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Cooperative Learning: A Teacher Perspective

Kooperativt Lärande: Ur Lärares perspektiv

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1. Abstract

This study’s aim is to investigate what strategies within cooperative learning teachers’ use in the English classroom. An additional aim is to investigate how teachers’ believe cooperative learning contributes to interaction between students. The study focuses on the perspective of the teachers. Cooperative learning is a pedagogical method with roots from the sociocultural perspective. Furthermore, it is described by Kagan and Stenlev (2006) as a method where students work in groups and cooperate in order to achieve the mutual goal. According to Kagan and Stenlev (2006), the students’ communicative interaction between each other is one of the critical elements of cooperative learning.

The empirical material consists of qualitative interviews with four legitimized teachers. I chose to conduct a qualitative research in order to guarantee valid answers due to the time given. After the interviews, the recorded answers were analyzed and compared to one and other in order to reach answers to my research question. After having finished the result analyze, the recordings of the interviews were deleted.

The result of the study shows that teachers tend to use following strategies within cooperative learning: think-pair-share, team-pair-solo, quiz-quiz-trade, jigsaw, poem for two voices and placement consensus. Furthermore, it shows that teachers’ attitude and willingness to use cooperative learning can depend on when they got their degree. However, additional factors may have an impact, such as the lack of further education in connection to the introduction of the new steering document in 2011.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning, English as a foreign language, Interaction, Sociocultural perspective, Zone of proximal development.
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2. Introduction

During my practice teaching (VFU) at primary school level (K-3) I have experienced many positive learning situations, but also some less inspiring. The traditional teacher-centered classrooms have been criticized by researchers like Freiberg (1999) and Dollard & Christensen (1996). In teacher-centered classrooms “authority is transmitted hierarchically” (Dollard & Christensen, 1996, p. 3), meaning the teacher exerts control over the students. Critics of teacher-centeredness argue that in these classrooms, compliance is valued over initiative and passive learners over active learners (Freiberg, 1999). I remember the first VFU course, when I documented some of my reflections after four weeks. I wrote, “Where is all the group work? In what situations do the students interact with one another?” This carried on through all of my courses; and what I have seen is students working individually in the English classroom. For example, in the English classroom, the students worked individually the majority of the time. In reading situations, there were no book circles where 5-6 kids read the same book so that they can discuss and reflect about it together. Instead, students read by themselves and thereafter wrote a book review. An additional example was when the students were learning vocabulary, new words and pronunciation. In this case, I have witnessed students sighing over vocabulary since the type of vocabulary learning taking place was where the teacher wrote down new words on the whiteboard, and students wrote them in their notebooks. This can be problematic due to the fact that in these learning situations mentioned above, there were no interaction and communicative situation between students. The fact that it is still dominating English classrooms is for me difficult to understand, since it is the totally opposite way of teaching compared to what Malmö University has been teaching us for almost four years.

Research illustrates that the practice of group work is increasing, and the merits for the method are numerous. Cooperative learning is a method students cooperate in groups in order to reach the mutual goal. Both Johnson and Johnson (1999) and Slavin (1995) argue the fact that there are positive outcomes in terms of knowledge development as well as social behavioral development. Group based learning has become a popular method and is synonymous with group work. Group work is an expression that stands for various forms of work done in groups (Chiriac, 2003 and Mutwarasibo, 2013). Group work is a well-established pedagogical tool that encourages
democratic values and stimulates students in their learning process (Frykedal, 2008 and Mutwarasibo, 2013).

According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), students working together in structured, cooperative groups are more likely to experience positive outcomes in cognitive development than students who work in isolation from each other. Not all is positive, as reported by Chiriac (2014), group work can have positive effect on academic skills but in fact hamper the individual learning. However, Vygotsky (1978) argues that the social process of learning together, in a sociocultural perspective, through debate and discussion allows individuals to develop higher mental functioning. According to Vygotsky, knowledge arises in communication with other individuals. As stated by Lightbown and Spada (2013), it is in the social interaction with others that we learn how to communicate successfully. In addition to this, Wenger (2010) states that learning occurs constantly and more often together with others.

