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Universitat Autònoma
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[COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN THE ESL CLASSROOM]

"Although ideas may have changed to some extent in recent years, pupil-pupil talk is still regarded suspiciously by many teachers." (Mercer, 2005. p. 89).

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I would also like to thank my mentor Salvador Orquín for opening to me the world of English teaching in Emily Bronte high school in Sabadell and whose guidance during the practicum has been most precious. I have learnt many valuable things from him.

Last but not the least; I would like to thank all the teacher of this master who have devoted their time in teaching us how a good teacher has to be. And especially my colleagues with whom I have shared nerves, joys, long days of work and many good moments.

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Abstract

This research explores the advantages and disadvantages of collaborative learning departing from two different methodological studies. In the first one, we will go deep into the reflections about group work of a student-teacher in her first experiences during a two months practicum in Sabadell's Emily Bronte. In the second one, we will analyze in a more empirical way the interaction that takes place among a trio of students engaged in a question-answering task about a text based on a three minutes vignette recorded on January 2010.

Key words: advantages or disadvantages on group work, cooperative learning, student-student interaction.

Resum

En aquest projecte s'exploren els avantatges i inconvenients de l'aprenentatge cooperatiu partint de dos estudis amb metodologies diferents. Al primer, analitzarem profundament les reflexions sobre el treball en grup d'una professora en pràctiques durant la seva primera experiència a l'institut Emily Bronte de Sabadell. Al segon, analitzarem de manera més empírica la interacció entre tres estudiants que estan fent una activitat de respondre preguntes sobre un text, estudi basat en un enregistrament de tres minuts gravat el gener del 2010.

Paraules clau: avantatges i desavantatges del treball en grup, aprenentatge cooperatiu, interacció entre estudiants.

General purpose of the paper

During many years, group work has been used in primary and secondary education as a powerful teaching and learning strategy. There are many benefits in gathering students to work together as "research has shown that well-designed and conducted group work leads to greater retention and understanding of what is taught" (University teaching and development centre, 2004, p. 1).

This research will study collaborative learning from two different points of view in order to see if group work is beneficial for students' self-development.

First of all, the topic will be studied from a student-teaching experience and, later on, we will go deeper into a more analytic research of a trio of students working jointly on a task. Finally, this research will come out with a conclusion on the benefits or downsides of collaborative learning.

1. Context

During my practicum, I have spent two months working full time as a student-teacher in Emily Bronte together with my colleague and with the support and guidance of our mentor, Salvador Orquín.

Emily Bronte is a high school situated right in the city centre of Sabadell. Consequently, students attending this school belong to middle and upper classes. However, a 20% of the students come from the working neighbourhood called Torre Romeu inhabited mainly by newcomers and gipsies. I believe it is important to mention this fact here because the community in which the school is settled usually has a deep impact on student's way of living, their behaviour, their family situation and therefore, the way they see education and the way they learn. The school is a very complex environment where many factors gather together in order to create a unique learning atmosphere. And the one in Emily Bronte could be considered one of the most favourable for the learning.

During this 8 week practicum I have had the opportunity to teach to students of 1st ESO, 1st Batxillerat and 2nd Batxillerat and implement a CLIL teaching unit about Ancient Egypt in 2 groups of 1st ESO.

2. Global objective

The global objective of this paper is to gather data from the experiences of a student-teacher and the analysis of the interaction of a trio of 13 year old students in order to arise some final conclusions on the advantages or disadvantages of collaborative learning in the language teaching, which will help me become better at teaching and better at reflecting upon my work.

3. Methodology

The methodology used in this research and the kind of analysis undertaken are explained below.

This research is 1st ESO classroom-based in the sense that all data collected and analysed has been taken, photographed or recorded from 1st ESO C and D classrooms in Sabadell's Emily Bronte during the two following periods: January 2010 and late March-early April 2010, corresponding to Practicum I and Practicum II.

In this work, I am at the same time student-teacher and researcher. As a student teacher, I seek to improve my teaching skills through the analysis of the data collected during the practicum and as a researcher; I seek to better understand the teaching techniques and specially group work technique.

The data:

The data collected for this research is comprised by student's productions, pictures of student's working, student-teacher journal, student-teacher field notes, a three minute video recording taken during Practicum I that is used in the empirical study and transcription of that video recording. Video recording has been chosen for this study instead of voice recording due to the fact that non-verbal communication plays a very important role in the classroom interaction and using a voice recording would imply missing such valuable piece of information.

Analysis methodology:

There are two differentiated sections in this research. The first one comprises the student-teacher's reflections after the practicum supported by literature and based on activities that can be found in Annexes 2 and 3. As this section has a more personal approach, it has been written in 1st person singular.

The second section of this paper comprises an empirical study of a trio of students working together. In this study, the student-teacher turns into a researcher and that is why the 3rd person singular will be used in this section using a more academic style.

The methodology used in the empirical study is Conversation Analysis (CA). Conversation analysis is an approach to the study of natural conversation, especially with a view to determining participants' methods of turn-taking, constructing sequences of utterances across turns, identifying and repairing problems and employing gaze and movement (SIL International, 2004). In order to correctly analyse the video recording the interaction has been transcribed (*find transcription in Annex 5*). Non-verbal communication can be found to the right of the transcription.

4. <u>Reflections of a student-teacher</u>

4.1. Practicum I

I started Practicum I on the 11th of January and I was so excited about it because I had the feeling that it was going to be something very intensive and profitable as it actually ended up being. I also wanted to see in practice if teaching was what I wanted to do as a job, and it is something you can not know until you try it.

During my first practicum, I learned many things about the organisation of the high school and I could see by myself what I had been hearing about during the last months in the common module lessons. I attended many teachers' meetings regarding ESO students, English department meetings, I visited Aula Oberta and Aula d'Acollida, and I had interviews with the secretary of the school and the pedagogical coordinator who gave us a lot of information about how the high school operates.

It was the time when I also had my first contact with students, I got to prepare my first activities or whole lessons together with Laura, and I got to teach for the first time in front of a big group of teenagers.

I learned many useful things from the practice, but also from hearing our mentor's advice. It is always nice to have somebody next to you with a large carrier as a teacher to guide you in those first days. One of the first things I learned from him was that, in order to make all students participate in the class and increase their self-esteem, it is better to ask first those students that are weaker in English. Usually, this kind of students can not finish all the activities proposed and, by asking them first, we make sure that they give an answer instead of having to say: "I don't have it done"; which would make them feel really uncomfortable in front of the whole class. This is an example of the valuable things that we can only learn during the practicum and that no practical lesson in the university could ever make it so clear.

Fuller (1968, inside LePage 2005. p. 379) said something I find very interesting and adequate to my evolution as a student-teacher during my first and second practicum. He claims that "new teachers develop through phases in which they

focus initially on themselves and their teaching – for instance, their ability to control the classroom, what their supervisors think about them as teachers – and then eventually on concerns that are related to student learning, such as designing curriculum, finding effective teaching strategies and assessing student learning". Those are two stages I've gone through during my first experience as a teacher. It is true that when you face a group of students for the first time, you only think about you being able to do things, such as being a good teacher, giving the right instructions, handling the timing, speaking aloud, monitoring student's behaviour, etc. But after some days, you realise that the classroom you have got in front of you is so diverse, so complex that you are not the focus of your interest anymore. Students turn into the teacher's main concern.

