

Collaborative Learning: Enhancing project based learning through teamwork

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Abstract

Being able to work in a team is a highly appreciated skill nowadays. Teamwork has been widely implemented in a series of environments. It has been posed the need to teach children to work collaboratively at a school level, but results have not been satisfactory. Studies have shown that students still opt for silent individual work in the classroom. This lack of interaction is a deterrent to English language teaching that is currently following a communicative approach, aiming at the development of communicative competencies. This article presents the experience of the implementation of a didactic unit in a 9th grade class from a Chilean private school. A series of team building strategies were applied to enhance their collaborative experience throughout the development of a writing project. Results of the intervention showed that students improved their attitude towards teamwork once they had developed a mutual relationship of trust and interdependence with others.

Key Words: EFL, Teamwork, Team building, Collaborative Learning.

INTRODUCTION

The ability to work in teams has been widely recognized as one of the 21st century skills that must be improved. The absence or poor development of the skill has resulted in failure for scenarios where collaborative work is mandatory, such as sports, specific work environments, or education. Companies have asked educational institutions to prepare students so as they acquire the highest possible degree of the skill during their school years. In order to achieve this goal companies and schools have given great importance to collaborative work making people working together in groups.

However, research on collaborative work has shown that working in the same physical space is not enough to make the collaborative work efficient. Similar findings have been made in educational settings. Students prefer to work on their own when the goal is to achieve individual good performance (Ruiz, 2004). In the case of English language teaching, students with a higher level of English tend to either avoid collaborative work, or to take the entire workload and complete the tasks silently. This situation is detrimental to English language teaching as its current, and widely adopted, main goal is language production through oral interaction. The question remains, how would students develop communicative competencies without interaction?

The aim of this article is to present the experience of the implementation of a didactic unit in a 9th grade class from a Chilean private school. A series of team building strategies were applied to enhance their collaborative experience. The school follows a project based methodology for English language teaching, therefore, the strategies were implemented along with the project development in a period of six weeks.

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The article presents theoretical support, diagnosis of the educational institution, the class, and a description of the didactic unit. Learning results are shown and analyzed according to the theoretical foundations and a critical reflection upon teaching practices.

Results are shown and analyzed according to the theoretical assumptions discussed; student perceptions towards the new methodology are also considered for analysis and reflections. Finally, an improvement plan is proposed based on the reflections, strengths and weaknesses recognized during the process.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Life needs Team Players

Life, as it is known nowadays, needs team players. Among the most common requirements in job applications is the ability to work with others, and most important, to solve problems (Rocco, 2000). What has become an obstacle is that applicants do not have enough experience of working in groups. In recent years, companies have asked educational institutions to prepare students to be effective team players (Ruiz, 2004). This is a past, present and future concern; in this respect, Fredrick (2008) states: "As professional settings continue to become more collaborative, experience working with groups will remain important for students" (p. 12). This scenario also poses a challenge for teachers at all levels, Fredrick continues, for it is in the classroom where skills are developed to "be thoughtful collaborators who are able to succeed in a wide range of collaborative environments" (p. 13).

One way to address this challenge would be to persuade teachers and students about the benefits of working in groups. Jiang (2009) claims that "group work provides them the opportunity to be good teachers, good helpers, good speakers and good listeners" (p. 136). Moreover, group work brings a wide range of benefits. It gives students a *positive affective climate*, creating a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom developing student's *self-confidence and self-esteem*. It also establishes a *setting of collaboration* rather than competition, increasing the chances of success and sense of achievement. Moreover, it promotes students' *social interaction*: they practice negotiation of meanings and improve their communicative language competence at the same time (p. 137). Finally, teachers also benefit from group work. While students work, teachers can move around the classroom monitoring, providing feedback, and paying attention to students' strengths and weaknesses (p. 137).

Focus for this intervention

The school in which this intervention took part has only one main objective in the English yearly program: oral production, both spontaneous and in prepared scenarios (Bell, 2016). It is expected that oral language is produced regardless of mistakes and during designated, progressively increasing periods of class time (p. 1). This objective seems to aim directly at the concept of communicative competence, that is to say, the different types of knowledge that a language user has or a language learner develops. One of these knowledges is known as *strategic competence*, which in words of Celce-Murcia (1995) is an "ever-present, potentially usable inventory of skills that allows a strategically competent speaker to negotiate messages and resolve problems" (p. 9). Therefore, in order to accomplish the objective of the program, oral production must be deep-rooted in class routine and implemented in a setting of peer interaction and collaborative work. In this scenario, students would constantly be developing their communicative competence through the negotiation of meaning.

Group Work

Studies have shown that depending on someone else in a task is widely beneficial, helping students to overcome challenges, to develop interpersonal skills, and enabling them to achieve more than they could do individually (Nguyen, 2013). Researchers assert that, as our culture becomes progressively more independent, students need to learn how to work well with others, negotiate differences, and form relationships with people that are not like themselves (Pfaff, 2003). It has also been found that students themselves perceive the need of working in groups. However, research in educational settings shows that they still opt for individual work when the objective is to achieve good performance (Ruiz, 2004). This might be due to the relevance grades are given in the educational system: students do not want to take the risk of working with people that may lower their grades. This situation has led to huge amounts of individual work that are taking the interactional --therefore oral-component out of the language classroom.

It has not been different in relation to group work. Although it is a widely used strategy, research has found that teachers tend to attach importance only to the outcome and not to the process. There is also imbalanced participation of students: those with a better mastery of English get the heaviest workload, while those who have a lower performance cooperate less and, most of the times, have no interest in participating in group work (Jiang, 2009). These drawbacks and examples of ineffective group work have raised criticism and made individual work the most preferred and used strategy in the classroom. The question that arises is: how are students going to produce oral language and develop competencies if there is no interaction?

In order to be effective, a group needs cooperative learning. According to Brown (1994) "cooperative learning involves students working together in pairs or groups [...] to achieve goals successfully." (p. 145). Along the same lines, Johnson (2000) proposes five elements that cooperative learning must have to work effectively. First, there must be *positive interdependence*. Students should perceive that the success of a member depends on the success of the other (p. 16). Second, *face-to-face interaction* is required to maximize the opportunities to support and encourage each other (p. 18). Such interaction will enhance *oral* explanations, teaching one another, discussing, and checking for understanding. The third element is *individual and group accountability*. The purpose is to make each member a stronger individual by assessment, assistance, and support, in order to make it a representative of the group to show what they have learned (p. 19). Fourth, students should *learn and use social skills* such as leadership, decision-making, trust-building, communication, and conflict-management skills (p. 20). Finally, a *metacognitive exercise* should make them reflect upon how well they have cooperated, as well as monitor involvement, effort, and a fair share of the work (p. 22).

