

Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico

Using inter group competition in order to improve motivation in reluctant learners in the Primary English foreign language classroom

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M

2022



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Relatório realizado no âmbito do Mestrado em Ensino de Inglês no 1º Ciclo do Ensino Básico, orientada pela Professora Doutora Maria Ellison de Matos

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Classificação obtida: (escreva o valor) Valores

Dedicated to all those who believed in me.

Contents

Acknowledgments	4
Resumo	5
Abstract.....	6
List of graphs	7
List of abbreviations and acronyms.....	8
Introduction	9
Chapter I – Justification for Action	14
1.1. School Context	14
1.1.1. Externato Ribadouro	14
1.1.2. Facilities.....	15
1.1.3. Curriculum	16
1.1.4. Learners’ profile	17
1.2. Observation Process	18
Chapter II – Theoretical Framework	21
2.1. How young learners learn	22
2.2. Group and pair work	26
2.3. The reluctant learner	28
2.4. Motivation.....	31
2.4.1. Competition	32
Chapter III – Research Design.....	34
3.1. Methodology	34
3.2. Data gathering tools.....	37
3.2.1. Observation grid	37
3.2.2. Questionnaire	38
3.3. Intervention plan and description of the first cycle of the Action Research project	39
3.3.1 Contextualization of the activity.....	39
3.3.2. Intervention plan	42
3.4. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results	43
IV – Conclusions	61
4.1. Limitations to the study and future research suggestions	62
References	64
Appendices	67

Declaração de honra

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[Porto, Fevereiro 2022]

[Tiago Dos Santos Oliveira]

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank Professor Maria Ellison for guiding me throughout this Action Research project and also through my very first teaching practice. I would like to thank Professor Maria Ellison for all the words of encouragement and motivation, the advice given and the knowledge shared during the course of my Master's degree.

I would like to thank Externato Ribadouro for welcoming my teaching practice colleague and I in such short notice and allowed this teaching practice to take place.

I would like to thank my mentor Teresa Oliveira for always being there for me when I needed the most, a mentor that guided me through the lessons, that received me in open arms and above all else, a friend that I could count on for everything.

I would like to thank my teaching practice colleague Lúcia Silva for helping me during my observations and for all the companionship and willingness to help me.

I would like to thank the 3rd and 4th year students for being the best students I could've asked for, and for allowing me to build an amazing relationship with them that, in the end, made me fall in love with this profession.

I would like to thank my family and friends for supporting me throughout this journey. Without you, none of this would have been possible. Thank you for always being there for me, through the good times and the bad. We did it.

Resumo

Os alunos mais jovens partilham muitas vezes um caráter lúdico, tendem a favorecer a interação com os seus pares durante a aula e consequentemente, demonstram sentimentos positivos em relação às atividades de trabalho de grupo. Este projeto de Investigação-Ação fundamentou-se em descobrir se os alunos mais tímidos estariam inclinados a participar mais durante a aula se se realizassem atividades em grupo. Neste estudo adicionámos também o elemento de competição entre grupos para verificar se o aspeto competitivo da atividade fizesse com que os alunos mais reticentes cooperassem com mais frequência com os restantes membros do grupo e se sentissem mais motivados na realização destas tarefas em grupo. Este estudo consistiu num ciclo de investigação com ambas as turmas do 3º e 4º ano, onde os alunos foram inseridos em dois tipos de atividades diferentes, uma sem necessidade de trabalho de grupo e outra onde o trabalho de grupo era a norma. Para coletar os dados dessas atividades, foi utilizada uma grelha de observação em ambos os tipos de atividades. Também foi entregue um questionário aos alunos para conhecer os seus pontos de vista e convicções em relação às atividades de trabalho de grupo durante a aula de Inglês. Os resultados da grelha de observação mostraram que houve um aumento significativo na motivação dos alunos relutantes, nível de envolvimento, frequência de participação e cooperação ao participar em atividades de grupo. Os resultados do questionário também indicaram que a grande maioria dos alunos valoriza muito as atividades de trabalho de grupo e sentem que estas atividades têm um papel importante no aumento da sua vontade de participar.

Palavras-chave: Trabalho de grupo; Motivação; Alunos reticentes; Aprendizizes mais novos

Abstract

Younger learners often share a playful nature, tend to favor interaction with their peers during the lesson and consequently also demonstrate positive feelings towards group work activities. This Action Research project focused on whether the more reluctant students would be more inclined to participate in the lesson when they engaged in group activities. In this study we also added the element of inter group competition in order to see if the competitive aspect of the activity would make the more reticent students cooperate more frequently with the other members of the group and become more motivated when performing these group tasks. This study consisted of one cycle of investigation with both the 3rd and 4th year class where students were inserted in two different kinds of activities, one without requiring group work and one where group work was the norm. In order to collect the data gathered from these activities, an observation grid was utilized in both types of activities. There was also a questionnaire which was handed to the students in order to find out their feelings and convictions on group work activities during the English lesson. The results from the observation grid showed that there was a significant increase in the reluctant students' motivation, level of engagement, frequency of participation and in cooperation when partaking in group activities. The questionnaire results also indicated that the vast majority of the students highly values group work activities and feel that these activities have an important role in increasing their willingness to participate.

Key-words: Group work; Motivation; Reluctant Learners; Young learners

List of graphs

GRAPH 1 – 3 RD YEAR OBSERVATION GRID – PICTURE REVEAL GAME – 11 TH OCTOBER	44
GRAPH 2 – 3 RD YEAR OBSERVATION GRID – GROUP GAME – 10 TH DECEMBER	46
GRAPH 3 – 4 TH YEAR OBSERVATION GRID – PICTURE REVEAL GAME – 26 TH NOVEMBER	48
GRAPH 4 – 4 TH YEAR OBSERVATION GRID – GROUP GAME – 26 TH NOVEMBER.....	50
GRAPH 5 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 1ST QUESTION – 13 TH DECEMBER	53
GRAPH 6 – 4 TH YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 1ST QUESTION – 14 TH DECEMBER	53
GRAPH 7 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 2 ND QUESTION – 13 TH DECEMBER	54
GRAPH 8 – 4 TH YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 2 ND QUESTION – 14 TH DECEMBER	54
GRAPH 9 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 3 RD QUESTION – 13 TH DECEMBER	55
GRAPH 10 – 4 TH YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 3 RD QUESTION – 14 TH DECEMBER.....	55
GRAPH 11 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 4 TH QUESTION – 13 TH DECEMBER.....	57
GRAPH 11 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 4 TH QUESTION – 13 TH DECEMBER.....	57
GRAPH 12 – 4 TH YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS TO 4 TH QUESTION – 14 TH DECEMBER.....	57
GRAPH 13 – 3 RD YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS OF STUDENT A, B, C AND D – 13 TH DECEMBER	59
GRAPH 14 – 4 TH YEAR QUESTIONNAIRE: ANSWERS OF STUDENT A, B, C AND D – 14 TH DECEMBER	60

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder

CLIL – Content and language integrated learning

EMAIE – Equipa Multidisciplinar de Apoio À Educação Inclusiva

PPP – Presentation Practice Production

SPO – Serviços de Psicologia e Orientação

Introduction

English may well be perceived as the full embodiment of a global language. Over the years we have witnessed the English language become the number one most spoken language in the world with over 1.35 billion speakers spread all over the globe. This, by definition, places English in the status of the lingua franca of the world and very few people could argue with this statement. A “lingua franca” is a “shared language of communication used between people whose main languages are different” (Oxford University Press, s.d.). It comes with no surprise then, that of those 1.35 billion speakers, only 348 million are native speakers. This means that approximately 75% of all English speakers in the world are non-native speakers, nearly 743 million to be precise.

We can assign this phenomenon to several factors. Some might argue that English is a fairly simple language to learn, in comparison to French for example, which was the previous lingua franca of the world. Some attribute the advancements in technology and more specifically, the internet to be one of the main factors.

Since English is so widespread across the world, it is no surprise that most countries are now, more than ever, heavily investing in teaching English as a foreign language in their schools. In 2015 Portugal made English a mandatory subject in Primary Education, starting from the 3rd year onwards. Up until that point English was an extracurricular activity and it was merely facultative to the students. Due to this, new guidelines such as the Metas Curriculares and most recently the Aprendizagens Essenciais, were made in order to help Primary English teachers to effectively target and develop the skills present in the Perfil do Aluno (learners profile), some of which included: communication, critical and creative thinking and personal development and autonomy (Direção Geral da Educação, 2018).

This being said, both the 3rd and 4th year documents lack clear ways of developing these skills which are massively important for the student to develop as a person to then become a well-formed individual in today's society.

Teaching in general, like everything else, has been through and is currently going through some significant changes. However, teaching still has a very teacher centered approach. Teachers decide on the content that they intend to teach, plan how to teach this content and how to assess it. This teaching style also leads to a monopolized lesson, which

in a language lesson specifically, can have a massively negative impact on the students' oral and written production skills. This also normally leads to a very passive, un-motivated student and with teacher dependency, which curiously is the exact opposite of the skills students are meant to develop such as proactivity, autonomy, and so on. Cameron (2002) states that "Current knowledge reinforces an intuitively obvious notion: foreign language learners who depend on their teachers and texts for most of their exposure and input, will not, if this is restricted in type, develop across the full range of the foreign language" (p. 16). The main outcome of these watered-down documents is that it becomes the teacher's responsibility to come up with ways to develop these skills.

In these teacher-centered lessons, the curriculum and the teaching strategies usually remain the same. The teacher does not connect learning to what a child knows or adapts it to each student's needs. Due to this, some students become uninterested, struggle with learning and acquiring the content, or may even demonstrate behavior issues. Adapting the curriculum and the teaching process is a crucial step in order to keep students motivated throughout their school years.

Howard Gardner famously introduced his multiple intelligence theory in 1983 in his book: *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, where he suggested that every single person has 8 different kinds of "intelligences". Each intelligence has their own core of set operations and supports specific activities. Musical intelligence for example, is the ability individuals own to produce and make meanings of different types of sound.

The theory of multiple intelligences supports what was mentioned above: A one-size-fits-all approach to education will ultimately leave some students behind. However, we must not confuse multiple intelligences with learning styles. Learning styles, according to Gardner are mainly a "hypothesis of how an individual approaches a range of materials" (Gardner, 1986, cited in George Lucas Educational Foundation, 2016).

Everyone has all 8 different types of intelligences, but according to Gardner (1983), where individuals differ is in the strength and in the ways that these intelligences are combined to carry out different tasks, solve different problems, and progress within various domains. These differences challenge an educational system where it is assumed that every student can learn the same content by using the same methods. Gardner (1986)

also states that “the broad spectrum of students – and perhaps the society as a whole – would be better served if disciplines could be presented in a numbers of ways and learning could be assessed through a variety of means” (Gardner, 1986, cited in Cornerstone University, 2018).

In order to keep students engaged it is crucial not to fall in the temptation of sticking with the same methods and materials used in the classroom, just because it worked with other groups of students. To use Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory effectively inside the classroom, it is absolutely crucial for the teacher to know their pupils individually and be able to identify the methods that work for that specific group of students.

With regards to young learners we can easily bring games and group activities to the classroom since they have been proven working strategies for this specific age group. Games can help create a fun and safe environment while reducing the distance between teachers and students. (Brewster, 2002) concludes that for very young learners, games can provide an important link between home and school which then helps the children feel more secure and confident.

Young learners have a shorter attention span, so implementing different games and activities during a lesson can be an effective strategy to keep students engaged and motivated and of course, depending on the nature of the activity, it can help to develop the four main language skills, which are speaking, listening, writing and reading.

There are many different types of games. However, one very important criterion that teachers must consider when choosing a game for their lesson is if it promotes cooperation or competition. Competitive games always have a winner, whether that be one person or a group. However, while a game might mainly promote competition, if the students are separated in groups we can debate that it also promotes cooperation because each group has to work together in order to win.

While teaching young learners a foreign language we must develop all of their language skills, but also, skills that go beyond the foreign language classroom. These include skills such as the ability to work in groups, to collaborate, to become aware and to learn how to deal with different opinions within the group, time-management skills, the ability to take leadership in the group and much more.

In this study we will explore the usage of group activities, specifically those that promote inter group competition or in other words intra group cooperation. Some students, when participating in group activities, tend to shy away and let the other members of the group to do the work for them. There are obviously different dynamics in each group, some groups might have innate leaders that, sometimes without realizing it, monopolizes the entire activity. However, an in-depth analysis is required to figure out what we can do as teachers to help motivate those shy and reluctant students in becoming more engaged in the group activity and become motivated to play an active role within their groups. In order to do so, I decided to implement the element of competition in group activities during the lesson, where students would compete against the other groups. Given the fact that young learners thoroughly enjoy playing games in the classroom, and are extremely motivated and engaged while participating in these activities, a different variety of ludic games and activities were chosen. These activities simultaneously challenged the students and allowed them to work as a team.

This Action Research project begins by identifying the school context, including the facilities, the curriculum and the student/class profile for both the 3rd and 4th year class. This is followed by discussing the observation process where the issue was firstly identified and where the research question, that motivated the use of these activities throughout the term, emerged.

Chapter 2 focuses on theoretical framework that includes pertinent literature in regards to the topics of this study. We will look into some of the characteristics of a young learner and some of the most effective ways to target these strengths in order to improve the learning process. We will also discuss on using group activities in the classroom and the effects of said activities on the students posture, motivation, and level of engagement. We will approach the concept of reluctant student and the several factors that can influence this behavior. We will also take a closer look into motivation, where we will look into different types of motivation, such as intrinsic/extrinsic, and which ones provide the more positive results. Finally, we will explore the concepts of competition and what kind of competitions are more suitable for the young learners classroom context.

In Chapter 3 we will discuss the methodologies used in this study along with their respective data-gathering tools and how they were formed. Then, there will be a

presentation of the data collected and of the results followed by an in-depth analysis and interpretation of the two.

For the Conclusions, we will reflect upon the outcomes of this study, some of its limitations and future suggestions for research, and also, how this Action Research project helped the researcher in becoming a more aware, curious, reflective teacher and individual.

Chapter I – Justification for Action

This study, along with supervised teaching practice, took place in a private school located in the center of Porto during the 2nd semester of the 2020/2021 school year up until the end of the 1st semester of the 2021/2022 school year within the sphere of the Master's Degree in English Teaching in the 1st Cycle of Basic Education. The investigation was focused on both the 3rd and 4th year classes at the school. Both the supervised teaching practice and the observation part that took place in both semesters were extremely important for identifying an area that needed intervention.

