ROLE OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF 5TH GRADERS' SPEAKING SKILLS AT GEORGE WASHINGTON SCHOOL

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LICENCIATURA EN LENGUA CASTELLANA, INGLÉS Y FRANCÉS

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DEDICATORIA

…"La gloria del mundo es transitoria, y no es ella la que nos da la dimensión de nuestra vida, sino la elección que hacemos de seguir nuestra leyenda personal, tener fe en nuestras utopías y luchar por nuestros sueños"….

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present action research study was to investigate the role of cooperative learning strategies in the development of 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School. To achieve this, the researchers of this project based on literature review and related studies to choose accuracy, fluency and pronunciation as the main speaking micro-skills to work with 35 students from whom we took a sample population of 15 learners. Besides this, to carry out this research project we implemented a pre and post test to evaluate the level of students' oral proficiency; one before starting the application of cooperative learning activities, and the other one at the end. Also a journal was used in each of the 10 sessions to register the observations about the performance that the students showed in the implementation of such activities. The results of the data analysis revealed that the ability in which students improved in a meaningful way was the accuracy, because at the end of the process they could organize their ideas more adequately. On the other hand, the micro-skill less developed was pronunciation since students did not take the risk to pronounce the words imitating the native accent.

Key Words:

Speaking Skills, Accuracy, Fluency, Pronunciation, Cooperative Learning Strategies.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio de investigación acción fue analizar el rol de las estrategias de aprendizaje cooperativo en el desarrollo de las habilidades comunicativas en el área de inglés en los estudiantes de quinto grado del colegio George Washington. Para lograr esto, los investigadores de este proyecto se basaron en revisión de estudios y literatura relacionada con los dos pilares fundamentales de este trabajo (Speaking and Cooperative learning) para definir accuracy, fluency y pronunciation como las principales micro habilidades de habla a desarrollar con 35 estudiantes de los cuales se tomó una muestra poblacional de 15 aprendices para la evaluación del proceso. Además, para llevar a cabo este proyecto de investigación se implementó un pre- test antes de comenzar la aplicación de las actividades de aprendizaje cooperativo, y un post test para evaluar el progreso en el nivel de competencia oral que los estudiantes lograron a través de las estrategias de Cooperative Learning. También se utilizó un diario durante cada una de las 10 sesiones para registrar las observaciones acerca del desempeño y comportamientos que los estudiantes mostraron en la implementación de dichas actividades. Finalmente, los resultados del análisis de datos revelaron que la habilidad en la cual los estudiantes mejoraron de manera significativa fue accuracy, ya que, al culminar el proceso los estudiantes pudieron organizar y expresar sus ideas de manera más apropiada y coherente. En contraste, la micro habilidad menos desarrollada fue la pronunciación puesto que ellos no demostraron suficiente seguridad para pronunciar palabras imitando el acento nativo.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

1.1. Introduction

If we think about our experiences as learners and teachers of English as a second language, we realize that encouraging students to participate actively in speaking activities is difficult due to many factors that affect students' self confidence when they communicate an idea, answer a question or give a presentation. It is for this reason that we as teachers feel the need to analyze, select, adapt, improve and put into practice strategies that can provide students with effective tools that help them to interact with other people and to develop oral communication in a successful way.

In order to achieve it, we will mention, explain and give examples of cooperative learning strategies which some teachers of fifth grade at George Washington School could take into account when they propose activities in which their students have to carry out speaking tasks. Our aims are to determine the role of the use of cooperative learning strategies in the development of speaking skills in students of fifth grade at George Washington School and to describe the ways in which some strategies of cooperative learning might contribute to dealing with students´ weaknesses where teachers promote an atmosphere of achievement in which each person into group had a specific role, helping and encouraging each other to learn, based on Cooperative learning (CL).

Finally, this action research project provides an analysis of positive and negative issues that the application of cooperative learning strategies had when they were used with 5^{th} graders at George Washington School for the development of speaking skills, doing a descriptive and statistical analysis which gives an account of the performance that these learners presented

during the implementation of cooperative learning activities allowing that readers have an idea about the effects of the strategies in which this study was based.

1.2. Problem Description

Since of the creation of the Common European Framework for Languages Teaching (CEF) in the last ten years, it is undeniable that there has been a change in language teaching around the world, because CEF takes into account the needs of students not only from the grammatical aspect, but also it makes a close relation to the sociolinguistic features of communication. Furthermore, this guideline has a great influence on educational institutions which becomes in the basic tool that guides all the processes of second language teaching.

Nevertheless the George Washington School where this research project was carried out, takes as a guide the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF) to classify English students' level, establishing that learners of fifth grade should be in A2 level in which they can understand sentences and frequent expressions related to their daily routine in order to communicate and exchange information in a simple and direct manner, taking into account some aspects such as their immediate environment and needs.

But contrary to statements by CEF in which a foreign language should be taught developing all skills almost in simultaneous and equitable way, we perceived that in this school the lead teacher of this grade gives priority to make students develop reading and writing skills rather than listening and speaking skills, tending to use more class time teaching grammar through reading and writing activities rather than applying speaking and listening tasks causing that the majority of fifth graders have demonstrated difficulties to express their ideas in oral form. For this reason taking advantage of our teaching practicum we wanted to establish communicative

spaces in the second language where students adopted specific roles inside of their work groups, interacting and helping to each other in a reciprocal way to carry out proposed tasks through cooperative learning strategies. That is why this research project attempts to answer the next questions.

What role does the use of cooperative learning strategies play in the development of 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School?

What kinds of cooperative learning strategies can be useful to improve 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School?

And the research project takes into account the following objectives:

To determine the role of the use of cooperative learning strategies in the development of speaking skills in students of fifth grade at George Washington School.

To explain which kinds of cooperative learning strategies might be useful to improve 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School.

1.3. Justification

Nowadays technology, international relations and globalization have a huge importance in the development of societies, and for that reason these aspects of modernization have been expanded through an international language such as English, which we as future teachers must teach in an active way through the application of modern teaching strategies and the implementation of material based on appropriate content and level to ensure that our students have the opportunity

to understand and practice the second language and therefore, they can participate actively in the interaction with other cultures.

Due to the necessities of modern life previously mentioned it is important to develop speaking skills during the English learning process because through the acquisition of this ability students can cope in a society that every day requires professionals who can speak in English because of the need to maintain international relations which promote the development of our economy and additionally to be able to speak another language provides the opportunity to get in touch with other countries, learn their customs and thus enrich our cultural level . Rahman (2010) states that speaking is the way of communication that humans most frequently used to express their opinions, make arguments and in general to transmit information. This shows that students need to speak well in their daily lives, in order to get successful social interactions but also to learners achieve a better development when they have to express in oral manner in meetings to attend, in discussions to participate arguing their own thoughts in class, or make oral presentations about a particular topic. Giving opportunities to students can practice the target language becoming in competent speakers in English-speaking contexts.

Along these lines, this research project attempts to students at George Washington School obtain a higher level in their capacity to communicate orally and the best form to do that is promoting Cooperative Learning strategies, where they can interact with each other to share their views, background and experiences at the same time they are acquiring individual knowledge.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop speaking skills through the correct use of the micro-skills such as fluency (being able to use the language in real time), pronunciation (being able to pronounce the language enough correctly to enable communication to take place) and accuracy (being able to use a range of vocabulary and grammatical structures according to student's level).

In addition, to enable students to put into practice these micro-skills, it is necessary that teachers promote an environment in which learners feel motivated to work in groups and at the same time, help and encourage each other to achieve a common goal, for this reason we have decided to implement the cooperative learning as a strategy to help students develop speaking skills.

Moreover, this research integrates cooperative learning with teaching speaking skills inside the communicative approach context, since at George Washington School the English classes are focused on this methodological perspective. Besides it is hoped that this study provides a close link between cooperative learning and the development of speaking skills, proposing guidelines for teachers who wish to implement cooperative learning to enhance their students' language learning and to develop their speaking skills in the English learning process.

Finally, this study makes a contribution for the area of teaching English as a foreign language and also for us as teachers because it allows us to learn more about cooperative learning strategies and also acquire experience to know how to promote oral communication environments inside the classroom in a striking manner for students and at the same time, to handle properly certain situations that may happen in the classroom, since through the implementation of cooperative learning, teachers must overcome some difficulties that may arise such as: students' gender preferences at the moment of making groups, number of students in each group, rejection to work with other people, lack of interest to contribute with team work etc.

These issues can be overcome through the motivation that teacher gives to their students in order to sensitize them to feel committed to work actively to achieve a common goal, which does not only depend on the work of a minority but of the entire group. Moreover, for us as researchers it is important to evidence process of teaching and learning based on cooperative

learning strategies mixed with speaking activities, since it provides us a better understanding of how effective can be the classes based on strategies of cooperation among students.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. Literature Review

The following are studies that have been carried out in different academic settings, which provide valuable information for the development of our research project related to cooperative learning strategies which were complemented with communicative activities to increase students' oral participation.

The first study that we refer to is developed by Prieto Castillo (2007) who proposes different Cooperative learning strategies such as numbered heads, jigsaw, Think-Pair-Share, Round Robin and Brainstorming combined with speaking activities of performance, controlled/guided and creative or freer tasks like find Someone who, questionnaires, information gap, dialogues, role-plays and simulations. Creating an environment in which the anxiety and pressure were set aside giving students' opportunities to express in a freeway, in which they were teachers and learners at the same time. To collect data, Prieto used the following instruments: students' and teachers' surveys, students' interviews, field notes and audiotapes recordings during the application of the five classes. After the implementation and analysis of the previous instruments it was evidenced that students improved their perception about the group work and therefore they improved their speaking skills due to the fact that through this kind of strategies the students had the possibility to help and to learn from their classmates.

In addition the research developed by Mohd Hilmi Hamzah & Lu Yee Ting (2010) it is similar to the previous study because it suggests activities such as brainstorming, group discussion, and competitive game, in order for ESL teachers to be able to identify the principal problems and needs that students have and to develop successful oral group activities through the

application and analysis of students' questionnaire, interviews to English teachers and observations in classes during the implementation of group work activities giving as a result the improvement of students' speaking skill when they were assessed individually. It is important to mention that for this study they took into account students' perspectives about their performance in oral group activities and the implications of these activities on the students' individual learning process for them to appreciate team work. To achieve the development of students' speaking skills the researchers of this study choose 33 learners of SMK (Sekolah Menengah Kedangsaan) and the data were obtained through the application and analysis of students' questionnaire, interviews to English teachers and observations in classes during the implementation of group work activities giving as a result the improvement of students' speaking skill when they were assessed individually.

Mohd Hilmi Hamzah & Lu Yee Ting's study is related to this research project because it determines the effectiveness of group work activities on the students' individual performance in speaking assessment and it gives to English teachers proposals of work group activities that they can carry out to improve students' speaking skills.

Another study developed by Maher (2010) showed that the cooperative activities help in the learning of the whole groups with the intention of each individual improved its own skills. This project is focused on implementing, measuring and examining the effectiveness of using "assigned group roles" and "gender grouping", like strategies to increase participation in cooperative learning groups. In order to get the results, data was collected using a triangular approach base on observations, change in grades, and questionnaires. The results from this study showed when students were organized in their cooperative groups; there was an increase in students' participation. Participation also increased when those teachers assigned roles to their

learners. But it is important to clarify that some of these strategies did not affect all the participants' group but only some of them, because the effectiveness of this study also depends on students' mood affecting their performance and willingness to work in groups.

