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**COOPERATIVE LEARNING VERSUS GROUP  
WORK IN ENGLISH LESSONS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The thesis deals with cooperative learning and group work. Firstly, it provides a general theoretical introduction to cooperative learning. It contains basic information regarding cooperative learning principles, advantages and disadvantages of cooperative learning. An individual section is dedicated to cooperative learning in English language classes. The chapter focused on group work is written in the same way – there is also basic information concerning group work and its advantages and disadvantages are discussed. It is explained why group work should be used in English lessons, too. The research was carried out through observation in three Czech schools. The goal of the research was to determine whether group work (including pair work) as an organizational form is used in English lessons and to what extent. Next part of the research was focused on whether group work activities can be considered cooperative learning activities. The research has shown that group work as an organizational form was used in two thirds of the visited English lessons. Nevertheless, based on the evaluated data, not each group work activity can be considered cooperative learning activity and not all necessary principles for cooperative learning were fulfilled.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, there are many modern teaching methods actively involving students in learning, nevertheless, some teachers extensively use teacher-centred lessons, which are associated with the traditional approaches to learning. The main disadvantage of this fact is that students are passive in learning, they listen to the teacher who talks during the majority of the lesson. To learn English language, students need to have many opportunities to practice the language. To one of the student-centred forms of class organization belongs group work which provides more time and opportunities for speaking. Specifically, the best choice for teachers teaching foreign language is to choose cooperative learning which is based on group work. Cooperative learning not only has the best learning results but also develops social skills necessary for the success in the future lives of students. The problem is that many teachers think that they are using cooperative learning activities in their lessons, but in fact, they are only using group work activities. In this thesis not only the similarities for both cooperative learning and group work are presented, but also differences between them are explained.

In the first chapter, the thesis provides with the theoretical background concerning cooperative learning. The necessary elements of cooperative learning are described. Benefits and drawbacks of cooperative learning are also presented in here and another section of this chapter focuses on cooperative learning in English language classes. The second part of this chapter deals with group work. Just as the previous section, it mentions the benefits and drawbacks of group work. Furthermore, a section of this chapter is dedicated to group work in English language classes. The differences between the cooperative learning group and traditional learning group are summarized at the very end of this chapter.

The practical part of the thesis describes the methods which were selected to do the small-scale research. The observation was chosen as a method to gather data for the research. This chapter is followed by the results of the research and commentaries. Last but not least, pedagogical implications resulted from the analysis, together with the limitations of the research and suggestions for further research, are included in the thesis. In the last chapter, the main ideas of the whole thesis are reviewed.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The first part of this chapter lays out the theoretical background of cooperative learning, its benefits and drawbacks and describes five necessary elements of cooperative learning. A section dealing with cooperative learning in English lessons explains why cooperative learning should be used in English lessons. The second part of this chapter covers group work (as a form of class organisation), there is basic information concerning group work and its advantages and disadvantages are discussed. It is explained why group work should be interoperated in English lessons. The last part of this chapter aims to compare a cooperative learning group and a traditional learning group and highlights the differences between them.

First of all, it should be explained why cooperative learning and group work has started to be introduced in schools. A teacher-centred classroom has a very long tradition in the Czech Republic. Its concept was created by John Amos Comenius, the father of modern education, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It is a form of class organization where the teacher is actively involved in teaching while learners are passive, putting all of their focus on the teacher. In this form of class organization, the teacher talks almost 80 percent of the time during the lesson. The biggest disadvantage is that this method does not allow students to express themselves, ask questions or direct their own learning. Moreover, it does not provide enough time for the learner's understanding. This traditional lecture setup typically consists of parallel rows, minimizing the possibility of face-to-face communication. Although this type of class organization is very criticized by experts, it is still excessively used (Vališová & Kasíková et al., 2007, p. 176-180).

On the other hand, cooperative learning and group work are student-centred forms of class organization. They started to be used in schools because it was necessary to replace a teacher-centred classroom with its above mentioned drawbacks. Cooperative learning (CL) and group work (GW) are crucial especially in foreign language teaching (L2). Experts who focus on language teaching agree that in order to be able to speak, students need opportunities to speak. Classes should be organized in such a way which enables the better acquisition of second language skills. To maximize opportunities to speak, it is recommended to divide students into small groups consisting of a few people.

# Cooperative Learning

**What is cooperative learning?** To understand cooperative learning, it is first necessary to understand what cooperation is. From a psychological point of view, cooperation is positive mutual dependence of people working together to achieve shared goals (Kasíková, 2009, p. 11). Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (1993), top experts on cooperative learning since the 1970s, have defined cooperative learning as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning” (p. 9). This strategy is based on cooperation, and its aim is to solve problems and accomplish common goals. Each member of the group gains from the knowledge that is available in the group as a whole. This can have the form of knowledge, skills or experiences that not every member of the group possesses (Kolář et al., 2012, p. 67). Students in groups are led to be able to complete educational tasks, distribute social roles in a group, plan their activities, advise each other, solve problems together, and further each other's understanding of a material being used during learning (Mareš, Průcha, & Walterová, 2009, p. 133). The key concepts for cooperative learning are sharing, cooperation and support (Kasíková, 2010, p. 27).

Johnson and Johnson (2001) have identified five basic elements that are necessary and need to be included in cooperative learning. These principles distinguish cooperative learning from other forms of group learning. The principles are as follows: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills and group processing.

Positive interdependence is fittingly characterized by the sentence – we sink or swim together (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1998, p. 7). As Stevens (2003) explained:

Students in a team need each other’s output if they are to solve the task they have been given. The contribution of each student is a piece of the total work; this means that everyone has an interest not only in explaining their knowledge to the others, but in extracting knowledge from the others until they have understood each other. (p. 36)

According to Johnson and Johnson (2001), positive interdependence is the heart of cooperative learning. Within cooperative learning sessions, positive interdependence can be achieved through mutual learning goals (p. 13).

The next principle, individual accountability, means that each student must be regularly accountable for his or her contributions and learning (Kagan & Kagan, 2009, p. 5.10). The purpose of cooperative learning groups is not to strengthen the whole group but to make each member of the group a stronger individual (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 71). This principle eliminates the amount of free riders on the work of the others (Kagan & Kagan, 2009, p. 5.10 - 5.11). Kasíková (2010) recommends that teachers check individual accountability by giving an individual test to each student, having each student explain what they have learned to a group member, or randomly selecting one group member to give the answer (p. 38).

The third pillar of cooperative learning is called face-to-face promotion. Promotive interaction exists when students share resources and help, provide one another with feedback, and encourage each other's efforts to learn. According to Kagan and Kagan (2009), face-to-face interaction is the greatest advantage of cooperative learning over traditional teaching, because it allows more frequent student participation than in traditional teaching (p. 5.11). As Goodlad (1984) proved in his revolutionary work *A Place Called School*, almost 80% of the talking in the classroom is by teachers, and 20% of the time is left for students. If there are 15 students in the traditional classroom, each student has less than a minute for his or her own contribution. For the rest of the time students have to listen to their classmates or to the teacher, and that is why they feel bored in a traditional classroom setting. Cooperative learning provides students with enough time for talking. Furthermore, cooperative learning eliminates boredom and students feel more motivated (Kagan & Kagan, 2009, p. 5.11 – 5.12).

The recommended amount of students in a group in cooperative learning ranges between two to six students, and the activity of the group should be based on the principle that all members need to work together (Kasíková, 2010, p. 38). Johnson and Johnson (2001) argue that doing so results in the improvement of verbal and nonverbal communication, which provides important information regarding students' performance (p. 15).

Cooperative learning would not work without social skills, which is the fourth principle. The development of these skills in cooperative learning is progressive. Students first learn to know each other and communicate precisely, and then move to more advanced skills, such as trusting each other, accepting someone else's opinion or solving problems in a constructive way. Teachers must show students how to interact effectively within a group and help them develop the required interpersonal and social skills (Kasíková, 2010, p. 38). Moreover, the better the students' social skills are, the more positive relationships among students can be accomplished (Johnson & Johnson, 2001, p. 15).

The last inseparable element of cooperative learning is group processing. The effectiveness of group processing is influenced by whether the group members periodically reflect on how well they are proceeding and how the group reflects its work and decides about its future plans. Students must be given the time at the end of the cooperative learning activity to think about the above mentioned issues. Group processing tends to increase motivation and achievement, and keeps positive working relations within a group (Kasíková, 2010, p. 38).

**Reasons for cooperative learning.** Panitz lists over 50 benefits of cooperative learning. These benefits can be classified into four major categories: social, psychological, academic, and assessment (as cited in Palmer, Peter, & Streetman, 2003, p. 311). In this section only the most important benefits will be discussed.

***Development of social skills.*** The first benefit of cooperative learning to be mentioned is the development of social skills. Human society consists of many cooperative groups such as families, groups of neighbours, classmates, friends, sport teams, work groups and political parties. To be a member of a group, the individual needs to have certain social skills. Schools should not only provide knowledge, but also show students how to behave in society (Kasíková, 2010, p. 9). In other words, the school environment functions as a model of the outside world society, because it prepares children to become responsible citizens and be successful in their workplace, and it also teaches them how to interact with others throughout their lives (Geary, 1999, p. 4). Without social skills people are not able to function independently, have friends, relationships or start families. The



development and improvement of social skills is very important for success in life (Kasíková, 2010, p. 9).

According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), even kindergartens can practice social skills in cooperative activities (p.73). Cooperative methods help improve and develop many social skills; for instance, accepting someone's decisions, apologizing, asking for help, coming to consensus, criticizing an idea, decision making, disagreeing appropriately, excusing oneself, expressing an opinion, giving reasons, greeting others, leading, making friends, negotiating, offering help, problem solving, responsibility, tolerance, and working together (Kagan & Kagan, 2010, p. 11.2).

The data collected by Johnson and Johnson (1989) confirm that cooperative learning does not only promote social interaction, it also enhances the extent to which students enjoy their lessons as they enjoy the company of one another more than they would in traditional teacher-centred lessons (p. 72).

***Deeper understanding of subject matter.*** In addition to encouraging students to do their best, cooperative learning motivates students to help one another learn. Firstly, if students do not understand what they should do during a lesson, they can translate the teacher's language into "kid language" for one another (Slavin, 1987, p. 9). The grammatical and lexical simplifications are typical modifications for "kid language" (McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006, p. 6.).

Secondly, learning results are improved. Slavin (1987) pointed out this argument: "Students who explain to one another learn by doing so. When students have to organize their thoughts to explain ideas to teammates, they must engage in cognitive elaboration that greatly enhances their own understanding" (p. 9). Students who were taught by cooperative methods had a deeper understanding of the subject matter and retained considerably more information than students being taught by other methods (Palmer, Peters, & Streetman, 2010, p. 312.). Besides, cooperative learning is highly recommended as one of the most effective ways of learning. Based on Dale's Cone of Learning (1969), humans can come across different types of experiences. The effectiveness of teaching is dependent on whether the teaching method approaches the real situation. The more the teaching method is closer to real life the more effective it gets. The arrangement of the

methods in Dale's Cone of Learning<sup>1</sup> is based on abstraction and on the quantity of the senses involved. According to his diagram, the most effective methods are placed at the bottom of the cone involving doing a dramatic presentation, simulating the real experience, and doing the real thing. On the other hand, the least effective method is learning from information presented through verbal symbols. This method is located at the top of the cone.