The Swedish National Curriculum (2011) states that it is the school’s responsibility to ensure that all students can learn, research, and work independently and together with others, and feel confident in their own ability after leaving compulsory school. The school is supposed to promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathize. This is not an easy task, and in my opinion, it can only be done if and when students get the chance to work cooperatively in groups or in pairs. Cooperative learning in the English classroom is important for K-3 learners, because of the importance of interaction between students in order for them to develop the language as much as possible. I find support in this by the Swedish National Curriculum for the compulsory school (2011), where one of the aims for the English subject that:

Through teaching, pupils should be given the opportunity to develop all-round communicative skills. These skills involve understanding spoken and written English, being able to formulate one’s thinking and interact with others in the spoken and written language, and the ability to adapt use of language to different situations, purposes and recipients. Communication skills also cover confidence in using the language and the ability to use different strategies to support communication and solve problems when language skills by them themselves are not sufficient (p.32).
Additionally, it is stated in the Curriculum (2011) for the English subject, that students should get the ability to express themselves and communicate in speech. Additionally, students should get the ability to develop language strategies in order to understand and make themselves understood (p.32). Yet, the role of sociocultural perspective in teaching is something that I believe is lacking in my practice teaching courses. Teachers in my practice school share the opinion that group activities and teaching via social exchange is tricky and demands a lot of planning and structure. Cooperative learning goes hand in hand with the sociocultural teaching perspective where concepts as ZPD (zone of proximal development), interaction, communication and mediation are emphasized.

English as a foreign language, EFL, is a term often used to describe English learners that live in a country where English is not their first or second language. In this text, I will use the abbreviation EFL and EFL learners.

3. Aim and research questions
The purpose of my study is to examine in what ways teachers use cooperative learning as well as how it contributes to interaction between students.

The following two research questions have been formulated related to the aim of the study:

1. What strategies do teachers use to facilitate cooperative learning?
2. What are teachers’ thoughts about how cooperative learning can contribute to interaction between students?

4. Theoretical background
In this section I will explain some of the key terms and concepts in my study, Vygotsky and the sociocultural perspective, cooperative learning, zone of proximal development, English as a foreign language, learning strategies for EFL learners, think-pair-share, poem for two voices and jigsaw.

4.1 Vygotsky and the sociocultural perspective

The reason why I chose to write about Vygotsky and the sociocultural perspective in the theoretical background section is because of the fact that Vygotsky’s theories has formed cooperative learning.

The ideas of Bruner (1915-2016), Piaget (1896-1980) and Vygotsky (1896-1934) formed the sociocultural and constructivist perspectives of learning (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 3). Vygotsky developed the perspective further, with the idea that learning is a social event that takes place when people interact with others. Vygotsky also stated the fact that all individuals are unique learners and that the social context where learning takes place has great impact on the learner. Vygotsky states that language is a crucial part of social interaction and understanding of the outside world. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), we learn how to communicate successfully through social interaction with others. In agreement with the researchers above, Wenger (2010) states that learning is something that occurs constantly and more often together with others. To be able to learn, we need a way to communicate, one of the ways being speaking. However, communicative competence can be more than just speaking. Communicative competence could be reading and writing as well, but this study will focus on speaking. By communicating with others, we receive direct response and feedback that facilitate our development. Tornberg (1997) argues that the need for communicative competence is one of the things that have had the largest impact on modern language teaching in Sweden.

4.2 Zone of proximal development
Zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a concept that was developed by Vygotsky. Vygotsky (1999) argues that what a child can do with the support of someone else today, she can do by herself tomorrow. Education that focuses on what the child already knows is without effect. ZPD describes how an individual can perform at a higher level because of the support offered by an interlocutor. Several foreign language researchers, for example, Richard Donato (1994) and Jim Lantolf (2000), are interested in showing how foreign language learners acquire language when they collaborate and interact with other speakers, linked to Vygotsky’s theory. ZPD has previously been seen as an interaction between an expert and a novice. However, recent work has broadened the term to include novice-novice interactions, like in cooperative learning, where the students develop together (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p.118-119). Vygotsky (1978) states that the students have to interact with someone in order for learning to take place. The intention is that the dialogue with other students will challenge the student’s current knowledge and abilities and thus facilitating development. In agreement with Vygotsky’s theory of ZPD, Partanen (2007) wrote in his book that a task should not be designed so it is too difficult for the student. However, when repeating something that they already know, studying makes no sense and becomes boring.

4.3 Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is based on the sociocultural perspective, and the thoughts are based on Vygotsky’s theory that learning is a social process that arises in interaction with others (Vygotsky, 2017, p.90). In cooperative learning, all students’ participation is important, and in order to achieve a well-functioning group, the engagement of all students is required. The entire group creates knowledge together: simultaneously as each individual develops new knowledge.

There are many definitions of cooperative learning in the literature, following is one of numerous examples:

Cooperative learning will be defined as students working together in a group small enough that everyone can participate on a collective task that has been clearly assigned. Moreover, students are expected to carry out their task without direct and immediate supervision of the teacher. The study of cooperative learning should not be confused with
small groups that teachers often compose for the purpose of intense, direct instruction - for example, reading groups (Cohen, 1994, p.3).