On the other hand, this study contributes to our research project, because it establishes some cooperative learning strategies that we as researchers could use with our target population. Mahers' (2010) study did a complete data analysis through a triangular approach focusing on observations, change in grades, and questionnaires examining how students' behavior were during the implementation of gender groping, assignment group roles and organized participation strategies.

Finally the study developed by Tsailing Liang (2002) has two principal objectives, firstly to show a close relation between cooperative learning and the communicative language teaching and secondly to propose guidelines for EFL teachers who want to apply the following strategies based on cooperative learning: Three-Step-Interview, Learning Together, Talk Pair, Inside-Outside Circle, and Student-Teams-Achievement Division to improve students' communicative competence. The evolution of learner was analyzed from two oral tasks such as scores of monthly examinations, motivational questionnaires, students and teachers interviews for make a methodological triangulation to show that studied population improve significantly the oral communicative competence in English as the Laura Maher's study.

Although Tsailing Liang's research was focused on students of ninth grade, it is a guide to this research because it shows how to establish a close relation between cooperative learning and communicative language through different strategies that promote students´ English learning process. Therefore this research project took the previous strategies mentioned as a reference to design the methodological plan.

Finally, we took as a reference for our research project the above studies concluding those strategies based on cooperative learning helping to improve students' oral production giving them the opportunity to interact in small work groups, where each student has a specific role, and at the same time developing values such as responsibility and cooperation which allow to achieve a common goal and as consequence of this exchange of ideas and knowledge generated inside the group also it gets an individual learning improve.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Communicative competence means learners ability to express what they want to say efficiently in the language that they are learning and in this sense to achieve successfully communications in daily life situations. For this reason in our research project we chose three main constructs that are fluency, accuracy and pronunciation to foster the level of the students' speaking skills in the development of this action research, using strategies of cooperative learning to create communicative environments. Because of this in the following lines we are going to explain each one of the concepts mentioned previously to have a clear knowledge about them.

2.2.1. Speaking

One of the main aspects that we as teachers have to take into consideration before to encourage our students to speak in the target language is the fact that learners need to know the importance of language and put into practice it during speaking activities; otherwise it could be a negative experience for students because they would not have appropriate tools to perform an oral communication causing them problems such as lack of self-confidence and thus creating bias that will not allow them to feel comfortable the next time they have to develop an oral activity, and as a result to lead oral activities to failure. To avoid this frustration in students who

develop oral activities, it is important to provide them specific grammatical structure like verb to be, present simple, present continuous, past simple and use of the adjectives. According to A2 level students will be able to participate actively in a conversation practicing vocabulary and pronunciation when learners talk about exchanging personal information, describe characters, actions in progress, and past actions; making them feel secure at the moment of expressing an idea, ask a question, participate in a conversation, etc.

In accordance to the previous statement, the principal duty of teachers is to have clear what objectives they want their students to achieve, and prepare learners in an appropriate way, as Brown (1994, P.5) states "learners produce the sounds, stress patterns, rhythmic structures, and intonations of the language; using grammar structures accurately; selecting appropriate and understandable vocabulary and topics according to the students' level and needs." Then, we as teachers should take into account grammatical aspects, vocabulary and pronunciation according to the students´ English level to get the objective proposed and to develop the students´ speaking skill.

In addition, it is necessary for us to know the difference between knowledge and skill when using a foreign language since it is essential in teaching speaking. To explain this distinction, Bygate (1987, P.3) provides an example to clarify the meaning of these concepts. "What knowledge does a car driver need? Clearly he or she needs to know the names of the controls; where they are; what they do and how they are operated. However, the driver also needs the skill to be able to use the controls to guide the car along a road without hitting the various objects that tend to get on the way" It is exactly the same situation that students experiment when they put into practice a foreign language, specifically when they speak, as a result, it is not enough to know and accumulate sentences in the abstract. On the contrary, what learners should do is to

produce and contextualize sentences according to the different situations that they have to face in the real circumstances.

Likewise, knowledge and skill should work together, because it is impossible to speak without previous comprehension of the grammatical structure, the meaning of words, and the correct pronunciation of the language. Though, memorizing should not be the unique aspect that students should work in the learning process of the target language, as Brown, (1994); Burns & Joyce, (1997) argue that speaking is an interactive process, in which students construct meanings, that involves them to produce, to receive and to process information (Its form and meaning depend on the context in which it occurs; including the speakers, their experiences and the purposes of speech). In addition, it is necessary that learners not only know how the language is structured (grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary) that are linguistic competences, but also they could understand when, why and in which way the language is produced, bearing in mind that this aspect is related to the sociolinguistic competence.

Nevertheless after reviewing some definitions about speaking skills, we want to emphasize on the importance of developing this skill in English classes, as pointed out by McDonough and Shaw (2003), sometimes teaching speaking is undervalued as a result of traditional education´s aftermath in which students only memorized grammatical structures without giving importance to the development of oral communication. In addition, as revealed by Namira, Saif and Shamin (2007) some students do not have developed enough the ability to speak in English, due to the fact that some teachers find hard work to do any oral communicative activity with their students, because the application of oral activities in the classroom can promote indiscipline and disorder among students.

As it was mentioned previously, also we as researchers reported that learners have few opportunities to develop and improve the oral communication because teachers stated that this kind of activities have fostered a lot of indiscipline among students since there were many kids in the classroom. Despite this fear to lose the control of the class, teachers must avoid these kinds of issues and provide students with easy and familiar topics for helping them to get started with speaking, through propose activities such as 'introduce themselves' and 'talk about what they do in their spare time" with the aim that students produce little utterances (expressions) to communicate their ideas. In order to search the way to teach this ability appropriately it is necessary to mention the goals of teaching speaking consider some techniques that can contribute and improve the quality in teaching of this skill.

2.2.2. Techniques for Teaching Speaking

According to Catherine Keatley and Deborah Kennedy (1998), members of National Capital Language Resource Center (NCLRC) the main objective of teaching speaking skills is getting a successful and effective communication in which students should be able to understand by themselves a message and put into practice their speaking ability in the best form. For this reason, it is necessary that we as teachers encourage our students' safety, making them aware of the fact that they can achieve effective interaction with others, joining the following kind of activities:

2.2.2.1. Language Input:

In this activity teachers provide to students all material that they need, in order to produce language by themselves, and it can be content oriented input or form oriented output.

2.2.2.2. Content-Oriented Input:

The students´ oral production is based on information (could be a simple weather report until an extended lecture on an academic topic.) provided by the teacher.

2.2.2.3. Form-Oriented Input Focuses on Ways of Using the Language.

It is the orientation from teacher on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, that it is known like discourse competence" or proper things to say in specific contexts, discursive speed, turn-taking and "strategic competence" referred to use of phrases that help to ask for clarification and repair miscommunication.

2.2.2.4. Structured output:

Here learners may have different response options, but they should bear in mind that they only can follow the forms or structures that teacher have proposed previously for the development of the activity.

2.2.2.5 Communicative output:

Its purpose is that students can catch and transmit the message; here it is not necessary for students to understand with precision every meaning. On the contrary, the most relevant point is that they can maintain a successful communication based on a main idea.

2.2.3. Oral Communication Micro - Skills: Fluency, Accuracy and Pronunciation

To carry out an effective speech act, we considerate necessary that students be able to put into practice "fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation" in an appropriate form because through these

three micro-skills, our students will achieve effective and comprehensive communication, making the listeners understand the ideas that students want to express.

Then we want clarify that a person speaks fluently when he/she includes a few features in his/her speech like, typically pausing, hesitations, speech rate and students' capacity to use synonymous in order to affirm their speaking proficiency. In addition, Koponen, (1995) includes in definition of fluency the following aspects: flow or smoothness, rate of speech, absence of excessive pausing, absence of disturbing hesitation markers, length of expressions and interconnection between them. Besides, to have a broader idea of fluency Hasselgren (1998) defined it such as the aptitude to contribute to clearly understanding of listener showing the proficient of the language that is known as coherent speech, without undue strain and taking into account that a speech act should carry out at a comfortable pace does not disrupted by excessive hesitation.

Overall, fluency is to speak spontaneously and eloquently, with no extensive pauses or repetition, responding coherently within the turns of the conversation, using linking words and phrases keeping in mind a comprehensible pronunciation and adequate intonation without undue hesitation. Then it can say that fluency is the speaker's ability to put into practice linguistic and pragmatic competence that they have, including three competences: semantic that makes reference to the joint between propositions and speech acts to give a whole coherence discourse, lexical-syntactic related to syntactical components and words and finally, the last competence that must be developed by speakers, that is the articulate language in which they organized the speech fragments to achieve a coherent message.

On the other hand, accuracy is other important micro skill that students apply when they speak, according to this many learners also have the goal to speak accurately, and it means that students are able to speak without errors or mistakes of grammar and vocabulary. At this point, it is important to remember some beginning about the development of speaking skills and more exactly in accuracy micro-skill.

Taking into account the previous lines, accuracy has become another important goal to follow with our students in their learning process at the same time that fluency. Moreover, it is important to clarify that to achieve a good level of accuracy, we as teachers should make that our students have in mind the elements of phonology, grammar, and discourse for learners' speaking production.

Therefore, we should take into account the different characteristics of accuracy activities that can be focused on the use of the following aspects like language for effective transition of the message, language for knowledge in which it is evidence the quantity of information that students have respect to determined topic, and the last feature of this micro-skill is given by linguistic competence that attempts to the correction of the utterances to get a correct communication. Considering the above, students will be able to develop their language capacity processing a complex language Skehan (1998) suggests that “speakers' fluency, accuracy and complexity of speech demand capacity, and that there is likely to be a trade-off between these aspects of the skill” (p.17).

Furthermore other micro-skill that is involved in the speech act is pronunciation, however many teachers, usually can feel intimated to teach pronunciation in English as foreign language because there is not a specific method to teach it, where we as future teachers can base on

activities that contribute to improve the appropriate pronunciation of our students. But to expand in this topic, first we want to clarify the definition of pronunciation as Carter and Nunan (2004) argue, “When talking about pronunciation in language learning we mean the production and perception of the significant sounds of a particular language in order to achieve meaning in context of language use. This comprises the production and perception of segmental sounds, of stressed and stress syllables and of the speech melody or intonation.” (p.56) In this connection, pronunciation refers to the manner in which someone say a word without evidence a particular dialect or accent in the case of learning a foreign language.

Besides, this micro skill is important because without having a good pronunciation no matter the knowledge that students have about the vocabulary and grammatical rules or structures of the language, if they do not use correct pronunciation it may be very difficult for listeners to understand what they say, causing interference during communication since if a student cannot pronounce correctly a word, they may not be able to understand what another person says, making communication more difficult. So the pronunciation has a central role in both academic and social field of learners because this will provide them the tools to participate and integrate into a community.

Although, we had noticed that students have different difficulties in pronunciation during their learning process in a foreign language because not all sounds in the English language are common to other languages specifically in Spanish. For instance, some languages do not have sounds like “r”, so students tend to imitate it using a similar sound like “l”. Therefore the communication is going to be totally confused and as a result it will produce misunderstanding. Thus, to teach pronunciation, we consider that a good tactic is to provide feedback to students about their performance. This feedback should specify the problem and what they need to do to

correct it, also including where to place the tongue in the mouth to say particular words, or how the lips should be formed, or the action of the tongue when saying specific sounds.