Another aspect that was extremely beneficial during my first practicum was B hours. We taught to 1st ESO C and D and those students have 2 hours as a whole group and then they split into two groups during the 3rd hour. The result is that, as a teacher, I got to teach the same lesson 4 times a week. This is extremely advantageous for a novice teacher as we had the chance of implementing the lesson in four different groups. This way, we could see what went wrong in the first one, change it in the second one and try to improve as much as we could in the rest. Another advantage of this kind of lessons is the fact that they took place in the language laboratory, which is a much better setting than the regular classrooms to encourage cooperative work among students.

Regular classroom setting in Emily Bronte   Language laboratory in Emily Bronte

4.2. Teaching unit elaboration and implementation

The biggest challenge of the whole practicum has been elaborating and implementing the teaching unit. When Laura and I started creating the activities for 1st ESO students, we were completely lost in the world of activity designing and lesson planning. If, to that fact, we add that our teaching unit was content based (CLIL) and we had never seen a CLIL lesson before, the result was that our minds were entirely disoriented. Little by little we started to see the light and begun creating activities in order to elaborate a complete teaching unit about Ancient Egypt.

We chose Egypt as a topic as it was in 1st ESO's curriculum for that year and we thought that studying Ancient Egypt's history, art, society, geography and scripts would arouse student's interest.

We decided to base our teaching unit on collaborative learning and we tried to create as much activities as possible in which students would work mainly in pairs or small groups. We thought that gathering students to work together would increase their motivation for the task and it would also improve their learning capacities as well as social and communication skills. (*Find some pictures of students working in groups in Annex 1 and group and pair work outcomes in Annex 4*).

When we started implementing the teaching unit, I realized how complex this world is. Preparing a teaching unit is not only about preparing activities but also about taking into account student's needs, student's mood, mixed abilities, the day, the weather, assessment, time needed for activities, time needed for instructions and time needed for feedback. When first designing it, we did not take into account the time needed to give instructions to students and the time needed for feedback and correction. This can consume an enormous amount of time during the lesson and it is extremely essential for the good operation of the course. It is not until you face it in the practice that you are aware of it.

4.3. Practicum II

After a month and a half taking lessons at the university, we went back to the high school. This time, I already noticed that I had evolved. I was not as shy as I was when I started the first practicum. I felt more confident when talking to students, giving instructions and I already knew how school operated. The only thing that had not changed was my motivation. Moreover, as I was not so nervous this time when being in front of the whole class, I really enjoyed every minute teaching.

4.4. Relationship between theory and practice

There have been many topics related to teaching world that have been discussed among our mentor and us during the first and second practicum such as monitoring more or less the activities, the timing, the necessity of always having a B plan, mixed abilities and grouping. All these topics came up from our daily practice. I am afraid I can not explain them all in this portfolio due to lack of space but I would like to write about those topics that have made me reflect the most or that have had a deeper impact on me during my first teaching experience.

The two topics I am writing about in this section deal with collaborative learning as it played a very important role in the implementation of our teaching unit. In this first section I am going to explain the importance of grouping students in a heterogeneous way using a situation that took place in one of my lessons. In the second section, I am going to talk again about grouping, but this time, about the importance of arranging the class and tables in a proper way.

4.4.1. Heterogeneous grouping

One day during the implementation of the teaching unit on a B hour with a 1st ESO group, students came in and I asked them to sit down in groups of 3. The

tables of the language laboratory, where B hours take place, are already placed in a way that facilitates enormously group work.

After a couple of minutes, I realised that students were sitting down according to gender and friendship. The result was groups of boys and girls sitting down separately. Moreover, there were three girls that had the curriculum adapted that were sitting down together. This group was formed by two Moroccan girls and a girl with Asperger's syndrome. As I wanted to create heterogeneous groups, I asked some other girls to mix with this group. But I faced a problem: the girls I asked to move did not want to change their groups and after some minutes, I decided to leave the groups as they were.

I know it was not the right decision to be taken then but at that moment, I did not want to argue with those girls because I was afraid that if I did so, we would not have had enough time to finish all the activities. Moreover, I decided I wanted to do a little experiment.

We have been talking a lot in the master's lessons about mixed abilities and the necessity of making heterogeneous groups, and I wanted to see what happened if I did not mix students according to their capacities. To this end, I decided to follow very closely this group of three girls in order to see how they worked together.

The term mixed abilities comprises a wide variety of students with different language knowledge, different intelligences, different learning speeds, and different styles and preferences (Harmer, 2007, p. 127). When we teach, we have to know that there is not a single student equal to another one. They are all different and consequently, they all have different needs.

The fact of dealing with diversity in the classroom in a proper way worries me a lot. It is a matter that is very complex and I know that during my practicum, I did not do it properly. I was sometimes so worried about the whole class and about filming and timing, that I sometimes forgot those students that might need more attention from the teacher. I know it is something that all teachers face every day and some manage it better and some other don't. What I know is that I will do my best in order to have the whole class happy and attended. It

might be very difficult and it might take me a lot of time to reach a state that I like, but at least, I will try hard.

Then, what happened to the girls? The thing is that I was so concentrated on my little experiment that I paid too much attention on them. I did not leave the rest of the class alone and I was very lucky that my colleague Laura was there with too. The girls did not get lost and they could follow the whole class. But, the reason why they did so was because Laura and I helped them a lot.

This same group in a regular class with only one teacher would not have followed the lesson and would have got lost at some point. And I would not have been able to help them as much as I could that day.

Therefore, this little experiment proved me that grouping the students in an adequate way is very important in order to create the most adequate atmosphere for learning. In a better world, peer teaching would be somehow usual and I could be working with Laura regularly. Nevertheless, as this is not common practice nowadays, we, as teachers, must find other strategies to assure student's improvement.

4.4.2. *Classroom organisation in group work*

The way a teacher sets to organize the classroom exerts a powerful influence on teaching and learning (Coen et al. 1996). I could see very clearly what Cohen et al. meant by this statement while implementing the teaching unit.

One of the activities we had designed was a jigsaw called pyramids and mummies jigsaw (*find instructions for this activity in Annex 2*) in which students had to work collaboratively in groups of four. We were having lesson in the regular class and students were grouped in pairs. At the beginning of the activity, we asked some students to turn around their tables or chairs in order to work with the pair that was behind them. The activity was working very well until we started correcting it with a power point. I did not realise the problem until later on when our mentor was giving us the feed back but I did realise that there was something not going on the right way.

The fact is that, as half of the students were with their backs to the whiteboard, it was very difficult for them to follow the correction and it was much easier to get distracted. The same happened with the following activity which consisted on looking at a picture that was projected and finding some words from a Wordle (*find instructions for this activity in Annex 3*).

Below, there is a picture of the correction of the activity where we can see four students turned around to see the power point.
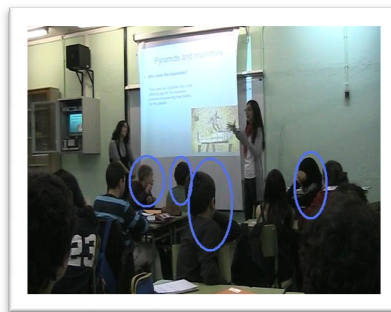
As future teachers, we must know that the physical environment of a classroom can contribute to either promoting or impeding the learning (Cohen et al. 1996) and in this case it was definitely impeding some students' learning. It was not at all comfortable for them to turn around all the time. Those students could not follow the correction properly and they were not completely engaged in the second activity. Therefore, an efficient classroom organization and structure is crucial to maintaining an orderly and effective learning environment. (LePage, P. et al. 2005, p 340).