Thirdly, in cooperative teams, students are more willing to help one another than in traditional classrooms. Team members have a "we are all in this together" attitude, they are therefore likely to receive help rather than mockery if they don't know the right answer (Slavin, 1987, p. 9).

To sum it up, everyone should profit from cooperative learning. Positive results have been found both for boys and girls, coloured people, students from different cultural backgrounds, low achievers, average achievers and high achievers. Concerning high achievers and gifted students, they are not brought down by the whole group. As Geary (1999) remarked, "they suffer no loss of learning, yet they gain in their ability to work with others" (p. 6).

***Interpersonal relationships.*** According to Geary (1999), cooperative learning helps students establish and maintain friendships in the classroom. In general, learners tend to sit with their friends. Someone who is somehow different may be excluded. The reasons for this may be their race, gender, social background, newness, disability or intellect. By establishing cooperative groups, these outsiders will be integrated among the other students and accepted (p. 11). From a psychological point of view, it is very important to have friends, as Johnson and Johnson (1999) note: "Students who are isolated or alienated from their peers are more likely to be at risk for violent and destructive behaviour than students who experience social support and a sense of belonging" (p. 73).

***Psychological health.*** By following the appropriate structuring of cooperative learning, the individual's psychological health is strengthened. Students are more self-confident and able to form personal as well as professional relationships. Learners know how to build trust, support others and rely on others. Group members are able to share their

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix A

personal problems with others, solve these problems and cope with stress. On one hand, cooperative learning increases personal ego-strength, independence and autonomy, on the other hand, cooperation reduces anxiety (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 72-73).

To conclude this section: “Cooperative experiences are not a luxury, they are an absolute necessity for the healthy social and psychological development of individuals who can function independently” (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 73).

***Other advantages of cooperative learning.*** Cooperative methods are very flexible and as such can be adapted for learners with special needs, such as dyslexia or dysgraphia. However, some significant changes must be made in curricula, technology and the attitude of some teachers in order to help learners with special needs to overcome obstacles they might not be able to overcome themselves. Besides other things, this type of learning improves the social acceptance of learners with learning disabilities by their classmates (Slavin, 1990, p. 52-54).

In addition to the benefits described earlier, positive effects of cooperative learning have also been found in such outcomes as the extent to which students like their classes and their attendance to these classes. Teachers have noticed that absences began to decrease as learners feel that they are a valuable and necessary part of their groups. Moreover, they do not want to disappoint their peers (Palmer, Peter, & Streetman, 2003, p. 312-316).

***Drawbacks of cooperative learning.*** Cooperative learning has many benefits, and it also has some drawbacks. In this section I mention some challenges for teachers considering cooperative learning, and I also provide with possible solutions to these challenges. However, these challenges can be applied to group work, as well.

Complications may occur when one individual refuses or boycotts working in a group. There are several reasons for such behaviour: the student’s insufficient experience with this method, he or she might be an introvert, or there may be behavioural problems. Generally, it is recommended to let him or her do the project alone. Nevertheless, such a person should handle the same amount of work that is assigned collectively for the whole group (Geary, 1999, p. 7-8). It should motivate the student to change his or her opinion, because each has less to do when helped by other students, as Geary (1999) explains:

“That way the student has more to do than if part of a group, and will eventually see the wisdom of voluntarily participating with others” (p. 8).

Cooperative teaching methods also provide many ways of assessment. Narrative assessment is highly recommended by experts in cooperative learning, because it should fully respect the learners’ personality and assess his or her own progress regardless of comparison with the other learners. It can have different forms such as observations, discussions about advantages and disadvantages of the work done by the whole group, an interview, and assessment through video recording or self-reflection (Kasíková, 2010, p. 92-100). These forms leave much more room for discussion about error or misconception. This way of assessment can be especially appreciated by learners who get nervous when writing a test or feel pressure to do well in their tests (Palmer, Peters, & Streetman, 2010, p. 312.). Narrative assessment should be the most extensive and motivating. Nevertheless, this type of giving feedback in cooperative learning can be very problematic for many teachers, because they might not know how to measure the development of social skills or how to assess the work done by the whole group. The next reason why teachers do not want to use this type of assessment is the amount of time it takes (Vališová & Kasíková et al., 2007, p. 245-259). In any case, a good narrative assessment provides learners with a more understandable feedback than a grade.

Another aspect which should be taken into consideration is preparation for the lesson containing cooperative learning activity. Preparations of cooperative learning activities are very time-consuming for instructors. In most cases teachers have to create their own materials for their students since textbooks are not suitable for this relatively new method of learning (Kasíková, 2009, p. 29). Moreover, Palmer, Peters and Streetman (2003) say that “instructors may be unable to cover the same amount of curriculum as before when they used teacher directed class discussions “ (p. 315). However, in comparison to other methods, cooperative learning does not cover a very large amount of curriculum; CL is still considered one of the best methods, because learners gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Based on Edgar Pole’s Cone of Learning (1969), the best learning results are achieved when people experience something themselves, do something themselves, or explain it to other members of group.

**Cooperative learning in English lessons.** Although cooperative learning has not been specially developed for foreign language teaching, it can be used in all subjects thanks to its flexibility. Stenlev (2003) claims that “cooperative learning can be used at all age levels, from kindergarten to university” (p. 33). She also points out that cooperative learning in English language teaching helps to practice all competences: speaking, listening, reading and writing. The prime aim of cooperative learning is to improve communicative competence. The more opportunities for communication students have, the better learning results they attain (Stenlev, 2003, p. 33 - 42).

Research conducted by Long and Porter (1985) has proven that the chance of students’ talking in English lessons was significantly greater in cooperative learning groups than in traditional teacher-centred lessons. Pica and Doughty (1985) have confirmed the above mentioned research, noting that in comparison to teacher-fronted activities, cooperative learning provides learners with many more opportunities to practice the English language and to get involved in direct interaction. In teacher-fronted classrooms the teacher limits the number of occasions in which individual students are able to communicate. Moreover, according to Freeman (as cited in McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006), “social interaction is especially important for students learning a second language” (p. 7).

Many students, especially ones who are shy, linguistically insecure or low achievers, are stressed out in second language lessons (L2) as soon as they are called upon to speak publicly. This stress is caused by the knowledge that they must answer the question accurately and as fast as possible. Someone might rather say nothing in front of the whole class than risk being embarrassed by his or her wrong grammar or pronunciation (Long & Porter, 1985, p. 211). In contrast, Long and Porter (1985) emphasize that students in cooperative groups feel better and more relaxed because “a small group of peers provides a relatively intimate setting and, usually, a more supportive environment in which to try out second language skills” (p. 211). Naturally, this “more supportive environment” is believed to increase learners’ motivation, and students do not perceive the teacher as their judge (Long & Porter, 1985, p. 211 - 212). In other words, as Long and Porter (1985) summarized the benefits of cooperative learning in English language classes:

It allows for a greater quantity and richer variety of language practice, practice that is better adapted to individual needs and conducted in a more positive affective climate. Students are individually involved in lessons more often and at a more personal level. (p. 212)

The essentials of cooperative learning lie in interaction among students; communication in English language classes is therefore very important, even though learners can hear the incorrect forms of the second language from other group members (McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006, p. 18). Nevertheless, Krashen and Terrel (1983) are sure that the incorrect use of L2 among students working in teams “does a great deal more good than harm, as long as it is not the only input the students are exposed to” (p. 97).

McCafferty et al. (2006) pointed out the last benefit of cooperative learning in English language teaching, such as the possibility for teachers to “give extra attention to students whose proficiency is less developed than that of their classmates while the other students are working together in their groups” (p. 4).

## **Group Work**

**What is group work?** Group work is a term used widely across fields such as psychotherapy, social studies, business and teaching, or it can refer to team work in the workplace. There are many definitions of this term. What all these definitions have in common is a number of people involved; the group must have at least two members working together.

From a pedagogical point of view, according to Brown (2007), group work is “a generic term covering a multiplicity of techniques in which two or more students are assigned a task that involves collaboration and self-initiated language” (p. 177).

Beebe and Masterson (1997) define group work as “interaction among a small group of people who share a common purpose or goal, who feel a sense of belonging to the group, and who exert influence on one another” (p. 6).

On the other hand, Skalková (2007) provides with a more complex definition of group work:

It is a method that uses small groups of pupils who work together to solve a common task. This group is a social group; social interactions are developed among its members, the behaviour of the individual is governed by both the common goal and the behaviour of the members of the group. Social interaction is understood as the relationships between pupils, so one's behaviour is the stimulus to the behaviour of the other. (p. 224)

In contrast to teacher-centred lessons, group work relies more on a student's active involvement to absorb knowledge, and it improves the social skills of the students (Nash, Lowe, & Palmer, 2011, p. 11). Maňák (1992) argues that students in groups not only learn how to use their own experiences, knowledge, habits, skills and interests, but also how to switch their roles within a group (p. 78). In other words, group formation, cooperation, communication and assigning of group roles are typical features of group work.

As already explained before, the fundamental condition for doing group work is having at least two people working together. Some experts distinguish the term *pair work* and *group work* because they can be used in different situations and purposes. According to Ur (2012), pair work includes two students, making it easy to organize because students often sit in pairs anyway and simply turn towards each other. Pair work is more suitable for shorter tasks, such as comparing answers to a grammatical exercise. On the other hand, group work consisting of three and more students is more complicated from an organizational point of view, because in most cases it involves moving students and their chairs and tables. Group work is more suitable for longer activities, such as contributing ideas to a discussion task. Overall, most activities can be done both in groups and in pairs (p. 233). In this whole thesis, the term *group work* includes the term *pair work*.

There are varying opinions on the optimal number of people for group formation. According to Kasíková (2010), the size of a group depends not only on the objectives and type of task, but also on the experience that teachers and students have with group work. Nevertheless, she recommends groups consisting of three, four or five students (p. 75). In contrast, Kagan and Kagan (2009) think that groups of four students are the most effective ones, because teams of four allow pair work and avoid an 'odd man out' (p. 7.1 -7.2). It is

much easier to exclude one student from a triad than in a team of four, as Kagan and Kagan (2009) explain: “the social psychology of a group of three is often a pair and an outsider” (p. 7.2). Overall, the best solution for the high achievement of the group seems to be no more than four people involved (Slavin, 1987, p. 8). To quote Geary (1999): “the larger the group, the more ideas, but also the more difficult it is get them all working together” (p. 7).

Experts have not reached a consensus on how to establish groups, either. Slavin (1987) suggests groups consisting of four members – one high achiever, two average achievers, and one low achiever (p. 8). Today it is even possible to use software programs measuring the achievement of the students. These programs classify students in groups by mixing high, medium and low achievers (Geary, 1999, p.7). On the other hand, Johnson and Johnson (1999) propose to form the group randomly (p. 70). Moreover, Kagan and Kagan (2009) suggest forming a gender-balanced group; the ideal team is a one with two females and two males (p. 8.21).

A good choice of seating arrangement makes communication among students in the classroom easier. For each activity, teachers should consider what grouping, seating and standing arrangements are the most appropriate. Parallel rows are good for explaining grammar, but they are unsuitable for discussion in the classroom, because students see their classmate’s back instead of his or her eyes. Scriverener (2011) suggests using seating arrangements such as enemy corners, pairs, opposing teams, face-to-face, panel, public meeting, buzz groups (people change groups occasionally), wheels (the outer wheel can move round, changing pairs). Furthermore, teachers may be creative; the seating arrangement could reflect a special context such as a train carriage or a town centre (p. 64). The most commonly used seating arrangements are parallel rows, horse shoe, roundtable, group pods and pair pods (Vališová & Kasíková et al., 2007).