In conclusion, fluency, accuracy and pronunciation are three important and complementary components in students' development of their speaking skills, because with the correct use of these micro-skills, learners are going to improve their oral communication since without the correct use of fluency, accuracy and pronunciation it is difficult to express understandable speech acts.

2.2.4. Cooperative Language Learning

Learning is a process that needs the uninterrupted and active participation of students. Moreover, the cooperation is related to the joint of human beings, who seek to achieve common goals through teamwork, getting at the same time the fortification and improvement of their knowledge. Returning to the previous concepts, cooperative learning was established as an educational method which gives the opportunity for learners to develop language through the increment of active and complex communication and the use of academic and social language functions. According to Olsen and Kagan (1992) cooperative learning is defined as an organized learning activity into groups since this process depends on the socially structured exchange of information between the participants of the team in which each of them is responsible for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.

This approach appeared in 20th century, when John Dewey promoted the idea of building cooperation in learning into regular classrooms on a systematic form creating a response to the forced integration of public schools in which teachers of these institutions promoted the competition among students rather than cooperation. Regarding this matter, Johnson and

Holubec (1994) considered that cooperative learning was applied with the aim to promote communicative interaction in the classroom and was seen as an extension of the principles of cooperative learning teaching. According to this, Richards and Rodgers (2001) state the following goals of cooperative language learning: first, to give opportunities for second language acquisition through interactive pair and group activities, second, to focus attention to specific lexical aspects, language structure, and communicative functions through the use of interactive activities, third, to offer an appropriate environment to students build up successful learning and communication strategies, fourth, to increase student motivation and reduce learners anxiety and to create a positive classroom atmosphere.

Also it is important to remember how the cooperative learning method started just before World War II, some psychologists such as Allport, Watson, Shaw, and Mead began to implement some features of cooperative work in order to make people develop more effectively quality and quantity work, as opposed if one person worked alone. Besides in the decades of the 30 'and 40' some philosophers like John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Morton Deutsh also made contributions to the cooperative learning strategies, as Dewey stated, it was important that learners develop knowledge and social skills that could be used outside the classroom, emphasizing that students' role is not to be passive receptors but rather they are active participants in their learning process. Regarding Lewin, his ideas are focused on building relationships between group members to implement and achieve the goal of learning.

As the years go by more exactly in 1975, it was established that cooperative learning promotes mutual satisfaction, better communication, acceptance and support between the participants of the team, and has shown an increase in a variety of thinking strategies among individuals in the group, Finally, in 1994 Johnson and Johnson published the 5 elements

(positive interdependence, individual accountability, face to face interaction, social skills, and processing information) essential for effective group learning, being able to achieve, and increase social, personal and cognitive skills. These elements set the tone for new teachers to use cooperative learning in the classroom.

2.2.4.1. Cooperative Learning Principles

Many principles have been proposed for cooperative learning through history, but the following are the main factors that take part of this method. And it guided our pedagogical intervention throughout the research process.

2.2.4.1.1. Heterogeneous Grouping:

This principle consists of integrating and mixing the students of the groups including people of different sex, ethnicity, social class, religion, personality, age, language proficiency. The small groups usually are composed by four or five students who can interchange ideas and give different point of view to help each other and get a common aim. In addition in our experience the way to organize the groups influence in the learners' discipline, classroom management and the successful of the activity.

2.2.4.1.2. Collaborative Skills:

Where students have to share their ideas with other classmates to achieve the goal proposed for the group and likewise they should understand and perceive the objective of the activity such as own, taking into account the abilities and needs of each one and thus to select appropriate strategies to achieve the common aim. We want to clarify that it is different work in groups and

work in a collaborative way because it is necessary that all members of the group contribute in a positive form to finish successfully the activity.

2.2.4.1.3. Group Autonomy:

In this principle, we as teachers should cheer students to look the resources that they have such as their previous knowledge, their own experience and their support material to solve the problems and obstacles that they face inside the group not only keeping in mind the concept or opinion that the teacher can give them.

2.2.4.1.4. Simultaneous Interaction:

As Kagan, (1994) states, while in the traditional classroom the only active agent is the teacher because he or she is the only one who has the opportunity to speak, in the cooperative learning method, students have the chance to interact at the same time. In other words, our learners can express and take postures in a conversation exchanging knowledge and points of view to enrich and to feed back what the teacher is saying.

2.2.4.1.5. Equal Participation:

Taking into account to Kagan, (1994) he argues that a common problem inside group work is that one or two persons dominate the whole group, preventing the participation of others. That is why Cooperative learning offers many ways of promoting more equal participation among partners, assigning a role of equal importance to each group member. To get this, it is crucial that we teach to students how they can establish their own roles in each group.

2.2.4.1.6. Individual Accountability.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) argue that this element takes into account both group performance and individual performance of each student who is part of the group therefore the performance of each individual student is assessed and the feedback are given back to the group and the individual student. In this form it is important that the group knows who needs more assistance, support, and encouragement in completing the assignment and to help him/her overcome their weakness. The purpose of cooperative learning groups is to make each member a stronger individual and in this way to strengthen the group. When we try to encourage individual accountability in groups, we hope that each student try to share and interchange her/his knowledge and ideas with others.

2.2.4.1.7. Positive Interdependence:

This principle is the main element of Cooperative learning. When positive interdependence exists among members of a group, learners feel that to help one member of the group, in implicitly way they feel that they are helping to the progress of the whole group. In addition this element is reflected in the practice when all members learn in a meaningful way the topic for the class.

2.2.4.1.8. Cooperation as a Value:

This principle means that rather than considerate cooperation only as a way to learn, also this strategy cultivate in students the feel of work for themselves and for their classmates not only in the classroom but also beyond of it, and in this order we not only uses cooperative learning like a tool to teach academic content also, through this strategy we can educate students in solidarity to help their classmates.

2.2.4.2. The Roles of Teachers and Learners

2.2.4.2.1. Teachers' Role

Here it is important to recall and specify the function of the teachers in the activities of cooperative learning, because making students working in groups in which they have to help each other it is not the excuse for educators can leave the class and neglect their jobs, due to the fact that in cooperative learning activities, students are the main participants while teachers are no longer the most important member of the class.

On the contrary, a real teacher is the person who serves as guide and facilitator at the same time that he or she encourages students to be interdependent. Larsen-Freeman (1986) point out that teachers' role is more than teach language, but also they teach cooperation and beside of this, they are seen as useful tools of guidance who always are present to make of cooperative learning a successful method to use in class, rather than are seen like judges who distribute grades. Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1998) reveal that teachers need to stipulate clear objectives regarding aspects such as academic and social skills.

Other functions of teachers is to decide group size taking into consideration factors such as time limits, students' age, students' experience working in groups, and the easy access to appropriate material. Additionally teachers can organize the working groups using random procedures to make them heterogeneous which is (one of the main principles of cooperative learning) since when students have the chance to choose their own partners, they usually tend to form homogeneous groups which are always composed by the same people.

Furthermore while carrying out a lesson, teachers should monitor checking continuously each learning group, intervening when their students need to improve their task work and team work,

and bring an adequate closure to the lesson. Also it is important that teachers observe the interaction among members of each group to assess students' progress and also the appropriate use of social skills. Additionally is necessary that teachers be sure that through the development of the activities proposed for the classes, students can benefit from face-to-face interaction.

Finally other important function of teachers is assessing and evaluating the quantity and quality of students' learning. It is also important to engage the students in assessing each other's level of learning. Regarding group processing, teachers must make sure that all the students receive feedback on their work, analyze the data on group functioning, set an improvement goal, and participate in a team celebration, and also revise the aspects to improve in each activity.

2.2.4.2.2. Students' role

Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that learners are aware and responsible for planning, monitoring and evaluating their own learning having in mind that learning is a process that requires students' direct and active integration of groups works and participation in the activities. On the other hand, Pair grouping is the most typical cooperative learning format, ensuring the maximum amount of time that both learners spend engaged on learning tasks. For example Pair task in which learners alternate roles, involving partners in the role of tutors, recorders, and information sharers.

Therefore some functions of students when they working in groups are to discuss the material to be learned with their classmates, helping and giving a hand to each other to obtain a better understanding of the topic proposed, and encourage their partner to work hard to finally get a common goal. Moreover through cooperative learning activities, students become directors, and

tutors of others, contributing there to students feel more comfortable because the lessons are coming from their peers.

2.2.4.3 Types of Cooperative Learning Groups:

Johnson, D, Johnson, R.& Holubec, E. (1998) describe 3 types of CL groups:

2.2.4.3.1. Formal Cooperative Learning Groups:

This has been established for developing a particular task and requires students working together to reach shared learning aims.

2.2.4.3.2. Informal Cooperative Learning Groups:

They are used to focus student attention during a short time class to facilitate learning through direct teaching.

2.2.4.3.3. Cooperative Base Groups:

It allows teammates to give each other the help, support, encouragement, assistance etc, they need to acquire a successful academic achievement

The success during the implementation of Cooperative learning classes depends on the assignment of roles by the teacher and of course, the responsibility and commitment of students to work in an atmosphere of partnership and solidarity, carrying out interaction among themselves in order to feel motivated to increase their learning.

2.2.4.4. Some Class Activities That Use Cooperative Learning To Develop Oral Speaking Skills.

2.2.4.4.1. Three-step Interview:

Each student of a team chooses another person to be his or her partner and distribute the roles to know who will be the interviewer and who will be the interviewee, second: each individual interview their partner by asking clarifying questions, third: partners change the roles. And at the end of the activity, students share their partner's response with the rest of the group.

2.2.4.4.2. Round Robin or Roundtable:

It is an activity that requires people on each group sit in a circle. There is a leader in charge to enunciate a question or a problem then, groups should be told that their job is to brainstorm as many answers as they can, obviously related to the topic. They must follow certain rules in answering, for example the group members must take turns writing answers on a piece of paper, passing the paper to the person sitting at the right side until the piece of paper passes by all group members. Finally groups must stop writing when time is called.

2.2.4.4.3. Think-Pair-Share:

First of all, students listen while a teacher proposes a question, second: they are given time to think of a response, then they discuss their responses with a partner, And finally, they are invited to share their responses with the whole group. They have to be responsible and listening very attentive to their partners because during the share time, they are called to share the answer they heard from their partner. A time limit is set for each step in the process. Teacher can use signals such as bells or body language to make students move through the cycle.

2.2.4.4.4. Numbered Heads:

This is an activity that teachers can use for speaking activities and also to develop other skills, in this activity first: a team of four is formed; each member is given a number from 1 to 4. Second: questions are asked for the group, Third: group members answer the question among them. And fourth: the teacher calls out a number, then the person who has that number must give the answer.

2.2.4.4.5. Circle the Sage:

First the teacher asks the class to see which students have a special knowledge to share. For example the teacher may ask who in the class was able to solve a math problem, who has visited a particular city, etc. Second: those students stand and are located around the room, third: the teacher and the rest of the classmates each surround one of the people who has a particular knowledge, with no two members of the same team going to the same sage, then the student explains what he or she know while the classmates are listening, asking questions and learning some information about this topic. After that all students then return to their teams. And finally each one explains what they learned. As each one has gone to a different sage, they learn how others think, share ideas and practice oral language skills inside the groups.

