



INTEGRATING COOPERATIVE LEARNING INTO A CONVENTIONAL EFL CLASSROOM

Martine Wilwert
professeur-candidate
Lycée Technique de Bonnevoie

Declaration of Originality

I, Martine Wilwert, hereby declare that the present work is all my own work and that all references contained within it have been correctly cited and the original authors acknowledged.

Luxembourg, 31 March 2015

To what extent can cooperative learning be successfully integrated into a conventional EFL classroom?

ABSTRACT

The following *travail de candidature* examines the key factors that are contributory to the successful integration of cooperative learning in the traditional EFL classroom. It looks at how my personal understanding of cooperative learning and my application of it in the classroom have developed over a period of three academic years (2012-2015). The main research questions are:

1. Which key factors are contributory to a successful integration of cooperative learning?
2. What evidence may indicate a successful integration of cooperative learning into a conventional classroom?

The first chapter details the rationale behind this research project and my personal motivation to use cooperative learning. In the second chapter, the dominating theories especially in the field of educational psychology and socio-constructivism are outlined. The third chapter focuses on the main cooperative learning models and the fourth chapter hints at the existing gap between the theory and the practice thereof. The fifth chapter explains the method, i.e. action-research, that I have used to determine the key factors that need to be respected in order for cooperative learning to be implemented successfully. In the sixth chapter, sample lessons are described and conclusions with regard to the main research questions are drawn. Finally, this research paper identifies 10 keys for successful cooperation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank a number of individuals who have assisted me during the past 18 months. I would like to express my wholehearted appreciation to my supervisor, Andrée Margue, and my advisor, Jean-Baptiste Kremer, for their valuable advice, support and guidance during the dissertation research. Thanks also to my colleague Gilles Glod for proofreading this thesis.

Special thanks go to my family for their sustained encouragement and unfailing patience which they showed me while I was writing this *travail de candidature*.

Luxembourg

March 2015

LIST OF FIGURES

- **Figure 1:** Bloom's Taxonomy (revised)
'<http://pcs2ndgrade.pbworks.com/w/page/46897760/Revised%20Bloom's%20Taxonomy>' (accessed 20.02.2015)
- **Figure 2:** Skinner's law of conditioning (Surgenor, 2010)
'<http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLT0017.pdf>' (accessed 20.02.2015)
- **Figure 3:** The Zone of Proximal Development
'http://www.innovativelearning.com/educational_psychology/development/zone-of-proximal-development.html' (accessed 17.02.2014)
- **Figure 4:** Einbringen persönlicher Verantwortung (Weidner 2009:29)
- **Figure 5:** Essential Components of cooperative learning (Johnson et al. 1994b:26)
- **Figure 6:** Kagan's basic principles (PIES) - 'www.kaganonline.com'
- **Figure 7:** The Jigsaw Technique
'<http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/coursedesign/tutorial/jigsaw.html>' (accessed 17.02.2014)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION	11
1. COOPERATIVE LEARNING: A DEFINITION.....	11
2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND THE TEACHING ETHOS OF THE LTB	13
3. PERSONAL MOTIVATION TO USE COOPERATIVE LEARNING.....	15
4. RATIONALE OF THIS <i>TRAVAIL DE CANDIDATURE</i>	17
A. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND THE CURRENT TEACHING PARADIGM.....	17
B. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND MEETING THE NEEDS OF SOCIETY	19
II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	21
1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.....	21
2. SOCIAL INTERDEPENDENCE THEORY.....	22
3. BEHAVIOURISM	23
4. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORIES.....	25
5. COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND STUDENT MOTIVATION	27
III. COOPERATIVE LEARNING MODELS.....	29
1. THE LEARNING TOGETHER APPROACH.....	29
2. THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH	35
3. THE JIGSAW METHOD.....	38
4. THE 'STUDENT TEAMS-ACHIEVEMENT DIVISIONS' METHOD.....	40
IV. THEORY AND PRACTICE	43
V. METHODOLOGY: ACTION RESEARCH.....	45
1. WHAT IS ACTION RESEARCH?	45
2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	46
VI. IMPLEMENTATION AND ANALYSIS	51
1. BRIEF CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW	51
2. COOPERATIVE LEARNING: 2012/2013 - 8STP1.....	52
A. CLASSROOM SETTING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	52
B. LESSON 1: GRAMMAR REVISION - THE PRESENT SIMPLE.....	53
C. LESSON 2: EMMA YOU'RE IN BIG TROUBLE.....	54
D. LESSON 3: VICKY'S DAILY ROUTINE.....	55
E. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION.....	56
3. COOPERATIVE LEARNING: 2013/2014 - 8STP4	58
A. CLASSROOM SETTING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	58
B. LESSON 1: GRAMMAR REVISION - THE PAST TENSE	59
C. LESSON 2: A MURDER STORY	60
D. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION	62

4. COOPERATIVE LEARNING: 2013/2014 - T2CM1	64
A. CLASSROOM SETTING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	64
B. LESSON SEQUENCE: INFOGRAPHICS.....	65
C. LESSON SEQUENCE: CONSPIRACY THEORIES.....	67
D. READING PROJECT: THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME	68
E. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION.....	70
5. COOPERATIVE LEARNING: 2014/2015 - 9STP2	73
A. CLASSROOM SETTING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	73
B. LESSON 1: WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO?	74
C. LESSON 2: TALKING ABOUT THE FUTURE	76
D. LESSON SEQUENCE: RABBIT-PROOF FENCE	78
E. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION.....	80
 VII. CONCLUSION.....	 83
 VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	 85
 IX. APPENDICES	 87

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Positive Interdependence and Individual Accountability (Weidner)
Appendix 2: Kagan's Structures
Appendix 3: RoundRobin (Kagan)
Appendix 4: Three-Step Interview
Appendix 5: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (09.01.13) - Instructions
Appendix 6: Worksheet- Emma you're in big trouble
Appendix 7: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (15.01.13) - Instructions
Appendix 8: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (29.01.13) - Instructions
Appendix 9: Telling the Time - Student's Book p.108
Appendix 10: Vicky's Daily Routine - Student's Book p.30
Appendix 11: Overview of Summative Evaluation - 8STP1, 8STP4, T2CM1 and 9STP2
Appendix 12: Student Survey - 8STP4 (July 2014)
Appendix 13: Lesson Plan 8STP4 (07.05.14)
Appendix 14: Spelling of the Past Participle
Appendix 15: Past Time Expressions - Student's Book p.55
Appendix 16: A Murder Story - Student's Book pp. 60 & 61
Appendix 17: Police Interview - Student's Book pp. 104 & 108
Appendix 18: Infographics - T2CM1
Appendix 19: Infographics - Quiz
Appendix 20: Student Survey T2CM1 - Cooperative Learning 1 (12.11.13)
Appendix 21: Conspiracy Theories - Texts
Appendix 22: Conspiracy Theories - Worksheet
Appendix 23: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - Worksheets
Appendix 24: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time - Students' Productions
Appendix 25: Student Survey T2CM1 - Reading Habits (26.06.14)
Appendix 26: Student Survey T2CM1 - Cooperative Learning 2 (30.06.14)
Appendix 27: Lesson Plan 9STP2 (25.11.14)
Appendix 28: Colours and Roles
Appendix 29: Plans and Dreams - Student's Book p.20
Appendix 30: Teacher Observation Sheet
Appendix 31: Lily's Plans - Model Answer
Appendix 32: Student Reflection Sheet (26.11.14)
Appendix 33: Evaluation of Social Skills - Group Tournament 1
Appendix 34: Final Evaluation - Group Tournament 1
Appendix 35: Lesson Plan 9STP2 (06.01.15)
Appendix 36: Opposite Verbs - Student's Book p.157
Appendix 37: Flashcard - Opposite Verbs (iTools)
Appendix 38: Are you a pessimist? - Student's Book p.44
Appendix 39: Grammar Bank - Student's Book p.137
Appendix 40: Final Evaluation - Group Tournament 2
Appendix 41: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Project Guide
Appendix 42: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Instructions 1 (Blackboard)
Appendix 43: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Comprehension Questions
Appendix 44: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team Statements (Blackboard)
Appendix 45: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Roles
Appendix 46: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Instructions 2 (Blackboard)
Appendix 47: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team-2-Team (Instructions)
Appendix 48: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team-2-Team (Feedback)
Appendix 49: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Comprehension Test
Appendix 50: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Reflection Forms
Appendix 51: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Final Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Cooperative learning: A definition

Cooperative Learning is a well-researched and widely documented field in education. Consequently, a multitude of definitions and characteristics can be found across various types of research documents. Although these definitions vary in their scope, they all emphasise the idea of **working together** to reach a **shared aim**. A definition that is often cited is that given by Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993):

Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximise their own and each other's learning.

While this definition certainly offers a good starting point, the definition given by Brody and Davidson and restated by Sharan (Y. Sharan, 2010) is more comprehensive as it puts more emphasis on the characteristics that separate cooperative learning from conventional group work:

It is a pedagogy that generates a **diversified body of methods** of instructions which organise students to work in groups toward a **common goal** or outcome, or share a **common problem** or task in such a way that they can only succeed in completing the work through behaviour that demonstrates **interdependence**, while holding **individual** contributions and efforts **accountable**.¹

Adhering to this definition, it is essential to point out that cooperative learning is far more than just group work. In a cooperative classroom environment, the assignments and the implementation of tasks differ from traditional group work in some important ways. In contrast to conventional group work activities, cooperative learning follows a strict set of guidelines and the tasks need to be highly structured. As stated in the above definition (Y. Sharan, 2010), it is essential that the tasks be designed in such a way, that students can neither successfully complete them alone (positive interdependence) nor that they can rely on their teammates to do the work for them (individual accountability). These elements, i.e., positive interdependence and individual accountability, and the theories on which they are shaped are outlined and explained in the theoretical part of this *travail de candidature*. At this point it is sufficient to point out that research in this area has shown that group work that does not fulfil these criteria does not produce the beneficial outcomes associated with cooperative learning (Weidner 2003:90, Slavin 1995; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1994).

¹ My emphasis.

Another important aspect of cooperative learning, which is not explicitly stated in the aforementioned definitions, is the development of **social skills**, i.e., interpersonal and small group skills. As will be argued in various parts of this *travail de candidature*, the success of any cooperative learning assignment and/or lesson is dependent on students' ability to rely on their interpersonal and small group skills to interact with their peers.

Based on the various theories on the beneficial outcomes of structured student interaction, renowned researchers have developed a vast amount of cooperative learning models, methods, strategies, techniques, structures and scripts, which can readily be adapted to one's own personal classroom use. A brief overview of the most common approaches to cooperative learning can be found in 'Chapter III: cooperative learning Models' of this thesis. In general, however, it can be said that Kagan's Structural Approach and the Jigsaw method, developed by Arson and refined by Slavin, constitute important elements in the practical part of this research project.

It is also essential to state right from the beginning that not every cooperative learning structure leads to the same results or is equally well suited for any activity, grade and student. As will be explained in chapter III of this dissertation, some cooperative learning structures are designed to help students learn and rehearse new material, especially with regard to a formal test, whereas others aim at promoting students' ability to critically review their existing knowledge and to reach higher levels of understanding. In terms of Bloom's (revised) taxonomy, some of the cooperative structures target lower-level cognitive processes such as remembering, understanding and applying new knowledge, whereas others are more suited to target higher-level cognitive processes such as analysing, evaluating and creating new knowledge (Anderson et al. 2000).

Bloom's Taxonomy (Revised)

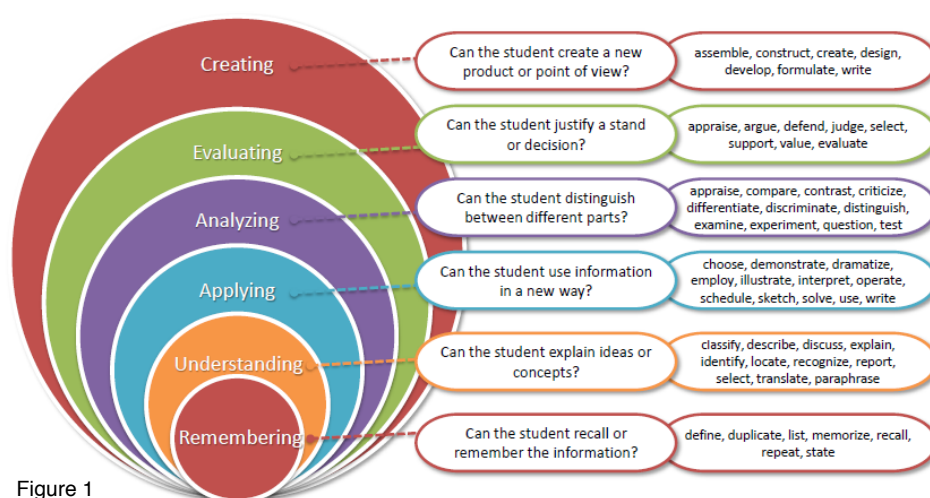


Figure 1

2. Cooperative learning and the teaching ethos of the LTB

The *Lycée Technique de Bonnevoie* (LTB) is one of four Luxembourgish schools that introduced a project called *projet-pilote 'cycle inférieur'* (PROCI) in September 2003. Since then six other schools have been implementing the project. PROCI was initiated by the Ministry of Education in the light of Luxembourg's disastrous results in the PISA study in 2000². The aim of PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is to:

[...] provide the participating countries with information on how well their schools prepare young adults to meet the challenges of the future [...]. The PISA assessments do not focus primarily on purely factual knowledge. Rather, they evaluate the wider knowledge and skills needed to participate in social, economic and political life in modern society.

(Stanat, 2002:1)

As Luxembourg's performance was significantly below the OECD average³, the Ministry of Education decided that it was time to change some of its educational policies and in this context the PROCI project was launched. As stipulated by PISA and the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), the PROCI project aims at preparing students to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world. Its main objectives, subsequently referred to as O.1, O.2 and O.3, are

- O.1: améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement par l'introduction de nouvelles méthodes de travail,
- O.2: garantir une meilleure orientation des élèves à la fin des trois années du cycle inférieur,
- O.3: une meilleure prise en charge de l'élève.

(Raths, 2009:10)

As a matter of fact, the results of the 2009 PISA study show that the PROCI project has had a positive impact on students' performance compared to the performance of those students who did not take part in the project.

L'étude PISA 2009, publiée en 2010, confirme le constat que les élèves des classes PROCI sont nettement supérieurs à ceux de leurs camarades alors même que ces élèves, examinés par PISA à l'âge de 15 ans, n'avaient bénéficié de PROCI que depuis deux années et demie.⁴

Unfortunately, the results of the 2012 PISA study show that Luxembourg's performance is still below the OECD average. I believe that this state of affairs can be explained through the simple fact that a policy change does not show results overnight but that it progresses incrementally. Reforming the entire educational system, the current shape of which is firmly embedded in Luxembourg's culture and mentality, may seem an impossible endeavour at first, but I am confident that, at least at the LTB,

² https://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/Pisa/PISA-2000_Overview.pdf (18.02.2014)

³ <http://www.men.public.lu/catalogue-publications/secondaire/etudes-internationales/pisa-2000/2000-fr.pdf> (18.02.2014)

⁴ <http://www.reformelycee.lu/le-projet-pilote-du-cycle-inferieur-proci/> (18.02.2014)

teachers and students are slowly adapting to a more student-centred and competency-based learning environment.

In order to further and consolidate the pursuit of the objectives of the PROCI project, especially objective O.1, the LTB has introduced the project TIM (*Tutorat und integriertes Methodenlernen*) in 2009. As the name of the project suggests, it aims at encouraging teachers to substitute or complement their traditional teaching approach with more varied learning methods that put the student in the centre of the learning experience.

TIM, ein Pilotprojekt (seit 2009/2010) im *Cycle Inférieur* des *Lycée Technique de Bonnevoüe*, verfolgt das Ziel, unsere Schülerinnen und Schüler zu **selbstständigem** und **eigenverantwortlichem** Lernen hinzufügen. Dabei wird auf Konzepte des **Methodenlernens**, der **Differenzierung** und des **selbstgesteuerten** Lernens zurückgegriffen, die in einem Gesamtprojekt zusammengeführt werden.⁵

(TIM vademecum, version avril 2011)

Thus cooperative learning fits within the LTB's teaching ethos. Most of the objectives pursued in a cooperative learning environment overlap with the objectives of both the PROCI project and the project TIM. Firstly, cooperative learning leaves a lot of room for a variety of teaching methods (integriertes Methodenlernen and PROCI objective O.1). Most activities can be designed to be completed individually, in pairs, in small groups and/or in plenary sessions. Secondly, the cooperative learning classroom favours the development of social, communication and transferable skills, which learners need to be successful in our modern society (PISA/OECD). Thirdly, cooperative learning furthers student autonomy and individualises the learning process. In the cooperative learning classroom, the students, as opposed to the teacher, are the focus of attention. The role of the teacher is to create a learning environment and to design tasks that allow students to consolidate and gain knowledge through interaction with their peers.

On top of that, the classes at the LTB, especially at the *cycle inférieur*, are very heterogeneous. In a traditional classroom setting, this means that low, medium and high-performing students are, in a way, *competing* against each other. Sadly, wanting to do better than our peers is part of human nature. It is not difficult to see how this can lead to a loss of motivation and a source of frustration for the lower achievers, as they are continuously confronted with failure compared to their stronger peers. In a cooperative classroom setting, however, these students learn to work together in order to maximize their own as well their collective learning.

⁵ My emphasis.

3. Personal motivation to use cooperative learning

The headmaster of the LTB, Jean-Marie Wirtgen, has always been eager to encourage his teachers to experiment with new teaching methods and to participate in relevant teacher training workshops (*formations continues*). So, in May 2011, I accompanied some colleagues to a school in Germany, *Gesamtschule Holweide*, in which cooperative learning is the dominant teaching ethos.

Die Gesamtschule Holweide möchte die Kinder und Jugendlichen zu **selbstbestimmten** und **sozial verantwortlichen** Menschen erziehen. Dazu gehören hohe Kompetenzen in Kommunikation, Selbstmanagement, Konfliktfähigkeit, Gemeinschafts- und Teamfähigkeit und Verantwortungsbewusstsein. Der pädagogische Schwerpunkt der Schule ist das **Kooperative Lernen**⁶, bei dem das Lernen als Prozess von den Lehrenden und Lernenden gemeinsam entwickelt wird. Offene Arbeitsformen wie projektorientiertes Lernen, Wochenplanarbeit, fächerübergreifende Unterrichtsvorhaben sowie das Lernen an außerunterrichtlichen Lernorten fördern die angestrebten Kompetenzen.⁷

We had the opportunity to observe several lessons and we were shown a 30-minute video of applied cooperative learning. I was fascinated by the way the students interacted with each other. The groups were formed of heterogeneous students with high-performing students helping and coaching students with learning difficulties. Even though students were constantly communicating and talking with each other, the noise level was acceptable and as soon as the teacher raised his hand (thus giving the 'quiet signal'), the students complied and raised their hands, too. The tasks seemed to be engaging and challenging at the same time.

I was also positively surprised by how well the teachers cooperated with each other. Most of the time, there were two teachers in the room to observe, monitor and guide the students while they were completing given tasks. I believe that team teaching is one of the perks of working at this school. Moreover, at the *Gesamtschule Holweide* cooperation does not only take place in the classroom but the entire organisation of the school is based on cooperative principles. Teachers, just like their students, function as teams. They prepare and evaluate their lessons and projects in cooperation with their colleagues. Of course, comparing the LTB to the *Gesamtschule Holweide* would be like comparing apples to pears and wouldn't do justice to the great work teachers do at the LTB. As a matter of fact, those teachers at the LTB who teach at the *cycle inférieur* already meet once a week to plan lesson sequences, share material and ideas, and to design common test papers.

The visit of the *Gesamtschule Holweide* took place while I was still on maternity leave, so I did not get the opportunity to experiment with cooperative learning methods straightaway. Moreover, I did not dispose of the necessary knowledge to start planning my lessons cooperatively as I had not done any

⁶ My emphasis.