These elements appear to be crucial, but there is one not addressed by Johnson: *rapport*. Nguyen (2007) defines *rapport* as a "positive social relationship characterized by mutual trust and emotional affinity" (p. 284). Jiang (2005) states that *rapport* is composed by mutual attentiveness, positivity, and coordination. Subsequently, he claims that *rapport* enhances learning, motivates learners, and reduces learners' anxiety (p. 49). It is expected that peers build long-term relationships that help and support them in educational settings.

Nguyen (2013) explains: "students provide scaffolding to each other in completing a collaborative task and they benefit from peer scaffolding through the course of the task" (p. 64). He also asserts that this collaborative practice gives them the opportunity to *build rapport* with each other, and that one of the most important benefits of this type of interaction is the development of language abilities (p. 71). Brown (1994) offers directions for building *rapport*, advising that a relationship of trust

and respect should be established. He mentions that members should show interest in individuals, everybody should feel invited to express their thoughts and feelings, all ideas should be listened to and valued; humor, though not ridicule, should be shared, the work should be done with and not against the other members, and true happiness should be expressed when someone else succeeds (p. 421).

Turning Groups into Teams

Epperson (2014), after having conducted a research based on Chilean classrooms experiences, concludes that teams --as opposed to groups- have "a greater sense of trust, belonging, and camaraderie" (p. 49). She postulates a set of steps to be followed to turn groups into teams by building rapport among members. First, students should feel identified with the team --one strategy is encouraging them to create a team name based on what they have in common. Second, each member should feel as a vital element in the team. This could be developed by assigning each member a different role, which will eventually increase the sense of ownership (p. 54-55).

A study by Pfaff (2003) had previously found drawbacks when implementing these steps, suggesting some strategies to solve them. If a team member does not participate, a potential solution would be assigning every member a role and switching roles from time to time (p. 38). Likewise, problems may emerge if team membership is assigned by students and not by the teacher. Teams that are deliberately assigned by students may not include challenging combinations of students (p. 39). Pfaff also establishes that a team should stay together for the entire project and should feel identified with something they create, for example, a logo that represents the whole team.

Assessment

The way in which teamwork is assessed may also cause problems. Some authors suggested that if team performance does not affect the grade of an individual, students tend not to participate (Feichtner and Davis, 1984). More recent studies have shed light upon the importance of peer evaluation over instructor based evaluation. Pfaff (2003) assures that "peer evaluations [...] allow students to feel that they are in more control of the result of their efforts" (p. 43). Fredrick (2008) notes that this would also reduce frustration, for it grants them the opportunity to talk about the negative aspects of a team experience. In such a way, self-evaluation drives students to reflect critically upon their performance and find strategies to adopt in the future (p. 9). This author also remarks that an effective peer evaluation should "address a broad range of collaborative skills including active listening and managing conflict as well as more overt signs of team leadership" (p.10). In other words, peer evaluation is crucial to hold students accountable for their learning.

Teacher's role

In words of Fredrick (2008), teachers should attain a considerable amount of 'good' skills. They should be constantly critical upon their own practices, design assignments that fulfill the necessity and benefits of working as a team (p. 7) and, finally, become better facilitators, paying attention and responding to the students' needs. Teachers should also be able to reinvent and improve strategies for the sake of students' process of learning.

To conclude, it can be said that it is possible to enhance oral production in a good cooperative learning environment. Teamwork may provide such environment and has proven to be an effective strategy as long as team members develop relationships of trust and interdependence.

DIAGNOSIS

This intervention took place in a private school located in Vitacura, Santiago. It is regarded as one of the most exclusive schools in the city. The school is currently attended by 2.637 students, distributed from preschool to 12th grade, most of which come from wealthy families that have studied in the school for generations.

Parents have declared to have a high level of income --more than \$1.300.000 CLP a month. Therefore, the rate of social vulnerability is under 6 per cent (MINEDUC, 2016). The school monthly fee is around \$400.000 CLP, besides an enrollment of \$317.200 CLP, which is paid at the beginning of the year along with an initial incorporation fee of \$2.080.000 CLP. (School website, 2016)

The school is fostered by a Catholic congregation, a French religious community that took charge of the school a few years after its foundation. Their purpose was to deliver an excellent academic preparation, emphasizing English as a second language and a solid Catholic education. For this reason, the Educational Project includes a curricular project and a pastoral project. (School Educational Project. p. 5)

The school's mission as declared in the Educational Project is: "aspire to a comprehensive education of the individual, preparing committed Christians and competent citizens". To enhance these values, the school offers programs of sexual education; drugs abuse counseling, social assistance activities, environmental care, pastoral activities, and a constant promotion of a sporting culture. Students of the school have traditionally had a reputation not only for their academic performance, but also for their social and political activism, as well as a renowned participation in sports competitions.

English Department

Despite not being a bilingual school, English is given great importance. First, the school has an alliance for Catholic education with an American university. Graduates from that center spend one year teaching English at the school, so as to provide students with the opportunity of interacting with native speakers of English. Second, oral production is the most encouraged ability in the classroom. Efforts are being made to ensure success regardless of mistakes. Finally, students sit two international exams: Cambridge English Preliminary (PET), and Cambridge English First (FCE) to certificate their level of English in 8th and 12th grade respectively.

Students who pass these tests are given two types of certificates; pass with merit, or pass with distinction. A formal letter containing tests' results is sent to parents whose children did not achieve the expected results. Moreover, students who fail the FCE have to take an extra English class in 12th grade to improve their level.

Apart from taking international tests, students from 10th grade have sat the SIMCE test in 2010, 2012 and 2014, achieving similar or higher results than those obtained by schools of the same type, which means that an average of 97,6% of students have achieved A2 or higher level according to the CEFR (MIME MINEDUC, 2016).

Each secondary level works independently, having their own teachers and programs. Students attend five hours of English classes a week. Classes are held exclusively in English and students are asked to speak in English as much as possible. This is successfully achieved for two reasons: on the one hand, when it comes to English, each class (38 to 40 students) is divided in two groups of about 19 students

each, and on the other, there are five English classrooms fully equipped to fulfill the needs of an English learning environment.

