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A Zombie Apocalypse:
Developmental stages in L2 learners' interactional skills when
working in small groups



**Universitat Autònoma
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Master's Dissertation

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Abstract

This paper focuses on learners' talk while doing group work in grade 8 of secondary education in Catalonia. It aims to gain understanding of the interactional strategies deployed by the students as they try to reach an agreement. The basis of the study is Mercer's definition of exploratory talk, as well as Storch's concept of equality and her patterns of interaction. The analysis reveals that the groups observed show distinct proficiency levels in their deployment of interactional strategies. The study concludes with a pedagogical proposal designed in collaboration with Algueró 2020 so that the activity can be improved for future occasions.

Key words

Interactional competence, Collaboration, Classroom-Based Research, Exploratory Talk, Equality.

Resum

Aquest treball es centra en la parla dels estudiants de segon d'ESO a Catalunya mentre duen a terme el treball en grup. L'article intenta entendre millor les estratègies interaccionals utilitzades pels estudiants mentre intenten arribar a un acord. La base de l'estudi és la definició de conversa exploratòria oferta per Mercer, així com també el concepte d'igualtat de Storch i els seus patrons d'interacció. L'anàlisi demostra que els grups observats mostren diversos nivells de domini en el seu desplegament d'estratègies interaccionals. L'estudi conclou amb una proposta pedagògica dissenyada conjuntament amb Algueró 2020 per tal que l'activitat pugui ser millorada en futures ocasions.

Paraules clau

Competència interaccional, Col·laboració, Investigacions basades en l'aula, Conversa Exploratòria, Igualtat.

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1. Introduction

The aim of this Master's Dissertation is to study the students' abilities in terms of interactional competences by means of classroom observation, focusing on group work and the strategies and the language the participants use when attempting to reach an agreement. In particular, this paper conducts some research on the concept of exploratory talk according to Mercer, as well as other authors' findings and conceptions of the different types of talk within the classroom and the impact they have on the process of learning. Therefore, Vygotsky's ideas are mentioned, as well as such techniques as scaffolding or co-construction of meaning. An analysis of Storch's bases of equality in conversation and participation strategies is also covered to carry out the analysis. By means of the observation of a recording of an activity performed during the Practicum period in a Catalan high school with Grade 8 (ESO Year 2) students, the study focuses on the students' strengths and weaknesses in terms of interactional skills in their L2.

The relevance of classroom observation is key in action-research projects. In order to be aware of one's teaching, and to come up with improvement plans, it is precise to study the context of the classroom. This is directly linked to both self- and peer-observation, thus, collaboration and cooperation with other teachers are key to obtain testable evidence so that one can later recall and reflect on one's actions as a teacher, as well as on their students' responses to the observed teaching. This study is part of a larger research project in which I have been working with my colleague Algueró. Whereas my partner focuses on Storch's equality and mutuality, I devote my study to Mercer's exploratory talk and Storch's patterns of interaction.

1.1 Objectives and research questions

As a student-teacher, the ultimate goal of this exploratory paper is to improve my teaching skills in relation to how:

- To observe and analyse the students' group work and techniques and patterns of collaboration and cooperation.
- To examine whether all the ideas and perspectives are treated with respect so as to create an atmosphere of trust. To detect a difference between disrespectful comments and constructive criticism.
- To study the way students listen, and to note whether they participate actively, sharing their opinions and knowledge in a critical, challenging way.
- To note if the participants offer substantial reasons and relevant pieces of information to defend their view on a particular idea.

In order to gain understanding on how to improve the previous skills, in the present paper I will attempt to answer the research questions below:

RQ1. Do students use exploratory talk in order to solve the task related problems?

RQ1.1. Do they discuss in a critical, challenging way?

RQ1.1.1. Do students use language patterns and keywords that suggest the presence of exploratory talk?

RQ1.2. Do they accept critically and agree on what the other students have said?

RQ2. Can patterns of interactions be observed in the conversations held by each group?

RQ2.1. Is the amount of talk distributed evenly among all participants?

RQ2.2. How are responsibilities distributed among students?

RQ2.3. Do the students interchange the roles established by Storch's patterns of interaction?

2. Context

This data gathering was carried out alongside my partner Algueró, during the second practicum period in the high school Frederic Soler, located in a city within the Barcelona's industrial belt. The school, a high complexity centre, is found inside a primary school building and even though for the moment they only count with the first two years of secondary education (Grade 7 and 8, that is, 1st and 2nd of ESO), the team of teachers have the ambitious goal to keep on growing until they can offer Vocational Education and Training (CFGM).

Students work uniquely with computers, and all the tasks, planning, and assessment information is available for them in Google Drive. Apart from this ground-breaking methodology, classes are organized in a non-traditional way: there is no teacher's table, no separate desks for students. They are always divided in groups of four or five in order to work in the different projects, but the whole group of students is found within the same classroom: 53 students in 1st ESO, and 56 in 2nd ESO classrooms, respectively. All projects are interdisciplinary and teachers intend to change the language on which they are working in each project, so that if they work on a project related to health and they are developing it in Catalan, on the following one, when they work on migrations, the language they will develop it in will be English. Co-teaching, then, is a crucial aspect in IJC, as all teachers work together to plan and develop all projects. Usually, each project has one or two leaders, and several supporters.

3. Theoretical Framework

Exploratory talk is defined as “a specific mode of social interactions in the class” (Tartas, V. Giglio, M. 2016: 421). Its participants are said to “engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas”, as well as to give reasons and offer alternatives when challenging each other’s proposals. They are also expected to provide relevant information which is “offered for joint consideration”, in order for them to reach agreements.

According to Mercer (2008), there exist three different types of talk in a classroom when considering group work discussion and interactional strategies. If students do not comment on or develop their ideas and simply disagree with each other, Mercer puts forward the concept of “disputational talk”. The students set a competitive atmosphere, which is filled with quite poor and basic interactions, and where there is no presence of constructive criticism. In the second kind of talk, students do try to elaborate their ideas and share their views and knowledge, but they do not go further. Mercer uses the term “cumulative talk” when students simply accept and agree with others, but they do not evaluate their own nor their peers’ perspectives from a critical point of view. If taught properly, students are eventually able to develop “exploratory talk”, which Mercer describes as an “atmosphere of trust” (Mercer. 2008:11), where its participants listen actively and provide others with relevant information. At this stage, students are willing to ask and answer challenging questions, by alluding to valid, critical reasons, and there is a sense of cooperation and shared purpose.