Kasíková (2009) states that group work is suitable for almost all age brackets - children starting their compulsory education, older children and adult learners, including teachers (p. 23-24). Mechlová and Horák (1986) hold the same opinion as Kasíková, nevertheless, they claim that the best learning results of group work can be achieved at the ages of ten to eighteen. The most problematic group to work with using group work are children who are of the age set by law for children to start school attendance. The biggest



difficulties at this age seem to be the lack of a natural need for cooperation and organizational skills, as well as poor vocabulary (p. 28-30).

**Reasons for group work.** The following paragraphs provide the reasons why group work has a great potential for students.

**Psychological health.** Long and Porter (1985) argue that group work provides effective support and a friendly atmosphere for linguistically vulnerable children whose main barrier may be the lack of confidence to speak. These children do not believe that they can do what they are being asked to do. They may feel nervous and under pressure. In this scenario, group work helps to reduce these bad feelings (p. 211-212). Besides, Nash, Lowe and Palmer (2011) state that group work “gives a strong foundation for improving individual confidence to a level at which the pupil will be able to join in more fully with the class group (p. 14-15).

**Interpersonal relations and social skills.** One more major reason for group work needs to be mentioned here. As explained before, human beings naturally have a strong need to group with other people and develop interpersonal relationships. Hewstone and Hogg (2005) explain:

People usually seek out and maintain the company of people they like. We tend to like others whom we consider physically attractive and who are nearby, familiar and available, and with whom we expect continued interaction. We also tend to like people who have similar attitudes and values to our own, especially when these attitudes and values are personally important to us. (p. 388-390)

Someone who differs in something, for example, being red-haired, wearing thick glasses or belonging to a socially disadvantaged group, can be refused by his or her classmates. Group work brings the possibility of including these learners among the others, and it helps them form relationships with their peers and work collaboratively with them. Not surprisingly, well-liked students communicate more effectively in comparison with their less popular classmates. A study has proven that well-liked children are those who have good language skills. These children know how to communicate clearly, for instance, by addressing the child, keeping eye contact and using appropriate touch to gain attention (Hewstone & Hogg, 2005). In addition, Nash, Lowe and Palmer (2011) note that popular children “replied appropriately to children who spoke to them rather than ignoring the

speaker, changing the subject or saying something irrelevant, which a less linguistically confident child may well do” (p. 11).

***Learner autonomy.*** Group work fosters learner autonomy as Ur (2012) claims that learners working in group “are not directly controlled by the teacher, and they make their own choices about how they do the group task; if they are discussing something, then the language they are using will be determined by them, not the teacher” (p. 234).

***Other advantages of group work.*** Hewstone and Hogg (2005) summarize why group work is used: “To get things done that we cannot do on our own, including making decisions and collaborating on group projects” (p. 397). They list some obvious attractions such as more hands involved, the human resource pool is enlarged, and there are social benefits. Moreover, when people work in groups that depend on them, they may even work harder collectively than alone (Hewstone & Hogg, 2005, p. 397-398).

***Drawbacks of group work.*** Although group work has many benefits, it also has a number of drawbacks. In this section various challenges concerning group work and also possible solutions to these challenges are provided. However, these drawbacks can be applied to cooperative learning, as well.

The overuse of the mother tongue (L1) can be a serious problem during work in groups. Some learners in the group may tend to use L1 permanently because it is easier for them, and it might feel more natural for them to talk to each other in their own language. The teacher should set rules to avoid this situation; for example, L1 should be used only in situations where it is necessary to use it. The next advice for teachers is to base activities on easy language or review essential vocabulary before the activity starts. Moreover, instructors should make a careful choice of topic and task to stimulate interest. The more interesting the topic, the more motivated students will be (Ur, 2012, p. 118-119).

The next drawback to group work is related to loss of control since the groups are too noisy (Kasíková, 2009, p. 29.) When students are talking, they should maintain acceptable voice levels. There is a simple solution: a quiet signal such as nonverbal noise reduction signal. Kagan and Kagan (2009) explain: “horizontal palm slowly lowering, can be helpful to remind students to keep it down“ (p. 8.16). However, it is not easy to manage

noise in the classroom; it requires an experienced teacher (Palmer, Peters, & Streetman, 2003, p. 314).

Some students think poorly of group work, to be specific, they consider group work to be worthless and ineffective. They think that they do not learn anything because their teacher does not stand in front of the whole class; he or she does not explain new grammar or how to use new vocabulary and does not observe them. For the above mentioned reasons, a lot of learners perceive group work as an opportunity to chat with their classmates sitting at one table together. Ur (2012) recommends not only explaining to students why it is important to do the group task, but also giving them opportunities to express how they feel about it (p. 234-235).

**Group work in English lessons.** Today, group work should be a natural part of language classes since it has great potential for several reasons. A brief overview of these reasons is listed below.

As mentioned earlier, in a traditional classroom most teachers spends an average of two thirds of the lesson on tasks such as setting instructions, explaining grammar, asking questions of the whole class, or collecting homework assignments. According to Long and Porter (1985), group work increases language practice opportunities; this can be an increase of over 500 percent in comparison with teacher-fronted lessons (p. 208).

Putting students in groups encourages them to communicate together, practice the language that they are trying to learn and improve their language fluency. Verner also claims that “speaking is an important skill, and producing out loud language can be intimidating for non-native speakers at any point in their journey” (“Top 10 Benefits of Group Work for ESL Classrooms,” n.d.). Teachers should include group work from the very start of their classes to avoid these bad feelings (Long & Porter, 1985, p. 211 - 212).

Group work encourages students to use language creatively. Two, three or four students working in one group are not forced to produce hurried, isolated sentences. They can talk in a natural way without a distant initiator of speech (the teacher). In other words, what learners say is more important than how they say it, as Long and Porter note (1985): “outside the classroom communicative ability is always at a premium” (p. 209).

Besides, Long and Porter (1985) state: “group work is a first step toward individualization of instructions” (p. 210). Each student has needs and abilities that are unique. Group work should respect individual differences including gender, learning style, interests, motivation, aptitude, personality, native language, prior language experience and target language needs. In an ideal world, teachers take into consideration these differences in the kinds of classroom roles to which students are assigned (Long & Porter, 1985, p. 210).

Group work offers a friendly and supportive climate. Students in small groups are not so starkly on public display, they are not afraid of criticism coming from their classmates. Brown (2007) remarks on this topic: “In countless observations of classes, I have seen the magic of small groups; quite suddenly, reticent students become vocal participants in the process” (p. 178). Moreover, Brown (2007) addresses the term “safety/ security level”. This is the extent to which the students feel safe in their group. Based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, if the learner’s “safety/ security” level is satisfied, then the individual is motivated (p. 178).

## **Cooperative Learning versus Group Work**

Recently in English as a second language (ESL), there has been great emphasis on the transition from a completely lecture-based classroom to a more student-centred one that better engages the students; allowing students to work with their peers is a great way of achieving this. As this idea is strongly recommended in ESL, more and more seating arrangements are changed from parallel rows to clusters of desks. Students are placed mostly in groups of four people crowded around one assignment, but just because learners are grouped together, this does not ensure that they will work together. This section of the thesis briefly summarizes the main differences between cooperative learning and group work.

According to Kolář et al. (2012), group work is defined as a form of class organization in which individual pupils work together in small groups on their tasks, assignments, or they solve problems (p. 173). Johnson et al. (1993) explains cooperative learning as a teaching method based on cooperation, solving problems, and accomplishing

common goals in which students work in small groups. To sum up, group work as a form of class organization can be realized through cooperative teaching methods but not vice versa.

The major differences between cooperative learning groups and traditional learning groups summarized by Johnson (1984) are presented in Table 1.

<b>Cooperative learning groups</b>	<b>Traditional learning groups</b>
positive interdependence	no interdependence
individual accountability	no individual accountability
heterogeneous	homogenous
shared leadership	one appointed leader
shared responsibility for each other	responsibility for yourself
task and maintenance emphasised	only task emphasised
social skills directly taught	social skills assumed and ignored
teacher observes and intervenes	teacher ignores group functioning
groups process their effectiveness	no group processing

*Table 1 . What is the difference? (Johnson, 1984, p. 16).*

The differences presented in this table are based on the following five basic elements of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, social skills and group processing. These principles distinguish cooperative learning from other forms of group learning. All these pillars of cooperative learning were thoroughly described at the very beginning of this chapter.

Positive interdependence means that in cooperative learning the effort of the whole group is required, while in group work each individual member of the group is concerned with his or her own performance instead of the performance of all group members (Johnson, 1984, p. 15).

The biggest difference between group work and cooperative learning is accountability. Group work often ends with one or two students taking over and doing a lion's share of the work while the others do almost nothing. Frey, Fisher and Everlove (2009) explain: „Whether students experience group work as a worker bee, gopher, or hitchhiker, the end results are generally the same – lots of frustration and not enough real learning“ (p. 4). The key is to structure the task in a way that requires the involvement of each student in order to make students work together to be successful. Learners are mutually dependent on each other. This principle eliminates the number of free riders in the group (Kagan & Kagan, 2009, p. 5.10 - 5.11).

Concerning social skills, cooperative learning is based on sharing, discussing ideas, giving reasons, offering help, working together, tolerance, and the ability to communicate. Students need social skills to work collaboratively. Interpersonal and small- group skills are taught directly. On the other hand, group work requires far less interaction in comparison to cooperative learning (Johnson, 1984, p. 15).

In cooperative learning there is a part of the lesson dedicated to the process of how effectively the group is working (Johnson & Johnson, 2001, p. 16). According to Frey, Fisher and Everlove (2009), group processing is the key to a group's future improvement (p. 19). On the other hand, in group work no attention is given to the way the group is working or not working (Johnson, 1984, p. 15).

In cooperative learning groups, all teammates share responsibility for performing leadership activities in the group, everyone is equal, while in group work a leader is often informally selected and put in charge of the group. It may even happen that the leader is the only working member of the team (Johnson, 1984, p. 15).

Concerning membership, Johnson (1984) claims that “in cooperative learning groups membership is typically heterogeneous in ability and personal characteristics, while traditional learning groups are often homogeneous in membership” (p. 15).

Teachers who use cooperative learning groups in their lessons have to observe the groups, analyze the problems that learners have, and provide them with help. In other words, teachers give each group feedback on how well they are solving the task, whereas in traditional learning groups, teachers usually do not monitor and intervene during a group task (Johnson, 1984, p. 16).

Cooperative learning tries to bring each member's learning to the maximum and keep a good working atmosphere and relationships among the group members. On the other hand, learners in a traditional learning group are mostly concentrated only on completing their task (Johnson & Johnson, 2001).

Cooperative learning is a teaching method characterized by sharing, cooperation and support. Cooperative learning is based on five necessary principles: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotion, social skills and group processing. In cooperative learning groups, students learn English language better in comparison to a teacher-centred lesson, yet cooperative learning is one of the most effective strategies. Learners have more opportunities to speak and practice the language. Interpersonal and social skills are developed in cooperative learning groups because students learn within their group how to behave in society.

On the other hand, group work is a form of class organisation in which students are divided into small groups consisting of at least two people. During group work, students have more time to practice English language; this can be an increase of over 500 percent in comparison with teacher-fronted lessons. A good choice of a seating arrangement supports communication among students. Group work encourages students to use language creatively. Students in groups are not forced to produce hurried, isolated sentences in front of the whole class. On the contrary, they can talk in a natural way without being afraid of errors. Besides, group work allows students to do things which they would not be able to do on their own, including making decisions and collaborating on group projects.

