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**GROUP WORK IN DEVELOPING SPEAKING  
SKILLS IN ENGLISH IN FORM 9**

**GRUPU DARBS RUNAS PRASMJU ATTĪSTĪBAI ANĢĻU  
VALODĀ 9. KLASĒ**

DIPLOMA PAPER

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## Anotācija

Diplomdarbs „ Grupu darbs runas prasmju attīstībai angļu valodā 9. klasē” ir pētījums par runas prasmju pilnveidi, izmantojot grupu darbu angļu valodas stundās. Diplomdarba tēma tika izvēlēta ar mērķi pierādīt komunikatīvā un sadarbības procesa nozīmīgumu svešvalodas stundās, uzlabojot sarunvalodas praktisko lietošanu un pieredzi. Darba hipotēze: grupu darbu un dažādu aktivitāšu izmantošana veicina runas prasmju pilnveidi.

Teorētisko materiālu par komunikatīvās mācīšanās teorijām izpētes rezultātā tika izdarīti secinājumi, ka grupu darba rezultāti ir saistīti ar pozitīvu un draudzīgu attieksmi vienam pret otru un personisko atbildību grupas kopīgo mērķu sasniegšanā.

Empīriskajā pētījumā ir atspoguļotas un analizētas angļu valodas stundas, kurās tika izmantots grupu un pāru darbs. Tika veikta aptauja ar mērķi izzināt kādā veidā uzlabot skolēnu runāšanas prasmes.

Darba gaitā nākas secināt:

- mūsdienu mainīgajā sabiedrībā aizvien lielāka nozīme jāpievērš katra skolēna spējām izmantot zināšanas un prasmes vēl nebijušās situācijās, īpaši praktiskās situācijās;
- jāattīsta prasmes un vēlēšanās sadarboties ar citiem - strādāt grupās, komandā un pāri;
- angļu valodas apguves procesā jāizmanto aktīvas mācību metodes, kas veicina attieksmi pret otru, attīsta spējas klausīties, vērtēt, izteikt savu viedokli, sadarboties.

Šī pētījuma rezultāti un noslēgumā minētie dati var tikt lietoti angļu valodas stundās, lai efektīvāk veidotu mācīšanas un mācīšanās procesu.

Atslēgas vārdi: grupu darbs, sarunvalodas prasmes, sadarbība, motivācija.

## **Abstract**

The present paper investigates the group work in developing students' speaking skills in the English language lessons. The theme of the paper was chosen in order to prove the importance of communicative and cooperative process in foreign language lessons improving practical use and experience of the spoken language. The hypothesis of the paper is the following: implementing group work in the teaching process and different activities provides effective opportunities for mastering speaking skills. The methods of the research have been based on theoretical studies, and conclusions were drawn that result of group work is connected with positive and friendly attitude to each other and individual responsibility to achieve common goals. The empiric research reflects and analyses the usage of the group work in the English language lessons. The questionnaire was organized with the aim to investigate the ways of improvement the students' language skills.

In the process of work certain conclusions were drawn:

- in nowadays' changing society great attention has to be paid to each student's ability to use knowledge and skills in unexpected situations, especially practical one;
- skills and desire to cooperate with others – working in groups, teams and pairs;
- the data obtained indicate that development of speaking skills can be fostered by applying the group work and different activities.

The results and conclusions of this research can be used in the English classroom in order to make the teaching learning process more effective.

Key words: group work, speaking skills, learners, speaking activities, motivation.

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## Introduction

Nowadays, English is spoken in the whole world, and it is the first foreign language learnt at schools in Latvia. Students often associate the ability to communicate in English with the development of speaking skills because often the way how people can express themselves orally testifies to their overall ability to communicate in English.

Communicative Learning is found as one of the best learning approaches. It allows using a variety of learning activities students have a chance to improve their understanding of the English language.

Using Communicative Learning methods and effective teaching strategies, teachers can help their students use English as a foreign language more frequently and experience language more naturally through communication and work in groups. The purpose of this diploma paper is to study the concept of group work and the ways it could be used for developing speaking skills in the English language.

The **goal** of this paper is to show how useful group work is as a teaching means and to develop the principles of using it. The best and the most important is that the teacher, by choosing group work can encourage not confident and shy students. Group work is one of the methods that could be successfully used for teaching speaking in English as a foreign language.

The order to achieve the aim the following **enabling objectives have been set**:

- To find out and analyze the available theoretical literature on communicative approach
- To carry out Action Research in order to prove the efficiency of using group work in the development of students' speaking skills improvement;
- To use group work practically in the study process with the target group of learners.
- To work out and pilot practical tasks to develop students' speaking skills.
- To analyze the results and draw conclusions.

The following **hypothesis** has been proposed:

Implementing group work in the teaching process and different activities provides effective opportunities for developing speaking skills.

**Methods of research:**

- The study of Communicative Language Teaching principles and techniques and theoretical literature on the development of speaking skills.

- Action Research as a research method was conducted in the period from January 10 to March 17, 2011 in Sigulda State Gymnasium in form 9.
- Questionnaires and observations tools were administered in order to collect relevant data.

# Chapter 1

## 1. Theoretical Background of the Research

Chapter 1 presents the analysis of theories on Communicative Approach and its role in language learning and teaching. The definition of the notion of communicative language teaching as a method of evaluation and its place in language teaching and its description will be given.

### 1.1 Definition of communicative language teaching

According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, ‘the *Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching* is *approach* to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is *communicative competence*.’ (Richards et al 1992:65) The approach mentioned above was developed to emphasize not the grammatical structures of the language but accentuate the communicative qualities as the main purpose of learning the language is communication. The same dictionary says that the approach mentioned above:

- a) Teaches the language needed to Express and understand different kinds of functions
- b) is based on a *notional syllabus* or some other communicatively organized syllabus
- c) emphasizes the process of communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations; using language to perform different kinds of tasks, e.g. To solve puzzles, to get information, etc.; using language for social interaction with other people. (Online1)

### 1.2 Historical background and the Functions of the Communicative Language Teaching

Savignon (1983) points out that the origins of The Communicative Approach date back to the early 1970s and was worked out by the Council of Europe experts. The Communicative Approach was mentioned earlier than in the 1970 and it was done by Chomsky. ‘He advanced the two notions of ‘competence’ and ‘performance’ as a reaction against the prevalent audio-lingual method and its views.’ (Online1). The next linguist who developed this approach was Hymes. He transformed the two notions started by Chomsky ‘into a “communicative competence” which refers to the psychological, cultural and social rules which discipline the use of speech’. (Hedge, 2000)

Hymes emphasized the importance of social and cultural background which have to be taken into consideration and cannot be excluded to use the language properly. He claimed that

a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and ability for language use with respect to:

1. whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
2. whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
3. whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
4. whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails. (Hymes 1972:281)

Several linguists (e.g. Richards & Rodgers, 1986; and Hedge, 2000) distinguish the dimensions of communicative competence, which are ‘linguistic or grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence’ (Online 1)

Richards & Rodgers (1986) point out that ‘Communicative Language Teaching is best considered as an approach rather than a method.’(Online 10) They explain the difference between the method and approach indicating that ‘methods are held to be fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices, whereas approaches represent language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom’ (Rodgers, 2001).

Nunan points out five the Communicative Language Teaching describing features, which by his opinion are:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learners own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom. (cited in Brown 1994a: 78)

Halliday emphasizes the importance of language functionality and points out that ‘with the description of speech acts or texts, since only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language, and therefore all components of meaning, brought into focus’( Halliday 1970: 145).

Halliday suggests (1975) the basic functions for language learning, which are:

1. The instrumental function: using language to get things;
2. The regulatory function: using language to control the behavior of others;
3. The interactional function: using language to create interaction with others;
4. The personal function: using language to express personal feelings and meanings;
5. The heuristic function: using language to learn and to discover;

6. The imaginative function: using language to create a world of the imagination;
7. The representational function: using language to communicate information.

(Halliday, 1975:11-17)

Brown (1994) indicates that 'it (Communicative Language Teaching) is therefore a unified but broadly-based theoretical position about the nature of language and of language learning and teaching.' (Brown 1994b:244-45)

Richards and Rodgers (1986) offer language functions, which from their point of view are the most important:

1. Language is a system of the expression of meaning
2. The primary function of language is for interaction and communication
3. The structure of language is reflects its functional and communicative use
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. (Richards and Rodgers 1986:71)

It seemed very vital for the author of the current paper to find out how important is the Communicative Language Learning from the point of view of the learner and what teachers have to be aware of when using this approach. Shrivener (1994) distinguishes three main features of communicative activities:

1. **Information gap**
2. **Choice**
3. **Feedback**' (Shrivener, 1994:62)

Shrivener (1994) explains that it is not a real communication if one of the speakers asks a question and the other answers it. He continues that information gap occurs if one of the speakers possesses the information the other speaker does not have. The second feature mentioned by Shrivener is choice. The researcher points out that every speaker should have a choice of whether to speak or not, what to say and about the way the information is presented. The third feature mentioned by Shrivener is feedback. He claims that every speaker receives a feedback from his/her communication partner and according to the information received, makes conclusions about the quality of communication.

Another aspect which has to be taken into consideration when using the communicative approach is the choice of appropriate tasks. Harmer (2007) maintains that successful task choice can facilitate learning, on the contrary, if the tasks have not been successfully chosen, it can result in lack of motivation.