In that sense, Mercer (2015) firmly claims that exploratory talk is the only means that will lead to positive educational outcomes when talking about interaction, as collaboration and discourse are mediated by the “reasoned discussion” (Mercer. 2015:304) that characterises exploratory talk. This particular kind of talk not only allows students to acquire and develop abilities such as decision-making, but it also offers the reasoning skills they will need to use throughout their lives, in the majority of discussions they participate in. So as to develop a proper research, Mercer expresses the need to draw special attention to the language used by students to collaborate and engage with each other. He puts forward the concept of “interthinking” which he defines as “the shared use of spoken language to create meaning and achieve joint goals” (Littleton & Mercer. 2013 in Mercer. 2015: 306) as an essential piece of exploratory talk.

Based on her analysis in young learners’ interactions, E. W. Patterson (2018) associates the concept of exploratory talk with “high levels of cognitive challenge” (Patterson. 2018:264) in terms of collaborative group work. Patterson highlights the importance of considering scaffolding and co-construction of meaning when analysing exploratory talk so as to achieve a superior stage of learning. As claimed by Vygotsky (1978), the learning process of a child develops through interaction with other members of society. In order for that interaction to be efficient, the presence of an expert to guide, help and adapt to the child’s needs is required. This assistance, which tends to be gradual and casual, is referred to as “scaffolding.” Continuing on his emphasis on language, Mercer (1996) picks up Vygotsky’s fixation in language as well and highlights the importance of group interactions to solve problems to the point that, as himself claims, “the individuals of the group would not be able to

achieve in isolation.” He proposes the concept of Intermental Development Zone (IDZ) to refer to the interaction in which language “becomes a dynamic scaffolding technique” (Fernandez et al. 2002 in Patterson. 2018:266) to enable collaboration.

Apart from this technique, the model of co-construction of understanding, which Mercer coined in his 1996 study, and Patterson terms as “the new shared understanding that has developed through inter-subjective interaction”, is a way to conceptualize students’ interactions when their “dialogue involves the challenge of ideas” (Patterson. 2018:266) which automatically makes their learning more efficient. In his study, Donato (1988) discovered a “pooling of resources” used by a group of students who used their knowledge on a particular topic to co-construct resolutions and to eventually reach a consensus. The author refers to such concept as “collective scaffolding” and alludes to Vygotsky’s theory (1978) of cognitive development, thus, highlighting the importance of society and social interactions when learning and developing language as individuals. (Donato 1988 and Vygotsky 1978 in Storch 2002: 120)

Recalling Mercer’s three types of talk, Rojas-Drummond and Zapata (2004) developed some research into the potential of ground rules for exploratory talk to be implemented, basing their analysis on Wegerif, Mercer and Dawes’ (1999) idea that “teaching ground rules for talk results in higher level exchanges” (Mercer and Dawes. 1999 in Rojas-Drummond and Zapata 2004: 542). The ground rules were established following Mercer’s definition of the concept of exploratory talk, whilst keeping in mind the fact that as mutual understandings, they could be considered as a type of scaffolding. They were presented as follows (Rojas and Zapata. 2004:545):

- (1) to express and share ideas
- (2) to listen and respect opinions of group members
- (3) to argue and justify their opinions
- (4) to criticise constructively, asking others to justify their opinions
- (5) to try to reach consensus

Even though there have existed several researchers who have framed these rules as negative, alluding to the impact they could have on students' motivation and freedom, the vast majority of researchers agree that these rules are not constraining, but a mere guide for participants to achieve a richer type of conversation, as well as an encouragement for students to "engage critically and constructively" (Rojas-Drummond, Zapata. 2004: 541) with each other's points of view and ideas. Rojas-Drummond and Zapata conclude their study by demanding the necessity of the participants to "understand and actively engage" (Rojas-Drummond, Zapata. 2004: 542) with these rules in order to develop and achieve exploratory talk.

On another level of observation analysis, Storch (2002) distinguishes four different patterns of interaction in terms of equality and mutuality. While mutuality makes reference to "the level of engagement with each other's contribution" (Storch. 2002: 127), according to Damon and Phelps (1989) equality is not only a matter of turn-taking, but "an equal degree of control over the direction of a task", (van Lier. 1996 in Storch. 2002:127) that is, the participants' authority over the arranged activity. Observers talk about a fruitful interaction with a high level of equality when students try to "take directions from each other" (Storch. 2002:127) and work together to reach the expected consensus.

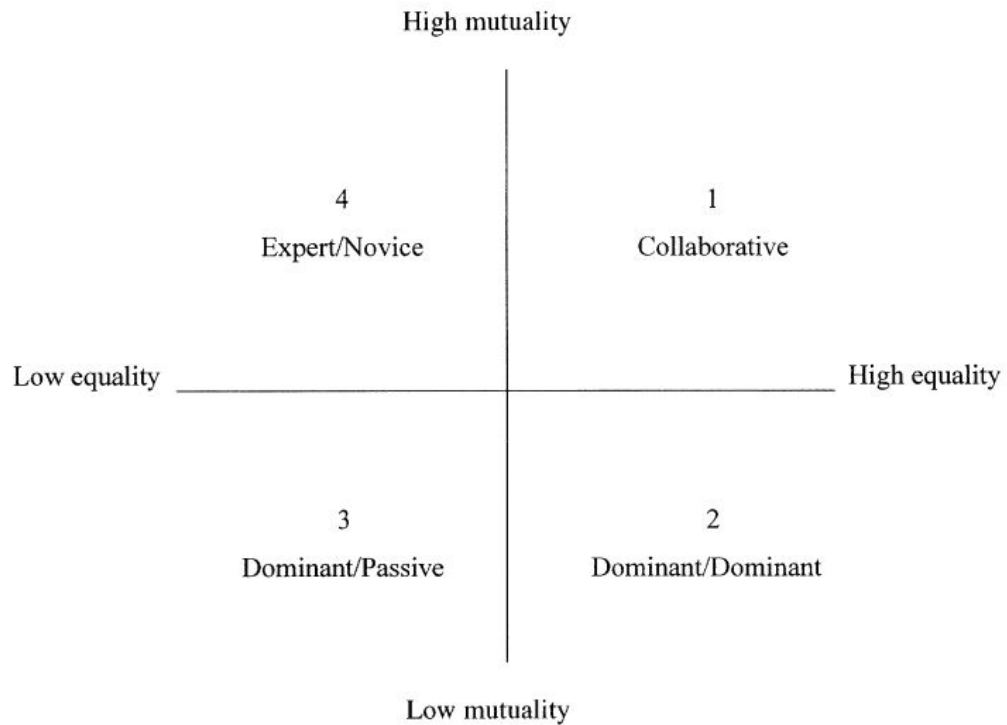


Figure 1. Storch's Dyadic Interaction Model (2002:128).