9th grade

There are three teachers of English for 9th grade. Each one is in charge of the English classes for half of the groups from 9A to 9E. English for this grade has a yearly program: this year, it “takes a trip through the world of literature, creative writing, and language, while everything learned in the process will help students to reflect on their own responsibility in life” (Bell, 2016). Learning objectives to be accomplished throughout the year are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1.

9th Grade Learning Objectives
1. To read and analyze a variety of narrative texts.
2. To produce different written texts, adequately considering grammar, spelling and vocabulary elements.
3. To write, present or perform different oral tasks in front of the class.
4. To orally express different points of view in class discussion and give opinions about different topics/situations.
5. To speak in English every single day, growing in confidence and focusing on success instead of mistakes.
6. To listen to and understand different oral inputs of native speakers with different accents.
7. To respect each other's opinions and differences considering that we are all God's work of art in progress.
8. To use different IT's responsibly and effectively in obtaining information and to create texts, citing other's work and respecting intellectual property.

Source: School's 9th grade program. English Department 2016

The year is divided in four units. Each unit has a bimestral plan that includes the distribution of the learning objectives according to the four abilities, activities, evaluations, and time allocation. In addition, English is taught through a project based methodology. Students are meant to work on four projects throughout the year using English as the only means of communication.

Class 9A

9th A is a lively group of 38 students, 17 girls and 21 boys aged 14 to 15. What has been found to be a common interest among them is rap music. Most of the time, during recesses and classes, they sing popular songs in English. This has created a friendly environment within the group, except during hard working academic periods.

Students are committed to have an excellent performance on every subject. Nevertheless, the group has been dealing with low grades in Math, which has caused stress and other related emotional issues. Fortunately, meetings have been held between students' delegates, teachers and the educational psychologist, in order to develop plans to cope with the problem. In addition, three students have been diagnosed with ADD, one student with both dyslexia and dyscalculia, and another student with “emotional and learning problems”. Apart from these diagnosed disorders, teachers have been advised to have special considerations with students that neglect school subjects on behalf of sports activities.

With respect to English classes, the group is divided in two without following special criteria. The first and the second half of the list are assigned to two different teachers of English. They have built a

good classroom environment, following the rules shared with the students at the beginning of the year: “mutual respect”, and “100% effort”.

Students are asked to use only English to address the teacher and classmates. Strikes are given as a penalty every time a student is caught using Spanish. This might have a negative impact on their final grade, while an outstanding performance might have a positive impact as well.

Both groups are enthusiastic about English. Motivations are related to using the language for traveling and studying abroad. Some students take advantage of every opportunity for practicing their English. There is a high level of listening and reading comprehension; apparently, there are no major problems with productive skills either.

Tensions are produced when students face stressful times: “No les gusta trabajar con sus compañeros cuando están preocupados por sacarse buena nota. Al parecer no tienen paciencia con los que les cuesta más hablar inglés” (Vera, 2016). They tend to avoid any type of interaction that may require a greater time investment or personal effort. This has led to a huge amount of *silent* individual work during English lessons.

In order to know their perceptions, students were asked to rank from 1 to 5 their disposition to speak in English and their disposition to work with their classmates. Results of the survey are displayed in as follows:

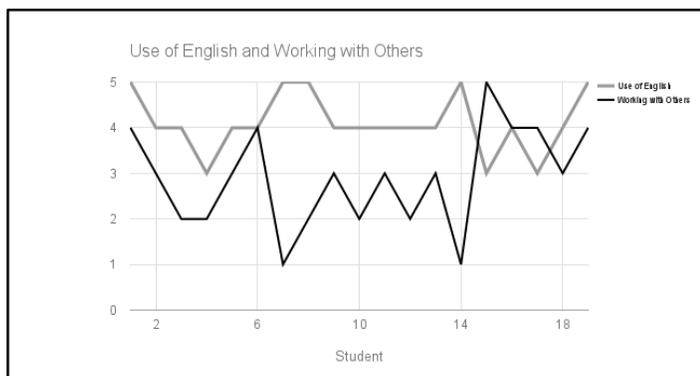


Fig.1 Students disposition towards the use of English and working with others.

Results showed that students tend to have a good disposition to speak English during class, while their disposition to work with others was shown to be remarkably lower. Even though their attitude towards the use of English is positive and highly beneficial, it becomes of little use if the interaction with others is avoided.

In an increasingly detached and individualistic world, it becomes compulsory to help children in the development of *soft skills*. Communication, interaction, tolerance, respect, and many others should be developed in their adolescence along with the identity they would probably uphold for the rest of their lives. Therefore, these values should come as the basis of a lesson plan regardless of the subject or the content being taught. In this case, the English language would serve as the tool to negotiate meaning during any interaction.

It has already been said that the ability to perform well and solve problems in group work is highly appreciated nowadays² and that the classroom should be considered a good place for their

² (Rocco, 2000)

development. This becomes highly important considering that students from this school have traditionally held important offices in many governments, or have become owners of important companies that have had major impacts on the country's economy. The ability to work with others becomes then essential, as well as making decisions on behalf of a community and the development of soft skills mentioned above. Therefore, these variables should be considered when designing, implementing and assessing English classes.

DESCRIPTION OF THE UNIT

Decisions

Considering the diagnosis, a series of decisions were made before planning the unit. In terms of pedagogical and disciplinary decisions it was not possible to make any significant changes. When asking for a space to carry out the intervention, teachers of 9th grade agreed on providing a space in the final unit, which was said to be "not as hard as the others". However, it was not possible to make any changes either to the content or the role and use of the English language.

This unit consisted of the creation of a short story based on giving a twist to a classical fairy tale. The process of reading, writing, and creation was done exclusively in class, as well as a subsequent creation of a big book that contained the story along with colorful illustrations. English was used as the only means of communication. Special emphasis was given to the development of productive skills, and to make students focus on success instead of mistakes.