According to Forslund Frykedal (2008), cooperative learning is identified by structure where small strategically designed groups work together towards a mutual goal. Furthermore, when learning cooperatively, support and mutual interest for the task within the group is of importance. This could, according to Bertucci et al. (2008), enhance motivation towards learning and increase students’ academic achievement. As cited in Boundary Crossings: Cooperative learning, collaborative learning and problem-based learning by Davidson and Major (2014), Davidson and Worsham (1992) suggest that the following four attributes are common to all methods of cooperative learning. (1) A task suitable for the group work, (2) student-to-student interaction, (3) interdependence structured to foster cooperation within groups, (4) individual responsibility. In later research Davidson (2002), added one element: (5) cooperative, mutually helpful behavior (p.14). In agreement with Davidson (1994, 2002), Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (2013) suggest that five critical elements have to take place in order for a lesson to be cooperative. The first element of a cooperative lesson is positive interdependence, which means that students must believe that they are linked with others in a way that one can not succeed unless the other members of the group succeed. The second element is student-to-student, promotive interactive, which refers to students assisting, encouraging and supporting each other’s efforts in order to learn. Individual accountability is the third element, where the performance of each individual student is assessed and the results are given back to the group as well as individually. This is to ensure that students can not “free-ride” on the work of others. The fourth element is social skills since a group needs students that use leadership, decision-making, communication, conflict-management skills and trust building in order to function. The fifth, and final element of a cooperative lesson, is group processing, where students are asked to reflect upon what each group member did that was helpful for the group, as well as what each student could have done to make the group even better. These elements ensure that students receive feedback on their participation and facilitate the learning of social skills.

However, it is important to reflect about the fact that cooperation within the group is not always given; group work without any cooperation or interaction between students is not cooperative.
learning (Forslund Frykedal, 2008 & Chiriac, 2014). The students can work individually with separate parts within the task and assemble the different parts to the definitive product or result later on (Chiriac & Granström, 2012). There are several strategies to use in cooperative learning, I will explicate four of them in the following section.

4.3.1 Think-pair-share and team-pair-solo

These structures are easy to use in the classroom and are one of the classics within cooperative learning. The first step is for the teacher to hand out a task, step number two is for each individual to think for themselves, step three is to discuss the answer with a peer, lastly, step four is to discuss and share the answer within a group or the entire class. According to Kagan and Stenlev (2017), the benefits of using think-pair-share is that every student will be provided with time to reflect upon their own ideas and thoughts before someone else informs them about their ideas. The learning process domains that are developed using this structure are capacity of thinking, analytic/critical, innovation, problem solving and reflective thinking. Furthermore, the development of the students’ communicative and social abilities will increase in regards of summarizing the important topics in a discussion, expressing agreement and disagreement as well as repeating someone else's point of view (Kagan & Stenlev, 2017 p.93). This strategy is similar to think-pair-share, but in this case the students firstly discuss in teams, secondly in pairs and lastly they reflect individually. This strategy is often used when introducing and discussing a new topic, where students may not have enough knowledge to first reflect individually.

4.3.2 Poem for two voices

This structure is especially suited for younger students, both in their mother tongue and in second language learning. This is a pair activity, where reader number one is A and reader number two is B. Step number one is for the teacher to mark parts of the text with A, B or AB. Secondly, the reading begins. Reader number one reads parts marked ‘A’, reader number two reads the parts marked ‘B’, and the parts marked ‘AB’ are read by both students in choir. Poem for two voices increases the synergistic effect that could affect positively in relation to the pleasure of reading. The learning process domains that are developed using this structure are knowledge and skills: mastering basic reading skills and pronunciation. In terms of the communicative and social
skills; being able to help a peer and working in a mutual rhythm are the skills that are developed by this structure (Kagan & Stenlev, 2017 p.136-137).

4.3.3 Jigsaw

Gibbons (2015) argues for this cooperative learning structure when listing well functioning reading strategies for foreign language learners: Firstly, the students are divided into groups, secondly, the teachers prepare three or four different readings about a specific topic. Each group will become an “expert” of each reading. Thirdly, they regroup so that all new groups contain one expert from each previous group. Using this structure, the students are provided with a real purpose, where the aim is to share what one has read with others. Additionally, it provides an authentic context for developing summarizing skills, since the groups has to decide what key points to share with the others (p.159). In agreement with Gibbons (2015), professor Elliot also claims that the jigsaw has benefits in students’ development. He claims that most teachers find jigsaw easy to learn and enjoy working with it. Furthermore, it can be used with other reading strategies. According to Kagan and Stenlev (2017), the learning process domains that are developed using the Jigsaw structure are: classroom structure, knowledge and skills, reflective thinking, exchange of knowledge and the ability to select key terms to present (p.97).