Storch terms an interaction as “collaborative” when the participants engage and contribute with each other’s arguments, the discourse employed is cohesive (students repeat or extend on one another’s contributions) and sometimes unpredictable. When the participants contribute in the discussion, but do not collaborate, Storch talks about a “dominant/dominant” pattern of interaction. There is no willingness to negotiate and the discourse is filled with disagreements; therefore, there is an inability to reach consensus. These two patterns are defined by Mercer (2008) as exploratory and disputational talk, respectively. (See above). The third pattern Storch puts forward is the “dominant/passive” interaction, which takes place when one or two participants dominate and appropriate the discourse, and the other(s) participant(s) do(es) little attempts to engage in the conversation. Finally, in a dialogue where one or two of the participants assume the role of the leader, Storch

coins an “expert/novice” interaction. Unlike the previous pattern, the “expert” intends to involve the “novice” by offering help and plenty of opportunities to participate in the conversation. On their study on group interactions, Damon and Phelps (1989) distinguished three distinct patterns of peer interaction: “cooperative learning”, “peer tutoring” and “peer collaboration”.

Mercer (1996) states that research into collaborative learning can be classified into two main groups: “an experimental approach” based on the set of interventions during group work, or an “analysis of detailed observations” of the interactions taking place during a collaborative task. The nature of this study clearly belongs to the second type of research Mercer puts forward. When considering the analysis of classroom talk, Mercer (2010) distinguishes between two different methods regarding the results they provide: quantitative and qualitative. Whereas in the former, particular words or patterns are analysed in order to obtain a systematic observation, the latter tends to reveal the “nature, patterns, and quality” of the interactions. However, he claims that “the combined use of both methods has become more common in educational research.” (Mercer. 2010:8) And this is precisely what this present study intends to do when analysing the presence of exploratory talk in the participants’ interactions, not only focusing on particular keywords or vocabulary employed by the students, but also the patterns of speech and the characteristics that the dialogue they establish has.

4. Methodology

• Overall Methodological Approach

The overall methodological approach employed was classroom-based research. The study was developed from a qualitative method, in particular, an ethnographic view. The conversation was recorded, transcribed and included throughout the analysis part in the format of short illustrative extracts to exemplify the results.

• Data Collection

Teaching Materials

In order to elicit conversation so as to analyse the interaction, an activity called “Zombie Apocalypse” which was designed by some of our peers during the Master’s Course (Castillo, L. López, A. Núñez, C. Saba, N. Vila, E. (2020) was carried out. The students were given 6 pieces of paper (See Appendix 4), each one with a different character, which included a drawing of the person, their name, the skill they had, as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Based on that information, students are supposed to choose 3 characters out of 6 that will accompany them to save humanity in the midst of a Zombie Apocalypse. In order to choose these 3 people, students need to discuss, express their reasons behind picking one character over another one, and finally, reach an agreement with their classmates.



Figure 2. Examples of 2 Characters from the Zombie Apocalypse activity (See All in Appendix 4)

Data Collection Procedure

While the activity was in development (Algueró, H. Cervera, N. 2020) my peer student-teacher Algueró recorded the activity of one group with a video camera, which from now on will be referred to as Group A. In a second implementation of the task, whereas Helena was in charge of the task, I was in charge of video taping a second group, which from now on will be referred to as Group B. Additionally, a voice recorder registered the students' conversation from a closer perspective during the whole process of data collection, so as to make the data more reliable.

- **Participants**

The two groups of Grade 8 students (ESO, Year 2) attend the same high school and are formed by two girls and two boys each. They all are in the same class and go to the same classroom, due to the school's very innovative and participative style of working and distribution of spaces. The activity was performed during their Speaking period, when the class is divided in two halves: the advanced students (Group A), and the students who have a lower domain of English (Group B), and therefore, a group of students with fewer interactional skills in their L2. The eight students were handpicked with the help of our mentor in the school.

- **Data Treatment**

The transcription of the recording has been carried out with the help of both the video and the audio recording, and particular fragments extracted from the complete transcriptions (See Appendixes 1, 2 and 3) are to be found throughout the analysis.

- **Analytical Approach**

In order to answer the first research question regarding the presence of exploratory talk, the following steps have been followed:

- **Step 1:** The video / voice recordings have been transcribed, analysed and explored.

- **Step 2:** The existence of exploratory talk (Mercer. 2008) was determined by identifying:

2A) particular keywords the participants may utter while talking that reveal a certain approach to the conversation (Mercer. 2015). The keywords picked are: *because, so, therefore, think, but, and if*. The word *for* was added to the list for reasons that will be explained at a later stage.

2B) particular verbs and verb phrases the participants may utter while discussing that are employed to express their opinion, to defend their position, or to challenge each other's arguments. The words and phrases picked are: *want, need, can, I prefer...because, I think it's better...than..., and but the problem is*.

The occurrence of all relevant terms was counted and fragments of the conversation where they emerged were identified for more in-depth analysis.

- **Step 3:** Relevant characteristics of exploratory talk have been identified by using indicators developed by Patterson (2018), Mercer (2008) and Rojas-Drummond and Zapata (2004). These characteristics are:

- The views of the members of the group are respected, valued and actively considered, but / and.

- The proposals are constructively challenged, and may even be counter-challenged

- Reasons are given for challenges

- Decision-making in response to challenge is
- Agreement and consensus are sought
- **Step 4:** The occurrence of such characteristics was counted, and fragments of the conversation where they emerged were identified for more in-depth analysis.

When coming to the second research question concerning Storch's patterns of interaction, the following type of analysis has been performed:

- **Step 1:** The video / voice recordings have been transcribed, analysed and explored.
- **Step 2:** The distinction of patterns of interaction (Storch. 2002) was determined by identifying Storch's roles in collaboration with Damon and Phelps (1989) patterns of peer interaction and comparing Group A's utterances to Group B's.
- **Step 3:** Fragments of the conversation were included to keep the arguments more realistic and illustrated.

- **Ethical issues**

The ethical nature of the research has been ensured before and after the data recollection. First, the participants were asked for their consent as well as the school's, and then, they were told about the purpose of the activity. In this report, the anonymity of the participants has been preserved in the transcription, as well as the school's for privacy reasons. This paper has also a gender-sensitive approach, as there is an equal number of male and female students. The use of FS for female student and MS for male student may contribute to provide visibility to participants of both genders.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Use of Language to Identify Exploratory Talk

In relation to the presence of exploratory talk in the participants' interactions, analysing it from the point of view of the language employed, Mercer's research (2015) has been taken into account. He focuses on the typology of talk used by the participants to create meaning in their conversation. He claims that employing "concordance analysis for keywords" (Mercer. 2015: 311) is one of the most valid methods to identify whether exploratory talk is present in any group discussion.