⁷ '<http://www.igs-holweide.de>'

preliminary research about it. Fortunately, a *formation continue* about cooperative learning was held by Antje Hammoud at the LTB in November 2011. During the theoretical part I was a bit disoriented as it was based on a previous *formation continue* that I had missed because I was on maternity leave. But what started as a rather frustrating experience resulted in an inspiring afternoon. In a more practical workshop we were asked to plan a cooperative lesson in cooperation with our colleagues. In other words, we were taught what cooperative learning is by actually enacting it (learning by doing). Each group then had to present its cooperative lesson to the other groups so that by the end of the day, I thought that I had acquired a fairly good grasp of what cooperative learning is. With Ms Hammoud's handy toolkit of the most popular cooperative teaching methods in my bag, I felt confident that I would be able to successfully try out some of them in the weeks to come. However, when a week later, I tried to use cooperative learning in my own classroom, it was nothing like I had imagined it would be. With hindsight, I can safely argue that this is due to the fact that neither I nor my students were ready for this. It is only later, when doing the research for this thesis, that I realised that cooperative learning needs to be introduced step by step. A more complete overview of me trying to come to grips with cooperative learning can be found in Chapter VI of the present *travail de candidature*.

This personal experience also shows that Brüning and Saum seem to be right in arguing that sporadic teacher training workshops alone do not constitute enough incentive for teachers to implement cooperative learning on a regular basis. As a matter of fact they stipulate the necessity for recurring cooperative learning workshops over an extended period of time (four years) as well as the permanent presence of experimented cooperative learning mentors at the school.

Fortbildungen allein haben erfahrungsgemäß oft nicht die gewünschte Wirkung: Häufig sind die bisherigen Routinen so stark, dass sie sich wieder durchsetzen, sobald nach einer Fortbildung die Trainer wieder weg sind. Dies geschieht seltener, wenn die Lehrkräfte Mentoren haben, die an ihrer Schule unterrichten und sie begleiten.

(Brüning und Saum)

Similarly, I have to admit that if I hadn't had this *travail de candidature* as an incentive to deal with cooperative learning and the underlying concepts in more depth, I think I might not have had the necessary patience and endurance to change my ingrained teaching practice. As a matter of fact, as will be argued throughout this thesis, shifting from a traditional to a cooperative learning classroom is a long and tedious process. Compared to 2012/2013 when I first started experimenting with cooperative learning methods, I now use the method on a much more regular basis (2 out of 4 lessons are entirely cooperative). Nevertheless, I am confident that, as result of my teacher training at the University of Luxembourg (*stage pédagogique*), I have always designed student-centred activities even if I have not done this as systematically as it is required in a cooperative learning classroom.

4. Rationale of this *Travail de Candidature*

a. Cooperative learning and the current teaching paradigm

It is a well-known fact that in traditional teacher-fronted classrooms there is not much room for the production of authentic speech and/or writing in the target language. Whereas some students certainly get the opportunity to express ideas in the target language, at any one time the lips of the majority of the students remain sealed. This is due to the fact that the teacher monopolises the talking and there are not enough opportunities for the students to verbally share their ideas. As a matter of fact, according to Long & Pater (1985), 'in an L2 class of 30 students, under typical teacher-fronted, or lockstep, procedures the average time that a student spoke was only 30 seconds per 50-minute lesson' (Jacobs et al., 2006:21).

Fortunately, however, the way foreign languages are taught has changed fundamentally in the past decades and much more emphasis has been put on student communication. As the quintessential purpose of any language is to communicate, students need to get the opportunity to learn a new language in an environment that furthers communication and promotes student talk. As Jacobs and McCafferty (2006:20) rightly point out, 'in order for learners to increase their second language proficiency, they need to produce language via speech or writing'. In other words, students must get involved in tasks that force them to use the target language in an authentic way. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has thus become the dominant teaching model in many EFL classrooms all over the world.

If we had to choose one word to symbolize the changes in second language teaching over the years, it would be *communicative*: the idea that the surest path to engagement in learning a second language lies in students - even beginners - communicating in that language.

(McCafferty and al., 2006)

Communicative Language Teaching is 'based on a view of language as communication, not as a system of grammar rules or vocabulary lists. Fluency, not accuracy, is valued' (Jacobs & McCafferty, 2006:24). In this respect, cooperative learning fits in perfectly within the CLT paradigm. In the cooperative learning setting 'words are produced not as an end in themselves, but as means toward accomplishing a goal' (High, 1993:vii). Rather than sitting in neat rows, staring at the blackboard, listening to the teacher, copying answers and drilling new words, students are encouraged to cooperate and communicate with their peers in order to complete a common task. Through the use of small groups, students get the opportunity to produce much more speech in the target language than they would in a traditional classroom setting. In a cooperative learning environment, students are 'forced' to continuously take turns to voice and share their ideas concerning a certain topic. This ensures that *every* student uses the target language to communicate. Furthermore, research has

shown that students' willingness to speak in small groups increases as the fear of talking in front of an audience decreases (High, 1993:vii).

Cooperative learning thus fulfils one of the most important criteria of the CLT paradigm, namely communication in an authentic context. It can even be argued that cooperative learning 'provides the means of operationalizing the new paradigm of teaching and provides the context that encourages the development of student talent' (Johnson and Johnson, 1994:104). In other words, if we want to apply communicative language teaching, cooperative learning offers the necessary tools and sets the context by creating a learning environment that boosts students' communication skills.

The *new* paradigm of teaching is one that puts the student in the centre of the learning experience and its buzzwords are: **meaningful student interaction, student autonomy, authentic communication, student responsibility, task-based learning** and **critical thinking**. The majority of contemporary educational articles, books and critical reviews focus, in one way or another, on the importance of these concepts. Some of the research articles and books date back to the early 90s and some are as recent as 2015. Similarly, the essays that I wrote in the framework of the *stage pedagogique* in 2005/2006 all reiterate the importance of the *new* paradigm and its implications on existing teaching practices. In 2015, almost ten years on, it looks like nothing has changed. It still sounds as if student-centred rather than teacher-centred teaching models are something *completely* innovative. However, these concepts are **not** new and research on student-centred models date back to the early 20th century and can be found above all in the works of social psychologists like Piaget, Vygotsky and Deutsch. So why is it that we still, explicitly or implicitly, refer to the current teaching paradigm as *new*?

First of all, paradigm shifts do not occur overnight. Once a paradigm shift has taken place, teachers need to understand and accept the need for change. To meet the challenges of the new learning environment, teachers need to familiarise themselves with and practise appropriate teaching methods. On top of that, for the paradigm shift to be complete, teachers need to internalise these new teaching methods and their underlying theories. This is a long and difficult process. Secondly, some teachers seem to be resistant to change or are at least reluctant to face new challenges. Simply getting out of bed one morning and deciding to switch to a more student-centred teaching method does not work. As a matter of fact, bombarding students with information and facts about a certain topic and expecting them to understand and remember everything, at least until the next test paper, does not require much extra work on the teacher's part. Of course this description of the traditional approach is exaggerated. Nevertheless, it can be argued that preparing a teacher-fronted lesson is much less demanding than preparing a cooperative learning lesson: even though teacher talk is considerably reduced in a student-centred learning environment, planning the actual lessons takes up a lot more time and the teacher's work outside the classroom increases accordingly. Finally, there is also the popular argument put forward by many busy teachers that much more content and material

can be covered using a teacher-fronted instructional method. While this is certainly true, especially in the light of the enormous curricula, one must acknowledge the relative truth of the well-known saying 'less is more'. Indeed, student-centred activities, in general, and cooperative learning activities, in particular, are very time-consuming and consequently less material is covered in a cooperative learning classroom than in a traditional teacher-fronted classroom. However, the cooperative learning material is studied in much more depth and may therefore have a more long-lasting and beneficial effect on the student's learning as a whole.

b. Cooperative learning and meeting the needs of society

Throughout this thesis, I want to argue that the skills that students acquire in a cooperative learning environment prepare them for their adult life outside the classroom. Researchers, both in the fields of social psychology and education, do not get tired of pointing to the school's responsibility to turn its students into responsible, creative and critical citizens. As early as at the beginning of the 20th century, John Dewey, a very influential educator and philosopher, expressed his belief 'that education was a process of living and that schools had a responsibility to capture children's interests, to expand and develop their horizons, and assist them in responding appropriately to new ideas and influences. (Gillies & Ashman, 2003). Similarly, in an article published on 26th October 2014 in the *Luxemburger Wort*, Christoph Bumb deplores the fact that Luxembourg's citizens do not know how to have constructive debates: 'Anders als in vielen anderen europäischen Ländern gibt es bei uns keine tief verankerte Tradition einer gepflegten Streitkultur.' He mainly puts the blame on our education system, which he still believes to be too teacher-centred. Allegedly, the students are never really encouraged to express their own ideas and arguments in constructive dialogues with their peers.

Während es anderswo üblich ist, das rhetorische Konzept der Rede und Gegenrede schon in frühen Jahren einzuüben, herrscht in unserem Bildungssystem oft noch der auf den Lehrer fokussierte Frontalunterricht vor. Die Meinung der Schüler, also schon die Möglichkeit, ihre Meinung im offenen Dialog zu äußern, spielt oft nur eine untergeordnete Rolle.

(Bumb, 2014)

Unfortunately, teachers are often not ready to assume the role of a guide rather than that of a transmitter of knowledge. As I have already pointed out, this can be due to a general reluctance to change but I believe that a lack of appropriate teacher training and institutional support is also partly to blame for this deplorable state of affairs. Teachers need to get support and encouragement both from their colleagues and the institution they work for if they want to successfully adapt their teaching to the new social and political challenges. But it is also each teacher's responsibility to continuously adapt his/her teaching practice to the requirements of our rapidly changing world. It is absolutely necessary that teachers, no matter their age and/or level of experience, engage in regular self-reflection and keep themselves up-to-date with the most recent educational research.

In a nutshell, this *travail de candidature* is my personal effort to become a more reflexive teacher who takes the external socio-political demands on the school seriously and tries to teach her students the skills that they will need to succeed in life. I firmly believe that cooperative learning as a teaching model is perfectly suited to this endeavour. This dissertation is thus, above all, an exercise in self-reflection that should help me refine my existing knowledge of cooperative learning and help me develop expertise. As Johnson and Johnson (1994:105) rightly point out: 'Years of experience using cooperative learning are needed to gain the needed expertise'. In other words, I do not expect to find conclusive answers to all the questions or problems I will encounter during the planning and implementation of this research project. Rather, this dissertation is part of an on-going process that helps me become a better teacher in the light of the existing institutional and socio-political framework.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. Historical perspective

The concept of cooperation and the insight that working together on a common project engenders more effective outcomes than working alone are not new and are not unique to the domain of education. There are a lot of pioneering researchers, especially in the field of social psychology, who identify cooperation as being the most effective form of interaction between human beings. Likewise, there is a multitude of educational researchers who observed, analysed and drew conclusions about the effectiveness of structured group work. Thus, it is difficult to associate one single person with the birth of cooperative learning as a useful tool in education.

Generally, one could argue that the concept of cooperative learning as we use it today has been shaped and continuously refined since the 1970s. Its roots, however, date back to the early 20th century and can be found above all in the field of social psychology. An early pioneer in this domain is Kurt Koffka, one of the founders of Gestalt psychology. Apart from developing theories about the mind, he also analysed group dynamics and drew conclusions about the nature of interdependence among group members. His research was extended in the 1930s by his student Kurt Lewin, who laid the foundation for the group dynamics movement and propagated his belief that, 'learning was more effective when it was an active rather than a passive process, and was pursued in collaboration' (Y. Sharan, 2010). It was, in turn, one of Lewin's graduate students, Morton Deutsch, who took the theory one step further by formulating his own theory of cooperation and competition in 1949. Deutsch was the first one to conceptualise what has become the fundamental principle of CL: 'positive interdependence which promotes a situation in which each student in the group is responsible for contributing to the learning of all members, and is in turn enriched by others' (Y. Sharan, 2010). Deutsch's students, the brothers David and Roger Johnson, took his theory as a basis for shaping their theory on social interdependence, which up until today constitutes one of the cornerstones of cooperative learning (see chapter II. 2).

For the purposes of this *travail de candidature* I am mainly going to focus on the works of the two social psychologists David and Roger Johnson. Their research on **social interdependence theory** has had an enormous influence on the development of cooperative learning models since the early 1970s. I am going to refer to the relevance of **behavioural learning theory** in relation to cooperative learning. And, last but not least it is essential to refer to the works of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, pioneers in the domains of **cognitive developmental and social constructivist theory** and their impact on the shaping of cooperative learning models.

2. Social interdependence theory

According to Johnson and Johnson, social interdependence theory is at the very heart of cooperative learning. They ascertain that the main asset of this theory is its longevity and its validation through continuous high-profile research and its numerous applications to practice. Hundreds of research articles have been published, especially on the link between social interdependence theory and cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2003:286). But before the impact of social interdependence theory on cooperative learning can be further explored, it is vital to briefly explain the birth and development of this theory. Social interdependence theory has its roots in social psychology and can be traced back to the work of Morton Deutsch, who, in 1949, published his theory on cooperation and competition (see previous section). Social interdependence can be defined as follows:

Social interdependence exists when the outcomes of individuals are affected by each other's actions. There are two types of social interdependence: *positive*, when the actions of individuals promote the achievement of joint goals, and *negative*, when the actions of individuals obstruct the achievement of each other's goals.

(Johnson & Johnson, 2005:287)

Whereas positive interdependence leads to cooperation between individuals to reach a shared goal, negative interdependence fuels competition. 'Negative interdependence typically results in individuals opposing each other's success' (Johnson & Johnson; 2005:320). As a matter of fact, the traditional teacher-fronted classroom is characterised by a competitive and individualistic atmosphere. When the teacher, for example, asks the class a question about the studied material, some students will raise their hands but only one student will get the opportunity to give the right answer and earn the teacher's respect. There is no need for cooperation as the individual effort is the only effort that will be rewarded either through praise or through grades. It is, thus, not difficult to see why researchers in education favour a cooperative over a competitive learning environment. This intuitive belief in the superiority of a cooperative learning environment is further strengthened by various research studies that have compared the outcomes of cooperative, individualistic and competitive efforts. In a meta-analysis of a vast array of studies, Johnson and Johnson found that 'the average person cooperating performed at about two thirds of a standard deviation above the average person performing within a competitive or individualistic situation.' They also found 'correlational evidence that being cooperative and willing to share resources with classmates is associated with academic achievement' (Johnson & Johnson; 2005:304-306). On top of that, the research findings showed that cooperation furthers positive relationships among group members, which in turn has a positive impact on students' self esteem and their psychological health.

This, however, does not mean that competition is an essentially bad and undesirable state. There are obviously situations in which competition is the engine that drives development. This is above all the case in the world of business. Furthermore, competitive efforts seem to be more natural than cooperative efforts. Having observed this in various situations, Morton Deutsch came to the conclusion that cooperation needs to be 'carefully monitored and nurtured'.

First, it is very easy to move from cooperation to competition (Deutsch, 1985). There is an inherent tendency of cooperation to fail because competitive actions undermine its effectiveness. Effective cooperation requires very active and sustained effort to prevent it from deteriorating into competition.

(Johnson & Johnson; 2005:297)

The extent to which social interdependence theory has informed the development of cooperative learning models is outlined in chapter III.1 of this *travail de candidature*. As a matter of fact Johnson and Jonson have developed their own approach to cooperative learning, which is generally referred to as the 'Learning Together' approach. In the same chapter, practical advice on how cooperation can be nurtured and strategies to further positive interdependence among students are listed and explained.

3. Behaviourism

Behavioural theory, as the name suggests, analyses our *behaviour* in response to certain stimuli. Its main assumption is that 'continuous praise and reinforcement of positive actions lead to changes in behaviour' (Slavin, 1987). In other words, human behaviour can be **conditioned** to behave in a certain way. Based on his observations, B.F. Skinner, one of the leading psychologists in that domain, developed the following law of conditioning (Surgenor, 2010):

Law of conditioning	Law of extinction
A response followed by a reinforcing stimulus is strengthened and therefore more likely to occur again	A response that is not followed by a reinforcing stimulus is weakened and therefore less likely to occur again

Figure 2

Furthermore, Skinner argued that the process of conditioning (stimulus → response → reinforcement) could also be applied to language learning. As a matter of fact, behaviourist theories have informed educational practices for many years, especially in the teacher-fronted classroom. The idea is that the teacher is in command and responsible for transmitting knowledge to his students. The underlying belief is that knowledge is gained through repetition and drilling exercises. Metaphorically speaking, students are considered to be clean slates whose behaviour can be shaped through the teacher's use of immediate feedback. If the student gets positive feedback and praise, he is likely to adopt the same behaviour next time. Similarly, in the absence of praise, the student will most likely refrain from using the same behaviour.

In the light of the current teaching paradigm, which focuses on the student and the construction of knowledge through interaction with one's peers, behavioural approaches to teaching are often frowned upon. Moreover, in a critical review of Skinner's book, the renowned linguist Noam Chomsky (1959) sheds a very negative light on behaviourism as a successful theory of learning. He objects that 'if all language is learnt behaviour, how come children and adults frequently say things they have never heard before?' (Harmer, 2001:69). According to Chomsky, the problem of behaviourism is that it does not take into account our mental ability to process and synthesise information.

Similarly, there does not seem to be any space for behaviourism in the cooperative learning classroom. Effectively, theories of cooperative learning are based on the belief that students acquire and consolidate knowledge through complex mental processes that are stimulated through human interaction (see next section on constructivism). However, in line with Spencer Kagan (2009), I want to argue that behaviourism and cooperative learning are not mutually exclusive. This mistaken belief probably results from another common misconception, namely that cooperative learning is constructivist by nature (see next section). According to Kagan, cooperative learning encompasses a variety of different human interactions and not all of them involve the *construction* of knowledge. He sees the different cooperative learning structures as being on a same spectrum ranging from behaviourism to constructivism:

At the behaviorist end of the spectrum are structures like the Flashcard Game - students receive peer praise after each correct answer and the game is structured so students have repeated trials on missed items. At the constructionist end of the spectrum are structures like Team Statements. Through Team Statements, students construct knowledge: First they generate and share their individual definitions of a concept, explore the differences among their concepts, and finally construct one definition that they can all endorse more strongly than their original individual definition.

(Kagan, 2009:1.17)

I further believe that parallels can be drawn between the idea that cooperative learning activities move along a spectrum and along Bloom's taxonomy. Some cooperative learning activities target higher-level reasoning like discussing the pros and cons of a character's actions, whereas others simply aim at rehearsing new vocabulary or the spelling of more difficult words. Especially at the *cycle inférieure* when students first learn English, activities often aim at teaching students very basic skills like remembering the pronunciation of the alphabet or the spelling of new words. While these activities can be structured cooperatively they are certainly not constructivist (see next section).

Robert Slavin (1987) has also found a way to reconcile aspects of behaviourism with cooperative learning. He has developed a system called STAD (Student Teams-Achievement Divisions), which rewards groups based on the sum of the group members' individual learning (see chapter III.4). In

other words, he uses reinforcement to encourage groups to continue or change their behaviour. He calls this 'group contingencies'.

In the behavioural view, cooperative learning is a form of group contingencies, because it rewards students on the basis of the performance of their group. [...] It is the combination of group rewards and peer interaction on learning tasks that is necessary to produce the learning gains characteristic of effective cooperative learning.

(Slavin, 1987:29)

The next section then explores the link between cooperative learning and constructivist theories.

4. Social development and constructivist theories

Most teachers should be familiar with the works of the social psychologists Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Their insights in the construction of knowledge in general and the development of cognitive abilities since early childhood in particular have had an enormous impact on many educational theories but especially on cooperative learning. As Vermette and Foote (2001:27) put it: 'Constructivism seems to match up quite nicely with the practices of cooperative learning, and is (sometimes) seen as the philosophy in practice.' However, they also draw attention to the misconception that every instance of cooperative learning is essentially constructivist. 'While many cooperative learning activities are constructivist, many are not, and it is a mistake to simply equate (and conflate) the two practices' (Vermette & Foote 2001:27). Before this common misconception can be explained, it is necessary to give a brief overview of Piaget and Vygotsky's respective theories and their link to cooperative learning.

According to Piaget, we expand our knowledge about the world through constant re-evaluation of our existing knowledge in the light of new experiences. In this sense, knowledge is something inherently personal, which is constructed rather than simply adopted by the thinker. That is why the teacher can no longer be seen as a transmitter of knowledge and the students as mere receptors. This arguably old-fashioned perception of teaching does not take into account the cognitive processes that take place in the acquisition of new knowledge. As a matter of fact, knowledge is not just acquired but it is critically assessed and constructed through the person's interaction with his or her social context. Followers of Piaget and educational researchers have taken his theory a step further by emphasising the necessity to create social contexts and classroom environments in which productive cognitive conflicts can take place (Doise & Mugny, 1984; Murray 1982; Slavin 1995; Johnson and Johnson 1994). The idea is that cognitive conflicts engender high-level reasoning and allow students to achieve academic goals that they would not be able to achieve if they were working in an individualistic and competitive environment. For instance, Murray (1982) found that 'two students – neither of whom was able to do a particular task alone – were able to complete the task when working together' (McCafferty et al. 2006:11).