1.1. School Context

1.1.1. Externato Ribadouro

Externato Ribadouro is a private teaching establishment, and it is located right in the center of the city of Porto, in Rua de Santa Catarina which is at the heart of the historical metropolitan area. Externato Ribadouro is the founding establishment of Grupo Ribadouro, that now includes Externato Camões in Rio Tinto and Colégio da Trofa in Trofa.

Externato Ribadouro is a very prestigious school that places an emphasis on the individual path of the student, allowing them to develop their skills and competences with the main goal of personal, social and academic success and fulfilment. Católica Porto Business School/Público ranked Externato Ribadouro the 25th best school in Portugal in 2020. Being a very sought-after school, Externato Ribadouro receives students from all of the northern regions of Portugal (Viana do Castelo, Braga, and so on).

There are as many as 1700 students in Externato Ribadouro. Though the school has every level and age group ranging from pre-school all the way to secondary, the vast majority of its students are in the secondary cycle. Externato Ribadouro has approximately 114 teachers, 23 educational assistants and 3 psychologists.

This school is recognized for having a “project” centred on the student. Externato Ribadouro is concerned with potentializing the student’s work ethic, resilience and determination and the students’ guardians are actively involved in this project in a very transparent way through regular meetings with the teachers and the class coordinator. Externato Ribadouro is an establishment that thrives to make school a safe learning environment that promotes the development of the individual, so that students can be successful in whatever area they decide to take on in the future.

As mentioned above, Externato Ribadouro has a very individualistic approach to their students’ learning process. This includes students with certain special educational needs. With the Equipa Multidisciplinar de Apoio À Educação Inclusiva (EMAEI) the school has a response to those needs. The Serviços de Psicologia e Orientação (SPO), along with the participation and guidance of several paediatricians, doctors and psychologists, offer their help and knowledge in order to facilitate the integration and smooth integration of students with special needs in their respective classrooms.

1.1.2. Facilities

Externato Ribadouro is one of the biggest schools in Porto. The facilities are in a restored building right in the center of the city. There are 3 floors along with an outdoor playground. There is also a computer room designed for Primary students, mainly the 3rd and 4th year class where they could easily search for information needed for a specific project on any given subject.

Regarding the primary student’s area alone, there are several classrooms all equipped with a whiteboard and a projector. Given the current pandemic situation every school desk is separated individually but there is still plenty of room for the teachers and students to move freely around the classroom. In the school desks there is also a place under the desk where students can store their books, notebooks, worksheets, and other classroom material. (Appendix. 1)

At primary level, the children are in the same classroom across all subjects for each individual class. However, there are always some English materials on display in the classroom, mainly on the walls such as posters, drawings, etc. made by the students themselves during their English lessons. This is an important part of the classroom because it allows the students to never fully disconnect from the foreign language and it also gives them a sense of pride seeing their own work on display.

1.1.3. Curriculum

In Externato Ribadouro the curriculum is based on the official documents provided by the Ministry of Education across all subjects. However, since Externato Ribadouro is a private school, it has the autonomy to adapt the curriculum for English. At this school, students can start to learn English in preschool. This has a massive impact on the students' knowledge and ability to interact with the English language once they reach the 3rd year which is usually the first time a student is in contact with the foreign language in the public sector. Subsequently, once these students reach the 3rd year they are already producing English at a far higher level than what the curriculum says they need to achieve.

Externato Ribadouro also has a very active Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) project. CLIL is an interesting project that utilizes the foreign language to teach non-language subjects. During my teaching practice most of the CLIL lessons I observed and taught were about a certain topic that students would originally learn in Social Studies, however, they were first introduced to the topic during the CLIL lessons. Starting from the 1st year, each class has 2 one-hour English lessons per week and one CLIL lesson, also one hour long. Preschool has one hour of English per week, and usually, this hour is spread across the week.

In regards to the 3rd and 4th year, both classes have 2 English lessons per week, and one CLIL lesson. These 3 lessons are one hour each, and during the teaching practice these lessons were distributed between the two teacher-students and the English language teacher.

Externato Ribadouro also provides extracurricular activities such as karate, ballet, chess and modern dance. The school also has an arts club where students can explore their artistic competences and a sports club, where they can experience and practice all sorts of different sports.

1.1.4. Learners' profile

Both the 3rd and 4th year classes are fairly small, consisting of only 16 students each and in general, their level of English is very high for their age. The 4th year class is the group that I am most familiar with, due to the lessons I observed and taught during my very first teaching practice in this school which occurred during the last term of the school year of the previous year and at the time they were the 3rd year class. This was a very important opportunity to see how they were able to grow and progress as a group into a different year. The 4th year class is composed of 13 boys and 3 girls all between the ages of 8 and 10 years old. The class remained exactly the same from the previous year, so no students left and no new students entered at the beginning of the new school year. Most of the 4th year students showed above average level of English and were generally enthusiastic to learn, participate and to speak the foreign language. There was one special needs student in the classroom and they were diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), however this student constantly showed a very high level of understanding of English, and was generally able to complete the tasks the teachers would ask them to do.

The 3rd year class, as previously mentioned, also has 16 students and it is composed of 7 boys and 9 girls all between the ages of 7 and 8 years old. This group is a little different in terms of knowledge of the foreign language because nearly half the students were new to the school, so to some, this was their very first contact with the English language. Despite that, the class generally showed good knowledge of the language and was able to easily deal with the new language and subject. In this class there is also a student diagnosed with ASD (autism spectrum disorder). This student in particular needed more attention from the teacher and usually needed more incentive to participate.

1.2. Observation Process

After being given the opportunity to observe both the English lessons and CLIL lessons throughout the teaching practice, I was able to attain new perspectives when it comes to teaching young learners. As this was my first real contact with this age group, it was interesting to see the materials, the strategies implemented and also the lesson planning of the English teacher. I was also able, through this observation process and also my through my taught lessons, to understand the theory in practice that we discussed in the University, for example what sort of lesson structures works best depending on your goals, what strategies we should use with young learners, classroom management, different materials that we could use, scaffolding, and so on.

It was also extremely interesting to see the students react in different ways to the materials used. Some students may not like coloring activities or music, and this came to the point that we as teachers should always aim to be as flexible as possible and adapt materials and teaching strategies so as to provide equally engaging lessons to all learning types.

Generally speaking, the lessons were very consistent with regards to the routines, structures of the lesson and interaction patterns. First, the teacher would ask the students the date and the day of the week as well. Afterwards she would write the summary on the board and only after the students have copied the summary in their notebooks would the teacher move on to the topic of the lesson. Having this routine of writing the date and the summary helped the students to get in the mood for the English lesson and helped them realize that breaktime was over. This was particularly important because the English language teacher mentioned that, before, students did not take English lessons very seriously and acted as if it was a facultative subject. I found that writing the summary is also a good way to calm the students down and easily take control of the lesson.

During the observation process, more specifically, in the zero cycle of this Action Research project I would take some notes throughout the lessons with regards to the students' attitudes in the classroom (if they were engaged, misbehaving, etc.) and also how well they performed the task in general.

Since these groups were slightly smaller than regular state school classes it was easier to pinpoint some interesting ways of how the students reacted to a certain activity. As mentioned previously, the lessons were generally very consistent, and they were mostly based on the student's ability to acquire the new language through all kinds of exposure and be able to orally produce it. Not much emphasis was given to the written aspect of the language. Consequently, most of the activities done in the classroom focused more on understanding the language, repeating it, and manipulating it properly. Students had to orally produce language with high frequency. This method worked particularly well with both the 3rd and 4th year class because, as previously mentioned, they were classes that were highly motivated to learn, and felt comfortable enough to speak frequently in English.

Since these were very communicative classes, tasks that required pair and groupwork were commonly used, whether they were games or any other kind of activity. During most lessons, the teacher tried to make the students work in small groups or in pairs. Though the noise levels were high during these activities, it was kept at a reasonable level and students did not use this opportunity to become distracted and speak about something else. Most students also tried to use the target language instead of relying on their mother tongue.

It was during one of those group activities however, that I noticed that some students were not as engaged and participative as the rest of the group. It seemed as if the students were being extremely passive and letting the other members of the group do the task for them. These students were usually the "quieter" students and the more reluctant to participate in a normal lesson. There could be many reasons to why these students were not as engaged as the others, for example: shyness, lack of self-esteem, etc... but as I have gotten to know the students more and more, I believe that every student in the 3rd and 4th year class is capable of understanding and producing language.

While continuously observing their behavior during other lessons where the class was separated in groups, the pattern kept repeating itself. These particular students remained passive during the group activities and sometimes would even start distracting themselves and their colleagues.

During one of my taught lessons I decided to do a group game covering the present continuous where a member of the group would come to the front of the class and choose a random verb they would have to mime from a plastic bag (e.g.: riding a bike, dancing, shopping, etc.). The rest of the group would then try to guess what that action was. The class was divided in groups of 4 students. I used a points system to encourage the students to give me the full sentence. For example, if the students just said “dancing” they would earn 1 point, but if they answered: “he/she is dancing.” Then they would get 2 points. I kept the score for ever team on the board and frequently updated it while the game was still occurring.

During the game however, I kept on noticing that those shy, more reluctant students were in fact participating actively in the activity and helping their teammates. And even those students that relied heavily on their mother tongue genuinely tried to use the target language in order to get maximum points. As I updated the points on the board, you clearly noticed their level of enthusiasm rising as they got the full answer correctly. After the game was finished the students wanted to keep on playing and some even got upset when the activity was over.

Considering this was the first time I did a class activity that explicitly involved competing against other groups (by using the points system on the board) and after seeing this blatant shift in attitudes in the generally quieter and more reluctant students led me to formulate the following research question:

Can inter-group competition help to improve reluctant children’s participation in the classroom?

Chapter II – Theoretical Framework

In this chapter we will analyze some of the main areas of this Action Research project. We will look at some of the unique characteristics that young learners possess and how we can take full advantage of those strengths. We will also review some of the outcomes and positive aspects of utilizing group work inside the classroom. Then, we will explore the concept of a reluctant learner and how teachers can help facilitate these students learning process. In this chapter we will also discuss student's motivation, and the multiple factors that can influence it either positively or negatively. We will also analyze the effects of competition within the classroom context.

(Smith, 2018) defines teaching as the "process of attending to people's needs, experiences and feelings, and intervening so that they learn particular things, and go beyond the given". Teaching is a very personal profession that enables the teacher to pass on their knowledge and skills in a way that hopefully connects with their own learners.

According to (Roland, Garvin, & Sweet, 1991):

To teach is to engage students in learning; thus teaching consists of getting students involved in the active construction of knowledge. A teacher requires not only knowledge of subject matter, but knowledge of how students learn and how to transform them into active learners. Good teaching, then, requires a commitment to systematic understanding of learning. The aim of teaching is not only to transmit information, but also to transform students from passive recipients of other people's knowledge into active constructors of their own and others' knowledge. The teacher cannot transform without the student's active participation, of course. Teaching is fundamentally about creating the pedagogical, social, and ethical conditions under which students agree to take charge of their own learning, individually and collectively.

(Roland, 1991, cited in Stellenbosch University, s.d.)

Teaching is then a very symbiotic relationship. The student's ability to play an active role in their own teaching is crucial in order to help the teacher adapt to their learning styles and preferences. As this Action Research project focuses on younger

learners, we will discuss some of their characteristics and explore how exactly a young learner learns and what teaching strategies are effective and useful for this specific age group.

2.1. How young learners learn

First, in order to understand how exactly young learners learn, it is important to define a young learner and some of their unique traits. According to (Genesse, 1994) young learners are considered to be children between approximately four and twelve years of age.

Just because a child is learning a foreign language for the first time does not mean that they are completely oblivious. According to (Halliwell, 1992) young children bring with them “an already well-established set of instincts, skills and characteristics which help them to learn another language” (Halliwell, 1992, p. 3) and these are the following:

- are already very good at interpreting meaning without necessarily understanding the individual words;
- already have great skill in using limited language creatively;
- frequently learn indirectly rather than directly;
- take great pleasure in finding and creating fun in what they do;
- have a ready imagination;
- above all take great delight in talking!

(Halliwell, 1992, p. 3)

This ability children have to understand meaning without general understanding of the individual words is a great motive to use gestures, actions, facial expressions and even flashcards in the classroom. It comes as no surprise that children are very responsive to these materials and most of them would be learners that could benefit from any variant of the audio-visual methodologies.

Young learners also have the ability to learn indirectly. This is particularly important because according to (Halliwell, 1992) “at primary school level the children’s capacity for conscious learning of forms and grammatical patterns is still relatively undeveloped” (Halliwell, 1992, p. 6). However, she mentions, that children bring with them a natural instinct for indirect learning (Halliwell, 1992).

Both direct and indirect learning will help a learner to acquire the language. However, direct learning tends to focus more on the more technical aspects of the language, such as the accuracy and the grammar. Indirect learning promotes a spontaneous and more natural/fluent use, especially when there is a good amount of quality exposure as well as opportunities provided for use.

Following Krashen’s theory that language should be taught in a relaxed and natural way (Krashen, 1986) language teachers should aim to produce opportunities for this indirect style of learning to occur. Children have a special connection with games, which by themselves are already a remarkable way of learning. However, they also allow the children to learn indirectly. A good example of this are guessing games, since it is the mind that is engaged with the task and not the language and it also allows the children to simultaneously acquire the structures of the language covering this lack of conscious learning of grammar patterns that is not very natural to them.

Krashen is known for popularizing the idea of comprehensible input. Comprehensible input consists of language input that can be understood by learners despite them not understanding all the words and structures in it. Usually, comprehensible input occurs when the teachers uses materials one or more levels above their students level. If we take into account that children are exceptionally good at acquiring language indirectly and are very good at understanding meaning without actually knowing all of the words, then we can state that comprehensible input is a key factor in learning a

language especially when it comes to young learners. A good example of taking advantage of this comprehensible input theory are stories. Using stories in the foreign language classroom is one of the oldest and most effective ways to teach young learners. Even if it is a rather challenging story for their level, as (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 2002, p. 24) claim, if “children are motivated, and if appropriate visuals are used, it is surprising how much the children will understand as they are focusing on the meaning of the story rather than focusing on its grammar”.

However, this concept of comprehensible input has also consequently brought the need for comprehensible output. It is crucial for young learners to not only listen and acquire the language but also to produce it. It is our job as teachers, to provide learners with occasions where there is an opportunity to speak and express themselves. Children are naturally very playful so by using games in the classroom we are combining and using their own strengths to offer them rich and appropriate learning opportunities. Games can also be a form of indirect learning, since their subconscious mind is the one that deals with the language structures, while the conscious mind is focusing on the task in hand.

Using games in the classroom, according to (Halliwell, 1992) also creates a desire to communicate and this desire to communicate or, in other words, to produce comprehensible output should be explored with great frequency by the teacher.