4.4 English as a foreign language

By definition, EFL learners have already acquired at least one language, regardless of age. In my study, the students will in fact be foreign language learners, since they live in Sweden, where English is not the first or second language. Lightbown and Spada (2013, p.38) argue that young foreign language learners are exposed to their second language learning for several hours every day. It could be in the classroom, on television or on the playground. Furthermore, it is stated in their book (2013) that classroom learners obviously spend less time in contact with the new language, as well as being exposed to a smaller range of discourse types.

In Gibbons finding (2015), she argues that well-designed group work offers many advantages in terms of language development and social development for EFL learners. The learners are provided with interaction with other speakers, and therefore the usage of the language increases.
Additionally, students tend to take turns more and in the absence of the teacher they take more responsibility, since the learners themselves are in fact conducting the language learning. Further, the students who are not confident using their English in class will benefit from the use of group work, since they feel more comfortable using English with fewer peers (2015, p.49-50).

4.5 The Curriculum for Compulsory School

The curriculum that is now regulated is The Curriculum for Compulsory School (LGR 11), and it has been mandatory for teachers to comply to by law since 2011. According to the Education Act, the purpose of the education is to encourage all-round contacts and social fellowship and provide a good foundation for an active participation in the social life (10 chapter § 2). The fundamental values of the national school system should be based on democratic foundations in order to promote knowledge and values for all students, as well as a lifelong desire to learn. School is supposed to teach more than just reading skills. For example, it is also stated that the school should promote understanding of other people and the ability to empathize. School is a social and cultural meeting place with both ability and responsibility to strengthen this ability for all those active in school, both teachers and students. Furthermore, it is not enough to teach about democratic values; democratic teaching forms should be applied in practice (p.9-14).

5. Methodology

This study falls under the definition of qualitative research, a concept that will be explained in following section. I have conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers in order to collect
data regarding my research questions. As stated by Alvehus (2013), when using the following structure, the interviewer should prepare open-ended questions, avoiding yes or no-questions, which opens up for discussion and follow-up questions. According to Bryman (2011), this type of interview increases the validity of the result.

My interview questions were formulated in order to answer my research questions in underlying themes, which will be presented in the result and discussion section.

I interviewed four legitimized teachers in English. I followed Vetenskapsrådet (2002) four ethical considerations, as stated below, when interviewing the four teachers. In the sections below I will refer to T1, T2, T3 and T4 as she. In the result and discussion section, I have group related some of the interview questions so that they fall under one of my three themes in the section.

### 5.1 Participating teachers

Due to the time limit the interviews had to be held in a geographical area close to where I live. Additionally one criterion was that the teachers were all legitimized teachers. The participating teachers will be defined in this section.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The interviewees</th>
<th>Years of teaching with degree</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Number of hours of English per week with their class</th>
<th>Teach in grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 (T1)</td>
<td>Two years</td>
<td>Primary School teacher training, 2016</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 (T2)</td>
<td>Seven years</td>
<td>Primary School teacher training, 2011</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>Score</td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher 3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Primary School teacher training, 1994</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Primary school teacher training, 1995</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher 1**

T1 uses cooperative learning in the English classes and has used it for the past two years. She had used CL before she got her degree, but this is out of the scope for this study. T1 has had her degree since 2016 and has English two hours per week with her second grade class.

**Teacher 2**

T2 uses cooperative learning in the English classes and has used it for the past five years. T2 has had her degree since 2011 and has English three hours a week with her third grade class. T2 works cooperatively with her students and have done so for almost five years, so she had more experience with CL than T1.

**Teacher 3**

T3 claims that she has tried to use CL in the beginning of her years of teaching, but found it too difficult and disorderly. But after my interview, I found out that she has used think-pair-share without reflecting about it.

**Teacher 4**

T4 has been using CL in her English classes for the last year of her 23 years of teaching. T4 has a third grade class, and she introduced CL for them when they started second grade. T4 has not
been using CL structures for a long period and she was introduced to it herself by a new colleague.