Most of the benefits of cooperative learning and group work can be universally applied for both CL and GW. Concerning all drawbacks named individually in this part of the thesis, it can be said the same – these drawbacks can be universally mentioned in both CL and GW. In conclusion, being realized in small groups, cooperative learning and group work are very similar in their essence.

Considering all these facts I have decided to carry out a research exploring the usage of group work as a form of class organization. The main part of the research is focused on the differences between cooperative learning activities and group work activities with respect to five principles of cooperative learning identified by Johnson and

Johnson (1999). The following chapter contains a description of the method chosen for the comparison of cooperative learning activities and group work activities.



### **III. METHODOLOGY**

This chapter covers a description of the research methodology and discusses which method was chosen and why. This chapter includes necessary information about when and where the research was done, who the respondents were, and how the research was carried out.

#### **Background and Purpose of the Research**

To carry out the research, I decided to prepare a cooperative learning scoring rubric and gather data by attending twelve randomly selected English classes. The research questions were following: Are students exposed to group work (including pair work) in English lessons? If yes, to what extent? Can group work activities be considered cooperative learning activities?

During two weeks in April 2018, I visited 12 randomly selected English lessons at three different schools in the Czech Republic. For my observation I attended English lessons at SOU Nové Strašecí in Rakovník district, Language School Eufkrat in Pilsen and one unnamed school in Pilsen (the teacher from this school allowed me to attend her classes, but she wished not to public the name or address of the school because of the management of this school). These lessons were led by four different teachers who were not older than 30 years. The teachers were not notified in advance to interoperate traditional learning groups or cooperative learning groups in their lessons. Most of the lessons were 45 minutes long, the rest of the lessons took 90 minutes (language school). Concerning the level of English, there were three different language levels: pre - intermediate, intermediate, and upper-intermediate. The age of the learners ranged from 10 to 55 years.

#### **Method for the Gathering of the Research Data**

After thorough consideration, observation was selected as the most appropriate method for gathering the data for the research. Other research methods, such as questionnaires filled out by the students or interviews with the teachers, would not bring the most relevant information, since students do not know the difference between a

cooperative learning group and a traditional learning group. Even teachers are sometimes not completely sure about how to design an activity containing all five cooperative principles.

I prepared an observation sheet<sup>2</sup> for recording the process of English lessons. This sheet was set up as a tool which should not only keep a record of the individual stages of the lesson, but also of other information regarding the given lesson. On this sheet, there was the name of the school, the length of the lesson, the language level, the number of students, classroom arrangement, and the topic. The observation sheet was designed so it could register all individual stages of the lesson that were filled out during the observation. The teachers did not announce the transfer to another stage of the lesson in advance, but these stages were identifiable during the observation as soon as an activity was changed. Further, the observation sheet was set up as a chart consisting of six columns.

The first column defined the stage of the lesson which meant how many stages there were in the lesson. The second column described what the teachers did. The next aspect covered in the next column was the current activity of the students. This column was the most important one for the research, because based on the way the students worked, I had to decide whether there were traditional learning groups or cooperative learning groups. The fourth column stated what activity was taking place. According to the type of the activity I also decided whether the lesson included all principles of cooperative learning. The fifth column allowed me to write down my commentaries. However, this column did not suffice to cover the other aspects which I wanted to mention as well, for instance whether the teachers created the groups randomly or whether they let the students set up the groups themselves, how many students there were in the groups, how the group behaved, in what way the group worked, whether the teacher was monitoring the students, whether a feedback was provided to the group in any way, whether some problems occurred within the group, etc. The last column, the sixth one, indicated how much time the individual activities took. Later I found out that the data noted in this column are not relevant for my research, therefore they will not be mentioned in the forthcoming chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix B

As soon as the observation sheet was filled out, I moved to the next part of my research, namely to the cooperative learning scoring rubric<sup>3</sup> which I was able to complete based on my observation. This rubric was made to assess whether the lesson included all five basic aspects of cooperative learning. This rubric was set up as a table consisting of four columns and six lines.

The first line contains notes to the lines 2-6; the first column lists the principles of cooperative learning, the second column briefly describes these principles, the third column indicates whether the requirements were met (1 point = meets expectations), and finally, the last column was filled out in case the requirements were not met (0 points = not meeting expectations).

The second line states whether the first principle of cooperative learning, the positive interdependence, was present in the lesson and it also describes this principle. One point was awarded if members of the group worked towards mutual learning goal, helped to understand each other, learned from each other. If this principle was not fulfilled, the students got 0 points.

The third line states individual accountability, it describes if each students had his or her own contribution to the topic. The lesson was awarded with 1 point in case the students met the requirement.

The fourth line contains the face-to-face promotion. This principle refers to communication within a group and participation in task. The group was awarded with 1 point if students shared resources and help, encouraged each other's effort to learn.

The fifth line evaluates the social skills; 1 point was awarded to the group in which a good friendly atmosphere prevailed, the students maintained friendly relations with each other, they respected each other's opinions, they communicated appropriately, ideas were shared etc.

The sixth line contains the last of the cooperative learning principles, the group processing. 1 point was awarded if feedback was provided to the group from the teacher or from another group, possibly from both.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix C

Below the table, there is a line indicating the total amount of points reached in the cooperative learning scoring rubric. If the activity did not fulfil all five necessary principles of cooperative learning group, it was a traditional learning group.

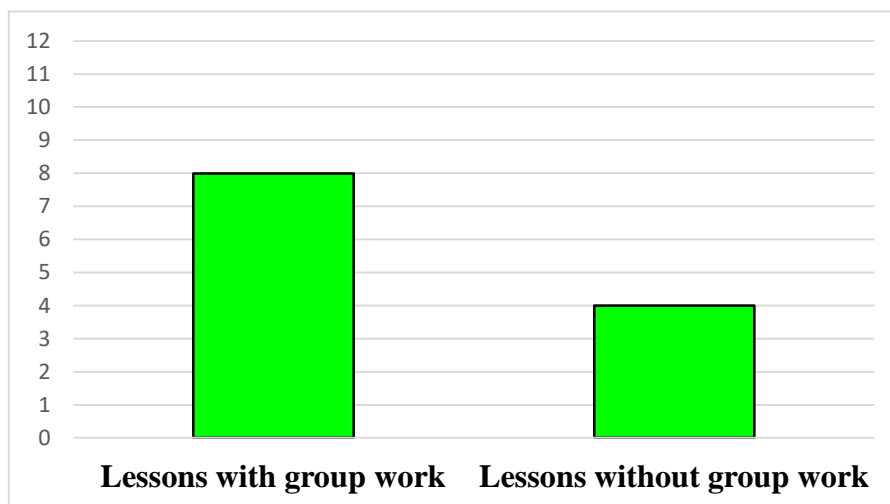
In conclusion, the research explored to what extent is group work (including pair work) as a form of class organization used in English lessons and whether group work activities can be truly considered cooperative learning activities. The following chapter of this thesis deals with the results of the research and provides commentaries on the findings.

## IV. RESULTS AND COMMENTARIES

The objective of the chapter is to present the collected data and analyze them on the basis of the theoretical background provided in the theoretical chapter. The first part of the research answers questions about whether and to what extent group work (including pair work) as an organizational form is used in English lessons in Czech schools. The second part of the research focuses on whether group work activities can be considered cooperative learning activities. Data which were gathered from the observations and then evaluated are illustrated in the graphs.

### Number of Lessons with Group Work

The data was collected from 12 randomly attended English lessons. Afterwards, an analysis concerning whether the lessons contained group work as an organizational form was carried out. From a total of 12 lessons, group work was used in 8 of them. The usage of group work was broad and diverse. Whether a group work activity was really a cooperative learning activity is addressed further in this chapter. As already mentioned, group work as an organizational form was used in 8 lessons, but in 4 lessons it was not present at all. Graph 1 shows the amount of lessons with and without group work in English lessons.



*Graph 1.* The occurrence of group work as a form of class organisation in English lessons.

There were 4 lessons where no group work was used. Lesson number 2 was focused on taking a test lasting the whole lesson. In lesson number 5, new grammar was explained to the students. The teacher explained and wrote grammar regarding the passive voice on the black board and the students took notes. Lesson 9 was based on a grammatical exercise concerning present perfect, the teacher reviewed present perfect and then students translated Czech sentences into English. In lesson 10, students watched an American film about *The Great Gatsby* for the whole duration of the lesson.

Based on the data gathered by the observations, it is clear that two thirds of the lessons randomly attended in Czech schools included group work as an organizational form. Cooperative learning (principles of cooperative learning) is sometimes observed in group work (including pair work).

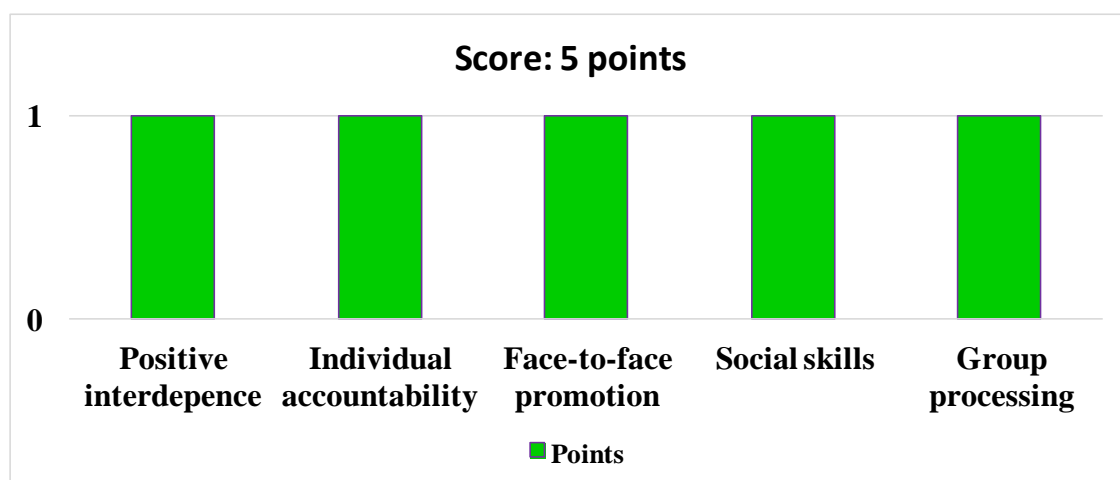
## **Analysis of Lessons with Group Work**

The data collected from the individual observations were used not only to determine whether the lessons included group work as an organizational form but also to provide a further analysis of it. It was also researched whether group work contained the five basic elements of cooperative learning. For these purposes, the cooperative scoring rubric was used. The total score was divided according to Table 2 that briefly comments on the achieved amount of points. The total scores of the individual group work activities are presented on the following pages.

0 points	No group work as an organizational form
1-4 points	Traditional learning group (1-4 principles of cooperative learning were observed)
5 points	Cooperative learning group (all 5 principles of cooperative learning were seen)

*Table 2.* Amount of points in English lessons.