In relation to didactic decisions, and considering that students did not show a good disposition towards working with others, it was deemed necessary to adopt team building strategies to enhance the collaborative learning. Strategies are listed as follows:

1. **Form groups:** The teacher formed the groups of three students. The criteria used were: first, not to have close friends in the same group, in order to force students to interact with new people. Second, put together students with a similar level of English to avoid that a student with a higher level would take all the workload. The division resulted in five groups of three students and one group of four.
2. **Turning groups into teams:** For a group to become a team, a relationship of mutual trust and interdependence must be developed. Members need to feel identified with the team, through the use of common elements with which all members identify as relevant and that give them a sense of belonging.
 - a. **Create a Team Name:** Every team created a name that would identify them for the whole project.
 - b. **Team Logo:** Students were asked to create and draw a logo in the cover of their study guides. Sometimes they were recognized by their logo during the development of activities.
 - c. **Handshake:** Each team had to create and practice their "secret handshake". They performed the handshake at the beginning of every subsequent class.
3. **Accountability:** One of the most commonly agreed features of a successful team is the ability of being responsible for their own learning. For this to be developed, the following strategies were implemented:

- a. **Roles in the Team:** Each member of the team had a different role: Captain, Co-captain, and manager. Roles gave them a position in the team and made them feel as an important part of it.
- b. **List of duties:** Each role had to accomplish a list of duties that were displayed on the board in every class. An example of a class list of duties is shown below:

Roles	Duties
Captain	Present any doubts, opinions, or concerns to the teacher Keep an eye on the project deadlines Don't be bossy - Be tactful and respectful of the work of others
Co-Captain	Promote even participation Help solve conflicts Keep an eye on cellphones or any other distraction
Manager	Make sure everybody speaks only in English Make sure everybody brings their materials Make sure everybody participates actively

Table 2: Roles and list of duties.

- c. **Switching Roles:** Roles were switched on a weekly basis. This allowed every member to experience different types and level of responsibilities, such as holding their classmates accountable, avoiding any type of distraction, or helping in the solution of conflicts.
- d. **Tracking Sheet:** At the end of each class, the designated manager was in charge of recording the team's performance. An example of the tracking sheet is displayed as follows:

Tracking Sheet						
Name	Use of English	Materials	Participation	Role	Date	Comments

Table 3: Tracking sheet for self and peer evaluation.

Lessons and Activities

There were 3 lessons per week: two of 90 minutes and one of 45 minutes. Specific language objectives and content objectives were defined to be accomplished every week. Lessons followed a structure of three moments: pre, while, and post. *Pre* considered presentation of the objectives, and the development of team building strategies. *While* involved activities to build up writing skills, as well as illustration and coloring of the big book. *Post* included metacognitive activities about peer and self-evaluation through the completion of the tracking sheet, along with plenary discussions to wrap up the week's activities.

Materials and Resources

The teacher provided a study guide to be used during the whole project. It contained short writing activities to practice, blank space to write the first draft of the story, and little diagrams of the big book so as to organize the text and sketches of the drawings before working on the big book itself. They were also given six classical fairy tales: *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Rapunzel*, *Bluebeard*, *Rumpelstiltskin*, and *Hansel and Gretel*³. The big book was also provided by the English department. Students were given a book of 50cm x 30cm with 16 blank pages to work.

Assessment

Formative assessment was held in terms of classwork and use of English. Students had a tracking sheet to assess their classmates and themselves students in terms of the frequency of use of English, the responsibility of bringing materials, and participation. Scores obtained in those tracking sheets had no impact on the final grade. The teacher had a similar tracking sheet to assess students' frequency in the use of English. Strikes were given when students were caught speaking Spanish and a sum of three strikes in a row would result in the discount of a point in the use of English. The maximum possible score was 10 points. Classwork and the completion of activities in the study guide corresponded to 41 points total which, along with the 10 points for use of English, counted as a whole grade.

The big book was graded using a rubric⁴ that follows the 6+1 Traits of writing⁵ and some other general requirements regarding the presence or absence of visual elements. The maximum possible score was 45 points. The original unit plan considered another evaluation; an oral presentation of the story to be graded with a rubric. However, this second evaluation could not be held due to time constraints.

Unit Plan

The unit was a writing project that consisted on the creation of a short story (about 200 words) based upon classical fairy tales. Students were supposed to identify the elements of classical fairy tales, as well as fairy tale vocabulary, connectors of sequence, voice, narrator, and elements of the plot. Then, they had to apply these elements to the re-creation of a classical fairy tale. Each team was assigned a fairy tale. The only requirement was that they had to interchange the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist, that is to say, in the new versions the protagonist was the old villain.

They created a first draft of the story that was edited by their peers and a second draft, which also included thumbnails of the illustrations, that was edited by the teacher. Once they finished the process of creation they started working on the big books. It is important to note that each team member had a specific function in this stage of the process. As there were three members per group there was a creative writer, a chief editor, and an illustrator. These roles were chosen according to their preferences and special abilities either for writing, editing, or drawing.

³ Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, [Children's and Household Tales -- Grimms' Fairy Tales], vol. 1, 7th ed.

⁴ See project rubric in the appendix.

⁵ The 6+1 Trait® Writing Model of Instruction & Assessment comprises 6+1 key qualities that define quality writing. It was developed by Education Northwest.

The general objectives of the project as listed as follows:

- To orally express different points of view in a discussion
- To develop creative writing skills.
- To create narrative texts.
- To produce an original short story of 200-words, including specific short story vocabulary

The specific objectives of the intervention are listed as follows:

- To develop communicative skills through team interaction
- To solve problems using English as the only means of communication
- To develop a relationship of mutual interdependence and coordination
- To develop a positive attitude towards teamwork

The time allocation for the project was six weeks total, which corresponded to 18 classes and about 30 pedagogical hours. A synthesis of the planning is shown as follows:

PLANNING SYNTHESIS

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/1 (90')	Content Objective: Students will be able to identify and analyze the elements of a narrative text (short story). Students will be able to recognize different text types. Students will be able to plan before writing. Language Objective: Students will be able to use connectors of sequence.	Teacher PPT Tracking sheet Students Study Guide prepared by the teacher	Pre Teacher: Project introduction. <i>Forms the teams</i> While Teacher Review strategies. Students: Apply strategies Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre Team building strategy 1: Create a Team Name While Teacher: Review of Literary Fiction Students: Work in teams in their study guides Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre Team building strategy 2: Accountability While Teacher monitors Students work in the study guide Post Plenary discussion to wrap up the week's activities.	Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet
2/1 (90')				
3/1 (45')				

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/2 (90')	Content Objective: Students will be able to identify and use the 6+1 Traits of Writing in editing a short written text Language Objective: Students will be able to use connectors of sequence and time expressions, punctuation marks and capitalization appropriately. Students will be able to use adjectives and adverbs to make complex descriptions.	Teacher PPT/ Tracking sheet Students Study Guide	Pre Team building Strategy 3: Roles in the Team While Teacher: Review. Students work in teams Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre : Teambuilding Strategy 4 List of duties While Students work in teams Teacher monitors Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre Teambuilding strategy 5 Accountability While Students work in teams Teacher monitors Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet	Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet
2/2 (90')				
3/2 (45')				