The works of Piaget and Vygotsky are very often mentioned in the same breath. However, there are some considerable differences in their views about how and when children develop their cognitive skills. Whereas Piaget 'considered development to be a precoded aspect of our biology' and therefore believed that 'a child's development cannot be considerably accelerated through learning with the help of teachers or others', Vygotsky postulated that 'learning leads development' (McCafferty 2006:11). Furthermore, he stressed that human cognitive growth is directly related to and influenced by the way we interact with our social environment through symbols and signs (i.e. principally language). 'He called the theoretical construct that enables this process the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)*' [...] 'The ZPD is a key concept for Vygotskian theory in that it distinguishes what a child can do on her or his own cognitively, and what she or he can do in conjunction with an adult or more capable peer' (McCafferty 2006:11; Vygotsky, 1978). He argues that learning takes place with and alongside others and that 'working alongside more proficient peers leads to progress in our zone of proximal development' (Jolliffe, 2007). Through a process of 'scaffolding', which is a structure of 'support points' that help individuals perform an action they couldn't do on their own, learners can reach a level of academic growth 'beyond the limitations of their physical maturation'⁸. One example of this is a teacher who guides his/her students' learning through focused questions and positive interactions. If this concept is applied to learning a foreign language, students can indeed help each other develop their language skills.

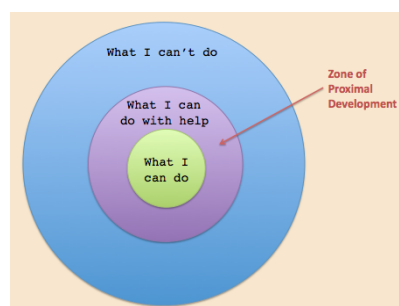


Figure 3

It is obvious how these insights inform and validate some of the theories postulated by researchers on cooperative learning. One aim of cooperative learning is to gain new knowledge through interaction with other people. The underlying belief is that students gain a higher-than-usual understanding of the given tasks if they study them in cooperation with other students. As McCafferty et al. (2006:12) rightly point out, 'the notion that peers can help each other is very much in line with student-centred perspectives on education, and it also fits with what Johnson et al. (2002) say about positive interdependence.'

However, as aforementioned, not every cooperative learning task is constructivist as they do not all lead to high-level cognitive processes. Cooperative models such as STAD and certain forms of Jigsaw (see chapter II. 3) entice students to find 'right' answers and are a means to test students'

⁸ close paraphrasing;

'[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_\(philosophy_of_education\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_(philosophy_of_education))' (accessed 16.01.2015)

understanding of a certain topic or grammatical aspect rather than a way for students to create and critically assess new knowledge claims. In the eyes of Vermette and Foote (2001:27), the Jigsaw cooperative learning model has indeed constructivist potential 'because individual students need to generate and share personal understanding of parts of a topic. However, while its use often results in meaningful understanding of the part personally investigated, it often produces a superficial and very passive student presentation to others for the rest of the topic.' As Vermette and Foote (2001:30-33) point out,

In order for the task to be constructivist the format of the learning task needs to be student-generated. [...] Constructivist cooperative learning seeks to push inquiry as practice, not rehearsal. [...] The more the activity engages students to search for understanding over recall, the more constructivist it is. [...] As students move away from helping each other to simply remember content and toward the creation of their own, and therefore new content, the level of constructivism increases.

Following this line of argument, the Learning Together (chapter III.1) can be said to have its roots in socio-constructivist theories as it calls for more complex student-generated projects. Even certain models of the structural approach advocated by Kagan 'may meet the desired constructivist challenges, depending on whether or not activities are used for rehearsal and practice or for analysis and reflection' (Vermette & Foote 2001:32).

5. Cooperative learning and student motivation

As a matter of fact, many researchers, including Johnson and Johnson, have come to the conclusion that cooperative learning has a positive influence on students' motivation. They argue that 'students' motivation to enquire, reason, learn and apply knowledge is increased when educators ensure that classrooms and schools are dominated by cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic learning' (Johnson and Johnson, 2003:168). The focus here is on **intrinsic motivation** as opposed to extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation, as defined by Deci and Ryan (1985) is the 'motivation that is inherent in the activity and its perceived meaning. It is interest in and enjoyment of an activity for its own sake' (Johnson and Johnson, 2003:163). In contrast, students who are extrinsically motivated strive to achieve an academic goal mainly because of the rewards (i.e. grades) associated with it.

In Johnson and Jonson's article on student motivation in co-operative groups (2003), I have identified 4 main factors that, according to the authors, promote intrinsic motivation in a cooperative setting. Firstly, they argue that cooperative tasks are inherently more 'interesting, fun and enjoyable' than traditional tasks. Secondly, they believe that students who work in a cooperative environment experience 'greater internal pressure to succeed'.

The more co-operative individuals' attitudes, the more they see themselves as being intrinsically motivated, persevering in pursuit of goals, believing that their

own efforts determine their success, wanting to be high achievers, and believing that learning new ideas is important and enjoyable.

(Johnson and Johnson 2003:164)

Thirdly, they state that if students perceive themselves as being responsible for the learning of their peers, their intrinsic motivation to achieve academic success increases. In this sense motivation has social origins and thus fits Johnson and Johnson's theory of social interdependence. And lastly, they suggest that there is a link between academic conflict among individuals and intrinsic motivation in the sense that disagreement stimulates what they call 'epistemic curiosity'.

The research indicates that within a co-operative situation, disagreement over information, conclusions, theories and opinions tends to lead to uncertainty, epistemic curiosity and a re-evaluation of one's conclusions.

(Johnson and Johnson, 2003:167)

Similarly, Margit Weidner (2003) has identified a kind of symbiosis between cooperative learning and intrinsic student motivation. She argues that in order to ensure individual accountability, one of the basic elements of cooperative learning, it is essential that students are intrinsically motivated.

Um einen möglichst hohen Grad an persönlicher Verantwortung zu erreichen, sollte die Motivation zum Lernen entsprechend vorhanden sein.

(Weidner; 2003:48)

In other words, cooperative learning fosters motivation but in order for cooperative learning to work there needs to be some intrinsic motivation in the first place. As will become apparent in the practical part of this *travail de candidature*, fostering students' intrinsic motivation is often the most difficult part to achieve. According to Weidner, to ignite students' motivation, the content of the assignment needs to be **interesting, relevant** and at an **adequate level of difficulty**. Students should be convinced that they are able to successfully complete the assignment. Furthermore, the teachers should closely observe their students' work, offer help and support, and give **regular constructive feedback**. On top of that, Weidner suggests, in line with Slavin's theory, that students' work should be valorised through **external rewards**. Finally, the tasks should be completed within a **tight timeframe** in order to prevent digression and loss of concentration. This 'checklist' will prove invaluable for the analysis of the relative success and failure of my own personal cooperative learning project.

III. COOPERATIVE LEARNING MODELS

Considering the scope of this *travail de candidature*, I believe that it is simply impossible to outline and explain all cooperative learning models and methods that have been developed since the 1970s. I am mainly going to focus on those approaches, models and methods that I have identified to be the most influential and/or to be most relevant to my own personal project. This, however, does not mean that I have actually tried out all those models but a basic understanding of the main models is necessary to fully appreciate the final analysis of the present project.

I am first going to outline Johnson and Johnson's *Learning Together* approach to cooperative learning as this constitutes the building block for many subsequent approaches and models. In a second step, I am going to address the work of Spencer Kagan whose main merit is the development of specific cooperative learning scripts/structures i.e. the application and implementation of specific cooperative teaching methods in the classroom. I am also going to give a brief overview of Robert E. Slavin's contribution to the field of cooperative learning. Relying on the findings of behavioral theory, he postulates the need for extrinsic group rewards to motivate people to learn in cooperative learning groups. Like Kagan, he has developed specific cooperative learning methods that can be adapted to any grade level and subject area.

1. The Learning Together approach

The Learning Together approach to cooperative learning has been developed by Johnson and Johnson and naturally results from their research on social interdependence theory. This approach encompasses a variety of different methods that have subsequently been adopted and adapted by other practitioners and researchers. However, before the Learning Together approach to cooperative learning can be explained, certain related concepts need to be clarified.

First of all, Johnson and Johnson distinguish between three types of cooperative learning, namely, formal cooperative learning, informal cooperative learning and cooperative base groups. In the case of **formal cooperative learning**, students work cooperatively for one class period to several weeks to complete assignments such as 'decision-making or problem solving, completing a curriculum unit, writing a report, conducting a survey or experiment, reading a chapter or a reference book, learning vocabulary, or answering questions at the end of the chapter' (Johnson & Johnson 1994c:52). In this respect, Johnson and Johnson do not tire of reiterating their belief that 'any course requirement or assignment can be reformulated to be cooperative.' Having studied the curriculum, the teacher's role is to define clear academic and social objectives, to set appropriate assignments, to form (heterogeneous) groups, and to monitor and evaluate students' progress.

In the case of **informal cooperative learning**, students work cooperatively in temporary, ad hoc groups that last from a few minutes to one class period.

Informal cooperative learning groups are often organized so that students engage in three-to five-minute focused discussions before and after a lecture and two- to three-minute turn-to-your-partner discussions interspersed throughout a lecture.

(Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:54)

The aim of this method is that students actively engage with the taught material in order to integrate it into existing conceptual structures. Finally, in the case of **cooperative base groups**, students are part of long-term, heterogeneous learning groups. These groups are permanent and can last from one to several years. The members of each group are expected to meet regularly, even outside class, to offer each other help and support in order to make academic progress. While this latter type of cooperative learning can certainly have a beneficial impact on students' learning experience, it is a form of cooperative learning that is not going to be further investigated within the framework of this *travail de candidature*.

Secondly, the term of **cooperative learning structures** needs to be explained. They are 'standard cooperative procedures for conducting generic, repetitive lessons and managing classroom routines. They are used to organize course routines and generic lessons that repeat over and over again' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:55). Johnson and Johnson are not the only researchers who have developed such structures. As a matter of fact, cooperative learning structures are the building blocks of Kagan's structural approach, too (see chapter III.2). The idea is that teachers have access to a vast array of different content-free structures that they can then apply to their unique classroom setting and tailor to their students' individual needs. The aim is that these structures become a part of the teacher's daily teaching repertoire and are used naturally and automatically. These structures can be used sporadically during the lesson, for example to drill-review facts, or they may 'be used in combination to form an overall lesson' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:55).

Thirdly, and arguably also most importantly, Johnson and Johnson have developed **five basic elements** that distinguish cooperative learning from traditional group work. These five elements, which continue to have a huge influence on theoretical and practical research in the field of cooperative learning, are the following:

1. The first element is **positive interdependence** and is directly derived from social interdependence theory.

Positive interdependence is the perception that you are linked with others in such a way that you cannot succeed unless they do (and vice versa), that is, their work

benefits you and your work benefits them. [...]. Students must believe that they sink or swim together.'

(Johnson et al., 1994b:27)

The more the students are aware of this positive interdependence, the more likely they are to work together cooperatively. In other words, students need to realise that in order to reach their shared goal, each and every one of them has to contribute their fair share.

There are various strategies that teachers can deploy to ensure positive interdependence among group members. In their book *cooperative learning in the Classroom* (1994;51-56), Johnson and Johnson offer a detailed account on how positive interdependence can be structured. In a nutshell, it can be said that positive interdependence can be strengthened through 'joint rewards (if all members of your group score 90% correct or better on the test, each will receive 5 bonus points), divided resources (giving each group member a part of the total information required to complete the assignment), and complementary roles (reader, checker, encourager, elaborator)' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:58). Both 'divided resources' and 'complementary roles' are two aspects that will be examined in the practical part of this project.

Finally, it can be argued that some cooperative teaching models strengthen positive interdependence more than others. The Jigsaw method (chapter III. 3), for example, is structured in such a way that positive interdependence is guaranteed from the beginning. As each group member holds a unique part of the puzzle, a distinct piece of information, they must cooperate and share their knowledge if they want to successfully complete the puzzle.

2. Closely linked to this first element is the element of **individual accountability**. In order to make sure that positive interdependence takes place, students need to know that they will be held individually accountable for their work. 'Individual accountability exists when the performance of each individual student is assessed and the results are given back to the group and the individual' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:58). In the cooperative learning model there is no space for students who are used to free riding on other students' work. Not only should students at the end of the assignment be able to explain their part of the work but they should also be able to report back on their team members' work. This is only possible if two conditions are met: firstly, students thoroughly engage with the task at hand and secondly, students interact with each other so that in the end every team member masters the given task.

Again there exist numerous strategies that teachers can readily apply to their classroom to ensure that students assume responsibility for their own as well as their team members' learning. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994c:58), 'common ways to structure individual accountability include (a) giving an individual test to each student, (b) randomly selecting one student's product to represent the

entire group, or (c) having each student explain what he or she has learned to a classmate.' Similarly, Margit Weidner, a renowned German pioneer in cooperative learning, offers a vast array of practical examples and good advice in her book *Kooperatives Lernen im Unterricht: Ein Arbeitsbuch* (2003:53).

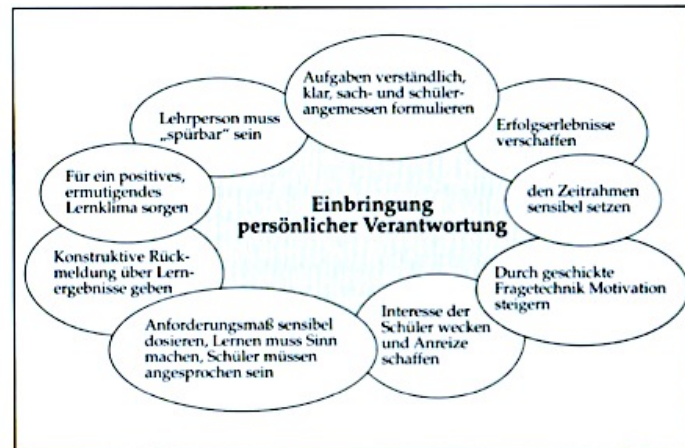


Figure 4 Wege und Möglichkeiten, persönliche Verantwortung für Lernprozesse zu kultivieren

It is beyond the scope of this TC to comment on all of those aspects but a more complete overview of Weidner's practical advice can be found in appendix 1.

3. The third basic element postulated by Johnson and Johnson is **face-to-face promotive interaction**. The idea is that 'students promote each other's success by helping, assisting, supporting, encouraging, and praising each other's efforts to learn' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:58). This element is derived from the belief that peer tutoring leads to academic growth and furthers students' social skills. 'There are cognitive activities and interpersonal dynamics that only occur when students get involved in promoting each other's learning. (...) Promoting each other's success results in both higher achievement and in getting to know each other on a personal as well as professional level' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:58). However, such face-to-face promotive interaction is only possible if the classroom setting allows for a favourable seating arrangement. Students should be able to communicate with each other without disturbing the other groups and there should be enough space for the teacher to circulate from one group to the next. Students should sit closely together in order to be able to maintain eye contact and use their 'quiet voices' to interact with each other.

4. The fourth element is **social skills**. This element is closely linked to face-to-face promotive interaction. In order for students to be able to interact successfully with each other and to promote each other's learning, they need to have learnt and internalised a set of social skills. 'Contributing to the success of a cooperative effort requires interpersonal and small-group skills' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:59). On top of that, social skills allegedly 'not only promote higher achievement but also contribute to building more positive relationships among group members' (Johnson & Johnson; 2005:320). Unfortunately, contrary to what a lot of teachers assume, social skills are not naturally

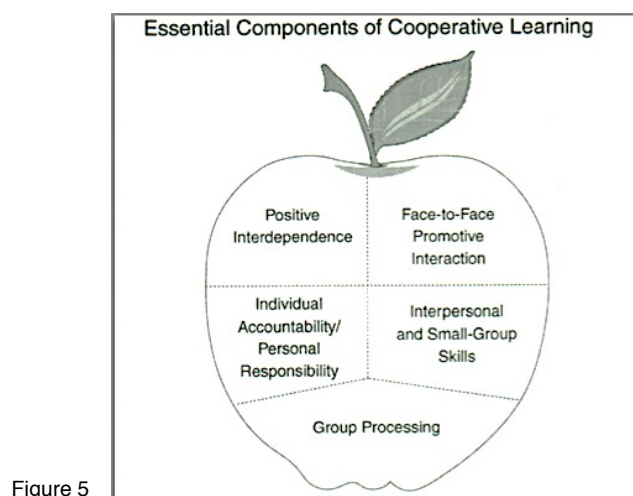
given and thus need to be taught just in the same way as academic skills are taught. 'Placing socially unskilled individuals in a group and telling them to cooperate does not guarantee that they will be able to do so effectively. Persons must be taught the social skills for high-quality cooperation and be motivated to use them' (Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:59). Basic social skills necessary for fruitful cooperation are, for example, being able to listen to other students, waiting one's turn to speak, showing mutual respect, showing interest in one's peers ideas, being able to manage conflicts peacefully, and assuming responsibility.

5. The fifth and last element is **group processing**, which again is closely linked to the previous elements. In order for students to be able to assess their progress both in terms of reaching their academic goals and developing their social skills, they need to get the possibility to reflect on their teamwork.

They should discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. (...) Students must also be given the time and procedures for analysing how well their learning groups are functioning and the extent to which students are employing their social skills to help all group members to achieve and to maintain effective working relationships within the group.

(Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:59).

Margit Weidner's work on cooperative learning (2003; 45-47) is a good reference book for hands-on material that can be readily used to further students' group processing skills. She believes that it is very important that students regularly reflect on the way they work together in order to develop their interpersonal and small group skills. Through detailed self-reflective questionnaires she guides students towards a better understanding of what it means to interact cooperatively. This is an idea that has greatly influenced the practical part of this *travail de candidature*.



These five elements have been adopted, at least partly, by most researchers and practitioners of the cooperative learning teaching strategy. They are often used as means to justify the validity of certain cooperative structures and/or entire cooperative lessons.

Finally, Johnson and Johnson (1994:51) argue that for the Learning Together approach to take place the following four requirements need to be fulfilled:

1. The three types of cooperative learning - formal cooperative learning, informal cooperative learning and cooperative base groups - should be used in an integrative way.
2. The five basic elements should be included in every cooperative learning lesson or activity.
3. The repetitive, routine lessons as well as classroom routines should be cooperative.
4. The organizational structure of the school should be changed from a competitive & individualistic mass-production structure to a co-operative team-based structure.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Johnson & Johnson's model of cooperative learning is very demanding and far-reaching as it operates on various different levels - the school, the teacher and the students - and does not leave any room for alternative teaching methods.

Each learning group is a cooperative effort, but so is the class as a whole, the teaching team, the school, and the school district.

(Johnson & Johnson; 1994c:57)

This model presupposes the cooperation of the entire school collegium, which I believe to be an unrealistic endeavour. Even in a school like the *Lycée Technique de Bonnevoie*, which certainly endorses the use and spread of cooperative teaching methods, the Learning Together model would be impossible to apply to its full extent. Nevertheless, some of the underlying ideas will prove to be useful for the final analysis of the present project and the conclusions that can be drawn. Especially the concepts of formal and informal cooperative learning, cooperative learning structures and the five basic elements – positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual accountability, social skills and group processing – are indispensable aspects of any cooperative learning project.

2. The Structural approach

One could argue that the Johnson brothers are the fathers of the classical and theoretical approach to cooperative learning and that Kagan Spencer gave birth to the more innovative and practical approach. Johnson and Johnson's Learning Together approach to cooperative learning requires a radical shift from traditional teaching. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they believe that in order for cooperative learning to be a successful method of instruction, *all* the lessons need to be structured cooperatively. However, the planning of complex cooperative learning lessons is very time consuming and requires a lot of effort and creativity. That is why many teachers who, initially, were enthusiastic about the new teaching method soon lost interest and eventually dropped the method altogether. For Kagan, who used to be a fervent advocate of the classical approach to cooperative learning, this was a 'harsh realization' (Kagan; 2009:1.5). He had been teaching the cooperative learning model to teachers for years and he had always been keen on pointing to the overwhelmingly positive research findings in the field. That is why he was all the more disappointed when he had to face the truth, namely that 'what was proven by research was of little value because it was not consistently implemented' (Kagan 2009:1.5).