## Lesson 1.



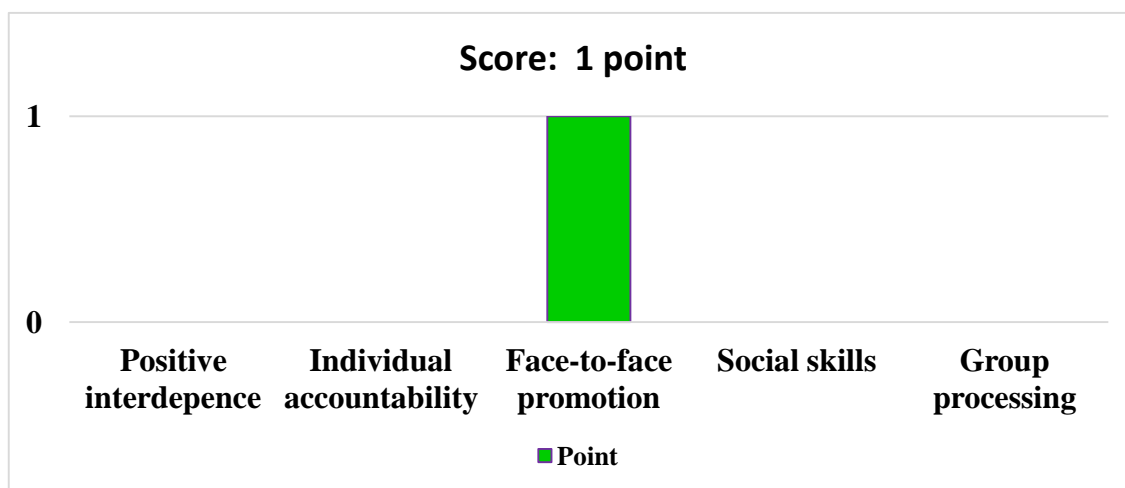
*Graph 2. Lesson 1.*

Lesson 1 had four stages, and the third and fourth ones were a cooperative activity. The topic of the lesson was At the Doctor's. In the lead-in stage there was a mind map on the black board with the illness, disease and injuries ("fever, cold, alcoholism, depression, headache, rash, diarrhoea, sore throat, stomach ache, cough, flu, toothache, earache, backache, vomiting, broken leg, cut, sprained ankle, cut finger"). Concerning this topic, students were encouraged to write as many words as possible on the blackboard. The second stage of the lesson was reading and translating a conversation between a patient and doctor. The first two stages of the lessons were teacher-centred. As for the third stage of the lesson, students started to work in pairs on their tasks. They were sitting in parallel rows, so teacher asked them to work in pairs with their neighbours. There were 7 groups of two people and 1 group of three people. The teacher gave each pair a piece of paper with an illness, a disease or an injury and asked them to divide roles within the group. One student was supposed to be the doctor and the second student was supposed to be the patient. Based on the conversation in the textbook, the doctor's task was to ask the patient about symptoms, how long the patient has been feeling like this, and finally, to suggest a treatment. The patient's task was to thoroughly describe his or her symptoms and feelings (I feel faint or weak, I feel sick, I feel lonely) and to discuss the possible treatment with the doctor. Students were allowed to use an offline dictionary in their mobile phones to look up the vocabulary related to the treatment. Concerning the fourth stage of the lesson, when

all pairs finished this activity, students formed groups consisting of four students consisting of two pairs. A cluster of desks was used as the seating arrangement for this activity. The first pair was asked to tell the name of an illness, disease or injury to the second pair and explain how to treat this illness and vice versa. The group goal was to share information about the treatment and to compare their answers. In the end, the whole group was supposed to agree on the best solution of how to cure the illness.

The third and fourth stages of the lesson were awarded by 5 points; there were all five principles of cooperative learning. Individual members worked both in pair work and group work towards the group goal, they were able to help the others (with word order in questions, description of symptoms), they actively participated in this activity, social skills were developed (they were communicating properly, they respected others opinions, they kindly rejected certain ideas without insulting the particular person), the feedback was provided by team members. The teacher was walking around the class and observing the groups. Nobody asked her for help, it seemed to me that members of this class were used to this method, they knew how to behave in groups, how to reach an agreement.

**Lesson 3.**



*Graph 3. Lesson 3.*

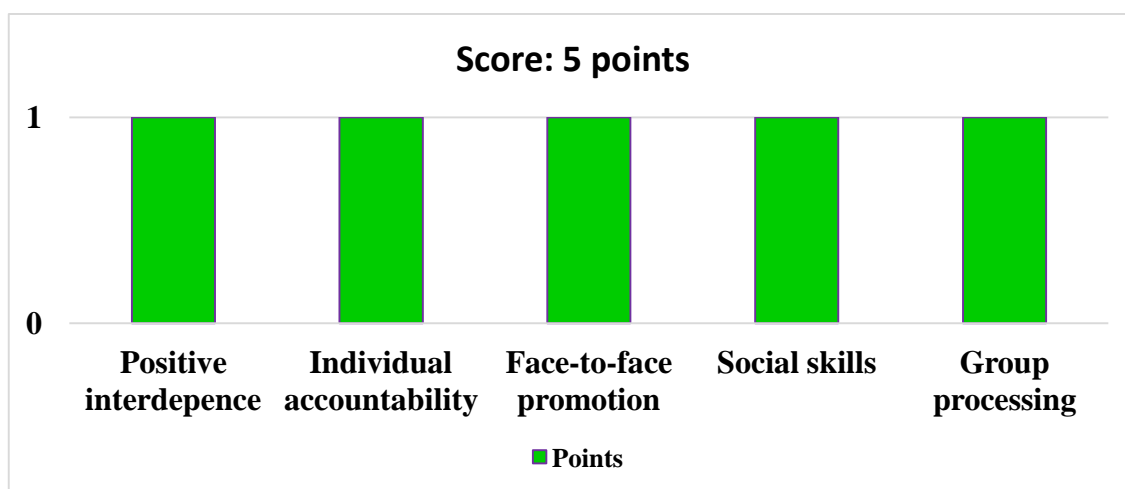
This lesson had 3 stages. The topic of the lesson was Sports. The first and second stages were teacher –centred. At the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher asked



students questions related to the topic of sports (“What free time activities do you know? What do you like doing in your free time? What kinds of sports do you know? Could you name some summer sports? What type of sport do you prefer and why? Why don’t you like any sport?”). The second part of the lesson was the longest one; students read a relatively long article about summer sports, each of them had to read approximately one paragraph and translate it. They were called on by the teacher one by one. Then, in the third stage of the lesson, the teacher decided to move to the exercise below the article, where there were 7 questions about the article. Teacher asked the students to answer and discuss all of them, suggesting to the students that they can work in a pair or in a group of four people to answer these questions if they want. The result of these instructions was that some students decided to stay in their seats, some students started to move with their chairs to look for someone they could join. The groups were not equal regarding the number of students; there were 4 pairs, 2 groups of four students and 1 group of five people. People in pairs worked better than the people in the bigger groups since the people in pairs helped one another to answer all questions and they discussed and shared information together. In one of the pairs, one student explained to his classmate why one particular answer was right when he didn’t understand it. They communicated well, although no feedback was given to them because the teacher didn’t call them. Concerning the bigger groups, as soon as they were grouped together they started to divide questions among themselves (“You do questions 1-2, you do 3, you do 4-5, I will do 6-7”). Two people from the whole group tried to work, discussing the article, trying to find the best answers. Concerning the rest of the group, they were doing nothing; they played mobile games or surfed the internet from the very beginning of the activity. When someone from this group was called out to answer question number four, he didn’t know the answer, arguing that someone else should do this question instead of him. The student who was originally assigned this question replied that he could not answer this question because he did not understand the question. He didn’t ask for help and nobody from the group offered him help. Paradoxically, the behaviour of the biggest group consisting of five people was even worse. One student was leader of the group assigning the questions to his classmates; it seemed to me that all members were working on the task; they were communicating together and writing something. However, when a weaker student suffering from dyslexia was called for the answer, he answered wrongly and then he was laughed at by his classmates for the incorrect answer.

For the reasons mentioned above, the third stage of the lesson was not cooperative learning activity since some very important principles weren't met in the larger groups. Firstly, positive interdependence was missing in these larger groups; they divided the questions among themselves, and maybe they thought that if they split the questions among four or five people, it would mean less work for everyone. Individual accountability cannot be seen because two people from the group of four weren't active at all, they had no contributions to the topic, they preferred spending the time assigned to this activity by doing something else on their mobile phones. Social skills were not developed in a proper way – the students behaved badly towards the weaker student, they did not show sufficient understanding about his dyslexia. Group processing was partly present as the teacher discussed four questions with the students, but the rest of the questions remained without any feedback because of the lack of time; the bell rang and the class ended. Face-to-face promotion was awarded by 1 point since some students participated in the task and they shared resources and help.

**Lesson 4.**



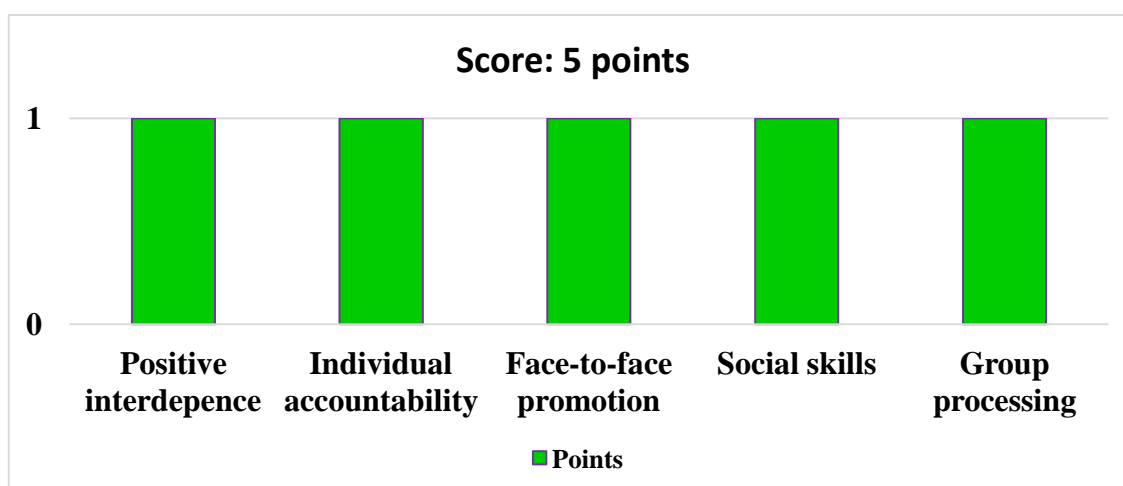
*Graph 4. Lesson 4.*

This lesson had 3 stages. The topic was English speaking countries. On the blackboard there was a projection of a very short English video with Czech subtitles containing basic information about Canada. Students were asked to watch the video twice. Then a big poster including the information from the video was projected to the students. The second stage was group work. Students were asked to form four groups. They formed