### 1.3 Communicative Language Teaching

The author of the paper considered it important to look at Communicative Language Teaching from the perspective of teachers as the teachers are organizers of learning process in the classroom and they choose the appropriate activities for efficient learning.

Revell (1991) claims that ‘theories of communicative competence imply that teachers must do more than just supply learners with a number of language structures to manipulate’ and proposes the necessity to distinguish ‘linguistic competence’ and ‘communicative competence’ (1991:5).

Littlewood (1991) offers to divide the activities into two groups, ‘pre-communicative activities, and communicative activities.’ (1991:8) Littlewood (1991) explains that pre-communicative activities help the learners to start thinking about the topic they are going to communicate. The linguist suggests the further division of communicative activities, which is ‘structural and quasi-communicative activities’ (Littlewood, 1991:8) Littlewood explains that the purpose of structural activities is to ensure accuracy by means of such activities as drills. On the contrary, the aim of quasi-communicative activities is to facilitate the development of communicative skills using such tasks as questions and answers, dialogues, role plays and others. Littlewood (1991) goes further and provides a more detailed division of quasi-communicative activities, which is ‘functional activities and social interaction activities’ (Littlewood, 1991: 9) Communicative activities from Littlewood’s point of view prioritize the meaning over accuracy. On the contrary, the main goal of social interaction activities is to socialize thus developing social competence.

Byrne (1991) points out that,

Teacher controlled whole-class activities that focus on the accuracy of language involve making drills and controlled or story-telling. On the other hand, learner directed pair work, or group work activities that focus on accuracy involve role-plays, controlled conversations or working with questionnaires, while fluency activities make use of project work, various games, and also discussions carried out within groups or pairs. (Byrne, 1991:10-12)

In the chapter above, the author of the paper has discussed the definition of The Communicative Language Teaching, has looked at the historical background of development of this approach and analyzed different types of tasks as regards this approach.

## Chapter 2

### 2. Teaching speaking

Speaking is one of the four skills taught at school with listening, reading and writing. There are different approaches towards teaching English and each of them interprets methods of teaching speaking in different ways.

The author of the paper is going to discuss different approaches to teaching English in general. This chapter describes many various group activities at developing speaking skills. The author gives some overview of group work as communication facilitating method that she has carried out in her teaching practice.

#### 2.1 Approaches to Teaching Speaking in ELT Methods

Before discussing general principles of teaching speaking, it is necessary to mention some main approaches to teaching English as a second language. According to Kerper Mora, from San Diego State University (Online2), are following:

1. *The Grammar-Translation Approach.* The lessons are performed in the learners' native tongue, with little active use of the target language.

Nowadays this situation has not changed, the teachers teach by this method still continue using at least some elements of it. Vocabulary is taught like isolated word lists, while elaborate explanations of grammar are always provided. Grammar explains the rules for combining words together; this is supposed to be enough to encourage learners to start speaking foreign language.

The advantages of this approach are that the learners' knowledge of grammar is perfect; however, the skills of speaking are not so high. This approach does not imply conversational studies; therefore the language obtained is more artificial. The disadvantage of this method is lack of training of speaking skills.

2. *The Direct Approach.* As Kerper Mora describes it, 'This approach was developed initially as a reaction to the grammar-translation approach in an attempt to integrate more use of the target language in instruction. Lessons begin with a dialogue using a modern conversational style in the target language' (Online2). In junior forms it may be a simple dialogue between the teacher and the learner about the weather and about the mood of the class, while in senior forms it may be based on past events as well as on some simple themes.

'New material is first presented orally with actions or pictures. The mother tongue is never used. There is no translation. The preferred type of exercise is a series of questions in the target language based on the dialogue or an anecdotal narrative. Questions are answered in

the target language' (Online2). One negative point is that although the approach implies much speaking, the ways of introduction of speaking are rather one-dimensional: 'a series of questions in the target language which are asked by the teacher. There are no other types of dialogues (which we discussed previously in this chapter) used in conversational part of the language'. (Online2)

'Grammar is taught inductively- rules are generalized from the practice only much later after some oral mastery of the target language. Thus, grammar is perceived without any explanations and therefore sometimes there is a threat of mixture of forms and structures' (Online2).

Advanced learners within this approach read for comprehension and pleasure. Literary texts are not analyzed grammatically. The culture associated with the target language is also taught inductively. Culture is considered an important aspect of learning the language.

The advantages of this approach are that the learners start speaking by imitating and vocabulary is learnt with the help of pictures and actions. The disadvantages lie in low grammar knowledge.

3. *Community Language learning*. According to Kerper Mora described the method:

The approach is patterned upon counseling techniques and adapted to the peculiar anxiety and threat as well as the personal and language problems a person encounters in the learning of foreign languages. Consequently, the learner is not thought of a student but as a client. The native instructors of the language are not considered teachers but, rather are trained in counseling skills adapted to their roles as language counselors. (Online2).

The language- counseling relationship begins with the client's linguistic confusion and conflict. The aim of the language counselor's skill is first to communicate empathy for the client's threatened inadequate state and to aid him linguistically. Then slowly the teacher-counselor strives to enable him to arrive at his own increasingly independent language adequacy. This process is furthered by the language counselor's ability to establish a warm, understanding, and accepting relationship, thus becoming an 'other- language self' for the client. The process involves five stages of adation (Online2).

Having considered three different approaches to language teaching, it is, could be conclude that only Direct approach and Community Language learning are belonged to speaking. This conclusion proves the fact that teachers of English should be creative and combine different approaches to teaching as well as different methods in order to give their learners the best possibility to learn spoken English.

## 2.2 Techniques and activities for teaching speaking skills

According to Eluhina (1996) the speaking is the most important part of the work during the lesson, because if the learners are able to speak correctly and fluently, it will also be possible for him/her to read and write well. (Eluhina, 1996)

It is possible to use dialogues and monologues in order to improve speaking skills in the classroom. Many teachers use retelling in their lessons, which is an effective means of speaking practice. Retelling is oral reproduction, which in some cases can include 'copying' something read or heard and presenting it in monologue. However, retelling requires consequent and full exposition of the speaker's own ideas. Since learners often confuse retelling and learning by heart, the teacher has to explain that is a creative process and not a mere reproduction of the text.

According to Tuzova, teachers use small and simple texts as part of speaking practice. The learners have to listen to the texts first; then teacher asks questions about each sentence. The learners have to answer by using full sentences and retell the text afterwards. This is a creative approach to teaching retelling. It is also possible to ask learners to think of a possible ending or continuation of they listened to, invent a title for the text, etc. (Tuzova, n.d.).

In senior forms teachers ask the learners to listen to the text and then prepare a report evaluate the information given in the text. Listening activities followed by speaking activities help the learners to develop their speaking skills, starting with simple and short sentences and gradually moving on to complex monologues.

There are many points to consider in teaching speaking, including pronunciation. As Tarone (2005) points out, 'the goal of pronunciation teaching has shifted from targeting a native like accent to targeting intelligibility, that is, the degree to which the listener understands the speaker's utterance' (Tarone, 2005: 485-502). Thus one of the teacher's main tasks when teaching speaking is to ensure that their students' speech can be understood by others. The learners should know the basic principles of pronunciation in English (especially concerning some specific sounds), word stress, and the use of pauses (attention should be paid to their length and timing in general).

According to Chun

The current approach to teaching pronunciation is generally based on three principled criteria: (a) pronunciation and intonation are taught in context and in conjunction with speaking skills, (b) instruction in pronunciation serves broader communicative purposes, and (c) the teaching of pronunciation and intonation is based on realistic rather than idealistic language models. (Chun, 2000)

Before realizing any speaking activity, the teachers should introduce or revise the necessary 'vocabulary' and 'grammar structures'. In case there is no time, it is possible to write some grammatical structures and vocabulary on blackboard. Learners can be supplied with special hand-outs, to train special lexica of the day or certain grammar structures. (Online3).

The teachers can train learners' 'small exercises' during the lessons such as: to respond fluently and immediately to questions put or to give 'instant comment' while reading. These activities involve showing the learners to say the first thing that comes into their head. This activity is very popular in primary school, but it can also be used in secondary school too. (Online3). In senior forms it is possible to use such activity as 'balloon debate'. A popular dabling game which has survived during many decades it is called so because it is based on a scenario in which a group of people are traveling in the basket of a balloon. Unfortunately, however, the balloon cannot take their weight. There is a leak, and unless someone leaves the balloon, they will all die. The students take on a role of a real personage, either living or historical- from Confucious to Shakespeare, from Cleopatra to Marie Curie. They think up arguments about why they should be the survivors either individually, or in pairs or groups. Participants in the 'balloon debate' can represent age groups, hobby enthusiasts, or societies. Thus, there are lots of possibilities and variations. The main thing is that the learners are supposed to use unprepared speech, which simulates their speaking skills very effectively. (Online3).

Kramina (2000) considers that 'A variety of activities is used to promote the development of speaking skills: dialogues, role play, simulation and a selection of activities where the learner can speak personally in the classroom situation which is brought as close as possible to the relevant real life situation.' (2000:72).

During the action research, the author of the present diploma paper has found many different techniques of Communicative Learning. Teachers all over the world have used them in order to vary and improve language learning, increase students' motivation for the study of the English language. The presented techniques are developed from Gairns, (1986), Harmer, (1984), Kagan (Online 4), other sources (Online 1), (Online 5).