The instinct for interaction and talking that children bring to the classroom is probably the most important and crucial attribute that the teacher must use to their advantage in order to provide children with opportunities to develop their speaking skills. It is not only young learners, but learners in general that can learn about the language, however the only way to know how to use the language is to actually use the language.

(Brown, 2001) separates different kinds of oral production that students might be expected to produce during the lesson. The first one is imitative and, as the name suggests, deals with the ability to repeat certain sounds, words or sentences. It does not necessarily focuses on meaningful interaction but instead on some particular element of the language form. A very common way this imitative production is explored in the classroom, especially with young learners, is through drilling. Drilling is a teaching technique that utilizes spaced repetition to aid memorization, and there are a lot of

misconceptions whether drilling is actually part of a communicative language lesson, and according to (Brown, 2001) there is little to no doubt:

The answer is a qualified “yes”. Drills offer students an opportunity to listen and to orally repeat certain strings of language that may pose some linguistic difficulty – either phonological or grammatical. Drills are to language teaching what the pitching machine is to baseball. They offer limited practice through repetition. They allow one to one focus on one element of language in a controlled activity. They can help to establish certain psychomotor patterns (to “loosen the tongue”) and to associate selected grammatical forms with their appropriate context.

(Brown, 2001, p. 272)

The next type of oral production in the classroom is called responsive. This is one, if not the most frequently used during a lesson. It comprises short replies to teacher or student-initiated questions or comments in the classroom. Close ended questions like yes/no questions are the most common ones along with comprehension questions that usually lead to one- or two-word answers to check if a student is following the topic and the lesson.

However, the speech can also be authentic and meaningful, for example: “How are you today?” and to which the student responds: “I’m fine, thanks”. The replies usually do not require extended answers and are more than enough to complete the task in hand.

The other two forms of dialogue consist of transactional and interpersonal, and these tend to deal with longer interactions, usually amongst students. Transactional conversations “may have a more negotiative nature to them than does responsive speech” (Brown, 2001, p. 273). These sorts of interactions are usually part of group activities where members need to discuss something amongst themselves. No less than important however, is interpersonal dialogue. This type of dialogue is “carried out more for the purpose of maintaining social relationships than for the transmission of facts and information”. (Brown, 2001, p. 274)

We have to remember that as language teachers, it is our duty to develop all of the four language skills. Nonetheless, it is also crucial that we prepare young learners by using the foreign language in a natural and authentic environment, because that is probably the most useful skill that will help the student later in their lives when speaking the language. Most won't remember a specific grammar rule, but they will certainly remember the engaging interactions, whether that be through games, group projects, or by simply talking with either their colleagues or their teachers.

2.2. Group and pair work

More often than not we hear teachers complain that they can not do group/pair work with their students because they just keep talking about topics unrelated to the lesson. This, however, is just another sign that we should actually use and encourage group/pair work during the lesson much more frequently. According to Brewster (2002), "the use of pair work is one of the most important ways in ensuring learners think and produce language independently and draw on the linguistic resources they have been developing" (p. 24). It is important to note that group work in general will mostly be composed of smaller groups of no more than 6 students. Larger groups simply deny one of the main purposes of group work: giving each student an adequate amount of time for each student to speak and interact with the other members of the group.

If we follow a traditional teacher-centered approach Long & Porter (1985), estimated that if we use group work during half of the average lesson time, we could increase the individual practice time up to five times. This means that learners can have five times more individual language production if they actually work in groups and are all equally involved. This is obviously just an estimate as it depends heavily on other factors, such as the student's will to participate, their language skills, their motivation, and so on.

Working in groups and using group activities in the classroom also help to promote a positive affective climate. Many students experience considerable stress when they are the center of attention. This stress can increase even further when they are asked to quickly answer a question whilst they are simultaneously worrying about the accuracy

of their answer, whether grammatically or if it is the right answer for that specific question. The majority of teachers tends to move on and ask someone else if a student does not give the correct answer in time. Some might ask the same question in a different manner or interrupt the student if they are saying something wrong. This can have a seriously negative impact on a student's confidence and self-esteem. By working in groups we are sort of relieving that stress by a substantial margin, and, as Barnes (1973) states:

An intimate group allows us to be relatively inexplicit and incoherent, to change direction in the middle of sentence, to be uncertain and self-contradictory. What we say may not amount to much, but our confidence in our friends allows us to take the first groping steps towards sorting out our thoughts and feelings by putting them into words. (p. 19)

During his studies (Barnes, 1973) noticed that children, while working in small groups, had a higher incidence of false starts, changes of direction, pauses, hesitations and of expressions of doubt (such as "I think" and "probably"). There, as Long & Porter (1985) mention, the pressure to give out a short polished right answer, the perception of the listening teacher as judge, and the "audience effect" of larger classrooms would inhibit this kind of language.

Working in groups allows the language to flow much more freely amongst the students. Instead of focusing and nearly obsessing over the accuracy and correctness of the language, entering a richer and more accommodating set of relationships would help develop a student's personalized and creative talk which is the main thing that language lessons are trying to prepare learners for.

During his observations, Brown (2001) noticed that suddenly, during group work, reticent students became much more vocal participants in the learning process and concludes this line of thought by explaining that "The small group becomes a community of learners cooperating with each other in pursuit of common goals" (Brown, 2001, p. 178). With that common goal in mind, group work also promotes learner autonomy and responsibility. It is up to each individual member of the group to show initiative and

willingness to help the other members in completing a certain task. Group work can place equal responsibility for action, and it is rather difficult to “hide” in such small groups.

Oxford (1997), has shown in her research that collaborative learning tasks, such as group work and team games helped lower anxiety levels and prejudice, heighten self-esteem, create caring and meaningful relationships and also helped promote intrinsic motivation of students. Also regarding collaborative learning, a fairly recent study by Veldman, Doolaard, Bosker, & Snijders (2020), concluded that cooperative learning facilitates and it “may lead to improved group work behaviour of young pupils (6-7 years old)” (p. 1).

A study conducted by Kutnick, Ota, & Berdondini (2008) on the effects of group work in classrooms with young learners concluded that the “children in experimental classes improved more than children in control classes with regard to academic attainment, motivation to work with others, group and on-task focus and showed high levels of communicative interaction with partners” (Kutnick, 2008, p. 83).

Another study with regards to the impact of group work, this time by (McDonough, 2004) done on Thai English foreign language learners, concluded that “Thai EFL learners who had more participation in pair and small group activities showed improved production of target forms” (McDonough, 2004, p. 207).

As these studies have shown, group work can help to improve the language production, frequency of production and more confidence when producing the language. Students become involved in lessons more often, and at a more personal level. For all these reasons, it seems reasonable to believe that group work most definitely motivates the classroom learner. When it comes to motivating a learner it is common to think of those who become disengaged, and develop ways to keep them involved in the lesson. However, we must also reflect on the quieter, more reluctant student.

2.3. The reluctant learner

It is commonly known that reluctant students are one major element of, not only the language lessons, but across the entire curriculum. However, there is little research

for such a large and pertinent topic. First, we have to define what a reluctant learner actually is and then analyze why they become reluctant and reticent during the lesson. Especially during language lessons, where one of the main goals is to develop speaking and communication skills, having reluctant learners in the classroom might bring all sorts of new challenges for the teacher. It is then crucial that we understand what exactly makes a learner reluctant to speak and, at the same time, develop certain strategies to help facilitate their learning process.

There are several definitions of what we consider to be a “reluctant learner”. According to Herzog (2002), a reluctant learner is one who "is not interested in life at all, is not interested in what you are teaching, and is not able to learn in the time-frame or manner of presentation" (p.1). Protheroe (2004), states that reluctant learners “avoid challenges, don’t complete tasks, and are satisfied to “just get by.” They are reluctant learners, who often have the potential to excel but don’t seem to care about achieving in school” (p. 46).

Personally, I find these claims to be rather unfair and inaccurate. We have to remember that there are several reasons to why a learner becomes reluctant. Young learners especially, are still very much susceptible to negative feedback and to what others might think of them. Brown (2001) goes on to explain that:

Children are often innovative in language forms but still have a great many inhibitions. They are extremely sensitive, especially to peers: “What do others think of me? What will so-and-so think when I speak in English? Children are in many ways much more fragile than adults. Their egos are still being shaped, and therefore the slightest nuances of communication can be negatively interpreted. Teachers need to help them overcome such potential barriers to learning. (p. 89)

Obviously, there are some learners that just simply become unmotivated in the classroom but even so, to some extent, it might not even be entirely their fault. Perhaps the teacher could not develop a working strategy in order to engage that student in the lesson, or perhaps the teacher did not even try. Most of the time, there are other reasons that eventually lead to this reluctance of the student. It is not so much to do with motivation in itself. More often than not there are other limiting factors.

A learner behaves in a more hesitant way when they are afraid to take risks and make mistakes. Consequently, instead of speaking and practicing the language, they tend to remain silent during most of the lesson. Phillips (1968), has defined a "reticent" person as one "for whom anxiety about participation in oral communication outweighs his (or her) projection of gain from the situation" (p. 40). According to McCroskey (1977), reticent individuals "will avoid communication much of the time in order to avoid experiencing the fear or anxiety the person has learned to associate with communication encounters" (p. 78). Brown (2001) has an interesting perspective when it comes to anxiety and fear in regards to learning a new language. The language ego principle mentions that learners have this sense of fragility when learning a new language because "the strategic arsenals of their native-language based egos, which are normally well developed and resistant to attack, are suddenly – in the perception of the learner – obsolete" (p. 61). He then adds that learners are "left with a feeling of total defenselessness" (p. 61).

It is then crucial that teachers, as previously mentioned, provide a safe and friendly environment for the learners to experiment with the new language in a natural and relaxed manner. Displaying a supporting attitude with your pupils, the regular use of scaffolding, and selecting tasks that are adequate (but still challenging enough) to the learner's level are all ways in which we can help to reduce the fear and the anxiety levels of the students.

Another reason as to why a student may become reluctant to participate is their self-esteem. The impact teachers may have on their pupil's self-esteem must be taken very seriously. There are several ways in which we can increase and boost a student's self-esteem, but some simpler ways are to give ample and reoccurring verbal and non-verbal assurances to the students. Getting positive feedback from the teacher can be an extremely useful way to keep the student engaged and simultaneously building higher confidence levels. Another way to improve self-esteem is to sequence activities from easier to most difficult. Performing these simpler activities during the earlier stages of a lesson, will establish in the students a sense of accomplishment, that will eventually catapult them to the harder, more difficult steps. If the students are motivated and possess higher self-esteem levels, they will take on these harder activities with a more positive approach.

A study conducted by Koosha (2011) concluded that students who possessed higher levels of self-esteem were “more sociable, more risk taking and more prepared to share their views with others regardless of whether, lexically or grammatically, they produce what can be regarded as accurate or standard or even correct English” (p. 1335). As we can see, even if the language produced was not fully “correct” in terms of grammar, students did in fact produced language more frequently, and as is known, the single best way to learn any language is to practice it and speak it.

2.4. Motivation

In order to discuss the impact motivation can have on young learners, we must first divide it in two different types of motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes from the learner itself. The student engages in an activity for their own sake and not because it leads to a reward. This type of motivation that occurs when there is a reward for completing the activity or winning a game is called extrinsic motivation. The rewards themselves can be prizes, grades and even some sort of positive feedback. There have been lots of debates as to which motivation is more powerful, however, there seems to be a general consensus that intrinsic motivation is the most effective kind of motivation especially for long term knowledge retention. Maslow (1970) claimed that intrinsic motivation is far superior to extrinsic motivation, and that we as individuals, are ultimately aiming to achieve self-actualization once the basic needs, such as food, shelter and safety are met. No matter what kind of extrinsic rewards are placed in front of us, we will always thrive for our own self-esteem and to be as fulfilled as we possibly can. Bruner (1962) claimed that one of the main weaknesses of extrinsic motivation is its addictive nature. Once a learner is captivated by the immediate reward, then can become heavily dependent on these external factors. If we were to remove said reward, some learners might even withdraw and eventually lose their desire to learn.

One valuable example of extrinsic motivation being used to increase intrinsic motivation is the positive feedback the learners receive from the teacher. The students often gain a confidence boost in their skills and competences. Validation of their personal autonomy, to their critical thinking skills and other competences will have a long lasting effect on increasing or, at the very least, maintaining their intrinsic motivation. This leads

us back into the self-esteem factor that we have previously discussed. Bojovic & Antonijević (2017) explain and conclude:

Students who highly evaluate self-efficiency will employ sufficient efforts, energy and strength, or they will try and select corresponding behaviour resulting in achievement and success. Students who think they are not self-efficient probably will not even try; they will employ some insignificant efforts or will immediately give up resulting in failure and stronger conviction of own inefficiency (p. 19).

2.4.1. Competition

Competition can be used in ways that serve both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In this section we will focus on the different types of competition and their effects on a student's motivation and on their general attitudes. The concepts of healthy and unhealthy competition have been around for a very long time. Shindler (2009) helped us get a clearer understanding of some of the characteristics that makes competition either healthy or unhealthy. In healthy competition: the primary goal is fun; the competitive goal is not real, and it is portrayed as such; there is an equal chance for all individuals or groups to win and there is no long term effect from the outcomes of the game/competition. In unhealthy competition on the other hand, the winners and losers will be affected; the competitive goal is real, and it is treated that way; competition often rewards the advantaged students and winners are able to use their victory as a social or educational capital in the future. (Shindler, 2009)

Healthy competition can bring a whole new perspective on some of the activities that teachers perform, especially during group work and group games. When competing against other teams, students are encouraged to work together and the motivation of competing against one's peers can challenge a student to work much harder on their tasks than they would if they were independently compelled to do so. Competitions offer the students a safe environment to make mistakes, fail, celebrate others winnings in addition to their own, and much more.

Competition can be a positive strategy to help promote student's motivation but we must also be aware of the negative outcomes it may possibly bring. One of these negative outcomes revolves around the student focusing on the wrong aspects when

competing. Some students might take the competition too seriously and hinder their learning process by prioritizing performance over learning. This is especially true in competitions that the main goal is to finish first or something similar. Secondly, competition can up the anxiety levels on some students that then obviously interferes with their ability to focus and to actually learn. A 2001 study conducted by Lam, Yim, Law, & Cheung (2001), compared two different groups that were inserted in both a competitive and non-competitive environment and concluded that “compared to their counter parts in non-competitive condition, students in competitive condition had better performance for easy tasks. However, they were more performance-oriented and more likely to sacrifice learning opportunities for better performance.” (p. 3)

Teachers then need to be extremely careful while introducing the element of competition during some activities and always check to see if any issues may arise from implementing these activities. Young learners usually, do not take these sorts of games/competitions very seriously and so, the possible negative outcomes from the competitive element may be extremely difficult to arise.