5.2 Ethical considerations

Vetenskapsrådet (2002) describe four different ethical conditions that I took in consideration when I carried out my interviews. The four considerations: the information condition, the permission condition, the confidentiality condition and the utilization condition. They are defined as follows:

The information condition states that all of the participants have to receive relevant information regarding my study in order to conduct valid information. I informed the teachers that I interviewed about my study. Before conducting the interview, I provided the interviewees with a summary of what my study will be about in an email that was sent out one week before the interview took place. The permission condition is the interviewers’ safety condition, where it is demonstrated that one must obtain teachers permission for them to participate in the study. The teachers that I interviewed received a question in email regarding if they want to participate or not, I stated clearly that it is voluntary to take part of my study. The utilization condition states that the data collected in the study will only be used for this study, and thereafter will be discarded. The confidentiality condition states that personal information about the participants of a study should be handled with great carefulness. People without authorization have had no access of any personal details of the participants. All of the teachers’ personal information will be excluded from the study. When writing the study, I used fictional names, as well as names of cities and schools of employment leaving them anonymous. The teachers will be denominated T1, T2, T3 and T4. The teachers that participated in my study signed a contract when we met to carry out the interviews, where I guaranteed the compliance of conditions stated above.

5.3 Qualitative interviews
I chose to conduct qualitative interviews in person due to the time limit of the study. I wanted to make sure that all the teachers I interviewed were legitimized teachers. After having read *Social Research methods* by Alan (2011) I know that the method has been criticized due to the fact that one can not generalize the results for a population or on other environments because of the limited amount of included individuals in the study. In quantitative interviews more people would have participated and people from geographical areas than in this study, which could lead to more generalizable results. However, if I had conducted the data in a wider form, for example using quantitative surveys on Internet, it could have decreased the interviewees’ credibility. For example, some of the answers could have been written by an individual just for fun, they may not even have been teachers. In order for me to complete surveys on the Internet, I would have had to complete several controls in order to reassure the trustworthiness of the answers, and due to the time limit of 10 weeks, it would have been to time consuming. Therefore, I felt that I would be able to guarantee the credibility of the interviewers’ answers if I conducted qualitative interviews. Furthermore, the aim of using qualitative method in this study is to reach a deeper contextual understanding, rather than get a wider understanding of the subject.

### 5.4 Semi-structured interviews

Alvehus (2013) claims that by using semi-structured interviews, the interviewer will prepare mostly open-ended question in order to get in-depth answers and avoid yes or no answers. I decided to use this structure, since I wanted to ask open-ended questions in order to receive in-depth answers and open up for discussion. The aim of my interviews is to receive data regarding what strategies within cooperative learning teachers’ use in the English classroom. Additionally I want to examine teachers’ thoughts on how cooperative learning can contribute to interaction between students. Furthermore, both Bryman (2011) and Alvehus (2013) explain that by conducting semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, the interviewer should ask follow-up questions that would both show the respondent that the interviewer is attentive and responsive and will lead to clarification. Also, if interviews are conducted properly, they can provide insights to the teacher's experiences, perceptions and motivations at a depth that is not possible with a survey (Croker & Heigham, 2009).
5.5 Procedure of the interviews

I decided that I would record the interviews to be able to go back and reflect about the interviews afterwards. The participating teachers gave their consent to this in prior to the interviews. Although the recording of the interviews, according to Alvehus (2013, p.85-86), might have intimidated the interviewees, I found it necessary in order to analyze the result. By recording the interviews it provided me with the opportunity to go back to the recordings when analyzing my results, as well as not having to take notes during the interviews, that could have obstructed the flow of the interview.

The interviews were carried out in English, so that I would not have to translate the data when writing the result and conclusion section. However, the interviewees of the study may or may not master the English language at this level, therefore I wanted to ensure that the teachers felt comfortable in the interviews. I decided to send out my interview questions to the participating teachers a couple of days before the interview will take place, they were sent out in an email. My intention was that this work as an aid for the teachers, giving them the option to conduct the interview in English or Swedish. The interviews were carried out at the teachers’ school of employment. I had booked a conference room, since it would minimize the risk of students or teachers disturbing the interview. The interviews were conducted on the afternoon when the students had gone home. All the interviews were recorded for later analysis. However, some parts of the interviews were excluded, as they had no relevance to the study. The interviews were recorded because if one takes notes, instead of recording the interviews, the risk is that the data collected will be centered on what the interviewer heard instead of what was actually said (Alvehus, 2013, p.85). Each interview lasted for roughly forty minutes. After having analyzed the recording, I deleted them.

6. Results and discussion

The research questions that will be answered in the following sections are:
RQ1: What strategies do teachers use to facilitate cooperative learning?
RQ2: What are teachers’ thoughts on how cooperative learning can contribute to interaction between students?

In order to answer RQ1 and RQ2 I have conducted qualitative interviews with four legitimized teachers. The following section presents the results from the data collection, as well as discusses, analyze and compare previous research in relation to my research. This section also aims to answer the research questions.