**Discussions** are very popular activities to promote speaking skills. Before the discussion, it is important that the purpose of the discussion activity is set by the teacher. In this type of discussions, the teacher can form groups of students, 4 or 5 in each group. Then each group works on their topic for a given time period, and presents their opinions to the class. It is important that the speaking should be equally divided among group members. At the end, the class decides on the winning group who defends the idea in the best way. This

activity includes critical thinking and quick decision making, and students learn to express and justify themselves in polite ways while disagreeing with the others. It is always better not to form large groups. The group members can be either assigned by the teacher or the students may determine it by themselves, but groups should be rearranged in every discussion activity so that students can work with various people and learn to be open to different ideas. In class or group discussions, whatever the aim is, the students should always be encouraged to ask questions, paraphrase ideas, express support, check for clarification. (Online1)

**Brainstorming** is also a very popular communicative activity, and it is useful when there is a necessity of maximum ideas for problem solving on the given topic. Students can produce ideas in a limited time. Depending on the context, either individual or group brainstorming is effective and students generate ideas quickly and freely. The good characteristics of brainstorming is that the students are not criticized for their ideas so students will be open to sharing new ideas. (Online 5)

**Jigsaw** can be used for learning both new material and reviewing it. Each group member is given different material to learn it and then to teach to their group members. The same sub-section get together as 'expert' groups to decide what is important and decide how to teach it. After their practice, the original groups reform and the students teach each other. This activity improves communication, speaking and reading skills. Each student's personal investment influences others in the group and therefore a common goal of the group. (Online 4)

**Interview** is an activity that develops understanding and empathy for the opinions of other group members. It also improves students' speaking and listening skills. Students can conduct interviews on selected topics with various people. It is a good idea that the teacher provides a rubric to students so that they know what type of questions they can ask or what path to follow, but students should prepare their own interview questions. Conducting interviews with people gives students a chance to practice their speaking ability not only in class but also outside and helps them become socialized. After interviews, each student can present his or her study to the class. Moreover, students can interview each other and 'introduce' his or her partner to the class. (Online 5)

**Story Completion** is 'a very enjoyable, whole class, free-speaking activity, for which students sit in a circle. For this activity, a teacher starts to tell a story, but after a few sentences he or she stops narrating. Then, each student starts to narrate from the point where he/she previous by had stopped. Each student is supposed to add from four to ten sentences. Students can add new characters, events, descriptions and so on'. (Online 5)

**Playing Cards** is a game that involves the class to make groups. In this game,

students should form groups of four. Each suit will represent a topic. For instance

‘Diamonds: Earning money  
Hearts: Love and relationships  
Spades: An unforgettable memory  
Clubs: Best teacher’

Each student in a group will choose a card. Then, each student writes 4-5 questions about that topic to ask the other people in the group. For example: if the topic ‘Diamonds: Earning Money’ is selected, here are some possible questions:

‘Is money important in your life? Why?  
What is the easiest way of earning money?  
What do you think about lottery?’ Etc. (Online 4)

The teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare, the teacher should state at the very beginning of the activity that students are not allowed to prepare yes-no questions, because by saying yes or no students get little practice in spoken language. Students ask open-ended questions to each other so that they reply in complete sentences.

**Cooperative Story Telling** involves the students to think and communicate with the aim to create their own stories (Gairns, 1986). The students work in pairs with a task to fill in the details of a story. The teacher writes down the first line of the story on the board, e.g.: A woman was sitting in a cafe drinking tea one afternoon. (describe the woman). The pairs are asked to describe this woman and the teacher sets a time limit for the students.

After that the teacher continues with the next line of the story, writing it again on the board and giving the students their next instruction, and so on to the end. The teacher asks each student to find a new partner and tell them their version of the story. Finally, the teacher asks the students to tell their story to the group. (Gairns, 1986)

**Role-play** is another way of getting students to speak. Students speak on various social themes and have a variety of social roles. In role-play activities, the teacher gives information to the students such as who they are and what they think or feel. Thus, the teacher can tell the student that ‘You are David, you go to the doctor and tell him what happened last night, and...’ (Harmer, 1984)

**Simulations** are very similar to role-plays but what makes simulations different than role plays is that they are more elaborate. In simulations, students can bring items to the class to create a realistic environment. For instance, if a student is acting as a singer, she brings a microphone to sing and so on. Role plays and simulations have many advantages. First, since they are entertaining, they motivate the students. Second, as Harmer (1984) suggests, they increase the self-confidence of hesitant students, because in role play and simulation activities, they will have a different role and do not have to speak for themselves, which

means they do not have to take the same responsibility. (Harmer 1984)

All communicative activities mentioned above provide the possibilities to encourage and motivate the students use the language and they can see a reason to communicate or a communicative need in order to practise their speaking skills. To help the students to get good results and increase their participation in language lesson activities, the teacher's task is to involve the students in problem- solving activities in which they are required to negotiate meaning. Besides, the tasks should be incorporated in the way they relate to the students' real -life communicative needs.

## **2.3 Group Work in Developing Speaking Skills**

### **2.3.1 Group Work– Communication Facilitating Method**

Interactive teaching methods are predominating in the teaching process in Latvia at the moment, students are being involved actively and stimulated in learning process. Therefore group work is something more than a group of some students, who are given a task, but the task should be developed creatively. Students, performing the task in a group, are involved in active participation. Depending on the task, they solve a problem or think creatively, analyse or change the text.

It is important that they are not passive listeners or observers because they have to cooperate. While working together, students should come to an agreement, practice language skills by asking questions and answering them, they should know how to motivate their thoughts, specify and finally present them to others, if the teacher has set such conditions. Students' disposition to act and learn increases, because they see the application of their knowledge. Group work enables students to a greater extent to use the vocabulary that they have already mastered as well as to learn more actively and faster a new vocabulary in the language studies.

Norman (1992) thinks that

many people learn a foreign language more willingly than their native language. Language learning demands to a greater extent understanding of words and grammatical rules. It demands a capability to use the obtained knowledge into practice. (1992:48)

Wheeler (1994) considers the use of the learned vocabulary or grammatical forms must be included into practice almost in each task prepared for a group work. During a foreign language lesson these methods better enable development of speaking skills involving all students, because if 'there are 30 students in the classroom and for the improving development speaking skills we have 30 minutes, then for each student the time limit is only 1 minute.

Many communicative exercises should be performed only in pairs or in groups'. However, unfortunately some teachers are still using only traditional teaching methods. For example, 'to answer a dialogue only two students are asked enabling them to converse with each other, while, using work in pairs it would be possible for all the class. These teachers say that they have to teach language, grammar, words and pronunciation. Students cannot learn that in the groups and pairs, teachers cannot control them'. (1994:48-49). Exercises, various activities from the book and other methods are neither deniable nor be abandoned, but during the lesson they could be very well combined with the group work or work in pairs. Often it could be practicing the new material and it also makes the lesson more interesting.

### 2.3.2 Organizing Work in Groups

During study process with interactive teaching methods, in more specific terms with group work, the personality of a student should be treated paying attention to his/her ability to cooperate, taking part in collective work. The student has a greater possibility of demonstrating his/her skills without paying special attention because very often students feel very shy to express their opinion or to speak in the foreign language. In a small group, taking into consideration the specificity of the group, there is a greater possibility for humanitarian development while it favours the development of responsibility and self-confidence.

According to Wheeler

In pairs and groups students talk to each other face to face.

Students have an opportunity to work independently.

Students should bear responsibility about what they are doing.

Work in groups makes the lesson more effective. (1994:49)

Peterman (1992) considers that working face to face, opens also the shiest students. Students often listen more willingly to their peers than to the teacher. (1992:19-20) Avotina (1996) maintains that for primary school students the acknowledgement of peers becomes more important than parents or teachers (1996:10-11)

Work in a group for many children gives the sense of security. Children sometimes cannot complete the task of the lesson, when they work in a group they feel themselves like participants and are satisfied with the result.

According to Byrne

1) students have greater possibilities for mutual assistance, instead of sitting one by one and striving for comprehension;

2) it is really easier to show what you know or what you don't know in a smaller group than in a big one. (Byrne, 1987:8).

These cooperation methods give benefits for educational field. Peterman the teacher of Nica Secondary School thinks that along with successful results, students also learn social skills, for example: to organize groups silently, using quiet voices, involve everyone in the group, listen attentively to the speaker and praise each other.

In addition to the above mentioned qualities, help, sense of security and discipline. During this activity no breach of discipline, because children are busy in work, which is interesting for them. Dyachenko is of the same opinion as Peterman in regard to the principles of cooperation by the observance of which, he thinks, successful work in group would be possible. The author is going to speak in detail about three of them:

- students ask for help when it is necessary;
- during the lesson, using work in groups, it is possible to develop planning skills, as well as the way how to teach others better;
- express his/her support or consent to the group or to substantiate his/her opinion.

(Dyachenko, 1991:10)

According to Norman ‘often in educational establishment you can notice that some students are afraid or shy to ask to the teacher’s help if they cannot do the exercise themselves, but they usually are not shy among the peers and if they do not know what to do, they ask questions easily’. Sometimes weak students, who are not able to contribute significantly in group work, still listen to attentively, express their support, study and remember. Children like to play the role of a teacher. One of the main ‘preconditions’ in a group work - is teaching others and learning better themselves. Speaking about cooperation in study work, there should also be mentioned some negative aspects, which the teacher should take into account. The teacher cannot forget that mutual work can become a disturbing experience; there could always be a possibility of conflicts. One or more students could strive to dominate in a group. Contradictions or repulsion can quickly arise and work with others can lead to conflict. (Norman, 1992:140)

The author, using work in groups in the teaching process, has not experienced such disagreements among group members, but agrees and admits that it is possible and then a teacher is needed as an advisor, who would be able to determine the problem and would help to solve it in a tolerant way. Characterizing the age of primary school, Avotiņa (1996) considers that teenagers respond emotionally to peers’ estimation, strive for self-admittance, which sometimes could be unfair – by lying, boasting, mocking other children, mischief and even by humiliation, therefore it is important that the teacher observes how mutual relations among pupils have been developing.(1996:10-11)

The teacher plays a very important role in the facilitation of cooperation, because it is

necessary to observe and organize work in groups accurately.

