Cooperative Learning in English Language Classes in Four Private Subsidized Schools in Santiago

Aprendizaje cooperativo en la clase de inglés en cuatro colegios subvencionados de la Región Metropolitana

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Abstract

The teaching of English as a foreign language has been a topic of concern for multiple Chilean administrations. However, figures show that most of the population does not have an elementary-level of the English language, implying that student–teacher interactions have not produced the expected learning outcomes. The purpose of this project was to research the variables that affect classroom management and their impact on the teaching of English. Variables such as knowledge generation, classroom discipline, and assessment, among others, were found to have an impact on language learning. The study was conducted in four classes in three districts of the Metropolitan Region of Santiago. The qualitative approach used here employed descriptive-interpretative strategies. The information was gathered through field observation, individual interviews, and questionnaires. The results support the idea that classroom management that promotes cooperation in English language classes helps to foster learning communities that make student learning more efficient.

Keywords: classroom management, classroom discipline, learning communities, knowledge generation, assessment, cooperative learning

Resumen

La enseñanza del inglés ha sido objeto de preocupación para los Gobiernos chilenos. Sin embargo, las cifras demuestran que la mayor parte de la población no maneja un nivel elemental del mismo; por ende, las interacciones profesor-alumno no producirían los aprendizajes esperados. El objetivo de este proyecto fue indagar las variables que inciden en el manejo del curso en el aula y su efecto en la enseñanza del inglés. Las variables como generación/creación de conocimiento, control disciplinario y tipo de evaluación, entre otras, tienen un impacto en el aprendizaje del idioma. El estudio se llevó a cabo en cuatro cursos, en tres comunas de la Región Metropolitana. Se utilizó el enfoque metodológico cualitativo, a través de estrategias descriptivo-interpretativas. Se realizaron observaciones de campo, entrevistas individuales y cuestionarios. La información obtenida permite sostener que el manejo de curso que desarrolla la cooperación en la clase de inglés permite crear comunidades de aprendizaje que hacen más eficientes los aprendizajes de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: manejo de clase, control disciplinario, comunidad de aprendizaje, generación de conocimiento, evaluación, aprendizaje cooperativo

The teaching of English as a foreign language has been a topic of concern for multiple Chilean administrations, the creation of the program «English Opens Doors» (in Spanish, *Inglés abre puertas*) in 2003 demonstrates this. However, the figures obtained in three measurements conducted by the Education Quality Agency (ACE) (2012) through the SIMCE English test for 11th grade[1], show that the majority of Chileans do not have an elementary level of English. This is equivalent to the A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Therefore, the interactions that are generated in the classroom do not produce the expected learning outcomes.

The aim of this research is to show some of the different variables that affect appropriate group management in the classroom and their effect on the learning of English. Graves (2008) points to the importance of creating a real learning community in the classroom. If the management of the class is not adequate, the appropriate conditions to produce the desired learning outcomes are not created. Variables such as the philosophy of each teacher and their perception of teaching, the teacher-student interaction, the way the classroom rules are applied, the way to control disruptive behaviors, and the factors that affect the assessment methods, among others, affect the management of the class and the ability to generate effective learning communities.

Thus, this qualitative research with an interpretative analysis strategy, is focused on the relational dynamics of English classes at four schools in Santiago in the private subsidized sector, on courses ranging from 6th to 12th grade. In light of the findings, we will consider the importance of building communities that facilitate learning, with an emphasis on cooperative learning in English classes with the purpose of students achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Framework of reference

This study adopts a constructivist approach, understanding that the processes of teaching and learning are interrelated and cannot be separated. As stated by Ascorra, Arias, and Graff (2003), learning is a building significance process and attributing meanings that sets in motion in the different relationships that occur in the classroom. In this regard, it is essential for the teacher's group management to enable learning by transforming the classroom into a community where students cooperate with each other to generate learning. Scrivener (2012) defines classroom management as the way in which the teacher organizes the learning of their students, by controlling what happens in the classroom and, therefore, the strategic decisions that have a key role by creating a favorable work environment. In this sense, it

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[1] The first measurement was done in 2010, and only 11% of the students were certified. In 2012, 18% of the students assessed obtained certification, and in 2014 25% of the students were certified, which shows a significant advance, particularly in middle socioeconomic sectors. In 2010-2014 the number of students who obtained a certificate was doubled. To obtain the certification students must reach levels A2 or B1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), on receptive-type reading-listening skills (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, n.d.).

