensure that their communication is clear and relevant.

The collaborative learning activities should provide students with opportunities to analyze and evaluate their ideas together. This means facilitating discussion and interaction so that students are forced to go beyond mere statements of opinion. Nevertheless, the educator needs to get learners used to work in groups since these students were treated under strict condition such as : the in service teacher was very demanding, the classroom arrangement was always in lines , the teacher told us that she did not know games, for that reason learners worked individually. We learnt that the use of games are very useful and important in a English class with children because through this tool the vocabulary, grammatical components, and language use can be presented and practiced and it is more meaningful than using traditional methods in which the learners have to transcribe or learn by heart .

## **16. Limitations**

Through this classroom project there were some aspects, which the educator had to face. First of all, the time, the university had problems assigning the school for the practicum; so that, the classes started two weeks after as it was scheduled. Also, there were a lot of missed classes because of institutional meetings and holidays.

Secondly, learners' language exposure was not enough for the development of the project because they only had two hours class during the week and it was complex since the educator had to review every class the vocabulary and grammatical components and learners always forgot them.

Another limitation has to do with Cooperative work. This was challenging because as we mentioned before, the learners did not get used to work in a cooperative way and most of learners did not want to work with their partners they preferred to work individually. This probably occurred inasmuch as the in service teacher was very demanding and used traditional methods in which they had to write and stay sitting in their chairs.

In terms of learners' age, learners were just learning how to write and read, they spent a great deal of time transcribing tasks and activities and providing the worksheets and handouts; this was difficult because the educator did not have money to bring the material for each learner. This probably occurred because first graders should not be involved in writing activities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1:

<b>Date of the class:</b> September 30, 2013	<b>Class Number:</b> 03
<b>AIM:</b> At the end of the lesson the learners will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Use how someone is and answer it (I am fine thank you).</li><li>- Recognize some commands.</li><li>- Spell their names in the target language.</li></ul>	
<b>Estándares Básicos de Competencias (MEN):</b>  <b>Estándar General:</b> comprendo el lenguaje básico sobre mi familia, amigos, juegos y lugares conocidos, si me hablan despacio y con pronunciación clara. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- <b>Estándares Específicos:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- reconozco cuando me hablan en inglés y reacciono de manera verbal y no verbal.</li><li>- Entiendo cuando me saludan y se despiden de mí.</li><li>- Sigo instrucciones relacionadas con actividades de clase y recreativas de clase y recreativas propuestas por mi profesor.</li><li>- Entiendo la idea general de una historia contada por mi profesor cuando se apoya en movimientos, gestos y cambios de voz.</li><li>- Relaciono ilustraciones con oraciones simples.</li><li>- Respondo a saludos y a despedidas.</li></ul></li><li>- <b>Indicadores de logro:</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Respondo a saludos y a despedidas.</li><li>- Sigo instrucciones relacionadas con actividades de clase y recreativas de clase y recreativas propuestas por mi profesor.</li><li>- Entiendo la idea general de una historia contada por mi profesor cuando se apoya en movimientos, gestos y cambios de voz.</li></ul></li></ul>	
<b>Assumed Knowledge:</b> in previous lessons guided by the in-service teacher, the learners must be familiar with the colors.	
<b>Materials:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Board - handouts</li><li>- Markers</li><li>- flashcards</li></ul>	

<b>DAY/STAGE/ ACTIVITY /TIME</b>	<b>PROCEDURE TEACHER AND LEARNER ACTIVITY</b>	<b>ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS AND PLANNED SOLUTIONS</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<p><b>Warm up</b></p> <p><b>Relaxing</b></p> <p><b>5 min</b></p> <p><b>Study</b></p> <p><b>singing</b></p> <p><b>15 min</b></p> <p><b>Practice</b></p> <p><b>The</b></p> <p><b>alphabet</b></p> <p><b>5 min</b></p> <p><b>10 min</b></p> <p><b>5 min</b></p> <p><b>Writing</b></p> <p><b>names</b></p> <p><b>5 min</b></p> <p><b>Dictation</b></p>	<p>The facilitator will ask students to make a circle on the floor. Then, the facilitator will ask them to follow what he says and does. For instance, stand up, sit down, stretch, hands up, hands down, spin around, clap your hands and jump.</p> <p>The facilitator will teach to children a short song about the greetings, but focused on hello, how are you, and I am fine thank you. Teacher will sing and make some movements that represent the song. The learners must follow to the facilitator until they understand the song. Then, the teacher will divide the group into two groups. One group will sing the part asking how are you, and the other will answer I am fine thanks and you.</p> <p>The facilitator will show learners a poster with the alphabet. He will teach them how to pronounce every single word. Then, some students will come to the board and will say it louder.</p> <p>The facilitator will show some papers with names. For instance, Robinson, Ana, and so on. He will spell some of them and the learners will spell the others.</p> <p>The facilitator will give learners some pieces of paper with the letters of the alphabet. The learners are asked to write their names using those letters and say it aloud.</p> <p>The teacher will spell some names, so the learners have to construct them with the papers.</p>	<p>Maybe the learners do not understand some commands, so as a facilitator, I need to make sure I use good body language to be clear.</p> <p>Have alternative activities in case of any others do not work.</p>	

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**EXTRA-CLASS WORK, ANNOUNCEMENTS, THINGS TO CONSIDER**

Using magazines, newspaper or whatever, the learners will cut letters to write the names of their family members. For instance, Peter (dad) and paste it in their notebooks.

**REFLECTION SESSION:**

- What went well?**
- How do you know that?**
- What didn't go that well?**
- What would you do different next time?**

**Appendix 2:**

<u>Students' responses</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Reflection</u>
<p>Towards the material: instructions, impact, type of material, skill development, time management, authentic or adapted</p> <p>What went well?</p> <p>What didn't go that well?</p> <p>What would you do different next time?</p>	<p>Presentation of the vocabulary (professions) it was perform by dressing up students, then learners were asked to say who was the person, example: who is she? She is a doctor. Learners get together in groups of four. The facilitator says that there is a person who forgot everything about his/ her profession; the T gave two learners a piece of paper with a profession. The other student had to ask if that person was a woman or men, ask: what does she/he do? The last student must guess the profession by doing gestures, mimics performed by the other students. Finally each group must say louder: we are doctors or we are teachers, etc.</p>	<p>They were eager to participate. They had fun in the dressing part. Most of them were very attentive. They understood the instructions of the activity, however, when they answer, they did it in Spanish. Spanish is fundamental in classroom, there is not use of the English language, maybe, and they are so shy to talk in another language.</p> <p>There were cases in which the learners did not want to work with other partners. no matter the age, the children have differences between them. One factor could be the economical status, or they are dirty, smell bad or simply, they are not popular. What the facilitator could do is to change the child into other group, talking with the partners and find the reason of the rejection.</p> <p>Making groups was complex since the learners are accustomed to work in couples, arranging the classroom; they made a lot of noise. Facilitator modeled the instructions for a better understanding.</p>
<p>Towards the tasks and activities</p>	<p>The activity was focus on cooperative learning, in groups of 4 or 5 learners. One student has a piece of paper in which was written a profession, other student must asked Who is she/he? What does she do? If he or she made the correct question, the S said the answer: she/ he is a doctor. The next step, the two Ss must performance the profession and the other two had to guess what profession was.</p>	<p>The learners did not get the results expected by the facilitator, their answers were in Spanish despite of teacher's repetition, only some students tried to use the language making some mistakes.</p> <p>Most of them did not did the activity as the facilitator explained. Maybe this activity is complex for the level of the learners.</p>

**Appendix 3:**