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/3	Content Objective Students will be able to identify and review the elements of a fairy tale Students will be able to create their own version of a short story but with a twist Language Objective: Students will be able to identify and use storytelling vocabulary	Teacher PPT/ Tracking sheet Students Study Guide Bag of materials	Pre Team building strategy 6 Switching Roles While Teacher fairy tale twist Students Write 1st draft Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre : Team Building Strategy 7 Team Logo While Students Write 1st draft. Teacher monitors Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet Pre Teambuilding Strategy 8 Accountability While Students Write 1st draft. Teacher monitors Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet	Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet
2/3				
3/3				

PLANNING SYNTHESIS

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/4 (90')	<p>Content Objective: Students will be able to create their own version of a short story but with a twist</p> <p>Language Objective: Students will be able to identify and use storytelling vocabulary in a descriptive text</p> <p>Students will be able to use the contents of the last study guide in a creative writing task.</p>	<p>Teacher Tracking sheet</p> <p>Students Study Guide. Materials for the big book</p>	<p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 9 <i>Switching Roles</i></p> <p>While Students Write 1st draft. Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 10 <i>Accountability</i></p> <p>While Students Write 2nd draft, preparing the big book. Teacher plays music, monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Team Building Strategy 11 <i>Accountability</i></p> <p>While Students Write 2nd draft. Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p>	<p>Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet</p> <p>Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet</p> <p>Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet</p>
2/4 (90')				
3/4 (45')				

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/5 (90')	<p>Content Objective: Students will be able to create a big book with the short story and illustrations</p> <p>Language Objective: Students will be able to use storytelling vocabulary in short descriptive texts</p> <p>Students will be able to use narrative text elements appropriately in a short written text</p>	<p>Teacher Tracking sheet</p> <p>Students Study Guide/Materials</p>	<p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 12 <i>Switching Roles</i></p> <p>While Students: Big books Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 13 <i>Handshake</i></p> <p>While Students: Big books. Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 14 <i>Accountability</i></p> <p>While Students Big books Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p>	<p>Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet</p>
2/5 (90')				
3/5 (45')				

Class/Week	Learning Outcomes	Materials/Resources	Activities	Ongoing Assessment
1/6 (90')	<p>Content Objective: Students will be able to create a big book with the short story and illustrations</p> <p>Language Objective: Students will be able to reflect upon their own learning writing a feedback letter to the teacher.</p>	<p>Teacher Rubrics Tracking sheet</p> <p>Students Big books</p>	<p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 15 <i>Switching Roles</i></p> <p>While Students Big books Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Teambuilding Strategy 16 <i>Accountability</i></p> <p>While Students Big books Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post Peer/ self-evaluation. Tracking sheet</p> <p>Pre Team building Strategy 17 <i>Accountability</i></p> <p>While Students FINISH Big books Teacher monitors</p> <p>Post PROJECT FEEDBACK</p>	<p>Classwork, Use of English, Tracking sheet</p>
2/6 (90')				
3/6 (45')				

LEARNING RESULTS

Short Story Project

Students finished and delivered the study guides with the completion of the different stages of the project (pre-writing activities, first draft, second draft and sketches), as well as the tracking sheet with the record of their own and their team mates' performance during the project. Through these instruments it was possible to assess the process involved in the project.

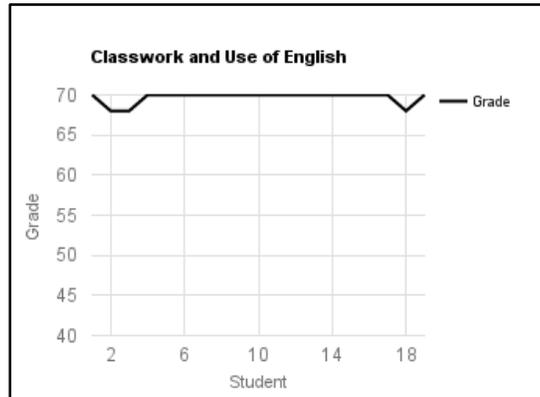


Fig. 2 Grades obtained in Classwork and Use of English

With respect to the final product, students delivered six big books ⁶with their own illustrated versions of classic fairy tales. Books were handed in on time and following all the formal requirements⁷.

Grades obtained in the final product are shown in Fig. 3:

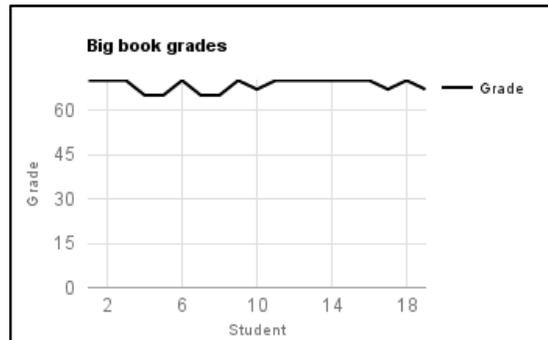


Fig.3. Grades obtained in the final project.

All students obtained good grades. On the one hand, the fact that the project had a focus on the process as well as the product helped them to be assigned different scores for classwork and use of English, so as to assess their performance on every class. On the other hand, as the final product was edited in different stages of the process the final evaluation was also satisfactory.

⁶ See appendix 1.

⁷See appendix 2.

Feedback

Students were asked to provide feedback for the project in the form of questions. Results are shown in the following table:

Question	Most common type of answer
What did you like the most about the project?	<i>My group/ Working in groups/ Create the story</i>
What did you like the least about the project?	<i>The final book/ Draw and paint</i>
Did you feel engaged with the project? Why? or Why not?	<i>Yes, because of my group/ Yes, because my ideas were considered in the group</i>
Did you feel you were asked to work creatively? Why or why not?	<i>Yes, because we had to create our own story and drawings/ Yes, because I had to work with people I didn't know</i>
How could the project be improved for next year?	<i>We could have more time</i>
Please write any other suggestion or comment you may have about the project	<i>We should choose the groups</i>

Table 4. Students' feedback on the project.

It is interesting to note that even though they were not asked to answer about group work they mentioned some aspects of it. When answering about what they liked the most, they answered "My group", or that their groups were one of the reasons they felt engaged with the project. They also suggested that they would like to choose their groups.