is the teacher who, when considering their pedagogical options, may choose to adopt more cooperative work systems that generate a joint work and allow an English learning community to be created. In this way, students play more predominant and participatory roles, and make themselves responsible for their learning, while a course management focused solely on the teacher, restricts the possibilities of students generating their own learning. More than 20 years ago, Kagan (1994) developed his theories about the positive effects of the cooperative learning strategy, where students work together towards a common goal. Kagan considers that each member of the group is responsible not only for their own learning, but also for cooperating with their classmates learning, which creates an atmosphere of achievement not only individually, but also in community. The students work in pursuit of a task until every one of the members achieves learning and reaches the goal. In the same vein, Morales and Ferreira (2008) state that cooperative learning emphasizes highly interactive activities, centered on the students, where each of them becomes the manager of their own learning and motivates other students to make themselves responsible to learn as well. This produces a socially-generated learning in the interchange. However, although most English teachers are clear about the importance of cooperation and the need for being more a facilitator and creator of participatory environments, this does not always happen in English classes.

There is often no record of what really happens and how the teacher mediates between his own educational philosophy, the social context of their students, and the curriculum that must be taught (Graves, 2008). Nevertheless, there are concrete facts indicating that the classroom can be a social community in itself, with human activities and its own conventions to perform activities. Knowledge is cooperative and co-produced by all; if the course management does not take these aspects into account, valuable opportunities to generate cooperative interactions between students are probably being wasted. The teacher who makes the decision to create an English learning community should decide on the ways in which each student will contribute (Van Lier, 2007) and in what ways the classroom management will outline to include more cooperative learning activities or strategies. Poehner (2009) adds that a community classroom model affects the type of assessment done, and the traditional model in which the teacher observes and describes the performance of activities is replaced by a model in which both teachers and students develop tasks together to enable the development of student skills beyond what they could accomplish separately.

In this regard, a program oriented towards the creation of learning communities and knowledge generation in a cooperative manner, allows that the teacher is a mediator/facilitator who helps students to develop their individual skills and, subsequently, put them to the service of their community. That is to say, students make themselves responsible for their learning and for their peers to learn and achieve the goals. In the community model, there is a strong emphasis on the social role of the individual, in co-responsibility, in values such as solidarity and respect for the differences of others, and the binding dimension of human beings (Rogers, 2000). This is developed and enhanced in its social and supportive role for those who know less or who have more difficulties. More effective and meaningful English learning are produced for students, and values such as solidarity and cooperation are also developed (Roberts & Cook, 2009). The latter adds to the disciplinary climate which should be enhanced with appropriate group management and enables proper learning to occur through diverse active and passive strategies (Zuckermann, 2007). In addition, appropriate motivation is also generated in the students. Slavin (1984) mentioned that one factor that influences the success of cooperative learning and the building of learning communities is the positive motivational impact of peer support in the learning process.

By working in small groups, the peers recognize that, to achieve their goals, they rely on the success of their classmates and, therefore, they show greater willingness to provide support to others. The cooperation also improves student motivation, helping them to have greater control over their learning experiences. The aim is to help students to become actively involved in the learning process (Slavin, 1980). This ensures that the human being will be completely involved and it is possible that it will lead to a more inclusive type of motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

The truth is that, in our Chilean reality, many students have poor performance in English due mostly to motivational deficiencies. For this reason, it is important for teachers to cultivate motivation and interest in learning among students. Only if they become fully engaged in learning this will be meaningful to them and the effects will be more enduring. The more cooperative the student interactions are, the higher the level of motivation and learning will be.

To conclude this issue, it is important to bear in mind the concepts emerging from this literature review; firstly, the need for pedagogical decisions made by teachers within the classroom management framework with emphasis on the students and relationships that they are able to build with their classmates. This will develop the dimension of person in the students, besides the individual dimension (Rogers, 2000). In the English classroom, it seems to be vitally important that this personal and social dimensions of students build learning communities through cooperation, where students take responsibility for their individual learning and for their classmates. For purposes of this research, it will be considered that an EFL[2] classroom is cooperative when the generation/creation of knowledge is shared by the teacher and students, that is, students cooperate with their classmates to achieve a learning goal together (Kagan, 1994). A classroom is also cooperative when students make themselves responsible for their own individual learning and are concerned that the rest of the community is also learning (Kagan, 1994; Morales & Ferreira, 2008). In the exchange produced between students, this shared responsibility is evident. One clearly cooperative element is the use of the teaching strategy for pairs and group works. By interacting with their classmates, students are cooperating to make learning more shared (Kagan, 1994). Another aspect of the cooperative classroom for the purposes of this study is the disciplinary plan, that is, rules have been created collectively and they apply to everyone (Kagan, 2010). The opposite of this would be rules imposed by teachers. Finally, the cooperative classroom includes students being an active part of the assessment process together with their teachers, that is, it is not a task done only by the teacher (Poehner, 2009). Table 1 below shows the variables and indicators.