Chapter III – Research Design

3.1. Methodology

The primary concern of this Action Research project was to see if utilizing group activities during the lessons would help to improve reluctant students' participation within the group and overall engagement throughout the activity in a Primary Education EFL classroom context. Burns (2010) states that the process of Action Research is simply “to intervene in a deliberate way in the problematic situation in order to bring about changes and, even better, improvements in practice” (p. 2). To do this, the teacher/researcher must reflect on their own teaching practice and have the ability to see it from a critical and systematic point of view. To confirm if the intervention actually improved that specific element of the teaching process, the teacher/researcher must rely on actual data, which can be collected in different ways depending on the goals of the Action Research. Developing an Action Research project as a teacher can be very useful way to look closely into a certain classroom issue and subsequently try to improve it in some way. Whatever area they decide to focus on, it is important that the researcher is aware of the theoretical background of the topic (by reading through relevant case studies, books, and even other Action Research projects) as this will provide them with the foundation of knowledge to then be able to implement the changes in their practice that could or could not lead to expected outcomes in terms of data and results. An Action Research project is extremely attractive to teachers because it allows them to reflect on their own teaching routines, approaches, philosophies, and values. Teaching suddenly will not be so technical and automatic especially to teachers who have been in the profession for a very long time.

Personally, as this was my first teaching practice, it was rather challenging to identify an area that required intervention due to the lack of experience and not knowing what to look out for. However, after observing and reflecting heavily on the teaching process in this school I was able to do so. Then, I consulted relevant literature that helped me understand the concepts of a reluctant learner, the multiple reasons some students become reticent to participate and strategies to help overcome this common issue a little better. Afterwards,

I developed an action plan to implement the use of inter group competition during the lessons and collected the data from those lessons in order to answer my research question mentioned previously in 1.2. Can inter-group competition help to improve reluctant children's participation in the classroom?

To ensure higher accuracy in the results obtained, I chose to implement both quantitative and qualitative methodologies when it comes to data-gathering in this Action Research project. As Dörnyei (2007) states: "words can be used to add meaning to numbers and numbers can be used to add precision to words" (p. 45), in other words, having multiple data gathering tools and methodologies will always enhance the reliability of the study as we then can triangulate the data and double check to see if the results coincide and complement each other.

Through a quantitative approach I was able to have a more explicit and objective view when it came to the results as these were not so subjective as some of the other data gathering processes in this study. Having a quantitative approach also meant quicker and concise results obtained during the data gathering process. In order to make sure that the data collected was as reliable as possible, I decided to focus on 4 students of both the 3rd and 4th year class. This was done to prevent the qualitative data collection becoming an exhausting and overwhelming data gathering task due to the amount of detail and attention placed in each individual student. With the help of my student-teacher colleague, we were able to collect pertinent data regarding these 8 students and how they reacted to certain activities done in the classroom. Having a second view and analysis on the student's behavior during the lesson was crucial in order to make sure that the data collected was as unbiased as possible.

Another way to make sure that the data collected was as accurate as possible was to make the students feel comfortable around me. As we know children can be quite reluctant and shy in the presence of an adult figure, especially one that they do not have a good and friendly relationship with. Fortunately, both classes were extremely welcoming to both me and my colleague and within a few lessons we had already gained their trust. With this, children were able to act naturally which helped us to collect compelling and authentic data for this study.

As mentioned previously, the observations during my mentors' lessons were essential to identify the issue and the students to who I needed to pay closer attention during the implementation of my strategies. An observation grid was designed in order to account for the students' behavior and posture during the lessons. I decided to focus on whether the students were engaged in the lesson or not, if they contributed and played an active role in their groups and whether they only participated when the teacher directly asked them to or not. I also developed a questionnaire for the students to answer, where they would reflect on their own learning, as students' understanding of how they learn should be a primary focus in every school, for students to understand how exactly do they learn. This might seem somewhat of a challenging process for younger learners so I decided to do the questionnaire in their mother tongue and using short, simple and straightforward sentences so that they would feel comfortable in reflecting these questions. I reinforced that there were no wrong answers in this questionnaire and the only thing that mattered was their own reflection and views. The questionnaire focused on the use of games/group games during the lessons and whether that could have a positive impact on their participation or not.

This study was conducted in two classes, the 3rd year class and the 4th year class, both consisting of 16 students and their age ranged from 7 to 11 years old. As mentioned previously, I chose 4 students of both the 3rd and 4th year class (8 students in total) to facilitate the qualitative methodology employed in this study. These particular students were selected because they shared one common trait: they were very passive when it came to group work and were reluctant to participate throughout the course of the lesson. In order to protect their identity, these students were all identified by letters in this study and I made sure to attribute them with that said letter beforehand in order to avoid forgetting who student A, B, C and D were when reviewing the data.

The consistent observations were important in identifying these students because it allowed me to uncover a pattern among them. Their posture remained the same throughout most of the lessons (general lack of interest and willingness to participate) and it was not just a one-time occurrence where they might be feeling a bit down and did not want to participate on that specific day.

During the activities I made sure that each of these 4 students from both classes were in separate groups and that the groups had the same members every time. This further helped me with data gathering as I could focus on one student at a time while paying attention to each separate group.

3.2. Data gathering tools

This study is composed of two major data-gathering tools, an observation grid used in both of the 3rd and 4th year class that deals with the students' attitudes and posture during the lessons where the use of inter group competition was implemented. The other data gathering tool was a questionnaire given to the students at the end of the term where they reflected on their own learning and answered some questions based on their level of agreement. Both these data-gathering tools will be described in more detail below.

3.2.1. Observation grid

The observation grid (Appendix. 2), as previously mentioned, was developed and used only for the 4 identified students of each class so that the gathering of the data and information was firstly, easier to retrieve and also with the purpose of being as accurate and detailed as possible. Due to the nature of this study, the grid was created in order to keep track of the students' attitudes and behaviors during the activity instead of their language production, accuracy and fluency. The first criterion was developed to see if the students were engaged in the activity, so whether or not they were paying attention and if they were trying to use the target language or not. The second and third criteria had to do with participation; the second criterion focused on whether they participated actively in the activity or not, so if they would show interest or not and if they volunteered to participate by raising their hands frequently. The third criterion was to see which students only participated when it was their turn to answer or when the teacher directly asked them to. The last criterion had to do with cooperation in the classroom, in order words, how much these children would actually help and cooperate with their colleagues throughout different activities.

To rate these criteria accurately, I developed a coding system beforehand in order to complete the observation grid: an “X” would mean “no”, a tick was as “slightly perceptible” and 2 ticks meant “yes”. This helped me save time when completing the grid and I was able to complete it as soon as the lesson was finished when it was still fresh in my memory. My student-teacher colleague also had an identical grid that they filled in while observing the lesson and we would discuss the results of our own grids at the end of the lessons. This allowed me to add an outside perspective and confirm my point of view in relation to the observation grid, which ultimately led to the results we will discuss shortly.

3.2.2. Questionnaire

The use of the questionnaire (Appendix. 3) was to confirm the students view with regards to their own learning. Since we are dealing with young learners, some might argue that it might be a rather challenging task for this age group, I found that it was extremely important to have the students view, and also, how they felt when participating in games/group games in the classroom. The questionnaire was in the students’ mother tongue and consisted of 4 short and concise sentences in order to facilitate their individual reflection process. There were 5 levels of agreement symbolized in small emoji style faces with different facial expressions and colors, the red frown face would mean “totally disagree” and the opposing green smiley face would mean “totally agree”. The first statement was regarding the use of games in general in the classroom and whether the students liked it or not. The second statement was regarding group activities in the classroom and whether students liked these or not. The third statement, which is probably the most self-reflective in the questionnaire, stated to see if the students were more willing to participate when they were doing group work during the lesson in comparison to other activities. The final statement had to do with competition and the competitive element in group work, and whether the students enjoyed playing against, or in other words, competing against the other groups in the classroom. Despite the observation grid only dealing with 4 students of both the 3rd and 4th year class, I decided to distribute the questionnaire to all students of both classes. This was rather important because it allowed me to see a general perspective of the students and also to compare the results between both classes since no two classes are the same. Each class has their own living and

breathing eco-system that will certainly bring changes, even if subtle, to the different types of activities, materials and outcomes of whatever the teacher uses in a daily basis.

3.3. Intervention plan and description of the first cycle of the Action

Research project

In this study I completed one cycle of the Action Research project of “plan, act, observe and reflect” (Burns, 2010, p. 166). This cycle was done in two lessons, one with the 3rd year and one with the 4th year in the English foreign language classroom. These lessons were taught during my teaching practice at the school and they took place in the first term of the school year. The focus was to see if implementing inter group activities during the lessons would help to improve motivation amongst the more reluctant students in each separate group. In the following sections of this study I will briefly contextualize the activities used, the idea behind these activities and how they were implemented during the lesson. Afterwards I will present and analyze the results from both the observation grids and the questionnaires and give my reflections on these results.

3.3.1 Contextualization of the activity

In order to contextualize both the 3rd and 4th year class activity I will now briefly describe the game and when it was implemented. The group game had some similarities, such as the attribution of points for any correct answer, each group having their turn in an organized manner and the nature of the questions were fairly similar. Each game had a “Jeopardy style” structure to it. The 3rd year activity was done on the 10th December during one of my taught lessons. That specific lesson was a CLIL lesson and I decided to focus on arctic animals and some of their features (such as the type of skin, body parts, and habitat). Since the 3rd year was going to start learning about animals in Social Studies, I found it rather pertinent that they would learn it during the CLIL lesson. The game consisted of 16 questions, which divided by the entire class would mean that all 4 groups would get 4 attempts and every single student could have the opportunity to answer the question. Though it took a few attempts to explain the rules to the students, these sorts of games were already familiar to them, as my mentor and both myself and my student-

teacher colleague had already used this type of game with this particular group with relative frequency and they have always seemed to react positively.

Previously, before the game, there was a PowerPoint shown to the students with all the animals that they were going to learn that day and their names, the type of skin they had (fur, feathers, etc.), their body parts and also some of the actions that these animals could do, such as swimming, flying, running, etc. As the PowerPoint was being projected, I continuously kept asking the students questions in order to see if they were following along and, most if not all of them were able to follow the presentation throughout. There were lots of pictures of the animals and lots of drilling and repetition of the words as a way of scaffolding their learning, because we need to remember that this was the very first time that they were introduced to the topic. So, the topic was approached in a way that, with some guidance, students were able to take in the content and most importantly understand it. The questions on the game itself, dealt with a large variety of vocabulary such as the ones mentioned previously (animal names, animal body parts, types of animal skin and some of their actions, such as running, jumping, etc.). Since it was the first and only CLIL lesson on that specific topic, the questions were kept simple and relatively easy to answer. During their turn each group would choose a number in the game from 1 to 16 and then a random question would appear and if the group got the answer right they would earn 15 points. This cycle repeated itself until there were no more questions to answer. The points of all the teams were on display the entire game and the team with the most points at the end of the game would win.

As previously mentioned, the 3rd year game was focused on simpler questions due to the fact that this was the very first time they were learning about the topic of animals and animal habitats. However, the 4th year game (Appendix. 4), which was done during one of my taught lessons on the 26th November, allowed me to use more challenging questions. The topic for this lesson was regarding sports, specifically sports names, sports places (such as court, field, pitch, etc.) and sports equipment (such as helmet, bat, club, goggles, etc.). This topic was taught during the second unit called “Good Sports” in their pupil’s book: Kid’s Box 4. During the 4th year game, I used a “Jeopardy style” PowerPoint game, similar to the one I used in the 3rd year class, and this time there were harder questions in the game, since this was the second consecutive lesson

on a topic that I worked on in that very same week. After presenting the vocabulary to the students in the first lesson, I handed in a worksheet for the students to complete regarding sports equipment and this worksheet was completed relatively quickly. In the second lesson I decided to correct the worksheet in the beginning of the lesson and review the vocabulary learnt by using the “Jeopardy style” game. Once again, as done previously in the 3rd year class, I divided the class of 16 students in 4 groups of 4 elements and this time there were 20 questions on the PPT game.

As previously mentioned, since this was the second lesson on the topic of sports and generally, the level of English was somewhat superior to the 3rd year, I decided to use harder questions which were worth more points. So, for example, one of the easier questions would be: “What is this sport called?” and there would be a picture of someone playing football. Then, the students would simply answer “football” and would get the right answer. However, as points began to rise, so did the difficulty of the question. A sort of “mid-level” question would be: “What is she doing?” and there would be a picture of a girl playing badminton. Here the students would give the full sentence, which would be: “She is playing badminton”. This was an opportunity to also review the present continuous, since it was a heavily worked on grammar point throughout the whole school term and teaching practice. In the harder questions however, students had to think and subsequently, remember the vocabulary previously taught. For example, one of the questions was: “What do I need to play ice hockey?”, students must first remember what kind of sports equipment there is, and which ones would fit in that particular sport. The answer could potentially be: “helmet, stick and ice skates” for example. This time, since there was no way of displaying the points each team had on the PowerPoint, I kept track of the scores by writing them on the board next to the projector screen.

To summarize, the intervention activity of the Action Research project was carried out in two lessons; the 4th year activity was done on the 26th November and the topic revolved around sports and sports equipment. The 3rd year activity was done on the 10th December during a CLIL lesson and the topic was connected to Social Studies in regards to animals, animal body parts and different kinds of animal skin and what specific actions could they perform (flying, swimming, jumping, etc.). The 4th year game had generally harder questions than the 3rd year game because, as mentioned previously, the

4th year had already had one lesson prior to the 26th November regarding the same topic, whereas for the 3rd year, this was the very first lesson on the topic of animals, specifically arctic animals. It is also important to note that both the 3rd and 4th year lesson were based around the Presentation Practice Production methodology, also known as PPP. This type of lesson, as the name implies, allows the students to be presented with the new language first, practice it and then finally produce it (Appendix. 5). This shown to be a very effective style of lesson because it allows the students to get comfortable with the new language first, through drilling exercises, guessing games, memory games, and other activities, before producing the language independently. This was rather important because I wanted to make sure that every student got the language first so that when it came to the game implemented in this intervention, they were well prepared and able to autonomously produce the language within their groups.