In the picture above, we can see a more student-engaging setting of the classroom. This is a picture of the language laboratory in Emily Bronte high

school. As we were implementing the teaching unit with two groups of first of ESO, the second time we implemented these activities, we set the tables accordingly to the picture below and the result of the activity was that students were much more engaged in the tasks than the previous group.

4.5. Conclusions on student-teacher experiences with group work

Now that this year is nearly over, I can see now that after the process of professionalization that takes place during the practicum, I am aware of how much I have learnt during this intensive and wonderful experience. Teaching is not an easy task, but I know now that it is what I want to devote my time and efforts to.

Regarding teaching in a cooperative way, I have seen during my first experience as a student-teacher that group work is a very powerful tool that teachers can use. It is not used though by all teachers as much as it could be. English teachers employ this technique more often than the rest of the teachers in a high school belonging to other subjects.

I am aware now that the teacher plays a very important role in group work. He/she must make sure that all students understand what it is to work in groups and which role they have inside the group. In order to better face diversity in the classroom, the teacher should gather students in a heterogeneous way working with them to make them aware of the importance of working in groups and helping each other.

We must not forget either the importance of the layout. Depending on what layout we chose for our classrooms, the result of our group work activities will be more or less positive.

Therefore, from my experiences in the practicum, I can observe now that group work, as other teaching strategies not dwelt with in this research, is a very complex technique that, used in a correct way, can bring up many good qualities from students as well as motivate them in their learning process.

5. <u>Empirical study</u>

5.1. Introduction

> This research aims to analyse the interaction among a group of three students engaged in a question-answering task. In order to do so, the literature on the topic will be consulted and commented and the transcription of the excerpt will be analyzed arising final conclusions on collaborative learning.

Key words: cooperative work, student-student interaction, successful group interaction, transcription analysis.

5.2. Context of the study

This empirical study focuses on the analysis of the conversations of a trio of 13-year-old students that are working together in order to complete a task that has been designed for group work. The task consists on answering seven questions out of a text that hangs on the wall. Students are given one question sheet per group; they must read all the questions and find the answers on a text, about a school in England, which has been displayed on six papers hanging on a wall. *(See the text in Annex 7).*

The main objective of the task is for students to know how to scan through a long text in English and find the exact answers to their questions. The text is quite tricky and students must pay attention to the vocabulary and to where to find the answers. *(See a picture of the transcription setting in Annex 6).*

This task was first designed as an ICT activity to be done in the language laboratory. Nevertheless, due to the impossibility to use the computers in that classroom, the text was then printed out and hung on the walls. The activity was implemented during one week in four whole groups of 1st of ESO, a total of 54 students. The trios were made by the teacher who tried to make heterogeneous groups gathering students with different learning levels and sex. At the very moment of the transcription, this group of students has already gone through question one and are trying to find the response for question two which is: How old are the children when they start the school?

5.3. Focus of the observation

There are many factors that can interfere the interaction among the students such as genre, age, different personalities, and different ways of learning. That is why, through the analysis of this excerpt, this study will try to answer the following question:

Is the interaction that takes place among these students a success?

A successful or unsuccessful collaboration has often been measured by the results of the activity; being good results often similar to successful collaboration and bad results similar to unsuccessful collaboration. Nevertheless, the good result of an activity does not imply that a good cooperation has taken place (Swann in Mercer, 1997. p 97) as investigations have shown that students sometimes work separately or there is a leading student that gives orders to the rest that obeys, which we could not considerate a successful cooperation.. That is the reason why, through an exhaustive analysis of the interaction among our trio of students, this study will determine if there are any other positive outcomes which result from this shared experience apart from the final result in order to determine that a successful interaction has taken place among the students.

5.4. Literature review on the topic

The importance of cooperative work in the classroom

As this paper focuses mainly on cooperative work, it is appropriate to start by giving its definition: The California Department of Education (Trujillo 2002. p 4) defines it as "most cooperative approaches involve small, heterogeneous teams, usually of four or five members, working together towards a group task in which each member is individually accountable for part of an outcome that cannot be completed unless the members work together; in other words, the group members are positively independent."

"In recent years research in the field of second language acquisition has demonstrated the potential benefits of peer interaction in the foreign language classroom (Doughty and Pica 321-23; Van Lier 160; Kramsh "Socialization" 246; Porter 219)." (Knutson, 2001, p. 1138). It is nowadays thought that "collaborative learning", a term used by Mercer (1997) is very important in our lives because it has been proved that a lot of knowledge and many valuable skills that we have acquired throughout our lives come from talking and working with other people who were not our teachers.

In their book "Group work in the Primary Classroom", Mauric & Williamson (2004. p. 26) talk about the benefits of group work in the classroom. They point out that grouping "allowed more efficient use of a teacher's time, enabling increased contact with pupils, but also it improved the quality of learning since within this kind of groups children make their meaning clear to themselves by having to explain it to others and gain opportunities to teach as well as learn. Group interaction is thought to help the timid child who might be less shy in risking a hypothesis in a group. Apathetic children would also benefit since they may be infected by the enthusiasm of a group while other children benefit by being caught up in a thrust and counter thrust of conversation in a small group similar to themselves".

When it comes to collaborative work in a second language acquisition environment, Knutson (2001. p. 1139) comes to the conclusion that "while there is no conclusive evidence as to how classroom interaction contributes to second language acquisition, Long's interaction hypothesis and the output theories which have succeeded it lend support to the idea that students benefit from classroom practice in two-way communicative behaviour such as negotiation of meaning, modification of input and request for clarification".

Nevertheless, joining some students to work together does not guarantee a successful interaction. There are many factors that might oppose this goal. In here, the teacher has an important role in group work as it is his/her duty to design a good task and to give students some clues on how to work cooperatively. As Galton and Williamson (in Mercer 1997. p. 92) conclude "For

successful collaboration to take place pupils need to be taught how to collaborate so that they have a clear idea of what is expected of them".

This study will try to analyze if the evidences in the excerpt can show that a successful interaction between students has taken place.

5.5. Analysis of the transcription

The excerpt analysed below has a total length of 2'59'' and it is composed by 57 turns (*find full transcription in Annex 5*). It was filmed in a secondary school in Sabadell and the students involved in the task belong to 1st of ESO and they are 13 years old. The group of students is composed by one boy who will be addressed as Xavier ("X" in the transcription) and two girls, Silvia ("S" in the transcription) and Marta ("M" in the transcription). Silvia has the question sheet on a table that is placed in front of the wall; she seems responsible for writing down the answers. Two female student-teachers will appear on scene to help the students with the task, they will be addressed as Teacher 1 ("T1" in the transcription) and Teacher 2 ("T2" in the transcription).

In the transcription, there are many comments on what students are doing all the time, specially every time they point at the papers on the wall. Even though the papers are just objects, they play a very important role in this interaction.

We can divide the excerpt in four different parts according to what is happening:

- In turns 1 to 7 students are on the task trying to get the answer to question two.
- In turns 8 to 17, Teacher 1 appears in order to make sure that students have understood the task. What Teacher 1 does is very important in order to assure the good operation of the activity. When Teacher 1 is sure all students understand the operation of the task, she goes away and leaves students to work on their own again.