When including work in groups in the teaching process, the teacher should revise the educational programme and consider that work in groups could advance and develop in children, what skills must be facilitated. The teacher should prepare literature, technical means, work sheets for the work in groups or pairs and think about the creation of adequate language training environment.

Byrne (1987) suggests work in groups could be organized by setting up equal tasks for all groups, where each group will be able to demonstrate its competence, creativeness, cooperation, where 'self-motivation is facilitated'. Prior to the task the teacher has to explain the tasks in an understandable way, providing his/her own examples. For instance, 'the teacher sets a riddle to the students of form 7, who are learning about animals: "I am not very tall. I'm rather short. I may be thin or fat. I have long ears and I can jump"' (1987:5)

When somebody from the class has solved the riddle, the teacher asks each group to think of their own riddles about animals and to submit them to the teacher in written form or to speak in front of the class, presenting it in the form of the song etc. There could be various ways, for example:

- the teacher divides the tasks himself/herself;
- the students draw lots;
- the teacher allows students themselves to choose.

According to the aim, set forth by the teacher for this work, the division should be deliberate. Speaking about the number of pupils in a group, there is no certain number of students in a group, 'the group of 4-6 pupils is suitable'. It is better to organize the activities, like plays, for a smaller number of students. If the students have to develop some common ideas, a greater number of students in a group might be better, but it is due to the arrangement of the classroom, which determines the number of students in a group. (1987:75)

Arrangement in the classroom for groups may be various. The most important condition is that children in the group feel well. The teacher should remember that the more groups he/she has, the more difficult it will be to attract their attention. Speaking about the disposition of groups, there are different opinions. Peterman (1992) considers that the groups should be sitting around the desk in order to be able to communicate, share materials and keep eye contact without disturbing other groups. (1992:19-20)

The author of this work considers that disposition should be changed. The activity is well facilitated by arranging desks in a circle. Then children look at each other and other groups are behind their back. Moreover, the circle is a preferable form for group work. But sometimes the teacher does not have so much time to arrange the classroom for group work.

Then, taking into account the specificity of the task, the groups may be formed by arranging the nearest desks using the space of the room.

An important question is the composition of a group. There are different views on this question. The author of the work considers that the best way to make groups of students with different abilities. It causes additional trouble for the teacher, searching new exercises for the group, whereas the group may consist of weak and slow students. Sometimes the group has a leader. One of the suggestions is to leave the group on its own, but the teacher should take care of the work in a group.

Byrne (1987) gives an example about organizing group work. Organization of group work takes a lot of time. Teachers claim: *'I don't have enough time for things like pair work or group work.'* (1987:8) Certainly, it cannot be done in every lesson, but the teacher can try to organize it at least once a week, thus the pupils would have the opportunity to apply what they have learned.

How does teacher's role change in this process? The first condition is that teacher has to be sure if all groups have really understood the task. If it is not so, the teacher explains the task once again for the respective group. Afterwards the teacher can help. He/she must follow the groups, how much they have accomplished, ask questions, but he/she must not interfere in their work and conduct it. The solution of the author would be: if we work together then the teacher's role is to be the advisor, assistant and not the one who reprimands and instructs students. Teacher should allow students to work themselves, even if they make mistakes.

Norman (1992) considers that the teacher should not spend too much time assisting one pair or group because sometimes it may cause the 'loss of interest about the task'. The students feel that the teacher is not interested in them. (1992:78) One of the arguments why teachers do not want to accept work in groups in foreign language teaching is that they are afraid that pupils will make too many mistakes. In view of this, the teacher's assignment is to strive to practice this task together with students. The basic tasks might be written on the balckboard. In case the students continue to make mistakes, their work could be interrupted by reminding of the assignment and then they are allowed to continue. The teacher in group work should undertake the role of advisor. Students have to be allowed to practice this way because it is more important than a few mistakes. The teacher often hears to the pupils' conversation and finds their mistakes, in such a way finding out what the students should additionally repeat and improve. The teacher can spend some time observing what problems arise from working together in a group. Sometimes the teacher has to interrupt the group work to provide information or to help to collaborate but it is not done without reason. If a conflict arises in a group, the teacher should ask the group itself to analyse the situation and find the

solution of the problem.

### 2.3.3 Evaluation Aspects of Group Work

Evaluation of students' ability is considered an integral part of the learning-teaching process. Speaking about the group work the author, however, would like to emphasize, that the benefit is not in the result, but in the process itself.

As the evaluation has a great impact on the student's self-confidence and desire to work.

The form of expression of the result may be diverse, for example:

- performance,
- prepared narrative,
- written work,
- an exercise created by students,
- a poem, proverb, text of the song,
- a drawing, a table, etc.

Depending on the form of expression, the teacher chooses the form of evaluation. The teacher may evaluate all pupils in a group with equal scores. It turned out, that such a type of evaluation, after discussion about group work in Sigulda State Gymnasium, teachers use most frequently. The teacher, using evaluation, may mark for himself/herself the most active pupils in each group and give them higher marks. If the result is connected with the presentation, where the group work is presented only by some members, the teacher may give higher marks for their courage. This type of evaluation is not always objective, maybe a shy and reticent student has contributed a lot of work to reach the result. Sometimes it is good to use an opinion of the students themselves. For example, after listening to the result of the groups' work, the class votes for the best performance. The group, which has gained the majority of votes, gets the highest mark. When a written task has been performed, certainly, the common result of group work may be submitted for evaluation. Then it is usually equal for all participants of the group. In order to identify the achievement of students, some authors recommend that the best way is to entrust a small task from the whole work to each student in a group and prior to the submission of the exercise, they agree on putting it together. For example, 'if each group has a task to prepare a report on the football match, they can start the task by entrusting each student to write a paragraph about one aspect – the weather conditions, a football court, spectators, football players, referees, the first half-time, a second half-time and a score, etc'. (Norman, 1992:94) Along with the result, the participants of the group, hand in their own written paragraph. It allows the teacher to evaluate the contribution of each child. It should not be forgotten, that work in a group has enabled a weaker student to

reach a result at all, however, his/her paragraph may consist perhaps of one sentence. Therefore the author suggests to evaluate the work of weaker students with a higher mark in case the result is very good. Such evaluation would only stimulate self-motivation of students as well as arouse interest and more favourable attitude towards such a type of exercises. Maybe the weaker student will receive a gift, but why not? (Norman, 1992: 20)

There are teachers, who evaluate group work as a part of the whole teaching process in their subject. They intentionally separate the column 'group work, work in pairs' and afterwards, by evaluating a pupil, consider it as one of the skills. However, not all observations of the teacher can be expressed in numbers. For example, the following abilities as: student's interest about subject, his/her ability to cooperate, diligence, ability to specify and pass an opinion are difficult to evaluate, but the teacher obtains very valuable information about a student.

According to the principle of the division of students into groups, the teacher may group students artificially, e.i., according to teacher's opinion and their abilities. In this case, the teacher can set a standard for each group. For example, the strongest group will be demanded to express their own opinion about the text, but weaker students will answer only questions about the text.

The type of evaluation system each teacher should decide himself/herself. The author has used various means of evaluation however, she is striving to avoid the division and evaluation according to abilities, giving preference to the mixed division of groups and equal evaluation of all students in a group.

The positive aspect of the group work is that students of primary school are not afraid to present the result of their work, whereas when students are called up to the blackboard, most of them very often experience negative emotions, for example, fear. According to the observation, the author can say, that they are even waiting, when others listen to their performance.

One of the problems which arise in the evaluation is lack of time. If there are several groups, then during the lesson the teacher may be a shortage of time to check all groups. The solutions can be as follows:

- the teacher should inform the students about duration of the joint work;
- the teacher himself/herself has to adhere to time he/she will give for the presentation and how long the preparation will be;
- the students have to know how extensive their presentation should be and how they will do it;
- during the lesson, students should be reminded of the time limit for preparation;

- it is advisable to schedule two foreign language lessons in succession. (The author usually plans group work in those days).

It is not advisable to leave the presentation of a group for the following lesson, because it causes inequality among groups, as well as emotional dissatisfaction. In this case, it is better to allow all groups to improve their result until next time.

The teacher usually evaluates work in pairs either according to observation or written result or chooses at random to listen to a few pairs, because evaluation of oral presentation of all pairs is not possible. Peterman has come to a conclusion that each result should be evaluated in the end of the lesson, otherwise the child can lose the sense of his/her activity. Only a teacher can understand that the main meaning was not in the final product, but in the whole process of cooperation, where a pupil has obtained new knowledge. (1992:9)

Liepiņa, the teacher of Riga 47th Secondary School considers that students become assistants in the process of evaluation. The work is evaluated by the monitor, but the work of monitor– by the class. (1995:15) The best students are chosen to be the monitors. Work in groups also might be divided by the monitors. The monitor is allowed to give advice to the group. (ibid) The author has not used such evaluation method.

