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MSc Learning & Teaching

Part 3 Research and Development Project

Promoting Collaboration to Enhance Learning in MFL

ABSTRACT

This paper details school-based research conducted to gather pupil views on group work and promote collaboration to enhance learning in French lessons at a British junior school. A dual-phase intervention centred on a sample of 74 pupils in Year 5 and saw the collaborative design, implementation and evaluation, by four teachers, of tasks drawing on the cooperative learning principles of positive interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, group processing and promotive interaction. Questionnaires were employed to gather views at different stages of the enquiry, allowing for quantitative analysis; data was also gathered via qualitative techniques such as lesson observations and semi-structured interviews. A majority of pupils claimed to enjoy working together, learning from others and helping one another, with many citing teamwork as a key facilitator to effective collaboration and warning of the negative implications of arguing, bossiness and disruption. The role of the teacher was considered key to the efficacy of group work, with proficient task design and efficient classroom management seen as especially important. Overall, cooperative learning strategies were deemed effective in enhancing the quality of group work in French lessons, this judgment being based primarily on the observations and experiences of the pupils and teachers involved. The key findings from this study have been collated to form a set of guidelines, intended as a point of reference in the future planning and execution of group work in this setting.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 RATIONALE

The only thing that will redeem mankind, is cooperation. (Bertrand Russell)

There exists in our society a common rhetoric on competition. The media frequently reminds us about the 'global race' for one thing or another (Beckett, 2013; Palmer, 2016), where companies vie for contracts, governments contest laws and nations compete to host events such as the Olympic games. Simultaneously however, collaboration is arguably the bedrock of the human condition. What academic article relies solely on the viewpoints of the author? What scientific discovery ignores the findings of preceding trials? What factory has not benefitted from schools and colleges educating its workforce, from hospitals and surgeries keeping its workforce well and from roads and railways transporting its products? In all industries, throughout the world, people cooperate to achieve.

It would appear, however, that a preponderance of competitive mechanisms endure in education: the common perceptions are that one needs good qualifications to get a good job, that one needs good exam results to access worthy degree courses and so on. It is not unknown that in many British public exams, such as GCSEs and A-levels, grade boundaries are partially dictated by the performance of the cohort as a whole (JCQ CIC, 2016); thus, to better one's prospects, one is incentivised to outperform one's peers. Such mechanisms filter down: in my junior school setting, pupils are grouped by attainment in several subjects and compete for positions in sports teams, musical ensembles and school plays. They sit regular exams and see results scrutinised against their year group's median scores.

I hypothesise that such conditions impact on the way pupils view one another. My previous school-based research (AUTHOR[1], 2015) addressed the reaction of pupils towards a recent change in academic policy, involving the removal

[1] Name removed for anonymity.

of grades from routine pieces of work in the aim of subduing competition. The move was met with resistance by a majority of senior pupils, who claimed to enjoy comparing their achievements with one another. They felt a certain affirmation in this process, ignoring that a given task may provide scant chance to evidence one's true capabilities, that no human marker can guarantee absolute consistency and the fact that, as a global benchmark, one's classmates are a largely irrelevant measure. Alarmingly, having assumed that pupils wanted simply to come first, further probing unearthed more cases of pupils wanting reassurance that they had not come last. What influence does such a standpoint have on a pupil's ability to collaborate? Is one realistically equipped to cooperate with classmates whose achievements might correlate negatively with one's own sense of self-worth? They are effectively in a zero-sum game: one cannot succeed without a comparable degree of failure from one or more others. There is clearly more to group work than meets the eye.

"*Cooperative experiences are not a luxury. They are an absolute necessary for the healthy development of individuals who can function independently.*"
(Johnson and Johnson, 2014, p843)

It is argued that cooperation and teamwork are crucial elements of everyday life (Vrhovec, 2015) and that educational institutions have a responsibility to assist in the socialisation of pupils (Adams, 2015). Sociocultural theory holds, as its central tenet, that human beings develop socially, achieving more together than they could on their own (Vygotsky, 1986). Jane and Robbins (2007) highlight the importance of internalisation in learning, the process whereby 'intermental' functioning, (interactions between people) influences 'intramental' functioning (the thoughts and concepts that individuals hold in their head). This could not occur without communal activity.

As Head of Modern Foreign Languages, I carry out regular lesson observations and have been coached not to scrutinise the teacher, but to focus on the learners. By far my most common criticism is that, however engaging or otherwise impressive, a lesson does not necessitate sufficient active participation by pupils, who spend a majority of time listening passively to the teacher or to other

individuals feeding back to the class. I perceive my greatest weakness as a teacher to be an unwillingness to relinquish control; I feel most comfortable leading lessons from the front and am inherently wary of devolving autonomy to my pupils, lest a lack of scaffolding should lead them to fail. I know this to be a fickle logic however; I understand from my own experiences as language learner that overcoming setbacks and making one's own breakthroughs can be highly motivating.

Proficiency in a language relies largely on communication (Kim, 2008) and one's sense of identity is threatened if one cannot exchange information effectively (Duxbury and Tsai, 2010). One's first language retains considerable value in collaboration (see Section 2.1.4), especially in the negotiation of meaning, the discussion of key concepts and the resolution of 'cognitive dissonance' (Gillies, 2007), but unlike other subjects, a second language represents not just the content to be learned, but also a means of assimilating this content (Fathman and Kessler, 1993). If pupils use the target language collaboratively in class, then theoretically they increase their exposure to 'comprehensible input' whilst practising their key skills (Zhang, 2010).

Thus, in an attempt to address my own professional frailties and to encourage what I consider to be good practice among my colleagues, I regularly advocate the employment of group work, seeking to maximise the proportion of time that pupils are actively engaged in direct communication with others, be it in English or in French. Such promotion of pupil cooperation seems a worthy aim and yet, given what I have previously established about at least some of my pupils, and recognising the juxtaposition of competition and collaboration in my school and in wider society, I sense that group work that is genuinely and consistently beneficial to the learning and wellbeing of the pupils involved necessitates more forethought, knowledge and awareness than I currently possess. Herein lies the greatest impetus for this study: in order to instigate group work of genuine quality and value, I need first to establish what this constitutes, how it can be achieved and what influencing factors need to be considered.

1.2 CONTEXT

My school is the junior section of a selective London independent school. The junior school is autonomous and caters to 473 boys in Years 3 to 8, with 78 staff members in total. Pupils begin learning French in Year 5 with three lessons per week, before progressing to four lessons per week in Year 6 and thereafter. Throughout this investigation, I will work alongside departmental colleagues, using empirical research and subsequent interventions to examine collaboration (also referred to as group work and cooperation) in French lessons, addressing how it might be enriched to enhance learning.

1.3 AIMS

I hope to gain a deeper academic understanding of the dynamics and mechanics of classroom collaboration in second language acquisition. To achieve this I will gather pupil opinions, gauging their existing views and logging their reaction to a series of cooperative strategies. In doing so, I hope to better appreciate the nature of collaboration taking place in lessons within my department and to establish means of tailoring it to the pupils' greatest benefit. I will work alongside departmental colleagues and draw on their expertise throughout; co-working will be a key element of the study and I intend for us to share ideas, experiment with new methods and critique our practice and its impacts, becoming more able to empathise with pupils through this, our own up-to-the-minute experience of collaboration.

I hope ultimately to publish a set of collaborative guidelines for inclusion in our departmental handbook, to be considered in our future employment of group work, featuring methods that draw on both academic expertise and the practical experiences of our pupils and teachers, sources that should be of interest and value the school as a whole. I intend to contribute our experiences to the body of research on cooperative learning, which currently lacks detailed analysis of collaboration among younger learners, especially within the United Kingdom. Above

all, I intend to further my understanding in this sphere so as to improve my professional practice and thus enhance the learning of the pupils in my charge.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 BACKGROUND

2.1.1 Cooperative Learning

Following a meta-analysis of 685 studies on the relative value of cooperative, competitive and individualistic classroom structures, Johnson and Johnson (2014) assert that collaborating to accomplish a shared goal yields higher attainment and greater productivity than competition or working individually, considering this to be one of the core principles of social psychology. In a school context, Dörnyei (1997, p.482) defines cooperative learning, a prominent theme in the literature, as "*the instructional use of small groups to achieve common goals via cooperation*". Cooperative learning involves pupils working together towards a common goal, be it in an isolated activity, throughout a lesson, or over a longer period (Vrhovec, 2015).

Slavin (1980) stresses that cooperative learning occurs when groups receive rewards or recognition based on collective achievement. Others (Fathman and Kessler, 1993; Er and Aksu Ataç, 2014) focus on the process, insisting that cooperative learning is characterised by the contribution of pupils to one another's learning. This view is shared by Kagan (1994) and Johnson and Johnson (2014), some of the foremost exponents of cooperative learning, who suggest that within this framework, group members have a responsibility not just for their own construction of knowledge, but towards facilitating and indeed maximising the learning of their colleagues.

It is stressed that whilst cooperative learning will typically involve small group work, small group work does not constitute cooperative learning (Dörnyei, 1997). Cooperation does not occur when one pupil does the work and the group takes credit, nor when pupils chat together whilst working individually on the same task (Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, 2012). Vrhovec (2015) argues somewhat hazily that 'traditional group work' puts emphasis on cognitive goals, with no metacognitive

consideration of cooperative skills, interdependence or responsibilities; features of cooperative learning that are explored below.

2.1.2 Sociocultural Theory

"*Engagement in collaboration and social interaction is the main source of learning and development*" (Mirzaei and Eslami, 2013, p8)

Cooperative learning has its roots in sociocultural theory (Slavin, 1980), the notion that human beings have developed socially and that learning is chiefly a product of interactive processes (Marttunen et al., 2005; Abadikhah and Harsini, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) drew attention to the role of community and social interaction on learning with his work on 'the zone of proximal development', the difference between what a learner can achieve on their own and what they can accomplish with the help of others (de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014). Several authors proclaim that group learning should make each individual stronger in their own right, aiding retention and engendering autonomy (from the teacher, at least) through peer scaffolding (Slavin, Hurley and Chamberlain, 2001; Johnson and Johnson, 1994; de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014).

Dewey (1915) first stressed the importance of language as a social tool over a century ago but it was Vygotsky's innovation in social psychology that prompted second language acquisition to be examined as a "*social and contextually oriented enterprise*" (Mirzaei and Eslami, 2013, p6). One should here distinguish between learning as an active, deliberate process and acquisition, a subconscious internalisation resulting from continuous exposure and practice (Krashen, 1982). The 'input hypothesis' dictated that a flood of 'comprehensible input' (a propensity of reading and listening) was the only condition required for learners to attain mastery (Krashen, 1982), but criticisms were leveled that practices such as the grammar-translation method, whilst providing plenty of information about a given language, facilitated very little genuine communicative practice (Zhang, 2010). After all, an ability to perform technical skills is "*of little use if the person cannot apply those skills in*

cooperative interaction with other people in career, family, and community environments" (Johnson and Johnson, 1994, p9).

Until the 1970s, cooperative learning was relatively unknown. A transmissional teaching culture adopted an individualistic approach, with pupils expected to hear, accept and absorb information, working through curricula at their own pace, irrespective of peers' rates of learning (Vrhovec, 2015). Emphasis on interaction and its effects on socialisation led to the development of cooperative learning methods and principles in the 1970s and 1980s (Fathman and Kessler, 1993), coinciding with a shift towards a more transactional culture of teaching that predominates today (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012).

2.1.3 Constructivism

Cooperative learning is a constructivist strategy (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Learners are expected to engage in cognitive restructuring of the subject matter in order to learn (Slavin, Hurley and Chamberlain, 2001) and to continue to create new understanding by integrating new experiences to existing knowledge (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Studies in the Piagetian tradition of genetic epistemology (the origins of knowledge) have found sociocognitive conflict to be an essential component of cooperative learning (Marttunen et al., 2005). The constructive controversy between one's prior knowledge and new, alternative theories triggers a motivation to resolve the conflict (Johnson and Johnson, 2014). Personal constructivism occurs when one resolves this cognitive dissonance alone, whilst social constructivism involves the internalization of new ideas through repeated exchanges with others (Gillies, 2007).

2.1.4 Languaging

Swain defines 'languaging' as the act of "*mediating cognitively complex ideas using language*" (2006, p104), a tool that permits new cognitive functions and manipulations. Vygotsky (1986) holds that language is an essential mediating tool of the mind and that thoughts are not just expressed through words, they come into

existence through words from our 'inner voice'. Marttunen et al. (2005) speak of the importance of exploratory talk in cooperative language learning, when pupils explain their conceptions and encounter other views and understandings in the pursuit of firmer knowledge. There is some debate as to whether this exploratory talk should take place in the pupils' mother tongue, or in the target language, although Anton and DiCamilla (1999, p234) recognise that one's first language is "*a powerful tool of semiotic mediation between learners*".

Celik, Aytim and Bayram (2012) suggest that overuse of the first language undermines target language activities, but Fathman and Kessler (1993) argue that cooperative learning provides pupils with opportunities to use both known and new languages in a meaningful way. Accepting that one's native language is the tool that allows one to socialise, Duxbury and Tsai (2010) point out that pupils are handicapped in a foreign language classroom where this tool is forbidden. Cooke (1998, p21) grants that "*activating and connecting prior experience to the new knowledge will often be more effective if the talking around the topic allows for first as well as second language use*".

Swain et al. (2009) acknowledge that one's first language can facilitate the learning of complex content and see no contradiction in using this to mediate understanding, provided that it is later applied in the target language. Their study of nine intermediate learners of French as a second language at a Canadian university found that those who 'languaged' (discussed the concepts aloud) the most developed a deeper and more accurate understanding of the subject matter, in this case the notion of voice (active, passive etc.). Those who externalised their thoughts the most often were quicker to identify gaps in their surface comprehension and to turn this into deeper, conceptual understanding.