- Then in turns 18 to 35 students continue with the task. These turns will be the main focus of this observation since it is here where that we can see how they interact with each other in order.
- In turns 36 to 57, Teacher 2 appears offering help. She comes when students seem to have understanding problems about the text and she is welcomed. Teacher 2 helps students to answer the question and then leaves.

Before starting to analyse the transcription, what we consider a successful cooperation should be established. According to Mercer (1997, p. 98), to cooperate is **the sense of sharing of ideas, joint evaluation of information, hypothesizing and desicion making, or even taking advice from others.**

Therefore, what we are going to establish here is if the previous statements are shown among our trio of students. We will use four questions proposed by Mercer (1997, p. 111) plus a question that I personally have added, which I find necessary. The questions are:

1. Do the children disagree at all?
2. Do they ask each other questions?
3. Do they share knowledge which is relevant to the task?
4. Do they seem to have a common understanding of what the task is about?
5. Do students use L1 (catalan or Spanish) or L2 (in this case, English)?

Question 1: Do the children disagree at all?

Students do not seem to disagree, on the contrary, in turns 16 to 34, a total of 18 turns, they seem to be working together listening to each other. They refuse those ideas proposed by other students that they think they are not correct but give an explanation why they refuse them.

We can see an example below:

Excerpt 1

023	M	!quan comencen
024	X	Mentida. A complete summer location usually <u>ends</u> at about (0.5)
025	M	A no no no no es perquè acaba amb 17 anys però comença

In these turns, Marta thinks that the word they are trying to understand means "començar" but Xavier does not agree and answers with "mentida" and then reads the sentence again stressing the English word "ends". This seems to help Marta because she then uses the right meaning of the word in the following turn when she says "A no no no no es perquè acaba amb 17 anys però comença".

Question 2: Do they ask each other questions?

In the following extract from the transcription it can be observed that students actually ask each other questions and answer them.

In turn 27, Marta makes a question that is not answered, but it seems that she is asking herself and the rest of the group does not feel that she is waiting for an answer from them.

In turn 29, Silvia asks for meaning clarification when she says "Leaving és acaba no ?", Xavier answers by giving the translation of "acabar" and Marta in turn 32 gives the full answer when she says "Ends és acabar". Finally, Silvia makes a question in turn 33 that is answered by Xavier in the following turn.

Excerpt 2

027	M:	I llavors per què hi han posat això ?
028	X:	No venen venen a 5 però ma venen
029	S:	Leaving és acaba no ? (2)
030	X:	No però aqui diu usually [ends] ends
031	M:	[ends]
032	M:	Ends és acabar
033	S:	Pues comencen amb cinc?
034	X:	Vale (2) sinó posa cinc and

Question 3: Do they share knowledge which is relevant to the task?

During the whole transcription, all three students are working together on the task actively and enthusiastically and there is not a single turn in which they talk about something not related to the activity.

In the previous extract from question two, we can see that they join their knowledge in order to understand together the text and find the answer to the question. Even when the teachers come, they seem completely involved in the task and share their ideas with them too.

Question 4: Do they seem to have a common understanding of what the task is about?

When the transcription starts, students are already working on the task and they have answered question one. In turn 8, Teacher 1 appears to make sure the have understood what the task is about. Silvia's answer is "yes" and then Marta tries to explain it to the teacher but doesn't know how. Teacher 1 realises it and explains the task herself. In turn 14, Silvia makes a question that is inaudible; this is an evidence of her interest for the task. When Teacher 1 thinks they have understood the task completely, she leaves to let them work.

008	T1:	Did you understand what you have to do?	*Teacher 1 appears in the scene*
009	S:	Yes	
010	T1:	Yes? Have you read all this?	
011	M:	Hem de fer	
012	T1:	You have read all the questions, I mean all the questions and then you have to answer ( ) =	*Pointing at the papers on the wall, she realises she is making a mistake and then points at the question sheet*
013	T1:	= because here are the answers and they are more or less in order, ok?	*Pointing at the papers on the wall*
014	S:	( )	*Points at a sentence on the text asking a question that we can not hear*
015	T1:	[This is the sentence for you to write this.]	
016	M:	[nine, ten]	*Reading the text*
017		((Teacher 1 leaves))	

Question 5: Do students use L1 (catalan or Spanish) or L2 (in this case, English)?

Not all students use the same strategies when having to communicate in a foreign language.

On one hand, in this excerpt, we can see that both Xavi and Marta use sentences from the text in order to be able to communicate in L2. We can see a very clear example of it in the following excerpt which represents turns 29 to 32.

Excerpt 4

029	S:	Leaving és acaba no ? (2)
030	X:	No però aqui diu usually [ends] ends
031	M:	[ends]
032	M:	Ends és acabar

During the previous turns, students are trying to understand the meaning of the verbs "to leave" and "to end" which are the key works to find the answer to the question they are dealing with.

In turn 29, Silvia asks if the meaning of "leaving" is "acabar" which in Catalan means to finish. Xavi does not think that to leave means acabar and he answers through reading the text in turn 30. This seems to help Marta who realizes that the right translation into English of the Catalan verb "acabar" is "to end" in turns 31 and 32. And they do it by reading the text aloud and using it in order to make up for their lack of fluency in L2 language.

On the other hand, Xavier is the student that uses L2 more often. Apart from using the text to speak to the other students, he uses L2 to communicate with Teacher 2 as it is observed in the following except. Nevertheless, Marta and Silvia tend to use L1 to speak to the teachers as we can see in turn 40 when Silvia speaks.

Excerpt 5

036	T2:	How is it going?
037	X:	One question
038	T2:	Tell me
039	X:	In here pupils they come at five years, here I don't understand
040	S:	Aquí diu que tenen normalment no?

5.6. Empirical study conclusions

After having deeply analysed the transcription and consulted the literature on the topic, we can finally arise some conclusions. This study makes visible the evidences in the excerpt that show that not only the final result of the activity is a success but also the interaction that takes place among students.

There is not a single turn in the three minutes vignette in which students are not on task and this means that they are strongly committed with the activity as they work actively and enthusiastically.

We have also seen in excerpt 2 how students negotiate together the meaning of the words and sentences which means that they are constructing a jointly understanding of what the text say. This is very positive as it shows that working together they can face a task that would be perhaps too difficult to deal with individually.

The analysis of the transcription has also shown in excerpt 2 that students ask each other questions and answer to their colleagues'. This is a very good sign of good interaction as it is actually through asking and answering themselves that they share ideas and help each other to complete the task.

Even though using L2 was not the main goal of the activity, we have observed that they try to use L2 in their own way: sometimes employing the text as a support and others, trying to speak in English with the teacher. We have to take into account that the L2 fluency of these students is not very high, as seen in the

transcription when they are jointly trying to guess the meaning of such current verb as "to end".

All the transcription is valuable but it is turns 19 to 35 that have been the key element for this paper. If we go back to Mercer's description of what to cooperate is (see page 20) and we contrast it with the analysis of the transcription, we can perfectly see that students share their ideas, they evaluate jointly the information, the decisions are taken together and they even accept advice from the rest of the students in the group.

Therefore, after joining the most important points in this research, we can state that this task got a successful outcome both in the final result of the activity and in the positive outcome that student got from interacting among themselves.

6. Overall conclusions

As we have seen in both sections of this dissertation, there are many benefits of collaborative learning and if we can gather the right conditions we can get an interaction among students as successful as in the excerpt we have analyzed; but there are also some disadvantages if we do not make an appropriate use of this technique. In these final conclusions, we will put them all together in order to have an overall view on collaborative learning in the classroom.