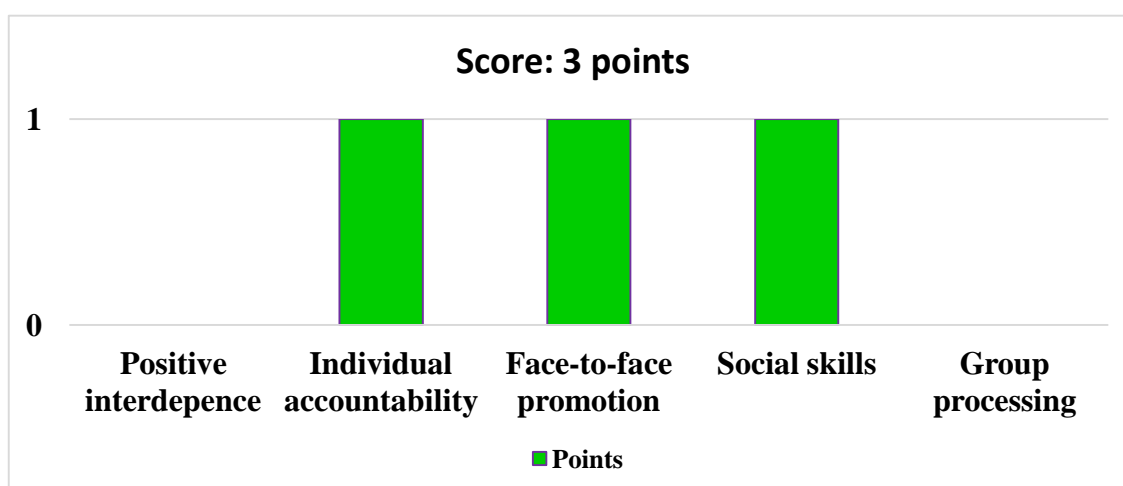
the groups as they wanted; the groups were not gender-balanced since there were 2 groups of girls and 2 groups of boys. The clusters of desks were used as the seating arrangement. Each group drew a different English speaking country (Great Britain, Ireland, USA, and Australia). In their groups, their task was to collect as much information about the country that was assigned to them as possible. The teacher advised them to mention everything that comes to their minds, such as writers, typical products of the country, tourist attractions, location of the country, typical dish, drink, national flag, etc. When they were ready, they were asked to introduce their country to the other group; everyone had to say a few sentences about the information presented on the poster. First, the other group listened to them carefully and then they started to ask questions about the topic (“You said that the Royal family lives in Buckingham Palace in London, what else do you know about them?”). Then, the second group provided the information that was not written on the poster, so the first group agreed to add this piece of information to the poster. When all posters were presented to the other groups, the information shared and feedback given, students themselves decided to hang all these posters on the wall in the classroom.

This activity was scored with 5 points; group work fulfilled all criteria of cooperative learning. All group members worked towards a common goal, each member’s contribution was necessary for the success of the whole group, each member of the group was aware of the importance of his or her part of the work, trying to be active. Social skills were deepened in a proper way; they had to respect the opinions of other students on the matter, they maintained eye contact with the person they were talking to, and the other group provided feedback.

## Lesson 6 and 7.



Graph 5. Past tense – regular and irregular verbs.



Graph 6. Past tense – sentences in the past tense with time expressions.

This lesson had 90 minutes. The topic of the lesson was Past simple. Students were sitting in two triads; there was a cluster of desks. At the very beginning of the lesson there was a revision of the past simple tense; the teacher asked students how it is created, what forms of the verb *be* are used. Each learner translated one sentence containing the past simple tense. The second stage of the lesson was cooperative learning. To begin this activity it was necessary to regroup the students, because the teacher wanted to form groups in which the students had approximately the same knowledge so the groups would be balanced. The teacher asked two girls to swap their seats. Each group was given two

blank pieces of paper. Their task was to write down as many regular words in past simple tense as possible on the first piece of paper, and also to write as many irregular words in past simple tense as possible on the second piece of paper. When they could not recall any more verbs, the teacher recommended that they think about basic verbs (such as to drink, to run), or about what they normally do in the morning, afternoon and evening. When they finished their task, the teacher gave the first group the pieces of paper with regular and irregular verbs from the second group and vice versa. Their next task was to look at the verbs written by the other group and correct their mistakes. Then, the pieces of paper from both groups were collected by the teacher who checked everything as well, writing on the blackboard what was wrong and explaining how to pronounce or write some verbs to not confuse them with other words (“said X sad”).

This stage was awarded by five points since all principles of cooperative learning were met. The students worked on this task together, sharing their ideas, learning from each other and helping each other. They corrected one another when a verb was written on the wrong paper. They tried to help one another with the spelling of certain verbs (“read X red, thought”). Everyone was active, aware of his or her importance for this task. The whole group was responsible for making decisions and for coming to a consensus. Feedback was given by the learners themselves and by the teacher.

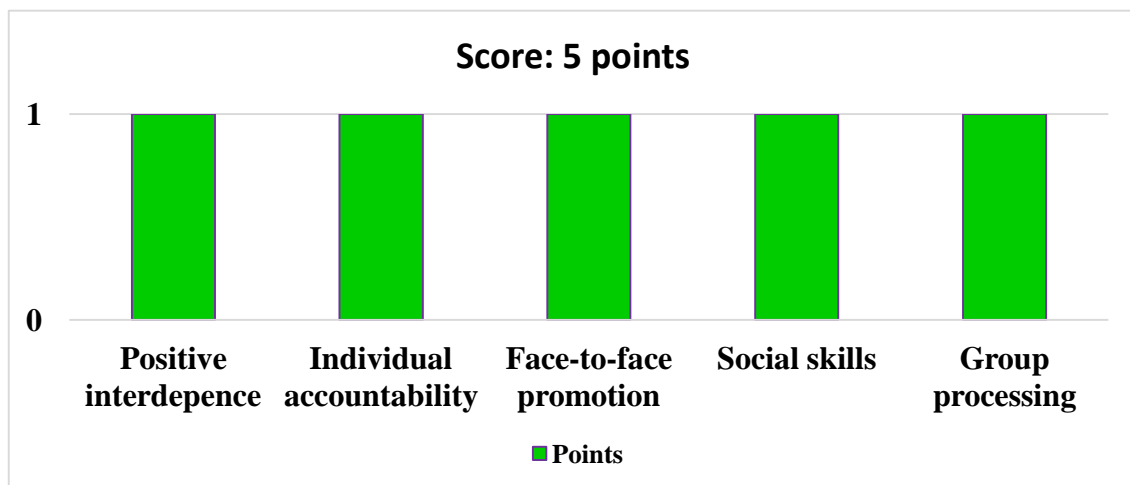
For the next stage of the lessons the groups remained the same. The teacher gave two small piles of paper to each triad. The first small pile of paper contained verbs in infinitive form (“leave, start, cut”), while the other pile of paper included some time expressions (“this morning, last night, 10 minutes ago”). Each student in the group had to draw a piece of paper from both small piles (“leave, last year”) and use both drawn words in one sentence with the past simple tense (“I left my job last year”). Everyone had to think of the sentence by himself or herself; when he or she didn’t know, the rest of the group tried to help. Working in triads, as soon as someone said his or her sentence, the remaining group members decided if it was true or false.

The third stage of the lesson was group work containing some principles of cooperative learning, but not all necessary principles were present in this type of activity. Positive interdependence cannot be seen in this type of activity since there is no common group goal and that is why the students in their teams do not need each other’s output. I

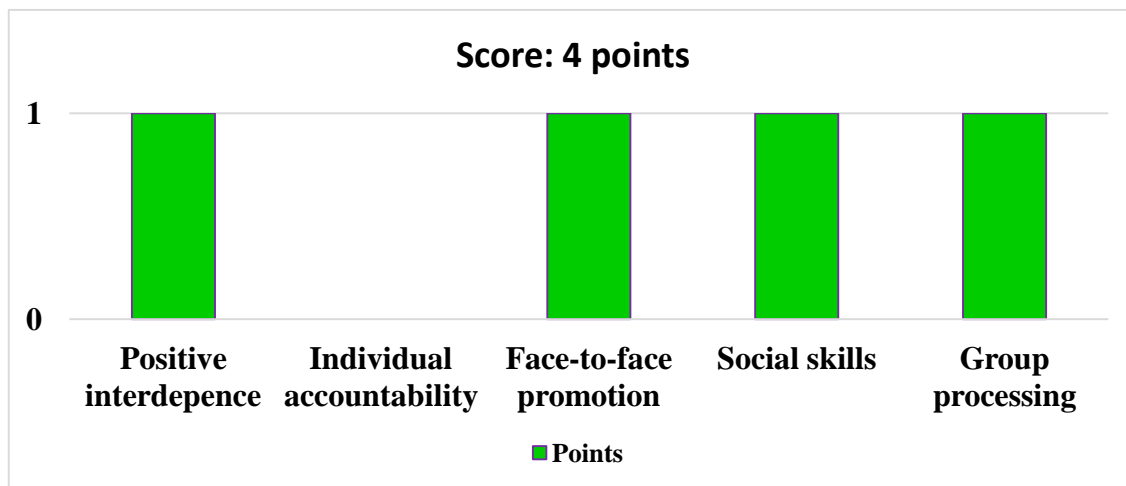
will explain it on the following example: although student A formed a sentence consisting of some verb in the past simple tense and some time expression, this sentence was not relevant for the sentence which was formed by student B. Student C formed her own sentence without hearing what student A or B said. Group processing is missing since there was no feedback on how the groups were working; there was no suggestion of improvement for the future. Individual accountability

The fourth and the fifth stages of the lesson were teacher-fronted. Firstly, students looked with the teacher for irregular verbs in a joke, translated the joke, and explained the meaning of the irregular verbs. The last stage was dedicated to completing two grammatical exercises and assigning homework.

**Lesson 8.**



*Graph 7A. Lesson 8.*



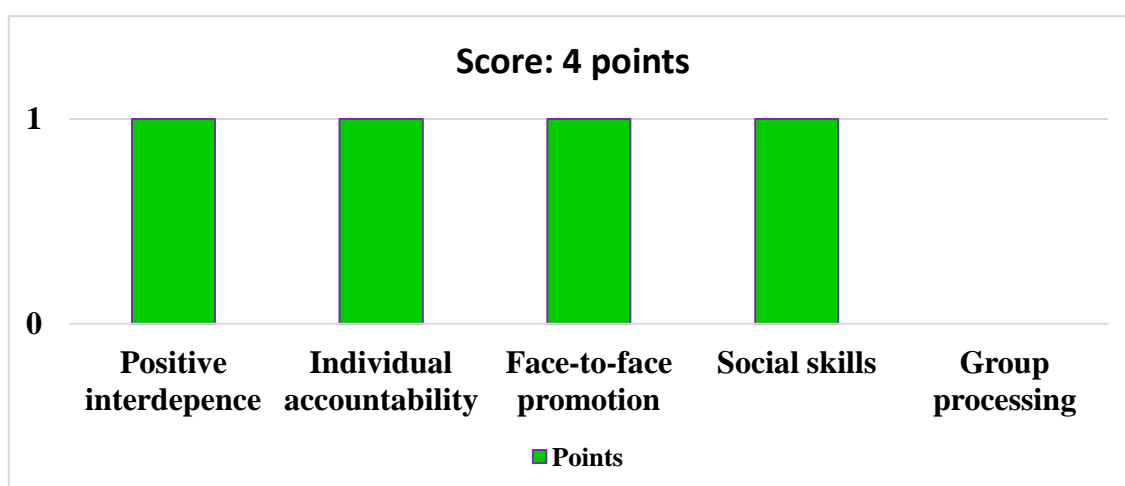
Graph 7B. Lesson 8.