2.1.5 Competition

Nunan (1992, p.1) acknowledges that collaboration is a valid means of "*promoting a philosophy of cooperation rather than competition*" in the classroom. It is alleged that competition is a universal aspect of learning (Tarban and Roark, 1996)

and that competitive and individualistic climate prevails in tertiary education (de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). Silva and Madeira (2010) go so far as to suggest that pupils might be encouraged to develop competitive instincts in preparation for the combative world they are set to inherit. Yet Johnson and Johnson's (1992) overview and meta-analysis of 73 studies on the comparative worth of learning together and learning alone found cooperative learning to be more effective than competitive and individualistic classroom practices in terms of academic achievement. Similarly, Slavin's (1980) systematic review of 28 primary field projects lasting two weeks or more found that cooperative learning techniques were more effective than competition in bringing about academic achievement at both lower and higher cognitive levels.

Adams (2015) finds it troubling that cooperative learning is neglected in favour of competitive mechanisms, which train pupils in asocial behaviour, defined by a lack of motivation to engage in social interaction. Competition has associations with anxiety and self-doubt and arguably disadvantages pupils who have a cooperative social orientation (Widaman and Kagan, 1987). Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012) highlight the prevalence of competition in the most basic of classroom settings: the classroom conversation. A teacher's question to the class encourages pupils to compete with one another for attention and the right to respond; the most forthright are liable to succeed, leading others to withdraw. Such passivity would be more difficult if pupils were required to question one another.

"*It is a problem of balance and diversity: just as the inequality between the status of the arts and the sciences skews the balance of a curriculum, so the faith in a totalising system of competitive and individualised learning produces a reduced and distorted shadow of what education might be.*" (Adams, 2015, p1)

This idea of balance chimes with the views of many other authors who recognise that cooperative learning need not be a total instructional system and that it can coexist with competitive and individualistic structures (Fathman and Kessler, 1993; Silva and Madeira, 2010; Er and Aksu Ataç, 2014; Vrhovec, 2015). Widaman and Kagan (1987) point out that there is unlikely to be one classroom mechanism

that suits all pupils absolutely, and that a range of techniques is required for universal engagement; however, given the range of benefits attributed to cooperative learning (see Section 2.3), could it be a justifiable aim to coach pupils to become more receptive to collaborative methodology?

A great deal of research on cooperative learning has been conducted in tertiary institutions beyond the United Kingdom. There is very little analysis of cooperative learning among younger children but Widaman and Kagan (1987) conducted one important study with 864 elementary school pupils in the United States. They challenged a notion that cooperative learning leads to greater achievement by the average student, hypothesising instead that one's response to cooperative learning was governed by one's natural inclination towards cooperation. It seems reasonable to suggest that this trait might be affected quite considerably by factors beyond the school gates (whether someone has siblings, for example) but the means by which the researchers determined which pupils had a cooperative or competitive disposition is not afforded much detail. Different pupils were randomly assigned to different courses of cooperative learning that featured differing degrees of competition. Team-Games-Tournaments, the method deemed to incorporate the most competition, was shown to be the most effective in raising standards of spelling among the sample, but this result was largely accounted for by gains made by pupils already considered to be competitive. Here pupils were pitched against one another in frequent contests, competing for credit for their teams. Cooperative pupils typically did better in Student Teams-Achievement Divisions (a condition incorporating less competition); here pupils were assessed individually but privately, gaining credit according to their knowledge and not their performance in relation to someone else. The findings are therefore problematic, as it is unclear whether learning was bolstered or inhibited by cooperative strategies, or indeed whether pupils' dispositions altered over the course of the investigation.

2.2 PRINCIPLES OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

2.2.1 Positive Interdependence

There are widely acknowledged to be five key principles of cooperative learning (Olsen and Kagan, 1992; Fathman and Kessler, 1993; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). The first is positive interdependence. This occurs when group members require one other to succeed; each receives a fair share of the work and is equally responsible for the realisation of the task (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Success, ultimately, hinges on pupils' support of one another (Vrhovec, 2015); pupils sink or swim together and need to know that their collective fortune is governed by their individual efforts (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). A rationale for positive interdependence more specific to foreign language learning is put forth by Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012), who point out that there is potentially greater motivation to speak and listen well in the target language when mutual understanding is crucial for the interaction to continue.

By way of contrast, negative interdependence exists in competitive exercises, where one's success is dependent on another's failure (Slavin, 1980; Johnson and Johnson, 1994). In many cases, attainment is attributed according to the relative performance of peers (Silva and Madeira, 2010). There is little research that examines the impact of competition between groups, when theoretically both positive and negative interdependence could coexist. Gillies (2014) and Silva and Madeira (2010) suggest that drawbacks of competition are attenuated among groups, yet neither study looked specifically at this singularity.

2.2.2 Individual Accountability

The second key principle of cooperative learning is individual accountability, the notion that group members must work towards shared goals whilst being held accountable for their own contributions and efforts (Sharan, 2014). Slavin (1980) states that the degree of individual accountability inherent in a task is governed by the extent to which group members' contributions are separately quantifiable.

Johnson and Johnson (2002) affirm that increased individual accountability tends to lead to increased positive interdependence.

The assessment of cooperative learning is widely considered a thorny issue (Fathman and Kessler, 1993; de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014). Slavin (1980) acknowledges that there is a danger for cooperative learning to impact negatively on motivation because the degree to which individual performances lead to individual outcomes is reduced. Some (Johnson and Johnson, 2002; Silva and Madeira, 2010) advocate assessing pupils individually within cooperative learning, arguing that, for individual accountability to take root, pupils need to know that their separate marks or comments will be made known to the rest of the group. Domalewska (2014) suggests that motivation is increased when group members know that their work will be visible to their peers, although this relies on a task producing a tangible and divisible output. She also states that the act of scrutinising another's work can boost confidence and reduce anxiety, but she does not attribute these benefits specifically to the examiner or examinee.

"*In order for cooperative learning to work, the group needs clear goals and every member must have clearly defined responsibilities in terms of accomplishing the common goals of the group.*" (Vrhovec, 2015, p132)

An alternative means of promoting individual accountability is by attributing different roles to each group member (Johnson and Johnson, 2002; Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Sharan (2014) gives examples such as recorder, time-keeper and coordinator, but these seem somewhat simplistic and it would seem that very careful task design would be required to ensure that any roles given out were equally engaging and demanding. It is unclear whether the identification of a coordinator, or some other more senior role, would encourage autocracy and thus impact negatively on cooperation.

2.2.3 Social Skills

The third key principle of cooperative learning is the teaching of social skills. Effective cooperation ultimately leads to group cohesion because it increases contact among group members (Slavin, 1980) but working in groups involves a higher risk of conflict than working individually or direct instruction (Vrhovec, 2015). Several authors advocate teachers spending time explaining key skills such as active listening, turn-taking, encouraging, decision-making and conflict management (Cooke, 2005; Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Gillies (2007) avows that teachers need actively to teach pupils how to interact in groups and even goes so far as to recommend 'cooperative scripts'. Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012) similarly extol the importance of 'gambit development', equipping pupils with productive phrases to employ in the event of disagreement.

2.2.4 Group Processing

"*Collaborative tasks provide an ideal space for learners to discuss and reflect on their learning with peers*" (de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014, p124)

The fourth key principle of cooperative learning is group processing, ongoing metacognitive evaluation that should be engaged in by all group members (Gillies, 2007). This should include reflection not just on *what* has been learned, but *how* it has been learned, through what behaviours and how effectively (Sharan, 2014; Vrhovec, 2015). Dörnyei (1997) attests that evaluating the learning of the group as a whole is as, if not more, important than assessing individual input and output. Pupils should have an opportunity to give and receive feedback (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012), both skills that themselves demand a degree of explanation and teaching on the part of the teacher (Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, 2012). Domalewska (2014) concedes that pupils often struggle to offer critical comments without a sense of guilt and, similarly, rarely accept such critique without feeling affronted.

Abadikhah and Harsini's (2014) work with 31 learners of English as a foreign language found that, often, task completion was prioritised over discussion about the

language. Anxiety or desire to finish the task undermined collaborative behaviours and further suggests that pupils need to be made aware of and equipped for the formative values of cooperative learning, rather than left focussed on the final outcome. This relates to achievement mastery, whereby those of a 'performance orientation' believe success to be characterised by the outperformance of one's peers (perhaps by finishing first), while those of a 'mastery orientation' are more concerned with overcoming the subject matter (Ames, 1984).

2.2.5 Promotive Interaction

The final key principle of cooperative learning is promotive interaction, a term coined by Dörnyei (1997) that refers to the stimulation of ongoing communication between pupils who are helped and encouraged in their cooperation. This relates largely to the physical facilitation of collaboration: pupils should be in close proximity and facing one another (Zhang, 2010). Face-to-face interaction is key so as to promote the exchange of non-verbal as well as verbal communication between group members (Gillies, 2007). Cooperative learning is harder to manage in crowded classrooms, be this due to a high number of participants or simply a lack of space (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012).

"*Classrooms of the future will be better integrated as the effects of different dimensions [...] on students' learning are more clearly understood.*" (Gillies, 2007, p241)

2.3 BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

2.3.1 Cognitive Benefits

"*Working collaboratively enables learners to pool their knowledge and produce work of a more sophisticated level than when completed individually. The collective aspect of knowledge building is an important part of the student learning process, a privileged occasion for peers to learn from each other, notice gaps in their learning and articulate their knowledge and skills in relation to that of others.*"
(de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014, p116)

Fathman and Kessler's (1993) review of cooperative learning attest that it promotes a different patterning of communication in the classroom, one that increases the volume of interactions between pupils. The act of commenting on one another's work prompts group members to share their creativity, to be reflective and thus develop their critical thinking skills (Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, 2012; Domalewska, 2014). Albeit in reference to research conducted by others, Zhang's (2010) endorsement of cooperative learning declares that pupils who collaborate produce more ideas and solutions than those working independently or in competition with one another; pupils working together also allegedly demonstrate a greater transference of knowledge and understanding to new scenarios.

Kim (2008) attests that collaborative problem solving is central to the construction of knowledge *about* and *in* a second language. Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012) remind us that in speaking to the whole class, the teacher cannot hope to provide adequate stimulation to every pupil, often bewildering the weakest or boring the strongest. This dilemma is reduced in cooperative learning: pupils have more opportunities to participate, thereby increasing occasions for comprehensible input and simultaneous output (Fathman and Kessler, 1993; Zhang, 2010). Swain's (1985) output hypothesis suggests that producing language through interaction allows learners to discuss their own language, to test hypotheses relating to the target language, and potentially to note where gaps exist between their current capacity and the desired competency.

Kim (2008) performed a study with 32 learners of Korean as a second language at a South Korean university. The main procedure was a dictogloss, whereby students had a text read to them and had to note unknown words and phrases before attempting to learn these independently. Half worked alone and half collaborated, speaking aloud to identify their 'language-related episodes' (when they encountered something new). All had similar amounts of these episodes, but pupils who had collaborated performed much better in later vocabulary tests. One might argue, of course, that speaking aloud may have put off those who worked independently, as they would ordinarily have performed such a task in their heads.

The author also concedes that this study is only concerned with the learning of individual items of vocabulary.

2.3.1 Social Benefits

"*To be successful in negotiation presupposes the ability to give reasons for one's own view as well as consider the views and arguments of others.*" (Marttunen et al., 2005, p367)

If one accepts that human beings develop socially (Vygotsky, 1986), then it is sensible to suggest that interaction with peers shapes children's personalities from a young age. Adams (2015) speaks of the importance of socialising pupils at school, by allowing them to share in common enterprises; cooperative learning has great potential for creating harmony in diverse, heterogeneous settings (Sharan, 2014) and helps pupils to use human beings as resources, drawing on the knowledge and understanding of other people (Jongsma, 1990).

Nunan (1992) brings to light the clashes between group needs and individual needs that materialise through cooperative learning. The conflict management skills that are therein tested arguably enhance interpersonal relationships, promote the acceptance of differences and lead to greater consideration of others (Dörnyei, 1997; Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, 2012). Johnson and Johnson (2014) highlight that, where positive interdependence exists, pupils are more committed to one another's success and thus care more about each other.

In his handbook for teachers, McMahon (2013) lists the qualities that he considers to facilitate effective group work. He includes abilities to give and receive feedback positively and constructively, to be reliable and to rely on others, to be patient, fair and flexible and to be open to compromise. If these traits are encouraged to develop through cooperative learning then surely its social benefits are considerable.

Er and Aksu Ataç's (2014) recent study involved 166 students at a foundation university in Turkey and used questionnaires and interviews to gauge attitudes to

cooperative learning. A majority acknowledged that it helped them to recognise (and in some cases mediate) their differences and appreciate that there is rarely solely one way of achieving a given outcome. The interviews yielded more negative feedback on cooperative learning, despite a preponderance of questionnaire data being in favour. This provides a reminder that respondents may lack the necessary confidence to be critical of something unless teamed with others in a supportive environment.

2.3.3 Motivational Benefits

"*cooperative learning creates a group ethos where students realize that members will work to help and support their endeavours, and it is the sense of group cohesion that develops that enhances students' motivation to achieve both their own and the group's goals*"
(Gillies, 2007, pp1-2)

A pupil's desire to engage in an activity is a key determiner of their learning (de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014). A person's language and their sense of self are very closely bound; as such, there is an anxiety particular to language learning that is debilitating to learning and achievement. When one's language takes a knock, so does one's self-confidence (Duxbury and Tsai, 2010). Cooperative learning is alleged to cater for pupils' emotional needs (Jongsma, 1990) and, in his analysis of the success of cooperative learning from a psychological point of view, Dörnyei (1997) makes a case for its impact on learner motivation. On a situational level, he suggests that courses are designed specifically to prompt discovery, that teachers are less authoritative and more supportive and that, in time at least, groups are cohesive. On a learner level, he reports that, whilst learning cooperatively, pupils demonstrate reduced anxiety, more autonomy, increased self-efficacy and a greater propensity for positive causal attribution (the tendency to consider success to be within one's own control).