Table 1
Constituent elements of the cooperative classroom

	Variables	Indicator
Cooperative EFL classroom	Generation/creation of knowledge	Knowledge is created jointly
	Responsibility in learning	Students are responsible for their individual and collective learning. The teacher is a facilitator
	Pair/group work	This occurs to a high degree
	Disciplinary plan	This is done jointly by teachers and students
	Assessment	This is done jointly by teachers and students

Methodology

In order to conduct this study, I used the qualitative methodological approach for the comparative case study and an interpretative and comparative strategy for the different interactions that occur in English classes at four private subsidized schools, in the context of class group management and its impact on the creation of learning communities through cooperative learning strategies. The research design was based on observations of four English teachers with an average of two years of professional practice in five of their English classes during the first term of 2014 in 6th grade (La Florida), 8th grade (Pudahuel), 10th grade (Lo Barnechea) and 12th grade (Lo Barnechea). All schools belong to the subsidized education sector in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago and a middle-low social class. In total, 20 English classes were observed, each course consisting of an average of 30 students. In sixth and eighth grade English classes consist of only 3 hours, 2 times per week. In the case of 10th grade, the students had a total of 6 hours of English, 3 times per week, and in the case of 12th grade, there were only 5 hours of English, 3 times per week.

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2   EFL (English as Foreign Language) is an acronym used to refer to the context in which English is taught as a foreign language. This is the case of Chile, in contrast to other places where English is taught as an ESL (English as a Second Language), such as Canada, where there is a community who speaks English as a native language.

Classroom observations were made to collect the information, teachers were interviewed, and students were asked to answer a questionnaire.[3] The information obtained was triangulated to explore how cooperative and communitary the English classes were. The variables that were sought were those previously listed in Table 1: generation/creation of knowledge, responsibility in learning, work in pairs/groups, disciplinary plan, and participation in assessment. Finally, parameters were established to classify the classrooms from the least to the most cooperative. Therefore, in the section of the results, when discussing level 1-2, level 3, and level 4-5, this refers to the level of cooperation, as shown in Figure 1.
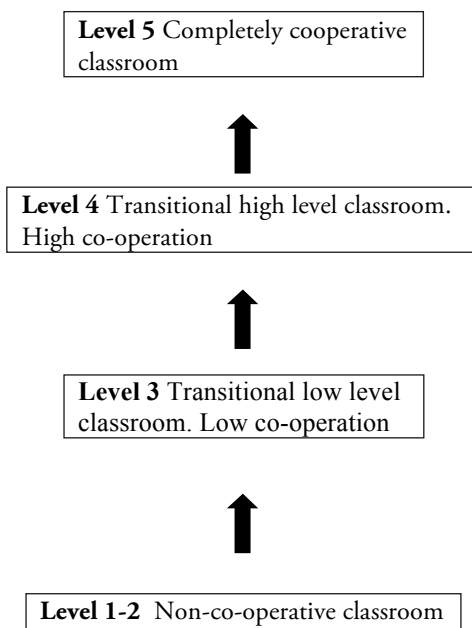
Level 5 Completely cooperative classroom

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Level 4 Transitional high level classroom. High co-operation

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Level 3 Transitional low level classroom. Low co-operation

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Level 1-2 Non-co-operative classroom

Figure 1. Cooperative level of EFL classroom.

Results

Generation/creation of knowledge

Knowledge generation is understood as the element responsible for creating knowledge in the classroom. In a classroom where there are community elements, knowledge generation takes place in a cooperative process, since all class members contribute to create knowledge. Interactions in this classroom model are more of the student-teacher and student-student type. In a fully cooperative class, knowledge generation is distributed between the different participants and each one has something to contribute to the knowledge generation. There is also a classroom atmosphere that allows learning to be something personal and social, and it is constructed and enhanced in the interactions that are created in classes. At the extreme opposite of this type of class, knowledge generation seems to be linked only to the teacher. The prevailing interaction is that of teacher-student, and the role of the student is rather passive. It is limited to merely listening and writing in a notebook and the students do not have a particularly active role where they ask, interact, and take the responsibility for generating their own learning. On the other hand, students believe that the only source of knowledge is the teacher.

Figure 2 shows that most of the observed classes are concentrated at levels 2 and 3, where level 2 means that the teacher uses group management strategies that do not help to create a cooperative classroom and level 3 corresponds to a low transitional level, where the teacher uses very few group management strategies which promote the creation of learning communities. A smaller number is concentrated on level

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3   The diagram in Figure 1 shows the levels of cooperation in the observed classes.

