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TRABAJO DE FIN DE MÁSTER

Is group work effectively used in International Baccalaureate for outstanding students?
Exploring opinions of International Baccalaureate teachers about their teaching practices
and the role of the language at Middle Years (MYP) and Diploma (DP) level.

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Abstract

The main question that this study is intended to contribute to answering is: “*Is group work effectively used in IB at MYP and DP level for outstanding students?*” exploring opinions of IB teachers about their practices and the role of the language.

Group work is nowadays a consolidated practice for any subject taught in the International Baccalaureate (IB) both at Middle Years (MYP, students aged 11 to 16) and Diploma (DP, students aged 16 to 19) level and also a common tool of the communicative approach for teaching languages. However previous studies (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2011; Chiriac & Granström, 2012; Le, Janssen & Wubbels, 2018) have indicated that both teachers and students encounters difficulties while working with groups. Most of the obstacles are connected with assessment and individual assessment of talented students (Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart & Tio, 2016), but also with negative experiences and presumptions (Pauli, Mohiyeddini, Bray, Michie & Street, 2008; Peterson & Irving, 2008). So how teachers plan and react when they set group work for talented (also known as *advanced learners* or *high achievers* or *gifted*) students? What are the beliefs and practices? What are the real outcomes? Is language playing an important role and how is it used?

This Master of Secondary Teaching thesis describes perceptions and opinions of 10 IB MYP and DP teachers of International Community School of London, interviewed in May 2019. Questions asked them to reflect about their practices and beliefs and to share their opinions about group work.

The main purpose of this study was to obtain not only increased knowledge of how IB teachers assess individual learning occurring in group work, but also explore how teachers manage the emerging challenges, especially those related to the differentiation for high achieving students, assessing individual effort in a group work, peer assessment and the role of the language.

Using the phenomenological method of qualitative research, this study reports that the participants identified various challenges within the purpose of the group activity.

Keywords: *group work, talented students, teachers beliefs, teachers perceptions, teaching practice, IB group work, IB teaching, International Baccalaureate, IB language teaching, assessment, group work assessment, group assessment, high achievers*

Resumen

La pregunta principal que este estudio pretende contribuir a responder es: “¿Se utiliza de manera efectiva el trabajo en grupo en el Bachillerato Internacional (IB) en los programas MYP y DP para estudiantes sobresalientes?”, explorando las opiniones de docentes del IB sobre sus prácticas y el papel que juega el aspecto lingüístico.

El trabajo en grupo es hoy en día una práctica consolidada para cualquier materia que se imparte en el Bachillerato Internacional (IB) en los Años Intermedios (MYP, de 11 a 16 años) y Diploma (DP, de 16 a 19 años) y es también una herramienta común del enfoque comunicativo para la enseñanza de idiomas. Sin embargo, estudios previos (Frykedal y Chiriac, 2011; Chiriac y Granström, 2012; Le, Janssen y Wubbels, 2018) han indicado que tanto los profesores como los estudiantes tienen dificultades al trabajar con grupos. La mayoría de los obstáculos están relacionados no solo con la evaluación en general y la evaluación individual de estudiantes de alto rendimiento (Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart y Tio, 2016), sino también con experiencias negativas (Pauli, Mohiyeddini, Bray, Michie y Street, 2008; Peterson e Irving, 2008).

Esta tesis del MUP (*Máster en Profesorado de Educación secundaria obligatoria, Bachillerato, FP, enseñanza de idioma*) describe las percepciones sobre las experiencias de 10 docentes del IB en MYP y DP de la escuela secundaria “International Community School” de Londres, entrevistados en mayo de 2019. Las preguntas les hicieron reflexionar sobre sus prácticas y compartir opiniones sobre el trabajo en grupo.

El objetivo principal de este estudio fue explorar cómo los profesores gestionan los desafíos, especialmente aquellos relacionados con la diferenciación para estudiantes con alto rendimiento, con el aspecto lingüístico, la efectividad percibida y la imparcialidad de las evaluaciones grupales y la evaluación de pares (*peer assessment*).

Usando el método fenomenológico de la investigación cualitativa, este estudio informa que los participantes identificaron varios desafíos relacionados con la actividad grupal.

Palabras clave: *trabajo de grupo, trabajo grupal, alumnos talentosos, opiniones de los profesores, práctica docente, percepciones de los profesores, trabajo colaborativo IB, aprendizaje cooperativo, enseñanza IB, International Baccalaureate, IB enseñanza de idiomas, evaluación grupal, evaluación de pares, alumnos de alto rendimiento.*

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Introduction

Over the past 13 years I have been teaching modern foreign languages in different educational environments: language academies, high schools, middle schools and university courses; in France, Spain, Turkey, Italy, Sweden, Australia and the United Kingdom.

At 21, close to finishing my Bachelor in Italian Studies, I realized I did not want to qualify as a teacher before having the opportunity to check what working in a classroom was like and if it really suited me. So I signed up for a foreign language assistantship and I ended up in Strasbourg, France. It was 2006, I entered the classroom and the pupils were the first of many I was to teach.

At that time, I had little knowledge of language teaching methods. My lack of confidence and awareness prevented me from using activities in class in which I feared I could lose the control of the students: I must admit that my first students were “tortured” with frontal lessons and loaded with individual grammar practice exercises.

Since then, my teaching practice has changed and developed as my confidence grew, and during these teaching experiences I discovered how quickly a teenager can feel bored in a lesson and I had to learn the importance of variety and differentiation. In my lessons, students experienced different activities and many tasks were done working in small groups.

Nevertheless, I started to seek for further language teacher training.