He is supported by many others, such as Sharan (2014), who adds that increased active participation is empowering for pupils, helping them to develop a voice: a crucial tool in second language acquisition. Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012)

demonstrate that many pupils have a 'lower affective filter', making them more willing to speak out in front of their peers than they would be in front of a teacher. Albeit on a very small scale, Celik, Aytim and Bayram's (2012) work with 14 Turkish teachers of EFL revealed that, over the course of a term's cooperative intervention, some shy students began to participate much more readily. Similarly, Suwantaratbip and Wichadee (2010) found that, among 40 students at a Thai university, foreign language learning anxiety was significantly decreased after learning through a cooperative approach.

2.4 ROLE OF THE TEACHER

2.4.1 Outlook

"*Learning to learn cooperatively requires several changes for teachers and students: in their perception of learning, in their attitudes towards teaching and learning, and in their social and cognitive behaviors in class.*" (Sharan, 2014, p802)

Johnson and Johnson (1994) argued several years ago that teacher training typically explored the interactions between pupils and the teacher, and between pupils and resources (such as textbooks), but that intrapersonal interactions between pupils themselves were left largely untouched. Much more recently, Gillies (2014) has endorsed the training of teachers in interpersonal skills, in the hope that subsequent modeling of desirable social behaviours will impact positively on pupils' own working relationships.

Celik, Aytim and Bayram (2012) underline that many teachers struggle to implement new ideas or overhaul their professional practice because of the pressure they feel to get through content and complete their schemes of work. Vrhovec's (2015) analysis of language lessons taught by 46 primary school teachers in Slovenia found that more experienced teachers applied fewer teaching methods, suggesting that some teachers prefer not to change their habits, especially when the planning of cooperative learning is seen to take longer than planning for direct instruction. It is

widely acknowledged that, where cooperative learning has not been in place before, it might take some time for pupils to adapt to its demands and that the perseverance of the teacher is crucial in modifying the perceived norm (Widaman and Kagan, 1987; Cooke, 2005; Er and Aksu Ataç, 2014).

Duxbury and Tsai (2010) measured the anxiety of 345 foreign language students across one American and three Taiwanese universities during the introduction of cooperative learning practices. They found an initial increase in anxiety as Taiwanese students encountered cooperative learning for the first time, but went on to endorse the upholding of these methods, pointing to the increased usage of target language among students. Interestingly, de Saint Léger and Mullan's (2014) similar work with 174 foreign language students in Australian universities found that the least experienced learners were the most amenable to cooperative techniques. This could be down to the fact that, not having worked towards an end-of-high school examination in French, these learners had not yet developed an individualistic work ethic in the subject; there is certainly a sense that learning habits are engrained over time, and that those yet to form habits are arguably more open to varying methods of learning.

Ghaith's (2002) research with 135 students of English as a foreign language course at a Lebanese university found that the more students engaged in cooperative learning, the more they deemed their teacher to care about their progress. Teachers trying especially hard for the externally monitored intervention might have skewed this feeling, but students felt that their peers also cared more about their work, suggesting that positive interdependence was achieved. Significantly, no correlation was found between peer support and the sense of being socially integrated within the class. This sense was more dependent on the teacher and illustrates that, in many cultures, the teacher's status is so much higher than that of the pupils, that learners are not interested in learning from anyone else. This is a key challenge that faces cooperative learning.

2.4.2 Task Design

"*The aim of any collaborative learning activity is to get pupils talking together about a particular aspect or aspects of a topic. As such the activity should be an effective catalyst which stimulates purposeful questioning and discussion.*" (Cooke, 1998, p23)

Kagan (1989) endorses a structural approach to cooperative learning, a content-free way of organising social interaction in the classroom. He puts forth a host (over 150) of these structures, defined as micro-tasks that can be employed on virtually any topic. Johnson and Johnson (2014) assert that any task, in any curriculum, at any stage, for any pupil, may be cooperative. Although it may be daunting for a teacher to master cooperative learning as an entire entity, it is purported to be relatively straightforward to master one structure at a time (Kagan, 1989). Slavin, Hurley and Chamberlain (2001) suggest that cooperative learning is most successfully implemented where there is support from the top of the institution and related professional development on offer to teaching staff.

Gillies (2007) points out that, in order to be an effective facilitator of cooperative learning, the teacher must execute thorough and effective preparation behind the scenes. In designing a cooperative task, Olsen and Kagan (1992) hold that the teacher must consider the goal, the rewards, the student roles, the materials and the rules. Johnson and Johnson (2014, p842) offer a more comprehensive guide, advising teachers to: specify objectives (both academic and social); determine the configuration of groups (personnel, size, positioning and roles); teach the "*concepts, principles and strategies*" to be applied, and set out "*expected student behaviours*"; monitor the cooperative work, offering academic guidance and collaborative modeling where necessary; and, finally, assess student and group performance according to the preset criteria, encouraging pupils to evaluate their own and their peers' efficacy in the task. Jongsma (1990) also advocates setting out the social objectives at the start of the lesson, alongside the academic targets, a seemingly sensible recommendation given the potential of cooperative learning to enhance pupils' social skills. Vrhovec (2015), however, deters from being too outcome-oriented, preferring to focus on the processes involved.

Davoudi and Mahinpo (2012) talk about the five stages of language acquisition as pre-production, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency and fluency. Kagan (1989) has structures for each of these stages and argues that they vary in their usefulness in terms of cognition, social skills and motivation. Significantly, he appears to support the notion that a variety of structures is desirable and that a given task might be of value even if it provokes little academic challenge, provided that it stimulates some social skills or yields higher motivation.

Zhang (2010) distinguishes between more 'traditional' language classroom activities such as knowledge recall, phrasal pattern practice, translation and dictation, and cooperative activities that centre on interaction, the negotiation of meaning and information sharing. A common example of a cooperative learning activity is the information gap task (Cooke, 1998), where pairs of pupils have two corresponding sets of incomplete information and must ask one another questions to acquire the missing data. Another is the jigsaw task (Fathman and Kessler, 1993), where, within a group, different pupils are charged with finding out about a certain element of a topic; members of different groups that share the same element then research it together, before feeding back individually to their original group. Finally, the 'think, pair, share' technique (Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul, 2012) involves the teacher giving a prompt that pupils should think about individually before sharing ideas with a partner, with the pair ultimately offering the best of their combined suggestions to the rest of the class.

2.4.3 Grouping

Gillies (2007) says that forming effective groups is a key role on the part of the teacher, seemingly implying that the teacher, rather than the pupils, should choose the groups. This is supported by Jongsma (1990) and Vrhovec (2015) but Slavin (1980) argues that there is little evidence to suggest that allowing pupils to select their groups would make much difference to their subsequent success. I would theorise that this may be true for popular pupils, who frequently find themselves selected in groups with their friends, and less so for pupils on the fringes of social groups, who may wind up perpetual makeweights in such a system.

Gillies (2007) advocates grouping pupils with their friends, suggesting that friendship (the demonstration of care, helpfulness and commitment) is a powerful determinant of academic success. Cooke (2005) warns, however, that self-selected groups are liable to suffer from too much 'friendly consensus', to the detriment of the cognitive dissonance that has been shown to be a key component of communal learning. Mason (1970) says that, unless there is stark division of labour, in turn relying on a cleverly designed task with clearly defined individual roles, effective collaboration drops off once a group grows beyond four or five members. Without evidence, Gillies (2007) states that, where appropriate, groups should be gender-balanced, as female only groups tend to be much more effective than male only groups and that mixing up mitigates this discrepancy.

Mirzaei and Eslami's (2013) examination of collaborative writing among 175 university students of English as a foreign language in Iran found that lower-attaining pupils tended to do better in mixed attainment groups. On the other hand, higher-attaining pupils appear to achieve similarly, whether in mixed attainment or exclusively higher attainment groups (Gillies, 2007). This supports the notion that 'peer tutoring' (explaining a concept to a classmate) can benefit one's own understanding; one assumes that higher-attaining pupils would have more opportunities for this in mixed attainment groups (Er and Aksu Ataç, 2014). Interestingly, there is a suggestion that middle-attaining pupils perform best in middle attainment groups, because they are stirred into action, rather than remaining a spectator the in tutor-tutee dynamic of the mixed attainment group (Lou et al., 1996).

2.4.4 Monitoring

> "*Unlike the traditional classrooms where teachers are the only source of knowledge, in collaborative classrooms, the teacher is the more knowledgeable person who assists students in constructing knowledge. This gained knowledge results from collaboration between teachers and students and also between the students themselves.*"
>
> (Abadikhah and Harsini, 2014, p25)

Teacher support is a key determinant of academic achievement (Ghaith, 2002). Zhang (2010) draws a distinction between the transmissional learning model, where the teacher is the centre of the classroom, the judge of right and wrong, the governor of pace and direction and the major source of assistance, feedback and support, and the cooperative learning model, where the teacher is the organiser, counsellor and facilitator. The roles of pupil and teacher are claimed to be more equal in the cooperative tradition (Gillies, 2007).

The teacher must engender a supportive climate of responsible learning, where negative comments are not tolerated (Jongsma, 1990; Zhang, 2010). They should also be prepared to join in if a task is not progressing satisfactorily (Vrhovec, 2015). Wichadee and Orawiwatnakul (2012, p95) offer us the catchy analogy of the teacher's role in the cooperative classroom being that of a "*guide on the side*", as opposed to a "*sage on the stage*". Fathman and Kessler's (1993) analysis of teacher talk in cooperative lessons shows that the teacher tends to speak less, issue fewer commands, assist more and give more praise than in a more transmissional approach. This infers that pupils speak more, a very positive implication given the importance of production in second language acquisition (Zhang, 2010; Vrhovec, 2015).

Cooke (2005) speaks of the vital role the teacher has in monitoring cooperative learning, using questions and comments to steer attention and help clarify thinking, and ensuring that tasks are adapted to match pupils' evolving needs and competencies. The teacher's monitoring must extend beyond academic assistance and informal assessment, to the scrutiny and perhaps management of social interactions (Jongsma, 1990). Gillies (2007) speaks of the importance of prompting, challenging, confronting, redirecting and scaffolding; all behaviours that one should ultimately look to devolve to pupils for use in their group interactions (Domalewska, 2014). Sharan (2014) advocates monitoring the teacher's centrality, to discourage constant guidance and supervision. Cooke (2005) agrees, noting that for many teachers, the greatest difficulty in facilitating effective group work is standing back and allowing pupils to work independently, resisting the temptation to offer support that is unnecessary.

There exists a fear that, by learning from one another and not directly from the teacher, one might learn something incorrectly (Kim, 2008). Pupils might make mistakes and then engrain poor habits and the teacher needs to be alert to this (Domalewska, 2014). The teacher is also responsible for arranging the classroom in such a way that they have visual and physical access to every group (Vrhovec, 2015).

2.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.5.1 Research Question1

Before any intervention, what is the nature of collaboration among pupils in my setting?

Having looked specifically at cooperative learning in this review, I intend to determine how much of the ongoing collaboration in French lessons in my setting could be afforded this label. Are teachers aware of the key principles above? Do they hold alternative theories that govern the way they employ group work in their teaching? Are the benefits of cooperative learning sufficiently appreciated to prompt its regular use?

2.5.2 Research Question 2

What are considered to be the facilitators of and barriers to collaboration in my setting?

Having analysed many theoretical perspectives on collaboration, I want to identify the practical factors that aid and inhibit effective cooperation among my pupils. This information will be accrued largely from the participants themselves, but I will consult with teaching colleagues to establish what elements of their practice they consider to be particularly beneficial and detrimental in this regard.

2.5.3 Research Question 3

How can collaboration be enhanced to improve learning in my setting?

In collaboration with teaching colleagues, I intend to experiment with strategies and techniques I have gleaned from the literature, in order to heighten pupils' experience and awareness of collaboration in French lessons. Through frequent and assorted means of feedback, I hope to hone these trials into very effective practice, ultimately drawing recommendations to be compiled in a 'collaborative manifesto' for dissemination within the department and beyond.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 OVERVIEW

The methodology featured in this action research was a dual-phase intervention that took place over six months, during the spring and summer terms of the school year (see **Figure 3.1**). The first intervention was designed to gauge the current nature of collaboration within my department, to gather views and to experiment with new methods; the second intervention was designed to synthesise these views and experiences and refine the new methods employed according to feedback from pupils and teachers. Throughout, I looked to draw on the findings of the previous stage in my design and application of the next, so although the techniques employed are here described in full, the investigation was evolutionary in nature.

Figure 3.1: Overview of Investigation

FIRST INTERVENTION	*Spring Term 2016*	Initial Lesson Observations
		Initial Questionnaire to Pupils
		Collaborative Lesson Series
		Subsequent Questionnaire to Pupils
		Discussion with Colleagues
SECOND INTERVENTION	*Summer Term 2016*	Subsequent Lesson Observations
		Class Discussions with Pupils
		Collaborative Lesson Study
		Review with Observers
		Review with Participants

3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Before instigating my research methods, I consulted an online course in research integrity in social and behavioural sciences (University of Oxford, 2012) and attained ethical approval (see **Appendix A**) from my university, setting out my plans and satisfying the criteria set out in the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011) that no child involved in the research would be subject to questioning or indeed any experience that was sensitive or beyond the scope of our regular school dealings. This approval was granted on the condition that any pupil data would be anonymised, held securely and not shared beyond the scope of permissions granted. I subsequently stated my intentions to my head teacher and formally requested informed consent to work with pupils and teaching colleagues in my school. This permission was also granted with certain conditions pertaining to confidentiality, which have been met (Israel and Hay, 2006).

At each stage of the research, I made clear my objectives to all respondents and did not enforce participation, except when interventions took place during lessons, the content of which was already my responsibility. The full support of colleagues was simple to secure as the enhancement of group work was on our mutually agreed 'departmental development plan', lending an added mandate to the investigation.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

In order to gather as broad a range of opinions on collaboration as possible, I issued my initial questionnaire to every pupil in Years 5 to 8, the year groups for which French is part of the curriculum. This constituted 348 potential respondents, which I considered to be a sensible number, both to achieve a wide range of responses and to keep data analysis a sustainable task (Edwards and Talbot, 1997).