Team building

Trust and Affinity

Students were asked to evaluate their team according to their perception about the development of certain attitudes. They ranked their perception in a scale from one to ten. The two first attitudes were: trust and affinity, which were considered to be something "felt", or not felt towards someone else. Results of the survey are shown as follows:

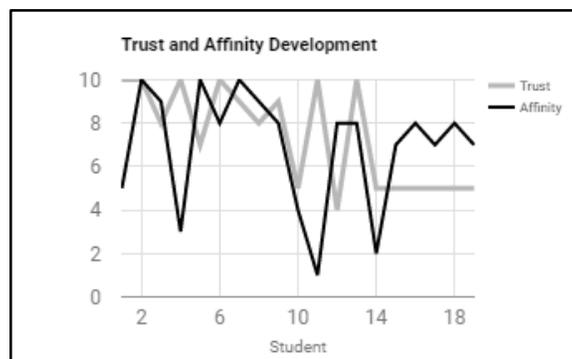


Fig. 4. Students' perception of the development of trust and affinity in their teams.

The figure shows that there was an even distribution among students. About half of the class perceived trust and affinity as high, while the other half perceived it as low. This explains their negative disposition at the beginning of the project when the teacher assigned the groups.

Communication and Interdependence

The other three attitudes were positivity, coordination, and interdependence. The development of these attitudes was analyzed in relation to the variable of communication⁸. Results are shown as follows:



Fig. 5. Student's perception of interdependence in relation to communication

The figure shows that the relation between communication and interdependence was directly proportional. While communication maintained high interdependence would also maintain high, and vice versa.

Communication and Coordination

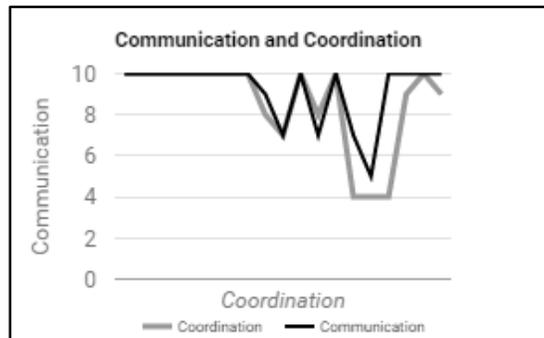


Fig. 6. Student's perception of coordination in relation to communication

The figure shows that the relation between communication and coordination was also directly proportional. While communication maintained high coordination would also maintain high, and vice versa.

⁸Students were given the choice to answer the survey either in Spanish or English

Communication and Positivity



Fig. 7. Student's perception of positivity in relation to communication

The figure shows that the relation between communication and positivity was, as well as the other attitudes, directly proportional. While communication maintained high positivity would also maintain high, and vice versa.

It is important to state that the development of communication was closely related to how identified students felt with their teams. The more time students spent together *talking*, working, and solving problems the better their interdependence, coordination and positivity became.

Accountability

Teamwork

Students were asked⁹ about their teamwork experience in relation to their perception of being part of the team. The most common answers are shown below:

Question	¿Te sentiste parte importante del equipo? ¿Por qué?
Most common type of answer	<i>Sí, porque fue un trabajo en equipo que necesitaba de todos los roles y capacidades por lo que aprendimos a dividirnos el trabajo y así logramos terminarlo.</i>
	<i>Sí, porque ayudé y cooperé en lo que se me dijo</i>
	<i>Sí, porque di mi mayor esfuerzo trabajando en el libro</i>
	<i>Sí, porque ayudé a mis compañeros</i>
	<i>Sí, encuentro que logramos un buen trabajo juntos y complementamos nuestras cualidades para crear una gran historia.</i>
	<i>Sí porque mis ideas fueron tomadas en cuenta.</i>
	<i>Si porque cada vez que hacía algo ellos me ayudaban a que fuera mejor</i>
	<i>Sí porque éramos un equipo, no un grupo</i>

Table 5. Students' perceptions about teamwork experience

According to the most common types of answers, students had a positive perception of teamwork. They recognized that every member was important and had a responsibility in the whole project. They regarded differences as something positive and valuable in the creation of the story. They also felt that they received help from their team when it was needed, and finally, they realized there was a difference between being a group and a being a team.

⁹Students were given the choice to answer the survey either in Spanish or English.

Teacher's role

Students were asked¹⁰ to write a feedback letter to their teacher. It was not given any other direction to guide their reflections. The most common answers are shown below:

Perception of the teacher's role	
Most common type of answer	<i>los profesores siempre están ahí por si tienes algún problema o si necesitas ayuda porque eso es lo que hace un buen profesor.</i>
	<i>You have worked extremely hard through this time you expended with us. Sometimes your motivation was a little too much, but I understand why you did it</i>
	<i>she helped me in everything that I didn't know. With she I improve my use of English and also my knowledge.</i>
	<i>aunque me dio lata el trabajo fue entretenido y mejor que una prueba porque nos ayudaste a seguir intentando</i>
	<i>She is really kind and easy to talk, She help us to do our best.</i>
	<i>Ella me enseñó a estar orgullosa del trabajo como equipo que se logró. Y más allá del estrés de pintar, dibujar, escribir es aprender a aceptar a todo el grupo y dejarlos participar porque su ayuda será necesaria</i>
	<i>thank you for being positive each class no matter what happened :)</i>
	<i>I really respect your work, and I hope you never stop doing what you love.</i>
<i>Thank you for being our teacher this year and helping us to understand english better and always try to make us do the best we can at works.</i>	

Table 6. Students' perception of the teacher's role

Although they were given the choice to write the feedback letter either in Spanish or English, most of them opted for English. Answers agreed on that the role of the teacher was to provide help, motivation, and to encourage them to give their best during the whole process.

ANALYSIS

Project based methodologies have been proven to be undoubtedly beneficial for English language teaching. It provided students with a "positive affective climate and a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere", as Jiang (2009) stated. It enabled students to forget that English was another subject in which making mistakes would result in a lower grade. On the contrary, it established a sense of achievement; therefore, students' trust, self-image and willingness to participate increased exponentially.

Having established that environment, the challenge was to improve student's disposition to work with others. Even if their attitude towards speaking in English had improved, their lack of interaction would eventually result in a poor or non-existent development of communicative skills. It would not have been necessary to negotiate meanings and resolve problems. The proposed solution, then, was to adopt strategies to help each student feel an important part of a team.

Students had a negative first impression when implementing team building strategies. They disagreed with the idea of the teacher assigning groups, claiming that it is always better to work with friends. It was not a pleasant discussion, but they needed to be exposed to new types of interaction aiming at the development of new competencies. Due to their negative disposition to work with their new assigned groups, it was decided to give them a couple of classes to know each other before implementing the subsequent strategies. During those classes it was of vital importance to have them sit in groups with the desks arranged to face each other while working.¹¹

¹⁰Students were given the choice to write the feedback letter either in Spanish or English.