Word	Occurrences	
Because	10	8
So	5	0
Therefore	0	0
Think	12	0
But	11	0
If	3	0
For	5	4
	Group A	Group B

Table 1. Analysis of Exploratory Talk Through Keywords (Mercer 2015:312)

Note that the word "for" has been added by the author's own choice in this study and was not to be found in Mercer's. The reason behind this decision is its similarity in meaning to the other linking words from the original grid to be analysed as conversation linkers, or to explain or justify one's reason to a certain point of view.

Fragment 1.

1. MS1: *His tool is so useful for whatever you want to do [...] to kill zombies is very good [...] or to destroy something.*

In fragment 1, MS1 (group A) is defending the choice of a character based on their tool (in this case, an axe), and to do so, they use prepositions such as “for” and “to”.

Also note that more proficient words such as “therefore” were not even employed. Apart from that, there are two words from the list which are only used by one student from group A: “if” and “think”. The other students do express their opinion, but they do not use the verb “think” to express it. These facts do not only prove that the more basic the word is, the more often the students will be using it in conversation, but also that sometimes, participants do not make use of a verb they know perfectly well, just because it comes naturally not to say it, or because they simply forget about it. Nonetheless, they are perfectly capable to express their ideas.

Fragment 2.

1. MS1: *The drone... I think drone is so useful because emm it's it it it works to watch the zombies and where them out, where are them out.*
2. FS2: *That's true.*
3. FS3: *And she ha... can hack ee anything and can repair aa...*

In fragment 2, while MS1 uses the verb “think” to express their opinion, FS2 simply agrees, and FS3 intervenes by employing the modal verb “can”, which also denotes the presence of exploratory talk through language, but not from the particular keywords Mercer put forward in his analysis.

In group B most of these keywords as Mercer terms them are not even employed. The most used word is “because”, but it is worth mentioning that is mostly uttered by MS1, who throughout the conversation proves to have the higher domain of English. This particular student uses words such as “because” and “for” to express their opinion or consequence of a fact to defend their view. (See Fragment 3).

Fragment 3.

1. *MS1: This is because have a helicopter for escaper.*
2. *T: Escape.*
3. *MS1: For escape.*
4. *T: Escaping.*
5. *MS1: For skipping, escaping, and this is because is very strong.*

Throughout the conversation, the participants in group A employ a wide range of verbs or verb phrases to express their opinion, to defend their position by talking about the characters’ abilities or strengths. They also employ particular phrases to challenge the other students’ arguments and reasons for a particular choice.

Word / Phrase	Occurrences	
Want	3	0
Need	4	0
Can	21	2
I prefer... because...	5	0
I think it's better... than...	1	0
But the problem is...	2	0
	Group A	Group B

Table 2. Analysis of Exploratory Talk Through Verbs and Verb Phrases.

Table 2 clearly portrays the difference between the two groups. While the students in group A (with a higher domain of spoken English) employ all kinds of grammatical structures to express their thoughts, the second group of students (Group B) barely use the modal verb “can”. (See Fragment 4).

Fragment 4.

1. *T: What does he have?*
2. *FS4: A radio.*
3. *T: A radio, and what are his strengths?*
4. *FS4: He can... can xxx music.*

5.2. Characteristics to Identify Exploratory Talk

In relation to the presence of exploratory talk analysing it from its features, the focus has been put on E.W. Patterson. Adapting Mercer’s criteria for identifying exploratory talk (2007, 2003 and 1996), she distances from language and puts forward a set of characteristics which enables researchers to differentiate the presence of exploratory talk in the early years from the higher educational stages. This analysis also considers Rojas-Drummond and Zapata’s (2004) rules to identify whether exploratory talk is being implemented or not.

In this particular study, Table 3 has been readjusted so as to establish a comparison between the more advanced students (Group A), and the ones with fewer interactional skills (Group B). Note that the early years’ characteristics are expressed with the letter “A”, while the letter “A+” indicates the higher stages’. When the group proves not to use any of the features, a hyphen or an “A-” symbol are used.

Characteristics	Group A	Group B
The views of the members of the group are respected, valued and actively considered, but / and	Sought (A+)	-
The proposals are constructively challenged, and may even be counter-challenged	Verbally (A+)	with gestures / face or body expressions (A)
Reasons are given for challenges	Almost always (A+)	-
Decision-making in response to challenge is	Collaborative (A+)	Predominantly individual (A)
Agreement and consensus are sought	Almost always (A+)	-

Table 3. Analysis of Characteristics of Exploratory Talk in Different Learning Episodes.

Fragment 5.

1. FS2: *And Marta? Marta is very strong.*
2. MS1: *I think Marta it's, is useful because she has an axe and I think it's...*
3. FS3: *Es impulsiva.*
4. MS1: *Yes, but she has, have and axe, and...*
5. FS2: *She's strong.*
6. MS1: *His tool is so useful for whatever you want to do.*
7. MS4: *To kill zombies is very good.*
8. FS3: *Yes.*

In Fragment 5 (group A), the presence of exploratory talk in higher stages (according to Patterson 2018) can be observed as all the students are participating in the decision of keeping one of the characters, Marta, or discarding it. FS3 (turn 3) did not completely agree with taking Marta, but the other students gave plenty of reasons to keep it and they convinced the doubtful student (turn 8). Thus, first the view of the students is considered, then, their proposals are challenged, and finally, not only reasons are given and decision-making is collaborative, but also a consensus is eventually sought, with the agreement of all the participants.

On the other hand, in Fragment 6 (group B's conversation), the total opposite can be seen. First of all, only two students (MS1 and MS2) are taking part in decision-making and they are not even trying to include the other two participants (FS3 and FS4). Even if they do give reasons for their choices, they do not reach a consensus at the end of this part of the interaction (turns 7 and 8).

Fragment 6.

1. MS1: *This [pointing] because hack hacking a...*
2. MS2: **segurity.*
3. MS1: **segurity. [Pointing to another paper] This because...for being...*
4. MS2 *[Whispering to S1's ear].*
5. MS1: *Because negotiation skills, this [pointing to another] because medical xxx and this [pointing to another] because very strong.*
6. T: *Ok, so you have 1, 2, 3, and 4.*
7. MS1: *No, this, this, and this.*
8. MS2: *No.*

Note that the main difference between group A and B is due to the amount of talk produced. Also, whereas the more advanced group (Group A) searches for each others' views and confronts them with arguments when expressed, group B simply agrees with one another's ideas, usually by nodding their heads. The making of decisions tends to be less individualistic in group A, in which the agreement is almost always reached in collaboration, after providing several reasons. (See Fragment 7).