Thereafter, research was conducted exclusively with pupils in Year 5 who were taught in four mixed-ability classes (74 pupils in total). The reason for focusing

on this year group in particular was that their scheme of work had sufficient space and flex to enable teachers to test new ideas without compulsion to match them to very specific content. Although the curriculum was broadly followed throughout, on a lesson-by-lesson basis there was scope to experiment whilst avoiding the pressure of time constraints (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). Working with mixed-attainment classes allowed my colleagues and me to study the interactions between higher and lower-attaining participants and, as first-time learners of French, I considered that Year 5 pupils might be more open and amenable to new techniques than older pupils, whose learning habits might arguably to be more engrained (de Saint Léger and Mullan, 2014). In addition, with three lessons per week, compared to the four of the older year groups, I considered that teachers' collaborative planning would be simpler to coordinate.

The purposive sample (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) was once more reduced in the second intervention, as I consulted the half of the year group that I teach (two classes, 37 pupils in total) on the findings yielded so far. Due to the nature of the research becoming more qualitative than quantitative at this stage, I wanted to restrict the inflow of data to a manageable level (Edwards and Talbot, 1997) and felt that, as the lead researcher, I had the best overall picture of the discoveries to date and thus the strongest position from which to probe further. The focus of the second intervention was a lesson study that took place with just eighteen pupils (one of these two classes), selected simply according to timetable restrictions, to allow all teachers in the department to attend.

My own collaboration with colleagues was a fundamental part of this investigation. There are three other teachers in the Modern Foreign Languages Department, two of whom also teach Year 5 classes. Of these, one was absent for the duration of the first intervention so I worked solely with her replacement and the other Year 5 French teacher on all matters of task design during this phase, although the fourth member of the department was involved in observations and all discussions in the second intervention. Albeit unanticipated, the influx of new ideas and fresh perspectives from the cover teacher (who was previously unknown to the

school) really fired the collaborative process and was the first tangible indicator of its considerable professional worth.

3.4 FIRST INTERVENTION

3.4.1 Initial Lesson Observations

Accepting that data cannot replace what we learn from live experience (Altricher, Posch and Somekh, 1993), I began by observing a lesson taught by each of my three departmental colleagues. I gave a deliberately open brief, asking simply to see some evidence of pupil collaboration and explaining that my focus would be centred on the interactions among participants. In each case, I made informal field notes and moved around the classroom to witness as much as possible. I subsequently met with each teacher in turn, sharing my impressions and gathering their reactions to the lessons. Finally, I considered my findings in light of one another and shared them at the next departmental meeting.

As a participant observer (Altricher, Posch and Somekh, 1993), I was afforded an impression of the nature of collaborative work employed in the department but I concede that my interpretations were subjective and I was limited in what I could write down; I also accept that a limitation of lesson observations as an investigative tool is that the observee often adjusts their regular habits in order 'impress' the observer, or otherwise acts differently from usual due to the perceived pressure of the situation (Menter et al., 2011).

3.4.2 Initial Questionnaire to Pupils

Recognising questionnaires to be an effective means of gathering standardised, quantitative data from a large sample, I designed an attitude survey (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981) to gauge opinions towards collaboration among learners of French in my setting. I consulted a number of related questionnaires in the literature, such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz,

Horwitz and Cope, 1986) but, as virtually all targeted university students and were designed to elicit information that was not directly in line with my objectives, I decided that, despite being tried and tested, they would require too much remodeling to retain their validity and opted instead to design a survey tailored specifically to my purposes.

This initial questionnaire (see **Appendix B**) comprised eighteen questions and a box for additional comments, a feature intended to allow respondents to clarify or add to their answers (Menter et al., 2011). Fourteen items were closed questions, eight of which were repetitions of two pairs of questions asked once in reference to general learning experiences and then again in relation to French lessons. The first repeated pair of closed questions asked whether pupils enjoyed working together and how this enjoyment compared to when working alone; the second asked whether pupils learned a lot when working with others and whether they learned more like this than on their own. Pupils were also asked whether, in general, they enjoyed learning from other pupils and, in general, whether they enjoyed helping peers to learn. There were an additional four closed questions asking whether pupils viewed one another as competitors or people to learn from in French lessons, and whether they had sufficient opportunities to collaborate in French lessons and if they would like more. All closed questions were compulsory (one could not submit the questionnaire without responding to all of them) and posed as statements, with five answers to choose from on a Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Clearly, a failing of this type of questioning is that it forces pupils to adapt their thinking to a given option and provides limited opportunity to express strength of feeling. Four open questions were asked, to which responses were optional: two asked what pupils considered to help and prevent group work from being successful, two asked specifically what pupils liked and disliked about working together in French lessons.

I drew up the questionnaire using a computer programme that forms part of the school database and prefaced it with a brief note to respondents (see **Appendix**

B). To gain feedback on its validity and attempting to eliminate ambiguities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), I piloted the questionnaire with two of my classes (in Years 6 and 7), assessing their interpretations. I made a number of resultant changes to the wording and then addressed all pupils in an assembly, detailing my research, defining key operational terms in the questionnaire and encouraging them to be honest with their responses, pointing out that nobody except me would know their provenance and that I was not seeking any specific 'right answers'. Despite my awareness (see Section 2.1.1) that group work does not necessarily constitute cooperative learning (Dörnyei, 1997), I avoided that concept at this stage, preferring to probe at what currently constituted group work in my setting, before attributing any definitions. Throughout the questionnaire, and indeed the investigation as a whole, I used the term 'group' rather than 'team' and encouraged my colleagues to do likewise, considering this a very simple way of avoiding competitive connotations.

I ultimately administered the questionnaire online to every class in Years 5 to 8 during their weekly ICT lesson. The assistance and cooperation of the ICT teacher (who taught all of these classes) was invaluable in this regard and likely ensured that I received a good deal more responses than had I asked pupils to respond to the questionnaire outside lesson time.

Analysis of closed questions was relatively straightforward, an advantage of this research method (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981), and I conducted t-tests to establish the statistical significance of differing responses between the youngest and oldest respondents. To achieve this, I used an electronic spreadsheet to generate two-tailed tests that took account of the homoscedastic nature of the two groups (their equal variance). Rudimentary numerical examination revealed little difference between responses to questions repeated generally and with specific reference to French lessons and I opted not to explore this association with statistical analysis, deeming it less relevant to my research questions than other comparisons.

Analysis of open questions was much more problematic. The sheer volume of feedback led me to categorise answers quite broadly in order to achieve some degree of quantitative analysis. Alongside the fact that one cannot accurately tell how

much thought has gone into each respondent's feedback, or whether they have interpreted questions in the same way, my subjective cataloguing of textual responses (Menter et al., 2011) was a considerable weakness of this stage of the methodology; in seeking to quantify qualitative data I feel I lent too much of my own interpretation to the responses. To dilute this influence, I presented a sample (10%) of the data to a colleague and asked him to attempt the same task, thus inter-rating my categorisation. He catalogued answers similarly, but slightly differently and I married both approaches in the final analysis (see section 4.1.2).

3.4.3 Collaborative Lesson Series

"*It is often possible to use research methods that are integral to the teaching and learning situation.*" (Altricher, Posch and Somekh, 1993, p80)

The main part of the first intervention came over a four-week period, when the other Year 5 French teachers and I designed and instigated a series of twelve lessons (35 or 40 minutes each in length) with a specifically collaborative focus (see **Appendix C**). We met weekly to plan a set of three lessons that we would all then teach to our separate classes, discussing our experiences of the previous sessions and using these to inform our planning of the next. Throughout, we allotted time to explain to our pupils the key terms, principles and social skills involved in cooperative learning, considering this a key strategy in enhancing their awareness of our desired behaviours and outcomes.

Over the course of the series, we experimented with different types of resources, grouping and assessment; however, we did not have to concern ourselves with grading (see Section 1.1). Each week we sought to focus on a different language skill and lessons were broadly based on the topic of the home, featuring vocabulary and grammatical structures pertinent to the discussion of rooms, gardens and furniture.

The first set of lessons focussed on listening and involved pupils labeling a blank plan of a house, deciding which rooms would go where. The pupils then had to

write some sentences about their house, saying what rooms were on a particular floor, before each reading aloud one of these sentences to the rest of the class, who noted these details down.

The second set of lessons focussed on reading and involved pupils collaborating on a comprehension activity. The text was about somebody's home and was followed by three types of question: some that tested understanding of the text, some that required pupils to identify specific passages and some that required pupils to generate new phrases by modifying specific sentences.

The third set of lessons focussed on writing and involved pupils generating an extended text about their imaginary home. Pupils were given a template and encouraged to write six paragraphs (each based on a different element of the home), with every group member scribing two each. Pupils were encouraged to help one another and proofread their text together, in order to achieve a polished product.

The final set of lessons focussed on speaking (in French) and required pupils to fix images of different rooms onto a blank plan of a house, before repeating the process according to the responses of a partner, having taken turns to ask where particular rooms were. An additional task asked pupils to write basic information about their home on a small piece of card and to move around the room interviewing one another with some given questions. After each exchange, partners had to swap cards before moving on to use this new set of information in their next dialogue.

3.4.4 Subsequent Questionnaire to Pupils

As above, the subsequent questionnaire (see **Appendix D**) that I issued to all pupils in Year 5 at the end of the four-week course of collaborative lessons consisted of both closed and more exploratory, open questions, intended to complement uniform data with more personal insight (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Alongside a box for additional comments, there were eighteen questions, the first six taken from the original questionnaire (to allow for the measurement of

attitude modification), relating to their enjoyment of group work, their rate of learning during group work and their view of peers during group work. Again, I prefaced the questionnaire with a note to respondents (see **Appendix D**).

The final twelve items consisted of four sets of three questions (one closed and two open) relating to each of the key language skills employed across the range of lessons detailed above. I intended to determine which of reading, listening, writing and speaking had been enjoyable for the pupils, and what they had considered helpful and unhelpful during each kind of task. In hindsight, it was overly ambitious to think that I might draw commanding conclusions regarding the relative suitability of each skill to group work, given that responses would inevitably depend on the nature of each task and each group's execution of it, none of which could claim truly to embody that skill.

The limiting nature of the closed questions again facilitated quantitative analysis (Ackroyd and Hughes, 1981) and I used effect sizes (Hattie, 2012) to measure changes in pupil attitudes over the course of the interventions. To achieve this, I attributed a numerical value to each of the five available responses on the Likert scale; I then calculated the difference in mean responses to questions repeated in both initial and subsequent questionnaires, dividing this figure by the pooled standard deviations of the two groups of Year 5 respondents to identify Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1998). Subsequently, isolating the responses of pupils who had completed both questionnaires (65), I conducted one-tailed, dependent samples t-tests to establish which collective increases in collaborative inclination were statistically significant. Analysis of the open-ended responses was once more very difficult and I enlisted the help of the same colleague in inter-rating my categorisation.

3.4.5 Discussion with Colleagues

To complete the first phase of the intervention, I met with my departmental colleagues to discuss the findings to date and evaluate the success of the various methods employed. We reflected on our own collaboration, considering which elements we would seek to maintain, and which we would look to develop and

improve. The conversation was largely unstructured, further promoting a spirit of collaboration by allowing every participant to raise questions and illuminate other points of interest without a stringent agenda (Menter et al., 2011).

3.5 SECOND INTERVENTION

3.5.1 Subsequent Lesson Observations

Having drawn on the principles of cooperative learning (see Section 2.2) during our planning and teaching of collaborative lessons in the first intervention, I now wanted to gauge firsthand their impact in lessons other than my own. I arranged more lesson observations with my colleagues and met them all beforehand to set out the five key features I wanted to examine: positive interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, group processing and promotive interaction. I then conducted the observations, again taking field notes and discussing each lesson with the teacher afterwards, before sharing general impressions with the department as whole.

3.5.2 Class Discussions with Pupils

Having spent time analysing responses to the second questionnaire (completed by Year 5 pupils following the collaborative lesson series), I took the opportunity to obtain more direct views from half of the respondents by discussing the results with my two classes. I wanted to hear more specifically about their negative experiences of collaboration and, to achieve this, spent two lessons with each class setting up, monitoring and gathering feedback from a jigsaw activity (Fathman and Kessler, 1993). This allowed pupils to articulate thoughts with the physical expression and verbal intonation that is missing from written feedback (Menter et al., 2011).

First, I showed pupils what they had collectively identified as the three main barriers to effective collaboration (arguing, bossiness and disruption). Within groups

of three, I charged each pupil to come up with ways of overcoming one of these obstructions. Across the class, I asked all pupils to team up with the members of other groups that shared their focus and encouraged them to develop their ideas together before feeding back to their original group as an expert in a discussion about all three. Having obtained their consent, I audio recorded the groups as they put forward their suggestions to the rest of the class and used these recordings and my own written notes to collate the findings (see Section 4.2.2).

3.5.3 Collaborative Lesson Study

The focus of the second phase of the intervention was a lesson study (see **Appendix E**) that I led with one of my Year 5 classes, in which I sought to put our collective key findings and theories to the test. Originating in Japan, lesson study is an educational research technique "*designed to improve instruction and to build and share knowledge of teaching and learning*", typically characterised by collective planning and group observation of individual or small clusters of lessons (Lewis, Perry and Friedkin, 2009, p142). Pupils were assigned to groups, asked to take on specified roles and then led through a speaking, listening and writing activity, in which one member of each group took on the persona of an imaginary relative. Another group member had to interview each of these relatives and feed responses back to the final group member, who was responsible for compiling an accurate table of information. All speaking and writing was conducted in French.