2.2.2.5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Cooperative Learning:

First it is known that cooperative learning encourages students be able to learn on their own, instead of always depending on an authority such as a teacher, in this method, students have the opportunity to work together with other members of the class, discussing topics learning to be responsible for their own education, cooperative learning also promotes team spirit, rather than feeding the rivalry, and encourage students to learn to work together under an atmosphere of

achievement and solidarity. Other benefits include improved social skills, greater use of higher-level thinking skills, positive relationships, higher self-esteem and better psychological adjustment. Moreover a cooperative learning activity can diminish students' anxiety to speak in front of the whole class, since it gives the opportunity for learners to practice with their partners before make a performance or give an answer in front of the entire class.

In addition, when a student represents the group and reports to the whole class, they feel more confident because the answer is not from one student alone, but from the whole group members giving the opportunity for students to feel more encouraged to work under this strategy. As Glasser (1986) states students "motivation to work in class is better when their basic psychological needs are met and Cooperative learning enhances learners" motivation by providing peer support.

However, there are some disadvantages of cooperative learning for example many students do not like working in cooperative groups. They do not like to show their lack of knowledge to other students. Moreover, they have been trained to be competitive and work individually, so they lack cooperative skills. In addition, bright students may try to take the control of any activity, and lonely people may find it hard to share answers. And for the teachers, the problem may be the disorder in the classrooms, because of the number of the students some teachers worry that the noise may be higher than the normal during cooperative learning activities. In addition, when students are working in their groups, could be difficult for the teacher get the class' attention.

Summarizing, cooperative learning seeks to be a promising method by which teachers can achieve both academic and socio-moral objectives simultaneously. Due to the fact that

cooperative learning approach can create supportive environments that enable students to succeed academically, and improve their interpersonal relationships, focusing on communicative skills, helping students get better performance in oral communication, because they feel more confidence working in small groups at the same time they strengthen their knowledge and their self-confidence.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1. Type of Research:

This project followed a mixed approach which as described by Christensen and Johnson (2003) is a "research in which quantitative and qualitative techniques are mixed in a single study. Besides of this, it is an attractive alternative (when it is appropriate) to quantitative and qualitative research" (Christensen and Johnson, 2004 p.439). And focusing on our research project, it is mixed because during the research process the numerical tests were implemented to know students' speaking level, but also we implemented cooperative learning activities in classes which were assessed through observations of the students' performance in the oral activities and at the same time relevant information was registered in a journal per lesson.

Furthermore this project is in the frame of the collaborative action- research paradigm which proposes that this model should be a collaborative process arising from the teachers' pedagogical work in a common context, discussing what collaborative action research is and why it is of interest to classroom teachers; besides this, we as teachers have kept in mind the steps established in collaborative action research to data collection through classroom activities and also we have to take into account ways to analyze action research data. All of this guides us to find new directions for our own professional development. As Burns (1999) states:

> Collaborative action research process strengthen the opportunities for the results of research on practice to be fed back into educational systems in a more substantial and critical way. They have the advantage of encouraging teachers to share common problems and co work cooperatively as a research community to examine their existing assumptions values and beliefs within the sociopolitical cultures of the assumptions in which they work. Policies and

> practices within the organization are more likely to be opened up to change when such changes are brought about through group processes and collective pressures- Collaborative action is, potentially more empowering that action research conducted individually as it offers a strong framework for whole-school change. (p. 13)

For all that, we as researchers and at the same time as teachers did interventions in the classes with the students, in which they had the opportunity to improve their speaking skills through the cooperative learning activities that we proposed. It is important to remember that through this kind of research related to social action programs for solving problems in educative community, teachers seem to identify potential educational problems to be solved, and consequently facilitating students' achievement in a specific field in this case to improve students' oral proficiency.

According to the previous statements, our research is associated to collaborative action-research paradigm because it was carried out by the three researchers who had different roles during the process; initially designing the oral test to apply with the fifth students, then each researcher took five students of the sample population to identify the students' level and their weaknesses; moreover to plan the topics and cooperative learning strategies implemented during the communicative spaces of ten classes proposed in this research project. At the moment of the application, one of the researchers assumed the teacher role, while the other two people had the role of assistant and observer respectively and in like manner in which the researchers divided the sample population for the application of the first test, they applied it once again to five people per interviewer in order to analyze the students' improvement. At the end all researchers did the comparison among first test, second test and journals based on the observations of each class

with the aim to solve the research question and take into account the students' oral improvement achieved through cooperative learning strategies.

3.2. Setting:

This research project was carried out at George Washington School, which is a private and bilingual school located in Lijaca (Car 8 C No. 185 a 24) in the north of Bogota city. We developed our practicum two hours per week during three semesters in which we made observations and developed classes based on cooperative learning strategies. The George Washington School bases its pedagogical work on a humanistic, constructivist and systematic philosophy which is linked with ethics and axiological training, framed in a bilingual education, identifying the specific skills of each individual and his/her potential to contribute in a positive way in the development of his/her community. Preserving a dignified and participatory work environment, that encourages creativity, recognizes the well done work and provides an integral development inside of this educative society.

3.3. Participants:

Our target population was 35 children of fifth grade among boys and girls, belonging to a middle socioeconomic stratum, whose ages ranged between 9 and 11 years old. According to our observations, they were in a basic level of English language proficiency. On the other hand, for the development of this research, the type of sampling procedure that we choose was probability sampling as defined by McMillan (2007) like a method of sampling that uses some form of random selection. Accordingly we selected randomly 15 students from the larger population giving the opportunity for any of them to represent those who were not selected. For selecting the participant we wrote on pieces of papers the names of all the fifth graders. Then, we put it

together into a bag. After that, one of the researchers took one by one the pieces of paper to draw 15 names and thus they were the sampling population for the application of the two tests that we applied before and after our interventions. However, it is necessary to clarify that we gave classes to the entire group ensuring that all of them benefit from the cooperative learning strategies that we implemented, because our goal was that all the students improved their speaking skills and not only were an achievement for the 15 children selected for the presentation of the tests.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures.

3.4.1. Instruments:

This collaborative action research project was based on different types of instruments to achieve the objectives raised in it, some of them pertain to the quantitative method and other pertain to the qualitative method, it had the purpose of collect the major quantity of data that could be helpful for the subsequent analysis of the outcomes, so these are the instruments that were applied:

3.4.1.1. Test:

It is an instrument created with the aim to measure people's knowledge, ability or performance in a specific domain. Among the kinds of test we can find multiple choice questions with prescribed correct answers, writing prompts with scoring rubrics, and oral interviews based on written questions and checklist of responses which are filled in by the administrator.

On the other hand, some tests are focused to measure test-takers general ability, whereas others are focused on particular objectives or competences. Furthermore when people are going

to administer these instruments they should keep in mind that after the application of a test always must exist a reporting of measurement which provide information about the performance of each individual. (See appendix No 1)

3.4.1.1.1. Diagnostic test:

It is designed to establish specified aspects of a language. A diagnostic test can help students become aware of errors and encourage the adoption of appropriate strategies to overcome the problem. In our case in the school in which we developed this research project it is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages to establish the topics that they may learn, according to this, the students of fifth grade should: exchanging personal information, talking about their family, describing characters, describing actions in progress and describing past actions. For all appropriate purposes to classify the fifth graders' speaking level and to identify their weakness and strengths focused on accuracy, fluency and pronunciation, we created a diagnostic test, in order to implement cooperative learning strategies, according to the oral performance that they had showed in this test.

The kinds of questions of this diagnostic test were based on: exchanging personal information section, there are four questions where the students say her or his name, age, the place where he or she lives and the telephone number. Then talking about their family section, there are three questions about the neighborhood where students live, the number of brother or sister that he or she has and the job of her or his parents. After that, in the adjective section students have to describe two famous cartoons, Phineas and Candace using some adjectives which were worked during some lessons. Next in the section describing actions in progress, there were three pictures and the students had to choose one of them and say what the character was doing. Finally in the

section related to describing past actions researchers showed to the test takers some pictures related to activities that Calvin did during a week, then students had to choose two days and answer what the character did according to what they saw in the picture (See Appendix 1).

On the other hand, the application of the post- test was carried out after ten class sessions; the researchers applied once again the test with the aim to recognize how much students could have made in terms of their speaking skills after have been involved in collaborative tasks in the English class.

3.4.1.2. Journals:

Other instrument used in our research project was journals that are written papers to be read as public documents although in almost all the cases, by a controlled amount of people, which are collaborator-researchers. Furthermore a journal has to be edited since it will be read by others. As Brock, Yu and Wong (1992) points out the following are some of the benefits that this kind of documents provide to a researcher:

- They could be carried out in a simple way.
- They are effective resources to reflect.
- They serve as a way of establishing questions and /or hypotheses related to teaching and learning process.
- They provide an accurate account of the experience lived during a teaching and learning meeting.

Likewise as is stated by Burns (1999, p. 89). Journals provide continuing accounts of perceptions and thought processes, as well as of critical events or issues which have surfaced in the classroom.

According to the previous statements and due to the importance of the journals application, it was an instrument that we used during the observation of the ten sections, in which the observer wrote the most representative information regarding the application of the cooperative learning to improve students speaking skills. This journal had two parts, the first is the description of the activities applied in class and the other one is the reflection about how did the observer perceive the development of the class and the attitude of the students. The most relevant information related to accuracy, fluency and pronunciation were used during the analysis, comparison and interpretation of the whole data collected in this project to clarify and understand the effects of cooperative learning activities in the improvement of students speaking skills (see appendix No 4).

3.4.2. Procedures:

To develop our research project the first intervention that we did was on March 9 - 2011, in this session we present our research project to students and chose the 15 children to pilot the first test, as conclusion of this piloting we could realize that the test was too long, for this reason we decided to modify it and only to present the following five main topics, exchanging personal information, talking about their family, describing characters, describing actions in progress and describing past actions.

In the next session, we did the application of the first test to check the students' level in speaking according to the Common European Framework. But only two of the researchers applied the first test to students while the other researcher assumed the role of the teacher to organize the other students who did not take the test, the process was to call each student and recording his or her voice and in this form to do a deep analysis of straights and weaknesses that

students showed and to choose the correct cooperative learning strategies to use in the next ten sessions.

After that, we started the observation and implementation process in the next form; one of the researchers always was the teacher and who applied in the classes the cooperative learning strategies while the other two researchers each class took turns to be the observer, since they also were teachers in other grades and they could not leave out the classes that they had to develop in other grades.

Subsequent to that, the observer took notes in a journal of all behaviors, issues and problems that students presented in every session to analyze the impact of this strategies in their oral micro-skills (accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation).

Finally, after the implementation of these strategies in the ten classes, the researchers chose once again the same groups of 15 students who were assessed at the beginning of this process and they took the same test. In this way the researchers completed the data collection process to then analyze it and examine the role that the use of the cooperative learning strategies played in the development of students' speaking skills.

CHAPTER FOUR

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

In order to answer our research question what role does the use of cooperative learning strategies play in the development of 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School? We designed an evaluation and intervention plan taking as reference some strategies of cooperative learning. Initially, we designed a test to revise the speaking level of the fifth graders based on (A2) level in which the school classifies these students. After that we took into account the strengths and weaknesses that students showed during the application of this test, we established a plan based on the cooperative learning strategies since it let the interaction of the students in oral way as Ghaith (2002 p 9) explained, this method allow the face-to-face interaction focus on groups that it is achieved only when members engage in dialogue with each other to explain, debate, encourage, and question one another. Finally in order to check the effectiveness of cooperative learning in the progress of students speaking skills we applied the same test that we implement at the beginning of the process. Then to get the previous plan we established the following objectives.