The answers from the interviewees will be presented in relation to the research questions and what has been presented in the literature review. The teachers will be referred to as Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), Teacher 3 (T3) and Teacher 4 (T4). Their teaching background and current teaching situation will be presented in tables. Cooperative learning will be abbreviated to CL in following sections.

6.1 Strategies of cooperative learning that teachers use

T1 claims that some of the CL concepts work better with second graders; “My favorite strategy is the jigsaw, but it works better in second grade than it did with my first graders.” In agreement with T1, Gibbons (2015) implicates that jigsaw is a well-functioning strategy to implement with foreign language learners, such as the students of the study. T1 refers to think-pair-share as a strategy to use with younger kids since it is easy to adapt depending on the subject. However, she said that when using think-pair-share, the teacher has to ensure that she divides the students in pairs that both students will benefit from, in order to avoid silence. For example, it would not be a good idea to pair up two students that are shy and silent. The fact that T1 states that think-pair-share is an easy structure to adapt, depending on what age the students are, can be valuable information for teachers, since it opens up opportunities for usage of the strategy. When she claims that the strategy is easy to adapt depending on subject and age of students, she refers to the fact that it can be easily adapted depending on students’ levels of knowledge.

T1 also emphasizes quiz-quiz-trade as a good strategy to start with since her experience is that even the shyest student will participate, and that it is good practice for the students to explain things to each other. It is of great importance to create learning situations where all students are
active and participating, and by implementing this strategy, according to T1 is a step in the right direction.

T2 claims to use at least one CL strategy every day. She highlighted the fact that she can not go a day without using think-pair-share or team-pair-solo. She believes that think-pair-share can be very useful and developing in teaching situations where the students are safe and already have knowledge about. However, in new learning situations for the students, she believes that it is better to use team-pair-solo, where they first start out in teams, secondly in pairs, and lastly individually.

Another structure that T2 conduct in her English classroom is poem for two voices, she refers to this strategy as being fun to use, both for the student as well as for the teacher. By using strategies that both the teacher and students find fun, the motivation can increase. The importance of motivation towards a task has found to be related to success in language learning, according to Lightbown & Spada, (2017 p.87).

Gibbons (2013) emphasized the importance of teaching students in a meaningful and fun context. This is supported by the Curriculum (2011) that claims that creative activities are essential components of active learning. In agreement with Forslund Frykedal (2008) and Bertucci et al. (2008) following can be provided by cooperative learning. Bertucci et al. (2008), argues that this could in fact lead to an enhanced motivation towards learning and academic achievement. Both T1 and T2 expressed that they have experienced that their students are motivated and engaged when learning cooperatively in the English classroom. Professor Elliot claims that most teachers find the jigsaw easy to learn and that they enjoy working with it, in agreement with T1 and T2.

T3 stated that the first CL structure she used was placement consensus, “[…] Although I do not like the structures of CL, I do let my students talk to each other […] they often discuss things in pairs or in groups.” After having asked her to develop that statement, I realized that the structure she is talking about is much quite like think-pair-share, so T3 evidently uses cooperative learning without reflecting about it.
When asked what strategy T4 preferred to use in her English classroom, she answered think-pair-share or team-pair-solo. T4 could not remember ever using another strategy within cooperative learning. One CL strategy that all teachers have used was team-pair-share, and a reason for this could be that it is an easy strategy to use in the English classroom. It may also be because the strategy can be used in several situations and can easily be adapted depending on the task. According to Kagan and Stenlev (2017), one of the benefits of using think-pair-share is that every student will be provided with time to reflect upon their own ideas and thoughts before someone else informs them about their ideas, something that T1 and T2 agree with. However, T2 prefers team-pair-solo in new contexts. This could be because students often tend to be more communicative about topics that they have knowledge about and feel confident about. By providing the students with opportunity to firstly reflect about a new topic in small groups, secondly in pairs and thereafter by themselves, it could end up to be more developing for the students.

6.2 Teachers’ thoughts on how cooperative learning contributes to learning

When asked what T1 thought about cooperative learning she answered that it was a bit tricky when she started to use the method, since she started out in first grade with the whole class. T1 recommends teachers to start using CL in half class, due to the fact that it can be quite disorderly and loud the first couple of lessons, before the students get the hang of it. When asked the same question, T2 answered, “I would recommend CL to all teachers that teach in elementary school [...] No it does not matter what ages they are.” However, T2 claims that it might be easier to conduct CL with older students than in for example year 1. In agreement with T2, T4 claims that it is too difficult to introduce CL for first graders, since they are new in everything and she claimed that her colleagues had enlighten her about the fact that it is easier to introduce CL when the students are older, and more experienced in school. T1, T2 and T3 were all in agreement that CL is easier to introduce to older students than young ones. By older students, they refer to third or fourth graders. In regards to working cooperatively, there is sufficient evidence that these methods are instructionally effective in grades 2-9 (Slavin,
When studying Slavin’s research, it is of interest that there is evidence of effectiveness in both second and third graders. However, he does not mention first graders in his research.