Benefits of collaborative learning

Group work is very important for many reasons and we are not just English teachers but educators and it is through cooperative learning that students can acquire some of the most important social skills that they would not acquire in the regular classroom setting (teacher centred classroom). When we talk about social skills we can think about security, satisfaction, cooperative awareness, creativity, development of social sensibility, development of effective methods of thinking, inculcation of social attitudes, interaction, group decision-making and many others.

We must not forget what Salvin (1950, p. 7) says about students when he claims that the student is a single unified being and not a compartment of knowledge, which means that general education programs must be defined in terms of what the learner is or does instead of course content or body knowledge.

And group work promotes learning independence by encouraging students to learn from each other, not just from the teacher. Therefore, working collaboratively we are stressing other important skills apart from the acquirement of knowledge.

Another advantage is that group work is student-centred and in an ESL classroom, it enables students practice with equals instead of having to wait for their turns to speak in front of the whole classroom. This is what Troncale points out when she says "While teachers do most of the talking in traditional classrooms, cooperative learning groups give students the opportunity to apply

new information, including linguistic knowledge, which is particularly important for ESL students (p. 4).

In addition, as we saw when answering question five in the empirical analysis: *do students use L1 or L2?*, we remarked the fact that working together students can face a task that would be perhaps too difficult to deal with individually, that is the reason why most projects are usually implemented in groups.

Disadvantages of cooperative learning

We must not forget that group work has some disadvantages as well. Randall (1999, p. 15) states that "it would be handy if our democratic ideals could guarantee that students would learn equally or work equally, but they do not. We place too great a burden on children and teens not only by making them responsible for each other's learning (Can you ultimately be responsible for anyone's learning besides you own?), but also by grading them on how much other students learn". By this statement, I believe that Randall wants to complain about cooperative learning abuse. Again, we find that cooperative learning is a very advantageous technique that can not be used all the time as teacher should employ it together with other techniques and with a more teacher centred learning. As professionals, we can not place the responsibility of student learning on other students all the time as it is our duty and without teacher scaffolding, students would get lost at some point as there is no fresh input to their knowledge.

It could also happen that students with a more advanced level could become bored of explaining to those with a lower level and, those with lower levels could become passive members of the group. That is why, even though collaborative learning is a more student-centred technique, the teacher plays a very important role in it as it is his/her responsibility to guarantee a good environment that will foster student's learning.

After my first experience in a high school, I believe to have found some of the key factors that help the teacher create the best conditions for group work. Of

course there are many others, but the following ones are the ones I have experienced myself:

- It is very important to raise student's awareness on group work and to be sure they understand what it is expected from them and which role they will play inside the group.
- The teacher should take into account the classroom layout as we saw in page 13 because it plays an important part in the good result of the activity.
- Moreover, grouping students in heterogeneous groups is usually more positive rather than grouping them by levels as those students with higher levels can help low-achieving students while consolidating and ordering their own thoughts and knowledge.

If we really want to use this wonderful technique in our teaching, we must take into account all the factors mentioned before and, if we do it the right way for the right group, we will be able to see that the interaction among our students is as successful as that one of Marta, Xavier and Silvia.

8.1. Future improvements

I believe it would have been nice to devote some time of the teaching unit to increasing cooperative learning awareness among students. I can really see now how important experience is in the teaching field. Self observation, class observation, knowing the literature on the topic and teaching experience gives you the right tools to improve your teaching techniques. If I would have to make some changes to the teaching unit after this analysis on cooperative learning, I would definitely enlarge it some more days and I would devote some time on collaborative learning awareness to make sure that students know how to work in groups properly. When first designing it, we were so much concentrated on creating content based activities, which was a big challenge for my colleague and myself, that we were not conscious then, as I am now, of the importance of creating a collaborative learning routine among students.

This is something I will absolutely try as soon as I get into a classroom.

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8. ANNEXES

Annex1: Emily Bronte students working in group

Annex 2: Pyramids and mummies jigsaw

extracted from A Trip to the Ancient Egypt teaching unit. Authors: Laura del Rey and Maria del Mar Soriano

	Time ~20'
ACTIVITY 17: *Pyramids and mummies* **Materials:** Pyramids and mummies cut-outs. **Grouping**: Groups of four **Notes for the teacher:** ● Prepare as much cut-outs as groups of four you will have in the classroom. Find the cut-outs **Annex 1.4**. ● Gather students in groups of four. ● Give each group a set of cut-outs and tell them to match each question with its corresponding answer. ● Once students have finished, use power point presentation called *"Pyramids_and_Mummies.ppt* (**Session 5** folder) in the CD attached in order to correct the activity.	 Ss ↔ Ss T ↔ S

What are the pyramids?
The pyramids are the stone tombs of Egypt's kings - the Pharaohs and one of the world's greatest historical mysteries. They have stood for thousands of years, and they have many secrets: clues about what life (and death) was like in Ancient Egypt
Why did the Ancient Egyptians build pyramids?
The Egyptians believed that if the pharaoh's body was mummified after death the pharaoh would live forever. The tombs were designed to protect the buried Pharaoh's body and his treasures.
Where were they built?
Most of the pyramids can be found on the western side of the Nile River, in the middle of the dry desert.
Why did they build pyramids next to the Nile?
The reason they built the pyramids next to the Nile River was so it would be easier to get the blocks to the pyramid. The stones could be bought nearer to the pyramid building site by boat.
What is the name of the most famous pyramid?
The Great Pyramid is the largest and most famous of the pyramids. It was built for the Pharaoh Khuf. It is over 140 metres high and took 20 years to build.
What guards the pyramids from dangers?

	The Sphinx protects all the pyramids in Giza. It has the body of a lion and the head of a pharaoh.

What are mummies?

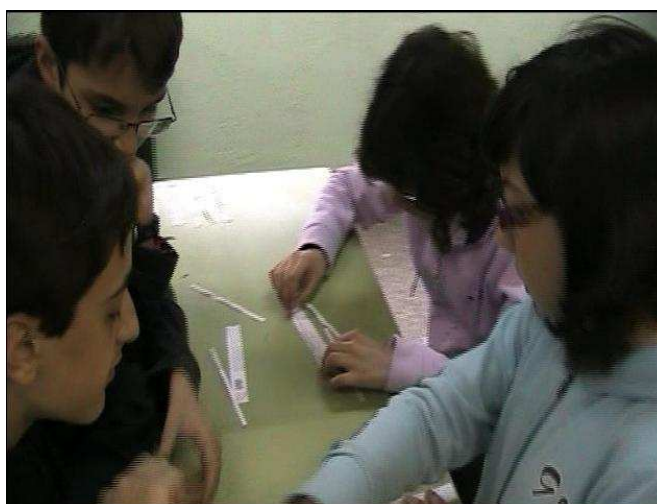|	
	A mummy is the body of a person (or an animal) that has been preserved after death.

Who were the mummies?