Main objective:

To provide a communicative space using cooperative learning strategies to develop speaking skills in students of fifth grade at George Washington School.

Specific objectives:

To establish the level of speaking skills of fifth graders at the George Washington School using a diagnostic test.

To plan cooperative learning strategies based on communicative activities to develop in the classroom, considering the weaknesses that students showed in the application of the first test.

To apply cooperative learning strategies through speaking activities in the classroom.

To analyze the effectiveness of cooperative learning strategies on the progress of speaking skill in students of fifth grade at George Washington School.

By the way, to get a general idea of students' proficiency to check the weaknesses and strengths of learners, we designed a test including the parameters and the classification that this school has established for this grade (A2 level) focusing on the common European framework, we want to clarify that this test was applied twice during the collaborative action research project to compare students' performance. Nevertheless, we created this test choosing five main topics in which they have to talk about personal information and their family, describe characters, and describe actions in progress and in past. After that, we piloted this test to prove the validity and reliability of it, to carry out this piloting stage; we chose a group of five students who took the test and their answers were audio recorded. Thanks to this, we realized that it was too long; for this reason we decided to reduce the number of questions in each section of the test because we noticed that students got bored and they took a lot of time to answer it. In the next session, we applied the test where each student of the sampling population had seven minutes to answer the questions. To analyze the results of the test we completed two rubrics (see appendix No 2 and 3) in order to evaluate the difficulties that our students presented.

According to the results, we planned ten sessions in which we applied cooperative learning strategies that we think were convenient according to the grammatical topic that the homeroom teacher assigned us to work with the students. Based on that, we implemented some activities

aimed at catching fifth graders' attention which at the same time were funny and appropriate for their ages, helping them to improve their speaking level. It is important to clarify that at the beginning of each session we organized the groups in a random way, assigning a role to each student inside the groups. Moreover we planned each of the ten sessions through a lesson plan for two hours of forty five minutes each one, which was designed with enough anticipation to be checked out by the homeroom teacher including cooperative learning activities in the development and closure of the class, with the aim to make students interact and help each other, creating communicative environments where they have the opportunity to practice the language in its oral form. In order to develop this research we follow the next work plan in which we specify the topic assigned by the homeroom teacher, and the cooperative learning strategy adequate for each one of them.

DATE	***ACTIVITY***	***OBJECTIVE***	***METODOLOGY***	***TOPIC***
March 9/2011	***DIAGNOSTIC TEST PILOTING***	To identify possible problems of the diagnostic test.	To prove the test with the sample population identifying its effectiveness or its possible problems.	• Exchanging personal information, • Talking about their family, • Describing characters, • Describing actions in progress • Describing past actions.

March 16 - 23/ 2011	***APPLICATION OF THE DIAGNOSTIC TEST.***	To check the students level in speaking according to the Common European Framework.	Each researcher interview to 5 students asking them about the five topics selected.	The same five topics above.
April 6 /2011	***ANALYSIS AND PLANNING THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES.***	• To analyze the students´ level in speaking according to the Common European Framework. • To plan the cooperative learning strategies to improve the students' level in speaking	To do the analysis of diagnostic test and planning the cooperative learning strategies to improve students' level in speaking.	
April 13 2011	***FIND SOMEBODY WHO…,***	• Students will be able to ask and answer questions using "do, play, go, go to" for free time activities. • Students will be able to pronounce the name of some games, sports and activities in a correct way.	Students must interview their classmates and complete the chart identifying who carry out some of the free time activities worked during the class.	Exchanging personal information using simple present

April 27 2011	***WHO I AM?***	Students will be able to answer and talk about their family.	In this activity the students discuss about their families and their daily routines. After 10 minutes, the teacher takes one student of each group and they have to go out of the room, then the teacher assigns one famous character, and their classmates had to guess what person is.	Talking about their family
May 4 2011	***THREE ADJECTIVES***	Students will be able to use descriptive adjectives and giving and asking personal information	Students have to write three adjectives that describe themselves, so the other members of the group should guess who the person was.	Describing characters
May 11/ 2011	***FIND THE CORRECT ANSWER***	Students will be able to identify and pronounce in a correct way adjectives to describe some images.	Students have to make groups and to find the correct adjectives according to some images.	Describing characters
May 18/ 2011		Students will be able to write, and produce in oral form simple	One student from each team steps out of the room and teacher presents information to	Exchanging personal

	TELEPHONE	sentences using the adjectives and the present simple tense taking into account the three ways (negative, affirmative, and interrogative).	the class, reading a short story, absent students return and teammates teach absent students everything they can about the information presented.	information. Describing characters.
May 25/ 2011	***TONGUE TWISTER***	Students will be able to use the verb “to be” according to the corresponding subject.	Teacher gives to each group of students a tongue twister, they will have to practice it and then all students are going to participate in a competence	Describing actions in progress
June 1 2011	***WHAT ARE YOU DOING?"***	Students will be able to answer and talk about their actions in specific moments.	The teacher gives an action to students and other student comes up to him and says, "What are you doing?" then they have to establish a dialogue using present progressive tense.	Describing actions in progress
June 3 2011	***NUMBER HEADS***	Students will be able to complete sentences, correct spelling mistakes, and organize some lines to complete and give coherence to a tale.	The teacher gave to each student a piece of paper that contains some questions about the kinds of tales and characters people prefer to read about, and they had to tell to their partners their likes and dislikes about literary genres.	Describing past actions.

June 8 2011	***INSIDE – OUTSIDE CIRCLE***	Students will be able to answer question using simple past structure.	The students had to ask to their classmates What did they do yesterday morning? And they had to answer using the past simple form and also using the verbs worked in the first activity.	Describing past actions.
June 10 2011	***"AGREEMENT CIRCLES"***	Students will be able to talk about a past experience.	The teacher begins to ask who developed an x action last week; quickly the students that made it must take a step forward and talk about his/her experience and so on even they arrived to the center of the classroom.	Describing past actions.
June 15 2011	***APPLICATION OF THE SECOND TEST.***	To verify the improvement of students' speaking skills	Each researcher interviewed to 5 students asking them about the five topics select.	• Exchanging personal information, • Talking about their family, • Describing characters, • Describing actions in progress • Describing past actions.

Moreover to carry out each class we divided it into three parts: opening, development and closure. The opening had a duration of 20 minutes in which we introduced the grammatical topic through games for catching the students' attention and preparing them to the next part of the class that is the development, this part had a duration of 40 minutes and it was related to the application of cooperative learning activity and finally the last section of the class is called closure that took 20 minutes for students to finish the activities and for teachers to clarify the doubts and provide feedback to them about their performance in the previous activities.

Considering the previous information, now we explain how each activity was developed and the objectives that we proposed to get meaningful learning during each class.

4.1. Find somebody who:

For the class dealing with free time activities using "do, play, go, go to", we decided to implement "Find somebody who" during the closure of the class, because through this activity students could put into practice the topic worked during the previous stages of the class asking and answering questions, pronouncing the name of some games, sports and activities in an appropriate way.

To carry out this task, students had a checklist which was used like a guide. In this way, the role of this speaking activity was that fifth graders could produce sentences to establish oral communication with their class mates. Also on the checklist, they had to write the names of the people who carried out some of the free time activities worked during the class and finally, tell to the teacher the results of the interviews.

4.2. Who I am?

The teacher took one student of each group and they went out, then the teacher assigned one famous character, when he or she came into the group their classmates asked yes or no questions about their daily activities, about their family for guess what person is. In this way they could practice the structure of the questions in present simple form that was the objective of this activity.

We chose this activity with the aim to increase students' awareness and encourage self-development, giving them opportunities to make connections among them and providing spaces to participants find unpredicted similarities and differences among themselves and others inside the group at the same time they practice the topic learned during the class.

4.3. Three adjectives:

As one of the topics for this class was: adjectives to describe people, we decided to implement at the very beginning of the class a game called "Three adjectives", because according to the ages of the students, this is an activity that helps teachers to get their attention at the same time that they enjoy of a game. For the development of this section, Students had to write on pieces of papers three adjectives which described themselves. All the pieces of papers were collected. After that, some students read it one after the other and with each set of adjectives, the groups must speculate who wrote those three adjectives. Beside this, the role of this activity was to make students participate actively, identifying and pronouncing many of the adjectives to describe people.

4.4. Find the correct answer:

During the development of this class, students had to work in groups, first able, they had to watch some images about physical appearance and personality, which were previously stuck on the board, each image had the first and the last letter of its corresponding adjective, then students had 30 seconds to guess the rest of the letters that composed the entire word and pronounce it in a correct way. We decided to implement this kind of activity, because we wanted students to carry out a group work in which everybody collaborated to find the adjective corresponding to the image. The role of this guessing game was to give each student a task with the aim all of them were attentive and collaborated to get a common goal. For example for each set of the game, students had predefined tasks such as maintain the order and the level of the noise, write the adjective on a piece of paper, and say what the adjective was. And in this way complete the activity in a successful way.

4.5. Telephone:

This activity was applied during the development of this class with the aim of students developed their speaking skills through telling stories using present simple and adjectives, then to carry out this strategy one students from each team steps out of the room and teacher presented information to the class, reading a short story, so the absent students returned and teammates taught them everything they could understand about the information presented describing the characters and the places of the story getting the objective of this activity in which students were able to write and say simple sentences using the adjectives and the present simple tense taking into account the tree ways (negative, affirmative, and question form). In this way the students had the opportunity to express what they had understood of the story inside of the

groups and among all contribute with their ideas giving more complete information as possible to their classmate.

4.6. Tongue twister:

In this activity our objective was that students were able to use the verb “to be” correctly according to the subject. In order to get the above the teacher divided the students into 5 groups and gave to each group a tongue twister, then, they had to practice it and then all students participated in a competition to find out which of the groups pronounce better the tongue twister. The aim in this activity was first, to make students practice the correct pronunciation of the unknown words of the tongue twister, and second that among all teammates correct their own mistakes to present it in the best form and to be one of the winning groups.

4.7. What are you doing?

The teacher started with one student who is doing an action. Another student came up to him and said, "What are you doing?" The student replied with a lie, mentioned another verb. Then he sat down and the student who asked begins to do the action that the other student said. A different student came up and said, "What are you doing?" This student said another action, and the person who asked has to start doing that action. And so on until all the students have had a turn achieving the objective that we planned. For this activity, students were able to organize quickly grammatical structures and specific aspects of pronunciation in their minds, answering and talking about actions in specific moments getting internalize and use in an appropriate and funny way the present progressive tense.

4.8. Number heads:

Since this class consisted on a reading comprehension activity, the cooperative learning strategy used during the development of the class was "Number heads", ensuring that all the students were attentive and participated actively to achieve a common goal. According to this, the teacher asked a question for the group, then students had to exchange concepts with their team mates to find the better response, and finally the teacher said a number to choose what person must answer the question representing the group. The role of this activity was to make students work together to construct a good answer and be able to answer it, independently of who was the person selected by the teacher.

4.9. Inside – outside circle:

In order to get the objective for this activity in which students were able to answer questions using simple past structure, teacher divided the group into two groups and organized the students in two circles one outside of the other, after teacher gave to each student of the couple a chard with some questions and wrote “yesterday morning” on the board and asked one or two students: What did you do yesterday morning? To explain how learners have to do the questions to their partners and at the same time they had to answer using the past simple form and also using the verbs used in the first activity. The importance of this strategy is that students could correct inside of the groups the proper structures of past simple and also to review some verbs in past in case of one student did not remember the appropriate verbs form; other classmate help him/her, and in this way to get a more meaningful learning.