Kagan's pet phrase thus shifted from 'Stop doing traditional lessons and do cooperative learning lessons instead' to 'Don't do cooperative learning lessons; make cooperative learning part of every lesson' (Kagan; 2009:15-1.6). It is with this idea in mind that Kagan developed cooperative learning **structures** and that the structural approach to cooperative learning was born. Nevertheless, he still believes that there is an important role for classic cooperative learning. 'Complex, well-designed cooperative learning lessons provide wonderful learning experiences for students that cannot be obtained if we use only the simple structures' (Kagan; 2009:1.6).

The underlying theory of the structural approach is not very different from the so-called classical approach. Just like Johnson and Johnson, Kagan puts a lot of emphasis on some basic principles, especially on positive interdependence, individual accountability and social skills. 'Cooperative learning is more effective when these basic principles are included' (Kagan; 1994:125). Strongly relying on Johnson and Johnson's five basic elements, Kagan has formulated his *own* four basic principles symbolized by the acronym PIES: Positive Interdependence, Individual Accountability, Equal Participation and Simultaneous Interaction (Kagan, 2009:5.9).

Equal Participation demands that every student participates unlike in a traditional classroom where the more extrovert and/or high achievers tend to monopolize student talk. A lot of Kagan's structures ask students to take turns and thereby 'force' them to participate. In this respect 'equal participation' and individual accountability' are closely linked. As Kagan puts it, 'students are held individually accountable to participate about equally in front of peers and/or the teacher. Students who would otherwise tune out because of lack of involvement are brought into the mix thanks to equal

participation' (Kagan 2009:5.11). The advantage of **Simultaneous Interaction** is that students interact much more frequently than in a teacher-fronted classroom setting. In the traditional classroom only one student or the teacher is talking at a time. In the cooperative classroom, depending on the structure that is being used, either half of the students communicate (pair work) or one student per group is using the target language at the same time.

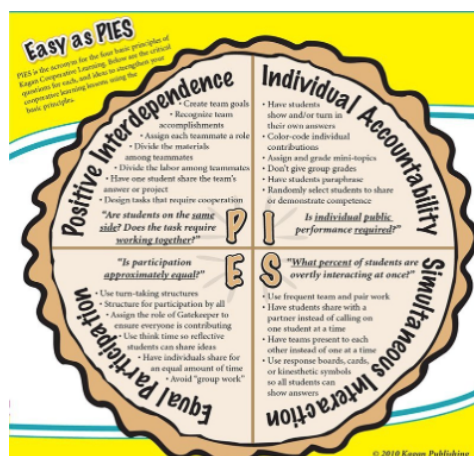


Figure 6

In a nutshell, the main difference between the classical and the structural approach is that the first focuses on complete lesson designs and that the latter focuses on lesson structures. 'Lesson designs provide the framework for the activities of the lesson just as structures are framework to hold content' (Kagan; 1994:126). These structures are essentially content-free and can thus be adapted to various topics, subjects and learning objectives.

Any one structure can be used to create an infinite number of activities. [...] Structures are the content-free 'how' of instruction. They define the social organization in the classroom. [...] The content is the 'what' of instruction.' [...] An activity is merely a structure plus content.

(Kagan; 1994:121)

Kagan also sometimes calls these structures 'tools', which teachers use to reach a certain learning objective.

Teaching is the art of efficiently reaching learning objectives. The structural approach to cooperative learning is aimed at providing teachers with tools to efficiently reach a range of learning objectives.

(Kagan; 1994:124).

Over the past decades, Kagan and his team of researchers have developed more than 200 different structures, which all vary in their scope and complexity. While some of these structures focus on the promotion of thinking skills, others might favour communication skills. In general, however, Kagan

argues that 'almost all well-established structures have built-in positive interdependence [...]. Positive interdependence is the most basic principle in cooperative learning' (Kagan; 1994:128-129).

With these structures being readily available for teachers all across the world⁹, implementing cooperative lessons has become a much less daunting endeavour. Again, it would be beyond the scope of this essay to enumerate them all¹⁰. Nevertheless, I think it is important to outline the most common structures as I have made them part of my regular teaching practice.

Think-Pair-Share: As the name already suggests, in a first step, students think about the material to be studied. This could be anything from a list of vocabulary, to a new grammar rule or an unknown text. During this phase, students work individually and no interaction is allowed. Students are then asked to talk about the task with their partner (pair work) before sharing their insights with either the teacher, the rest of the class, another pair, or their team. There exist some variations on this first structure: Think-Write-Pair-Share, Think-Write-RoundRobin or Think-Draw-RoundRobin. This structure essentially focuses on thinking, communication and information sharing.

RoundRobin¹¹: Once the teacher has posed a certain problem to which there are multiple possible answers students start taking turns providing answers. This might be preceded by individual thinking time. This activity can be done orally or by writing the answers down. To foster positive interdependence students may be given only one piece of paper on which the answers are written and in order to ensure individual accountability, students may each be asked to use a different colour of pen. This structure focuses on teambuilding, mastery, thinking, communication and information sharing.

Numbered Heads Together: This structure is above all designed to ensure individual accountability. To make sure that all the students in a group master the assignment, one student in each group is called upon randomly to report back on the group's work. Apart from individual accountability, it focuses on mastery and thinking.

Three-Step Interview¹². In the first step one student interviews his/her partner about a given topic. In the second step, they switch roles. In the third step each student shares what he/she has found out about his/her partner with either another pair or the rest of the class. This structure focuses on participation, listening, teambuilding, thinking, communication and information sharing. Positive interdependence is also ensured as in order to get all the information, students need to talk and listen to each other.

⁹ 'www.kaganonline.com'

¹⁰ appendix 2: Kagan's Structures

¹¹ appendix 3: RoundRobin (Kagan)

¹² appendix 4: Three-Step Interview (Kagan)

However, having all these structures easily available does not mean that teachers no longer need to gain expertise through continuous experimenting and adapting of the structures to their unique classroom setting. As a matter of fact, 'part of the art of structuring successful cooperative learning lessons is analysing the objective of a lesson and then knowing which structures to use' (Kagan; 1994:119). This presupposes a thorough understanding of what the structures exactly are and what learning objectives they favour. But even in this respect Kagan has already done some valuable work. In his book *cooperative learning* (Kagan; 2009:xii), he has compiled a list of the most frequently used structures and has linked them to different learning objectives. These learning objectives are the following: classbuilding, teambuilding, social skills, communication skills, decision-making, knowledge building, procedure learning, processing info, thinking skills, and presenting information.

Finally, I want to draw attention to one more alleged advantage of the structural approach over the Learning Together approach, which I will also endorse in the practical part of this *travail de candidature*. A lot of teachers ask whether it might not be counterproductive to teach students cooperative skills when what they really need is skills to survive in an individualistic and competitive world (Kagan; 2009:1.17). Whereas Johnson and Johnson advocate an exclusively cooperative learning environment, Kagan's structural approach allows room for alternative teaching methods.

If we were advocating exclusive use of cooperative learning, we would leave students very ill prepared. Students need to know how to work independently, and they need to know to compete. We don't, however, advocate cooperative learning as the only way to teach. We feel cooperative learning should be a big part of the instructional diet, not the whole diet. What we are doing with structures is making it easy to include cooperative learning.

(Kagan; 2009:1.18)

Complementing cooperative learning with other forms of instruction also complies with the objectives of the project TIM, which is endorsed at the *Lycée Technique de Bonnevoie* (chapter I.2).

3. The Jigsaw method

Jigsaw is arguably one of the most well-known cooperative learning techniques. Most teachers across all subject areas and grades have probably already experimented with this instructional practice even though they might not systematically endorse cooperative learning techniques. The origins of this technique date back to the early 1970s when the American psychologist, Elliot Aronson, and his colleagues tried to apply the findings of contemporary research on effective group dynamics to actual classroom practice. Their aim was to devise interactive classroom activities that met the following three criteria, which were established by Alport in 1954: '1) interactors¹³ must be of equal status, 2) they must have common goals, and 3) their collaboration should be officially sanctioned' (McCafferty et al., 2006:9). Whereas these original three conditions lay the foundations for the development of

¹³ Here: the students

Jigsaw, they are now no longer considered as valid. First of all, it is rare if not impossible that students are of equal status and the role of teacher as 'sanctioner of activities' has also changed considerably (McCafferty et al., 2006:10).

What has remained though is the basic structure of the method. Just like we have to put the pieces of a puzzle together to create a whole picture, hence the name *Jigsaw*, every student holds a unique piece of information that he or she needs to share with the other members of the group in order to complete a task. Thus, the main cooperative principle that the Jigsaw method is based on is positive interdependence. The students either 'swim or sink together' (Johnson and Johnson).

There are different stages in the implementation of the Jigsaw method. First, the class is organized in so-called 'home' groups. These groups usually consist of four students of various achievement levels. Each student then receives a different part of the subject matter to be explored. After that, they get some time to familiarise themselves with the material before they rearrange themselves in 'focus' or 'expert' groups. They exchange ideas on the subject matter, discuss controversial issues and help each other gain a better understanding of the task. Once they feel that they have understood the material they go back to their 'home' groups and teach the other members of the group their part of the common subject matter.

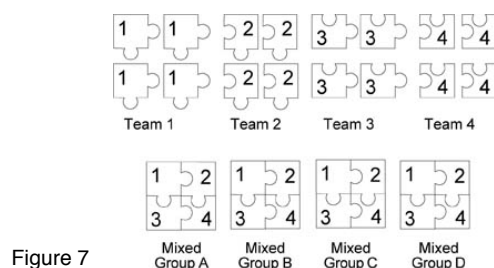


Figure 7

Evaluation can then take on various different forms. One spokesperson of each group could, for example, present the group's work to the rest of the class or the teacher could ask some non-prompted questions to elicit students' understanding. However, the students could also write individual tests, which are part of summative assessment.

Over the years, educational researchers have presented slight variations on the original Jigsaw technique. Slavin, for example, has developed the so-called Jigsaw II. This method is very similar to Arson's Jigsaw but it focuses more on the importance of group rewards. It contains many of the criteria Slavin has developed for STAD (see next section).

Another interesting variation on Anderson's Jigsaw is the 'structured-partner' Jigsaw. This form of Jigsaw focuses on pair work during first phase of the process (Clarke 1994:37-49). Each pair receives a very structured set of guidelines and questions, which they have to work through before they share their ideas with another pair. She therefore calls it a 'structured-partner' Jigsaw. After they have

listened to the ideas presented by another pair they get back to working in their original pair to reformulate their ideas in the light of the new information or insights they have gained. Then the ideas are openly discussed in a plenary session guided by the teacher. After this discussion round, students are once again allotted some time to exchange ideas with their partner and thus revise original thinking. According to Clarke, 'this Jigsaw activity promotes a natural kind of interdependence through three modifications: the extensive use of pairs, a structured-partner format, and the opportunity to revise original thinking after listening to whole-class discussion' (Clarke, 1996:39). The major assumption behind this approach is that: 'we can change and enrich our thinking after being exposed to the ideas of others' (Clarke, 1996:39).

4. The 'Student Teams-Achievement Divisions' method

Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (STAD) or simply Student Team Learning is above all associated with the research and the review of existing research by Robert Slavin. In a nutshell, this form of cooperative learning focuses on three main aspects: peer teaching, individual accountability and rewards of academic success regardless of the student's level of achievement. STAD is similar to the Learning Together approach in that it emphasises positive interdependence and individual accountability.

The method relies on principles of cooperative learning in the sense that it values cooperative over individualistic efforts to learn new material. However, for this specific method it is not sufficient to complete a task together with one's teammates, the focus lies on the *mastery* of the subject to be studied. An activity is not complete unless all the members of the group master, i.e. have learned and understood, the material at hand. In other words, a team can only earn rewards if each member has improved on his or her past knowledge. It does not matter if the members are all high achievers or not; what matters is that each individual, regardless of his or her current level of achievement and regardless of the level of achievement of his or her teammates, can prove that he or she has progressed since he or she was last tested on a given skill. It is thus in the interest of all group members to make sure that everyone has understood the new material and is able to progress. Peer teaching thus constitutes an important part of this cooperative learning model. As Slavin puts it, 'the main idea behind STAD is to motivate students to encourage and help each other master skills presented by the teacher. If students want their team to earn team rewards, they must help their teammates to learn the material' (Slavin 1994:5).

The other aspect of STAD is its focus on individual accountability. Whereas group rewards are at the foreground, individual accountability is a pre-requisite for team success. Students do indeed have to help each other during the lesson but they are not allowed to help each other during the test. Each student is assessed on his or her own work and, what is important, in relation to his or her own earlier performance. The points that each student gets, based on these aforementioned criteria, are added

up with the points his or her teammates received to get the team scores. Depending on their score, teams can then earn extra certificates or rewards.

On the one hand, the implementation of STAD is quite straightforward. The students are assigned to heterogeneous groups of four. They stay in those groups for the entire length of the lesson sequence or until every member of the group masters the task. Students work cooperatively to achieve the desired learning outcome. They are even encouraged to meet outside the teacher's lesson to help each other understand the lesson content (Slavin 1994:4-5). At the end of the sequence, every student takes an individual test or quiz on the material to be studied. On the other hand, however, this method takes up a lot of time and requires good organization skills in terms of recording, adding up and comparing students' results.

It can be argued that STAD targets above all low-level cognitive processes as the focus is on understanding, remembering and rehearsing new lesson content. Nevertheless, a number of well-researched studies document the relative success of this method in yielding higher student performance at all achievement levels (Slavin 1994:5). On top of that, 'studies of STAD have documented significant gains in student self-esteem, liking of class and behaviour' (Slavin 1990; Slavin 1994:6).

IV. THEORY AND PRACTICE

This section *briefly* looks at some of the benefits and shortcomings of cooperative learning as an educational practice.

On the one hand, cooperative learning is an immense success story. Over the past fifty years hundreds of research studies have been carried out, entire cooperative schools have emerged all around the world and teacher-training programmes have been multiplying. According to Johnson, 'cooperative learning is one of the best researched approaches in education' (McCafferty and al., 2006:6). This has led to one widely acknowledged advantage of cooperative learning over other educational models, namely the validation of existing theory by practice. The theory suggests and practice has confirmed that 'when compared to other instructional approaches, cooperative learning activities are associated with **gains in achievement, higher-level thinking, self-esteem, and interethnic relations** (Johnson and Johnson, 2003). Moreover, students in cooperative learning settings tend to like the subject matter and their school more (McCafferty and al., 2006:6).

On the other hand, however, a lot of teachers experience frustration when working with cooperative learning methods. There often seems to be a real gap between what the theories say will happen and what actually happens in the classroom. According to Yael Sharan (2010) this 'discrepancy between the promise and practice of cooperative learning' can be explained by a 'confusion about methods, lack of adequate preparation, and teachers' perception of teaching in general and cooperative learning in particular'.

As a matter of fact, a lot of teachers do not insist enough on the difference between traditional group work and cooperative learning activities and thus neglect teaching important cooperative skills. As Jolliffe (2007) rightly points out, 'just putting pupils together to work and providing some of the learning techniques will not guarantee success. [...] We are not born cooperative'. In a first step, both teachers and students need to be taught essential cooperative learning skills, i.e., interpersonal and small group skills. Moreover, there is a plethora of different cooperative learning approaches, methods, techniques and structures, which might intimidate some teachers at the beginning. 'It is important for teachers to understand the range of methods and the structure, and to select appropriately' (Jolliffe, 2007). Successfully implementing cooperative learning certainly takes time and perseverance as failures and setbacks are guaranteed. As will become obvious throughout this *travail de candidature*, only when the underlying concepts of cooperative learning are understood and internalised, can the positive effects of this teaching strategy over more traditional teaching strategies be observed.

V. METHODOLOGY: Action Research

1. What is Action Research?

Failure is part of the process of gaining expertise, and success is inevitable when failure is followed by persistent practice, feedback and reflection.

(Johnson and Johnson, 1994:70)

Perhaps it is unfair to expect teachers to reflect on their behaviour, adjust their actions in reaction to what is going on in the classroom, and at the same time monitor students' cooperative behaviour and learning, be aware of individual students' needs, and modify an activity on the spot according to needs that arise unexpectedly. Yet that is exactly what characterises a competent teacher.

(Y. Sharan, 2010).

I believe that the above reflections by Sharan and the Johnson brothers capture the essence of action research. The person engaging in action research, in this case the teacher, reflects on his or her actions by doing relevant research and drawing conclusions, which will then inform further action. This is an on-going process as each new action will in turn be critically examined.

Action research is a disciplined process of inquiry conducted 'by' and 'for' those taking the action. The primary reason for engaging in action research is to assist the 'actor' in improving and/or refining his or her actions.

(Sagor, 2000)

The aim of action research is to 'reveal effective solutions to issues and problems experienced in specific situations' (Sagor, 2000). It distances itself from experimental and quantitative research by putting more emphasis on the given social contexts and taking both the students' and teachers' specific circumstances into account. It refuses to give generalizable explanations. As a matter of fact, if a teaching method works for some students in a certain setting, it may not work for others even if the teacher is the same. There is often a serious discrepancy between theory and practice, a problem that action research tries to circumvent. In a nutshell, the difference between action research and traditional educational research is that it does not aim at reaching general truths and producing generally applicable rules. Rather, it takes the uniqueness of both the teacher and his or her students into consideration. It helps 'educators to be more effective at what they care most about - their teaching and the development of their students' (Sagor, 2000).

2. Project description and research questions

During the planning, preparation and implementation of this *travail de candidature*, I have relied on Richard Sagor's methodology (Sagor, 2000). He identifies seven steps that guide the action research project: setting a focus, clarifying theories, identifying research questions, collecting data, analysing data, reporting results, and taking informed action.

1. Setting a focus

In the introductory part of this *travail de candidature*, I have outlined the reasons why I believe that cooperative learning should become an integral part of my teaching practice. Various factors, i.e., the visit of the *Gesamtschule Holweide*, a *formation continue* on cooperative learning, the teaching ethos of the LTB, and the general demands of the current teaching paradigm, have led me to believe that cooperative learning is best suited to prepare students for the complex challenges they are confronted with inside and outside school. Allegedly, cooperative learning does not only lead to higher academic achievement and student motivation but it also furthers the development of social skills, an aspect that is often neglected in traditional classrooms.

Since I took the decision to improve and enrich my teaching practice through cooperative learning, my personal challenge has been to successfully integrate this approach into my lesson plans. Teaching students to work cooperatively is a gradual process and thus the benefits of cooperative learning are not immediate and they depend on various different factors. The focus of the present project is to identify the main factors that make cooperative learning a fruitful and rewarding learning experience for both the teacher and the students. The title of this *travail de candidature* thus reflects a concern that I have been trying to come to terms with over the past two years.

2. Clarifying theories

The immense success of cooperative learning as a teaching practice has led to an incredible increase in its popularity since the 1970s. Its burgeoning popularity, in turn, has generated a growing amount of research articles and handbooks published all across the globe in various different languages.

In a first step, I thus had to identify the most relevant theories before I was able to study them. After having read a couple of theoretical and more practical books on cooperative learning (McCafferty et al:2006, Gillies:2007, Brüning and Saum:2008), I have come to the conclusion that *The Handbook of Cooperative Learning Methods* edited by Shlomo Sharan (1994) probably constitutes the most comprehensive overview of influential theories. It comprises articles by the most prominent researchers in the field: the Johnson brothers, Robert Slavin, Spencer Kagan, Yael Sharan, and Shlomo Sharan. On top of that, it offers summaries of their respective approaches to teaching cooperative learning, i.e., the Learning Together approach, STAD, and the Structural approach. It

also includes articles that focus on the application and implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom.

In a second step, I had to decide which cooperative learning models would inform my project. In this respect, I have found it useful to make a distinction between the classical and the structural approach to using cooperative learning in the classroom. The classical approach encompasses models like the Learning Together Approach, Jigsaw and STAD. When applying these models, the teacher needs to revise his or her entire teaching routine. In this case, cooperative learning dominates every aspect of the learning experience. The teacher no longer prepares lessons with various activities but he designs entire projects that can last from one up to several weeks. The structural approach, in contrast, allows the teacher to take his or her existing lesson plans and to integrate aspects of cooperative learning at specific moments. In this respect, a lesson can be more or less cooperative depending on the general and specific objectives and the time that is available to reach these objectives.

In the end, I have mainly opted for the structural approach as it is easier to implement and it is much less time-consuming in terms of covering the set syllabus. Nevertheless, I have also occasionally included cooperative learning reading projects, which lasted for a sequence of at least 10 lessons. I believe that one benefit of such long-term projects is that they further specific social skills that are neglected when using only short-term cooperative learning structures. In my experience, projects foster team spirit and student autonomy in a way that can rarely be achieved in structural cooperative learning lessons. However, I also believe that cooperative learning projects can only be successful if students are used to working cooperatively. In other words, lessons in which cooperative learning structures are taught and regularly rehearsed are prerequisites for fruitful cooperative learning projects.