Fragment 7.

1. *T: Yeah? The hacker? Are you sure? Do you want to kick her out as well? [Looking at S4].*
2. *FS4: [Shakes head].*
3. *T: No?*
4. *FS4: [Nods]*

5.3. Distinct Patterns of Interaction

When coming to the distinction of patterns of interaction by Storch (2002) in terms of equality and mutuality while observing pair work, this study moves the scope to group tasks, drawing on the work of Damon and Phelps (1989). Putting together both authors' definitions and findings on each category, this study intends to term the particular interaction each of the two analysed groups developed.

Fragment 8.

1. *MS1: She had a helicopter.*
2. *FS2: But ee she doesn't.*
3. *MS1: She cannot drive the helicopter.*

Fragment 9.

1. *MS4: Axe to kill zombies is most important and Connor ee.. falla?*
2. *MS1: Miss.*

In Fragments 8 and 9 (group A's interaction), one student is helping another produce what they mean. This is a clear example of "peer collaboration" (Damon and Phelps:1989) or a portray of the pattern "expert/novice" that Storch puts forward.

Fragment 10.

1. *FS3: Es pesimista.*
2. *MS4: He's a pessimist.*

Fragment 11.

1. *MS4: I prefer Connor because I have a... [pretends to shoot a gun]*
2. *FS2 and FS3: a gun.*

Continuing with group A, in Fragment 10, FS3 expresses their reasoning in their L1, and MS4 intervenes to help them offering a translation in English. This could be an instance of the "expert/novice" pattern that Storch coined in her study. Nonetheless, in fragment 11, the very same student who played the role of the 'expert' before, is unable to find the word they want to say, either because they can not remember it, or they just do not know it. Then, the roles change and the student who was before the 'expert' turns into the 'novice'. Therefore, Storch's roles are interchangeable, and in this particular study, some of the participants are to be found in both roles.

Meanwhile, in group B, there is the intention to help FS4 by MS2, as they try to translate what the teacher has asked (See fragment 12).

Fragment 12.

1. *T: Do you want her in your team or not?*
2. *MS1: Not.*
3. *FS3: No.*
4. *FS4: [Shakes head].*
5. *MS2: [To FS4] Que si la sacamos o se queda.*
6. *FS3 and FS4: No [Shaking head]*

The lack of material to analyse from Group B hinders the resolution to which kind of pattern they belong to when coming to the interaction they establish, as the dialogue is too poor to take into account, since the conversation is mainly led by the teacher, and there are not enough defining interventions by the participants. As noted above, the overwhelming difference between the two groups is due to a lack of conversation, domain and fluency in their L2. Whereas group A barely stop talking, and practically do not need the teacher's assistance for over ten minutes, group B is most of the time in silence (See Appendixes 2 and 3), either because the teacher is trying to elicit conversation, or because the students are not able to express in their L2 what they mean. It should be mentioned that their activity lasts only for 6 minutes, in comparison to the more advanced group A's 10 minutes-long conversation. The few amount of talk in group B results in a short, poor conversation, and therefore is presented as a weakness, and a setback to properly analyse their interaction.

6. Conclusions and Pedagogical Proposal

To formulate a straightforward answer to the initial research questions, there is presence of exploratory talk to solve the task related problems in both groups' interactions. Even if in group B it is hardly visible, there are a few instances which, if properly developed, would finally lead to a richer type of conversation. Whereas group B could be said to generally stay in the cumulative talk stage, as they barely agree on what the other students have said, group A do discuss in a critical, challenging way, and therefore, their conversation could be labelled as an instance of exploratory talk.

In relation to whether students use language patterns and keywords that suggest the presence of exploratory talk, it has been concluded that a deeper analysis ought to be carried out in order to fully state whether the language employed by the students is empirical enough to label their talk as exploratory. Nonetheless, it is true that throughout the results, there is not only an analysis of exploratory talk from the scope of language, but also from its characteristics as previously studied by several researchers such as Mercer (2008), Patterson (2018) and Rojas-Drummond and Zapata (2004). Sometimes during conversation, the participants tend to get nervous and are unable to find the certain word they want to express in their L2, but, instead of using that word, they express their view with another sentence or simply with a gesture. This proves us that these students are employing exploratory talk in their conversation, without considering their usage of language, but the characteristics observed in their responses.

In relation to whether Storch's patterns of interaction are to be observed in the participants' conversations, it has been found that Group A could be said to display the "expert/novice" pattern of interaction. Results in Group B have been impossible to categorize due to the lack of dialogue and interaction among the students. When coming to the distribution of talk, - it should be recalled that both groups are mixed and formed of two girls and two boys each. - it has been found that whilst in the first group (Group A), the amount of talk and the responsibilities are properly distributed among all the participants regardless of their level of expertise or their gender, it is quite different in the second group of students (Group B), where the boys mainly lead the conversation, and the amount of talk or expressions the girls produce to intervene is hardly present. Last but not least, this study has *de facto* determined that Storch's roles in her patterns of interaction can definitely be interchangeable during conversation (see 5.3).

This study is presented in complementation to Algueró 2020's study, and as such, the list of pedagogical proposals and improvement plan for future implementations of exploratory talk and equality has been agreed and put together in collaboration.

One	Allotting roles within the activity to the students could be a valid idea for future research, in order for them to improve this uneven distribution or inequality of talk and to participate equally. The students who do not talk much, either because they do not know how to express some ideas in their L2, or because they do not feel like intervening or are not allowed to do so by the other participants, could be allotted the role of "Mr. Mrs. Quarrelsome" and their objective would be to question and disagree -
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	<p>always with proper arguments- with every single idea their peers proposed, or simply uttering the word “why”. Another task for Mr/Mss Quarrelsome could be to perform as a moderator of the conversation. They could assign speaking turns and they could involve those participants that are more quiet, asking them their opinion. At the very same time, this is a useful tool to establish a wider range of exploratory talk instances, as one of the characteristics this particular kind of talk has is to give substantial reasons for one’s arguments and to challenge and counter-challenge each other’s proposals.</p>
Two	<p>Distributing cards which told the students when to agree or to disagree with their peers’ views, or when to speak or be silent. As the activity develops, the cards are constantly interchanged among the students, so as to make them adopt different roles. Those cards could also include a few examples of the typical sentences to express agreement or disagreement. Another way to promote the use of this structures could be to print and pin those sentences around the classroom so that students could read them anytime, so as to keep the activity more dynamic and in motion, and as a results, to have more motivated students.</p>
Three	<p>Providing the students with any object, that, when given to them, either makes them talk or keep could be valid to equally distribute the amount of talk among the participants. Both 3 and 4 points would probably not only equally distribute the amount of talk amongst the participants, but also it</p>

	would keep the interaction more active and rich, and it would possibly, once again, include a few more instances of exploratory talk.
Four	Setting topics that are close and relevant to the students and make them research about the topic beforehand would also contribute to the developing of the activity. Conversation flows easier when every participant has thought about the topic. This extra time to prepare helps students to come up with arguments that even if they are in their L1, they are more likely to be able to produce them in the target language.
Five	Organizing a Debate League might be a valid idea in the long-run to keep the students' interest in interaction alive.
Six	In addition, it would be advisable to mix different levels when designing the groups. Students with more abilities with the language should be paired with students who have more difficulties. Both expert and novice would benefit from it since each would be consolidating what knowledge they have; one by having to explain it to a classmate and the other by having the opportunity to be taught by a classmate instead of the teacher. In both cases the learning occurs due to the proximity of vocabulary and closeness in experience.