If all groups have equal tasks, then the result could be comparison, which can be reflected on the blackboard. The group, which has the majority of the correct answers could get the best evaluation.

At the end of the lesson, it is advisable to have time for the evaluation of advantages of cooperative learning, the developed abilities and skills.

When we speak about group work in the teaching-learning process, one could object, that they make the teaching process and testing too easy. The author would like to answer with the following words: ‘Is the purpose of the testing to prove, what the student does not know, or what he/she knows and is able to do?’ (Peterman, 1992:20)

#### 2.3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of group work

Students have the necessity to belong to a group, know that they are esteemed and important. If we look at the people as social beings, it is clear that they can be understood only by the means of mutual communication. The method of group work includes the following advantages: the above mentioned necessities might be developed and improved; the form of this activity allows to integrate the student in a group prove and develop his/her abilities and learn from each other.

Often the teachers cannot get rid of routine, outworn views, they do not want to be

active and to change anything in the teaching process, do not want to change themselves, because they think that they are competent enough in their subject and they 'convey' valuable knowledge to students.

Certainly, by using new teaching methods and the newly obtained experience, one has to meet various difficulties and problems, therefore teachers do not feel so sure and refuse of these active teaching methods. What problems do the teachers encounter when implement the methods in the teaching process?

**1. The problem of noise and discipline.** Teachers are often worried that during group work the class will be noisier than in the lessons, when traditional teaching methodologies are used and that could cause disturbance in the daily routine at school. But the group work should not be very noisy. A certain period of time a student should spend working on reading, drawing, writing, etc. Surely, to a certain degree, the peace of traditional work forms is destroyed, because while the students are working on the task, they are asking questions natural in creative work. When several groups are working in one classroom and discussing, certainly, there will be noise, therefore the teacher should think in advance about other ways of obtaining information (library, information centre, video classroom) or other space (informatics room, lounge, reading-room) to provide the best facilities for students and to lessen noise. The essence of a problem is not the noise, but anxiety, that such a type of activity is out of a teacher's control. Students perform their work independently, therefore each student assumes the responsibility of the result of his/her work. A part of this responsibility is the allowable level of noise. Introducing group work or work in pairs, also this demand should be brought forward.

**2. The problem of time.** Group work is a time consuming activity, because more time is needed for preparation, making an assignment and telling about their work. They cannot always accomplish the task in the lesson. If it is group work, the majority of the task should be accomplished in the classroom, but at the same time each participant of the group has to do his/her individual part of the work at home. Individual work has to be performed independently at home, but the presentation could be made during the lesson.

Having discussed group work among the teachers and students it was concluded that learning in groups, students have lack of time, consequently both the teachers and students have to plan out the process of the work and the tasks in order to accomplish them. Teachers consider, that using this method the educational programme is held back, consequently it is advisable to consider integration of various subjects and collaboration among teachers, obtaining knowledge in various subjects. Such a type of work is advanced towards **the quality** of learning experience and not towards the quantity. Group work enables to put into

effect a rich teaching-learning experience: colours, motion, collaboration and foremost— participation and involvement. The positive motivation that is usually noticed in the process of the work influences students' attitude towards the subject and education in general.

**3. Various levels.** Group work is not only a method for the best students it is devised for students of all levels. Learning in group, a student can use not only existing knowledge, but also to obtain new knowledge and skills. Sometimes the teachers are worried, that without the firm control of the teacher, the weakest students will not be able to accomplish the task. It should be noted that not all children desire continuous presence and control of the teacher. By facilitating independence of more capable students the teacher obtains time for those students, to whom it is necessary. However, it requires sufficient Professional collaboration, competence, ability to watch group work and work with a student individually. The more talented students may be motivated to help their classmates. Group work is more complicated than other types of work. It requires special preparation and leadership skills from the teacher in organizing work in the classroom. Change in attitude is required towards the question, what is the true educational aim at school – teaching as an end in itself or the personality who knows and can use the knowledge in practice. Thus, group work stimulates the development of such attitude and is one of the factors in facilitating students' creative work. Sometimes the problems are caused by students' unwillingness to work, especially, if they see that somebody has already assumed the responsibility in the group. It should be noticed by a teacher during the planning of group work and the teacher should encourage the students distribute the tasks for each student in a group and answer for his/her result. The teacher has to check systematically, what a student has accomplished, heard, learned or understood the task.

In order to provide the implementation of group work methods in teaching- learning process, the teacher should take into consideration the following:

- 1) to understand the necessity of existing changes and willingness to change himself/herself, e.i., to refuse a leadership position, delegate responsibility to students, learn collaboration with students, as well as not to be afraid to be wrong and recognize his/her mistakes;
- 2) to get to know his/her students and motivate them to develop collaboration. It is necessary to investigate students' knowledge, skills and abilities, mutual relationship among students their social status in the class, to encourage more even division into groups in order to use their social skills more appropriately in group work.

It is important for the teacher to learn how to analyse his/her work – to evaluate his/her and students' mistakes, work and failure, to correct and improve his/her work.

## **Chapter 3**

### **3. Empirical Research into the Use of Group Work in developing Speaking Skills**

This chapter focuses on the conducted action research, including the description of the lessons using group work and different activities with the ninth-grade class at Sigulda State Gymnasium. The description of the learners and the procedure of the research will be provided.

The author of the present paper has designed a Questionnaire for the students of the ninth class to find out their attitude and understanding of a group work in order to take into account their suggestions and feelings about the efficiency of work in groups and purpose of implementing the group work in the English language lessons.

#### **3.1 Action Research as a Method for Developing Students' Speaking Skills**

The author of the diploma paper has chosen the action research as a research method with a purpose to find out appropriate and challenging methods to improve students' speaking skills. This research views the implementation of group work in the English language class for the ninth-grade students.

The Action Research was implemented in several stages:

1. The available theoretical literature on Communicative Teaching-Learning was studied and analysed in order to comprehend its basic principles.
2. As a result of the conclusions drawn from the studies of the theoretical literature, the following hypothesis was advanced.
3. Communicative Learning principles were implemented through group functioning and different activities facilitated the development of learners' speaking skills.
4. Questionnaires and different observation tools were designed and administered in order to collect the relevant data.
5. The obtained results were summarized and analyzed.
6. Conclusions for the further research were drawn.

### **3.2 Description of the Target Population**

The research was conducted in the ninth-grade class of Sigulda State Gymnasium from January 10 to March 17, 2011. There were 16 students from class 9. There were 10 girls and 6 boys. They were students at the age of 15-16. Their level of English proficiency was pre-intermediate. The author used such course book as New Opportunities Students' book, New Opportunities Work book but also made tasks and various materials from different sources, used samples of activities suggested on the Internet, depending on the theme being acquired. The learners' native language was Latvian; English was the first foreign language for all students. Their motivation was very different and certain students' learning skills were unsatisfactory.

The author of the diploma paper would like to stress the importance of using group work in order to promote students' interaction by sharing, helping, supporting, encouraging and learning together. Their collaboration could be the right way to gain a greater individual competence and at the same time to develop their language proficiency, vocabulary and speaking skills.

### **3.3 Piloted Lesson Plans based on Communicative learning**

In the following subchapters, the author intends to present lesson plans designed and piloted for the ninth grade students, using some Communicative Learning activities based on the theme 'Arts and Entertainment', sub-topic: 'Theatre'.

The lesson plans were designed considering the peculiarities of the students' age and the schools' curriculum. The author adapted suitable strategies from the available literature and teaching materials on Communicative Learning. The aims of these lessons were the establishment of friendly and confident atmosphere, positive thinking and the development of students' speaking skills.

#### **3.3.1 Piloting Lesson Plan No 1**

##### **1. Background**

Teacher: Irēna Ivanova  
School: Sigulda State Gymnasium  
Level: Pre-Intermediate  
Class: Form 9

Number of learners: 16  
Classroom layout: For group work the desks are formed in semicircle with a distance among them: four groups are formed with four students in each groups  
Length of the lesson: 40 minutes  
Date: 02.03.2011.

2. The main aims of the lesson:

1. to practice vocabulary on the theme 'Theatre' through working in groups;
2. to make students' aware of language in use (vocabulary, grammar, reading skills) and to improve listening and speaking skills;
3. to improve communication skills by comparing and contrasting similar and different things and ideas;
4. discuss their interest in the theatre and go through the problem-posing process.

3. Functions:

- Agreeing/Disagreeing
- Describing characters
- Making short presentations
- Expressing and defending their opinion

4. Grammar Points: Present simple and present continuous tenses

5. Materials and teaching aids used in this lesson:

- Copies of problem-posing dialogue (See Appendix 2)

Analysis of Lesson plan No 1

The lesson was held in a classroom where usually the English language is taught. There were 16 students in the classroom 5 boys and 11 girls. They were 15-16 years old.

**Stage 1**

Arranging the classroom

There were 12 ordinary desks in the classroom so the teacher needed to arrange them in a different way and they were formed in semicircle, there was a space in the middle of the classroom for the teacher to come up to every student and observe what they were doing.