I invited my three departmental colleagues to observe the lesson, asking them each to focus on two of the six groups involved. I encouraged them to note down as many observations as possible and gave them a form (see **Appendix F**) upon which to do so. This form asked for comments on each of the key theories and findings that I aimed to elucidate over the course of the lesson. The scale of this investigation was too large to allow for the exploration of every encountered theory in one session, but this nonetheless proved an efficient way of drawing the various strands of research together, into a representative focal point upon which to reflect.

3.5.4 Review with Observers

Immediately after the collaborative lesson study, I held a meeting with the three observers to hear their comments and discuss the session. The conversation was semi-structured (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000) according to the theories and findings I had included on their feedback sheet, also touching on broader notions and critiquing the lesson directly. Chiefly, we looked at what elements of this lesson could be generalised as guidelines or recommendations for group work more widely.

3.5.5 Review with Participants

On the same day as the tailored collaborative lesson, I invited back a selection of pupils to discuss the session. Four of the eighteen pupils were keen to assist, so I appointed them without applying any additional criteria. This ensured that I had respondents with ready views, but did not guarantee a sample that was entirely representative of the class as a whole, as it is reasonable to consider that volunteers will have stronger opinions than others, be they positive or negative.

Our conversation was also semi-structured according to the theories and findings I had put to my colleagues. This allowed me to pursue lines of interest and extract as much information as possible, although a danger of this is leading respondents to make statements that they might not have made otherwise (Edwards and Talbot, 1997). I had considered conducting a stimulated recall session, an efficient means of directing participants minds back to specific occurrences (Schepens, Aelterman and Van Keer, 2007), but finally opted against this, as video recording the lesson would have necessitated obtaining additional permissions and I considered audio recording impractical: pupils were working among their groups and moving around at all times, positioning a microphone would have been acutely difficult and I chose to rely on the views of my colleagues instead. I did, however, encourage pupils to respond to some of these teachers' observations, thereby steering their minds back to moments they may not necessarily have remembered, something rendered simpler by the flexibility of this focus group setting (Edwards and Talbot, 1997).

4.0 FINDINGS

4.1 FIRST INTERVENTION

4.1.1 Initial Lesson Observations

My initial lesson observations left me with three impressions that chimed with insight from the literature. The first was that social objectives of cooperative learning carry similar importance to academic objectives (Jongsma, 1990) and a given task can retain value without posing a significant cognitive challenge, provided that it stretches pupils' ability to collaborate. I viewed a task in which groups of four pupils were asked to create their ideal school timetable in French. They already knew all the necessary vocabulary so writing subjects onto their timetable was not difficult and, in addition, discussion took place almost exclusively in English; however, albeit very subjective, my impression was that the quality of the teamwork was high.

Secondly, I witnessed the value of positive interdependence (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). In one task I observed, pupils were given an empty grid and asked to question one another about their involvement in household chores, noting down the responses. There was no sense of competiveness and although pupils seemed keen to finish, they could not do so without the help of one another so accepted the transactional nature of the exercise, appearing to give information as readily as they requested it.

Thirdly, I noted that a group task could appear impressive without in fact employing the key principles of cooperative learning (Dörnyei, 1997). I witnessed one activity in which pairs of pupils took it in turns to draw two from a set of cards, seeking to make match a written sentence with a corresponding image. The pupils appeared to work studiously and engage with the challenge, yet it did not constitute collaboration, as the pupils did not need one another in any way. A simple adjustment would have been to ask the first pupil to draw a card and perhaps say it aloud, before getting the partner to find a match.

4.1.2 Initial Questionnaire to Pupils

Of the 348 pupils invited to complete the initial questionnaire, 321 did so, giving a response rate of 92%. With reference to the closed questions posed in general terms at the beginning, 88% of respondents claimed to like working with others in class (either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement posed), with only one pupil expressing an active dislike (either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing); 61% of the sample preferred working together to working alone. 62% agreed that they learned a lot whilst working with others and this view was more widely held among learners in Year 5 (69%) than those in Year 8 (55%). Fewer respondents (47%) agreed that they learned more whilst working with others than on their own. 74% claimed to enjoy learning from others; again, this was more widely felt by learners in Year 5 (81%) than Year 8 (65%). Overall, 80% agreed that they enjoy helping others to learn.

A visual depiction of the mean responses of the entire sample to the closed questions is included below (see **Table 4.1**). These were calculated by averaging all the response values, numerically attributed to each response on the Likert scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neither agree nor disagree (3), disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). Those questions to which Year 5 responses were *statistically significantly* different to those of Year 8 pupils are also detailed (see **Table 4.2**).

Table 4.1: Mean responses of entire sample to closed questions in initial questionnaire

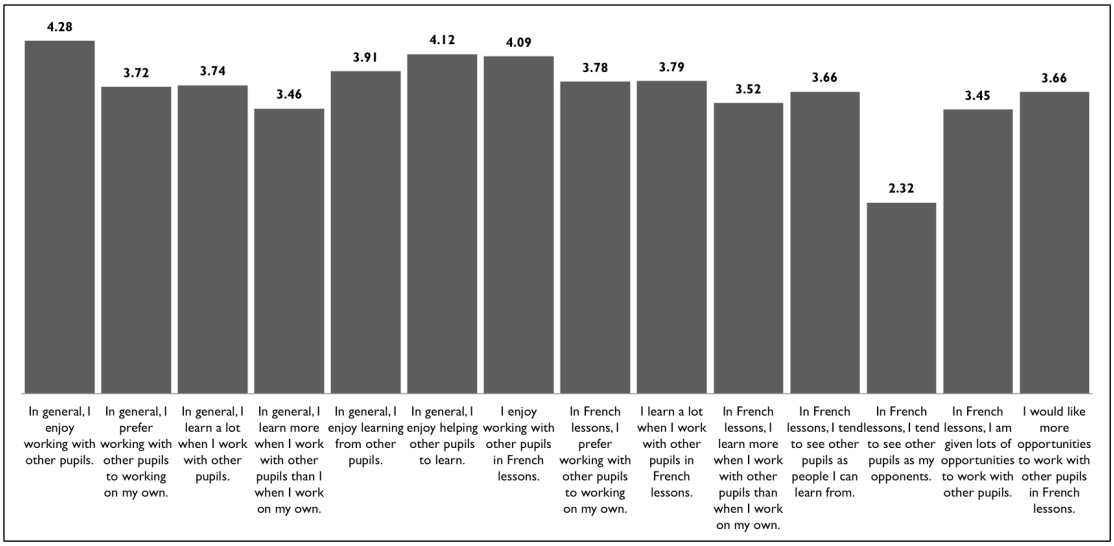


Table 4.2: Difference between mean Year 5 and Year 8 responses to closed questions

Statement	Year 5 Mean Response	Year 8 Mean Response	Statistical Significance
In general, I learn a lot when I work with other pupils.	3.90	3.56	**p = 0.012**
In general, I learn more when I work with other pupils than I when I work on my own.	3.65	3.23	**p = 0.006**
In general, I enjoy learning from other pupils.	4.04	3.73	**p = 0.017**
In general, I enjoy helping other pupils to learn.	4.26	3.99	**p = 0.030**
In French lessons, I learn more when I work with other pupils than when I work on my own.	3.66	3.34	**p = 0.034**
I would like more opportunities to work with other pupils in French lessons.	3.82	3.50	**p = 0.045**

Asked what they considered to make group work successful, 24% of respondents said that cooperation was essential for successful group work, with 21% of the sample referring specifically to the sharing of ideas. 17% referred to the equal distribution of responsibility within a group, denouncing either dominance or laziness. When asked what prevents successful group work, 31% referred to disruption, 19% to arguing or disagreement and 16% to bossiness. There were several responses to both of these questions that mentioned groups, with reference to their size, social dynamic and selection.

In response to the closed questions relating specifically to French, 83% agreed that they enjoyed working with others, with 64% of the sample preferring this to working alone. 54% of the sample claimed to learn more with others than on their own in French, 7% more than in general terms. 60% viewed their peers as people they could learn from in French, with only 13% considering one another opponents. 53% of respondents suggested that they had sufficient opportunities to work together in French lessons, yet 55% expressed a desire for more tasks of a collaborative nature.

Asked what they liked about working together in French lessons, 38% of respondents referred to the sharing of ideas or the availability of feedback from peers, 28% to a sense of learning and 21% to fun. On what they disliked, 42% offered

nothing, while 21% mentioned disruption and 11% pointed to a lack of listening or sharing on the part of fellow group members.

4.1.3 Collaborative Lesson Series

The four-week series of collaborative lessons taught to all four Year 5 classes was affected to a large degree by unforeseen practical limitations. Pupils were frequently absent due to music lessons, sporting commitments and illness; where collaborative tasks spanned more than one lesson, this necessitated manipulating groups and roles, occasionally to the detriment of the positive interdependence and individual accountability fashioned amongst the original group members. Teachers were similarly away on occasion and more than once entire lessons were missed due to events and trips. Whilst we remained united in our planning, it was impossible for teachers to progress through the course of lessons at the same rate, which inhibited some of our collective evaluation. It was similarly difficult to marry our collaborative lesson series with routine administrative tasks like weekly vocabulary tests, which took up time and muddied the cooperative working atmosphere with individualised assessment. In hindsight, these should not have taken place.

We noted that there appeared to be more disruption and arguing when groups were self-selected, so began appointing groups ourselves according to a range of criteria. We typically designed activities for groups of three and concluded that grouping pupils by attainment (one higher, one middle, one lower) seemed the most effective in terms of maximising engagement. This was harder for our stand-in teacher, who did not know the pupils so well and could only base selections on data, without the nuance that comes with knowing which personalities clash or go together well; we agreed that this was an equally important consideration. Contrary to the suggestion of Lou et al. (1996) that pupils of medium attainment work best in homogeneous attainment groups, we opined that a number of these pupils in particular flourished in heterogeneous groups. There were several occasions when hitherto quite timid pupils outwardly exhibited great pride in their output and active involvement in a group scenario.

Having trialled the assignment of different roles within group, we agreed that this was an efficient way of combatting an uneven workload and helping to ensure that every pupil had a stake in each task. Pupils enjoyed adopting roles but did not always stick to their own, especially when the roles were seen as unbalanced in their status or arduousness. Here again, the unpredictability of numbers in any given lesson made the design of roles somewhat challenging, as, if we succeeded in making them equally indispensable, it was damaging if a group did not have enough members.

Again, through experimentation and regular discussion, my colleagues and I found that positive interdependence could be achieved by raising the level of academic challenge beyond that of the strongest pupil in each group. At this point, it became all the more important for group members to share their ideas and seemed to soften any desire of the strongest pupil to press on alone.

Due to the absence of grades (see Section 1.1), assessment was largely informal, although we utilised one means of marking group work that we deemed highly effective. When groups had completed their writing task, where they had each contributed two paragraphs to a thorough description of a house and garden on a single sheet of paper, we marked them very thoroughly and included several questions, the smaller amount of scripts affording us more time than usual on each one. We finally photocopied each annotated script and gave one back to every pupil, before asking them to get into new groups and help one another to answer our questions. This proved highly engaging and prompted perceptibly more reflective discussion among pupils than when they consider feedback privately.

We considered it valuable to set aside time to discuss the social skills required by collaboration and to explain the key principles behind cooperative learning. Pupils seemed buoyed to be included in this kind of dialogue and responded enthusiastically to our attempts at 'gambit development' (Davoudi and Mahinpo, 2012), whereby we encouraged them away from negative speech and showed them more effective phrases to use in search of resolutions. Generally, the majority of languaging (Swain, 2006) occurred in English, although our overall impression was

that pronunciation improved over the course of the series, perhaps as a result of the rise in comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982).

4.1.4 Subsequent Questionnaire to Pupils

Of the 74 pupils invited to complete the subsequent questionnaire, 70 did so, giving a response rate of 95%. In response to the closed questions repeated from the initial questionnaire, 90% of Year 5 pupils now claimed to enjoy working with others in French lessons, 8% more than before the collaborative lesson series. 82% now agreed that they preferred to work with others than on their own in French lessons, an increase of 19%. 79% considered themselves to learn a lot when working with others in French lessons (15% more than previously) and 61% thought they learned more like this than on their own (a 3% rise). Perceptions of one another as learning resources remained largely unchanged although, surprisingly, slightly more (2%) pupils claimed to view one another as competitors. Despite some encouraging gains (see **Table 4.3**), numerical analysis of the impact of the collaborative lesson series (see **Table 4.4**) reveals that effect sizes were extremely low. Only the increase in pupils claiming to enjoy working together in French lessons was deemed significant, even then with an effect size of 0.28, which is small (Hattie, 2012).

Positive responses to questions about the four skill areas involved in the collaborative lesson series (positioned according to their position in the series) declined over the course of the questionnaire: 83% of Year 5 pupils claimed to have enjoyed collaborative listening, 77% collaborative reading, 73% collaborative writing and 70% collaborative speaking. Similarly, accompanying open responses grew sparser, the number of pupils writing nothing increasing towards the end of the questionnaire. While this trend might be explained by the fact that the lesson series grew somewhat rushed for some classes by the end (it could not spill over into a fifth week due to the Easter holiday), with later skills perhaps not receiving as much attention, I feel that it is most likely to be a fault of the questionnaire, which was, in hindsight, too long and did not contain sufficient differentiation between questions to retain interest until the end.