3.3.2. Intervention plan

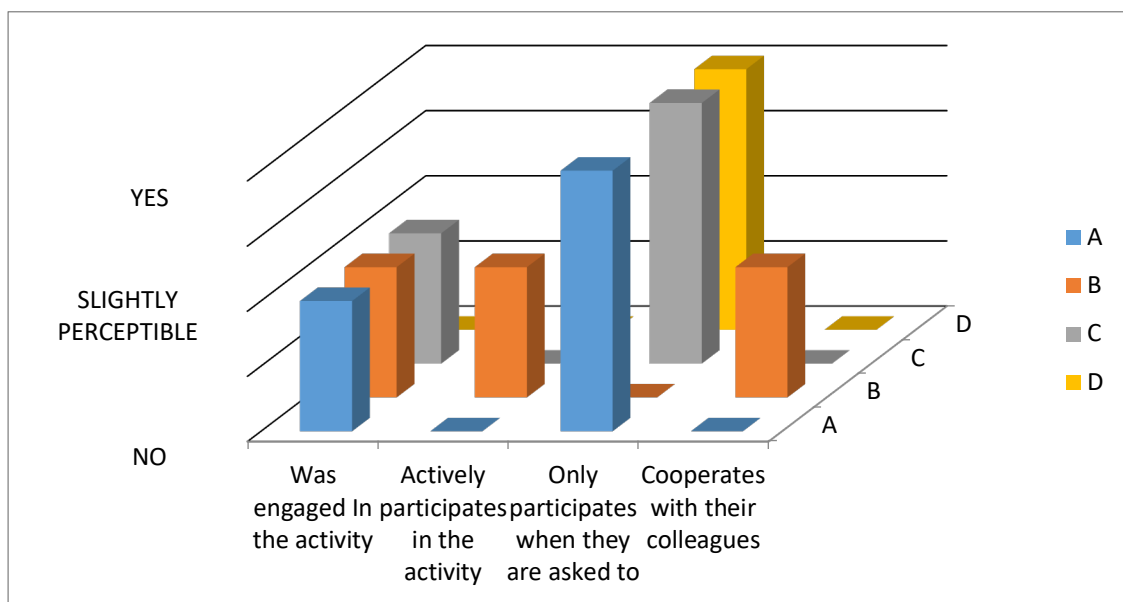
The main goal of this study was to see if using activities that promoted inter group competition would help reluctant students to participate more during the lesson. In order to confirm if that was the case, I collected data from two different activities, one was a guessing game, with no teams assembled, where there was a hidden picture that little by little would reveal itself and students had to guess what the picture was as soon as possible. This could be considered as a whole class activity where anyone could have participated and tried to guess what the picture was at any point. The second activity was the team “Jeopardy style” game which the details have already been explained above and how the game generally worked. The goal was to compare the students’ attitudes and posture during both of these activities and see if working in groups and playing against others would have a positive impact on the previously identified reluctant students’ participation and level of engagement. With the 4th year I managed to do this in a single lesson, which was on the 26th November. The picture reveal game (Appendix. 6) followed the same topic of the lesson which was sports and the game consisted of 10 sports which were hidden behind multiple squares and students had to choose two squares to reveal. From these two revealed squares, students tried to guess what that sport was. The activity went quite well as a whole, and several students showed great interest and wanted to participate.

With the 3rd year however, due to timing issues, I unfortunately was not able to use both type of games in a single lesson. The picture reveal game with the 3rd year was regarding the present continuous and this was one of the first lessons I have taught to this group. The pictures consisted of people performing different sorts of actions, such as dancing, running, playing football, etc. The purpose of the game was to have the students say complete sentences using the present continuous, for example “She is playing football”. The students had access to hints before each picture, specifically the gender of the person performing the action and if there were multiple people doing said action. This way, students could connect the action to the gender of the person, or multiple people and create a complete and meaningful sentence. This activity was done on the 11th October and as mentioned previously, due to timing issues, I had to postpone the “Jeopardy style” game to the 10th December. Despite that, each individual activity of both the 3rd and 4th year went according to plan and, along with my student-teacher colleague, we managed to successfully gather the data from these activities using the observation grid, and I was able to analyze the results in equal fashion.

3.4. Presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results

In this section I will present the data gathered from both activities in each class. I will display the obtained results through a graph representative of the observation grid used for each of the four students. We will mostly compare the differences in attitudes and posture of the students throughout the activities and see if there is any correlation with using inter group competition in the classroom and general participation of the more reluctant students which have been previously identified. Following the analysis of the graphs in regards to the observation grid, we will also analyze the results of the questionnaires handed to the students on the 12th and 13th December respectively. The results of the questionnaire will also be displayed in the form of graphs and there will be a comparison of the answers given between both the 3rd and 4th year class as well as the answers given by the targeted students in this study. We will begin by analyzing the 3rd year group and then we will move on to the 4th year group.

Firstly, to analyze the four students' behavior and attitudes during the activities the graph regarding the picture reveal game and how they reacted to the activity will be presented, and then the graph in relation to the group game I used, which was the "Jeopardy style" game, where they were actively competing against other groups and cooperating with their own group members will be presented as well. On the left side of the graph's vertical axis we can observe the same coding scheme I utilized to complete the observation grid (two ticks means "yes", one tick means "slightly perceptible" and an X means "no"). on the graph's horizontal axis are the criteria and descriptors utilized in the observation grid, or in other words, what was being paid close attention to, when it came to the students' attitudes. On the right side of the graph's vertical axis we can see the four students (A, B, C and D) and they are represented in four different colors to help differentiate the rectangular bars of each individual student.



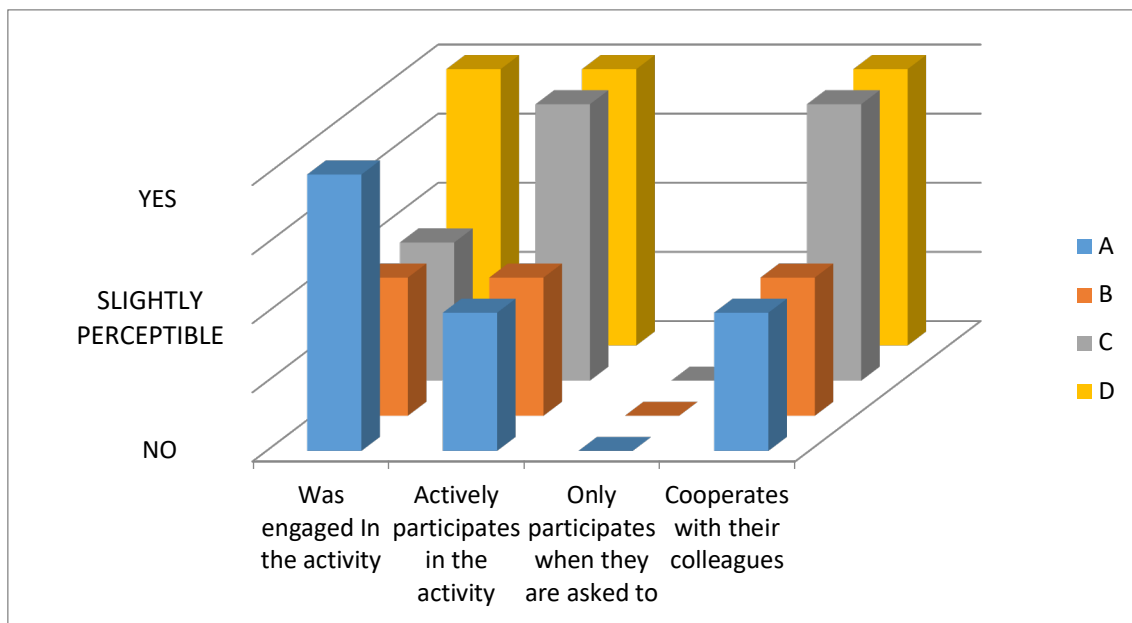
Graph 1 – 3rd year observation grid – picture reveal game – 11th October

As we can see from the gathered data in the observation grid, during the picture reveal game with the 3rd year group, Student B was the only one of these four to somewhat participate in the activity. Sometimes they would get distracted and would start talking to the colleagues next to them. However, they still managed to participate in the activity and maintain constant levels of engagement. Student B in particular, has a very high level of English and has always managed to complete any task we would put in front of them

despite of the fact that they are one of the shy students in that class. This sometimes could wrongfully lead the teacher into believing that they were not paying attention but with getting to know the students better with each and every lesson, I began to pick up on Student B's pattern to rarely participate, despite the fact that, when they did participate, it would more often than not be with the correct answer or something that contributed positively to the lesson. This shyness could explain the reason as to why their participation wasn't as constant as some of the other students. Perhaps they might have self-restrained themselves due to the lack of confidence in their linguistic ability.

At the other spectrum we can see that Student A, C and D only participated when the teacher directly asked them to. Generally speaking, they were in fact paying attention and were engaged in the activity. However, they would simply remain silent and allowed everyone else around them to play the game while they played a very passive role. Since this was a whole-class activity, where there were no groups assembled, perhaps they did not feel the need to intervene, as they had another 15 students ready to answer for them. Despite the fact that this was a whole-class activity, students still had the opportunity to cooperate with their colleagues. Student B however, was the only one to do so out of these four. One of the students sitting next to them was choosing the square to reveal a portion of the picture and Student B helped them by telling the other student to choose one from the middle because they might have a better chance of guessing the picture. This was a rather interesting moment that demonstrates the importance of promoting a supporting and cooperative learning environment. Both the teacher and the student should always work towards the same goals. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, Student A, C and D took on a very passive role and thus didn't show any clear signs of wanting to cooperate with their colleagues despite displaying relative interest in the activity.

The next graph is a reflection of the observation grid which was completed on the 10th December shortly after the group game took place.



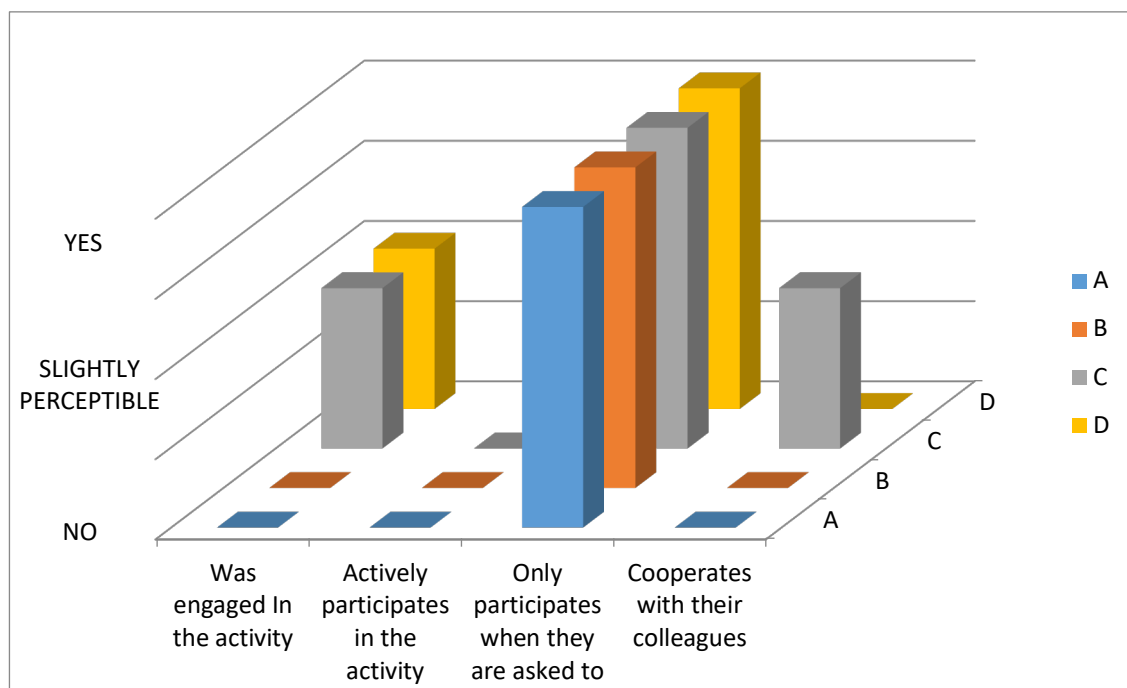
Graph 2 – 3rd year observation grid – group game – 10th December

As we can clearly see, there was a significant improvement in the students' attitudes and behaviors, mostly in Student C and Student D. Student D's attitudes had probably the most noticeable difference since this student in particular, is not usually shy outside of the classroom. They have a very friendly relationship with all their colleagues and they usually like taking initiative on other subjects. There is a strong possibility that perhaps the group environment helped them with the lack of confidence in their English language skills and they were able to feel more comfortable around their group, which subsequently allowed them to take more risks and to actively participate in the activity. As previously mentioned, Student D likes to take initiative and he was able to do so in this activity. They were very clearly the leader of the group, and I believe that also had a positive impact on the participation of the other members of the groups, since he was the one actually encouraging the others to speak. Student A and Student C also participated more in comparison to the picture reveal game and were able to cooperate with the other members of their groups. During other group activities Student A and Student C usually sit back and are completely passive in their respective roles. This time there was a significant difference in attitude, and they were both able to cooperate with their colleagues during the game. Perhaps adding the element of inter-group competition gave them that extra spark of motivation they needed to become active participants in each of

their teams. Another curious point to take notice is that Student C remained exactly the same in terms of both their attitudes and their participation. As mentioned previously, this student is shy than most of their colleagues and perhaps does not deal very well with group work. There were some moments however, where Student C visibly took initiative and cooperated with the other group members when it was their group's turn to answer the questions. I decided to give full autonomy to each individual group to manage themselves. As there were 16 questions in the game, there was a chance that every single student in that class could give out an answer. As the game progressed students started to assign roles in their groups and taking turns as to who would answer. This autonomy led most students to be able to answer a question without me having to directly elicit from them as much. Instead, their own peers started to encourage the students to participate and to contribute to their groups.

Although there was a visible improvement during the group game, it was also important to receive some feedback from the students. Shortly after the lesson was finished I casually asked around the class to see if the students enjoyed playing the game and nearly every student gave me an enthusiastic "yes" and some asked if we could play the game in future lessons. This feedback will be further analyzed when we take a closer look at the questionnaire answers. However, it seems that students had an overall positive reaction and that using group games proved to be an effective strategy in improving participation amongst the more reluctant 3rd year students.

When it came to the 4th year, as previously mentioned, I managed to successfully implement both the picture reveal game and the group game in the same lesson. This was relatively important because it allowed me to notice the differences in attitudes throughout different activities, on the same topic (sports) and within a relatively short amount of time, so there were fewer variables in the 4th year class which could have slightly influenced the results of the observation grids. The graph representing the observation grid on the students' attitudes and behavior during the picture reveal game done in the beginning of the lesson will now be presented.