3. Identifying research questions

After having defined the focus of the project and the theories upon which it would be based, I had to identify the research questions that constitute the leitmotif of the *travail de candidature*. I have decided to concentrate on two main questions that have guided me through the entire research, implementation and analysis of the project:

1. Which **key factors** are contributory to a successful integration of cooperative learning?
2. What **evidence** may indicate a successful integration of cooperative learning into a conventional classroom?

The first question relates both to the theoretical and the practical part of this *travail de candidature*. In the theoretical part I have outlined the main factors that the leading researchers in this field have identified. The dominant argument is that teachers have to understand the difference between an ordinary task and a cooperative learning task if they want to design successful cooperative learning

lessons. A cooperative learning task needs to respect certain criteria otherwise real cooperation cannot be ensured. In this context, positive interdependence and individual accountability are often cited as the building blocks of cooperative learning tasks (Johnson and Johnson, Kagan, Brüning and Saum, Weidner). Most theorists seem to agree on the fact that cooperative learning can only be successful if the teacher has understood these two basic elements and can apply them to his or her classroom practice

Apart from the cooperative learning tasks themselves, there are other factors that are contributory to a successful integration of cooperative learning into a conventional classroom. According to Johnson and Johnson, for example, the school and the way the different actors interact play an important part in the application of cooperative learning. Kagan and Sharan, among others, put a lot of emphasis on teambuilding activities and activities that develop students' social skills. The general argument is that cooperation does not happen naturally but needs to be taught and drilled until students have internalised it. Slavin, on the other hand, insists on the positive effect external rewards can have on cooperation. Finally, Weidner believes that student motivation also plays an essential role.

The practical part examines to what extent theory can be translated into practice. It looks above all at the process of internalisation of the principles of cooperative learning. This process takes place on two levels: first of all, teachers need to learn to structure their lessons cooperatively and secondly, students need to learn what it means to work together in a cooperative way. In essence, the practical part is an on-going process of trial and error.

The second research question is geared to analysing the data - student surveys, teacher observations and student productions - gathered throughout the implementation of the project. In order to evaluate the successful integration of cooperative learning, a reflective gaze needs to be cast on the students' *actual work* but also on the students' *attitude* towards the work they completed in cooperation with their peers.

4. Collecting data

In order to guarantee validity and reliability, I have applied a process called *triangulation*:

Triangulation is like studying an object located inside a box by viewing it through various windows cut into the sides of the box. Observing a phenomenon through 'multiple' windows can help a single researcher compare and contrast what is being seen through a variety of lenses.

(Sagor, 2000)

I have gathered data from four main sources. First, there are the student surveys that I have carried out at different times and in different classes. These surveys were aimed at enquiring about my students' attitude towards cooperative learning but also at checking whether they have understood its

main principles. Secondly, I observed, filmed and sporadically recorded my students' behaviour during cooperative learning activities. Thirdly, the students' productions and their achievements in the summative tests also provide information about the successful integration of cooperative learning in the classroom. Last but not least, there are my exercises in self-reflection. I have regularly reflected on my own lessons and have sought the expert advice of my tutor, Andrée Margue, who has observed several of my lessons.

5. Analysing data

The analysis of data in the context of action research does not aim at producing general conclusions. There are no complex statistical calculations like in qualitative and quantitative research. Rather, action research is a very personal endeavour and the conclusions that are drawn by the researcher are usually very specific and unique to the classroom settings that are investigated. The aim is to find an approach that fits one's particular teaching style and one's particular students' needs. As Sagor (2000) points out, 'all teachers have had the experience of implementing a 'research-proven' strategy only to have it fail with their students'. Action research tries to circumvent this negative experience by taking into account the uniqueness of any classroom experience.

According to Sagor (2000), two generic questions need to be answered while analysing the data:

1. What is the story told by these data?
2. Why did the story play itself out this way?

These questions will serve as guidelines in the analytical part of this *travail de candidature*.

6. Reporting results

Judging from my own professional experience, a lot of teachers work in isolation from their colleagues. Although at the LTB a culture of sharing material and ideas has started to emerge, teachers are still reluctant to discuss their personal experiences in the classroom. I believe that this is partly due to the fact that they are afraid of being judged by their colleagues. Moreover, teachers seem to believe that they need to reinvent the wheel on a daily basis, which, as Sagor (2000) argues leads to 'inefficiency'. Allegedly, teachers' work would be more efficient and timesaving if they cooperated more. In my opinion, if teachers shared the workload and exchanged ideas on a more regular basis, they would become more balanced, less stressed, more creative and more efficient teachers. As a matter of fact, Slavin identifies 'teacher burnout' as one of the 'plagues of the modern schoolhouse'.

Proponents of action research therefore insist on the importance of reporting one's results. The idea is that teachers can learn from their colleagues' experience and can take informed action and thereby improve their own teaching. The results of an action research project can be shared by giving a public talk on the topic or by writing the work up for publication and thus 'contributing to a collective knowledge base' (Sagor, 2000). The present *travail de candidature* will subsequently be available for

consultation in the Luxembourg national library but also on an online database,¹⁴ which was set up by Anne Scheer in December 2013 and is regularly updated.

7. Taking informed action

The ultimate aim of action research is to improve one's own teaching, i.e., to prevent oneself from making the same mistakes over and over again.

When reflections on the findings from each day's work inform the next day's instruction, teachers can't help but develop greater mastery of the art and science of teaching.

(Sagor, 2000)

The present project has stretched over a period of three academic years (2012-2015). The way I teach cooperative learning today has changed considerably since September 2012 and I am confident that it will continue to change. As aforementioned, teaching cooperative learning is a process of trial and error. Ideally, each new lesson is an improvement on the previous lessons, brought about by systematic self-reflection and data analysis.

¹⁴ <https://sites.google.com/site/travaildecandidature/home>

VI. IMPLEMENTATION and ANALYSIS

1. Brief chronological overview

The general focus of this *travail de candidature* was determined in September 2012 when I first met with my supervisor, Andrée Margue, to brainstorm ideas for a project on cooperative learning. Ms Margue provided me with various books and articles on cooperative learning and teamwork in general. The sheer amount of different resources was overwhelming and the prospect of integrating cooperative learning into my classroom seemed rather daunting at first. The present chapter will look at how I gradually moved from more basic to more complex cooperative learning lessons. The structure is chronological and each part will focus on one academic year.

In the academic year 2012/2013, I used cooperative learning in the 8STP1 and the 8STP2 (elementary level). On the basis of some sample lessons I intend to illustrate both my own and my students' first steps using basic cooperative learning principles. At that time, I was neither familiar with the prominent theories nor did I possess a firm grasp of the key elements of cooperative learning tasks. Even though I possessed a general understanding of the most popular cooperative learning models, such as Jigsaw and Placemat, these models could not be applied as my students lacked the necessary skills and vocabulary to communicate in English. Following the advice of my tutor, I thus started experimenting with a principle called Think-Pair-Share. The idea is that students work alone on a task before discussing their ideas with their partner and then sharing their results with either another pair or the whole class.

In the second part of this chapter, I intend to examine how my understanding and application of cooperative learning has evolved. In the academic year 2013/2014, I experimented with cooperative learning in the 8STP4 (elementary level) and the T2CM1 (intermediate level). Again I will look in detail at some sample lessons and lesson sequences to outline and evaluate the integration of cooperative learning in the classroom. Whereas I continued using and perfecting the Think-Pair-Share method in the 8STP4, I applied the Jigsaw method in the T2CM1.

The third and last part of this chapter will focus on the academic year 2014/2015. This time, I will focus on applying cooperative learning at a pre-intermediate level (9STP2). The 9STP2 was partly constituted of the students of the 8STP4, which means that about half of the students were already familiar with cooperative learning at the beginning of the year. This allowed me to introduce a more complex cooperative learning project in the second term. Moreover, I have started using Spencer Kagan's structures and the related terminology more systematically than in the previous years. Lastly, I have set out using team competitions and external rewards as an engine to drive student motivation and further cooperation.

2. Cooperative learning: 2012/2013 - 8STP1

A. Classroom setting and learning environment

The initial idea of this *travail de candidature* was to compare and perfect the use of cooperative learning methods in the 8STP1 and the 8STP2. However, due to factors of feasibility the project took on a different dimension. First of all, I always taught the two classes consecutively with only a 15-minute break between the lesson blocks. Consequently, there was not enough time for reflection and changing or adapting the lesson plan. Of course every class has its own dynamism and I never taught strictly identical lessons. Nevertheless, the basic lesson plan and the approach to teaching was the same in both classes. Secondly, I didn't feel confident enough to use different methods in the two classes as I had not acquired a deep enough understanding of cooperative learning yet. For reasons of simplicity, I will thus only focus on the integration of cooperative learning in the 8STP1. Thirdly, since I had not been teaching for almost two years due to maternity and parental leave, it took me some time to re-establish my old teacher persona. Moreover, I had to get familiar with the new resource material. As a matter of fact, a new coursebook, *New English File Elementary* (OUP, 1996), had been introduced and together with my colleagues we created and designed new worksheets to complement the book.




This latter aspect, i.e., the cooperation between English teachers, has also had an impact on the application of my project. At the *cycle inférieur*, the teachers are formally required to meet once a week (Cone8 and Cone9) to elaborate resources for the TIM lessons, to exchange ideas, and to elaborate common worksheets and test papers. As the integration of cooperative learning in the EFL classroom was not a goal that my colleagues shared with me, I had to continuously strike a balance between my own project and the general demands of the teaching environment I was part of. In other words, I always felt obliged to keep pace with my colleagues in terms of covering the same material with my students for the upcoming TIM lesson and the test paper.

The aforementioned factors also go some way towards explaining why, in this first year of the implementation of my project, I only sporadically integrated cooperative learning. The subsequent part looks at the very early attempts of using cooperative learning in the 8STP1. The class was made up of 21 students with the majority being boys (5 girls and 16 boys). I taught them 5 lessons a week, with a double lesson on Tuesday and Friday, and one single lesson on Thursday. There were 2 very low academic achievers (on average they scored below 10 out of 60 possible marks), whereas the rest ranged from medium to high achievers. In general, the students were well-disciplined even though the boys were a bit unruly at times, thus requiring me to be stricter in terms of reinforcing rules of classroom management.

B. Lesson 1: Grammar revision - the present simple

This lesson took place at the beginning of the second term (11th January 2013) and so far I had not worked with group work yet. However, I had regularly focused on pair work to further communication and cooperation between students. Some examples of previous pair work activities were: students reciting the English alphabet coaching and correcting each other; spelling difficult words to their peers; writing and acting out small dialogues; rehearsing vocabulary.

As my students were sitting in neat rows facing the blackboard, I first needed to form groups of four. I simply asked some pairs to turn around and form a group with the pair sitting behind them. They then moved their desks together in order to get a bigger work surface. I told them that from then on they were going to work more often in those groups. I briefly explained that group work was important because in that way they could help each other improve their English.

The overall objective of this lesson was to revise the form of the present simple in positive and negative statements, and questions. The method I chose was Think-Pair-Share and the instructions including time indications were projected via the projector¹⁵. I chose the TIM icons to illustrate the different steps:  individual work (Think),  pair work (Pair), and ...... group work (Share).

During the first phase (THINK) students were not allowed to talk to their partners. They were allocated six minutes to write down six sentences in the present simple using the guidelines that were projected. The objective was to reactivate students' previous knowledge about the difference between regular verbs and the verb 'to be', and the changes the verbs make in the third person. While my students were writing down these six sentences, I was walking around the classroom offering help when necessary.

In a second step (PAIR), students had to compare their sentences and discuss possible problems and questions. The idea was that at the end each student had six correct sentences on their worksheet. Again, my role was to monitor their work and give support when needed. For example, I would hint at mistakes and/or elicit correct sentences.

In a third step, each pair had to present their sentences (twelve in total) to the other pair of their group (SHARE). They then had to agree on the six best sentences out of 24, which would be shared with the rest of the class.

In a plenary session, I called upon random students to read out their group's final sentences. I wrote the sentences on the blackboard and the students copied them into their notebooks. I drew their attention to possible pitfalls and asked them to underline the third person and the auxiliary verb in the

¹⁵ appendix 5: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (09.01.13) - Instructions

questions and negative statements. The remaining fifteen minutes were spent on doing a revision exercise in which students had to fill the gaps with the correct form of the verbs in brackets (individual work).

C. Lesson 2: Emma you're in big trouble

In this lesson, which took place on 15th January 2013, students had to work on a short text called 'Emma you're in big trouble'.¹⁶ The overall objective was to improve my students' reading skills. The subordinate objectives were expanding their vocabulary, and fostering their communication and writing skills.

The students were asked to get into their groups of four. Once everyone was ready, I projected the task instructions and explained what I expected them to do in that lesson¹⁷. Each student received a worksheet with the text and the related activities.

In a first step (THINK), students had to read the text silently and underline unknown and difficult words. In a second phase (PAIR), students had to explain the text to each other focusing on these words. They were encouraged to use a bilingual dictionary. Then they wrote the new words with their translations on the worksheet.

Considering the fact that the text mainly consisted in a dialogue between Nasreen and her sister Emma, it lent itself perfectly to a role-play. Student A had to read out the part of Nasreen and student B the part of Emma. The difficulty lay in using the right intonation to reflect the characters' emotional states, i.e., anger and frustration. I briefly demonstrated what I expected them to do by reading out some lines and modulating my voice to create the desired effect.

In anticipation of the next phase (SHARE), each pair had to orally summarise the text in Luxembourgish, French or German and then compile a list of bullet points in English to recapitulate the main ideas. I closely monitored their work, intervening only when necessary.

In the last phase, they moved from pair work to group work. The two pairs compared and complemented their vocabulary lists. Then they exchanged their lists of bullet points and together decided on the most important aspects of the story. Finally, they were asked to write a short summary in English. Only one student in each group had to write down the summary on a piece of scrap paper. This part of the lesson was particularly chaotic and most groups needed a lot of help and support from my part. In part E of this section, I will analyse the situation and try to give an explanation of why the group work escalated in the end.

¹⁶ appendix 6: Worksheet - Emma you're in big trouble

¹⁷ appendix 7: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (15.01.13) - Instructions

In a plenary session, I first called upon random students to read out their group's vocabulary list. I wrote all the new words and their translations on the blackboard so that in the end each student had the same words on their worksheet. Then, I asked one student from each team to read their summaries. Building on their ideas, I wrote a model summary on the blackboard, which each student then copied on his or her worksheet. Finally, I wrote the students' homework on the blackboard and asked them to copy the task in their diaries: they had to answer eight short comprehension questions in complete sentences for the following lesson.

D. Lesson 3: Vicky's daily routine

This lesson was held on 29th January 2013. It was the first cooperative learning lesson that my tutor, Andrée Margue, observed. Its objective was twofold: the first aim was to reactivate the vocabulary and set expressions that students had acquired to talk about daily routines. The second aim was to consolidate students' ability to read and tell the time in English. The subordinate objectives of this lesson were fostering students' communication skills and practising their listening skills.

At the beginning of the lesson I asked my students to rearrange their desks as we were going to work cooperatively. This time I had prepared a set of coloured cards. Each group received four cards of different colours (orange, yellow, blue and green), which they randomly distributed among themselves. This would allow me to give clearer instructions later on. I gave the students a brief overview of that day's lesson and projected the instructions for the various tasks¹⁸.

The first part of the lesson was based once more on the Think-Pair-Share principle. In the first phase (THINK), the students holding an orange or a yellow card had to open their books on page 108¹⁹ of their coursebook, whereas students with a blue or green card had to go to page 111. The task consisted in writing the times below the clocks that were displayed. Considering the fact that students had been taught how to read the time in the previous lesson, this was meant to be a rather quick introductory activity. The aim was to consolidate previously acquired knowledge and prepare the ground for the following communicative task: *What's the time?* However, I soon realized that my students had not revised the studied material for this lesson and a lot of them couldn't remember how to tell the time in English. I thus referred them to page 126 to consult the relevant explanations.

In the second phase (PAIR), students were asked to compare their work and make corrections if necessary. The aim was to make students feel more confident before starting the actual communicative task, which consisted in telling the time to a third student who then had to draw the hands on 'empty' clocks and write the times beneath them.

¹⁸ appendix 8: Cooperative Learning Lesson 8STP1 (29.01.13) - Instructions

¹⁹ appendix 9: Telling the Time - Student's Book p.108

In the third phase (SHARE), the students holding an orange or yellow card asked the students with a blue or green card what time it was. They then drew the hands and wrote the times beneath the appropriate clocks. Ms Margue and I walked from pair to pair to listen in on their conversations and provide help and coaching. We continuously encouraged students to speak English.

In the second part of the lesson I introduced the three-step interview for the first time. The objectives of this part were to revise expressions related to daily routines and to foster students' listening and note-taking skills. In a first step, students had to listen to Vicky's daily routine²⁰ while taking notes about it. Using their notes they then had to formulate three questions to check if their partner had understood the text. I projected a model question and answer to illustrate what I expected them to do. In a second step they had to ask each other their questions and take notes about their partner's answers. In the third and last step, each pair had to present their questions and answers to the other pair. This phase was rather chaotic and noisy, and required the intervention of Ms Margue and myself at several times. This rather negative development will be closely examined in part E: analysis and conclusion. Unfortunately, in the end there was not enough time to share the groups' results in a plenary session, which had to be postponed to the next lesson.

E. Analysis and conclusion

In this section I will examine both the positive and the negative aspects of the previously described lessons.

As these were my very first attempts at integrating aspects of cooperative learning, I mainly focused on the Think-Pair-Share method. However, it was only the 'think' and the 'share' part that were new to my students as a lot of the activities in the coursebook encourage pair work and thus students had already practised this method on several occasions. In general, the pair work activities went well in the sense that students stayed focused and managed to complete the given tasks without too much difficulty. The fact that students had to do the task on their own (THINK) before they shared their ideas with their partner certainly improved the quality of their work. On top of that, it allowed the shyer students to feel more confident about their contributions. In my opinion, the regular use of think-time before pair and/or group activities increases students' self-esteem in the long run.

Moreover, I believe that the use of the projector to visualise the instructions lent more structure to the lesson and instilled confidence both in myself and in my students. This way, I did not constantly have to worry about the lesson plan and I had more time to concentrate on the activities going on in the classroom. My students, on the other hand, knew what they were expected to do in this lesson, which also increased their motivation to participate. Furthermore, the use of the TIM icons gave this new approach to learning an air of familiarity.

²⁰ appendix 10: Vicky's Daily Routine - Student's Book p.30

Similarly, however, I observed a decrease in their motivation towards the end of the lesson. As a matter of fact, during the group work activities the instructions were not as clear and well defined as during the pair work activities. This goes some way towards explaining why students were less engaged during these parts of the lesson. With hindsight it can be argued that there was not much difference between these group work activities and traditional group work. In the next section, I will examine more closely why my students did not really work cooperatively during these activities.

First of all, I simply told the students to work in groups and I thereby neglected the importance of teaching **social skills**, like listening to each other and taking turns to talk. Unsurprisingly, it was mostly one student who did all the work and the others started talking about different things, e.g., their lunch or the latest football results. Assigning students **clear roles**, e.g., focus keeper, quiet captain and checker, would certainly have improved the quality of their work. Although I introduced the system of coloured cards, I did not take advantage of its full potential at that time.

Secondly, my students were not used to working in groups and thus had not developed a sense of **team identity** yet. They did not feel responsible for the outcomes of their group work as they did not really see themselves as an essential part of their group. Consequently, positive interdependence and individual accountability, two of the most important aspects of cooperative learning, were not ensured. This became obvious when I randomly called upon some students to share their group's ideas with the rest of the class. In general, they did not feel confident to talk and often they simply did not know what had actually been discussed in their group.

Thirdly, a lot of the activities asked students to reach a consensus. At that time I believed that agreeing on best ideas or statements was an easy and straightforward task that did not require any further explanations. Only later did I realize that formulating and discussing arguments is a skill that needs to be carefully taught and practised. Likewise, the three-step interview required much more scaffolding and modelling than I had anticipated. Once again, the mastery of social skills constitutes a pre-requisite for these activities to be successful.

In a nutshell, the group work activities would have been more successful if I had given clearer instructions and had previously taught my students the necessary social skills to interact with their peers. Furthermore, I became aware of the fact that creating a team identity is indispensable for fruitful cooperation.