Table 4. Collaborative Pedagogical Proposal and Improvement plan (with Alguero, 2020)

The initial objectives have all been reached, as there has been the opportunity to observe and analyse different patterns of collaboration and interactions. Therefore, this study is presented as a valuable contribution to the educational

community for classroom observation as well as for the presence of exploratory talk and equality within the classroom. However, it has its limitations and is true that a second deeper analysis would have allowed this study to offer richer conclusions. Nonetheless, this analysis has offered a wide range of real conversation instances to analyse a particular activity, and not only on the students' attitudes and abilities when coming to their spoken English, but also on the author's position as a teacher. Self-observation may sometimes require a daring teacher, and adopting the position of analysing one's own interventions is quite complex at times. This focused analysis has allowed the author to discover a different point of view of not only students' interactions, but also of one's own interventions and their usefulness. Additionally, the development of this study has been carried out alongside Algueró's (2020), and this fact has allowed both student-teachers to learn how to work cooperatively and in collaboration, which will definitely be of usage for future projects.

Personally, after having gone through several studies previously done in classroom observation, there have been a few realisations. First of all, the participants were handpicked, and chosen based on their level of expertise, which can definitely influence or determine the analysis. The usual space was also modified: the two groups of students were moved from their original classroom to another space. Even if not all researchers agree on this fact, some of them do claim that specifically designing an activity for students to develop when the observation is being carried out is not natural, which may also have had an impact on the results.

As a final note, it is worth mentioning that due to the present situation the Covid-19 pandemic has caused, this study has had to go through a series of modifications, and it does not have the original nature intended for it to have.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1

Transcript Notation

Symbols taken from the Jeffersonian Transcript Notation System.

T	Teacher
SS	Students
MS1	Male Student One
FS2	Female Student Two
FS3	Female Student Three
MS4	Male Student Four
MS1	Male Student One
MS2	Male Student Two
FS3	Female Student Three
FS4	Female Student Four
xxx	Speech which is unclear or in doubt in the transcript
()	Annotation of non-verbal activity
<i>Italics</i>	Talking on another language

APPENDIX 2

Group A Transcription of the Recording

1. T: OK, So, thanks for helping us. This is for a University project, thank you for your
2. collaboration. The problem is: there has been a Zombie Apocalypse
3. FS3: Woo
4. T: So, the world is dying. And, you are 4 people who have been chosen to help all
5. humanity.
6. FS3: Oh
7. T: OK, So, I will give you different people that you can choose, with, each people, with
8. each person with different tools, yeah, and you need to choose, to choose one of these
9. people or two maybe, two or three, two or three people to survive this apocalypse.
10. Yeah?
11. So, focusing, looking, really looking into the tools and their strengths and weaknesses,
12. not so good things they have, you need to choose three of them, there are six, you
13. need to choose three of them to survive the Zombie apocalypse.
14. FS3: Woooo
15. MS1: Oh
16. T: OK
17. Xxx
18. FS3: Això què és?
19. Xxx
20. MS1: I want this.
21. Xxx
22. T: So, for example if M, for example chooses Martin, but N says "No, I prefer Connor"
23. yeah? You have to discuss.
24. MS4: I prefer Connor because... at...mmm
25. FS3: Can
26. MS4: Can a gun... be... but the problem is
27. FS2: He needs a ... to walk
28. MS4: Connor have
29. T: Connor is old
30. Xxx
31. FS3: Agnes is... can hack anything and she can repair electronic things
32. T: That's a good option, aham

33. FS3: But is very absent-minded
34. Xxx
35. T: Ahamm, (laughs) what's absent-minded, do you know?
36. MS4: That you have idea
37. FS2: Absent-minded?
38. MS1: Absent?
39. FS3: xxx
40. T: Aham, exactly
41. FS2: Absent-minded?
42. T: Absent-minded...
43. MS1: What minds, what means "tires"?
44. T: Tires easily... (plays tired, sits down) *uf* I'm so tired, you know?
45. MS1: Ah, okay, okay
46. SS: Ahhh
47. T: Easily, so... (makes a face)
48. MS1: I prefer Nasha because he, she had a first aid-kit
49. T: Aham
50. MS1: And I don't care if she's slow and she, try, tires easily
51. FS3: *Porqué está embarazada*
52. T: Maybe because she's pregnant, right?
53. MS1: And with his son we can *repopulate* the earth.
54. T: Oh, gosh that's a, wow, that's a good idea!
55. FS3: Agnes have a drone with camera
56. T: Aham
57. Xxx
58. MS4: Connor have gun, but the problem Connor have vision problems
59. T: Yeah, Connor has vision problems
60. MS4: *¿Como se dice disparar?*
61. T: When he shoots...
62. MS4: When he shoots Connor don't,
63. T: Can't see, right?
64. MS4: Don't can't see the victim
65. T: Aham..., what about you? What's your choice?
66. FS2: I don't know
67. T: You don't know
68. FS2: I don't know (laughs) Emmm
69. T: Which one do you prefer from the ones they said?