4, a higher transition level, where group management strategies do help to create learning communities, but none of the observed classes reached the highest level.
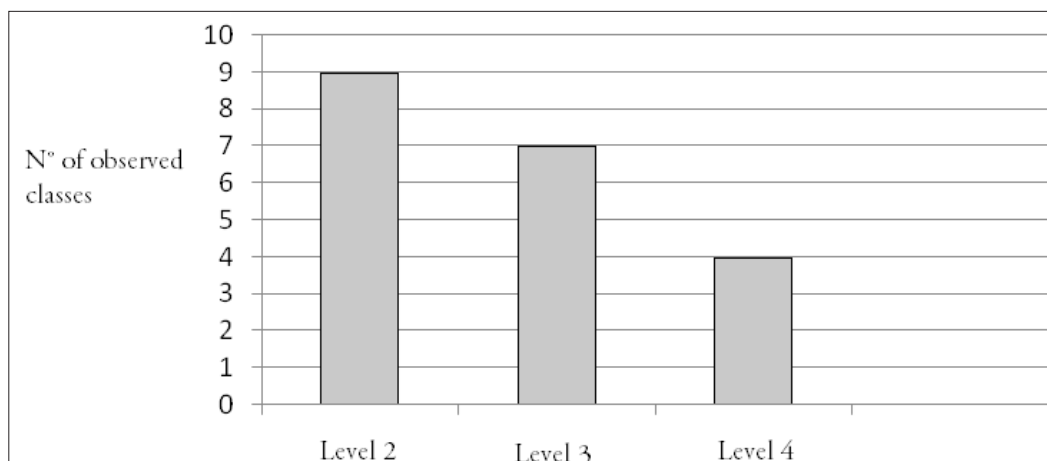

Figure 2. Knowledge generation/creation.

If we consider that learning of English should be active and cooperative, since it requires linguistic exchanges to generate communication and that the student manages their own knowledge and is co responsible for the learning of their classmates, it is concerning that there was a lack of more cooperative knowledge generation in the observed classes. This means that classes are still traditional. The teacher is the one who speaks most of the time and students write on their notebook, but they seldom have the opportunity to communicate in English and build their own knowledge, interacting with their classmates or the teacher.

It is interesting to notice that, by contrasting the classroom observations with what the teachers said in the interviews, the four teachers indicated that knowledge generation is shared between teacher and student. That is, there is a didactic and methodological auto-perception that opportunities are provided in class for students to generate knowledge together with those who teach. At the theoretical level, teachers recognize that this facilitates learning, but their classes are not conducted with this inclusive and cooperative approach. There is a notable gap between what teachers believe they do in class and what really happens. In the questionnaires they were asked if they believed in the communicative approach[4] and they all considered themselves as supporters. However, when observing classes, there were only rare occasions on which the students could generate their own learning, cooperate with each other or with the teacher in creating meanings, or use the English language in a communicative manner.

When the students were asked what they feel they contribute to the English class, 50% of them marked option B, indicating that they only contribute when they are interested in the subject of the English class, although there is a significant number of students who marked option A, confirming that they contribute a lot and, in particular, they ask questions about grammar and vocabulary. Nevertheless, these levels of participation and knowledge generation vary and fluctuate even more when students were asked about the role they should have in the classroom. In fact, 80% think that they should be more active, and this is directly related to the type of English class they attend. Often, they do not participate in classes because the subject does not interest them, but according to the observed classes, they also fail to participate because the classroom management strategies are non-cooperative and do not tend to create learning communities. Although the teachers understand the importance of the centrality of the student and that they are who might generate their own learning and take responsibility for learning, this does not happen most of the time. In this regard, students say: «I like it when the teacher doesn›t write and we do oral

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[4]   The communicative approach emphasizes on the use of English in different contexts, stressing the functions of language. Nunan (1989) mentions that the communicative method (a) emphasizes communication in the foreign language through interaction, (b) introduces real texts in the learning situation, (c) gives students the ability to think about the learning process and not just about the language, (d) gives importance to the personal experiences of students as elements that contribute to the learning in the classroom, and (e) is intended to relate the language learned in the classroom to activities outside the classroom.

classes. I find it better, so we all participate» (10th grade); «I like it when we work on the Power because we all work, it›s fun and we give our opinions» (6th grade); «I like it when we do activities with the class taking part and raising hands and commenting, because I believe that those of us who aren›t very good at English learn from the answers of the others» (4th grade).