T1 believes that CL is a good method that covers the majority of students. “It is great because the lower achieving students can get help from the higher achieving students.” Antil (1998) states, in agreement with both T1 and T2, that an advantage of cooperative learning is that it allows for simultaneous teaching approaches for multiple audiences and student levels. For instance, high achieving students may assist low achieving students, resulting in deeper learning for both. However, T4 raised the fact that students might not benefit from cooperatively group work. T4 problematized the fact that high academic performing students help the weaker students, since she believes that the weaker students can fall under radar when the stronger students will help them in order to carry out a task.

[...] I think it could work, to use cooperative learning, if all students are on the same level [...] but that almost never happens [...] mostly I am afraid that the weaker students never learn, that the stronger students do all the work for them [...].

T4’s theory is aligned with Chiriac’s (2014) research, where it is shown that group work can have positive effect on academic skills, but in fact hamper the individual learning. However, Davidson (1994) and Johnson et al. (2013) suggest that one of the elements of cooperative learning is individual accountability, to ensure that students can not “free-ride” on the work of others. A reason for T4 skepticism towards CL may be because of the lack of knowledge about the method. If T4 were to apply CL in her English classroom, starting out with the strategies that T1 and T2 highlight as easy and fun strategies to use in third grade, for example, jigsaw, think-pair-share and quiz-quiz-trade, she might change her opinion about CL. T1 and T2’s thoughts about following strategies are aligned with Kagan and Stenlev (2017), who claim that the strategies mentioned above, are well fitted for primary school learners.

T1 believes that it is of great importance to ensure that the groups you divide the kids in are well working groups. T2 states that all students get something out of working cooperatively. She claims that students always learn something when working cooperatively, either they develop knowledge regarding a specific subject or the ability to cooperate. T3 on the other hand, was not
as positive about CL as T1 and T2, she claimed that she has worked with CL before, but felt that it was not a method well fitted for her. I asked T3 what she meant with the statement above, and she explained that she felt that it was difficult to use the different structures; additionally, she felt that the English lessons where they used CL were too loud; “[…] I think that it is better to use CL with older kids.” Even though T3 was not positive about CL, she could agree on the fact that it can be good for the students’ in their social development. Furthermore, she argued the fact that students need to work close to their zone of proximal development, and that this is something that happens when working cooperatively.

6.3 Teachers’ thoughts about how cooperative learning contributes to interaction between students

T2 mentions that one of her favorite thing to observe when students are working cooperatively is the fact that they manage to cooperate with different people in the classroom. Although highlighted the fact that there are some students in her class that can not function well with someone, she believes that the majority of them can cooperate with anyone. T1 argues the fact that it can be a bit loud with first graders and that it takes time for them to understand the method, although she warmly recommend the method. When asked why she preferred this method she stated, “It is just so much fun and the students are really involved and active, even my shy students dare to take space and talk to the other students […].” T1 also believes that the students interact with each other more than when the students have teacher-centered lessons. Furthermore, T1 claims that her students have become more tolerant towards each other, taking turns, listening and respecting what other students have to say. In agreement with T1, T2 and T3, Vygotsky stated the fact that students develop more when interacting with other students, by working cooperatively. Both T1 and T2 are in agreement with Gibbons regarding working cooperatively, that students tend to take turns more; and in the absence of the teacher and having more responsibility, the learners themselves are in fact conducting the language teaching. Further, the students who are not confident using their English in front of the whole class, will benefit from the use of group work, since they feel more comfortable using English with fewer peers (Gibbons 2015, p.49-50).
T2 refers to CL as a method where students work together and in interaction with each other, and argues the importance of a classroom climate that is tolerant and warm in order for the teamwork to be successful. She believes that the social development is equally important for students as their knowledge development, and claims that it does not matter how much knowledge you have about a topic if you are unable to discuss the area in a respectable manner. Furthermore, she believes that her students’ have developed their rhetoric skills by the usage of CL for almost three years. Donato (1994) and Lantolf (2000) have both researched how foreign language learners learn when they cooperate and interact with other individuals, a theory that can be linked to Vygotsky’s theory ZPD. T1, T2 and T3 argue the importance of student’s being able to interact with each other and, thereby, develop together. T1, T2, T3 believes that by working cooperatively, the students are provided with this opportunity. T4, on the other hand, believes that students get more knowledge out of teacher centered learning. This could be explained by the fact that T4 has had her degree for several years and is more used to teaching through 1994’s years Curriculum for Compulsory School than LGR 11. One of the sentences that are stated in 1994’s years Curriculum for Compulsory School and thereby could be the source of T4’s theories, are following; in the section about the school’s mission; “knowledge should be transferred and developed from one generation to another”. It is stated in LPÖ 94 “individuals should be given the opportunity to develop their ability to work independently”. This quotation could lead teachers to believe that students should exclusively work individually in school.