Table 4.3: Mean Year 5 responses to questions in both questionnaires

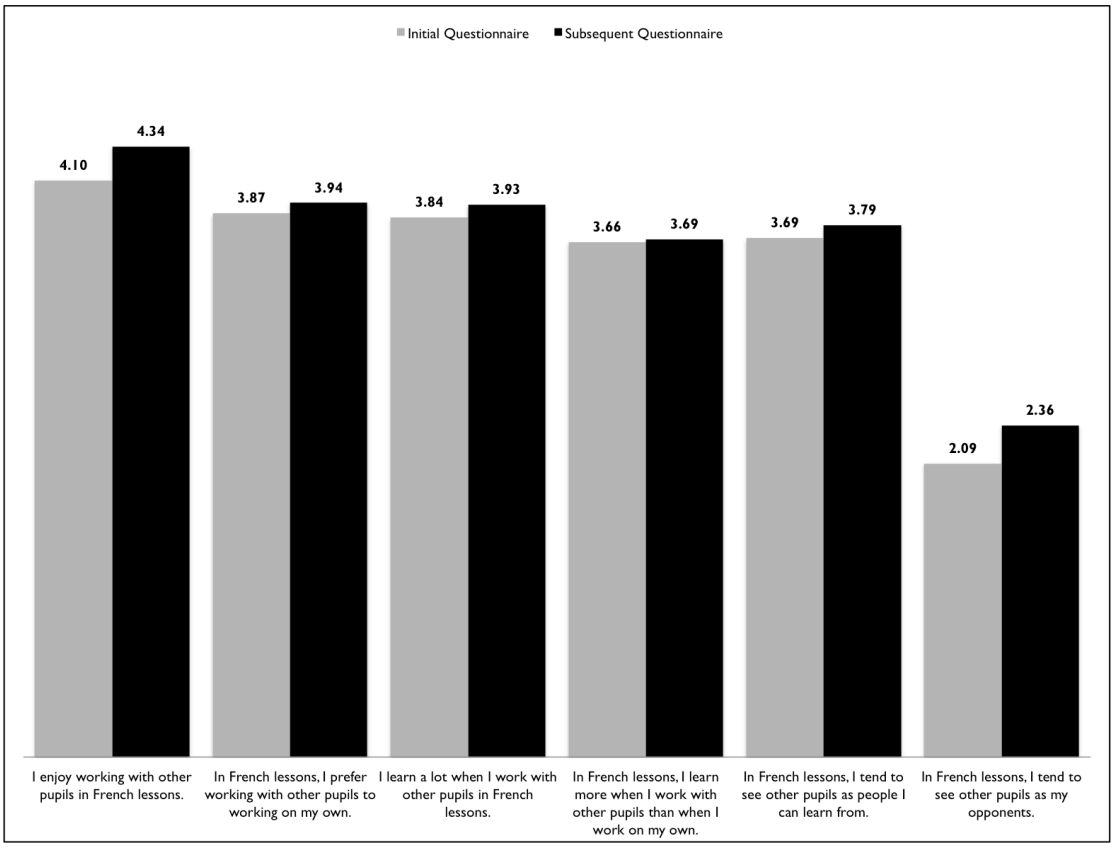


Table 4.3: Difference in mean Year 5 responses to questions in both questionnaires

Statement	Mean Response (Initial Questionnaire)	Mean Response (Subsequent Questionnaire)	Effect Size	Statistical Significance
I enjoy working with other pupils in French lessons.	4.14	4.38	0.28	**p = 0.024**
In French lessons, I prefer working with other pupils to working on my own.	3.91	4.00	0.09	p > 0.05
I learn a lot when I work with other pupils in French lessons.	3.86	3.91	0.05	p > 0.05
In French lessons, I learn more when I work with other pupils than when I work on my own.	3.69	3.69	0.00	p > 0.05
In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as people I can learn from.	3.69	3.81	0.13	p > 0.05
In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as my opponents.	2.11	2.36	0.24	p > 0.05

When detailing what they enjoyed about each skill area of the collaborative lesson series, respondents pointed to the fact that they could share their ideas, work together and help one another. These views were more widespread in reference to reading and writing, where output is less instantaneous. 33% of the sample reported learning a lot from the listening tasks, while 16% claimed that the speaking activities had aided their pronunciation. Across all four skills, there was consensus that bossiness and disruption remained dominant inhibitors of effective group work, although fewer respondents complained of arguing in the later stages of the series, perhaps an indicator of growing social skills. Academic incompetence of others was a more common complaint in relation to writing, where, conceivably, pupils' relative abilities were starker. Albeit by very few pupils, pressure was only raised as a negative aspect of collaboration in relation to the speech-based skills of speaking and listening.

4.1.5 Discussion with Colleagues

My discussion with colleagues after the collaborative lesson series centred largely on the adjustment of our own conceptions of group work. We concurred on the importance of social objectives and accepted that on occasion, where these are demanding, the academic challenge can be reduced. Our overriding impression was that we had been surprised by the level at which pupils could work and achieve independently of the teacher. In every class, collectively, pupils had exceeded our expectations and worked more constructively than we had predicted, given the complexity and novelty of some of the tasks. All agreed that this had already impacted upon our teaching of more senior classes; the capabilities of these younger learners had afforded us more trust in our elder pupils.

All colleagues reported to have found the collaborative planning process stimulating and refreshing. It was deemed a richer, more efficient means of designing tasks and lessons, due to the greater input of ideas and suggestions. We plan to hold similar collaborative planning meetings for other year groups as a result.

4.2 SECOND INTERVENTION

4.2.1 Subsequent Lesson Observations

During the subsequent lesson observations, a colleague expressed discomfort with the amount of noise and apparent chaos generated by larger scale group activities. By circulating, however, we were able to establish that all pupils were on task and engaging in more pupil talk than one might expect in a teacher-led session. During all these observations, pupils appeared to engage with explicit social objectives and there was evidence of group processing, when teachers paused to lead participants through metacognitive reflection. While some pupils contributed what I considered quite thoughtful evaluative insight, many others appeared more intent on moving forward with the task.

I noted that the employment of roles in seeking to achieve individual accountability seemed much more effective when there was some kind of tangible delineation. In one lesson, I saw pupils given printed badges with their titles on, which had been phrased elaborately to inflate a sense of status. Pupils appeared proud to put on their badge and stuck to their responsibilities more so than in cases during the collaborative lesson series where roles were more nominal. I also noted the value of altering the physical layout of the classroom to suit the activity. Teachers had acknowledged previously that pupils were very poor at arranging themselves in sensible formations for group work and by arranging desks and chairs in advance the teacher saved a great deal of time, ensured that there was adequate space for circulation and monitoring and also contributed to the enjoyment of the session, with pupils apparently excited by any new layout.

It struck me that, in certain lessons, there remained a focus on the outcome of the collaborative task, with group work twice cut short at the end of lessons to allow time to go through answers. I felt that, where a teacher has been able to play a reduced instructional role and had sufficient time to monitor closely, it is perhaps more obvious who has and has not understood and therefore less necessary to go through responses *en masse*. I also considered that, while there was much evidence

of positive interdependence *within* groups, it should be equally possible to generate positive interdependence *among* groups, by requiring some kind of trade of information, something I subsequently sought to achieve in the collaborative lesson study.

4.2.2 Class Discussions with Pupils

In the jigsaw discussion activity that I conducted with my two Year 5 classes, I asked pupils to consider arguing, bossiness and disruption, factors identified during the first intervention as having a detrimental impact upon the efficacy of group work. For each, I challenged pupils to think about why it occurred, and devise remedial strategies.

Some pupils considered arguing to be somewhat inevitable in creative tasks where many ideas are thrown together at once. To prevent talking over one another, it was suggested that groups be given an object that allows only the holder to speak; others argued that this would be off-putting and render conversations unnatural. Some advocated holding votes, or instigating more novel means of dispute settlement such as 'rock, paper, scissors'. Another idea was for each group to have a 'timeout card', which they could lay when they reached an impasse, summoning the teacher to make the decision on their behalf.

Another suggestion for avoiding arguments was to appoint a group leader, but this was considered very likely to prompt bossiness. Pupils were split on this issue, worrying that power would be abused and that leaders would side with their friends, but recognising that, with specific training, leaders could be valuable in a peace-keeping capacity. It was stated that it is much easier to form a majority in groups of an odd number; five was generally considered too big, so most agreed that three was the optimum size.

Pupils chiefly put disruption down to a lack of engagement in the task. Stated causes included the dominance of other group members, the perception that others were of greater or lesser value to the group, or simply the difficulty of the task (be it

too easy or too hard). Some pupils agreed that it was easy to lose motivation in a task where their role was uninspiring or unbalanced with others. Some suggested a 'three strike' rule, whereby unruly participants would receive some kind of sanction after two warnings; however, many retorted that prevention was preferable to cure and that the teacher's presence posed the best deterrent.

4.2.3 Collaborative Lesson Study

I wanted to test several theories during the lesson study, so designed the collaborative task accordingly. To demonstrate the value of positive interdependence, I ensured that each pupil needed every other member of the group to succeed. I also sought to establish positive interdependence among groups, requiring them to share information with each other. To promote individual accountability, I created three roles and allowed pupils to allocate them themselves, within groups of three that I determined beforehand according to attainment (one higher, one middle, one lower). To add status I created a badge for each role, along with a simple job description. To facilitate promotive interaction and a prompt start to the lesson, I arranged desks in advance, achieving a novel layout that allowed for plenty of movement and pitted pupils face-to-face.

Throughout the lesson, I sought to assume responsibility for managing any disruptive behaviour, circulating as much as possible and steering pupils back to task if ever they seemed disengaged. My primary aim was to maximise the amount of pupil talk in the target language and to achieve this I provided plenty of scaffolding and prompts on resources and on the board. Rather than providing pupils with answers, I sought always to direct them to one another, further endorsing the idea that effective group work encourages pupils to see one another as resources. At the beginning of the lesson, I set out the social objectives, stating them as fervently as the academic targets and referring back to them several times in periods of group processing.

4.2.4 Review with Observers

Following a discussion with colleagues immediately after the lesson study, I studied their feedback forms and highlighted common observations. All noted that positive interdependence was in evidence both *within* and *among* groups, and agreed verbally that this contributed to a supportive atmosphere without any sense of competition. All observers also noted that distributing stickers denoting the different roles was a simple way of raising status and encouraging pupils to take on the associated responsibilities; we considered how one might go even further and allot props or simple uniforms. A universal criticism, however, was that while equal in terms of workload, the roles involved different skills and by not rotating these responsibilities, I limited every pupil to some extent. In hindsight, where time allows, the switching of roles seems a sensible strategy, going some way to nullify the effect of imbalanced roles, a common side effect of flawed task design.

All remarked that the arrangement of desks before the lesson was beneficial, although it was mooted that such reconfiguration is not always possible between lessons. This led to an interesting discussion about the permanent formation of our classrooms, and which layout lends itself to the biggest breadth of classroom experiences, something we will continue to ponder. Even with the desks arranged, it took me ten of forty minutes to position the pupils and give the necessary instructions, which I did entirely in English. Thereafter, however, the amount of pupil talk was extremely high and almost exclusively in French; we broadly agreed that this was an acceptable trade. All concurred that it remains a primary responsibility of the teacher to monitor closely and manage any arising disruption, but we also acknowledged that it is important for pupils to encounter conflict on occasion and to learn how to mediate it. Group processing was raised as a pivotal strategy in this respect, with pupils encouraged to reflect on elements of their teamwork that might be improved. That said, all observed that there had been reluctance among pupils to admit weaknesses, and while the teacher can make suggestions, this is at the risk of damaging confidence.

All pupils were considered by observers to be fully engaged and actively involved throughout the task. It was not possible for the teacher to be party to every utterance in the target language but it was deemed acceptable to relinquish an element of quality control in order to promote more widespread skills practice. Throughout the lesson study, there was no reference whatsoever to dictionaries, vocabulary books or the several teachers in the room; every query was put to and answered by another pupil. There was some debate as to whether, in the long run, social objectives can be viewed as being as important as academic objectives, and whether this is just an ideal to maintain whilst teaching pupils to collaborate for the first time. This merits further discussion and would appear to be a question of context.

4.2.5 Review with Participants

Coincidentally, three of the four pupils who took part in this review had been in the same group in the lesson study. They reported that the nature of the task had motivated them to succeed as one and collaborate with other groups in the exchange of information. Pupils reported liking the arrangement of desks and were pleased that each group was designated an area, as this withdrew any disagreement as to who would work where. They said that, in our more regular set up (with desks in rows), it is easy for pupils to copy one another and/or interfere with others' work.

Pupils found this task fun and reported feeling busy and important. They were proud to have succeeded whilst using very little English, something they said that they would not have thought possible a few months ago. They also said that they now felt more confident working collaboratively than they had at the beginning of the first intervention. They claimed to have learned that arguing is less enjoyable than succeeding in a task and, when prompted, demonstrated awareness of a range of social strategies to minimise conflict and hasten compromise.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1

Before any intervention, what was the nature of collaboration among pupils in my setting?

There is little doubt that, preceding this investigation, language learning in my setting was a largely 'social enterprise' (Mirzaei and Eslami, 2013). Group work was widely employed by all teachers in the department, often very usefully, albeit without an awareness of the principles of cooperative learning as set out in the literature (Johnson and Johnson, 2014; Kagan, 1994). That said, whilst there were some genuinely communicative, transactional tasks, where the second language constituted both the means and the end of the activity (Fathman and Kessler, 1993), teacher feedback suggests that collaboration was often characterised by pupils working on the same task at the same time, without positive interdependence. In cases such as these, social constructivism (Gillies, 2007) is undermined, as pupils do not have to agree on responses unless they are jointly responsible for the same script.

There appeared to be a strong emphasis placed on the outcomes of collaborative tasks, with pupils typically asked to share their answers or check them against a given standard; I suspect that this focus might provoke a performance orientation (Ames, 1984), with pupils more likely to promote 'display behaviour' than 'communicative behaviour', demonstrating their competencies rather than using them to elicit an ongoing exchange of information in the target language (Davoudi and Mahinpo, 2012). Initial discussions with colleagues revealed that, before this investigation, group work was mainly conducted in pairs, with groupings dictated by proximity, according to where pupils chose to position themselves in a given lesson. One might assume therefore, that pupils often worked with their favourite peers, potentially resulting in the kind of friendly consensus that undermines cognitive dissonance (Cooke, 2005).