As it was announced from the teacher, the lesson's theme was 'Theatre' and she offered the class to divide into smaller groups. She used the numbers from 1 to 4- all students who had got the number '1' had made the first group, the students who had got the number '2' had made the second group, and the students with the number '3' and '4' had made the

third and the fourth groups. So there were four groups in the classroom. The students were very active and interested in the work. The instruction was simple. The students did the activity with fun and jokes. They took their seats in the groups 1, 2, 3 and 4 with four members in each. Each group received a dialogue (See Appendix 2) and copies of slips of paper with activities for students to accomplish. The teacher explained to the students that they would take part in a group work activity called problem solving, where they should read the Problem-posing dialogue and practice vocabulary on the theme. If the students did not know any word the group member helped to find the meaning of unknown word.

After selecting the groups, the teacher explained the reasons for such kind of a lesson and the tasks while working in groups, the students can feel the necessity for communication and exchanging ideas by speaking with each other. At the same time they can learn new words and enrich their vocabulary in a more exciting way.

## **Stage 2**

Procedure of the lesson:

At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher announced that the theme of the lesson was 'Theatre' and gave her attitude to this entertainment. After reading the dialogue the teacher asked some questions to the students to get a small discussion going: (the teacher did not go into details as this was a warming up). Then, the teacher asked the students to follow-up questions and elicited students' response:

1. Describe the situation: Who is John? Who is Jennifer? Tell me about Jennifer's father.
2. Identify the problem: What does Jennifer want to do in the future? What is her father's reaction?
3. Relate to the problem: Have you ever disagreed with anyone about the importance of the arts? What happens if your plan for your own future is different from what your parents want?
4. Analyze the reasons of the problem: Does Jennifer's father have the right to tell her what her future career should be?
5. Do something! How can Jennifer make herself happy and satisfy her father's wishes? What advice would you give to John, Jennifer, and Jennifer's father?

The teacher gave 10 minutes to the students to answer the dialogue's questions in groups, and she also added that each group needed to present their ideas to the rest of the class.

Observing each group's work, the teacher noticed that the students in groups 1,3,4 were very active and felt very comfortably in the group, but the students from group 2 did not

feel safe because one of the student was the leader in the group.

The teacher always gave the students an appropriate amount of time to finish the task.

### **Stage 3**

The teacher asked group 1 to present their work. Their presentation was good, the students were not shy but had some difficulties with fluency and correct pronunciation. Each member of the first group presented one question. (one question was extra, they did not choose question 3). The groups 2,3 and 4 evaluated them.

Next group was 2- they were a bit shy but the teacher reminded about the limit of the time and all the students wanted to speak. Like in the first group each student from group 2 chose one question and presented his/her idea. (similar by with group 1 the students from group 2 did not choose question 3). Again, groups 1, 3 and 4 gave them points for their presentation.

The group 3 and 4 showed a performance. The members of the groups had chosen the characters from the dialogue (John, Jennifer, Jennifer`s father and Jennifer`s mother. Both presentations were interesting. The students imitated the voices and performed other funny tricks. It really impressed the students and the teacher, so now groups 1, 2, 4, gave points for group 3 and groups 1, 2, 3 gave points for group 4.

### **Stage 4**

At the end of the lesson, in order to promote the learners` vocabulary revision and to prepare them to use the new words, the teacher gave the homework: to think about their own, different endings to the dialogue.

Conclusions:

Having observed the lesson, the students` participation and interaction, the author has drawn some conclusions:

1. Language learning using an active approach has helped to increase the students` self – esteem and motivation.
2. Group work encourages the students to think and speak in groups as partners, solving problems, finding answers and discussing the material.
3. The observation and evaluation process of groups and explanation of some items are demanding tasks from the teacher.
4. The aim of the lesson has been reached: the students have practised the new vocabulary and revised some expressions. They have also developed the experience of expressing their own ideas in a creative atmosphere and developed their oral communication and speaking skills.

### 3.3.2 Piloting Lesson Plan No 2

#### 1. Background

Teacher: Irēna Ivanova

School: Sigulda State Gymnasium

Level: Pre-intermediate

Class: Form 9

Number of students: 16

Classroom layout: For group work the desks are moved together by two to make four groups with four students in each group.

Length of the lesson: 40 minutes + 40 minutes

Date: 09.03.2011

#### 2. The main aims of the lesson:

1. to expand students' vocabulary on the theme 'Going Abroad', to practice new phrases and words learnt before;
2. to make students think about travelling;
3. to improve communication and listening skills while working in a pair;
4. to teach students to book a flight/trip in a role-play.
5. to develop students' interaction, encourage them to learn actively and develop their speaking skills.

#### 3. Functions:

At the end of the sub-topic 'Things you need to know when traveling' students should be able to book a trip, know what to pack when traveling, and know how to use conditional sentences.

#### 4. Grammar:

Conditional sentences and vocabulary

#### 5. Materials and teaching aids used in this lesson:

- The John Denver Song 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' (See Appendix 3)
- Vocabulary list (See Appendix 4)
- Extract 'Three men in a boat' (See Appendix 5)
- Scheme of an Airport

#### Analysis of the Lesson plan No 2

Lesson No2 was carried out to create more exciting language learning opportunities, thus motivating the students to get more knowledge through cooperation and speaking activities.

### **Stage 1**

Arranging the classroom:

The classroom was not big enough and looked as unusual classroom in Latvian schools. There were 12 desks in the classroom and the desks were moved together by two. The teacher asked the students to arrange the desks in two lines before the lesson.

Each group had two desks close together opposite each other. When the lesson started, the teacher introduced the students with the theme of the lesson and asked them to make four groups.

### **Stage 2**

Procedure of the lesson:

The teacher started her lesson by greeting. Afterwards the teacher wrote the lesson theme on the board. And the topic was: Going abroad. And sub-topic was: What you need to know to travel. Some students made a comment about the theme, but all of them liked it. This topic was planned for two lessons by the teacher. At the beginning the teacher told the students what they have to be thinking about. The students should think about travelling abroad. This step is to get a discussion going about travelling. The teacher did not go into details. It was a warming-up exercise. Some materials were prepared by the teacher. The first was The John Deaver song 'Leaving on a jet plane' (See Appendix 3). The students listened to the song and checked the words about travelling. They liked this task very much. One of the student, a boy began to sing the song loud, by some girls stopped him, after listening to the song the teacher asked some questions to the students to get a small discussion going: (the teacher did not go into details as this was still a warming-up).

- Have you ever been on a plane? What was it like?
- What other ways of travelling do you know?
- What are the workers on a plane called?

Students knew the words: crew, steward, stewardess, pilot.

### **Stage 3**

After that the teacher wrote the following questions on the blackboard. *Where would you like to travel? How would you get there? What do you need for travelling?* Then the teacher put the students into pairs and told them that one student is 'A' and the other student is 'B'. Next the teacher told students to ask and answer the above mentioned questions which were written on the blackboard. The teacher also told their students that while student A was answering the questions, student B had to be writing down the student's responses. When students had completed this exercises the teacher checked for understanding by asking the questions aloud. The students did this exercise with great interest.

#### **Stage 4**

Afterwards the teacher kept their students in pairs and asked them what things they would need to take on a trip. The students liked it very much, some students were very noisy especially some boys. The teacher was writing a brief list on the board while students were answering.

#### **Stage 5**

This step was concerned with 'how to book a trip' in a role-play. The teacher divided the students into pairs. She assigned one student to be a travel agent and one to be a customer. The teacher told the students who were customers in order to book a trip to places where they would like to travel. The teacher prepared a small questionnaire and put it on the board as a guide for students when they were doing this activity.

#### **Stage 6**

The teacher drew the Airport scheme on the board. Then she picked two energetic students to come to the front of the class. The teacher told the two students that one of them is a worker at the immigration point and the other is a traveler. They had a conversation using the travel vocabulary. This was really fun in my class when one student tried to bribe the immigration officer! After the class had seen the two students' presentation, the teacher picked two more students- a steward at check-in a traveller who wished to check-in.

The students were asked to read an extract from 'Three men in a boat' (See Appendix 5) at home.

#### Conclusions:

Observing how the lesson developed, the students' participation and interaction, the author has drawn several conclusions:

1. The students have had the opportunity to make their own decisions, prove their correctness or argue about them.
2. Work in groups and pairs has helped most of the students to give their individual account for task fulfillment and taught them some collaboration skills.
3. The tasks and activities in the lesson as well as the observation and note making of the group process take a lot of effort and time from the teacher: moreover, high concentration is required.
4. The teacher should think very seriously about the tasks that would help to involve each student in motivated communicative activities and how to gain better results for the development of the students' speaking skills.

### 3.3.3 Analysing Questionnaire Data

Group work has been widely recognised in the world and teachers have discussed and argued about its advantages and disadvantages and the problems of applying it in language teaching lessons.

The author of the diploma paper decided to administer a questionnaire (See Appendix 1) for the ninth grade students in Sigulda States Gymnasium with aim to check-up the students' knowledge and attitude to group work.

The summary of the results of the questionnaire is based on the answers of 16 students from the ninth grade.

They were asked to give answers to 6 questions about Group Work. Some important questions and students are shown in the diagrams below. The first question was about their preference to learn English alone, working with a partner or working in groups.