3. Cooperative Learning: 2013/2014 - 8STP4

A. Classroom setting and learning environment

The subsequent part of this chapter looks at the way cooperative learning was integrated in the 8STP4. Similar to the 8STP1, this class was mainly composed of male students (17 boys and 5 girls). On average, the 8STP4 scored 5 marks higher in comprehension tests than the 8STP1 and 4 marks higher in writing tests.²¹ I taught them four lessons a week on two consecutive days, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 8.00 to 9.40. On top of that, I guided and assisted them during their TIM lessons on Thursdays from 12.25 to 14.00. During the TIM lesson, students worked autonomously either on their mathematics or English dossier depending on their individual need to improve in these subjects. They corrected their exercises themselves using the answer keys provided. Their mathematics teacher, Mr Da Costa, and I coached and encouraged them whenever necessary. However, in line with cooperative learning we always encouraged students to first seek help with their desk neighbour before coming up to the teacher to ask for further explanations.

Considering the fact that I was not only their English teacher but also their form teacher, the relationship was much closer than the one I had with the students of the 8STP1. For many of them I was a person of trust who they sought advice from after the lessons. I regularly contacted the students' parents to inform them about their children's progress or to discuss minor problems encountered in class. I believe that this really positive relationship also had an impact on the general classroom environment, which was characterised by the students' eagerness and motivation to participate in cooperative learning activities.²²

Just like in the previous academic year, my students had not worked in small groups until the beginning of the second term. The first term was characterised by extensive use of pair work activities, which I believe constitute the first steps towards a cooperative learning environment. This year, however, I spent more time on introducing cooperative learning and the rationale behind using it before the students actually started working in groups.

In a first phase, I enquired about my students' past experiences with group work and elicited both its advantages and disadvantages. In general, students seemed to agree that working in groups was more fun but that it often led to chaos and students discussing private matters instead of staying on task. Moreover, they felt that it was usually only one student who did all or most of the work whereas the others were either too shy or too lazy to participate. In a second phase, I elicited the difference between cooperative learning and traditional group work. I focused on the word 'cooperation' and insisted on what working **together** really implies. I moved on to explain that cooperative learning group activities were much more structured and that consequently there was less space for loafers. I

²¹ appendix 11: Overview of summative evaluation - 8STP1, 8STP4, T2CM1 and 9STP2

²² appendix 12: Student Survey 8STP4

argued that equal participation was one of the cornerstones of cooperative learning. I also insisted on the use of their 'quiet voice', i.e. on keeping their voices at a sound level that allows them to communicate with their peers without disturbing the other groups. In the analytical part of this essay I will examine to what extent this brief introduction to cooperative learning has affected students' behaviour during the group work activities.

B. Lesson 1: Grammar revision - the past tense

This lesson took place on 7th May 2014 and its main objectives were revising the spelling of the past participle and practising the use of the past simple to ask and answer questions about past experiences. A subordinate aim was thus to improve students' speaking skills. The lesson was observed both by my tutor, Andrée Margue, and my advisor, Jean-Baptiste Kremer.²³

The first part of the lesson was allotted to correcting students' homework, which consisted in writing the past participle of a list of verbs and using the given flowchart as support²⁴. Instead of projecting the answer key straightaway, the students had to compare their answers first in pairs and then in their small groups. The idea was that students helped each other find and explain mistakes. Students were instructed to take turns reading their answers to their partner, thus making sure that each student participated for an equal amount of time. In the end the answer key was projected while I was drawing attention to potential pitfalls.

In the second part of the lesson, students had to interview each other about what they had done the previous day, using the questions in their coursebook as guidance²⁵. They were instructed to follow the structure of the three-step interview, which means that they took turns interviewing each other before sharing their partner's answers with the rest of the group. To make sure that students understood the instructions, I illustrated the activity by giving a concrete example. I also briefly revised the use and form of short answers as they would need them to successfully complete the task.

Moreover, to facilitate the process of giving instructions, I allotted a letter (A-D) to each group and a number (1-4) to each of its members. I asked the students with an odd number in each pair to begin with the interview. Later, student number 3 started sharing the new information with the other pair and then they continued clockwise, i.e., student number 4, student number 1 and last but not least student number 2. Later during the plenary session, I called out a combination of letters and numbers to select random students to report back to the class. As this activity targeted above all the development of listening and speaking skills, students were not required to write down the entire interview. Nevertheless, they were encouraged to take notes on a piece of scrap paper.

²³ appendix 13: Lesson Plan 8STP4 (07.05.14)

²⁴ appendix 13: Spelling of the Past Participle

²⁵ see appendix 15: Past Time Expressions - Student's Book p.55

In the third and last part of this lesson, I tried to speed up the pace and increase students' motivation by including a short race. Each student had 30 seconds to put the past time expressions (Student's Book p. 55) in the correct order. In pairs they then compared and if necessary changed the order. The idea was that students reached a consensus and thereby gained a better understanding of the expressions. Unfortunately, there was not enough time for the remaining activities outlined on the lesson plan. I used the last two minutes of the lesson to set and explain their homework.

C. Lesson 2: A murder story

This double lesson took place on 22nd May 2014, the day after their last English test paper. Its main objectives were furthering students' reading and listening comprehension and the subordinate aims were developing their note taking and speaking skills. A murder story constituted the background against which various reading and listening activities were tailored. The idea was that students pretended to be detectives whose job it was to solve the mystery of this murder. Each student received a coloured card at the beginning of the lesson but the roles would not be explained until later.

In a first step, I tried to catch students' interest by telling them that today they were all detectives. A man had been murdered on his sixtieth birthday and it was their team's responsibility to find the murderer. I told them that in order to be a good detective you needed to have an excellent memory and be able to draw connections between seemingly isolated facts. Secondly, I made it clear that a successful investigative team needed to keep their colleagues informed about the most recent developments. Communication was thus the most important part of this lesson.

While the students had their books closed, I briefly projected the back cover of the murder story²⁶. They got one minute to silently read through it before I removed it again and projected the pictures of the main suspects instead. On a piece of scrap paper students had to write down everything they could remember: date, place, occasion, and the relations between the people at the country house. I insisted that this was individual work and that later they could compare and discuss their notes with their partner.

I moved on to explain that, apart from having a good memory, detectives needed to be efficient at taking notes. With their books still closed, students listened to an interview between the inspector and the first suspect. While they were listening, they had to take notes about what they thought were the most relevant details. Like any good detective, they then shared their information with the rest of the team. Taking turns, each student read out his or her notes, while the others were listening and completing their own notes if necessary.

²⁶ appendix 16: A Murder Story - Student's Book p.60

In a second step students could finally open their books and read the interview with the first suspect. The student with the pink card was the narrator, the student with the blue card read out the part of the inspector and the person with the green card was the victim's wife. Finally, the student with the yellow card had to make sure that his or her peers were using their 'quiet voice'. After having read the text, students had some time to complement their notes and do the 'true or false' exercise in the book. I walked around the classroom and closely monitored their work. As it was a fairly easy exercise I deemed it unnecessary to correct it in a plenary session.

In a third step, they then had to discuss whether they thought the suspect was guilty or not. The difficulty consisted in putting forward valid arguments and then reaching a group consensus. After 5 minutes of discussion time each group had to decide whether the victim's wife was the murderer or not. They had to write their decision and the justification thereof on a small piece of scrap paper and hand it to the teacher for later use.

In a fourth step, students listened to the interviews between the inspector and three further suspects. Again they had to take and compare notes before discussing their educated guesses about who the murderer was. After having reached a consensus they wrote their final verdict and main argument on a piece of scrap paper and handed it to the teacher, too.

In a plenary session, each group told the rest of the class who they thought had murdered Jeremy Travers and why. They then listened to what had really happened that night in the country house. Finally, I disclosed which group(s) had correctly identified the murderer. As a matter of fact, only one group did not guess the right answer but their reasoning and arguments were valid.

To round off this double lesson students had to role-play an interview between the police and two people suspected of robbery. The two 'policemen' prepared a set of questions whereas the two suspects first decided whether they were innocent or not and then made up a story²⁷. Next the two suspects were questioned separately by the police officers. If they told the same story they were innocent if not they were guilty. In the end, a police officer from each group reported the results of their investigation to the rest of the class.

²⁷ appendix 17: Police Interview - Students' Book pages 104 & 108

D. Analysis and conclusion

This section will look at how my understanding and application of cooperative learning methods has evolved since the previous year.

Following last year's experience with cooperative learning, I deemed it necessary to explain the method and its advantages to my students before implementing it. Paradoxically, I used a teacher-centred approach to outline the main differences between traditional group work and cooperative learning. With hindsight, I believe that the 'learning by doing' approach would have been more effective. So instead of telling my students what cooperation is, I could have illustrated it with clearly structured short activities. Their behaviour in the group could then have been analysed and discussed in a plenary session. However, as has been mentioned on several occasions, integrating cooperative learning is a **process of trial and error**, and making mistakes and learning from them is part of the game. Nevertheless, I believe that it is safe to argue that the integration of cooperative learning was much more successful than the previous year. This is due to various factors, which I will examine in the subsequent part.

On top of that, being their form teacher allowed me to develop a much **closer relationship** with my students. On the one hand, I was more aware of the personal bonds between the different students and, on the other hand, I also had a better overview of their academic achievement in general. These insights had an impact on the way I formed the groups. I made sure that the groups were mixed in terms of friendships but also in terms of their academic abilities. Although there is some disagreement on this among theorists, I believe that **heterogeneous groups** are preferable to homogeneous groups. This way, students had the opportunity to positively interact with peers who are not necessarily their best friend, which is a skill they also need to master outside the classroom. Moreover, having low, medium and high achievers in the same group generally proved to be beneficial for everyone as they could assist each other in their learning process. Whereas low achievers understood the new material better when a more able student coached them, the higher achievers often experienced a sense of satisfaction and responsibility when they realized that they were able to help their teammate. These personal observations are confirmed in a student survey that I carried out at the end of the third term²⁸. In this survey, the majority of students indicated that they had understood the new material better when they had studied it in small groups. They also stated that they had helped each other and that they had done their best in order for their group to succeed.

Furthermore, I used cooperative learning methods much more **regularly** than in the 8STP1, which had a positive effect on the groups' **team identities**. Through observing my students' behaviour, I realized that the more often they worked together the more motivated they were to do group work. They also started to feel more responsible for the group outcomes and were less likely to display

²⁸ appendix 12: Student Survey - 8STP4 (July 2014)

disruptive behaviour. In general, they listened to their teammates and waited for their turn to speak. Once again, these observations were backed by my students' answers in the survey. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that their mastery of these **social skills** developed gradually and that during the first cooperative learning lessons I had to repeatedly remind them to take turns and communicate more quietly. In contrast to the previous year, I was much more aware of the importance of these small group skills and thus spent more time on enforcing them.

I would also like to point out that my **instructions** were much clearer and the lesson as a whole was more structured. I repeatedly insisted on students taking turns when sharing ideas and assigned the role of quiet captain to monitor the noise level. I always clearly stated which student had to start the communicative task and how they should proceed from there on. In general, students followed these instructions but they occasionally had to be reminded to use the target language when interacting with their peers.

I also provided much more **guidance** before and during the three-step interview. I reiterated and reformulated the instructions when I realized that my students were not following. Moreover, I used this method to personalise the learning process rather than to check students' reading or listening comprehension. This in turn had a positive effect on their motivation. Similarly, when students were asked to reach a consensus I put more emphasis on pair work to stimulate ideas. I assisted them by asking probing questions to help clarify thinking. This way they felt more confident when sharing and defending their arguments in the ensuing group work. What is more, the Think-Pair-Share principle was embedded in most activities even though I did not state this as explicitly as the previous year. Guaranteeing think time before each pair or group activity assured that every student was prepared to make a contribution.

Lastly, I particularly enjoyed the lesson in which students had to solve the mystery of a crime. The murder story provided a context in which **meaningful communication** and interaction took place. Being part of an investigative team provided students with an authentic reason to exchange ideas with their teammates and thereby raised their **motivation** to participate. In addition, in this lesson students could use the past simple in a much more creative way than in the previously described lesson. In the first sample lesson most activities aimed at checking whether students could remember the use and form of the past simple. They had to apply the tense in basic and highly structured communicative tasks. In the second lesson, however, students had to practise this tense in activities that required them to make use of their analytical skills. They had to be able to make inferences from the listening activities and develop arguments based on these inferences. In terms of Bloom's revised taxonomy, the tasks in the latter lesson were more challenging as they required higher order thinking.

To sum up, I had gained a deeper understanding of cooperative learning in the sense that I enforced the use of social skills, recognized the importance of building a team identity, gave clearer instructions

and provided more guidance before and after the activities. I had internalised the importance of the Think-Pair-Share principle and made it an essential part of every lesson. Through the regular use of cooperative learning students felt more comfortable to work in groups. They assumed more responsibility and were eager to help their classmates to achieve (see student survey). Consequently, positive interdependence and individual accountability was ensured most of the time. Moreover, students stated that they were more motivated to work in cooperative learning lessons than in traditional lessons. Despite these positive developments, there was room for improvement and experimentation especially in the areas of teambuilding and the implementation of short cooperative learning projects.

4. Cooperative Learning: 2013/2014 - T2CM1

A. Classroom setting and learning environment

The class T2CM1 was made up of 14 boys and 9 girls. Except for one boy who had never retaken a year, this was the students' sixth or even seventh year of learning English. Nevertheless, their level of proficiency was rather low with a mean mark of 33.8 at the end of the academic year. There were 4 very weak students, who consistently scored below 20 out of 60 possible marks in their English tests and one excellent student, who never scored below 50 marks. In the end, 6 students failed the year and only 5 students passed it straightaway, i.e., without resitting an exam or compensating the marks in one or more subject areas. I believe that it is necessary to include these statistics as they go some way towards explaining the relative success and failure of integrating cooperative learning in this class (see 'conclusion and analysis').

I taught the class in 2 double lessons on Tuesdays (08h00-10h00) and Thursdays (10h00-12h00). I used the coursebook *Lifelines Intermediate* (OUP, 1997), prescribed by the national curriculum, to cover the main grammatical aspects. However, in line with the requirements of the *Horaires et Programmes*²⁹, I complemented the coursebook with more topical texts to improve students' reading and communication skills. As a matter of fact, within the framework of the *Horaires et Programmes*, the *Commission Nationale des Programmes (CNP)* stipulates that,

En division administrative et commerciale il importe de mettre les heures hebdomadaires supplémentaires aux autres classes à profit pour engager encore davantage la **communication générale** (écrite et orale: listening, speaking, note-taking, drafting, dialogues, asking and answering questions, retrieving and passing on / presentation of information, etc.) le **travail en groupe** et les **mini-projets** en classe.³⁰

(ANGLA_T2CM_INTRO)

²⁹ <http://portal.education.lu/programmes/ProgrammeSecondaire.aspx> '

³⁰ My emphasis.

Cooperative learning seemed especially well suited to meet the aforementioned requirements. So towards the end of the first term, I introduced the Jigsaw method to study a variety of different texts. The idea was to engage students in discussions of infographics and short texts in order to develop their reading skills as well as their communication and speaking skills.

The CNP also advocated the extensive use of literary works:

Les membres de la CNP estiment qu'il faudra éviter l'usage exagéré d'activités du genre 'gap-filling' au profit d'activités plus complètes, plus stimulantes et favorisant **un travail et une attitude plus autonomes**. La lecture cursive s'y prête bien et servira aussi à accroître le vocabulaire des élèves, ce qui est très important.³¹

(ANGLA_T2CM1_INTRO)

At the beginning of third term students had to study the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. Again I believed that cooperative learning lent itself best to exploring the novel in a way that furthered students' autonomy as well as their communication skills. The subsequent sections will look in detail at how cooperative learning was used to implement the syllabus requirements of the T2CM.

B. Lesson sequence: Infographics

The small project about infographics stretched over a period of 2 consecutive double lessons. The first double lesson took place on 5th November 2013. The overall objectives of this lesson sequence were to further students' reading skills and promote their communication skills through close examination of infographics. Infographics are 'graphic visual representations of information, data or knowledge intended to present complex information quickly and clearly'³². I chose 5 different infographics³³ instead of short texts because my aim was to first familiarise students with the Jigsaw method before moving on to longer and more complex texts. The infographics used in this lesson were downloaded from the educational website 'www.macmillanglobal.com'³⁴.

In a first step, I had to introduce both the concept of cooperative learning and the Jigsaw method. I enquired about students' attitude towards working in groups and then moved on to highlight the differences between traditional group work and cooperative learning. I then explained the Jigsaw method by drawing the different stages on the blackboard, i.e., base groups → expert groups → base groups. As a matter of fact, some students had already been familiar with the method.

I divided the class into two groups of 4 students and 3 groups of 5 students. Based on my belief that heterogeneous groups are more motivating for everyone than homogeneous groups, I was careful to

³¹ My emphasis.

³² 'http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infographic' (accessed 23.03.15)

³³ appendix 18: Infographics - T2CM1

³⁴ 'http://www.macmillanglobal.com/resources/infographic-elessons' (accessed 23.03.15)

integrate at least one 'good' student in each group, based on their marks in the previous test paper and their participation in class. Moreover, there were a couple of students who were renowned for regularly playing truant. I thus made sure that they were not in the same group but in the three different groups of 5 members.

After the students had rearranged themselves into their base groups, I explained the actual task. Once I was convinced that everyone had understood what they had to do, I handed out the infographics and two bilingual dictionaries per group. In each base group, students were treating different texts. The infographics were of varying degrees of difficulty and I thus had to make sure that the more advanced students received the more complicated ones. Students then had half an hour to read through the text and do the related activities. As this was individual work, they were not allowed to speak with the other members of the group but they were encouraged to note down possible questions and issues that they would like to discuss in the expert groups later on.

In a next step, students formed their expert groups, i.e., all the students treating the same text got into one group. So instead of 5 base groups there were now 4 expert groups. For the remainder of the lesson, students were asked to summarise the main idea of their infographic before and to compare their answers on the worksheet. Finally, they had to design a kind of 'lesson plan' as they were required to 'teach' the content of their infographic to the members of their base groups. I observed each group in turn without interfering too much. I sometimes hinted at problems and encouraged them to speak more English. In general, the noise level was very high and students did not stay on task. In the analytical part of this section, I will analyse the reasons for this apparent chaos.

In the following double lesson, which took place on 7th November 2013, students arranged themselves in their base groups. Taking turns students had to teach their infographic to their peers. I gave them a set of guidelines, which they had to follow. First students had to read the infographics on their own and then each 'expert' had to ask questions to check whether all the members had understood the respective charts. After having tested students' general comprehension, they were instructed to go through the worksheet together. Again the expert should assume the role of the teacher and guide 'his or her' other students through the tasks. Unfortunately, the students did not follow my instructions and I often observed students simply copying the experts' answers. There was no real communication between the students and the rationale behind this supposedly cooperative task was lost. This aspect will also be reflected on in the analytical part of this section.

On the following Tuesday, 12th November 2013, each student participated in a short quiz on the five infographics³⁵. This quiz was not formally assessed but it showed students how much they had remembered and understood. As a matter of fact, the test was above all destined to give me feedback

³⁵ appendix 19: Infographics - Quiz

about the project in general and my instructions in particular. Moreover, after the test, each student had to anonymously answer the following two questions³⁶:

1. Which text did you remember best?
2. Write down 3 advantages and 3 disadvantages of the method called 'Cooperative Learning'.

The results of this survey and the conclusions I have drawn will be looked at in part e of this chapter. Interestingly, one student came up to me after the lesson and shared her personal experience and impressions of the project. I got some very honest and useful feedback. She explained that while she had been discussing her text with the other experts, she had not been aware of the fact that she would have to explain the text to the other students later on. She added that she had been hoping for more teacher intervention. She deplored the fact that the experts' work had not been corrected by the teacher. She was afraid of sharing wrong information with her classmates. The fact that students need more guidance when first implementing a cooperative learning project will be examined more closely later on.

C. Lesson sequence: Conspiracy theories

The project on conspiracy theories also took place in 2 consecutive double lessons, the first one on 4th February and the latter on 6th February. The overall objectives were the same as the ones for the previous reading sequence, i.e., fostering students' reading skills and developing their communication skills. The idea for the topic came from one particular student but his classmates shared his enthusiasm straightaway. Anxious to find appropriate texts, I asked my colleagues if they had any useful resources on this topic. Luckily, my colleague, Gilles Glod, had done a similar project a couple of years ago using texts from the *Headway Upper-Intermediate* (OUP)³⁷. The level of difficulty of these texts was slightly above my students' level of proficiency but I was convinced that students were able to successfully complete the related tasks in cooperation with their peers.