Pupils were encouraged to share ideas and engage in languaging (Swain, 2006), although until this investigation, they had not received any kind of formalised social training in this regard. Indeed, social objectives did not feature explicitly alongside academic goals; group work fulfilled cognitive objectives but there was little evidence of metacognition, or consideration of the value of certain behaviours in relation to others. This was clear from my initial lesson observations, but also from the reaction of pupils to group processing; many appeared unpractised in evaluation, seemingly reluctant to critique themselves and others. I remain uncertain, however, of the value of such kinds of reflection when a task is going well, given its potential stalling effects on momentum and motivation.

Responses to the initial questionnaire revealed that pupils in this setting enjoyed working together and preferred it to working alone. They widely agreed that group work benefitted their learning and a majority claimed to enjoy both helping and being helped by their peers. Such feedback would appear to challenge my initial hypothesis that competitive school mechanisms impact negatively upon pupils' ability to cooperate; however, enthusiasm for collaboration does not guarantee a capacity to collaborate effectively. It is undoubtedly a failing of this enquiry that no formal measure was employed to gauge the impact of collaborative measures on the quality of pupil output. Given the limited scope of the investigation, I considered it impracticable to identify a measure that isolated the impact of cooperative learning techniques from the varying influences of different teachers.

We have seen that, within my initial sample, attitudes towards collaboration differed slightly but significantly between pupils in Year 5 and those in Year 8, the younger cohort expressing a stronger preference for working together in general. My principle rationale, however, for focussing subsequent interventions on the younger year group was that, for a shift in culture to take root, it is wiser to target stakeholders who will remain in the setting for several years, rather than a cohort who will shortly move on elsewhere.

In response to my initial rationale for posing this first research question (see Section 2.5.1), I conclude that, prior to this investigation, very little collaboration in

French lessons in my setting constituted cooperative learning; teachers were not aware of its principles yet did not hold alternative theoretical perspectives. Over the course of the enquiry, the principles of cooperative learning have been acknowledged, assimilated and appreciated by all teachers in the department.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What are considered to be the facilitators of and barriers to collaboration in my setting?

Pupils were found to consider teamwork, the sharing of ideas and the equal distribution of responsibilities to be facilitators of effective group work, although one could argue that the latter two constitute the former. They also valued the availability of feedback from group members, which links to the notion that pupils might feel less threatened testing theories and receiving guidance from a peer than a teacher, whose critique might harm their self-efficacy (Davoudi and Mahinpo, 2012).

Many aspects of grouping impact on the efficacy of group work (Gillies, 2007), most notably the size, personnel and social dynamics. Based on our experiences during the collaborative lesson series, our impression (as a group of teachers) was that groups of three were most efficient, rendering it simple to form a majority in the event of disagreement, but without the wider disparity of opinions that becomes inevitable as groups grow in size. We also determined that, especially with younger pupils, groupings are best selected by the teacher; the teacher can take care to consider attainment and the compatibility of different characters, be they jointly combustible or prone to friendly consensus. Autonomy can be afforded to pupils in other ways, by allowing them to appoint their own roles within a group, for example; this should be monitored carefully, however, as both the dominance and laziness of individuals were highlighted by pupils as being common barriers to collaboration.

Arguing, bossiness and disruption were flagged by pupils as key inhibitors of effective group work, although it was not established whether disruption was

characterised principally by deliberate naughtiness or incidental distraction. Distraction might result from a pupil having to wait their turn and in this case relates to the nature of the task set, rather than to a pupil's predisposition for unruly behaviour. The remedies for disruption are thus likely to be diverse, and in need of deeper consideration. Similarly, bossiness is arguably too broad a label for the range of pupil feedback categorised under this term; as well as autocracy, bossiness might be evidenced by an inability to receive criticism, a lack of flexibility or an unwillingness to listen to opposing points of view. In any case, the existence of these collaborative obstructions, however they are identified, provides a rationale to persist in the trialling and evaluation of explicit instruction of social skills (Jongsma, 1990).

Undoubtedly, logistical factors impact upon group work to a certain extent. In my setting, there is a strong likelihood that any task spanning more than one lesson will not involve exactly the same pupils in exactly the same groups, although this unpredictability lies beyond the control of the department. A lack of physical space, be it due to small classrooms or large class sizes, heightens the probability of close proximity between groups, which would appear to provoke distraction.

I have come to consider that task design is perhaps both the greatest potential facilitator and barrier to effective collaboration, as so many elements of an activity are within the teacher's control. Where a teacher does not fully subscribe to the potential benefits of collaborative work, an individualised learning culture is perpetuated and the proportion of a lesson spent actively involved by a given pupil is arguably reduced (Zhang, 2010).

In summary, the teacher is central to the facilitation of effective collaboration, with key responsibilities relating to task design and pupil grouping. Disparity in workload, arguing, bossiness and disruption were identified by the sample as barriers to effective collaboration, whilst logistical factors can also have an undesirable effect.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How can collaboration be enhanced to improve learning in my setting?

To establish how to enhance collaboration, one must first hold a view of what constitutes good collaboration. Although a number of the perceived improvements in Year 5 pupil attitudes to collaboration over the course of this investigation proved to be statistically non-significant, one that *was* statistically significant was their overall enjoyment of group work, so I feel justified in endorsing the continued employment of cooperative learning, as detailed in the literature (see Section 2).

Discussion with teaching colleagues revealed consensus that positive interdependence was an efficient means of encouraging pupils to work for one another, whilst nullifying competition. If pupils require one another to succeed in order to be successful themselves, it seems logical that they will interact differently to when their individual attainment or degree of competence is measured in some way *against* that of their peers. Conversational language tasks lend themselves to positive interdependence, where pupils are required to listen carefully to fellow group members and negotiate for meaning (Fathman and Kessler, 1993) in order to maintain an exchange of information (Davoudi and Mahinpo, 2012). Teachers agreed that pitching the difficulty of a task beyond the reach of the strongest pupil in a group, whilst still in their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978), helped to promote positive interdependence, as it further encouraged pupils to pool their resources and help one another. Once positive interdependence was achieved *within* groups, all teachers affirmed that it was relatively straightforward to generate it *among* groups, which contributed to a sense of unity and further prompted pupils to work together.

In the employment of cooperative learning, we are advised to ensure that pupils retain some individual accountability for their efforts and output within groups (Gillies, 2007; Sharan, 2014); pupils need to know that they remain personally responsible for at least part of a given task. A simple means of generating this

individual accountability is by assigning roles, although these must be carefully thought out. We found that providing clear demarcation, through badges or props, added status and encouraged pupils to focus on their specific duties, although rotating roles is perhaps the only way to guarantee that every pupil gets the same opportunities. I fear that appointing group leaders increases the risk of squabbling, especially among younger learners who have expressed disdain for bossiness.

The assessment of individual contributions to group work is another way of fostering a sense of individual accountability, although we found that collective assessment (appraising and providing feedback on work completed in groups) was very effective, chiefly because of the extra time we were afforded as markers. This manner of assessment may be less individualised, but, in any case, I wonder how many teachers can claim to truly individualise their marking every time, particularly where pupils are encountering similar challenges on the same task.

Jongsma (1990) claims that social skills ought not be viewed simply as a by-product of collaboration; they should be explained and encouraged explicitly. Through our experimentation in the classroom and observation of pupil reactions, we came to agree that social objectives should be stated, praised and reflected upon in the same way as academic goals. We acknowledged that there is an argument for affording these objectives equal status, especially where pupils have not encountered them before. If every subject teacher in my school were to view the teaching of social skills as part of their remit then one might reasonably expect pupils to become more socially proficient very quickly indeed.

The nature of the teacher's role in cooperative learning is different to that in a classroom characterised by the transmission of information from teacher to pupil (Sharan, 2014). The teacher plays the facilitator, shepherding from behind as opposed to leading from the front. This should allow the teacher more scope for monitoring, which, alongside task design, is perhaps their greatest responsibility. Part of the monitoring role is to manage behaviour; pupils came up with suggestions for subduing inhibitors to group work (see Section 4.2.2) but we concluded that, ultimately, it is the teacher who should ensure that all pupils work together

productively and respectfully, by reducing distractions and suppressing disruption (Domalewska, 2014). It is recognised that working collaboratively yields a higher chance of conflict than working individually (Vrhovec, 2015), but this should not be viewed negatively. In conflict lies great potential for cognitive dissonance and social restructuring (Gillies, 2007; Johnson and Johnson, 2014); the teacher should not seek to drive pupils away from disagreement as a matter of course, but rather make timely interventions when an impasse seems inevitable.

Teachers can promote metacognition through frequent sessions of group processing (collective, metacognitive evaluation). Getting pupils to reflect on their learning and to consider how their actions may or may not have hastened the process has the potential to bring about more positive causal attributions (Dörnyei, 1997), the sense that pupils are in control of their assimilation and able to govern it via their own strategies. This has positive implications for pupils' self-efficacy and ties in with Dweck's (2006) work on 'growth mindset'. I would argue that pupils should not critique themselves or others for the sake of it, but that the ability to critique and be critiqued without causing or feeling offence is a valuable skill in any cooperative endeavour.

Teachers found that, by arranging desks and chairs in advance, they can save lesson time and facilitate promotive interaction. Zhang (2010) suggests that pupils should typically be positioned face-to-face during group work and we discovered the value of leaving adequate space between groups to discourage copying or other undesired involvement from outsiders. We have seen that the novelty of a new classroom layout seems to appeal to pupils, although, if cooperative learning were to feature more heavily in the future, teachers might reconsider the permanent layout of their classrooms.

As mentioned previously, the teacher has arguably more time for monitoring in cooperative learning, which should afford them a better impression of who has and has not satisfied the academic objectives of a task, thereby reducing the need for summative sessions, where pupils share their answers with the class, for example. By shifting focus away from the outcome, teachers might aid pupils to avoid becoming

performance-oriented, instead helping them to engage with and enjoy the ongoing practice of skills involved in a given task, thus developing a mastery orientation (Ames, 1984; Dweck, 2006). Such an approach might require a change of ethos, not just in task design but in the way teachers view their own role: one cannot expect to assess and correct every interaction in a highly cooperative lesson. If language learning is viewed solely as an academic discipline then this relinquishment of control on the part of the teacher might be viewed with suspicion, yet if language learning is primarily intended to prepare pupils to communicate in foreign settings, increased engagement with practical skills at the risk of slightly reduced accuracy (in the short-term) might seem a more acceptable exchange.

In summary, the principles of cooperative learning have been employed to enhance collaboration and, while not measured specifically here, a resultant improvement in learning is expected. Within my department, the collective planning of group work and subsequent evaluation of techniques has increased teachers' awareness and experience of this approach.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

The availability of research linked directly to the value of collaboration in language learning, in a setting such as this, was low and while I have sought to identify common themes, I have drawn on very diverse sources. This study was conducted on a very small scale, yet it retains value as a context-specific, informative tool. Throughout the enquiry, I attributed significant weight to my own views and reflections, as well as those of my departmental colleagues, whose input I obtained at virtually every stage. Whilst this method of working brought many benefits, there is no doubt that many of the research techniques employed (such as lesson observations and discussions) were subjective and susceptible to interpretation.

I concede that my initial aims were broader than the scope of this study. With more resources, I would have sought to investigate the suitability of different language skills to collaborative tasks and attempted to measure the impact of

cooperative learning strategies on the quality of pupil output. Similarly, I would have examined and explored the differences in pupils' attitudes to collaborating in French lessons and collaborating more generally. Whilst I have devoted considerable focus to the value of collaboration, I have not afforded competition a similar examination; my reasoning here was that my motives were to enhance learning through collaboration, not simply to endorse collaboration as superior to an alternative philosophy. The scope of this study did not allow me to focus on both of these constructs.

My data analysis revealed few trends of statistical significance. This could be due to the small size of the sample, the similarity of pupils in the sample and/or weaknesses in methodology. Further, responses to closed questions in the questionnaires were truncated on a five-point scale, thus removing a considerable degree of nuance; for example, is there an equitable gap between strongly agreeing with something and not holding an opinion, and agreeing and disagreeing? Categorisation of open responses proved problematic and this kind of feedback grew increasingly sparse, due perhaps to the excessive length of the questionnaires, which were not expertly designed. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that the methodology employed has provided a very thorough insight into the attitudes of stakeholders in this setting.

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has detailed a dual-phase intervention conducted to gather pupil views on group work and promote collaboration in French lessons at a British junior school. Tasks were collaboratively designed according to the principles of cooperative learning, which, overall, were deemed effective in enhancing the quality of group work.

In seeking to promote collaboration to enhance learning among our pupils, my teaching colleagues and I have felt the benefits of collaboration ourselves and enhanced our teaching through the assimilation of new ideas and techniques. Together, through extensive discussion and reflection, we have collated the central theories in the literature and key findings from this investigation to create a 'cooperative manifesto'. This comprises eight guidelines and a glossary of key terms and now forms part of our departmental handbook. It is intended as a point of reference in the future planning and consideration of group tasks:

- When designing collaborative tasks, seek to generate positive interdependence within groups by ensuring that success is dependent on the understanding, cooperation and participation of all members. It is also desirable to engender positive interdependence among groups, by requiring some exchange of information.

- Ensure that individual pupils are knowingly accountable for their contributions to collaborative tasks. This may be achieved by means of assessment, or by requiring the assignment of specific roles within groups. To ensure that all pupils get equal opportunities within a given activity, look to rotate roles where possible.

- State social objectives alongside academic goals and publicise them just as fervently. Reflect back on them in periods of group processing and help pupils to attribute their successes to specific behaviours and strategies.

- Where logistically possible, seek to arrange your classroom to promote face-to-face interactions, in a formation that allows you to circulate whilst monitoring and with sufficient space to deter pupils from interfering with the work of other groups. Consider that assigning pupils to groups of three according to attainment (one higher, one middle, one lower) has been found to be an effective strategy with some younger pupils.

- When monitoring a collaborative task, take full responsibility for behaviour management but do not steer pupils away from conflict without first considering if there is cognitive dissonance that could lead to social restructuring; such discord has great educative potential.