Graph 3 – 4th year observation grid – picture reveal game – 26th November

This game followed the same routine as the 3rd year class. One student would select a square with a number of their choosing to reveal a portion of the picture and then they would try to guess the sport that was being played in the picture as soon as possible. As we can see Student A, B, C and D only participated when the teacher directly asked them to. When we were discussing the lesson plan previous to the activity, the English teacher suggested that in order to keep the students engaged and producing language, specifically written, throughout the game was to have the students separate the sports revealed in the pictures in two different categories: “inside” and “outside” and then the students would have to write down the sports in their notebooks in the correct categories. This would lead them into not only taking in the language but also practicing it through writing. This proved to be an effective strategy to keep the students calm throughout the game, because the 4th year class is more agitated than the 3rd year class, so with this group in particular, we always need to use games in a very cautious and controlled way, or else it will just simply be too much noise. With this being said, it was easily noticeable which students were somewhat engaged in the activity. Student C and D were in fact engaged in the activity as they were paying attention and writing down the names of the sports in their notebooks in the different categories. However, they did not actively participate in

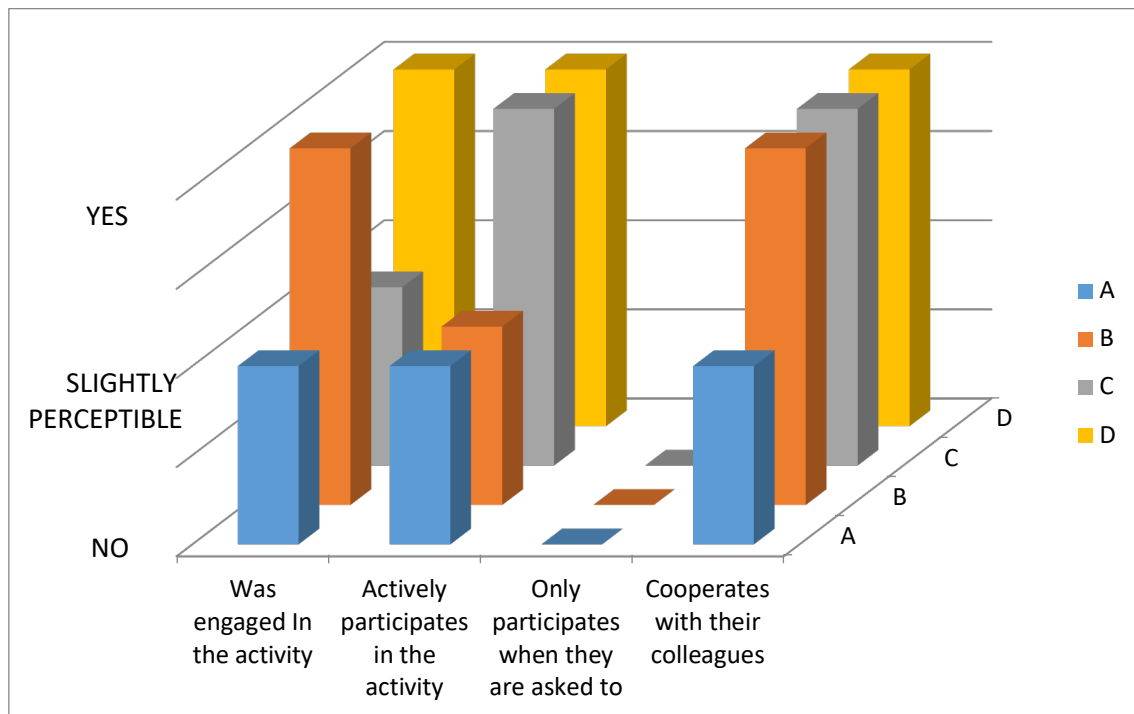
the activity. Student A and Student B required constant reminders to write down the names of the sports and generally were not as interested in the game as some of their other colleagues. Student C had moments when he did in fact cooperate with his colleagues, and it was a similar situation that happened with Student B of the 3rd year. The student next to them was having their turn selecting a square to reveal a portion of the picture and Student C suggested to choose a square from the center of the screen. When the small square was revealed, they also whispered the answer to their colleague, and it was in fact the right answer. It is also important to note however, that while the 3rd year group showed a somewhat equal level of engagement and excitement in the picture reveal game, the 4th year group showed very opposing sides.

The large majority of the students were incredibly excited to demonstrate their knowledge and to participate in the game, but there were other students, who were completely switched off from the activity. In the 4th year group, there are several students that show irregular patterns of attitudes through multiple lessons and sometimes even in that very same lesson. This is important to pick up on because it allows the teacher to see very clearly what motivates the student, and what drives them to participate in the lesson. Obviously, teachers can not always teach the lesson in the same way and use specific methods just because it made a particular student to pay attention and become engaged in the activity because teachers still need to account for the remaining students in that class. However, we can adapt those methods and divide the lesson in activities that engages all sorts of learning styles and specific personalities. Only then will there be a sense of balance and consistency in relation to the students' attitude, because if the students become accustomed to having engaging activities during a lesson, perhaps they will deal with the not so engaging ones in a better manner.

Student B from the 4th year for example, is a somewhat reluctant student. However when they are working in a group supported by their colleagues, it gives Student B a huge boost of confidence that then allows them to actively participate in the lesson. If throughout a lesson we keep doing individual tasks, like completing worksheets or doing grammar exercises on the book, Student B will eventually disconnect from the remainder of the lesson. Generally, the more reluctant students are not the ones who lack interest and do not care for the lesson. They are usually the ones that need extra

reassurance, and that reassurance can come from both the teacher and/or their colleagues, and the fact that they aren't in the center of attentions when they work in groups allows the reluctant student to feel much freer and confident enough in order to perform the task.

The following graph is a representation of the observation grid with regards to the 4th year students' attitudes and behaviors in the group game.



Graph 4 – 4th year observation grid – group game – 26th November

By taking a closer look at the graph, we can clearly see an improvement throughout all four students. Student A, who was probably the shyest student amongst the 4th year group showed higher willingness to participate and was engaged throughout the whole activity. If we compare the results of Student A with Student B, C and D we might have a sense that they did not improve as much as their peers. However, having the chance to observe and teach multiple lessons to the 4th year I still considered this to be a significant improvement in their attitudes and level of engagement. Student A usually does not show high levels of engagement during activities and seems to lack confidence when speaking. They tend to either freeze when the teacher asks them something or they say it really quietly. This ultimately leads to the teacher asking Student A to repeat

themselves a couple of times and that just makes the situation even worse. Student A probably has one of the highest levels of English skills from that class. However, there are not many tasks or activities that motivate them to display those skills. With the group game however, Student A managed to display a higher sense of cooperation in the group and was actively participating throughout the activity. There were some moments where Student A seemed a bit distracted and stressed but once the game started to pick up some momentum, they were able to focus and cooperate with the other members of the group. Student B, C and D also showed improvement when it came to their participation. In fact, Student C and D in particular, who usually took on passive roles in group activities were visibly contributing to the group task and sometimes they would even prevent the other members of the group to speak, so that they would be the ones doing the speaking. Obviously, this had more to do with their excitement during the activity than something necessarily negative like overpowering other members and neglecting them.

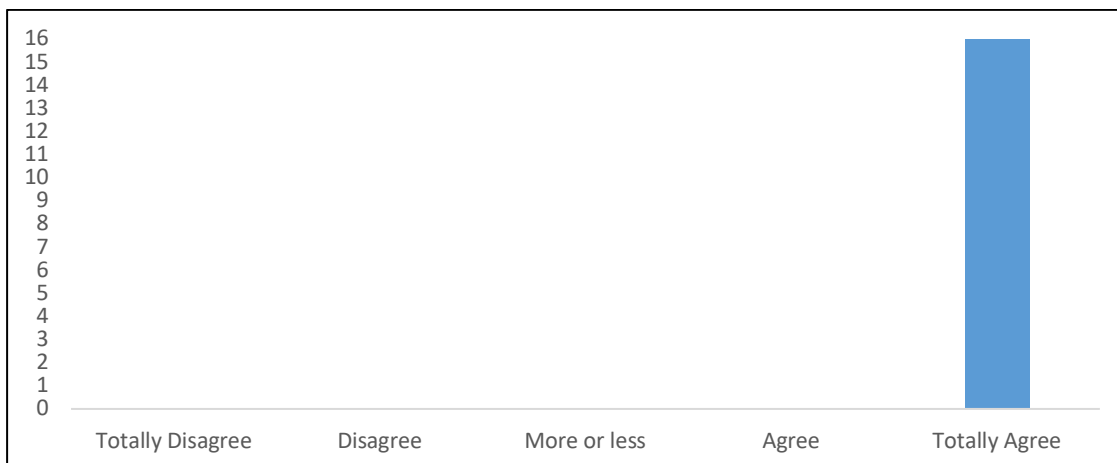
Very frequently these things happen without the students themselves realizing it, and it is also the teacher's task to ensure that there aren't any major discrepancies when it came to accountability within the group. Student B also showed high levels of cooperation during the game and encouraged other members of the group to participate as well. There is a very special class dynamic when it comes to the 4th year. Most of these children have already been together since the 1st school year and so they already know each other quite well and it is during group activities like these that we can observe just how much a cooperative learning environment is crucial for the development of a child. They learn how to deal with other types of personalities, they learn how to cooperate with others and ultimately these sorts of moments are what builds a strong foundation to a healthy relationship with their colleagues. As previously mentioned in the first chapter of this Action Research project, there is one special needs student in the 4th year group, and the ability that the rest of the class has, especially the ones who sit closer to that student, to cope with their needs. There is a constant support system where the other children voluntarily help the special needs student to focus and to follow along with the lesson. It is truly remarkable to see it in first-hand.

Much like the 3rd year class, I also took in consideration some feedback from the students at the end of the activity. Once again, the general response was extremely positive and Student D in fact, explicitly told me that these were their favorite kinds of lessons. Being able to have this sort of natural feedback from both classes was only possible due to the friendly and safe relationship I developed along the course of the term with the students.

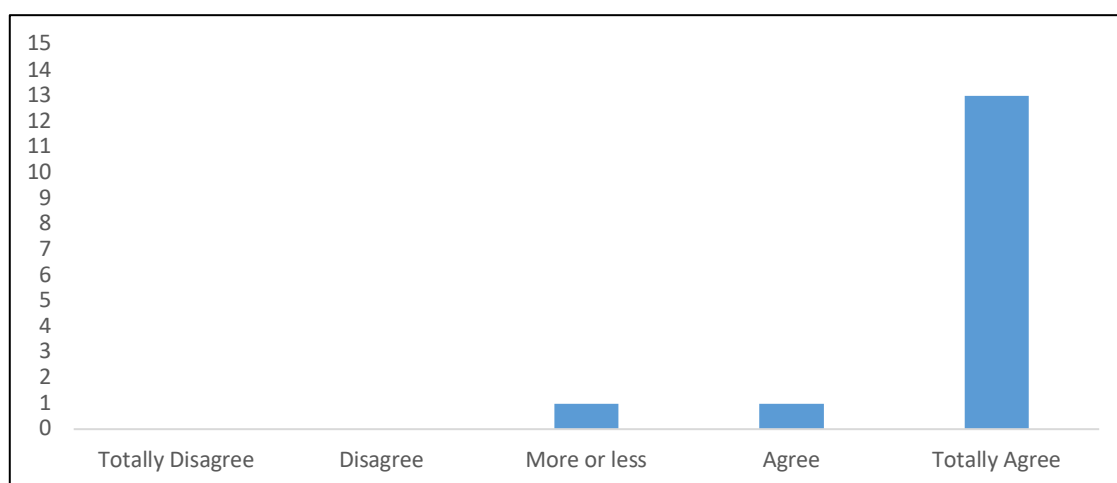
We will now analyze the answers to the questionnaire from both classes. It is important to point out that, unfortunately, one of the 4th year students was absent the day I handed in the questionnaire and so I was not able to collect their answers. 16 students from the 3rd year and 15 students from the 4th year answered this questionnaire. The results will now be presented through a chart graph and will analyze and compare the answers of each group. Then, we will pay closer attention to the answers specifically given by the 4 students monitored from each class in this study.

The first question was on whether the students enjoyed playing games in the classroom or not, this involved every sort of games, like guessing games, group games, Simon Says, etc. Students would give their answers by circling or marking one of the five colorful faces. On the far left we had a red frown face which would symbolize “totally disagree”, then we would follow along the order: an orange face would mean “disagree”, a yellow face would mean “more or less”, a green face would mean “agree” and a dark green would mean “totally agree”.

As we can see from the graphs below, there was an extremely positive reaction regarding the use of games in the classroom from both classes, in fact, every single student from the 3rd grade gave the exact same answer: “totally agree”. With the 4th year, 13 students also gave this answer and there were two students who gave out different answers in term of levels of agreement, but never actually showed signs of disagreeing with enjoying playing games in the classroom.