This lesson had 3 stages, and the topic of the lesson was Social Expectations. At the very beginning of the lesson, the teacher showed the students a picture of a man wearing a long, black overcoat, a black pair of trousers, sun glasses and a hat on his head. The students were divided alphabetically in two groups of four people. The students were sitting in clusters of desks. Their task was to make up a story about this man. The learners were supposed to present their ideas in the group, then agree on one particular idea and expand this idea. Firstly, it was quite difficult for the group to choose the best idea since all ideas were very good and creative (“The man is the boss of dope dealers, he is hiding behind a false identity, he is living in Mexico or Columbia, he robbed a bank, he has a long coat because he has a gun underneath it, he broke out of prison, he is obsessed with the colour black, he is depressed.”) When the group members agreed on the best ideas, together they prepared a story about this man. As soon as the group finished the story, they went to another group to explain and persuade its members why their story is the best one and vice versa. Each group provided feedback to the other. The teacher was monitoring them and providing help the whole time. At the end of the activity the teacher asked someone from each group why their story was so negative, so the feedback was provided by the teacher, too.

I decided to prepare two graphs that illustrate the work of each group in this activity. On one hand, graph A has 5 points, containing all five elements of cooperative learning; on the other hand, graph B contains 4 points, individual accountability is missing.

This difference is caused by the work of one group member. At first sight it seemed to me that he answered the other members of his group, but later I noticed that he didn't come up with any idea of his own, it was easier for him to immediately agree several times with the others rather than to contribute to this topic and persuade them about his idea. Then he helped them prepare the story. This student was not weak, he could speak English very well, and when the teacher asked him about the story, he talked about it in a very detailed manner. I have two possible solutions: this boy could have been ashamed of his ideas, having low self-esteem, or he might have been an introvert who does not like to work with several people in one group work. For him it would be better to work in a smaller group or with people who are not so self-assertive.

**Lesson 11.**



*Graph 8. Lesson 11.*

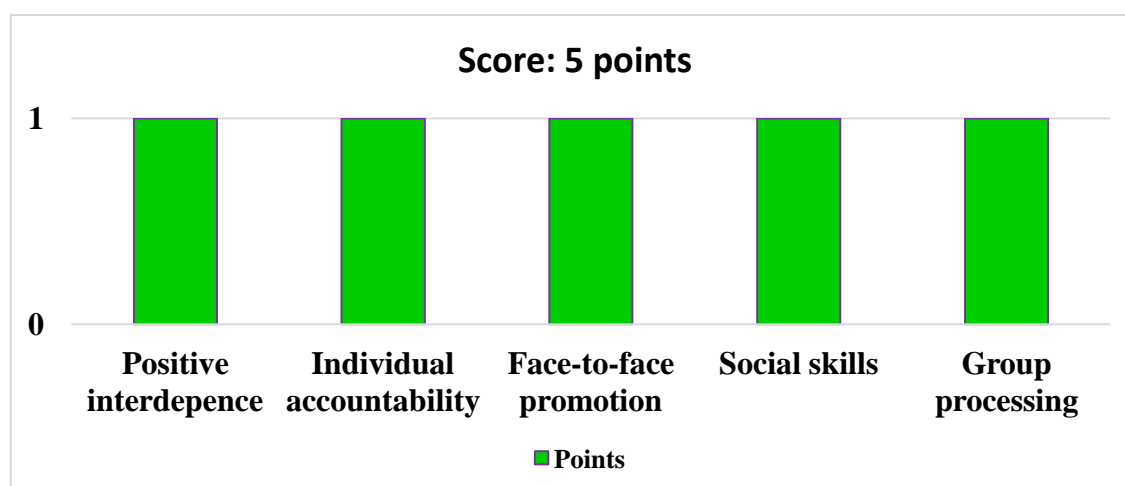
The topic of the lesson was Food. The teacher showed a picture of goulash to the students at the very beginning of the lesson and asked them to name all the ingredients which were used for cooking of goulash. The students shouted out ingredients such as meat, garlic, onion, black pepper, marjoram, flour, carrot, tomato, sweet pepper, hot pepper, and oil. The teacher asked them additional questions about goulash (“From which meat can goulash be cooked from? How would you describe the taste of goulash? Do you prefer very hot and spicy goulash? Is it a typical Czech dish? Does it really come from the Czech Republic?”). In the second stage of the lesson, the students were asked to form



groups of four people as usually (the teacher divided students into groups at the beginning of the school year according to their language knowledge). Each group was given a picture with some dish (the first group had spaghetti, the second one hamburger, the third one chips with fried cheese and tartar sauce, the last one potato salad and pork schnitzel). The students in groups were asked to look at their pictures very carefully and together write down all ingredients which were used for their dish. As soon as they were ready, based on their ingredients, in their groups, they were supposed to prepare a recipe for their dish which included the amount of ingredients and the exact description of how to cook it (for example melt the butter in a pan, peel and slice the onion, add the garlic and meat, cook it for 20 minutes etc.). They were allowed to use the dictionaries in their mobile phones to look up the unknown words. Before the learners managed to finish their recipes, the bell rang signalling the end of the lesson.

According to the teacher, the next stage of the lesson should have been a presentation of each group's recipe in front of the whole class. The rest of the class was supposed to think about the recipe, if it is possible to cook it in a different way and if some ingredients were not missing. Unfortunately, there was no time for this stage anymore because writing down the recipes took longer than the teacher expected. Since the last stage of the lesson was not realized because of the lack of time, this activity is awarded with 4 points. The first four principles of cooperative learning were seen in this activity, but the last one is missing. Each group worked towards a common goal (the recipe of their dish), everybody contributed more or less to the group's task. The students were communicating together in a right way, they helped each other, and there was a friendly atmosphere within all groups. Concerning the group processing, no feedback was given about the way the group worked. The teacher also did not give any suggestions for the future improvement.

## Lesson 12.



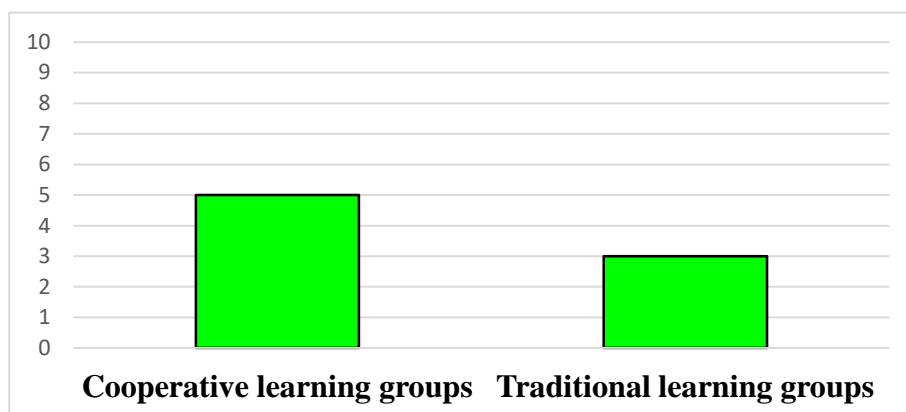
Graph 9. Lesson 12.

Lesson 5 had four stages and as a seating arrangement a horseshoe was used. The topic of the lesson was Food and it was opened with a mind map; the word Food was written in the middle of the black board. The students came up with words related to this topic, for instance main dishes, vegetables, fruits and drinks (“coffee, hamburger, fish and chips, goulash, onion soup, tortilla, spaghetti, pizza, juice, tomato, strawberry juice, sausage, water with lemon, chocolate cake”). The teacher wrote down everything the students said on the blackboard. Then the teacher asked some students about their favourite food, what they had for lunch the previous day, and what they usually have for breakfast. The second stage of the lesson was listening to the conversation in a cafe, the family was ordering hot beverages and some desserts. The third stage of the lesson was role playing activity (waiter, mother, father, and child), the students were divided into groups consisting of four people by counting off. Their task was to prepare a similar conversation that they heard several minutes ago. The task was to have the conversation to take place in the restaurant and the students were instructed to use some of the vocabulary from the mind map. This stage of the lesson was the longest one and the group members really enjoyed it. The groups communicated mostly in English, L1 was used only when necessary. The teacher was monitoring for the whole time and was offering help. At the end of the activity, she discussed with the groups what was done well and what should be improved.

The last stage was a cooperative activity because there were all five principles of cooperative learning. The first principle, positive interdependence, was present in this activity as the individual group members cooperated together to practise the conversation (the waiter greeted the guests in the restaurant, asked them about the drink and dish which they wanted, the guests answered to him, then the guests criticized or praised the dish (“it was too salty, it was really delicious”). Each group member actively participated and was aware of the importance of his or her contribution. Students were very communicative; they knew how to behave in the group, they tried to help each other, for example with the right word order in English questions or with the pronunciation of some words. This help was well received; no one made fun of the weaker students. The feedback was given by the teacher. It seemed to me that these students are used to work in groups; they know how to behave to their classmates.

## Summary of the Results and Conclusion

**The occurrence of cooperative learning groups and traditional learning groups.** Graph 10 illustrates the usage of cooperative learning groups and traditional learning groups in randomly attended English lessons. It is evident from the graph that cooperative learning groups were used in five cases whereas traditional learning groups in three cases.



*Graph 10.* The occurrence of cooperative learning groups and traditional learning groups.

To conclude this section of the thesis, group work as an organizational form was seen in two thirds of the English lessons. Although, not each group work activity in English lessons can be considered a cooperative learning activity. As it was explained in the theoretical background of this thesis, it is better to use cooperative learning groups instead of traditional learning groups for several reasons. Firstly, students need to be prepared for their future lives in which cooperative skills are expected in their future work and personal lives. Secondly, cooperative learning is one of the most effective teaching methods, yet it simulates the real experience. Students have deeper understanding of the subject matter, since they have experienced something themselves, have done something themselves, or have explained it to the other members of the group. Thirdly, cooperative learning groups reduce the amount of free riders in comparison to traditional learning groups.

As seen from the observations, all groups which participated in cooperative learning activities worked well because teachers knew how to do the task effectively. Before the activity, teachers reviewed the vocabulary to avoid the overuse of L1, used a seating arrangement which enabled eye contact, encouraged students to think up as many solutions as possible, asked the students to discuss their ideas within the group and to agree on one solution. The task was structured in a way that required the participation of each student in order to make students work together to be successful. The feedback was provided either by the other group, or by the teacher or by both.

In lessons where cooperative learning group was not used, teachers used traditional learning group. As the research proved, in most cases, students were capable of working with their classmates within a traditional learning group, but their cooperative skills were not too developed because there was no need to argue for something, reach an agreement, explain something to the other members, and respect others opinions. Another problem in traditional group work was accountability. Tasks were done only by some members of the group and there were a few free riders. The serious problem in this form of class organisation was the lack of feedback. In the classes which I attended, the teachers often forgot to include this step in the activity or they did not give any feedback, as they were under time pressure.

From the observations it is clear that cooperative learning activities can be used not only for communicative tasks, but also for grammar review (lesson 6 with the past simple tense). The most popular seating arrangement in English lessons seems to be a cluster of desks, parallel rows or a horseshoe. To avoid the overuse of L1 during the group work activities, teachers very often reviewed the vocabulary with the help of a mind map or brainstorming. Besides, students were very often allowed to use the offline dictionaries in their mobile phones, because the teachers wanted the students to be prepared for a situation when they cannot recall some vocabulary while they are in a foreign country. Whenever noise occurred during group work in the class, the teacher knew how to solve this problem. She asked learners to remember the list of the classroom rules which they agreed upon at the beginning of the school year. She pointed at a poster hanging on the wall where it was written “we don’t shout”. Concerning the groups forming, approximately in half cases the students were allowed to form the groups as they wanted. This resulted in a not gender-balanced groups or groups with different language knowledge. One teacher divided the students into groups at the beginning of the school year and the students had to stick to this rule. Sometimes, the students were divided alphabetically or by counting off.