- Concede that it is not possible to correct every output in the target language during a collaborative task and encourage all pupils to engage fully with the skills involved. Your filter for accuracy may be lower but the increased practical participation of pupils and volume of interactions between them should make up for this.

- Seek to facilitate collaborative tasks rather than lead them; trust pupils to respond well to new structures and enable them to make their own discoveries. Be adventurous in your planning and believe in the ability of your classes to respond positively to change.

- Consult teaching colleagues in the preparation of collaborative tasks. Draw on their ideas and expertise and provide your own to them; the sharing of tasks, resources and experiences is of great value to the department and school as a whole.

In addition to this departmental guidance, I will be presenting my findings to the senior management team at my school and recommending that direction on the explicit teaching of social skills (such as conflict resolution, mediation, compromise and turn-taking) be included in the teaching and learning policy that governs every department. It is my hope that the cooperation of all teachers in the explanation, encouragement and praise of certain key skills will better enable pupils to learn in group scenarios.

6.2 REFLECTIONS

I hypothesised that pupils might struggle to work together in a setting where they are frequently pitted against one another (see Section 1), yet have found no evidence to substantiate this theory. I understand that, for some, competition can be a great motivator (Vrhovec, 2015), but argue that the value of collaboration in second language acquisition is beyond question: collaboration can increase the volume of interactions between pupils and lead to enhanced creativity through more widespread sharing of ideas and solutions (Zhang, 2010). Teachers cannot realistically expect to teach everything to every child and are advised to harness the social element of learning (Mirzaei and Eslami, 2013), enabling pupils to operate within their 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) and allowing them to mediate their existing knowledge with new experiences and interactions.

I have uncovered, in my setting at least, some disconnect in the rationale for teaching languages. Do we teach French as an academic discipline, intended to challenge and increase pupils' ability to assimilate information precisely and reproduce it with a high level of accuracy? Or do we teach French as a life skill, with the intention of equipping our pupils to function in real life scenarios, using the language as a communicative tool? The answer, inevitably, is both, although I would argue that our current position on the continuum is too far towards the former of these ideologies. Punitive mark schemes that emphasise the importance of technical precision encourage teachers to scrutinise the accuracy of pupil output to a degree

that is unsustainable with more than a very small number of pupils. I fear that, as a result, opportunities for free, communicative exploration are limited.

I have come to appreciate that the teacher is central to the success of cooperative learning, in task design and monitoring as we have seen, but also in attitude. Cooperative learning might seem a large concept to adopt, yet we are reminded that teachers can begin imparting its benefits one structure at a time (Kagan, 1989), experimenting, reflecting and remodeling as they broaden their repertoire. Planning would appear to be enhanced by collaboration among teachers, who themselves reap the benefits of enhanced creativity and diverse experiences.

I chose to work with Year 5 pupils because, in part, I felt that they had the scope in their curriculum to adapt to a new model of teaching and learning, yet we must not dismiss the modification of teaching practice or the assimilation of new methods as too time-consuming or risky an enterprise (Celik, Aytim and Bayram, 2012). My colleagues and I must believe in our pupils; many of those pupils heavily involved in this investigation proved themselves more capable (both socially and academically) than we expected, demonstrating their potential to adapt to alternative methods. This enhanced sense of trust has influenced, and must continue to influence our work throughout the department.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Approval from Central University Research Ethics Committee

Dear AUTHOR[1], 13 January 2016 16:19

Application Approval

Title: Promoting Collaboration to Enhance Learning in MFL

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse.

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/factsheet-child-abuse-reporting-requirements-professionals.pdf

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Yours sincerely,
Heath Rose
--
Heath Rose
Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics
Department of Education
University of Oxford

[1] Name removed for anonymity.

APPENDIX B

Initial Questionnaire (with invitation to participants)

Dear pupil,

I am trying to find out what boys in [Years 5-8] think about working together in class, either in pairs or larger groups. Some questions ask for your general opinion across all subjects, while some relate specifically to your experiences and preferences in French lessons.

Most questions are in the form of statements and you need to indicate to what extent you agree with them. Other questions ask you to write out your feedback. Please think carefully about the questions and answer as honestly as you can - there are no wrong answers! I am very interested to read your views and nobody else will be able to see them.

Thank you very much,

AUTHOR[1]

1. In general, I enjoy working with other pupils.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

2. In general, I prefer working with other pupils to working alone.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. In general, I learn a lot when I work with other pupils.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. In general, I learn more when I work with other pupils than when I work on my own.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. In general, I enjoy learning from other pupils.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

6. In general, I enjoy helping other pupils to learn.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

7. In your opinion, what helps group work to be successful?

.....

.....

[1] Name removed for anonymity.

8. In your opinion, what prevents group work from being successful?

.....

.....

9. I enjoy working with other pupils in French lessons.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

10. In French lessons, I prefer working with other pupils to working on my own.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. I learn a lot when I work with other pupils in French lessons.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. In French lessons, I learn more when I work with other pupils than when I work on my own.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as people I can learn from.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as my opponents.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. In French lessons, I am given lots of opportunities to work with other pupils.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. I would like more opportunities to work with other pupils in French lessons.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. What do you like about working with other pupils in French lessons?

.....

.....

18. What do you dislike about working with other pupils in French lessons?

.....

.....

19. If you would like to comment on anything further, please do so here.

.....

.....

APPENDIX C

Outline of Collaborative Lesson Series

Week & Focus	Lesson (35 mins)	Key Tasks
1 Listening	1	• **Oral revision:** pupils to circulate, asking and answering a set of revision questions. • **Social skills plenary:** pupils to brainstorm the types of behaviours and strategies required for effective group work. • **Vocabulary mining:** in threes, pupils to adopt roles ('dictionary master', 'pronunciation wizard' and 'phrase builder') and seek out meaning of given words relating to houses, rooms and gardens.
	2	• **Vocabulary mining:** pupils to repeat task from previous lesson with new groups, cementing knowledge of new vocabulary. • **Repetition:** pupils to repeat (chorally and individually) new words to consolidate pronunciation. • **Design a house:** in threes (same groups for the rest of the week), pupils to label a blank plan of a house, putting different rooms onto different floors; pupils must agree on their design.
	3	• **Discussion:** pupils to generate phrases about the houses they designed in the previous lesson, stating which rooms are on which floors. • **Listening:** every pupil reads aloud a sentence about his group's house, other pupils to note details. • **Concept check:** pupils to generate (orally) new sentences from their notes, checking the house plans of different to see whether they have the right details.
2 Reading	1	• **Dictionary skills:** pupils to undergo a series of challenges designed to improve their dictionary skills. • **Preparation:** in threes (same groups all week), pupils to look through long comprehension text, identifying new words and collaboratively using dictionaries to discover their meaning. • **Comprehension (1):** pupils to answer a series of comprehension questions about the text, taking turns to scribe on the sheet itself.
	2	• **Dictionary skills:** pupils to undergo another series of challenges to improve their dictionary skills. • **Comprehension (2):** pupils to seek to identify specific phrases (given in English) in their comprehension text. • **Phrase chains:** pupils to attempt to create phrase chains using the phrases found in the text as the root, altering a different word each time to create new, similar phrases with a different meaning.
	3	• **Dictionary skills:** pupils to undergo a final series of challenges to improve their dictionary skills. • **Comprehension (3):** pupils to translate English phrases into French by identifying similar phrases in the text that they can simply adapt. • **Phrase generation:** pupils to generate their own new phrases by adapting passages in the text, challenging other groups to translate their creations back into English.
3 Writing	1	• **Instructions:** pupils to find predetermined groups of three (same groups all week) and read the instructions for the upcoming collaborative writing task. • **Paragraph 1:** pupils to create a paragraph about the general appearance of their imaginary house, incorporating its age, size and style. • **Paragraph 2:** pupils to create a paragraph about the garden, incorporating relevant items.
	2	• **Paragraph 3:** pupils to create a paragraph about the bedroom in their imaginary house, incorporating relevant items. • **Paragraph 4:** pupils to create a paragraph about the kitchen, incorporating relevant items, pupils to note new words on the whiteboard for others to use. • **Paragraph 5:** pupils to create a paragraph about the lounge, incorporating relevant items.
	3	• **Paragraph 6:** pupils to create a paragraph about the garage of their imaginary house, incorporating relevant items, again pupils to note new words on the whiteboard for others to use. • **Proof-reading (1):** pupils to read very carefully through their text, identifying mistakes and concluding any disagreements. • **Proof-reading (2):** pupils to share their texts with another group, seeking to identify any mistakes.
4 Speaking	1	• **Feedback (1):** pupils to receive marked copies of their house writing tasks and work together (in original groups) to answer the series of questions contained therein. • **Feedback (2):** pupils to create new groups of three (each consisting of members of three different previous groups) and attempt to answer the questions on other group members' texts. • **Speaking:** new group members to ask and answer a series of given questions about their houses.
	2	• **House exchange preparation:** pupils to stick a series of cut-outs onto a blank house template. • **House exchange:** pupils (in pairs) to ask one another about the location of rooms and items in their house, sticking a second set of cut-outs onto a second blank house template according to responses. • **Comparison:** pupils to compare both sets of houses and see whether information was shared correctly.
	3	• **Business card preparation:** pupils to fill small cards with answers to basic questions about their actual house and garden. • **Business card speaking:** pupils to circulate, asking and answering questions from the cards, exchanging cards at the end of each interview and using the new information for the next interaction. • **Business card removal:** pupils to continue these short conversations, but without referring to cards.

APPENDIX D

Subsequent Questionnaire (with invitation to participants)

Dear pupil,

I am trying to find out what boys in [Years 5-8] think about working together in class, either in pairs or larger groups. Over the past four weeks, you have been asked to work together in every French lesson and I would like to know how you have found the various activities.

Most questions are in the form of statements and you need to indicate to what extent you agree with them. Other questions ask you to write out your feedback. Please think carefully about the questions and answer as honestly as you can - there are no wrong answers! I am very interested to read your views and nobody else will be able to see them.

Thank you very much,

AUTHOR[1]

1. I enjoy working with other pupils in French lessons.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

2. In French lessons, I prefer working with other pupils to working on my own.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. I learn a lot when I work with other pupils in French lessons.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. In French lessons, I learn more when I work with other pupils than when I work on my own.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as people I can learn from.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

6. In French lessons, I tend to see other pupils as my opponents.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

7. I enjoyed listening with other pupils (reading out a phrase about the house your group designed and noting details of other pupils' designs).

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

8. What do you like about listening with other pupils?

.....

.....

[1] Name removed for anonymity.

9. What do you dislike about listening with other pupils?

.....

.....

10. I enjoyed reading with other pupils (working together to answer comprehension questions on a big text).

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. What do you like about reading with other pupils?

.....

.....

12. What do you dislike about reading with other pupils?

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.....

13. I enjoyed writing with other pupils (working together to write a long text with six different paragraphs).

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. What do you like about writing with other pupils?

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15. What do you dislike about writing with other pupils?

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.....

16. I enjoyed speaking with other pupils (asking questions to find out how a partner had fitted rooms into a house and using business cards to complete short interviews).

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. What do you like about speaking with other pupils?

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18. What do you dislike about speaking with other pupils?

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.....

19. If you would like to comment on anything further, please do so here.

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APPENDIX E

Plan of Collaborative Lesson Study

Teacher Objectives:
• To promote positive interdependence *within* and *among* groups. • To provoke individual accountability through the allocation of roles. • To facilitate a high volume of quality spoken interaction in the target language.
Learner Aims (social):
• To work hard to avoid arguing, bossiness and disruption. • To share ideas and help one another to succeed. • To trust each other and turn to one another for help.
Learner Aims (academic):
• To speak loudly and clearly with good intonation and pronunciation. • To revise a host of vocabulary and structures relating to personal description. • To create a table of accurate, written French, checked by all group members.
Roles:
• Actor: must take on a character and answer questions from the detectives (key skill: speaking). • Detective: must ask questions to the actors and relay information back to the strategists (key skill: listening). • Strategist: must record all the obtained information in a grid and advise detectives who to question next (key skill: writing).
Lesson Plan:
• Desks are rearranged before the class begins; the new formation allows for the circulation of pupils whilst allocating each group its own unique area. • Pupils enter and find their area; pre-determined groups are displayed on the interactive whiteboard. Pupils listen to thorough a description of the task, receive directions and are taken through the social and academic aims of the session. • Pupils are given descriptions of the three roles needed within each team (see above) and asked to nominate these responsibilities; stickers are distributed accordingly. • Pupils begin the task *within* their groups, the detective asking questions of the actor, whose answers are written up into a grid by the strategist. • Pupils are asked to reflect on the success of this first phase, considering what made it work and what might have made it easier. • Pupils continue the task working *among* their groups, the detective asking questions of other actors and relaying responses back (in French) to the strategist, who in turn advises where to go next. • Again, pupils are asked to reflect on their success so far, contemplating what strategies might enable them to work more efficiently in the final stage of the session. • Pupils complete the task, the strategist sending the detective to obtain any missing information. • Pupils are asked to reflect on the task as a whole, considering what they have revised, what they have learned (both academically and socially) and how well they have worked together as a group and as a class. • Pupils answer plenary questions about the characters encountered in the lesson, seeing whether different groups got the same information.

APPENDIX F

Feedback Form for Collaborative Lesson Study

Thank you very much for taking part in this lesson. The aim is to test a number of collaborative theories that have been developed over the course of the year. Please write down as many observations as you can (there is space for notes on the back); be critical and feel free to incorporate your own feelings and teaching philosophies.

Theories	Comments
Positive interdependence subdues competition between groups and group members.	
Allocating roles promotes individual accountability and adding status (with badges etc.) enhances engagement.	
Setting up desks in advance facilitates a quick start and promotes face-to-face collaboration.	
Conflict management in group work among younger learners is a responsibility of the teacher.	
Effective group work maximises the proportion of a lesson that pupils spend actively involved.	
Effective group work encourages pupils to use one another as resources and fosters independence.	
Social and motivational objectives in group work are as important as academic objectives.	