The methodology, i.e. Jigsaw, was the same as the one used with the project on infographics. I also decided to use similar base groups because I believed that this way students could more easily build upon and improve on previous experiences. However, due to the rather high number of truants during each lesson, I reduced the number of groups to 4. In contrast to the previous project, I provided more scaffolding during the group work and included an extensive plenary session at the end.

In a first step, each base group had to discuss what constituted a conspiracy theory and how they were circulated³⁸. Only one student in each group had to write down the group's ideas but every member of the group had to be able to answer the questions if prompted by the teacher. In a plenary

³⁶ appendix 20: Student Survey T2CM1- Cooperative Learning (12.11.2013)

³⁷ appendix 21: Conspiracy Theories - Texts

³⁸ appendix 22: Conspiracy Theories - Worksheet

session, I called upon random students to share their group's ideas, which I then summarised on the blackboard.

In a second step, students received their texts, which they had to read silently. Again dictionaries were provided to look up new or difficult words. They were instructed to underline relevant passages and take notes to answer the following four questions:

1. When and what was the event?
2. What theories are mentioned?
3. What proof is given to support them?
4. What reasons are suggested for hiding the true facts?

In a third step, students met with the other experts on 'their' text and compared and complemented their notes. Finally, they had to fill in the appropriate column on their worksheet. I closely monitored their work and provided help when necessary. After I had checked the work of each expert group, I ordered them to get back into their base groups. This however, had to be postponed to the next double lesson on Thursday.

In a fourth step, students summarised the text to the other members of their base group, focusing on the four main questions. The other students were supposed to listen carefully and take notes. By the end of the first lesson each student should be able to talk about any of the four texts if prompted by the teacher. Again some students simply copied the work of the expert rather than listening and taking notes.

Considering the fact that at the end of the project on infographics students felt that they hadn't learnt enough about the various topics, I decided to include a plenary session in the second part of the double lesson. I randomly called upon one student of each expert group to present their text in front of the class. I summarised the answers to the four questions on the blackboard so that students could copy them on their worksheets. As each student now had the same answers in their copybooks, I did not judge it necessary to design a separate quiz to check students' understanding of the various texts. Nevertheless, they had to study the texts for the upcoming test paper.

D. Reading Project: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

In the third term I carried out a reading project on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. I chose this particular novel because I had already read it with a 10PS in 2006/2007 and I had mostly got positive feedback from these students. Moreover, I judged that the level of difficulty was appropriate and I believed that autism was a topic that would catch students' interest. The project stretched over a period of 8 weeks and included various cooperative learning methods. Initially, I had planned to cover the book in 7 lessons but as students often came to class unprepared I had to extend the project to 9 lessons. It would, however, be beyond the scope of this *Travail de Candidature*

to outline and analyse each of these lessons. In appendix 23 all the relevant worksheets can be consulted and appendix 24 is a compilation of various student productions. Here is a brief overview of the different lessons, its main activities, its objectives and the methods used.

<i>THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME</i>			
Lesson Date	Chapters	Activities / Objectives	Methods
Lesson 1: 22.04	Introduction - What is autism?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - short video clip about autism - brainstorm symptoms - write a definition - analysis of 'That Asperger Kid' by Dave Spicer - write their own poems on autism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RoundRobin - Think-Write RoundRobin - Teacher fronted - Poems for Two Voices (pair work)
Lesson 2: 29.04	Chapters 2-73	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analysis of the narrative structure - character analysis - summary of the main plot - basic comprehension 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - RoundRobin - Think-Write-RoundRobin - Think-Write-RoundRobin - Pairs Compare
Lesson 3: 06.05	Chapters 79-139	the majority of the students hadn't read the chapters at home, so we read them together in class	- Plenary
Lesson 4: 13.05	Chapters 79-139	- comprehension questions	- Card game
Lesson 5: 20.05	Chapters 149-179	- analysis of the main characters' motivation (Christopher and his father)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think-Write-RoundRobin - Pairs Compare
Lesson 6: 27.05	Chapters 149-179	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - analysis of the main characters' motivation (Christopher and his mother) -role-play: chat show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think-Write-RoundRobin - Pairs Compare - Group work
Lesson 7: 03.06	Chapters 181-199	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - personalizing the reading process: which things would you pack if you decided to run away? - summary of Christopher's journey - discussion of religion and Darwinism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AllWrite Consensus (teambuilding) -Group work scrapped as once again students were unprepared

Lesson 8: 06.06	Chapters 179-227	- exploring Christopher's physical and mental journey	Interviews: student A and student B were holding different information which they had to exchange to complete the task
Lesson 9: 17.06	Chapters 211-233	- summary of the main events - round-up of the novel and review of the main topics	- Find-the-Fiction (pair work) - Freeze frames (group work) - Placemat activity scrapped as students were not motivated to participate

E. Analysis and conclusion

Integrating cooperative learning in the T2CM1 proved to be a much a more difficult endeavour than I had anticipated. This is due to a variety of different factors, which are examined more closely in the following section.

First of all, having read up on the Jigsaw method during the summer break, I was eager to experiment with this method in my class. That is why I started using it immediately at the beginning of the first term. However, I completely neglected to teach and **practise small group skills beforehand**. Considering their age and maturity, I simply assumed that students would know how to share information and discuss ideas in small groups. With hindsight, it can be argued that this was a rather naive expectation. It merely showed that I still had not understood the importance of preparing the ground for cooperative learning. I was not really aware of the fact that students needed to be taught to work together in small incremental steps.

It remains a puzzle why some teachers implement cooperative learning models or activities without heeding the need to gradually lay the groundwork for successful social interaction and cooperative behaviours, as is universally recommended.

(Y. Sharan, 2010:309)

On the one hand, it can thus be argued that I had not sufficiently prepared my students for the Jigsaw method. Effectively, this is confirmed by some of the observations I made during the group work activities. Students did not wait their turn to talk, nor did they listen to their students or encourage their participation. However, this might have been partly avoided if I had given **clearer instructions** and had offered **more guidance** during the different phases. In a student survey carried out on 12th November 2013³⁹ some students stated that they did not always know what they were supposed to

³⁹ appendix 20: Student Survey T2CM1 - Cooperative Learning 1 (12.11.13)

do. Consequently, they did not stay on task and started talking about different matters. As pointed out in the survey, students did not take the task seriously and refused to prepare their texts in depth. The background noise levels gradually increased to an unacceptable level, a fact also deplored by five students.

On the other hand, however, I want to argue that my students were so used to being spoon-fed information by their teacher that they simply felt overwhelmed with the task of analysing texts themselves. In contrast to the students in the 8STP1 and the 8STP4, who were used to working autonomously thanks to the project TIM, the students in the T2CM1 could not handle this much freedom in a productive way. I realized this when one student confessed that she had not enjoyed the Jigsaw lesson because she felt that she had not learnt anything that day. It thus became evident that most students neither had confidence in their own abilities nor in the abilities of their teammates. In the student survey four students stated that one disadvantage of cooperative learning was that it was difficult for those students who weren't good at English. In anticipation of the cooperative reading project in the third term, I thus decided to develop my students' self-confidence and their self-esteem through a more thorough focus on the Think-Pair-Share principle.

In addition, considering the fact that they were used to being taught in a teacher-centred environment, they firmly believed that only the teacher could transmit knowledge. This approach to learning was so deeply ingrained in their thinking that it was difficult to change their habits in just a few cooperative learning lessons. I got the impression that they sincerely believed I introduced the group work activities so that I could relax during the lessons while they were doing all the work. They simply did not grasp the advantages of cooperative learning and the benefits they would get from working things out in cooperation with their peers.

Notwithstanding the fact that I had not adequately prepared my students for cooperative learning, they were a class of rather unmotivated and passive students. This opinion was shared by the majority of their teachers. Their lack of motivation was a situation that we often discussed during the *conseils de classe*. Whereas a lot of them were playing truant on a regular basis, others systematically came to class unprepared and unwilling to participate. Although group work in general and cooperative learning in particular supposedly foster student motivation, I am convinced that students need to possess a minimum of **intrinsic motivation** to learn new things in the first place. Effectively, in private talks with some students I learnt that they did not consider English to be important because they had other subjects they wanted to focus on, e.g., economics and accounting. They estimated that in the worst-case scenario they could still compensate their insufficient mark in English.

Unfortunately, the cooperative reading project on the *Curious incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* showed that I had not managed to completely change their habits nor to increase their motivation to work. Nevertheless, I observed some improvements in my students' small group skills. This is

probably due to the fact that I had regularly integrated the Think-Pair and to a lesser extent also the Think-Pair-Share principle into traditional lessons. My students now actually waited their turn to talk and listened to their teammates when they wanted to share an idea. This observation is confirmed by students' own reflections in a student survey carried out on 30th June 2014⁴⁰. Moreover, throughout the second term they had become familiar with some of Kagan's cooperative learning structures. If I told them, for example that we were going to do a RallyRobin, a Think-RoundRobin or a RoundTable Consensus they knew what they were expected to do. This is why I also integrated these terms on the worksheets accompanying the study of the *Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nigh-Time*.

The introductory lesson on autism was a relative success compared to the Jigsaw projects. I managed to catch students' interest by showing them a short awareness raising video on autism. After that they actively participated in a cooperative activity aimed at recalling and summarising the symptoms of autism (Think-Write RoundRobin). In small groups they came up with very good definitions of this rare spectrum disease. I was also impressed by the small poems they wrote in pairs. To reward their work and to express my recognition for their efforts, I even got their poems published in the school magazine. The students themselves were quite proud of their achievement and this raised my hopes with regard to the rest of the project.

In general, however, I failed to successfully integrate cooperative learning in the reading project because students were not motivated to read the book. In an anonymous survey carried out on 26th June 2014⁴¹ 13 out of 21 students confessed that they had not read the book. Consequently, these students could not actively participate in the cooperative learning activities unless the task's focus was so general that students could complete it without having read the relevant chapters. That is why towards the end of the project, I included cooperative learning structures such as Find-the-Fiction, Interviews and Freeze Frames, and I provided all the material, e.g. summaries and short abstracts, which were needed to complete these tasks. Nevertheless, in the student survey some students described the lessons as 'boring' and their teammates as 'annoying'. Again, I believe this can be explained through their general lack of motivation and their refusal or inability to understand the advantages of cooperative learning.

Another aspect that I want to draw attention to is their general complacency. In the student survey, 11 students disagreed with the statement that they were 'well-prepared for each lesson because they did not want to let their peers down'. This means that they did not care whether they 'sank or swam together' and thus the concepts of positive interdependence and individual accountability were meaningless to them. They simply did not care whether they got a good grade and they did not see the need to support their classmates in their learning process.

⁴⁰ appendix 26: Student Survey T2CM1 - Cooperative Learning 2 (30.0614)

⁴¹ appendix 25: Student Survey T2CM1 - Reading Habits (26.06.14)

Finally, I resigned because I came to the conclusion that the majority of them prefer attending a traditional teacher-centred English lesson. This conclusion is supported by the answers the students gave in the survey on cooperative learning (appendix 26). Only 5 students believed that they can achieve more in small groups and 11 students disagreed with the statement that they are 'more focused on the task during cooperative learning lessons than during traditional teacher-centred lessons.' I want to argue that they like the traditional approach to teaching better because then they do not have to actively participate in the lesson and they can passively await the end of the lesson.

In a nutshell, it can thus be argued that the integration of cooperative learning in the T2CM1 did not work because the traditional approach to learning was so deeply embedded in their thinking and habits that they felt uncomfortable to work in small groups. On top of that, they simply seemed to be tired of school, which is an attitude that I did not manage to change.

5. Cooperative Learning: 2014/2015 - 9STP2

A. Classroom setting and learning environment

This section outlines the way cooperative learning has been integrated in the 9STP2. It is a class *avancé*, which consists of 25 students (17 boys and 8 girls). Students of an *avancé* class, typically attend a section *technique* or a section *technicien* the following year. About half of these students had been in the 8STP4 the previous academic year and were thus familiar with my teaching style in general and cooperative learning structures in particular. Their level of proficiency is adequate and they are generally motivated to learn new things and to participate in classroom activities.

I teach the 9STP2 in a double lesson on Tuesday mornings (08h00-10h00), in a single lesson on Thursday afternoons (12h00-13h00) and in a double lesson on Friday mornings (08h00-10h00). On Tuesday afternoons, we spend one hour on *Tutorat* and one hour on TIM (12h00-14h00). During the TIM lesson, their mathematics teacher and I provided help and guidance while they are working autonomously on their respective *dossiers*.

During the *Tutorat* I guide my students in their choice of studies for the following year. We review possible jobs on the basis of both their academic achievement and their individual interests. They have been taught how to write a *curriculum vitae* and a motivation letter. These lessons also provide plenty of opportunities to integrate class- and teambuilding activities, an aspect that is very important in a cooperative classroom and that will be further examined in the analytical part of this section. The fact that I see my students so frequently has enabled us to develop a very close and trusting relationship, which I believe has proven to be beneficial to the integration of cooperative learning.

Moreover, my students have participated in various extra-curricular activities: In December, they raised money for Amnesty International by selling candles and throughout the year, they collected

money to partly finance their field trip to *Rügen*, an island in Germany. They made cookies for Christmas, they sold cake during the breaks, they decorated eggs for Easter and they are going to actively participate in the organisation of the *porte ouverte* at the LTB. The fact that my students are involved in so many projects outside the regular school hours certainly has an impact on the way cooperative learning is enacted and experienced in this class.

In the first part of the subsequent section, I am going to describe two sample cooperative learning lessons that are entirely based on the coursebook *English File Pre-Intermediate* (OUP, 2012). In the analytical part, these two lessons can then be juxtaposed with the cooperative learning lessons carried out in 8STP1 (2012/2013) and the 8STP4 (2012/2013). I intend to draw on similarities, differences and areas of improvement. In the second part of this section, I am going to outline the reading project, which was tailored around the *Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington. Again, I mean to juxtapose this project with the reading project implemented in the T2CM1 (2012/2014) in order to draw relevant conclusions with regard to successfully integrating cooperative learning.

B. Lesson 1: What are they going to do?

This lesson took place on 25th November 2014 and was observed by my tutor Andrée Margue⁴². Its general objectives were to consolidate the use of 'to be going to' to talk about future plans and to foster students' communication and social skills. The subordinate objectives were furthering students' listening skills and broadening students' vocabulary to report and write about individual people's plans. The focus was on vocabulary related to airports, travelling and NGOs (Non-Governmental Organisations). In terms of Kagan's cooperative learning structures, I mainly used 'RoundRobin' to encourage students to take turns and 'RoundTable Consensus' to foster students' discussion and argumentative skills. Students had well defined roles, which were attributed randomly⁴³. Moreover, in order to encourage student motivation and participation, I set the lesson against the background of a kind of group tournament. This means that each task was presented as a challenge in which the different groups were competing against each other.

At the beginning of the lesson every student received a coloured card and the roles attributed to each card were projected via projector (pink - recorder, yellow - quiet captain, blue - checker, and green - focus keeper). Students were familiar with these roles and the 'coloured card' system as they had already been used on a regular basis. I always made sure to match a different role with each card to avoid students anticipating and exchanging their roles before the activities started.

The **first challenge** provided a link with the previous lesson, in which students had acquired new vocabulary related to airports and travelling. The aim was to write down as many relevant words as possible within a fairly short time frame. In order to score points the words needed to be spelled

⁴² appendix 27: Lesson Plan 9STP2 (25.11.14)

⁴³ appendix 28: Colours and roles

correctly. Students first got 30 seconds to brainstorm words on their own (think time) and then they got one minute to share their ideas with the group (RoundRobin). They had to take turns reading out their list (one word at a time) and only the recorder was allowed to write down the final list on a piece of scrap paper. The 'checker' was in charge of monitoring the words for correct spelling and the 'quiet captain' had to remind students to use their 'quiet' voice. As the activity was tightly timed students did not veer away from the task and the focus keeper was not required to intervene. In the end, the teacher selected random students to share their list with the class and all the words were copied on the blackboard. Groups were not allowed to complement their lists, which they handed in to me for evaluation.

In order to prepare students for the upcoming listening task in which three people were going to talk about their future plans⁴⁴, I decided to pre-teach the expression 'non-governmental organization'. **The second challenge** consisted in identifying the logos of famous NGOs (Amnesty International, Red Cross, Greenpeace, UNICEF, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, and WWF). This activity proved to be much more difficult than I had anticipated. Whereas most groups identified WWF and the Red Cross, they did not recognize or even know the other ones. I thus spent more time than planned on presenting the different NGOs and their objectives in a teacher fronted approach. I especially focused on Amnesty International as it had been a tradition at the LTB to sell candles to raise awareness of human rights across the world. As a matter of fact, the following week an entire lesson was tailored around Amnesty International and my students agreed to selling the candles to the teachers of the LTB. They actually managed to raise 152€ in just two days.

Preparing the ground for the next challenge, students were asked to describe the picture on page 20 of their coursebook (appendix 29). Using iTools (the electronic version of the coursebook), I zoomed in the picture of Lily, Matthew and Olivia, who were waiting in the departure lounge at the airport. In a plenary session, a few students were called upon to describe what the people looked like and what they were wearing. They were also encouraged to speculate about their age and job. **The third challenge** then consisted in guessing what each of these people was going to do. First each student wrote down his or her idea (Think) and then they shared their ideas with the group (RoundRobin). Finally, they had to discuss their ideas and decide on the group's best guess, which the recorder wrote down on a piece of scrap paper (RoundTable Consensus). Ms Margue and I observed the groups and took notes using a specifically designed teacher observation sheet⁴⁵. We focused on the following aspects: taking turns, listening to each other, using the target language, helping each other, and staying on task. To round up this activity, each group explained what they thought the three travellers were going to do next. They needed to be able to justify their answer.

⁴⁴ appendix 29: Plans and Dreams - Student's Book p.20

⁴⁵ appendix 30: Teacher Observation Sheet

The **fourth challenge**, which was based on the listening activity, took place in the following lesson. Unfortunately, Ms Margue could not stay to help me observe my students' behaviour in this second part of the lesson, which put an extra strain on me. In a first step students listened to Olivia, Lily and Matthew talking about their plans and dreams. While they were listening they took notes about relevant details. In a next step students compared and complemented their notes (RoundRobin). They checked each other's understanding of the main ideas and provided explanations when necessary. The actual challenge now consisted in formulating a coherent text that summarises Matthew and Olivia's plans. I showed them a model answer outlining Lily's plans so that they knew what I expected from them⁴⁶. I repeatedly insisted on the correct use of the form of 'to be going to' as this was the main objective of this lesson. The recorder wrote down the final text but everyone had to make a contribution to the final version. The quiet captain, checker and focus keeper were reminded to assume their responsibility and take their 'job' seriously. I did not intervene directly but I took notes about their behaviour during the completion of the task. In the end, I collected each group's work for later evaluation.

Towards the end of the lesson, students were asked to fill in a reflection sheet on which they rated their own as well as their teammates' cooperation in the group⁴⁷. They had to evaluate the same aspects - i.e., taking turns, listening to each other, speaking English, helping each other, and staying on task - as the teacher observed during their group work. I used both my students' self-evaluation and the observations made by Ms Margue and myself to assess their mastery of social skills⁴⁸. Finally, in order to determine which group(s) won the group tournament, I looked both at their performance during the four different challenges and their use of the social skills⁴⁹. Surprisingly, the group with the highest performance in the challenges did not exhibit the best social skills. There were thus two winning groups and their respective prize was a tablet of chocolate.

C. Lesson 2: Talking about the future

This lesson took place on the 6th January 2015⁵⁰. It constituted the sequel to the group tournament that is outlined in the previous section. This time there were three challenges and once again the use of their social skills played an important part. The lesson's overall objective was to introduce the use of will/won't to talk about the future and to consolidate the use of 'to be going to' and the present continuous. By the end of the lesson, students should be able to make a distinction between a future plan, a prediction and a future arrangement. Another main objective was to develop students' communication and social skills. Subordinate aims were fostering students' listening skills and broadening their vocabulary. Using Kagan's terminology the following structures were integrated:

⁴⁶ appendix 31: Lily's Plans - Model Answer

⁴⁷ appendix 32: Student Reflection Sheet (26.11.14)

⁴⁸ appendix 33: Evaluation of Social Skills - Group Tournament 1

⁴⁹ appendix 34: Final Evaluation - Group Tournament 1

⁵⁰ appendix 35: Lesson Plan 9STP2 (06.01.15)

Three-Step Interview to further students' listening and communication skills; RoundTable to guarantee equal participation; and RallyCoach to encourage students to help each other in their learning process.

To start off the lesson each student received a coloured card and the roles were administered. I told my students that they could take revenge that day by winning the group tournament. Again the prize was going to be a delicious tablet of chocolate. I added that, in contrast to the previous tournament, we were not going to talk about other's people's future but about more general future predictions. I then briefly revised and elicited the different uses of the 'going to' future and the present continuous before drawing a schema on the blackboard.