4.10. Agreement circles:

The teacher began asking who developed an x action last week; quickly the students that made it take a step forward and talk about his/her experience and so on until they arrived to the center of the classroom. This activity had the objective to prepare students to be able to talk about their past experiences including the conjugation of some verbs that they use daily, providing learning spaces to students express their ideas and apply their knowledge in real situations at the same time that they were corrected by their partners.

Finally to close our interventions we applied once again the test to check the influence that the previous strategies had in the development of speaking skills. For this, is important to remember the definition of post-test which is given after a lesson or a period of instruction to determine what the students have learned. In our case, it is important to highlight that through the observation we gathered the information about students' behaviors in the development of the different activities to analyze and compare it in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS.

To develop the analysis of our research project, we based this process on the a priori approach that Stemler (2001) describes it is one of the forms to analyze data where the main categories that guide the research are established before the analysis based upon some theory or concept. In this case at the beginning of our research project we established the three main concepts in which we focused on, these are: accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation and what the evolution of these three aspects in students was through cooperative learning strategies applied during our interventions in their English class.

Apart from this, the quantitative analysis of the diagnostic test was carried out in two stages; firstly, the student's individual performance was analyzed in each question of the test establishing a numerical value to the five descriptors that were intended to identify the level in which the students were before doing the intervention in the classes to apply cooperative learning strategies promoting communication environments. In the second stage, it was done a general analysis of each student's performance in the proposed topics (personal information, family, adjectives, past simple and present progressive) having the standards described for A2, which the students must have according to the proposal of the principal of the school, who takes as guide the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

5.1. Accuracy:

Accuracy is one of the micro - skills to produce correct sentences using correct grammar and vocabulary (tense, auxiliaries, sentence structure in affirmative, negative and interrogative form). It is important to clarify that accuracy is a relative aspect because a child in early primary does

not have the same level of accuracy as an adult. For this reason if teachers want to improve this micro – skill in their students they should help them to produce grammatically correct written and spoken English but always having in mind the level in which their students are.

According to the Common European Framework (CEF) (2001) students in A2 level use basic sentences patterns with memorized phrases and formulate limited information in order to communicate simply everyday situation, having basic mistakes. Also students can answer question and respond to simple statement indicating when he or she don't understand the conversation. Taking into account the previous features we designed and applied the tests, the cooperative learning activities implemented during our collaborative action research and also based on these parameters established by CEF we analyzed all collected data for assessing student's accuracy as will be shown below.

Firstly in the analysis of the pre - test we realized that among areas of personal information and family, the majority of students had scores between 2 and 3 that according to the descriptor, it refers to specific problems in the use and distortion of the meaning of words, for example in the case of the student number 1, who in the question "What does your mother or your father do?" he answered Claudia Patricia (his mother's name) showing that this child confused this question with a different one such as "what is your mother´s name?" losing the flow of the conversation. Besides this in the following three themes (adjectives, present progressive and past simple) children presented a poor syntactic control or simply they did not answer the questions of the test, this was evident specifically in the topics of adjectives and past simple since most of the students showed many difficulties to organize sentences using adequately the adjectives or conjugating verbs correctly in the past tense. These problems were also reflected throughout the

implementation process of this diagnostic test as it is mentioned in the some observations done by researchers of this project.

During the observations done in the implementation of cooperative learning activities to encourage communicative spaces, we noticed that most of the students repeated a lot the words that they use continually but when they needed to express an idea with unfamiliar words they use their mother language as it was evidenced in journal 1 since in the application of a memory game the members of each group talked with their partners to guess what the correct pairing was but all the time they were talking in Spanish rather than in English.

Another example of the previously mentioned problem was found in the journal 2 in the activity "who am I?" in which students firstly were organized in groups of four students through number-heads then one student of each group received a secret famous character and their classmates had to guess what the identity was asking some questions about personal information but to develop this activity they had to use the native language to elaborate the questions orally.

Furthermore in the journal 5 where students had to use the native language to describe to their absent classmates what they comprehended about the story they began the activity in English but to be understood and also due to the fact that students did not have enough vocabulary to express their ideas they preferred to tell the story in Spanish. In addition, these students used their mother language to clarify the instructions given by the teacher as was demonstrated in all observations done throughout the process. Although according to McGroarty (1989) the use of Spanish as mother language in a cooperative learning strategy can be useful and can support the cognitive students' development to increase their second language skills.

Another problem that became evident was the confusion that students had to conjugate verbs in different tenses (present simple, past simple and present progressive), as was noted in journal 6 in the activity of "charades" where in groups they had to guess the verb that one of members of each group had to perform through mimic and the group that knew the answer had to give a complete answer for example "Christian is dancing regaeton" but they showed some problems with *verb to be* because most of the groups said things like "they is singing", then to overcome this issue the teacher clarified the use of verb to be once again on the board.

On the other hand in the journal 7, we could notice that students that were developing the cooperative learning activity "who I am?" They had problems to formulate the questions in present progressive tense because they forgot to use the verb to be or they confused this verb and use the auxiliary do. Despite the previous problems, the opportunity of interaction given by this cooperative learning strategy allowed students to clarify the meanings and uses of the words to correct their mistakes and answer correctly.

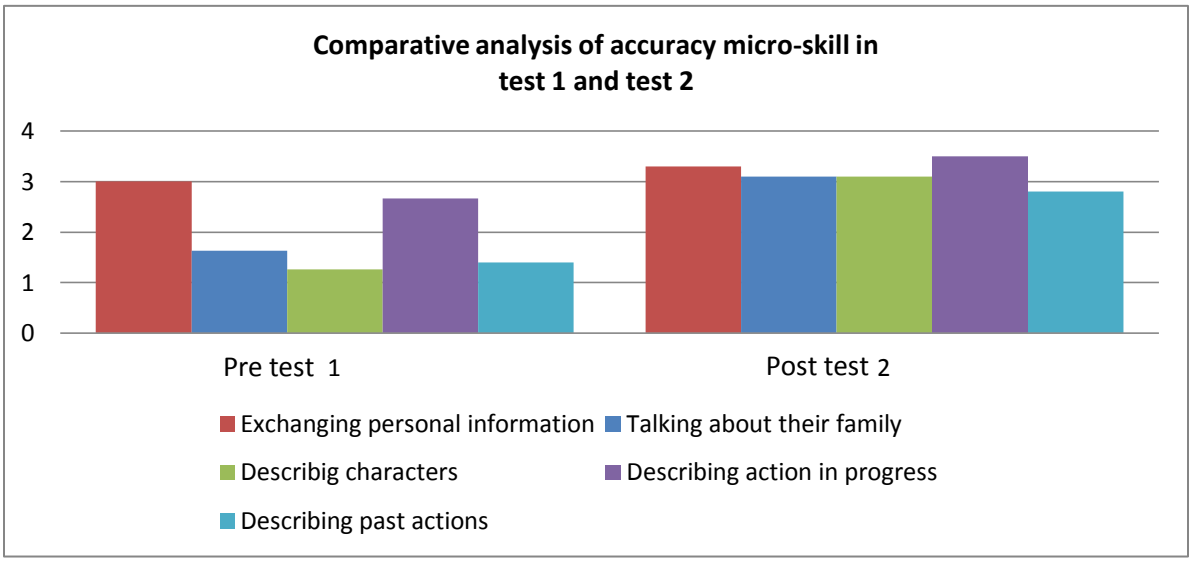
In the journal 10, we could realize other examples of the confusion in the conjugation of the verbs since in the topic of past simple, learners confused the conjugation of regular verbs with irregular verbs adding to all the ending "ed" because in the activity when students had to play a "stop game" in groups of three, they showed continuous problems with the verbs conjugation that could not be overcome because the students did not conjugate correctly the irregular verbs, they added to this kind of verbs also the ending "ED".

In addition, the second test of the process shows that in the topics of personal information and family most students evidenced progress since they got scores between three and four. Returning the case of the student number 1, he answered to the question what does your mother or father

do? They work in the school. It means to a certain extent that they overcame the scores achieved in the diagnostic test, this can also be demonstrated in the comparative graphs (see chart number 1) where it can be seen a slight improvement according to the general averages obtained by the group from the diagnostic test passing throughout the implementation process of cooperative learning strategies applied in the ten classes and finally we evaluate the students once again to check their oral language proficiency through the second test.

In terms of adjectives, present progressive and simple past; students indicated a significant improvement since the implementation of the first test most of them obtained scores no higher than 1 while in the evaluation test most learners got scores between three and four as it is corroborated in the comparison diagram.

Chart 1



According to what the chart shows, we can say that through the implementation of cooperative learning strategies carried out during ten sessions an improvement in this micro – skill was evidenced since the students were able to communicate their ideas in an orderly and

coherent way using grammatical structures appropriate to the level at which the school officials proposed, for example in the topic in which students had to describe characters in the first test they got a general score of 1,5 while in the second test they got a general score of 3 and in describing past actions students also showed an improvement because in the first test they got general scores between 1 and 1,4 while in the second test they got scores between 2,5 and 3 to support this we included the following pieces of transcriptions taken from recordings of the tests where a positive change in the students' answers was demonstrated, for instance the student number 15, as we can noticed in the follow transcription:

Test 1:

Researcher: can you tell me what Calvin did last Sunday?

Student: The last Sunday Calvin...mmm… was (silence of 5 seconds)

Test 2:

Researcher: look at this picture and now can you tell me what Calvin did last Monday?

Student: Calvin slept.

As we could notice in the first test the student to describe the actions of Calvin in past, He just replied Calvin was. While in the second test, he answered Calvin slept, this shows us how he could use correctly the grammar tense of the verb since we applied two sections to clarify doubts about past simple structure and the verbs conjugation helping to the internalization of the concepts.

Another example was of the student number 2 as it is demonstrated in the following transcriptions:

Test 1:

Researcher: Choose a picture of this. What is the man doing?

Student: perdon!

Researcher: what is the man doing?

Student: I don't know

Test 2:

Researcher: What are they doing today?

Student: eeehhh they are reading today.

As we can see this student in the diagnostic test in the part of describing actions in progress, he said that he did not know the answer of the question what are they doing? But in the second test the student answered to the same question they are reading today also using the correctly grammar tense.

5.2. Fluency

Due to the fact that this micro skill is the ability to speak quickly avoiding unnatural pauses and excessive use of crutches, during the implementation of our lessons we could realize that the lack of fluency when students wanted to say something was a negative characteristic which prevented children from showing self confidence at the moment of expressing ideas or answering a question. According to this weakness, we focused our lessons in oral activities such as find someone who, interviews, dialogues, and asking and answering games, which made students practice the English in an interactive way, helping them to feel more comfortable at the moment of saying something. Since almost always when a student did not know how to say something,

their teammates helped him or her to complete the idea that they wanted to express, at the same time they practiced the target language. In addition the CEF argues that students can make them understood through of little expressions presenting pauses, false starts and reformulate of their ideas.

According to the diagnostic test in this micro - skill most students were located in a range between 1 and 3.5 on topics related to personal information, and family that according to the descriptors set out in the rubric number 1 it states that students had a fragmented language or do not respond to questions like the students number 4 who did not answer and only used crutches:

Researcher: Hello, what is your name and surname?