Responsibility in learning

Responsibility in learning is understood as the level of involvement that the student has in their own learning. In a classroom where the group management allows the creation of a learning community, and where all members build knowledge together, the teacher becomes a facilitator who creates the conditions for the students to make themselves responsible for their own learning and for others. The whole community learns and everyone in the community cares; therefore the community ensures that every one of its members learns. On the other hand, in a classroom where group management strategies does not promote cooperation, the teacher assumes all responsibility for student learning and leaves no space for the students to take the initiative and become participants and co-responsible for generating knowledge together with the teacher. The interaction in this type of class is mainly teacher-student and the student is more passive about their responsibilities about their learning.

In this regard, in almost 50% of classes the English teacher still has a traditional leading role; however, the other 50% are in transition to more cooperative learning. This is consistent with what teachers said in the questionnaire. Indeed, they all agree that the responsibility in learning is shared. That is, they understand the importance of creating the conditions for students to make their own decisions about their learning and they know that students have to become independent. To this respect, when they are asked what it means to teach English, all of them show signs of understanding the importance of having a facilitating role in the classroom, since this gives students the opportunity to develop different skills, expand knowledge, understand the possibilities they will have if they are proficient in another language, and cooperate with each other to achieve a learning objective.

This is supported by the opinions of students. Fifty eight percent chose option A: «Yes, because the teacher gives me the opportunity to perform activities on my own». However, 39% of the students selected option B: «I am only responsible for my learning sometimes, but I often leave this responsibility to the teacher, because he is responsible». On this subject, the results are consistent with observations in the classes: teachers are at a transitional level that should increasingly lead to cooperative classrooms, with well-defined roles and the assignment of responsibilities to students.

Use of work in pairs and/or groups

A fundamental aspect for the creation of learning communities in English classes is for teachers to facilitate and incorporate work in pairs and/or groups in their classroom. This teaching strategy helps all members of the community to generate knowledge, strengthens the responsibility of each student in their own learning, increases the level of motivation among students because it gives them the opportunity to participate more actively and create links with each other, and strengthens the cooperation between students and between the student and the teacher. The teacher stop being a mere transmitter of knowledge and is becoming into a facilitator and promoter of learning.

However, in the English observed classes, work in pairs and/or groups was almost nonexistent. Figure 3 shows the classes in which this type of teaching strategy was used at least once. Only in five classes it was used in an activity for a few minutes and in two classes it was used more regularly and more results were obtained. The rest of the observed classes completely ignore the work in pairs or groups. That is, the interactions in classes were mostly teacher-student. This contrasts with the perception of teachers, who indicate in the questionnaire that they used these strategies regularly.
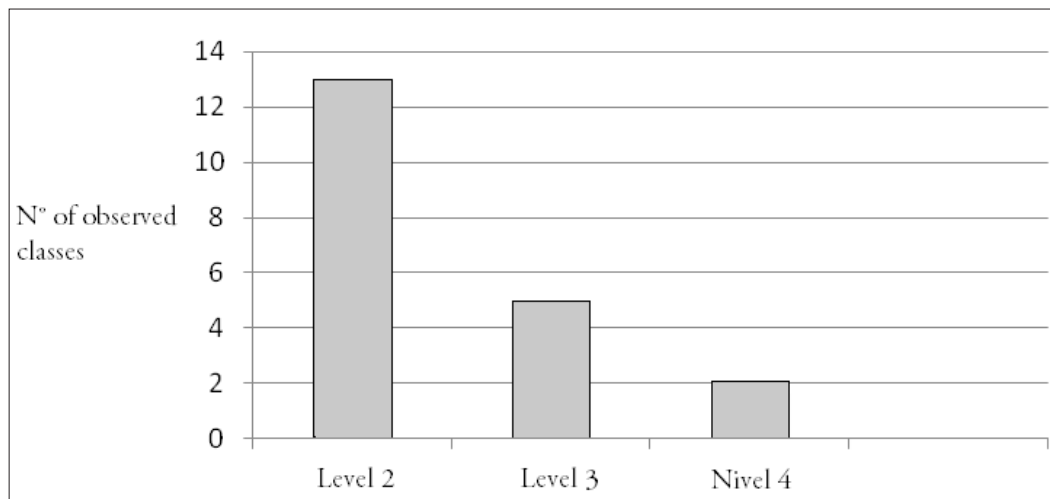
Figure 3. Use of work in pairs/groups.