The **first challenge** consisted in pairs interviewing each other about their future plans and arrangements. Then they had to report the information to the other teammates (three-step interview). My students were already familiar with this cooperative learning structure as it had been used on several occasions. Although only the 'recorder' had to write down everything that was reported, the other team members needed to stay alert and assist him. The 'checker' closely monitored his or her work and suggested changes when necessary. The 'quiet captain' insisted on keeping the noise level low and the 'focus keeper' made sure their teammates did not digress from the task at hand. I observed each group for about two minutes and took notes about their interaction and cooperation. After 20 minutes, I collected each group's work for later evaluation. However, I also called upon random students to tell the class what they had learnt about their teammates. This way I could check whether students had actually listened to all the teammates and not just their interview partner.

In preparation for the **second challenge**, students needed to acquire and rehearse new vocabulary. They were instructed to match a list of 13 verbs and pictures before identifying the opposite meaning of these verbs⁵¹. Then students got 2 minutes to memorise the verbs and their opposites and 3 more minutes to rehearse the new vocabulary in pairs (RallyCoach). When the time was up, students were ordered to close their books and the actual challenge was explained: students were shown flashcards⁵² of the pictures (iTools) and taking turns they then had to write down the corresponding verbs and their opposites. There was only one piece of paper and each student used a different coloured pen to write the verbs down. This way positive interdependence was ensured and visualised for the teacher. Before handing in their piece of scrap paper, everyone was instructed to help the 'checker' identify possible mistakes. As it was a group product, everyone needed to agree on the final version.

In the second part of this lesson students were introduced to the form and use of the 'will' future to make general predictions. To catch students' attention and to visualize the concepts of pessimism and

⁵¹ appendix 36: Opposite Verbs - Student's Book p.157

⁵² appendix 37: Flashcard - Opposite Verbs (iTools)

optimism students had to describe and comment on a cartoon depicting two fish in a half empty / half full glass⁵³. Then to personalise the learning process, students took turns telling their group members whether they thought they were optimists or pessimists using a concrete example from their life (RoundRobin). To ensure individual accountability random students were asked to report what their teammates had said.

Next, students had to complete activity 2.b in their coursebook on page 44 (appendix 38). The task consisted in matching pessimistic responses to statements like 'I'm doing my driving test this afternoon.' Students then listened to the correct answers before underlining *will* or *won't* in each sentence. I then elicited the use of *will* to talk about general predictions by juxtaposing sentences with the *going to* future. Finally, I referred students to the Grammar Bank on page 136 of their coursebook, where the difference between *will* and *going to* was explained in more detail.

Students got about 3 minutes to read through the grammar (Think) before doing the related gap-filling exercises on page 137⁵⁴ of their coursebook. The exercises were completed using the cooperative structure RallyCoach. Student A read out the first sentence and student B listened, checked and coached when necessary. Then student B took the next sentence and student A listened, checked and coached. This process was repeated until there were no more sentences left. The final correction was done via iTools in a plenary sentence.

Finally, the **third challenge** was introduced. In a first step each student had to write down optimistic responses to the given statements (Think) and then, in a second step, they had to share their ideas with the group (RoundRobin). The main difficulty consisted in agreeing on the best or most original response for each statement. The 'recorder' wrote down the final version and the 'checker' looked out for possible spelling mistakes. Their answers were collected for later evaluation.

At the end of the lesson, students had to fill in the same reflection form as for the previous 'group tournament'. This allowed me to evaluate possible progress in their mastery of the social skills⁵⁵.

D. Lesson sequence: Rabbit-Proof Fence

The reading project on *Rabbit-Proof Fence* by Doris Pilkington took place within the context of a nationwide reading project: *Reesen (m)am Buch*. The idea is to familiarise students with different cultures and/or countries through literary works. In total 12 different classes, ranging from 7^{ème}-10^{ème}, have participated in this project at the LTB. The students' posters will be exhibited at the LTB on the 22nd April 2015, the World Book Day, and the 3 best posters will be awarded a prize.

⁵³ appendix 38: Are you a pessimist? - Student's Book p.44

⁵⁴ appendix 39: Grammar Bank - Student's Book p.137

⁵⁵ appendix 40: Final Evaluation - Group Tournament 2

I chose the novel *Rabbit-Proof Fence* for various reasons. First of all, it deals with a highly interesting topic, namely the Aborigines and the Stolen Generation. The main protagonists are children and I thus believed that my students could easily relate to the anxiety experienced by the Aboriginal girls when they were removed from their families. Secondly, it is based on a true story, which definitely adds to its appeal. Thirdly, the story is set in Australia, a country that I thought would awaken students' curiosity. Finally, this novel is available as a graded reader (stage 3) and thus at an adequate level of difficulty for my students.

The project stretched over a period of 3 weeks, including a one-week holiday. In contrast to the reading project carried out in the T2CM1 (2013/2014), this reading project consisted entirely of group work and thus put more emphasis on students' autonomy and creativity. One could argue that this time a more holistic approach to cooperative learning was implemented.

The first lesson took place on 10th February 2015, shortly before the carnival break (16-02-20.02). In this lesson students received a project guide, summarizing the different steps⁵⁶ of the project. The next section outlines these different steps as well as the related teaching and learning methods.

<i>RABBIT-PROOF FENCE</i>		
Lesson / Date	Activities	Methods
Lessons 1 & 2: 10.02	<i>First part:</i> - project guide <i>Second part:</i> (computer room) - webquest about Australia	- teacher fronted - pair work (clearly defined roles: 'computer guru' and 'assistant')
Lessons 3 & 4: 13.02	<i>First part:</i> - Groups designed a poster about Australia using the information gathered during the webquest <i>Second Part:</i> - Poster presentations	- Pairs Compare - RoundTable Consensus -Group work
Carnival break: 16.02-20.02	Students read the novel <i>Rabbit-Proof Fence</i> at home and completed the 'after-reading' activities on pages 63-65.	
Lessons 5 & 6: 24.02	<i>First part:</i> - Correction of homework / answer key provided by the teacher: each student is	- RoundRobin

⁵⁶ appendix 41: Rabbit-Proof Fence - project guide

	responsible for reading the answers to one part of the homework ⁵⁷ - Comprehension questions ⁵⁸ - Reading about the author, the story of her family and the film adaptation & formulation of team statements ⁵⁹ <i>Second part:</i> - Gather ideas for the poster - Designing the poster	- Pair work / Pairs Compare - Think-RoundRobin - Group work - Clearly defined roles ⁶⁰ - Placemat ⁶¹ - Group Work
Lesson 7 & 8: 26.02	- Groups team up to practise their presentations and get feedback	- Team-2-Team presentations ⁶² - Team-2-Team feedback ⁶³
Lesson 9: 27.02	<i>First Part:</i> - Poster Presentations <i>Second Part:</i> - Self-reflection forms: students' individual efforts & teamwork ⁶⁴ - Comprehension test ⁶⁵	- Group work - Individual work - Individual work
Lesson 10: 10.03	Students got feedback on their project. They were evaluated on their presentation skills, their social skills during group work activities and their comprehension of the novel. They received both individual and team marks. ⁶⁶	

E. Analysis and conclusion

Considering the fact that 13 out of 25 students were already familiar with cooperative learning, I was able to integrate cooperative learning in week 2 of the first term. When I formed the groups I always made sure that in each group there were two students of the 8STP4, which could coach and guide the students who were new to this approach to learning. Furthermore, as the students of the two classes did not really know each other at the beginning of the term this presented an excellent opportunity for bonding.

⁵⁷ appendix 42: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Instructions 1 (Blackboard)
⁵⁸ appendix 43: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Comprehension Questions
⁵⁹ appendix 44: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team Statements (Blackboard)
⁶⁰ appendix 45: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Roles
⁶¹ appendix 46: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Instructions 2 (Blackboard)
⁶² appendix 47: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team-2-Team (Instructions)
⁶³ appendix 48: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Team-2-Team (Feedback)
⁶⁴ appendix 50: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Reflection Forms
⁶⁵ appendix 49: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Comprehension Test
⁶⁶ appendix 51: Rabbit-Proof Fence - Final Evaluation

The fact that I was not only their English teacher but also their form teacher entailed that I had a supplementary lesson per week in which I could integrate teambuilding activities. So far example, I spent one of the very first *Tutorat* lessons on creating team identities. I told them that they were going to spend a month on a lonely island with only their teammates for company. There were no houses, no hotels, no running water and no electricity. They then had to decide on a list of 10 items (10 items per group and not 10 items each!) that they could take to the island. I told them that they had to do this following the Think-Pair-Share principle. However instead of me presenting this method to the new students I asked the students of the 8STP4 to explain it to their peers. These activities were done in Luxembourgish as its primary aim was not to develop their speaking skills but their communication and argumentation skills. They got engaged in lively discussions and they were obviously having fun. At the end of the lesson they also had to come up with a name representing their group. Again I asked each individual student to brainstorm possible names before they shared their ideas and reached a consensus at the end.

From then on I integrated cooperative learning every Tuesday morning (08h00 - 10h00). My students got used to this routine very quickly and the desks had always been arranged accordingly when I arrived in the classroom at 8 o'clock. These lessons were very similar to the cooperative learning lessons that I had planned and applied in the previous academic year but there were also changes and improvements.

First of all, I started using Kagan's terminology more systematically. I would, for example, tell my students that the next activity was done using Think-Write RoundRobin or RallyTable. This lent more structure to the lesson and helped me during the planning and preparation phase. Secondly, I regularly insisted on sharing resources, e.g, using one piece of paper or handing out one answer key. This way the principle of positive interdependence was systematically implemented and assured. Thirdly, I used inter-group competitions to further motivation and make the lessons more interesting. This method strengthened their feeling of being dependent on each other's contributions and they were even more motivated to reach a common goal. Fourthly, I always assigned clear roles at the beginning of the lesson using the 'coloured cards' system. This considerably improved classroom management. I rarely had to remind my students to use their quiet voice and they stayed focused on the task most of the time. And last but not least, I occasionally asked students to reflect both on their own and their teammates' behaviour during the group work activities. This raised students' awareness of the importance of the social skills and encouraged them to use them even more systematically. In addition, I made a point of sporadically observing and evaluating their social skills. However, this was a very tedious process, which put an extra strain on me as I had to simultaneously monitor their work and provide guidance when necessary. I believe that all these factors have contributed to a positive and constructive learning environment.

I would like to argue that most of the students of the 9STP2 had internalised the principles of cooperative learning. This was obvious during the implementation of the reading project on *The Rabbit-Proof Fence*. In contrast to the students in the T2CM1, all of them had read the book and they worked autonomously on the project most of the time. I integrated plenary sessions at specific moments to check students' comprehension of the different tasks, give further instructions, clarify previous instructions and monitor the groups' progress. The project guide, which they received at the beginning of the lesson sequence, gave them the opportunity to organize themselves very rigorously. Moreover, the fact that they had to assign individual roles and individual responsibilities before the implementation of their project (appendix 45) ensured that they closely identified with their role and took their work seriously. This project also developed their creativity and fostered their analytical and synthesising skills. Finally, I believe that the prospect of having their work exhibited at the LTB spurred them on to create attractive posters. This is in line with the common belief that external rewards, other than summative marks, can have a positive effect on the students' motivation.

Furthermore, I believe that cooperative learning had a positive influence on their attitude towards school and learning in general. Effectively, I received a lot of positive feedback from their other teachers. Their History teacher, who teaches several 9STP classes this year, confirmed that they are more motivated to study and generally participate more than the other classes. Moreover, less classroom management problems were reported than in other parallel classes. Similarly, their German and Maths teacher stated that the students were very engaged during group work activities in their respective subject areas.

Besides, they also showed a sense of shared responsibility when they organised extra-curricular activities such as making and selling cakes. This project stretched over a period of 6 weeks and each team was allotted one week in which they alone were responsible for the 'business'. It needs to be pointed out that I did not actively help them with organizing and implementing this project, I merely provided guidance during the *Tutorat* lessons. I made suggestions which they could either accept or reject and I provided answers if they had any questions. The project was finished one week ago and they managed to collect about 300€. They were very proud of their achievement, which in turn had a positive effect on their class identity in general and their team identity in particular.

VII. CONCLUSION

Johnson and Johnson finish their book *New Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the Classroom and School* (1994) with the following personal address to the reader / teacher: 'Having read this book, you are now at the beginning'. I have to admit that I was shocked when I first read this. But essentially, they were right and I realized that I still had a long way to go with the deadline of this dissertation approaching fast. I experienced a lot of frustrations when the hours I had spent in my office preparing elaborate cooperative lessons did not pay off. Fortunately, there were also many rewarding lessons and the feedback I received from my students confirmed that I was on the right track. I had to continually remind myself that teaching is an on-going process of trial and error.

Fortunately, I do not think that I am still at the beginning. I have been experimenting with different cooperative learning methods in different classes over the past three years. However, I must admit that I am still far away from calling myself an expert in cooperative learning. I have encountered many of the pitfalls outlined in the theoretical part of this dissertation. Writing this *travail de candidature* has raised my awareness of these pitfalls and has helped me to identify the key factors that contribute to a successful integration of cooperative learning in an EFL classroom. In response to my central research question I have identified the following main components:

1. The teacher needs to understand the main principles of cooperative learning, i.e. positive interdependence and individual accountability and be able to apply them.
2. Cooperative learning needs to be introduced gradually. In other words, complex cooperative structures should not be integrated until students have gained a firm grasp of the basic Think-Pair-Share principle.
3. Students need to be taught to work cooperatively as this is not a natural behaviour of human beings. Social skills like taking turns, listening to each other, showing mutual respect and helping each other need to be regularly practised.
4. The attribution of clear roles ensures positive interdependence and enhances classroom management.
5. At the beginning students need a lot of guidance and close monitoring. Clear instructions and structured lessons are thus of the utmost importance.
6. Teambuilding activities further the students' motivation to work cooperatively.
7. Cooperative learning structures and methods need to be selected carefully to meet both the task requirements and the students' particular needs.
8. Regular self-reflection both on the part of the teacher and the students improves the quality of the cooperative learning process.
9. Teachers need to be patient and persevering as the successful integration of cooperative learning is a long-term project.
10. Students need to be motivated to learn new things and be ready to take on new challenges.

Finally, I believe it is also necessary to draw attention to the importance of the institutional context and the teaching values that are deeply embedded within it. The shape that cooperative learning takes in any class or school is always dependent on the values that both teachers and students have internalized. I consider myself lucky to have the opportunity to work in a school that advocates change and encourages the use of new teaching methods. The project TIM (*Tutorat und integriertes Methodenerlernen*), which has applied the cornerstones of the educational philosophy at the *Lycée Technique de Bonnevoie* since 2006, encourages teachers to substitute teacher-fronted lessons with student-centred activities. Its main objective is to further student autonomy through the use of more varied teaching methods. As a consequence, many of the students that I have taught had already been familiar with cooperative methods or had at least been used to working in groups. However, in order to maximize the benefits of cooperative learning, the method would need to be used much more rigorously and regularly across all grades and subject areas. This, in turn, would require extensive teacher training programmes and the willingness of the teachers to sacrifice their free time to the preparation of cooperative lessons, ideally within the framework of a cooperative collegial team.

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALPORT, G.W. *The nature of prejudice*, Cambridge, MA, 1954
- ANDERSON, Lorin; KRATWOHL, David; AIRASIAN, Peter (eds.) *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, Longman 2000
- ARONSON, Elliott; GOOD, E. 'Training teachers to implement jigsaw learning: A manual for teachers' in Sharan, S.; Hare, P.; Webb C.; and Hertz-Lazarowitz (eds.) *Cooperation in Education* (pp.47-81), Brigham Young University Press, Provo 1980
- BRÜNING, Ludger und SAMU, Tobias 'Schule für Kooperative Lernformen fit machen' - <https://www.iqesonline.net/index.cfm?id=aef19e37-1517-6203-60e6-e0369cbc9154> (accessed 18.02.2014)
- BUMB, Christoph 'Die Schwarz-Weiß-Demokratie: Luxemburg fehlt traditionell eine vernünftige politische Debattenkultur', *Luxemburger Wort*, 26. Oktober 2014
'<http://www.wort.lu/de/politik/analyse-die-schwarz-weiss-demokratie-544d38d7b9b398870807f4b8>'
- CLARKE, Judy 'Pieces of the Puzzle: The Jigsaw Method' in SHARAN, Shlomo (ed.) *Handbook of cooperative learning Methods*, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut 1994
- DOISE, W. and MUGNY, G. *The social development of intellect* Pergamon, New York 1984
- GILLIES, Robyn and ASHMAN, Adran (eds.) *Co-operative Learning: the social and intellectual outcomes of learning in groups*, Routledge Farmer, London 2003
- GILLIES, Robyn *cooperative learning: Integrating Theory and Practice*, Sage Publications, California 2007
- HARMER, Jeremy *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, Longman, Essex 2001
- HIGH, Julie, *Second Language Learning through cooperative learning*, Kagan Publishing, California 1993
- JOHNSON, David & JOHNSON, Roger 'Chapter 9: Student motivation in co-operative groups - social interdependence theory' in Gillies, Robyn and Ashman, Adran (eds.) *Co-operative Learning: the social and intellectual outcomes of learning in groups*, Routledge Farmer, London 2003
- JOHNSON, David and JOHNSON, Roger 'Chapter 4: Learning Together' in Sahran, Shlomo (ed.) *Handbook of cooperative learning Methods*, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut 1994c
- JOHNSON, David and JOHNSON, Roger 'New Developments in Social Interdependence Theory' in *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 131(4), 2005
- JOHNSON, David; JOHNSON, Roger; and HOLUBEC, Edythe *cooperative learning in the Classroom*, ASCD, Virginia, 1994a
- JOHNSON, David; JOHNSON, Roger; and HOLUBEC, Edythe *The New Circles of Learning: Cooperation in the classroom and school*, ASCD, Virginia 1994b
- JOLLIFFE, Wendy *cooperative learning in the Classroom: Putting it into practice*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London 2007
- KAGAN, Spencer and KAGAN, Miguel 'Chapter 8: The Structural Approach: Six Keys to cooperative learning' in Sahran, Shlomo (ed.) *Handbook of cooperative learning Methods*, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut 1994
- KAGAN, Spencer *cooperative learning*, Kagan Publishing, California, 2009
- MCCAFFERTY, Steven; JACOBS, George; and DA SILVY IDDINGS, Ana Christina (eds.), *cooperative learning and Second Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2006
- MURRAY, F. B. 'Teaching through social conflict' in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 7, (pp. 257-271), 1982

- RATHS, Tom 'L'apprentissage autoguidé en mathématiques: Comment mettre en oeuvre cette approche pédagogique au cours du cycle inférieur?', Travail de Candidature, Luxembourg 2009
- SAGOR, Richard *Guiding school improvement with action research*, e-book, ASCD, 2000
- SHACHAR, Hanna 'Chapter 7: Who gains what from co-operative learning: An overview of eight studies' in Gillies, Robyn and Ashman, Adran (eds.) *Co-operative Learning: the social and intellectual outcomes of learning in groups*, Routledge Falmer, London 2003
- SHARAN, Shlomo (ed.) *Handbook of cooperative learning Methods*, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut 1994
- SHARAN, Yael 'cooperative learning for Academic and Social Gains: valued pedagogy, problematic practice' in *European Journal of Education* 45, 2010, 300-313
- SLAVIN, Robert *cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice*, 2nd edition, Allyn & Bacon, Boston 1995
- SLAVIN, Robert 'cooperative learning: Where behavioral and humanistic approaches to classroom motivation meet' in *The Elementary School Journal*, Vol.88, No.1, September 1987
- STANAT, P et al. 'PISA 2000: Overview of the study', Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin 2002, 'https://www.mpib-berlin.mpg.de/Pisa/PISA-2000_Overview.pdf' (accessed 18.02.2014)
- SURGENOR, Paul 'Teaching Toolkit: How students learn 2', '<http://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/UCDTLT0017.pdf>' (accessed 16.01.2015)
- VERMETTE, Paul & FOOTE, Chandra 'Constructivist Philosophy and cooperative learning Practice: Toward Integration and Reconciliation in Secondary Classrooms' in *American Secondary Education*, Vol.30, No.1, Fall 2001
- WEIDNER, Margit *Kooperatives Lernen im Unterricht: Das Arbeitsbuch*, Klett, Bobingen 2003
- WEIS, Luc 'TIM vademecum', LTB, April 2011

IX. APPENDICES