Graph 5 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers to 1st question – 13th December

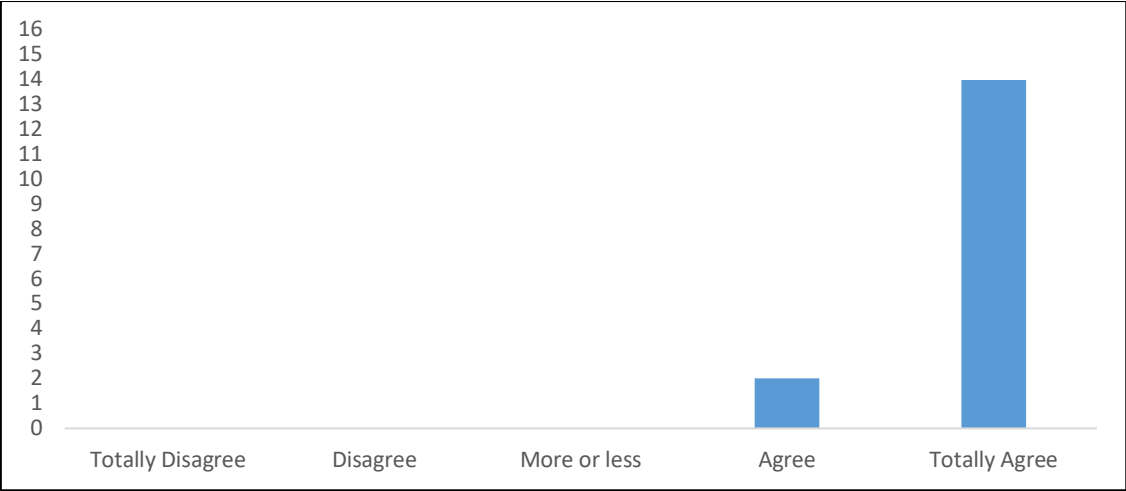


Graph 6 – 4th year questionnaire: answers to 1st question – 14th December

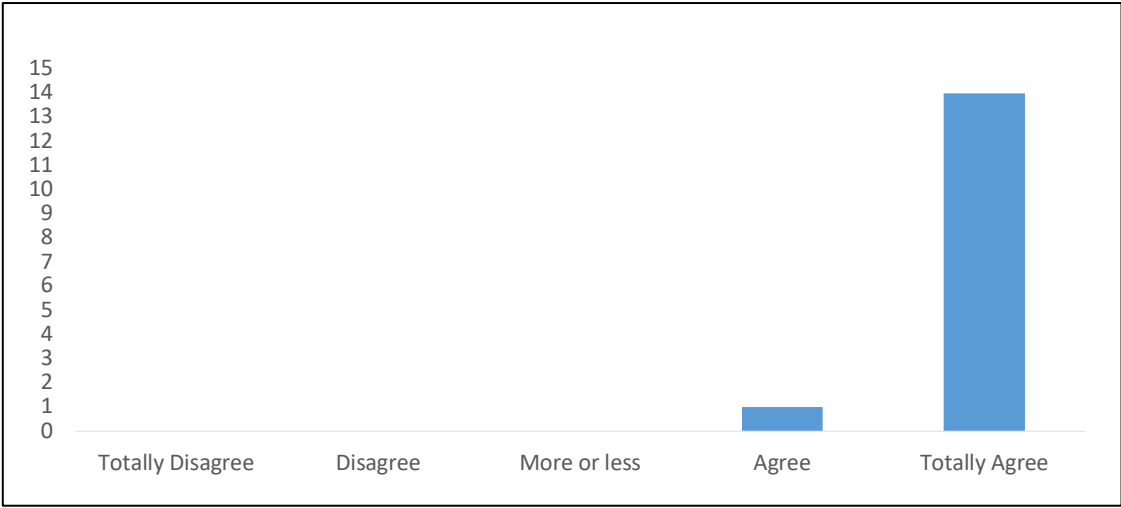
The next question revolved around group work activities, not necessarily just games, but for example, school projects, since this was a very reoccurring activity in the school in general, not just during English classes.

Regarding the students' opinions towards group activities, it is very clear to see the positive feedback that both graphs give. This is to be somewhat expected because as mentioned previously, these groups are already very used to work in groups throughout the whole curriculum and the English subject is no different. Children absolutely need social interactions with others of the same age in all contexts, whether that be in a school or casual setting. As stated in the results of the observation grid, these groups show an

exceptional willingness to help each other and there is a high level of companionship in the classroom. This is crucial in order to make the child feel safe and comfortable when learning so, it comes to no one’s surprise that both the 3rd and 4th year shared a very positive view on group work activities.

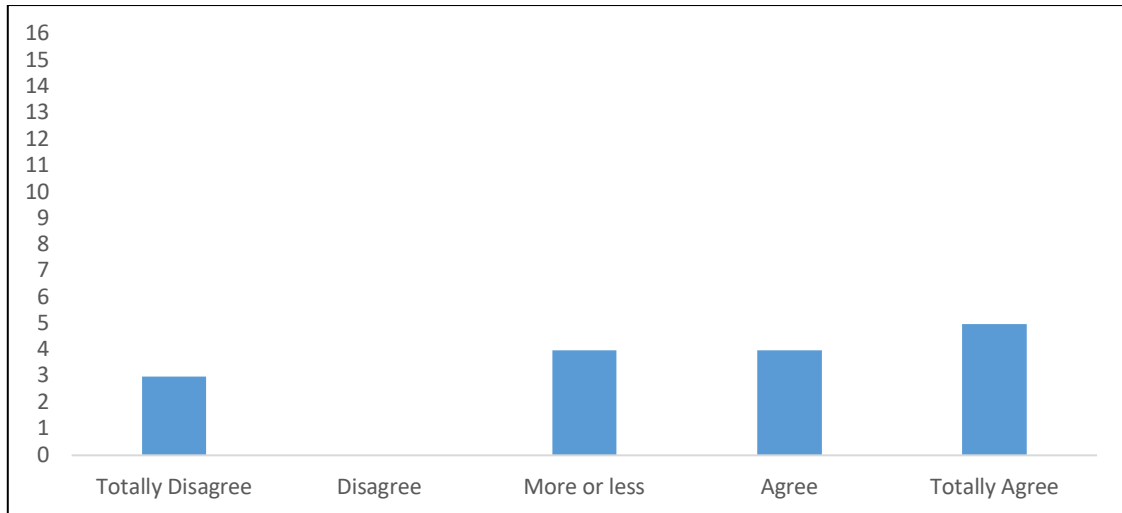


Graph 7 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers to 2nd question – 13th December

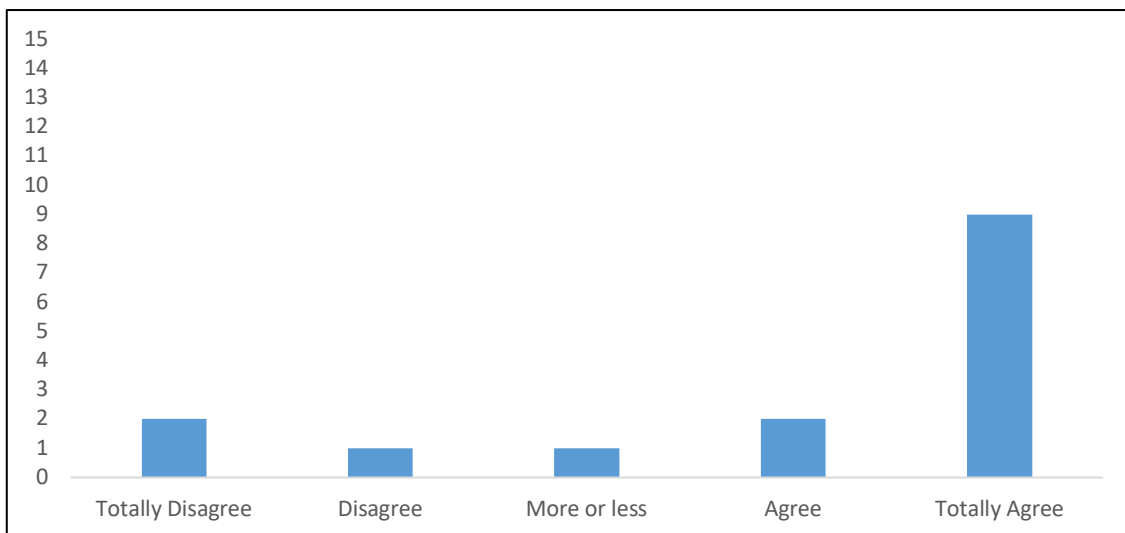


Graph 8 – 4th year questionnaire: answers to 2nd question – 14th December

The 3rd question is arguably the one that the students reflected the most on their own learning. The question itself was regarding the students' motivation when working in groups, specifically, if these group activities helped to improve their motivation in any way. There were several different answers as we will see in the following graphs.



Graph 9 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers to 3rd question – 13th December



Graph 10 – 4th year questionnaire: answers to 3rd question – 14th December

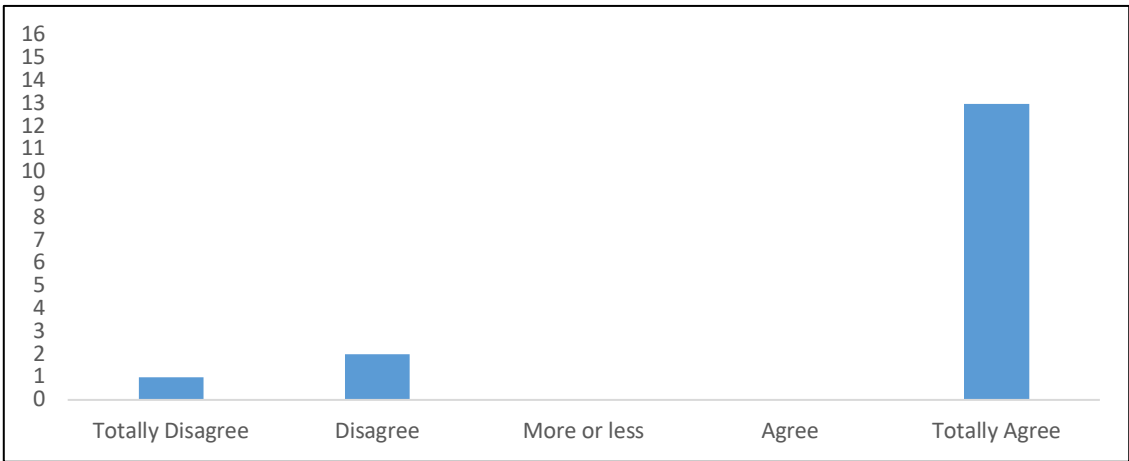
As we can see, the answers of the 3rd year are not as homogenous as the other questions. There is almost a certain balance of the different answers given. However, the general consensus was that group games did in fact make the students want to participate more often during English lessons. There were 4 students that were neutral when it came to group games and answered that their participation would remain the same regardless of the activity. There were 3 students however, that strongly disagreed with the statement. I find this to be fitting to the personalities of 2 out of the 3 students because they are usually extremely participative regardless of the activity we put in front of them, so they believed that group games wouldn't alter their participation levels for the better. The other student that strongly disagreed with the statement that group activities would improve their willingness to participate was in fact Student D from the observation grid graphs previously shown, which was surprising to see because during the group game with the 3rd year, student D was one of the more active members and showed a higher frequency of participation than usual.

With the 4th year however, the answers leaned towards the more positive answers rather than the negative ones. Only 3 students in total generally disagreed with the statement and there was only one student that remained neutral. The remaining 11 students concluded that doing group work activities would help them to participate more. This time there was a stronger conviction in comparison to the 3rd year, since only 4 of the 3rd year students strongly agreed and 5 agreed, as opposed to the 4th year group where 9 students strongly agreed, and 2 students agreed. This follows the same logic that I have been discussing throughout these results: the 4th year class has more experience in working together in groups, they have known each other for longer and already have the dynamics of a well-organized group as a whole. This could be one of the reasons as to why the 4th year class tends to favor group activities and highly values it as a tool to motivate them in participating more often.

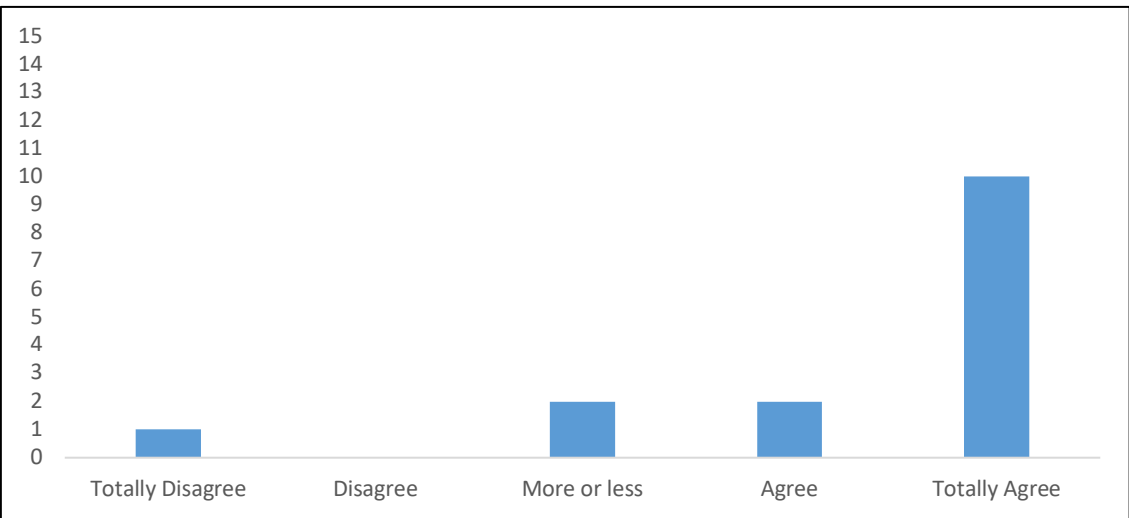
The final question touched the competitive side of the students, and whether they enjoyed playing and competing against other groups or not during English lessons. The overall view of the students regarding competition was very positive and the answers generally follow the same script of the answers given above. The students that disagreed

with the fact that group work would improve their participation also disagreed with the statement of enjoying playing against other groups.

Graph 11 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers to 4th question – 13th December



Graph 12 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers to 4th question – 13th December



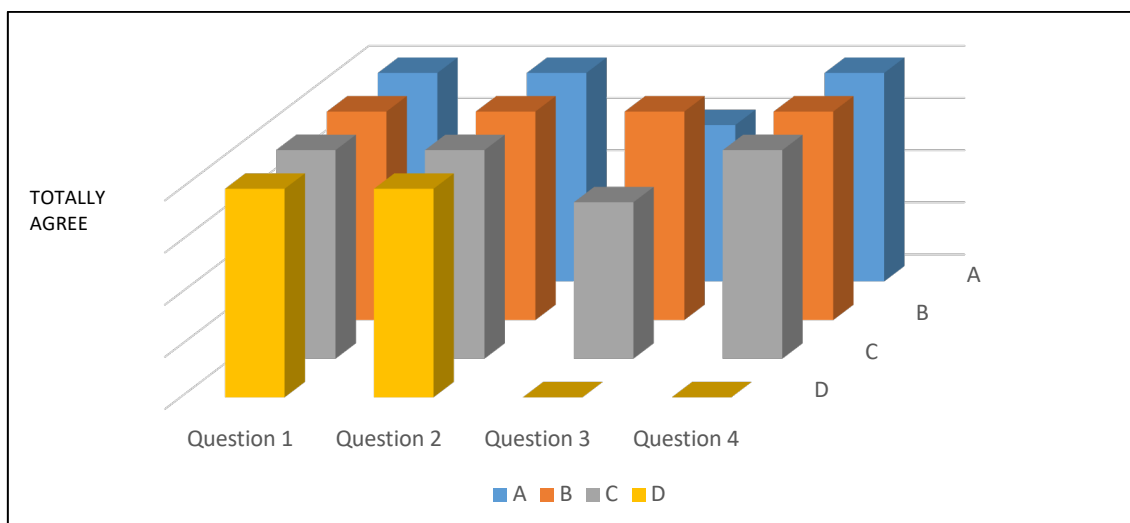
Graph 13 – 4th year questionnaire: answers to 4th question – 14th December

Despite of the fact that the vast majority of students from both the 3rd and 4th year strongly agreed with enjoying competing against other groups, there were still some that disagreed with the statement. The 3rd year student that strongly disagreed was Student D once again, even though there was a clear improvement in their attitudes during the group game in comparison to the picture reveal game. With that being said Student D

perhaps prefers a less competitive environment and group activities where the class, as a whole, is working towards the same goal and not competing with each other.