70. FS2: *No me gusta*
71. MS1: She had a helicopter
72. FS2: But ee she doesn't
73. MS1: She, she cannot
74. FS2: No, she cannot pl..
75. MS1: She cannot drive the helicopter
76. T: Exactly, she cannot pilot it
77. MS1: But, the other people can drive, I think
78. T: Exactly, maybe they can. Who knows?
79. Xxx
80. FS3: I don't know what choose
81. T: No?
82. FS3: No
83. MS1: Helicopter, it I think it's so useful for escape or go to everywhere
84. T: Aham, you can go anywhere, you can escape with a helicopter. That's true
85. FS3: Drone is very...
86. T: So, any of these is discarded? Is there one that you don't want? One of these. Which
87. one do you discard?
88. MS1: Maybe...
89. T: Martin?
90. SS: Martin
91. T: The musician?
92. MS4: Yesss
93. MS1: Maybe...
94. FS3: *Es pesimista*
95. MS4: He's a pessimist
96. T: He's a pessimist
97. MS1: Maybe it looks so emm useless I think
98. T: Aha, he's useless
99. (laughing)
100. MS1: because the song is not going to work versus zombies,
101. T: yeah
102. SS: yeah
103. MS1: against zombies, I think it's better an axe than music, I think
104. T: Than a radio, yeah, sure, so Martin is out. Martin is discarded, OK...
105. MS4: Yeah
106. FS2: Martin, emmm

107. MS1: We need Nasha, the first-aid kit, we need the first-aid kit
108. T: Aham
109. MS1: It's so useful for if zombie bite someone she can heal and for... well,
110. Whatever
111. T: Yeah, she helps the others. Yeah, that's true
112. T: So, everyone agrees? Nasha is in?
113. SS: Yes
114. MS1: Nasha is the useful
115. T: OK, Nasha is in. We have one. Now it's between Ginny, Connor...
116. MS4: Ginny have negotiation skills, emm...
117. T: but
118. MS4: But, ee, ee Ginny don't negotiation with zombies, zombie going to kill
119. Ginny
120. T: Exactly, exactly, negotiation skills sometimes are not that useful.
121. FS2: And Marta? Marta is very strong
122. MS1: I think Marta it's, is useful because she has an axe and I think it's
123. FS3: *Es impulsiva*
124. MS1: Yes, but
125. FS2: Yes
126. T: She's impulsive but she has an axe, right?
127. FS2: Mm
128. MS1: She has, have an axe, and
129. FS2: She's strong
130. MS1: His tool is so useful for whatever you want to do
131. MS4: To kill zombies is very good
132. FS3: Yes
133. MS1: Or to destroy something
134. T: So, Marta is in?
135. SS: Yes
136. T: Great! We have two then. Only one missing, though. OK. Which ones you
137. have?
138. MS4: Ginny, Connor and Agnes.
139. T: And Agnes... let's see.
140. MS1: I like Agnes
141. T: Aham
142. FS2: Why? Why?
143. FS3: Because

144. MS1: The drone... I think drone is so useful because emm it's it it it works to
145. watch the zombies and where them out, where are them out.
146. FS2: That's true
147. FS3: And she ha... can hack ee anything and can repair aa
148. MS4: But... yeah
149. T: any electronic things, devices, yeah. That's true.
150. FS3: Si
151. FS2: Yeah
152. MS4: Agnes...
153. MS1: I don't care... I
154. SS: Yes? Yes. OK.
155. T: Yeah? Agnes? Yeah? Then we have three. Very good!
156. MS4: And Connor and Ginny
157. T: And we discard Connor and Ginny, because that's, that's already three. One,
158. two and three, right? Nasha, Marta and Agnes, all girls I love that!
159. FS3: Yes!
160. MS4: I prefer Connor
161. T: (gasps) He prefers Connor
162. MS4: Because *I have* a... gun
163. FS2: a gun
164. FS3: gun
165. MS4: a gun, and ee
166. MS1: It is useful to kill zombies?
167. FS3: Yes,
168. MS4: Yeah
169. FS2: But...
170. FS3: *he can fighting*
171. T: He can fight
172. MS1: Well, but, probably he can give her gun to another one that can shoot
173. Easily
174. T: Aham, because he has vision problems, right?
175. FS2: Yes
176. T: So, we change Connor
177. MS1: Do you want to change *Agner* to... Connor?
178. FS2: Connor
179. MS1: You prefer?
180. FS2: Yeah

181. T: Yeah? OK
182. MS4: Mm, I prefer ee Agnes ee
183. T: than Ginny
184. MS4: I prefer Agnes than Ginny. Ginny I don't like
185. T: OK, so...
186. FS2: OK, Ginny no
187. MS4: Is a very bad
188. MS1: The helicopter is probably a bad idea, because
189. MS4: yeah
190. MS1: I think no one of these ee can drive a helicopter and maybe (laughs) it is
191. not a good idea
192. T: Exactly, the helicopter is there but no one can pilot it, right, so...?
193. MS1: yeah, and it can produce an accident and all can die easily
194. MS4: yeah, and kill
195. T: that's true
196. Xxx
197. T: that's true. So, we go for, we only need three, then it's Connor
198. MS4: Connor
199. FS3, FS2: Agnes
200. FS3: Nasha y Martin
201. T: But that's 4, we need 3, three.
202. SS: ah 3
203. T: only three, three. We have to decide.
204. MS1: Well, I think we have
205. FS2: we have, yes
206. MS1: We have an axe and we don't need a gun I think because mm gun it's
207. useful than an a..., well, we could change if we want, we can change Marta for
208. Connor.
209. MS4: Axe to kill zombies is most important, and Connor ee... *falla?*
210. MS1: Miss
211. MS4: Miss
212. T: He misses, very good.
213. MS4: yes, ee, and
214. MS1: yes, yes, but the gun doesn't have *munición*
215. SS: ohh, ahh
216. T: OK, the gun doesn't have ammunition
217. MS1: and it's probably a good idea take Ginny because the survival, well the

218. survival yes can trade with she amm, *munition*
219. T: ammunition, aham
220. MS1: but I think these three are useful than 2, than these 2
221. T: OK. So, you go for these three
222. SS: yeah. OK.
223. T: Agnes, Nasha and Marta
224. SS: yes
225. T: very good! Perfect! I think that's it right? Great, people! Thank you so much!
226. WOW! *Molt bé!*

APPENDIX 3

Group B Transcription of the Recording

1. T: so there has been a zombie apocalypse and you have been selected to mmmm
2. try and save humanity, you have to save humanity it all depends on you. So, and
3. then you have to choose three more companions to your trip, to your saving of
4. humanity and they have some tools, some strengths and weaknesses yeah,
5. strengths? And weaknesses, they are not good at doing something ok? They are
6. characteristics, personal traits or characteristics. So here you have them! You can
7. first read them so that you know who is everyone, and then you have time to discuss
8. which three you would like to pick to help you save humanity. Is it understood? Is it
9. clear?
10. SS: yes
11. T: so here you have, take them and you can start now (handing papers) yeah here
12. you have some more like read them all and then I don't know, comment them and
13. share what you think ok?
14. MS1: *this? Este?*
15. MS2: this (reaches to a further sheet of paper and points it)
16. T: Don't just look at the pictures, read what do they have, what tool do they have so
17. for example, Agnes here has a drone, she can hack anything, she is a hacker and
18. she can repair electronic things but, she is absent minded like (moves arms) she gets
19. distracted very easily and is very shy like (gesturing, almost whispering) oh I don't
20. want to talk because I'm shy OK? For example can you (looking/pointing S4) read
21. what does Martin.. what are Martin's tools and strengths and weaknesses?
22. FS4: mm
23. T: but like read aloud please? She.. a He has?
24. MS1: xxx
25. T: what does he have?
26. FS4: a radio
27. T: a radio, and what are his strengths?
28. FS4: he can .. he can xxxx music
29. T: okey
30. FS4: xxxx
31. T: easily yeah, so he is a? He is a.. musician. Right? He plays the saxophone
32. MS1: *como se llama el otro*