Student: …

Researcher: And your surname?

Student: …

Researcher: ok, How old are you?

Student: fine and you? Aahhh mmmmm … (10 seconds)

Researcher: Where are you from?

Student: silence, I don't know

Researcher: What is your telephone number?

Student: … ehehehehehe …

Or the students 5 and 6, who to the question what is your telephone number? answered but in a slow and fragmented way,

Researcher: What is your telephone number?

Student 5: the telephone number is 6 18 … 26 aah y 61.

Researcher: What is your telephone number?

Student 6: my telephone number is 3’ 10 5 80 eh eh 27 eheh 84

Moreover the quality of their performance decreased and varied in topics related to adjectives, present progressive and past simple because depending on the topic, students showed a fluctuation in the ranges. the previous statement shows that the level of the students in this micro - skill oscillate between 2 and 2.5 namely they used crutches, chunks, unnatural pauses, for example the student number 2 when being asked to give a description of Phineas using adjectives answered in the following form:

Researcher: ok, look at this picture; Do you know who is he?

Student: Phineas and Candace,

Researcher: ok please make a description of Phineas,

Student: heeee mmmm then made a short pause and he finally say happy.

In fact, during the observation process, the students showed a lot of insecurity to express their ideas for fear of not being understood as it was demonstrated throughout the classes, however through the implementation of communicative activities based on cooperative learning strategies students achieved progressively to express their ideas in a simple and complete way, accepting corrections and clarifications suggested by their teammates and from the teacher. For example, in the journal 9 we could observe that one group of girls started to correct mutually their mistakes and others follow this strategy when they were working through inside and outside the circle which is one of the strategies of cooperative learning. As Donato (1988) states through this kind of strategies students not only socialize their ideas but also these activities serve as transitional mechanism to internalize the corrections of the mistakes that they made and at the same time the grammatical structures consequently getting a more fluently speech.

Furthermore the children showed false starts, crutches, chunks, unnatural pauses, and took long time to answer or make sentences in a correct manner as was evidenced during the implementation of the classes.

In the same way, in general during the administration of the second test the students presented a range equivalent to 2.5 and 3.8 in the first two topics (personal information and family) showing an evolution specifically in the second theme, for example, student 4, who had used crutches and had not answered, in the second test he answered all questions quickly and in an organized way like the students number 5 and 6, who in the first implementation of the test had answered in a slow and fragmented way to the question What is your telephone number? They answered in a faster and safer form as noted in the following transcription:

Researcher: What is your telephone number?

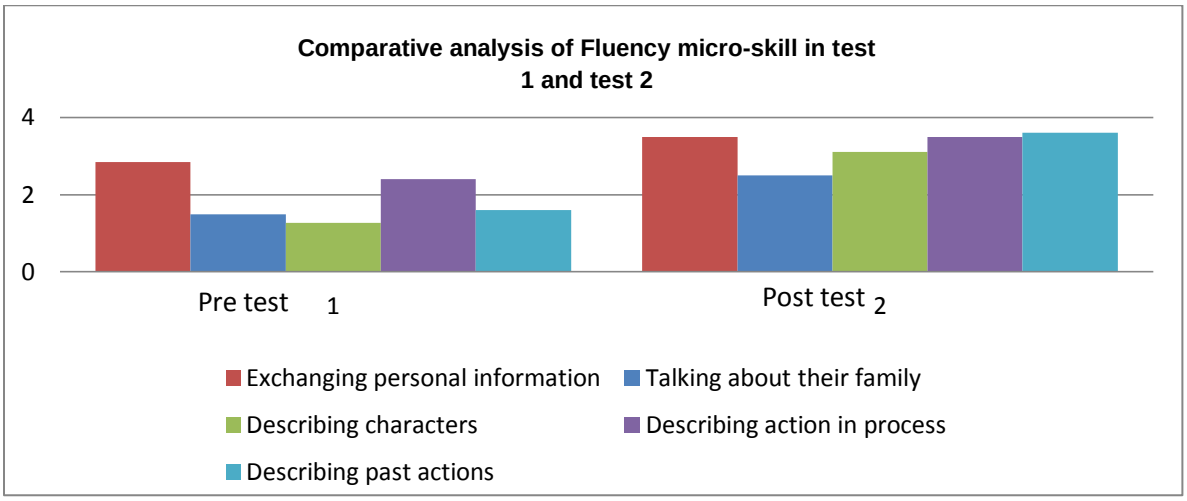
Student 5: my telephone number is 6 18 26 (short pause) 61

Researcher: What is your telephone number?

Student 6: my telephone number is 3 10 5 80 eh 27 eheh 84.

In contrast with the following three topics (adjectives, present continuous and past simple) in which the range demonstrated by the students increased, since it oscillates between 3 and 4 indicating a significant increase specifically in the section of adjectives and past simple, as student number 2 above in the analysis of pre-test, in this occasion answered to the question what do Phineas and Candace look like? Phineas is small, Candace is tall, is happy Phineas more quickly. The previous information is explained in the comparative graphs (see chart 2).

Chart 2



To conclude the analysis of this micro - skill, we can say it was the skill in which students presented more problems and therefore the most difficult skill to improve because during the entire process, students continued showing hesitations, unnatural pauses, chunks and crutches at the time of speaking. As noted in the second test, an example of this may be the student number 13, who in the question in which he had to describe actions in progress, he still made some pause before answering the man is eating, or student number 8 who answered the question Do you have brother or sister and brothers? saying: ehehehe yes (made a short pause) I have a brother.

5.3. Pronunciation:

As its name indicates, this micro skill refers to the ability to pronounce a language correctly making oral communication maintain phonetic similarities with the target language. With this in mind, we as teachers devoted time to correct mistakes, helping students to reduce their own accent and also demonstrating what the correct pronunciation was for some words that were difficult to produce for them. Additionally, we made learners realize the difference between the

pronunciation of words with similar writing and the variation in articulation when inside a sentence they found contractions.

When we analyzed the diagnostic test we noticed that many students obtained scores ranging from 1 to 4.5 and 0 to 3.5 in topics related to Personal and family information. At the same time, on the topics corresponding to describing characters, describing actions in progress and describing past actions, scores obtained by students varied from 1 to 3, 1 to 5 and 1 to 3 respectively. It shows that students do not pronounce the words having similar intonation to the second language according to the descriptors set out for assessing the performance of students in this test. For example student number 6, 9 and 13 in the question what did Calvin do last Friday? Pronounced the verb eat in the same way that they write it besides the grammar and syntax errors. According to the transcriptions, these are the answer that students gave us,

Researcher: what did Calvin do last Friday?

Student number 6: in the last Friday is **eat /i:t/** pizza,

Researcher: what did Calvin do the last Friday?

Student number 9: He **ate /et/** pizza,

Researcher: ok. What did Calvin do the last Friday?

Student number 13 - she is **eating / itɪŋ/ .**

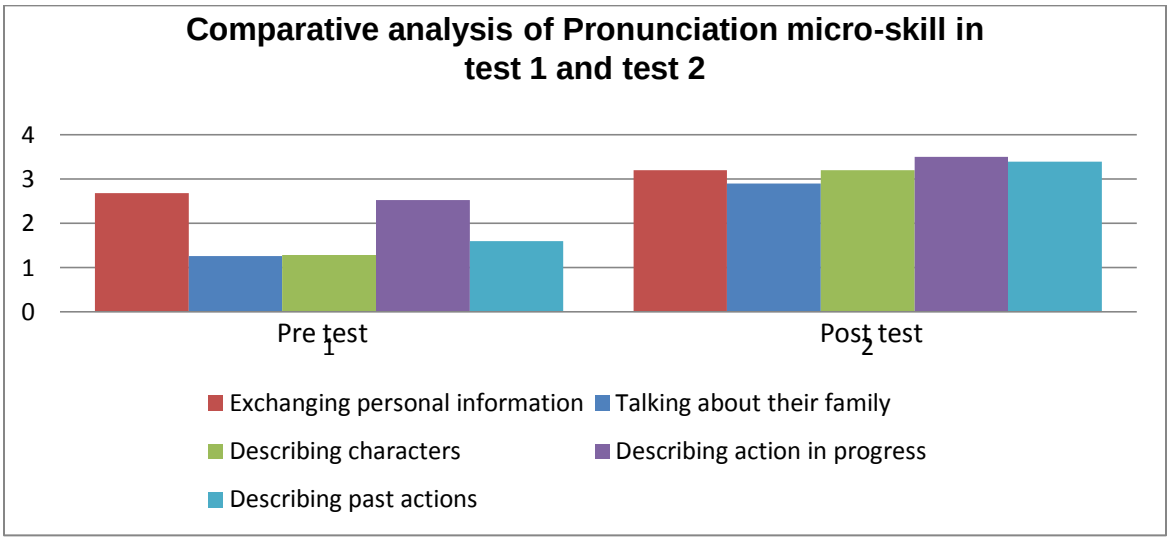
Similarly, during the first test and during the observation process students showed problems related to the differentiation of vowel and consonant sounds, as evidenced in the journal 1 where teachers had to help children to improve the intonation of some vowel and consonant sounds like “o”, “s”, "r", “ll” with the intention they make a reduction of their own accent, the teacher

emphasized the pronunciation of: go /gəʊ/ because students tended to pronounce the vowel “o” like in Spanish, sport /spɔ:rt /since students tended to pronounce the consonant “S” like “es”, running / ˈrʌnɪŋ/ due to the fact that students tended to pronounce the consonant “R” as strong as in their native language, and gallery / ˈgæləri/ because students tended to pronounce the consonants “ll” as in Spanish. In addition, another example was in the journal 4 during the application of the lesson of adjectives students made mistakes such as /shi/ instead of /ʃaɪ/, /beautiful/ instead of /ˈbju:tɪfəl/, /ambitious/ instead of /æmˈbɪʃəs/ and also presenting confusion with the pronunciation of the consonant “l” since they pronounced it like in their mother language. Furthermore children also presented problems to pronounce unfamiliar words in the same way in which they write as we could noticed in journal 3 in which students showed problems related to intonation and stress due to the fact that they used to say the words like in Spanish pronunciation for example: they said /friendly/ instead of / ˈfrendli/, /shi/ instead of /ʃaɪ/, /tin/ instead of /θɪn/, /beautiful/ instead of /ˈbju:tɪfəl/, and small instead of /smɔ:l/. another example was in the journal 2 in the activity of agreement circles where the students tended to pronounce the words as they are written, making mistakes with the vocalic and consonant sounds for example in two groups three students did not say /sli:p/ but /sleep/ it means they pronounce the word like they read with double “e” . According to what has been said, when students do not pronounce correctly, they could not differentiate the proper intonation and stress of the word.

Besides this in the second test, regarding the first two topics of personal and family information, students showed a slight evolution about their own information getting an overall score of 2.8 to 3.1, but in contrast was more evident the improvement when they talked about their families. At the same time, in the topic of describing past actions and describing characters, learners had a significant change while in the topic related to describing actions in progress there

was an increase in student performance from a score of 2.6 to 3.5, a clear example of this is the progress of the students 5 and 9 who in the question What did Calvin do last Monday? They pronounced the sentence properly, thereby evidencing in the comparison graphs (see chart 3).

Chart 3



According to the graphic it is evident that students had an increase on the different topics proposed in the test. Although, this improvement was not at the same level, since the most significant results were obtained from students responses related to: talking about their family, describing characters, and describing past actions, where they showed a better performance than on the application of the first test.