On the other hand, 54% of students show themselves very much in favor of group work. Most of students feel comfortable in this kind of activity and perceive it as a great tool to learn English. On crowded courses, which is the reality of the national context, work in groups and pairs is a very suitable option for students to interact in English. In any case, it is a challenge for teachers because they might have an adequate methodological and group management to suggest activities that allow students to participate without losing control of the class. It is clearly an example of practice that would help significantly in achieving learning and which is usually absent. Students comment on these activities in the following manner: «(What we like most is) group work since we learn to work together and it makes us joint together as a class» (10th grade); «Doing work in pairs to share time with classmates» (6th grade); «I like it when we do group activities, and when the teacher deliver the class, it›s nice to do English classes» (12h grade).

Disciplinary plan

One valuable aspect of using cooperative strategies in the classroom is that student discipline improves considerably. In this regard, Kagan (2010) states that he had started giving workshops on cooperative learning to secondary school teachers and cases of misbehavior in classes suddenly began to decline. This is explained by the fact that, by using cooperative learning strategies, students feel more involved in the class, since they have to interact with their classmates. In a traditional class they are expected to sit down and not interact with anyone. Those students who have a greater need to move around and interact with other students are referred to as «problem» students. Cooperative learning involves the students and allows them to do what they want most: interact with their classmates. If students are really involved in learning activities, there is little room for disruptive behavior. However, the national reality is a true challenge. Teachers are frequently forced to produce the expected learning in classrooms where they have to control 45 students and do not have additional hours of preparation to facilitate their academic planning work. And even less with a disciplinary plan based on cooperative learning. Unfortunately, this affects the quality of their planning and the results observed on their courses.

For purposes of this research, the subcategories that form part of the disciplinary plan variable are: (a) to promote high standards of behavior, (b) respect and fairness, (c) time spent teaching, and (d) preventing disciplinary problems. In relation to the first subcategory, as mentioned in the paragraph above, the higher the degree of cooperation in the classroom, the greater the involvement of students; there will be greater clarity in the way teachers communicate, and the students› behavior will be better. On the other hand, in less cooperative classrooms, the rules are not communicated, or are communicated irregularly or imposed without considering the characteristics of the students. In these classrooms there appear to be gaps in the information provided by the teacher regarding desirable behavior among the students. In a cooperative classroom students can work with the teacher on developing standards of expected behavior.

The second sub-aspect involves respect and fairness in actions intended to improve discipline: The teacher is perceived by students as fair and respectful, and is also seen as someone who cares about their students and is able to establish emotionally healthy relations based on respect. On the other hand, in classrooms where cooperative characteristics are not seen, teachers fail to create the conditions for respect and fairness in the treatment, and there may be cases of students who do not respect the teacher or vice versa.

The third aspect of the disciplinary factor is the time spent by the teacher on teaching, because when there are gaps in planning and students are not occupied, they lose track of the class and become disorganized. In the case of classrooms with cooperative characteristics, the teacher maximizes the amount of time spent learning and obtains a higher level of achievement.

The final subcategory is related to the prevention of disciplinary problems. In a classroom where the cooperative relationship is preponderant and where learning is built between the teacher and students, the teacher is always alert, acts dynamically, knows their students well, and has the self-confidence to prevent any disruptive classroom situation from becoming unmanageable. In classrooms where there are no cooperative processes and teachers know their students less, are repeatedly unable to prevent disciplinary problems that may be caused by the students. In a way, this is because in a classroom where there is no cooperation, knowledge ceases to be built between the various actors and is simply provided by the teacher.

With regard to the subcategory of promoting high standards of behavior, 55% of the observed classes achieved a score equal to 4, which is a high transitional level; that is, there are elements in these classes that suggest that the vast majority of strategies related to disciplinary control allow the creation of learning communities. At Level 4 the teacher clearly communicates the coexistence rules and they appear to have been socialized previously to the students.

Likewise, in the subcategory of justice and respect, there are also high transitional levels in cooperative classrooms. Sixty five percent of the observed classes showed practices equivalent to levels 4 and 5. Students perceive the values of fairness and respect in their teacher, and every one of the community members was treated with respect, creating close and empathetic relationships.