33. MS2: (points another character sheet.)
34. T: and he is good at?
35. MS1: *este, este, este y este* (pointing to different characters)
36. MS1: this?
37. T: he is good at multi(.)tasking. Do you know what multitasking is?
38. FS4: mm
39. T: multitasking is when you can do a lot of things, like for example here (pointing to
40. the right) you have a kitchen, here (pointing to the left) you have mm something to
41. study and you are cooking and studying and cooking (moving from right to left)
42. MS2: *que puede hacer muchas cosas*
43. T: yeah
44. MS2: (to other SS) *que puede hacer muchas cosas a la vez*
45. T: multitasking
46. MS1: *yo creo que este, que hackea la seguridad*
47. T: but you have to try and speak in English please
48. MS1: uuuuu
49. T: ok?
50. SS: [laugh]
51. MS1: this (pointing) because hack hacking a
52. MS2: *segurity*
53. MS1: *segurity* (pointing to another paper) this xxxx because mm for being
54. MS2: (whispering to S1's ear)
55. MS1: because negotiation skills, this (pointing to another character) because medical
56. xxxx and this (pointing another) because very strong
57. T: ok so you have one two three and four
58. MS1: no, this this this and this
59. MS2: no
60. T: ok so what do you think about these ones? (pointing to discarded characters) you
61. can eliminate them, are you going to eliminate like put them apart because you don't
62. want them? (MS1 hands me paper)
63. FS3: yes
64. MS1: yes (nodding)
65. MS2: nods
66. T: ok but you have to like say it between you. Ok so now you have to choose just
67. three, not four. There's one that has to go.
68. SS: point to different characters
69. MS2: this and this (pointing to two characters)

70. MS1: this (.) this and this. (sets character 4 apart) ok
71. MS2: (muttering) this and this
72. T: so you said bye to Agnes? Poor Agnes
73. FS3: yes
74. T: yeah the hacker? Are you sure? Do you want to kick her out as well? (looking at
75. S4)
76. FS4: (shakes head)
77. T: no?
78. FS4: (nods)
79. T: yeah? Do you want her in your team or not?
80. MS1: not
81. FS3: no
82. FS4: (shakes head)
83. MS2: *que si la sacamos o se queda?*
84. FS3 and FS4: no (shaking head)
85. T: not? Ok well why do you choose these three?
86. MS1, MS2 and FS3: (point to two of the remaining three characters)
87. T: no, why do you want these three people, what's the reason why?
88. MS2: *cual sacamos?*
89. T: no, why do you want them?
90. MS1: keep
91. T: why?
92. MS1: *por qué hemos elegido estos*
93. SS: (nod in understanding)
94. MS1: [to S2] *porque negocia* (discuss between them whispering)
95. FS3: this is you you *elegido*
96. T: you choose
97. FS3: you choose because to medical cure
98. T: she
99. FS3: she cure to the virus
100. T: ok so she can create a cure
101. FS3: yes
102. T: ok
103. MS1: This because have a helicopter for escaper
104. T: escape
105. MS1: for escape
106. T: escaping

107. MS1: for skipping escaping and this because is very strong
108. T: ok she is very strong. What about the weaknesses? She's strong but she
109. is clumsy like she is holding an axe (grabs papers) and ops it fell (paper falls)
110. she's clumsy
111. MS2: torpe
112. T: yeah
113. MS2: impulsiva
114. MS1: and impulsive
115. T: impulsive
116. FS3: yes
117. MS2: [mimics impulsiveness]
118. T: so like there's a zombie and she goes like oh I'm gonna kill it (gesturing an
119. axe and going to kill a zombie) and then she gets killed. Instead of waiting she
120. is impulsive and she I don't know Are you sure you want these three?
121. SS: yeah
122. T: sure? one hundred per cent sure?
123. SS: yeah
124. T: ok thank you very much
125. MS1: you're welcome
126. T: you would survive with these three I'm sure of it.

APPENDIX 4

Materials for the Activity “Zombie Apocalypse”

AGNES



Drone with a camera



STRENGTH

- ⊕ She can hack anything.
- ⊕ She can repair electronic things.



WEAKNESS

- ⊖ Absent-minded
- ⊖ Very shy

CONNOR



Gun



STRENGTH

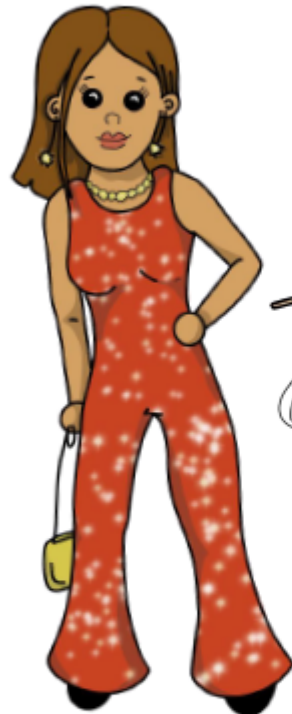
- ⊕ Fighting techniques knowledge
- ⊕ Survival knowledge



WEAKNESS

- ⊖ He needs a cane to walk.
- ⊖ Vision problems

GINNY



Helicopter



STRENGTH

- + Negotiation skills
- + Charismatic and unselfish



WEAKNESS

- Constantly stressed
- She doesn't know how to pilot the helicopter.

MARTA



STRENGTH

- ⊕ Very strong
- ⊕ She knows how to build safe shelters



WEAKNESS

- ⊖ Clumsy
- ⊖ Impulsive

MARTIN



Radio



STRENGTH

- ⊕ He can create music easily.
- ⊕ Multitasking



WEAKNESS

- ⊖ Pessimist
- ⊖ He doesn't take criticism well.

NASHA



TOOL



First-aid kit



STRENGTH

- ⊕ Medical knowledge
- ⊕ Perfect hearing



WEAKNESS

- ⊖ Slow
- ⊖ Tires easily