Finally we can conclude that the students did an effort to improve the micro-skill, because they tried to correct their mistakes avoiding interference in the comprehension by the listener, although there are topics that they should continue working such as the pronunciation of the past tense.

In general terms we can conclude that the ability in which students improve in meaningful way was: the accuracy micro-skill because to the final of the process they can organize their

ideas more adequately due to the fact that students have previous concepts about grammatical structures. On the contrary, the micro-skill less developed was pronunciation since students do not take the risk to pronounce the words imitating the native accent.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Conclusions

The main objective of this research project was to determine the role that cooperative learning strategies play in the development of 5th graders' speaking skills at George Washington School. To carry out this research, we designed and developed a set of instruments and activities which were useful tools to focus our classes, seeking to provide students with the necessary guidance to help them to improve their speaking skill in the foreign language.

It is for that reason that through the application of two tests, the first one to determine the students' speaking level and weaknesses that they showed in terms of accuracy, pronunciation and fluency, we choose as tools ten cooperative learning strategies to apply inside the classroom such as number heads, inside outside the circle, find somebody who, three adjectives, who I am?, etc. And after that implementing the second test that was equal to the previous one in order to verify the role of these strategies in the development of the students' speaking level, for finally to compare the results of each test to get to the following conclusions:

We realized that students' speaking performance improved, because according to the analysis of the first test, fifth graders showed a reduced use of the second language when they were interviewed for us with the aim for checking their English level in the following topics: exchanging personal information, talking about their family, describing characters, describing actions in progress and describing past actions, while in the application of the second test, learners demonstrated a better domain of the language, in terms of accuracy, fluency and pronunciation in the topics previously stated.

The above mentioned ideas makes us infer that cooperative learning activities are helpful for students to develop their speech in a progressive manner, due to the fact that helping students to develop this communicative skill, mediated by different types of activities which require the interaction between people, work team giving them the opportunity to practice the language in real situations in which learners could show an output of the topics covered during the classes.

Besides this, some real examples that help us to support our claims are: “Finds somebody who”, that was an activity whose role was giving students the opportunity to make questions and answer it, following models in order to exchange information according to a topic provided by the teacher; “Three adjectives”, in which students must identify and pronounce in the best way the adjectives with the intention to understand their partners and to guess who person described him/herself using three adjectives in this way they got to internalize strongly the knowledge and the suggestions made by their classmates and by the teacher.

Other cooperative learning strategy used was number heads which aim was to give the opportunity of interaction among different people, not always the same people in the same groups allowing the development of communicative spaces, because through group work, students strengthen their social ties helping each other, at the same time they learn from each member of the group, since during the different classes, all person's contribution was valuable for the consolidation of the themes proposed by the teacher.

To sum up, through this kind of teaching-learning strategies, the students could overcome some difficulties related to manner, grammatical organization, fluency and pronunciation that they use to communicate their ideas. At the same time students acquired more self confidence to talk in front of their partners.

For this reason, in the sphere of application of speaking skill, the teacher's role may be to stimulate and propose as many oral activities as possible with the intention students become familiar with this kind of activities and through the work in small groups, they begin to build self-confidence, while they leave aside the shyness gradually, being able to contribute with their points of view in front of their teammates, because as Dudgeon (1998) points out, students should have many opportunities to talk in the second language during each class section, and this can be possible if the teacher provides an environment in which learners can carry out the development and improvement of speaking skills.

Finally, we can say that according to our experience supported by the different instruments applied during our research. The diverse activities proposed by us during the classes, were useful to improve speaking ability in students, since making a contrast among the results of each test with the journals corresponding to each lesson, we realized that cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy that can be implemented by teachers during their classes to help students enhance the process of acquiring a second language, not only for oral tasks as it is demonstrated in this paper, but also to improve the listening, reading and writing skills, as Liang (2002) states.

6.2. Pedagogical implications

According to the experience acquired during this research project, we as researchers and teachers could understand through the application of cooperative learning classes that it brings benefits for teachers and definitely for students, due to the fact that collaborative action research permitted that in the course of the study we experienced along with fifth graders the importance of working following the parameters established by cooperative work, since promoting the

cooperation among team mates makes students understand that all the members of a group are important and indispensable to reach a common goal.

Furthermore, working under the influence of these learning strategies help students become responsible for their own and group work, contributing to the development of students social skills, increasing their retention, and the most important for this research project, it helps students to develop skills in oral communication. We can ensure this, because according to the results showed in our data analysis, students' performance improved after the implementation of classes thanks to the dynamics generated by the use of cooperative learning activities.

As a result of this, fifth graders at George Washington School improved their speaking skills, being able to understand and answer to different questions related to exchanging personal information, talking about their family, describing characters, describing actions in progress and describing past actions.

On the other hand, it is necessary to clarify that although students' speaking skills improved after the application of the classes, this does not mean that the shortcomings in terms of accuracy, fluency and pronunciation were completely overcome. On the contrary we are conscious of the importance of keeping a constant process to get more meaningful results.

Finally this study made a contribution to the area of teaching English as a foreign language and also to training teachers because it sheds lights on ways in which cooperative learning strategies can be used to promote oral communication environments inside the classroom in a striking manner for students, and at the same time, to handle properly certain situations that may happen in the classroom, such as: students' gender preferences at the moment of making groups, number of students in each group, rejection to work with other people, lack of interest to contribute with team work etc. And at the same time through this kind of action research, we as teachers not only

can identify problems that could arise in our classes, but also be able to find a solution throughout the interventions and consequently improving the quality of our teaching practicum.

6.2.1. Suggestions for Further Research:

In addition to the conclusions in the development of this research project, we could realized that the results gotten in a limited time, have given a set of recommendations for further studies in the frame of the application of cooperative learning strategies in teaching of English as a foreign language.

According to the above, this study may be took into account to be applied during a longer period of time and involve more sample population in order to achieve better results and get the considerable progress of each student like we had proposed at the beginning of this research.

In addition, this research project may include within its main objectives the development of other skills such as listening, writing or reading together with the speaking skills to improve the weaknesses that students might present and at the same time to improve learners' work ability in an integral way, to achieve more significant progress during the learning process of each them.

On the other hand, although the results of this study suggest a close relationship between the cooperative learning and the improvement of students speaking ability, it seems necessary to replicate this study incorporating other cooperative strategies in the teaching process to ensure that the application of cooperative learning strategies inside the classroom have validity and success, facilitating and helping to overcome the weaknesses that the students present during their learning process of a foreign language.

We also suggest to investigate the effectiveness of the use of cooperative learning strategies in the attitude that students adopt in the learning of English, since the strategies used to teach a foreign language are essentials to motivate students to learn and use it adequately, promoting a better retention and future application of knowledge.

Finally, we suggest inquiring the usefulness of cooperative learning strategies in other programs or grades in which teachers want their students to improve their English language skills, offering them the opportunity to develop positive and productive relationships moreover an academic support to help them overhang in their studies through cooperative teams.

6.2.3 Limitations:

Some of the limitations of this research project were that we did not have enough time to carry out a significant number of classes in which we can apply more cooperative learning techniques and developing other oral activities that would have made that students strengthen their speaking skill, giving more credibility to this research.

Moreover, we had wished that our meetings with children had not been so distant, since only we had two hours per week and sometimes we felt that seeing the children only once a week was a negative factor, because they lost the habit to work cooperatively, and we had troubles making students who liked to work alone go back to work jointly with others, since if in a class we were able to get encourage them to work together, that achievement was lost because eight days after they returned to work alone as always, while if the classes had been for example, three times a week, these kinds of problems had been overcome.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX No 1

GEORGE WASHINGTON SCHOOL
SPEAKING TEST

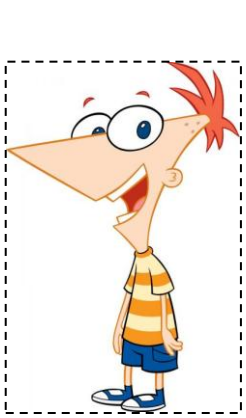
FAMILY:

1. Answer the following questions about your family.
   a. Where do you live?
   b. What does your father or your mother do?
   d. Do you have any brother and sister? What do they do?

- What is your name and surname, please?
- How old are you?
- Where are you from?
- What is your telephone number?

ADJECTIVES:

You have to use adjectives to describe the following image:



PRESENT PROGESSIVE:

1. Answer the following questions using present continuous. Remember the structure of the present progressive**:**

Subject + verb To be + verb with –ing + complement

She is listening pop music

a. What is the dog doing?

b. What is the man doing?

d. What are they doing today?

SIMPLE PAST

1. What Calvin did last week?

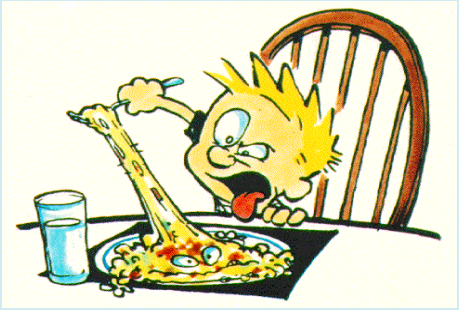
MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY



SATURDAY

SUNDAY

APPENDIX 2

RUBRIC

GEORGE WASHINGTON SCHOOL

Teaching with excellence a commitment to the future

SPEAKING TEST RUBRICS

RESEARCH QUESTION:

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THE USE OF COOPERTAIVE LEARNING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING SKILLS IN STUDENTS OF FOURTH GRADE AT GEORGE WASHINGTON SCHOOL?

TOPIC	[redacted]	ACCURACY					FLUENCY					PRONUNCIATION				
		4.1 - 5	3.1 - 4	2.1 - 3	1.1 - 2	0 - 1	4.1 - 5	3.1 - 4	2.1 - 3	1.1 - 2	0 - 1	4.1 -5	3.1 - 4	2.1 - 3	1.1 - 2	0 - 1
		Functions, grammar, and vocabulary are used correctly.	Minor problems in usage do not distort meaning communication	Problems in usage significantly distort meaning communication	Serious lapses of syntax interfering with comprehension.	Complete lack of syntactical control or no response	Overall ease of expression	Some hesitancy	Frequent pauses	Fragments of language	No response	Near native pronunciation and intonation	Good effort to simulate native intonation and pronunciation	Pronunciation and intonation do not interfere with comprehension	Pronunciation and intonation impair comprehension.	No attempt to simulate native sounds and intonation
Personal Information	1		3.2						2.8					2.3		
	2		3.6						2.6				3.3			
	3		3.2			1.0			2.7				3.6			
	4										1.0					1.0
	5	4.7						4.0				4.5				
	6		3.5				4.2					4.2				
	7	4.2						3.5				4.2				
	8			2.7					2.7					3.0		
	9		3.2					3.7						2.0		
	10		3.2						3.0					2.3		
	11				1.6					1.3				2.6		
	12			2.2						1.7						1.0
	13			3					2.5							1.7
	14				2.8				2.8						2.0	
	15			3				3.2							2.5	
	1				2.6						1.0					1.0
	2					1.0					1.0					1.0
	3				1.3					1.3						1.0
	4					1.0					1.0					1.0
	5					1.0					1.0					1.0

APPENDIX 3

JOURNAL

Date: **Place:** **Topic:**	
DESCRIPTION	**REFLECTION**