¹¹Johnson (2000)

There was a slight change in their attitude when they had to create a team name. Most of the groups created names that were related to aspects of their personality, such as “Cookie Monsters”, “The Best”, and “CBS’s” that was an acronym for their names. Another group got the name “Pen Pineapple Apple Pen” that was taken from a viral video they had just seen that week. There was only one group that could not agree on a name and had a bad disposition to complete the activity. It was another difficult discussion to have, but they agreed on mixing their preferences. They finally created “Believers of LeBron” that stands for a mixture between Justin Bieber fans and LeBron James fans. It is important to highlight that their discussions, either positive or negative, were held exclusively in English.

The discussion for the creation of the Team Logo was developed in a similar fashion than the team name, but with a less negative tone. The focus was to come to an agreement as fast as possible to draw the logo and have a good final product. The same occurred when inventing a handshake. The difference in the latter strategy was that they noticeably enjoyed it. It is important to state that this final strategy was implemented three weeks after the beginning of the intervention, so students had spent a considerable amount of time working and solving problems together.

According to Johnson (2000) the effectivity of a collaborative learning also depends on *individual and group accountability*, *positive interdependence* and *metacognitive exercises*. The strategies implemented were well received by team members. They liked to have different roles and a short manageable list of duties to accomplish each class. Some students did not show the same enthusiasm when it came to switch the roles they had had for an entire week. Captains did not want to stop being “the boss”; since they were convinced that any other member was not qualified to fulfill that position. At this point, I neglected the relevance of explicitly stating at the beginning that all roles were equally important and that the purpose of switching was to guarantee participation, fair share of the work, and learning to trust and depend on the work of others.

This caused a couple of students to maintain a negative attitude when they were assigned a role with which they did not feel comfortable. On other occasions they thought that the only important role was that of the Captain, or tried to avoid the role of the Manager arguing that keeping track of everybody’s performance was too much work. In this respect, it was my sole responsibility to explain them the purpose and importance of what they were doing, so they could understand and hopefully change their perception and attitude.

The tracking sheet proved to be an efficient instrument to enhance individual and group accountability. Students felt responsible for their own participation and commitment with the team. An interesting finding was that students invented strategies to cope with certain problems. One of the teams established a system to avoid the use of cellphones. The Co-captain kept everybody’s cellphone inside a bag until the end of the class. Another team agreed that the manager, as well as the teacher, had the power to give strikes if a member was caught speaking Spanish. They changed the term “*strike*” for “*reminder*”, as they did not have any impact on the student’s final grade on use of English. On the contrary, they certainly had a positive impact on their accountability and interdependence. This strategy, as Pfaff (2003) assures, allowed them to feel they were in more control of their results and effort.

Fredrick (2008) notes that self and peer evaluation give students the opportunity to reflect critically upon their performance. Some students added comments to the tracking sheet, even though they were only asked to rank their performance from 1 to 5. Some of their comments were: “*I spoke Spanish with people that were not in my team*”, “*we did it very good this class we made more effort*”. Other students, instead of assigning numbers commented: “*really good*”, or “*could improve*”, “*I promise*”

I'll bring my materials". These comments revealed that students had developed self and peer accountability to a certain extent. However, I did not suggest any strategy to help them guide their reflections or intentions to perform better.

In relation to final grades and assessment, it can be said that it was highly beneficial to take into account the process as well as the product. Students were aware and satisfied with the fact that everything they did was reflected on their final grades.

In light of these reflections, the intervention was successful in that students' perception of their experience working in teams changed. Team building strategies were successfully adopted and their interdependence had a satisfactory development. It was also crucial to find that according to their feedback, the development of the attitudes was determined by communication, that is to say, students were developing communicative competencies throughout the whole project.

On the other hand, these strategies were not enough to comply with the needs of every student. I found that some students still preferred to be the "lone ranger" in the classroom. When I addressed the problem with a particular student he replied that this "teamwork thing" was not of the real world and that grades, scores and going to university were a "personal thing". It is clear that this problem should be dealt with in collaboration with the whole school community.

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Considering Fredrick's ideas about good teaching I must constantly reflect on my own practices. I am convinced that a teacher who strongly believes that his/her methods are flawless could never have a positive impact on a student's education. Currently, there seems to be a tendency to have teachers under constant assessment. This has lead universities and teacher training programs to give special emphasis on the creation of a well evaluated teacher, one that complies with all the formal requirements measured by standardized tests. In much of the cases the focus on creating this teacher has neglected students, and classes are being planned to fulfill the needs of the teacher and not those of the students.

The first thing I have to remember is that my teaching serves the students' learning needs. I have to become a facilitator of learning that is able to reinvent and improve strategies for the sake of learning. This requires the development of critical reflection and willingness to change. It should not be difficult as far as students, and not the teacher, remain as the most important element in the classroom.

Second, I need to remember that students need to feel safe and comfortable to learn. It is my responsibility to create a safe environment so they feel confident to produce language. This involves the development of relationships of trust and interdependence, not only among students, but also among students and me.

Third, a teacher should never forget the context. All schools, classes and students are different and a good teacher needs to reinvent and adapt his/her teaching strategies according to the context's requirements. In relation to the context of this intervention I identified two important things that were not wholly considered during the process.

On the one hand, my students' personality. I knew through the process of diagnosis that they were used to know the reasons behind everything. They've always liked to negotiate decisions and have tried to be as involved as possible in their learning process. I should have remembered that and explicitly told them the purpose of the strategies that were implemented. Once they understood they

would have probably had a better disposition. On the other hand, I have to give them a voice. It was surprising that they created their own strategies, which most of the times, worked better or were more efficient than those proposed by the theory. I have to give them the opportunity to suggest changes or give ideas that improve the learning process. Nobody knows students best than students themselves.

Finally, I need to take advantage of “teachable moments”. I could have proposed strategies to those students that identified their own specific learning needs. I need to be prepared to guide their reflections and future actions to a better understanding of their learning style, as well as to propose strategies so they can improve their performance. A similar situation happened with that student that preferred to be a “lone ranger”. Taking the time to talk and exchange thoughts is the only tool that may have an impact on a student that already has a fixed, and not beneficial, idea in his/her mind.

CONCLUSION

It is widely recognized that being able to work in groups is a highly valued skill in diverse contexts such as work environment and education. It is also known that the lack or total absence of this skill could result in a failure of collaborative work. That is why companies have asked educational institutions to teach children how to be effective team players. Different strategies should be adopted to effectively teach this skill at school level.