The next subcategory, which is related to maximization of time devoted to teaching-learning process and the need to prevent gaps in class planning, is shown in Figure 4. It should be noted that in many of the observed classes a minimum score equivalent to 2 was achieved. In other words, the teacher uses classroom management strategies that do not contribute anything to the creation of learning communities. Specifically with respect to this subcategory, the teacher loses a lot of time when they change activity and significant scarcities are perceived in the preparation of classes, for that reason, students lose the track and interest.
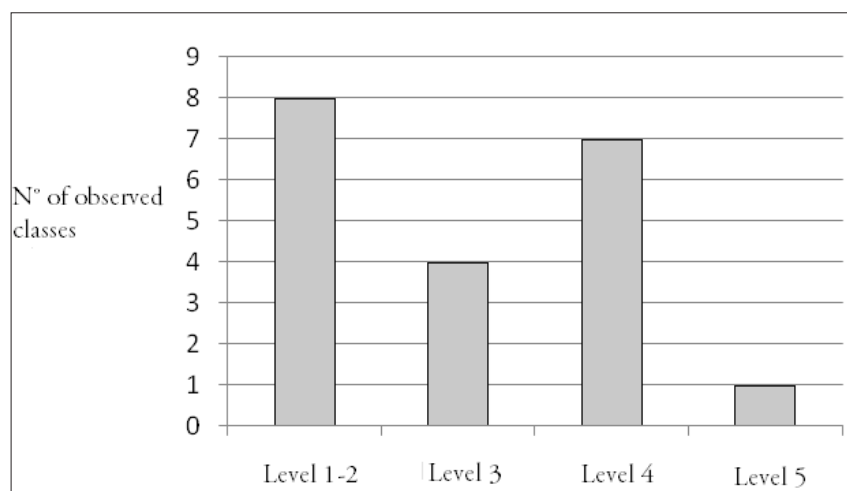

Figure 4. Efficiency of time in the teaching-learning process.

However, the same number of classes was also observed with a score equivalent to 4, corresponding to a high transitional level, and it was even found that in some classes the score was 5. That is, the teacher used cooperative class management strategies, maximizing time, giving each student a specific task without wasting too much time between one activity and another. Generally, teachers were observed acting dynamically. They show themselves as attentive and assertive and handle what they are meant to teach very well.

Finally, in the subcategory of preventing disciplinary problems, 65% of the observed classes had scores equivalent to 4; that is, there is a high transitional level, which means that group management techniques are used to create learning communities. Specifically, the teacher has the sensitivity and skill to prevent most disciplinary problems from reaching unmanageable levels.

Regarding the disciplinary aspect, teachers said it is important to have clear rules and know how to communicate them, but only three of them mentioned the importance of involving students in creating the rules. The latter should increase the level of cooperation in the classroom and improve the involvement of students in learning activities. Contrary to what one might think, students are very clear that to achieve effective learning, a propitious environment is needed and they defend the need for clear rules. In response to the question «Do you like the rules of discipline and coexistence to be clearly established?» Fifty seven percent of students answered that they do like this a lot because it contributes to learning. This shows that students need someone to organize the process for them to move freely, as a result of which class management contributes to the creation of a learning community should have very clear rules, assigned roles, and flexible but well-structured planning that leaves no empty spaces. In general, the teachers observed had acquired a certain leadership among students and were capable of creating spaces for the construction of learning; however, they had scarcities in planning classes, because there was a large amount of dead time between one activity and another. Therefore it appears to be important to include students in the disciplinary plan, so that they become more genuinely involved in the process and respect the rules. Participation affects knowledge of the rules and the clear communication of those rules.

Participation in assessment

Finally, a fundamental aspect in the creation of learning communities in English classes based on cooperative strategies is the student participation in the assessment process. This aspect has traditionally been in the hands of the teacher and students lack of opportunities to take part in the process. It is possible that this type of activity is conducted better at the higher grades of secondary education, but this could also apply to the grades of younger children to teach them to be part of the process. Activities such as building categories with the teacher, self-assessment, or assessing a classmate could help to increase participation in class and, at the same time, make students more responsible for their own learning and the goals they have for the class. It could also help significantly in constructive knowledge creation among all members of the learning community.

In a class where group management strategies are provided that promote the formation of learning communities, both teachers and students are involved in the assessment process in a constructive manner. In contrast, in a traditional class the usual model is given, where the teacher observes, gives the grade, and deprives the students of the opportunity to assess their own learning.

In the English observed classes, the inclusion of students in the assessment process is practically nonexistent. In this regard, teachers conduct the entire assessment process in isolation and independently. This follows the classic model where the teacher observes the students and assesses them. The lack of inclusion of students in the assessment process is something transversal, since it was not observed in any of the classes. However, all teachers agree that it would be an excellent idea for students to become responsible for their learning.

When consulting students about this alternative, 25% say they would like this very much and that it would be a contribution to their classmates, while 46% say they would like to participate in such an activity, guided by the teacher. That is, there is the openness and willingness among students to participate and cooperate more actively in the assessment of learning and thus contribute more to the learning community.