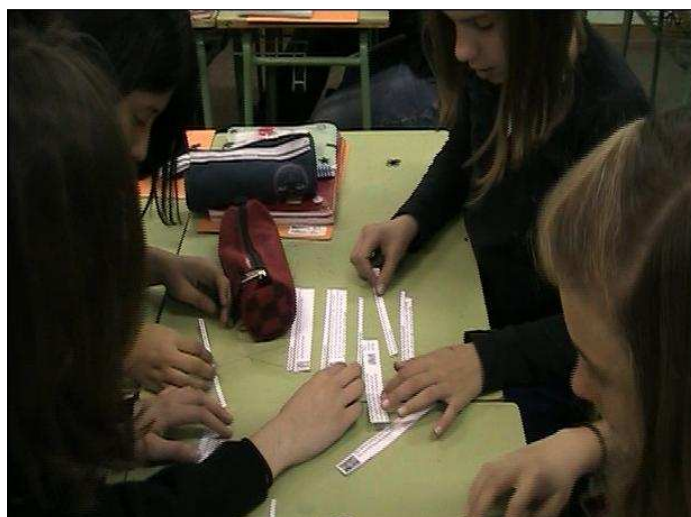|	
They were any Egyptian who could afford to pay for the expensive process of preserving their bodies for the afterlife.	
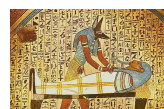
What was the name of the process the Egyptians used to preserve their bodies?

It was called mummification.

A mixed group of students working in the activity

A group of girls working on the activity

Annex 3:Egyptian Fashion

extracted from *A Trip to the Ancient Egypt teaching unit. Authors: Laura del Rey and Maria del Mar Soriano*

<table>
<tr>
<td>

ACTIVITY 11: *Egyptian fashion*

Materials: cosmetics_in_Egypt.jpg (**Session 3** folder), Ancient_Egypt_Fashion.jpg (**Session 3** folder) and Wordle (**Session 3** folder)
Grouping: Group work, whole class
Notes for the teacher:
- Place students in groups of four
- Project *cosmetics_in_Egypt.jpg* picture on the screen so that all students can see it.
- Give the following Wordle to each group of students. You can find the wordle either in **Session 3** folder or in **Annex 1.2**.
- Tell students to find in the picture those words that appear in the Wordle.
- Correct with the whole class asking each time to a different group of students.
- Do the same with picture *Ancient_Egypt_Fashion.jpg*.

</td>
<td>

Time ~15'

T →Ss
Ss↔Ss

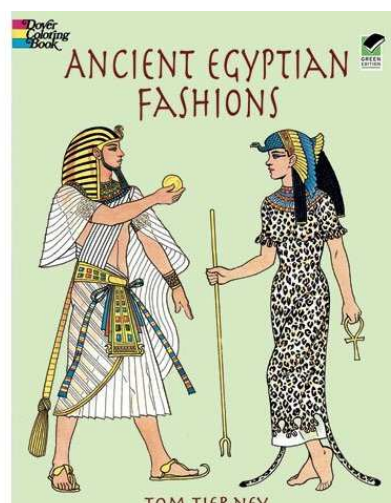T ↔Ss

</td>
</tr>
</table>

ANSWER KEY:
Words in cosmetics_in_Egypt:

collar, amulet, necklace, mirror, dress, bowl, box, wig, comb, bracelet.
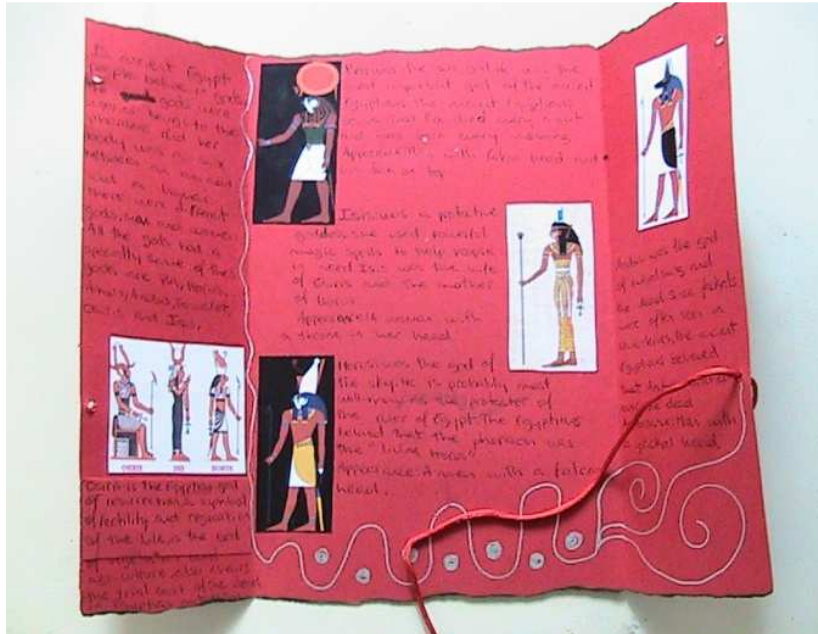
Words in Ancient_Egyptian_Fashion.jpg:

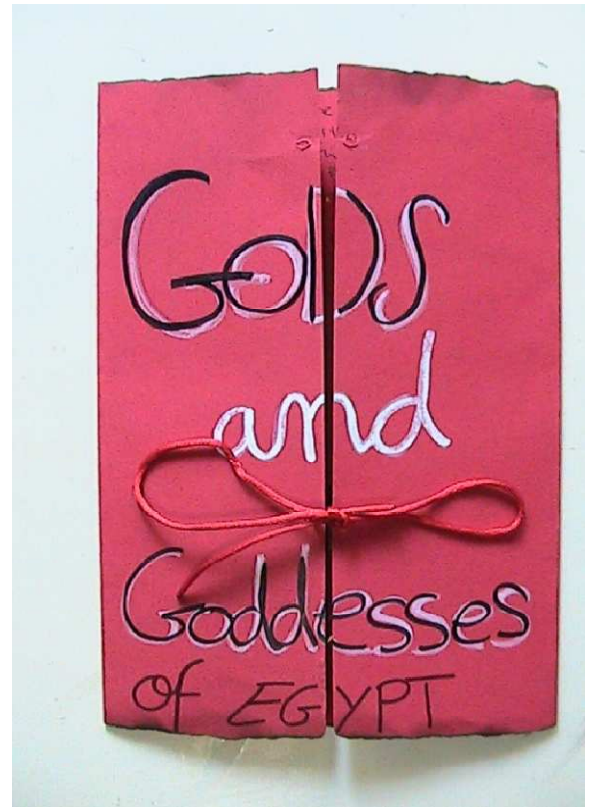cross, wig, neme, kilt, dress, bracelet.