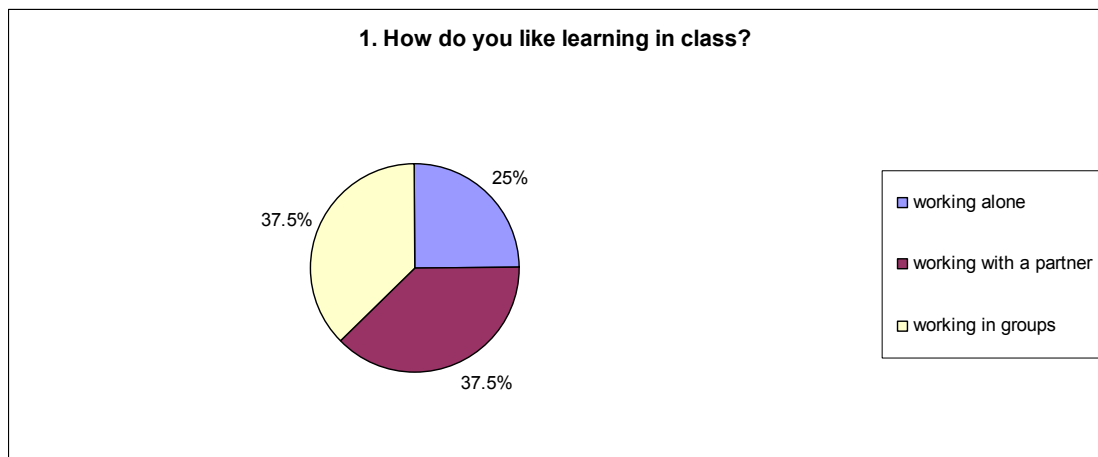


Figure 3.1 Preferences of studying English

As it can be seen from Figure 3.1 above, 37.5% (6 students) of the students preferred group work. 25% (4 students) of students, who had chosen working alone did not like the moment of disturbance and lack of concentration. This shows the benefits of group work as a way of getting different ideas and points out that the tasks were done faster and they seemed to be easier. There was also given an opinion that group depends on a situation and the knowledge of group mates. 37.5% (6 students) of students had chosen working in pairs. Working in pairs is the best way for them.

The aim of the 2nd question was to get to know how students feel about speaking in English in class.

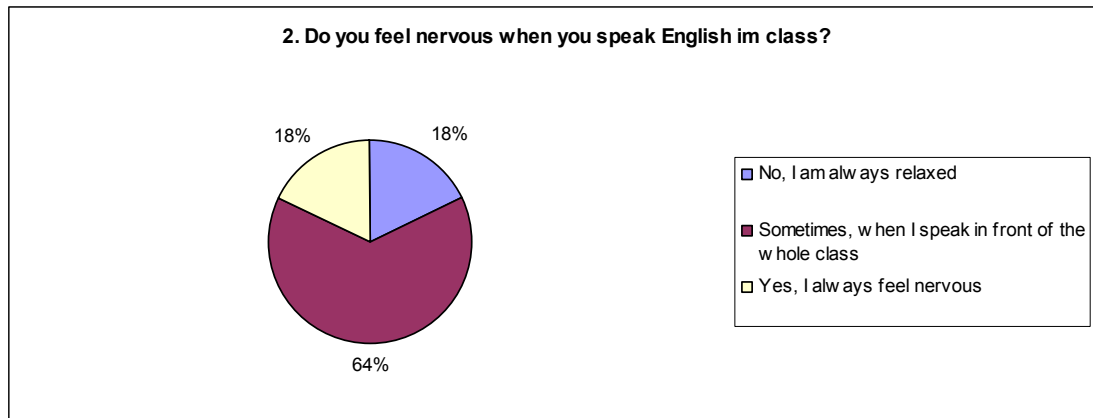


Figure 3.2 Feedback on feeling in the classroom

18% (3 students) of the students always feel nervous when they speak English in class and 64% (10 students) of the students sometimes feel nervous when they speak in front of the whole class. There can be many reasons for such a negative attitude towards speaking and one of the reasons could be connected with students' temperament as there are students who are introvert and do not like being in the centre of attention at all.

18% (3 students) of the students feel good when they speak in English in class. These students have rich vocabulary, they can speak English fluently, they are always active and feel comfortable with speaking skills.

The fifth question was given in order to get to know whether group work made a positive impact on learning English and whether it helped to achieve better results.

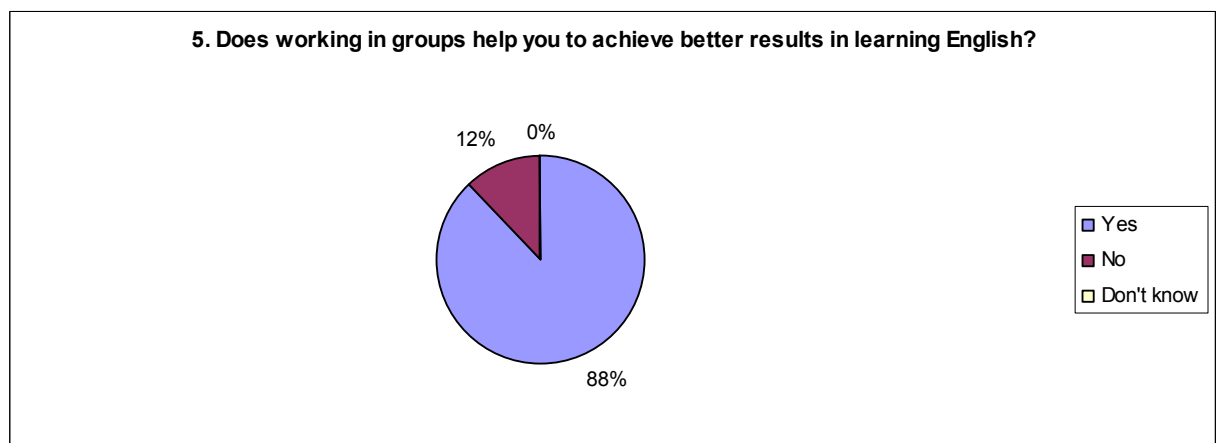


Figure 3.3 Overview of students' results

88% (14 students) of the students answered in the affirmative: they agreed that group work thinking makes students be more active and in this way they can learn from each other. They were sure that working together promoted mutual understanding, showed pluses and

minusies of students` language skills and helped to evaluate what was necessary for them.

12% (2 students) of the students answered negatively. They considered that sometimes group work really depended on their mood and atmosphere in the class, they felt bad by when someone offended them emotionally as well as such kind of learning disturbed them and, therefore, they lost the ability to think seriously about the task.

In the question 6 the students gave their explanations to the given examples promoted by the group work.

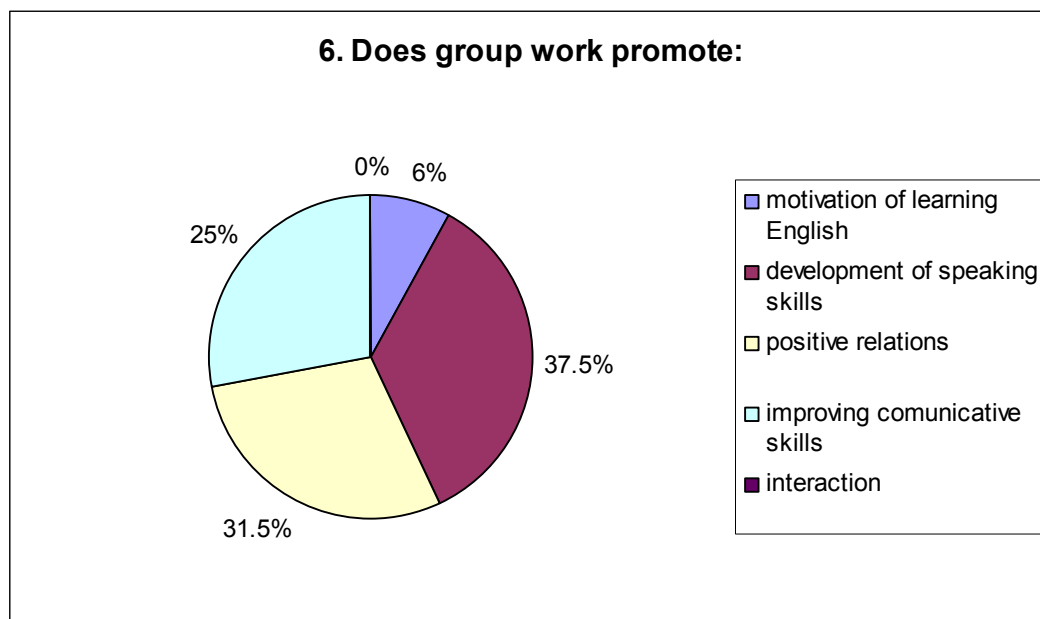


Figure 3.4 Students` feedback of group work

37.5% (6 students) of the students thought that work in groups promoted the development of speaking skills. 31.5% (5 students) of the students considered positive relations as the most important factor. 25% (4 students) of students thought that group work promoted the improvement of communicative skills, only for 6% (1 student) students motivation of learning English was important factor.

Having analysed the students answers the author came to conclusion that development of speaking skills through the work in groups is one of the most important factors in studying. Positive relations were another important factor for them. The third most important factor for students was improving communicative skills. And less important factor in the group work was motivation of learning English. None of them thought that work in groups promoted interaction.

To summarise the obtained data, the author of the diploma paper has got the impression that the students were honest when evaluating their classmates they supported fair group work

with strict rules. Most of them thought that group work promoted development of speaking skills.

### **3.4 Findings and interpretations**

The research findings of the present diploma paper have displayed students' more active participation in the English language classroom using the group and pair work. The research has also showed that there are different approaches for studying the English language, and communicative learning is one of them.

The author of the present paper has realised that implementation of group work in the English language lessons can lead to more active learning and the development of students' communication and collaborative skills.