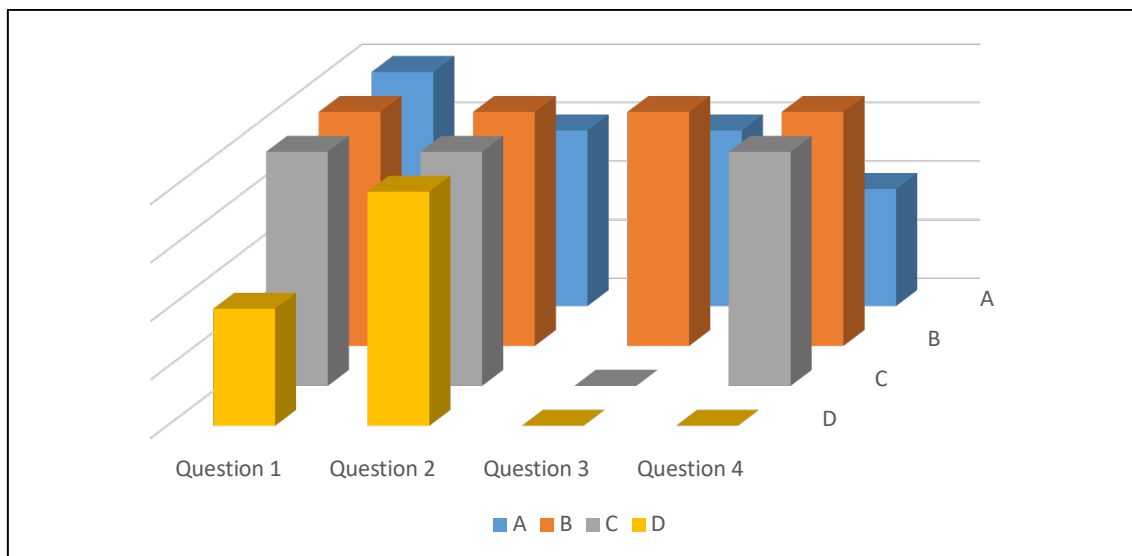
We have taken a look at the results of the questionnaires from both classes, and we can conclude that the vast majority of students enjoy playing games in the classroom and doing group activities. There was a slight difference in opinions however, when it came to the effectiveness of group work in order to increase their own participation and also with competing against other groups during the lesson. We will now take a closer look at the results of the questionnaire but this time we will focus solely on the answers of the students I decided to focus on when using the observation grid.

As shown in the graph below, the students answers were generally aligned with their improvement in regards to their attitudes and frequency of participation. All 4 students said that they enjoyed playing games in the classroom and in doing group activities. Student A, B and C agreed that working in groups motivated them in participating more during the activity and also, they liked the competitive element when performing group tasks during the lesson. Student D however, displayed very different opinions in regards to these two final questions even though there was a noticeable improvement during the group game. One possible reason as to why this has happened was that I was able to get Student D outside of their comfort zone, and perhaps they had the feeling that doing group tasks or individual tasks would not make much of a difference when it came to their participation. Perhaps they simply did not enjoy stepping out of their comfort zone, despite of all the visible benefits it did to their participation and level of engagement. Another possible reason had to do with Student D not liking the competitive element but that seems a bit further away from the truth because it was visible that they were in fact engaged and trying to win. I also tried to make the competition as lighthearted as possible, so there was no real value in the winners and the motivation students had was always intrinsic and never through a reward system which can spark unhealthy competition as we already know.



Graph 14 – 3rd year questionnaire: answers of Student A, B, C and D – 13th December

With regards to the 4th year students' answers, there was also a general consensus of games being seen in a positive manner as well as group activities. The third question however, once again, displayed some visible differences in opinions. Student's C answer is particularly interesting due to the fact that they do in fact enjoy competing against other groups, so the element of competition is a positive thing according to Student C. They believed that working in groups did not make much of a difference when it came to influencing their frequency of participation, despite the clear differences in their attitudes between the picture reveal game and the group game. Student C normally is a relatively reserved student, much like the other students in this graph, but he does tend to participate quite frequently when the teacher elicits them to. In group work however, they tend to play a passive role and allow the other students to do the task for them. Perhaps this might have influenced the way they see the idea of what a group activity is and then judged upon that thought. However, introducing the element of competition, which they explicitly said they enjoyed, perhaps gave a new dynamic to the group work which they are not used to and simply did not notice their shift in enthusiasm during the group game in comparison to different group activities done in other lessons. Student D from the 4th year had very similar answers to Student D from the 3rd year, coincidentally. In fact, they are very similar students personality-wise. They are quite shy and reluctant but when they work in groups they tend to open up and be confident enough in themselves to take risks more frequently.



Graph 15 – 4th year questionnaire: answers of Student A, B, C and D – 14th December

After analyzing the more reticent students' answers we can generally see that they do in fact enjoy taking part in group activities while some might not fully see the benefits themselves. However, it is safe to say that using group work during the lessons and specifically with adding that extra element of competition, proved to be an effective strategy in order to improve reluctant students' participation, motivation and engagement throughout the lesson.

IV – Conclusions

This Action Research project was an opportunity to reflect on the teaching process as a whole, and also to reflect on the students' learning. Since this was the very first teaching practice, it was extremely important to have a reflective and critical view of one's teaching strategies. This was made possible through the elaboration of this study. Through this study, some of the issues that an English as a foreign language teacher faces when teaching became clearer. The main focus of this study was on reluctant and reticent students, and specifically, to determine whether or not group work activities helped to improve participation and level of engagement amongst these quieter students. It was definitely rewarding to see just how positively most of these children reacted to the group work activities that were prepared for them. In the end, the enthusiasm that the students showed during the course of the whole teaching practice was one of the main reasons as to why this profession is so rewarding. It is the fuel that drives teachers in wanting to become better and better and improve their teaching strategies every single day.

The close relationship that we build with all our students throughout our career and the personal fulfilment of when the students show that they are interested in our lesson and they want to learn from us is extremely important to teachers. This is obviously a huge responsibility because it is our job to make sure that every learner leaves our classroom with the sense that they actually learnt something that day. To do this we must first get to know the students in order to accommodate to their specific learning styles and also constantly come up with ways to keep them engaged and wanting to expand their knowledge and develop as a person. Teachers must remember that they will never just be a source of knowledge, they will also be a role model and hopefully someone the students will hold dear in their hearts many years later.

Doing research allowed me to identify and grasp some of the issues that this Action Research report covers, such as the concept of a reluctant student and lack of motivation in the classroom. It has also granted the opportunity to implement different strategies to help cope with this problem and see if the supporting theoretical framework to this study would benefit the students in any way. It was very rewarding to see the more reluctant students improve their frequency of participation and become more autonomous

when performing group work activities. By implementing the use of inter group competition when doing these activities most of them were able to become very active in the lesson and would eventually lose their fear of speaking and would positively contribute to their group and to the lesson. We can then conclude that activities that involve group work, especially those that have the added element of competition between groups, led to an increase in the reluctant students' motivation, level of engagement and frequency of participation during the lesson.

4.1. Limitations to the study and future research suggestions

Since this study took place during the Covid-19 global pandemic, the frequency for group work activities significantly decreased. With that being said, it would have been beneficial to add more group work activities throughout the school term in order to collect additional data that could have made the data itself more precise. Since my student-teacher colleague and I had to share taught lessons with our mentor with both the 3rd and 4th year, it was harder to keep a consistent pattern with either group throughout the term. Even though consistently switching between groups helped us to develop as teachers due to the different group dynamics that we had to adapt to, it would have been positive to teach one group consistently, even if it was only for one or two consecutive weeks. It was also difficult to develop another cycle of intervention since my student-teacher colleague was also doing her research and so we had to divide the lessons equally among us to make sure that we had the same number of opportunities to implement our Action Research plan. Using a mask while teaching was also somewhat a limiting factor due to the fact that it took a couple of attempts for the students to understand exactly what was being said. However, with time and practice to adapt to this new reality, this issue was relatively easy to overcome.

With regards to this topic area, some future research suggestions would include using other sorts of group games and then analyzing and comparing the results with regards to the "Jeopardy style" group game that was heavily explored in this study, to see if there are any significant variables that could alter the outcomes and results previously discussed. Since this is a group work focused study, it would also be beneficial to look into the different strategies that students use to communicate within their group. In other words, what do students do and how do they express themselves when they are trying to

communicate with the other members of the group. Doing so would allow us to see if the students tend to rely more on their mother tongue or if they consistently try to use the target language, and also, how teachers can help promote the more frequent use of the target language when doing pair/group work activities. Since competition plays an important role in this study, perhaps it would be interesting to also analyze the positive and negative effects that competition may bring to the English classroom and also explore even further the nature of the activities that promote healthy and unhealthy competition.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – 4th grade classroom setting

Appendix 2 – Observation grid

Appendix 3 – Questionnaire

Appendix 4 – Jeopardy style game

Appendix 5 – 4th grade lesson plan – 26th of November

Appendix 6 – Picture reveal game

Appendix 1 – 4th grade classroom setting



Appendix 2 – Observation grid

Student:	Was engaged in the activity (paid attention, tried to use the target language)	Actively participates in the activity (raises their hand, and shows interest)	Only participates when it's their turn (when the teacher directly asks them to answer)	Cooperates with their colleagues (even when it's not group vs group; with the whole class, so they help each other's)
A				
B				
C				
D				

Appendix 3 – Questionnaire



Nome: _____

1- Gosto de jogar jogos nas aulas de Inglês.



2- Gosto de fazer atividades de grupo nas aulas de Inglês.



3- Tenho mais vontade de participar nas aulas de Inglês quando trabalhamos em grupo.



4- Gosto de jogar contra os outros grupos nas aulas de Inglês.



Appendix 4 – Jeopardy Style game

CHOOSE A CATEGORY AND A VALUE			
Sports	Winter Sports	Sports Equipment	Sports Trivia
20	20	20	20
40	40	40	40
60	60	60	60
80	80	80	80
100	100	100	100

Winter sports: 60 points

He is snowboarding.

What is he doing?



Back To Board

Appendix 5 – 4th grade lesson plan – 26th of November

SCHOOL: Externato Ribadouro		STUDENT TEACHER: Tiago Oliveira	
DATE: 26 th November		LENGTH OF LESSONS: 60m	TIME: 14:20 – 15:20 on Friday
CLASS LEVEL: 4th year primary		CLASS SIZE: 16	
SUMMARY: Introduction and practice of new vocabulary: winter sports (skiing, ice hockey, snowboarding) Reviewing and practicing previous lesson vocabulary: sports equipment (trainers, swimsuit, socks, stick, shirt, roller skates, racket, oar, knee pads, helmet, goggles, flippers, fishing rod, club, cap, boots, board, bat, balls) “- What do you need to...?” - I need...” Jeopardy Game			
AIMS (4Cs)			
Content: (thematic ideas/concepts) Sports, winter sports, sports equipment			
Communication: (Language of content theme; language needed for communication in tasks) “- What do you need to...?” - I need...” winter sports: (skiing, ice hockey, snowboarding) sports equipment: (trainers, swimsuit, socks, stick, shirt, roller skates, racket, oar, knee pads, helmet, goggles, flippers, fishing rod, club, cap, boots, board, bat, balls)			
Cognition: (Thinking skills development). For learners to understand the different kinds of sports, their locations and what kind of equipment is required			
Culture: (Target culture(s); intercultural communication; perceptions of self and others). For learners to work together as a class to support each other's learning. To learn and understand different kinds of winter sports, common in other countries			
TIMETALE FIT: This is the second lesson on Sports. The previous lesson covered more familiar sports and equipment, this lesson is more focused on reviewing the topic of sports in a general fashion with the use of the guessing game and Jeopardy game.			
ASSESSMENT: Through observation and monitoring of learners' performance. Asking comprehension questions throughout the lesson			
ASSUMPTIONS: Learners do not know some specific winter sports vocabulary. Learners already know: most sports equipment needed to play these winter sports, such as: helmet, skates, knee pads, etc.			
ANTICIPATED PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS: Some learners might struggle with understanding the vocabulary. It may help to use hand gestures (when applied) and potentially the mother tongue.			
TEACHING AIDS: Video, pictures, PPT (Jeopardy game)			

STAGE TIME INTERACTION	PROCEDURE	AIM	SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES
PRACTICE 10m T-Ss	Teacher greets the students 1. T reviews the previous lesson: What sports did we talk about last time? Where do you play football? (pitch) Where do you play basketball? (court) Where do you run? (track) Where do you swim? (swimming pool) And what about the equipment you need to play and practice some sports? Can I get some examples? What do you need to play tennis? (racket and a ball) What do you need to swim? (goggles, swimsuit and flippers)	To grasp the students attention and interest 1. Promote dialogue 1. Getting the Ss in the mood to learn	Gestures with hands and facial expressions Eliciting questions from the teacher
PRACTICE 10m T-Ss	T corrects the worksheet from the previous lesson T uses the previous lesson PPT to show the correct answers (first exercise) T corrects the second exercise on the board and with the whole class	Reinforcing the vocabulary and the pronunciation	Worksheet Pictures Drilling
PRESENTATION/ PRACTICE 10m T-Ss	Guessing game T writes inside/outside on the board and Ss must do the same on their notebooks Ss must write down all the sports that appears on game and order them by location (so, if the sport is usually played inside or outside) T asks a Ss to choose 2 numbers on the PPT, then T reveals those spaces and the Ss must try and guess which sport it is	Reinforcing the vocabulary and the pronunciation Ss to develop their thinking skills by making predictions Ss to develop their writing skills	PPT Repetition Pictures

PRODUCTION 20m T-Ss	T opens the Jeopardy game PPT and explains the rules: - The class will be divided once again in groups of 4 (same groups as the previous activity) - Each group will get 5 chances to answer to any questions they want - The harder the question the more points the team wins if they answer correctly - The team with the most points at the end of the game (when all the questions are answered) wins As the game progresses T writes down the scores of each team on the board	Ss to develop their higher order thinking skills by making predictions Reinforcing the vocabulary and the pronunciation Encourage verbal communication	Pictures PPT Points written on the Board as the game is played
5m T- Ss	T reviews the lesson T receives feedback from the Ss: what did they think of the lesson and of the games we played	To review the lesson a whole, not just what they learnt but how they felt throughout the whole lesson	Eliciting questions from the teacher

Appendix 6 – Picture reveal game