T4 argues that CL can be a good method for students who already are social and especially those who are doing well in school. “[...] It is not easy to start using CL with a class, since there is always someone who is incapable of working in groups and cooperate.” When asked to elaborate her answer, she referred to the students having difficulties either socially or cognitively. These theories are aligned with numerous researchers, three of them being Frykedal (2008), Chiriac (2014) and Chiriac and Granström (2012).

7. Conclusion
In this section a summary of the results based on the research questions will firstly be presented. Secondly, the limitations of the study will be presented in this section and finally, suggestions for further research will be given.

7.1 Summary

The findings of my study, in regards to CL indicate several beneficial factors. The majority of the teachers interviewed expressed that their students develop their language knowledge and their content knowledge in meaningful contexts when working cooperatively. Additional beneficial aspects regarding CL are the development of social skills, communicative skills and the ability to work well in group settings, as well as supporting each other, by scaffolding. This is supported by Gibbons (2013), as well as by the ideas of Vygotsky as cited in Teaching young language learners by Pinter (2017, p.11). As an answer to RQ1, strategies used by the interviewed teachers were following: think-pair-share, team-pair-solo, placement consensus, jigsaw, quiz-quiz-trade and poem for two voices. Answers to RQ2 are several. The interviewees believe that cooperative learning contributes to interaction between students, in terms of students working together and exchanging knowledge about subjects or social skills. Previous findings indicate that learning in cooperative situations is instructionally effective in grades 2-9 according to Slavin (1990), something that T1, T2 and T3 could agree upon. According to both Lightbown & Spada (2013) and Wenger (2010) we learn how to communicate most successfully through social interaction with others, cooperatively. Furthermore, it has been proven that by using following structure, students develop their classroom structure, knowledge, reflective thinking and the ability to select key terms to present (Kagan & Stenlev, 2017, p.97). In terms of Jigsaw, both T1 and T2 highlighted this structure as well fitted to use in the English classroom with second and third graders. Additionally, results from previous research about cooperative learning are according to Antil (1998) that it allows for simultaneous teaching approaches for multiple audiences and student levels, something that T1 agrees upon. However, T4’s opinion regarding the differences of student levels are aligned with Chiriac’s research (2014), where it is shown that group work can have positive effect on academic skills, but in fact hamper the individual learning. In agreement with Bertucci et al. (2008), Frykedal (2008) argues that working in groups towards a mutual goal could enhance motivation towards learning, and thereby increase students’
academic achievement. T1 and T2 express in their interviews how their students develop the ability to cooperate with all of the peers in the English classroom. Furthermore, they highlighted that the majority of students are active and motivated, and they expressed the fact that the shyest students in their classes, dare to take place and interact.

7.2 Limitations of study

A limitation of this study is that it has been conducted in a specific school in Sweden, which makes it difficult to determine if the findings of this study can be generalized to more schools in Sweden. In order to represent a result that could be representative for the whole of Sweden, the study would have to include more participating teachers. Additionally, it could be a limitation of the study that I knew the interviewees, and therefore their answers could have been different if this was not the case.

7.3 Further research

An idea for further research is that I was to perform workshops in my future school of employment. The workshops would take place for one hour each week over a period of 12 weeks. At the workshops I would provide my colleagues with information about cooperative learning, as well as strategies that are easy and fun to implement in the English classroom for K-3 learners. It would be more than just an informative workshop; it would also be a platform for pedagogical discussions, about how our strategies have been received in our classrooms, and reflecting upon why. After the 12 weeks I would conduct follow up interviews, to see if the teachers believe that they have developed their knowledge about CL by attending to the workshops. Furthermore it would be of interest to see if they use the method in their English classroom, and if yes, how?
8. References


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9. Appendix

Interview questions

What year did you get your teacher legitimization?

For how long have you been teaching?

Have you been working with cooperative learning in the English classroom?

If yes, for how long have you worked with cooperative learning?

If yes, why do you prefer this method?

If yes, what strategies do you use to facilitate cooperative learning?

If yes, do you feel that the method is successful for all students? (Why? Why not? Who benefits?)

What happens with the students when they are working cooperatively?

If no, why do you not use cooperative learning?