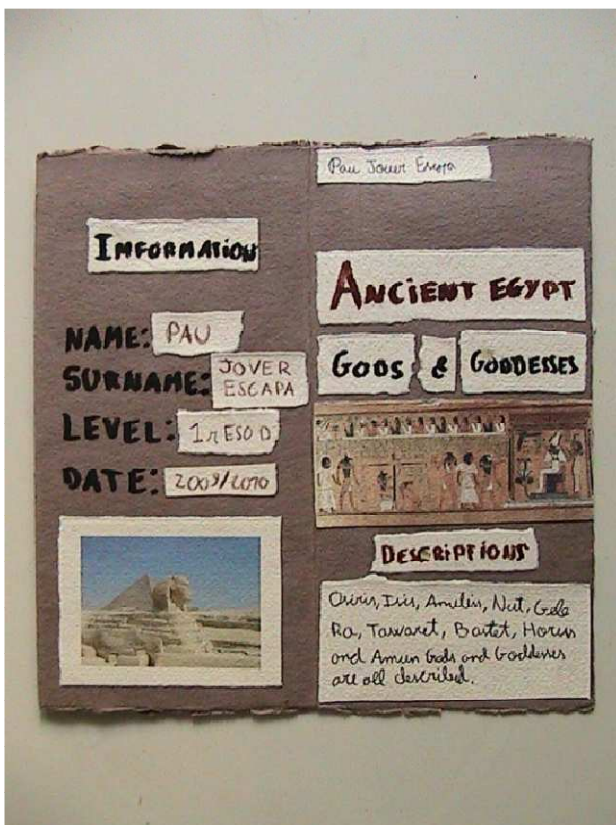

Cosmetics_in_Egypt

Ancient_Egyptian_Fashion

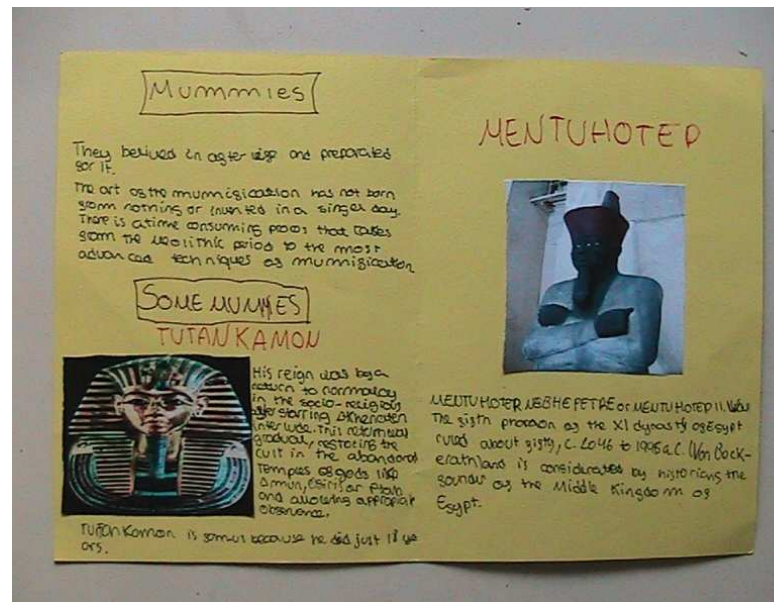# Annex 4: Pair and group work outcomes during the practicum.

Gods and goddesses leaflet, final output of the Teaching unit, pair work

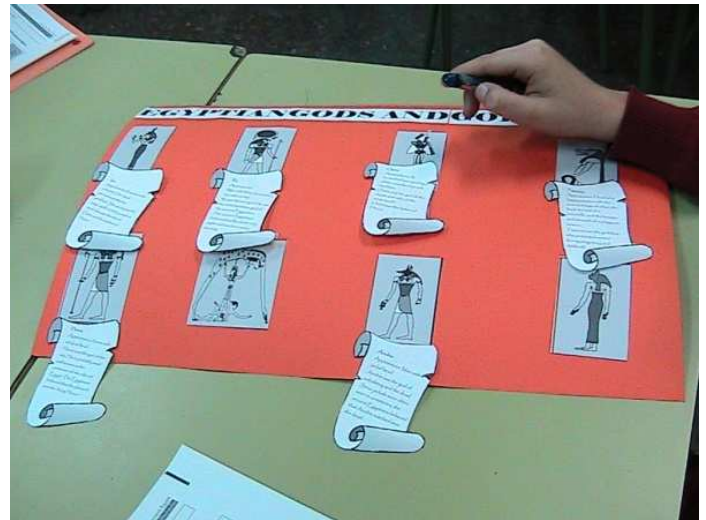Gods and goddesses leaflet, final output of the Teaching unit, pair work

Gods and goddesses leaflet, final output of the Teaching unit, pair work
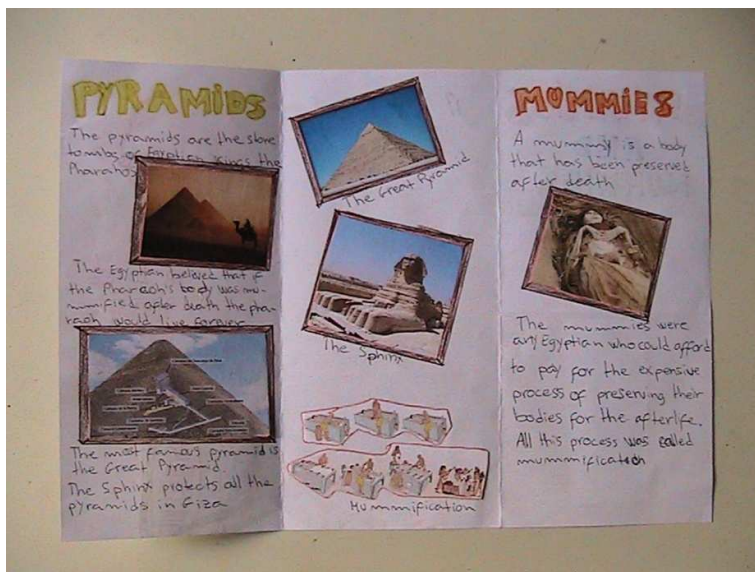

Mummies leaflet, final output of the Teaching unit, pair work
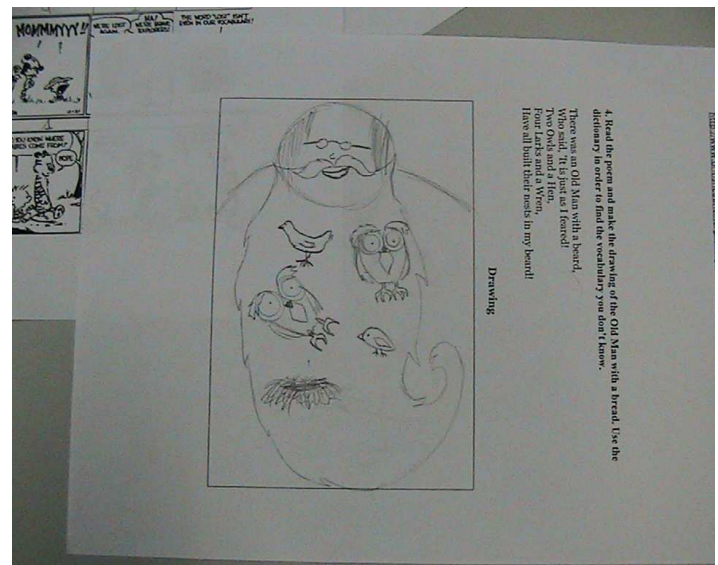
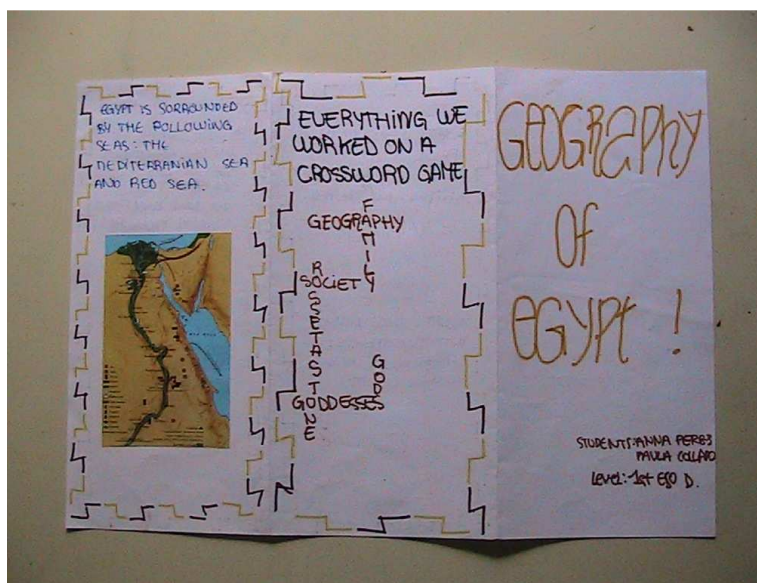Leaflet presentation, pair work