Moreover, such a method of learning can encourage the students to enjoy English language lessons, to learn respect to each other and appreciate the contributions of their classmates.

To implement group work into the English language lessons, the teachers should take into account that not always group members feel comfortable working with each other and are afraid to ask for help. The lack of confidence does not allow such students to be effective and successful participants in group work. Therefore, one of the most important tasks for the teacher to succeed and get good results in group work is to change the behaviour of learners. They should trust the teacher, should not have fear to ask for help, have to understand the lesson's material. Working in groups is working together to achieve a common goal: the group members then learn and experience the feeling of responsibility for their group mates'.

The author of the present paper has described two lessons, but in reality she has been using different activities in other English language classes (8, 7) in Sigulda State Gymnasium. In fact, the students enjoyed and asked to practice dialogues and brief discussions during the lessons. They suggested their favourite topics, learned useful words, phrases, and used them in writing and speaking. The students exchanged the information and put into practice their knowledge of speaking and communication skills.

Having analysed the results of the lesson1, the author believes that the problem solving activity had its pedagogical impact of the importance in participating. Besides, it helped the students to improve their communication in English it also stimulated their thinking skills and the skills of oral presentation.

For some students, working alone was the best position and, therefore, the author wanted to change this habit and the behavior of the students in her lesson.

Learning vocabulary by working together through communication gave a chance to

improve the relationship as well as helped them to overcome an inferiority complex. During the group work activities, the teacher was pleased with those students who gave a helpful hand to the ones aside. She observed that the students who liked to work alone could change their minds and decided to participate and accept their roles in the group for common goal.

For the majority of the students, the theme 'Theatre', was interesting due to their abilities to solve the problems.

While the students were working in groups to focus on the questions and elicit student answers, the teacher moved around the classroom, observing the students' interaction and the frequency with which they took part in the group's work. The teacher noticed that in group 1 one boy and one girl had problems with vocabulary and they had to look up the words in the dictionary but all of them were very active and felt safe and comfortable. In group 2 one girl was a leader, and she wrote down the ideas obtained from their group members. Groups 3 and 4 made more noise while speaking because they decided to show the performances.

The group work presentations reflected the students' abilities to act, perform and speak not only to demonstrate their own ideas but also to captivate other groups. The most exciting presentation was made by group 4, all members were very attractive they made really great performance and made the other students to break into a laugh. Group 4 got the best points from other groups.

Homework was given to consolidate the knowledge and skills gained from the lesson. The students should think about their own different endings to the dialogue.

Lesson 2 was carried out in the same school Sigulda States Gymnasium in the same class. It was form 9.

The theme was 'Going abroad' and sub-topic was 'What you need to know before travel'. As the students were introduced to the topic the teacher offered them a warming up task. First, it was thought about travelling abroad, then listening the John Deaver song 'Leaving on Jet Plane' was listened to. (See Appendix 3). Next was work in pairs and finally a role-play. All students were active and they could not work quietly. The teacher reminded them to work silently.

After finishing the listening to the song the students checked the words about travelling. The teacher asked some questions to the students to get a small discussion going and made notes about the students listening.

The next task was focused on questions and answers. The teacher put the students into pairs and explained them the task. While the student A was answering the question, student B was writing down the student's answers. When students had completed this exercise the teacher checked for understanding by asking the questions aloud. One pair had a problem with

this task's understanding, the teacher explained them again.

Afterwards the teacher asked their students what things they would need to take with them on a trip. Some students were very noisy especially 3 boys. The students liked this task very much. The teacher made a brief list on the board while students were answering. Then, the teacher made some comments on pair work.

'How to book a flight/trip' was activity in a role-play. The teacher drew the Airport scheme on the board. Then she chose two energetic students and asked them to come to the front of the class. The teacher told them that one was a worker at the immigration point and the other was a traveller. They had a conversation using travel vocabulary. (See Appendix 4) This was really fun in the lesson when one student tried to bribe the immigration officer! Both of them had rich vocabulary and they could speak fluently, of course, they had some grammar mistakes but in this case it was not very important. The teacher corrected their mistakes after their conversation. Next pair was a steward at check-in and a traveller who wishes to check-in. The teacher continued this activity until all students had had an opportunity to speak.

After finishing this activity the teacher made her comments on the activity. They were given the following home work: the students had to read an extract from 'Three men in a boat'. (See Appendix 5)

To sum up, the author can make a conclusion that it is necessary and important to use group work in the English lessons. The author used group work activities very often. Working in such a way students learn to work together. The author thinks that the usage of group work is very effective. It gives high results of learning teaching process. By working together, the students learn to trust, respect life experience of others and evaluate unique abilities.

## Conclusion

Summarizing the above mentioned, the author has come to conclusion that group work has completely reached the aims and basic principles set in the Standards of the English language, which determines that teaching of a foreign language requires a functional, situational, communicative and individual approach according to the listening, speaking, reading and writing specifics

The Standard determines that the objective of the foreign languages` teaching process together with the development of speaking skills comprises the purposeful and systematic improvement of the established intellectual skills, which are necessary for mastering a foreign language. These principles were also taken into account in group work, and their observance has been facilitated by the textbooks.

As a result of using problem solving, discussions and other activities in group work, the students` thinking process has been encouraged and developed with help of the critical thinking.

Using the students` narratives in group work about their experience and various past events, it is possible to develop their memory, helping to remember continuously the obtained information, relating it to the current situation. By implementing different group projects, the students are enabled to develop their imagination and creative abilities, because such a type of exercises can be related to literature, for example, (their own poems, stories) or performances (a short sketch or pantomime) or any other genre of art.

Also the guidelines for the English language teaching and the newest textbooks recommend the application of this methodology.

The author has developed two lesson plans using group and pair work activities and piloted them at Sigulda State Gymnasium with form 9 students. As a result of action research, some conclusions have been made and recommendations given by the author.

After research of the theoretical and practical aspects of this problem there was purpose to introducē group work in the English language lessons for mastering the speaking skills. It was implemented in form 9 in the academic year 2010-2011. The results of the questionnaires testify the accomplishment of this assignment.

Various tasks and activities whose elaboration is based on the on requirements put forward in the Standard of the English language teaching. Thus, a conclusion may be drawn that the application of group work in the mastering of the English language (form 9) is varied because group work can be easily adjusted to the various levels of the language aquisition. The result of the communicative approach in group work is the students` ability to join in the

mutual communication and interaction more easily, to speak the English language and use the mastered skills and abilities of communication. The author of the paper can conclude that the aims of the diploma paper have been accomplished and the proposed hypothesis: 'implementing group work in the teaching and different activities provide effective opportunities for mastering speaking skills, which improve the level of the students' English knowledge, develops the perception of language and improves communication skills and abilities', has been proved.

From the above mentioned a conclusion may be drawn that the author has succeeded in helping the students to overcome the obstacles and the possible failures while studying the English language and has made a successful transition to the student-centered, learning style.

Consequently, the principal pedagogical arguments for implementation group work in the mastering of speaking skills in the English language process are as follows:

Group work:

- 1) not only educates a student, but also develops personality;
- 2) increases possibilities to practice a foreign language;
- 3) improves the students' English language knowledge, skills and abilities (especially, speaking skills) because the environment close to the real communication has been created;
- 4) helps to individualize learning;
- 5) facilitates the development of the positive atmosphere in the classroom;
- 6) motivates students because they have a real aim to use a foreign language increases the level of students' conscientiousness and creative activity.

Since using group work in the mastering of the speaking skills in the English language lessons the roles of both the students and a teacher change, consequently the implementation process should be gradual to adopt themselves to the new roles. The most important part of the process is systematic work and purposefulness. Mastering the skill to work successfully in the variable situations the winners are both – the students and the teachers.

Organization of group work requires larger contributions from teacher. Preparing such lessons the benefit is more obvious. The students become more courageous, successful they are mutually dependent upon each other and responsible for academic progress, because the strong student helps the weak one, the more talented – to the less talented, the more successful – to the less successful.

The author hopes that her conclusions and recommendations can further the interests of language teachers to implement group work activities and promote more effective learning in order to improve the students' speaking skills.

Thus, the aim of writing the present paper and the set objectives have been reached. Also, the hypothesis advanced at the beginning of the research on teaching principles through group functioning and different other activities has been proved.

## **Theses**

1. Communicative Teaching-Learning gives opportunities for students to put in a practice their communicative strategies.
2. Communicative Learning is an effective approach to develop students` experience in oral communication, their speaking skills and skills through interaction, comprehension and fluency.
3. Well- planned group work promotes positive interdependence and solidarity, feeling of support and it helps to reflect the needs of individual member of the group.
4. Group work has benefits to get and share different ideas, exchange information, make decisions and solve problems.
5. Group activities promote students` self-esteem and positive relations among the class mates, their learning quality and achievement, stimulate the students be active, participating and respecting each other.
6. Enjoyable and exciting activities in non-threatening atmosphere promote students` succesful involment, their positive thinking by active and friendly position in the learning process.
7. Involvement of each learner in group work helps to concentrate the attention, increases individual accountability and responsibility.
8. Different activities make speaking lessons interesting and effective. Creative teachers to produce good stimulating tasks by themselves and to involve the learners in speaking activities on the basis of their interest.
9. Group work activities make a positive impact on learning English, working for a common goal develops the individual responsibility and improves students` cooperative and speaking skills necessary for their future.
10. Group work motivate students because they have a real aim to use a foreign language increases the level of students` conscientiousness and creative activity

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