Final discussion

Taking into account the categories analyzed in this study, the following conclusions were reached:

1. Implementation of increasingly English cooperative learning: as shown by this study, the English teacher currently works with significantly more critical students, who understand information technologies and have greater leadership in society. Therefore they expect greater participation in the development of their learning. To make this possible, one of the strategies that could be used is the cooperative learning proposed by Kagan (1994), adapted to the Chilean reality and the English learning context as a foreign language. This would not only have a positive impact on the generation of learning that is more in line with the times, but would also develop a social role and the personal dimension in students (Rogers, 2000). In the context of cooperative learning, the subject is responsible for their own learning, but also the learning of their group. In this way, English learning is enhanced, but also values such as solidarity and respect for differences.

2. Modification of the arrangement of the English classroom: In order to make significant changes, it is essential for school authorities to give English teachers greater freedom to decide the group management strategies that they will use and the arrangement of the classroom (Scrivener, 2012). As we have seen in this study, it is important interactions between students and teachers in English classes. If the classroom management choice made by the teacher is of a more cooperative nature, there will probably be a greater number of students interacting in groups, which will change the structure of traditional classes where students are sitting in rows. But this does not mean that students are not learning. I remember that I was recently called upon to supervise teaching practice at a private subsidized school that was not included in this study: the student in practice had chosen to ask their students to sit in a semicircle and then work with them in groups. The students were involved in their learning (Kagan, 2010) and, therefore, their discipline was quite good. Suddenly, the school principal entered into the classroom and told the students that they had to sit in an orderly and traditional manner, that is, one behind the other. All sense of cooperation was immediately lost and the class returned to being the traditional type, where only the teacher speaks. Associating good discipline with arrangement in rows, where the students simply listen to the teacher, makes them lose interest in the class, inhibits any kind of cooperation, and is insufficient to achieve enduring learning in English.

3. Construction of disciplinary and assessment plan with students: The previous point leads us to suggest that an effective disciplinary plan, especially in English classes, involves giving some control to students in order to build rules and regulations between all members of the community which foster better learning. If everyone collaborates in building rules, it is much more likely that they will be respected than if they are imposed by the teacher. The same thing could be told about the type of assessment. As the students who participated in this study indicated, many of them would like to be part of the assessment process being guided by their teachers. Teachers who participate in the study think that it is beneficial and enhances development of a critical-constructive spirit among students.

4. Allocation of hours for planning: Preparation of activities to develop more cooperative classrooms requires greater investment of time in preparing activities, and this seems to be an underlying problem. How could English teachers deal with this if they spend much of their busy schedule directly teaching classes? One of the teachers who participated in this study noted how difficult it was for her to make plans when virtually all of her working schedule was assigned to direct teaching. This teacher had only two hours per week with no classes, which she devoted almost entirely to dealing with parents. When I talked to her as part of this study, I observed the high volume of tests that she had to grade, since she was in charge of the entire secondary part of the school. Under these conditions it is very difficult for teachers to prepare cooperative activities for English classes.

5. Incorporation of peer observation in English classes: Finally, a practice that could help a great deal with the performance of teachers is the observation of colleagues in English classes. Observations could also be made by school authorities, but this could be perceived as something threatening by the teacher if they think that their job is at risk, whereas if a peer makes observations, the spirit is rather to help the colleague to improve certain aspects of their practice to strengthen the teaching-learning process and, ultimately, enhance student learning. The advantages of observing classes include being able to access the reality occurring in the classroom, making it possible to identify those aspects that the

teacher needs to improve to make it more effective (García, 2014). The observed teacher could, thus, become aware of the gap that sometimes exists between what they think theoretically and what they are doing in class. This process of becoming aware is frequently the starting point for positive changes in professional duties.

From the above, it follows that the strategy of cooperative learning in English classes would be very beneficial in our national reality, but it requires certain changes to be introduced in schools to foster greater inclusion of students in their learning process. There are some organizational and cultural barriers that undermine this possibility because, for example, there are very rigid beliefs about what is good discipline in the classroom or the type of assessment that should be done, among other aspects. On the other hand, it seems important to promote the continuous academic and professional development of teachers, not only by attending courses, but also through pedagogical practices such as class observation. In this way, so that the professional development of the teacher is not something that is given externally, but something that takes place in a more constructive manner (Burns, 2015). In this regard, motivating teachers to develop action research with their own students would be a way of making them more aware of their own pedagogical practices, as well as encouraging creative ways of solving everyday problems that occur in the classroom.

Similarly, the limitations of this study should be considered. The fact that it is a qualitative study and a study of cases with a small sample in the field of private subsidized education limits the types of generalizations that can be made. Indeed, a similar study could be conducted about private and municipal education to compare and contrast the results.

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