In the class where this intervention took place there was a tendency towards individualism and self-achievement. Students had a negative disposition to work in groups so the class had become used to silent individual work. This lack of interaction had a negative impact on the use of English in oral situations, which was the main objective to achieve during the year.

The key was to turn groups into teams. It was of vital importance to make students build a relationship of mutual trust and interdependence so they felt committed to collaborate actively with the work. In order to build this relationship, strategies for team building were implemented. Students worked on feeling identified with their teams through the creation of a team name, a team logo and a handshake. They also held themselves and their team accountable for their learning by reflecting upon their performance and keeping track of their participation in the project at the end of every class.

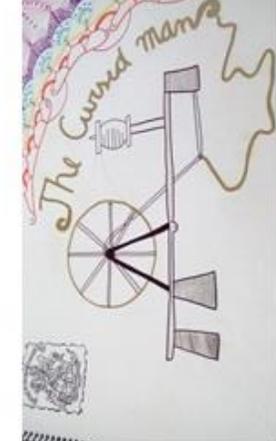
The results of the intervention showed that most of the students had a positive reaction to the strategies. They were willing to work with their teams and solve problems using English as the only means of communication. Some teams created their own strategies to cope with problems, such as the use of cellphones during class. Some other students had a negative disposition to work with their teams arguing that teamwork was useless and could never be found outside the classroom.

According to students’ feedback and teacher’s reflection it was possible to conclude that the context should never be neglected. It is important to consider students characteristics not only to choose strategies, but also to implement them in a better way. Students should also be given a voice to make suggestions or provide ideas so they can participate actively in their learning process.

Finally the teacher should constantly reflect critically upon his/her practices and be willing to change. Paying close attention to students’ performance should make the teacher reinvent and adapt strategies to facilitate students’ learning in a satisfactory manner.

Schools should become the place where students learn and are trained to be effective team players. Well supported and well intentioned strategies should be adopted to enhance teamwork in the classroom.

APPENDIX 1: Big Book Covers

<p>"The Guardian". New version of "Rapunzel" by The Grimm Brothers, retold from The Witch's perspective.</p>		<p>"A chronicle of a locked up Wolf" New version of "Little Red Riding Hood" by The Grimm Brothers, retold from the Wolf's perspective.</p>	
<p>"The Other Side" New version of "Hansel and Gretel" by The Grimm Brothers, retold from the Witch's perspective.</p>		<p>"Deceiving Looks" New version of "Blue Beard" by Charles Perrault retold from Blue Beard's perspective.</p>	
<p>"My Real Story" New version of "Jack and the Beanstalk" by The Grimm Brothers, retold from The Ogre's perspective.</p>		<p>"The Cursed Man" New version of "Rumpelstiltskin" by The Grimm Brothers, retold from Rumpelstiltskin's perspective.</p>	

APPENDIX 2: Short Story Project Rubric

	5 points	4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point
Requirements and Writing Process	Story meets all the requirements for length, format, content, and process deadlines.	Story does not meet one of the requirements for length, format, content or process deadlines.	Story does not meet two of requirements for length, format, content or process deadlines.	Story does not meet three of requirements for length, format, content or process deadlines.	Story does not meet more than three of the requirements for length, format, content or process deadlines.
Organization	Story clearly represents all phases of a developed plot, according to the plot diagram discussed in class.	Story does not contain one of the elements.	Story does not contain two of the elements.	Story does not contain three of the elements.	Story does not contain four or more of the elements.
Creative Ending	The ending of the story is original and creative. It includes the falling action and the resolution, and carries the story to its conclusion in a new and age-appropriate way.	The ending of the story is weak in one area or one thing is missing.	The ending of the story is weak in two areas, or two things are missing.	The ending of the story is weak in three areas, or three things are missing.	The ending of the story is weak in four or more areas, or is not present at all.
Ideas	The short story presents the appropriate change of perspective, which is present throughout the story. The story creates empathy for its new protagonist.		The short story presents a partial change of perspective that is not always present throughout the story.		The short story does not present a change of perspective. The story is mostly unoriginal, or lacking in creativity.
Sentence Fluency	Sentences are structurally accurate and varied. Story contains at least five connectors.	Sentence structure is mostly accurate, but lacks variety. Story contains four connectors.	Several sentences lack correct structure but are comprehensible. Story contains three connectors.	Most sentences lack correct structure. Story contains two connectors.	Errors in sentence structure make the story incomprehensible. Story contains one or fewer connectors.
Word Choice	The words used in the story convey meaning in an exact, interesting, and natural way. Vocabulary is advanced and varied, and at least 5 storytelling vocabulary words are used. Story demonstrates 1-2 errors in word choice.	The words used in the story are mostly correct (3-4 errors in word choice). Meaning is still comprehensible despite incorrect words. Vocabulary is somewhat varied. At least 4 storytelling vocabulary words are used.	Word choice is sometimes incorrect (5-6 errors in word choice), but causes only a few details of the story to be unclear. Vocabulary is not varied. At least 3 storytelling vocabulary words are used.	Word choice is often incorrect (7-8 errors in word choice) and makes the story difficult to understand. At least 2 storytelling vocabulary words are used.	Errors in word choice make the story incomprehensible (more than 8 errors). One or fewer storytelling vocabulary words are used.
Voice	The chosen task presents an engaging and/or identifiable voice, which successfully adapts to the given task.	The chosen task presents a somewhat engaging and/or identifiable voice, which successfully adapts to the given task.	The chosen task presents an occasionally identifiable voice, which adapts to the given task.	The chosen task presents a weak voice, which doesn't appropriately adapt to the given task.	The chosen task presents a weak, almost non-existent voice which does not adapt to the given task.
Use of Grammar	Story contains fewer than two errors in grammar. The past tenses are used exclusively.	Story contains 3-4 grammatical errors. Errors do not impede understanding of the story. The past tenses are used exclusively.	Story contains 5-6 grammatical errors. Errors slightly impede understanding of the story. The past tenses are not used in one instance.	Story contains 7-8 grammatical errors, but can still be predominantly understood. The past tenses are not used in two instances.	More than eight grammatical errors are made, significantly impeding understanding. The story contains three or more instances of non-past tenses.
Conventions	Story presents 1-2 errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation.	Story contains 3-4 errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation.	Story contains 5-6 errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation.	Story contains 7-8 errors in spelling, capitalization and punctuation, but essay can still be predominantly understood.	Errors in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization make the text incomprehensible.

Project Score: _____ /45 Grade: _____
 Classwork Score: _____ /41 Grade: _____

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