This chapter presents the results gained from the observations from the three schools. Individual lessons were discussed and analyzed in terms of the research questions. Nevertheless, these results cannot be considered as indisputable which is explained in the following chapter. It also mentions not only these limitations, but also the pedagogical implications and further suggestions for the research.

## V. IMPLICATIONS

This chapter describes the implications for teaching which arose from the research. They are accompanied by the limitations of the research and followed by suggestions for further research. Firstly, I discuss pedagogical implications that provide advice for teachers for their future teaching in terms of the differences between cooperative learning groups and traditional learning groups. Secondly, the limitations of the research describe the weaknesses and problems that were discovered during the research. In the end of this chapter there are suggestions of the research describing improvements and the possibilities for additional research.

### **Implications for Teaching**

The research of this thesis provided a broad description and analysis of individual English lessons in several selected Czech schools. The goal of the research was to determine if each group work activity can be considered a cooperative learning activity. Based on the gathered data, although a group work activity was used in 8 out of 12 randomly attended English language lessons, it was truly a cooperative learning activity in only five cases. Based on the results of the research, it is possible to summarize the biggest differences between a cooperative learning activity and a group work activity and provide possible pedagogical implications for teachers. As explained before, it is better to use cooperative learning groups instead of traditional learning groups, because students need to be prepared for their future lives in which cooperative skills are expected in their future work and personal lives. Moreover, when using cooperative learning activities, the best learning results are achieved, because people have experienced something themselves, have done something themselves, or have explained it to the other members of the group.

To sum up, it is important for teachers to understand the differences between a cooperative learning group and a traditional learning group. Moreover, teachers should understand the basic principles of cooperative learning to be able to establish effective, cooperative learning activities.

Positive interdependence is achieved through a mutual learning goal. Members of the group have to help each other. Moreover, they need to be aware that they should work

together to succeed in the task. Teachers should emphasize at the very beginning of the task that contributions to the topic from all members of the group are expected. During the task, each student is accountable not only to herself or himself but also to the whole group for her or his contributions. Students should feel that what helps one student also helps the group and what harms one also harms all of them. A well-selected seating arrangement supports achieving face-to-face promotion. All members of the group should have direct eye contact. This gives everyone an opportunity to speak. Furthermore, for the rest of the group it is easier to listen to what is being said because they can hear it properly as they are looking eye to eye with the speaker. Within the group, there is more interaction, more conversations and more opportunities for students to learn from each other. Social skills are developed when there are positive relationships and good atmosphere within the group, members of the group respect the opinions of the other members of the group, ideas are shared, and members of the group behave well towards the others. At the end of each activity, group processing should follow. Members of each group should reflect on their performance and decide together what has to be improved. Teachers can help students to evaluate their performance by asking simple questions such as “what worked?,” “what didn’t work?,” “what should be improved?”. It is recommended to provide enough time for group processing because this feedback is crucial for the future improvement.

## **Limitations of the Research**

It is very important to mention the limitations of the research, which have to be taken into consideration. Since the research was applied on a small number of English lessons, different types of schools, and heterogeneous English lessons, the results cannot be overly generalized and taken for granted. The following paragraphs describe the main weaknesses of the research.

As the biggest weakness of the research could be considered its extent. The research was carried out by observing 12 randomly selected English lessons. The research could be further widened by attending more random English lessons. The next weakness of the research is that it was carried out by attending only three schools. Therefore, to provide more objective results, the research could be further expanded by attending different types of schools based on the age and level of the students.

Secondly, the realization of the observation was quite problematic. During all of the observations, I was sitting at the back of the classroom because I wanted learners to behave in a natural way during the lessons. Sometimes not all groups were easy to observe. The groups that were close to me I heard and saw better than the ones that were further away from me. Concerning the groups that were far away from me, I frequently did not hear what they were saying when they were speaking in a low voice. It might have been better to walk around the class and individually focus on each group during their tasks.

Finally, although the method that was chosen for data collection is one of the simplest methods, it also has its limitations, especially for an untrained researcher. Observation may lead to faulty perception. Generally, we expect something from the observation and that is why there is always the danger that we will see what we want to see or what is somehow interesting to us or similar to our own behaviour. I may find something meaningful in a situation while other observers may completely overlook it since it has no meaning to them.

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

As mentioned before, the research was carried out by observing 12 English lessons. To gather more accurate data, it would be better to dedicate a longer period of time to the research. The research should take into consideration not only a large sample of different levels of English, types of schools, schools in villages and cities, but also teachers with different professional experience. Every class or group of students is different; there is a different atmosphere and relations among students who have different needs and learning disabilities. Taking into account the above mentioned issues, the research would be more valid and more generalized.

The data for the research was collected by observation in the classroom. Since this method has its limitations, I suggest implementing more methods in the research. The research could be expanded by interviews with teachers to see their point of view, interviews or questionnaires with students to know what they think about cooperative learning or how they feel while working in groups, if they enjoy it or not.

The research was only focused on the main differences between cooperative learning group and traditional learning group in English lessons. The other research could be



focused on the development of social skills in both cooperative learning group and traditional learning group, for example. It would be interesting to compare the effectiveness of cooperative learning and group work and determine their strengths and weaknesses with respect to progress in the social skills of students.

In conclusion, this chapter suggested possible teaching implications on the basis of the evaluated data in comparison with the theoretical background. Next, limitations of the research were discussed and consequently, the suggestions for the further research were proposed.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The aim of the theoretical background of the thesis was to provide a theoretical description of cooperative learning and group work. The thesis summarizes the major differences between cooperative learning and group work. These differences are based on five necessary principles of cooperative learning that were identified by Johnson and Johnson (2001) which were designed to distinguish cooperative learning from any other forms of group learning. Also, the benefits and drawbacks for both cooperative learning and group work were discussed.

Based on theory, the research focused on the differences between cooperative learning activities and group work activities in 12 randomly attended English lessons. The research answered questions whether group work (including pair work) as an organizational form is used in English lessons and to what extent. It was also analyzed if each group work activity can be considered cooperative learning activity. Based on the data gathered through observation, it was revealed that group work as an organizational form was used in two thirds of English lessons. The results also showed that not each group work activity contained five necessary principles of cooperative learning.

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# APPENDIX A

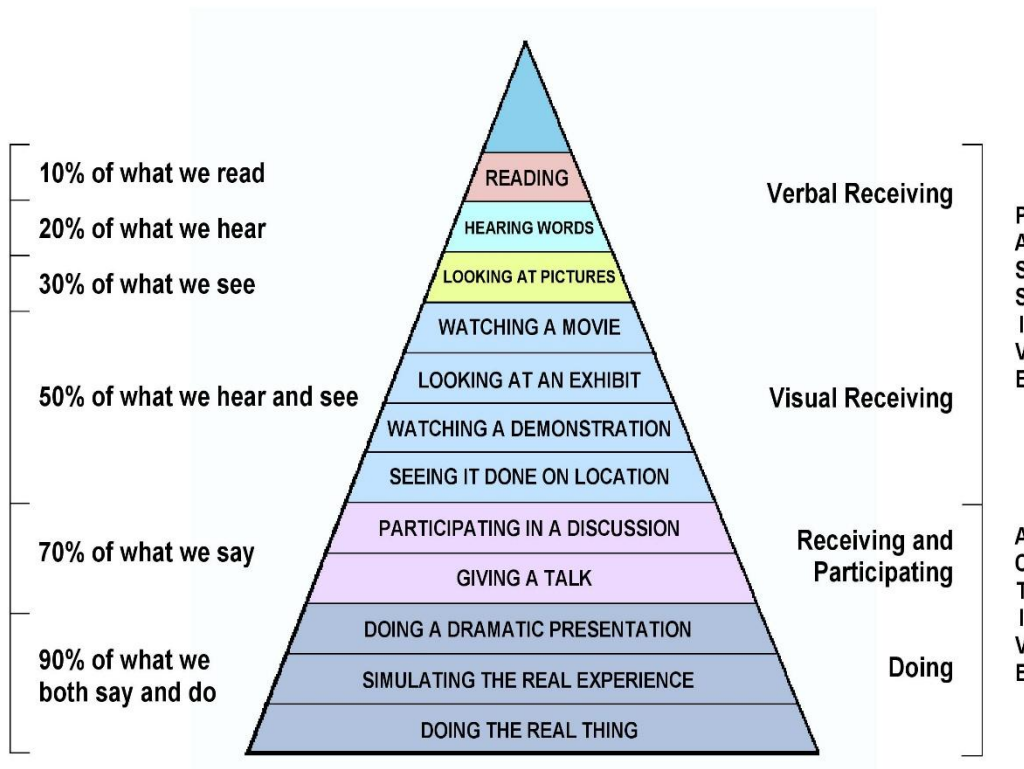
## Cone of Learning

Source: Adapted from Dale, E. (1969). *Audiovisual methods in teaching*. New York: Dryden Press.

### CONE OF LEARNING

WE TEND TO REMEMBER OUR LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT

(developed and revised by Bruce Hyland from material by Edgar Dale)



Edgar Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1969).

# APPENDIX B

## Observation sheet

School:

Time:

Level:

Number of students:

Classroom arrangement:

Topic:

Stage	Teacher does	Students do	Activities	Comments	Time
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					



## APPENDIX C

### Cooperative Learning Scoring Rubric

Source: Adapted from Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (2001). Learning together and alone: An overview. In S. Sharan (Ed.). *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 22. (1). 95-100.

<b>principles of cooperative learning</b>	<b>description of principles</b>	<b>1 (meets expectations)</b>	<b>0 (not meeting expectations)</b>
<b>positive interdependence</b>	Members of the group work (including pair work) toward mutual learning goals, help to understand each other, they learn from each other		
<b>individual accountability</b>	each member of the group is accountable for his or her contributions and learning, he or she is aware of the importance of his or her part of the work, tries to meet the goals and be active		
<b>face-to-face promotion</b>	students share resources and help, provide one another with feedback, and encourage each other's effort to learn		
<b>social skills</b>	social skills are developed, there is a positive relationship and environment within a group, members of the group respect someone else's opinion, ideas are shared		
<b>group processing</b>	group provides feedback (individual members to each other / group to the teacher)		

Score: \_\_\_\_\_ points

## SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na kooperativní učení a na skupinovou práci (včetně práce ve dvojici) v hodinách anglického jazyka. V první kapitole se nacházejí základní informace o kooperativním učení, dále jsou zmíněny četné výhody kooperativního učení. Nevýhody kooperativního učení jsou také diskutovány, je zde i navrženo, jak tyto případné nevýhody vyřešit. Dále je vysvětleno, proč je vhodné používat kooperativní učení v hodinách anglického jazyka. Stejným způsobem je zpracována část diplomové práce týkající se skupinové práce. Velký důraz je kladen na rozdíly mezi kooperativním učením a skupinovou prací.

Cílem práce bylo zjistit, zda je skupinová práce jako organizační forma výuky používána ve výuce anglického jazyka a v jaké míře. Dále bylo zkoumáno, zda práce ve skupině obsahuje prvky kooperativního učení a zda se opravdu jedná o kooperativní učení. Pro získání dat byla použita metoda pozorování. Výzkum se konal ve 3 českých školách. V práci je kladen důraz na správné používání kooperativního učení, je zde vysvětleno, proč je lepší upřednostnit tuto učební strategii před tradiční skupinovou prací.