Gods and goddesses activity, group work

Pyramids and mummies leaflet, pair work

Increasing Reading awareness activity, group work

Ancient Egypt geography leaflet, final output of the Teaching unit, pair work

Annex 5: Transcription

001	X:	Boarding school	
002	M:	( )	
003	S:	It is ( )	
004	S:	Em… mira no (1) a vere Sergi n'hi han [un]	*((Counting the papers on the wall))*
005	M:	[però hem de buscar tots aquests dos]	
006	S:	Dos, n'hi ha fins a tres	
007	X:	( )	
008	T1:	Did you understand what you have to do?	*((Teacher 1 appears in the scene))*
009	S:	Yes	
010	T1:	Yes? Have you read all this?	
011	M:	Hem de fer	
012	T1:	You have read all the questions, I mean all the questions and then you have to answer ( ) =	*((Pointing at the papers on the wall, she realises she is making a mistake and then points at the question sheet Pointing at the papers on the wall))*
013	T1:	= because here are the answers and they are more or less in order, ok?	
014	S:	( )	*((Points at a sentence on the text asking a question that we can not hear))*
015	T1:	[This is the sentence for you to write this.]	
016	M:	[nine, ten]	*((Reading the text))*
017		((Teacher 1 leaves))	
018	X:	Ages and a complete Summer Summerhill Education. (3.0) Day pupils may come at five years.	*((Reading the text while the girls check the question sheet))*
019	M:	A vere hi posa	
020	X:	Some children are very happy (1.0) may come at five years.	*((Keeps on reading. Points at the text to show the other students))*
021	M:	Hi posa many children	*((Reading another line of the text))*
022	X:	There are there are	
023	S:	Acaben now they end (.)	
024	M:	!quan comencen	
025	X:	Mentida. A complete summer location usually ends at about (0.5)	
026	M:	A no no no no es perquè acaba amb 17 anys però comença	
027	S:	((Points at a sentence on the text))	
028	M:	I llavors per què hi han posat això ?	
029	X:	No venen venen a 5 però ma venen	
030	S:	Leaving és acaba no ? (2.0)	
031	X:	No però aqui diu usually [ends] ends	
032	M:	[ends]	
033	M:	Ends és acabar	
034	S:	Pues comencen amb cinc?	
035	X:	Vale (2.0) sinó posa cinc and	

036	T2:	How is it going?
037	X:	One question
038	T2:	Tell me
039	X:	In here pupils they come at five years, here I don't understand
040	S:	Aquí diu que tenen normalment no?
041	T2:	Here it says that, do you know what's a pupil?
042	S:	((students nod))
043	T2:	You are a [pupil of the school]
044	X:	[sí, ah sí ah]
045	S:	(xxx)
046	X:	no ah
047	T2:	It's the same as a student
048	X:	Això
049	T2:	so, because, did you see that this is a boarding school. It's a day school and a boarding school. Day school is your school and a boarding school -
050	X:	Internat
051	T2:	yes, very well. So, so, the students that only go to [day school] they start
052	X:	[day school]
053		((Students go to check their question sheet))
054	T2	So?
055	M	Five
056	T2	Or nine
057		((Teacher 2 leaves and students write down the answer))

Transcription symbols

Indicates the point of overlap onset	**[**
Indicates the point of overlap termination	**]**
An interval between two utterances	**(3.2)**
A very short untimeded pause	**(.)**
Unclear or unintelligible speech	**(xxx)**
Non verbal actions	**(( ))**
Underlining indicates speaker emphasis	**<u>word</u>**

Annex 6: Transcription setting

The Very Basics

Where are we?

Summerhill School is in Leiston, Suffolk, in the United Kingdom. That's in the countryside of East Anglia, 10 minutes from the North Sea. Two hours from London.

Day school, Boarding school?

It is a boarding school, but we do have day pupils. Most are local but a few have moved here specifically to be near the school. It is common for parents of younger children to move here for the first few terms so that the child can start off as a 'day student'.

Ages and a Complete Summerhill Education

Day pupils may come at five years. Some children are very happy to board about six or seven. Others need more time and come later. Many children begin at 9, 10 or 11 years of age. A complete Summerhill education usually ends at about 17 years of age. Leaving early is not advised. This is not a school for a 'temporary'

break from the mainstream. A Summerhill education offers each child a sequence of important social, emotional and intellectual experiences that should not be missed ! Summerhill does not enroll children over 11 years of age.

An International School
Summerhill is an international school with children from England, Germany, Norway, Holland, Switzerland, Israel, America, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, France etc. This makes for a wonderful multi-cultural environment.

How Big?
There are usually between 80 to 90 children and 12 full time staff. There are several part time staff and many other adults who help keep the school running smoothly. Summerhill is a small, caring community of children and adults.
The school is set on 11 acres of very beautiful woods and fields.

Why do parents send their children to Summerhill?

Most parents believe in the philosophy of the school, but some parents are looking for an alternative option for their children after dissatisfaction with mainstream education. Generally, the mix of children at Summerhill is the same as at any other school. Summerhill is not a school for problem children. Having said that, Summerhill's ability to allow children to experience natural emotional, social and intellectual growth often has an extraordinary effect on self-esteem and positive personal development.

What particular qualities do you expect Summerhill pupils to acquire?

Obviously this depends to some degree upon the personal circumstances of the child before and during their stay at the school. Some children who have come to the school with problems are still going to have to deal with many of them into their adult lives. Summerhill

©

has a very good record of helping such children, but it is no magic "fix" or utopian cure-all.

Qualities we typically see in Summerhill pupils are: Self-esteem, tolerance, integrity, fairness, understanding, sensitivity, compassion, assertiveness, creativity, individuality, humour, self-motivation, and common sense.

How much are parents involved in the school?

There is no regular parent involvement at Summerhill. They are able to visit during term time on a limited basis and there is a newsletter sent to parents each holiday.

In spite of this, many parents become good friends and participate from a distance with their approval and with anything helpful they can offer. We also have a really nice summer half-term weekend when parents are invited to come and stay for a few days and relax – but the philosophy of the school is to encourage children to live their own lives, and make their

own decisions. The children value their independence and the vast majority prefer parents not to be a part of it.

When Can Children Begin at Summerhill?
Once accepted, children can begin at the beginning of any new term. (September , January, April)

Holidays?
Summerhill, with many international students, has generous holidays to allow all students to travel home for realistic periods of time : 5 weeks at Christmas, 5 weeks in the spring and 9 weeks each summer.

2 Read 'The Very Basics' and answer the questions.

a) Is Summerhill School in the UK?

b) How old are the children when they start the school?

c) How old are the children when they leave the school?

d) How many children are usually in the school?

e) Is the school in the town or the country?

f) Which months can children begin at the school?

g) How many weeks holiday do the students have each year?

Annex 7: Vignette CD