I felt especially in need of professional development in 2013-2015 while teaching French in an International English School in Sweden, where my approach to teaching had to face new challenges like mixed classes with very different linguistic skills, distinct cultural and family backgrounds.

I have to admit that teaching in such a context was a new challenge, in which I had to learn how to solve unusual (for me) situations such as mixed abilities in the same class. I did my best to prepare students for a world that is constantly changing by encouraging them to be independent learners who are collaborative, determined, confident and who try to never give up.

In 2015 I was at a point in my career in which I felt the need to fully develop my potential as a teacher in a world renowned educational system: the International Baccalaureate. At the same time I decided to attend an intensive course for Spanish teachers at International House

of Barcelona, in which I could explore and actively starting to practice the communicative method for teaching languages whose one of the features is group work.

Finally in 2018 I started this long awaited and very intensive Master of Secondary Teaching at the University of Navarra in Spain and I suddenly found myself in the role of a student again. I felt I was in the privileged position to find out how all the activities I used in the classroom could be perceived by a student - and most of these were done in small groups.

As a student I started to reflect upon the efficiency of this practice and I could only record my personal experience: all of a sudden I started to realise that the pedagogical practice of small group work could be less beneficial for some categories of students: students with a lower linguistic ability, introverted students, and high achieving students. I found myself in all the three categories at the same time, being a non-native speaker of the dominant language but willing to study and succeed.

Consequently, I started to reflect on how young students could feel when working in small groups in an International School. Are the teachers aware of their difficulties? As teachers we tend to focus on lower ability students, but are the other students in the class less important? What can we do to involve them? How can we include them in the process of learning? How can we assess the results of group work in a fair way? How are teachers in International Baccalaureate addressing these challenges?

All these questions prompted me to start this study: I wanted to gain more knowledge on how to effectively use group work in class, possibly including the higher achieving students, without neglecting all the others.

Thanks to the school placement of the Master, I could observe and get involved in an International Baccalaureate Secondary School in London.

After studying the modern pedagogical literature about group work in class, in the International Baccalaureate and in language learning, I asked ten teachers to explore how they overcome the challenges and difficulties of a curriculum that promotes collaboration with a very diverse community of learners, usually coming from different linguistic backgrounds. I was especially interested in inclusion of high achievers and how to fairly assess individual effort in group assignments.

All the teachers who voluntarily participated in this study were kind and eager to talk about their teaching practices and share their opinions: I feel extremely grateful for their time and patience.

During this journey into group work and International Baccalaureate I have learned a lot, and even if I still have many unsolved questions, I am surely more confident about how to face my future teaching challenges in international schools along with an increased knowledge on which aspects I still need to seek training.

This study starts with a literature review about the aspects of group work relevant for my teaching practice: group work in class, group work in the International Baccalaureate, group work in the language classroom, assessing group work and group work as assessment: peer assessment. The last part of the literature review section is about group work for high achieving students. The second chapter is the Method section explaining the context of the school (International Community School of London, United Kingdom) and the type of interviews teachers were asked to answer. Finally, findings are presented using a qualitative data analysis and conclusions highlighting further areas of research.

Terminology

Over the last six decades, extended essays and research papers have given different names to “group work” in the educational environment: cooperative learning (CL), the Structural Approach (Kagan, 1989), Group Investigation (Sharan & Sharan, 1992), Student Team Learning (Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes, & Snapp, 1978; Slavin, 1995), Curriculum Packages (Slavin, Leavey, & Madden, 1986) and Learning Together (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1991, 1992, 1994)¹.

Currently, as Ghaith (2003) stated in her research, “CL is perceived as a generic term for a number of instructional techniques and procedures that address conceptual learning and social development”.

It is also true that there is some confusion on the terminology, as Hammar Chiriac (2014) noted:

Two approaches concerning learning in group are of interest, namely cooperative learning and collaborative learning. There seems to be a certain amount of confusion

¹ For further description of the various CL models, see Kluge, McGuire, Johnson and Johnson, 1999.

concerning how these concepts are to be interpreted and used, as well as what they actually signify. Often the conceptions are used synonymously even though there are some differentiations. Cooperative group work is usually considered as a comprehensive umbrella concept for several modes of student active working modes [...] whereas collaboration is a more of an exclusive concept and may be included in the much wider concept cooperation. (Hammar Chiriac, 2011). Cooperative learning may describe group work without any interaction between the students (i.e., the student may just be sitting next to each other...), while collaborative learning always includes interaction, collaboration, and utilization of the group's competences. (Hammar Chiriac 2014, p. 558).

Also Scager, Boonstra, Peeters, Vulperhorst and Wiegant (2016) stated: "Collaborative, cooperative, and team-based learning are usually considered to represent the same concept" (Scager et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this extended essay, I will use the generic term "group work" for referring to all the teaching practices involving a team of students working towards a common product or with a shared goal (for example: to complete a task). The reason is that "cooperative learning" and all the other labels above mentioned are very academic and volatile² (who knows what the new word will be in a decade) while the aim of this research was to explore IB secondary teachers perceptions and practices, therefore "group work" is the term we have used³ in the interviews as it was accessible and universally understood⁴. In the following part (Literature review) *Collaborative Learning* and *group work* are used as synonyms, unless specified.

Similarly, "outstanding" students or "high achieving" students are terms used in this study to identify a student with higher abilities than the norm of his or her year group. Literature⁵ and curricula designers have indicated this type of learner with many different terms: talented,

² A similar approach was taken by Murphey, Falout, Fukada and Fukuda (2012): "we take an intentionally broad view of this concept, which we use as an umbrella term to include, what have been called in the literature, community practices, cooperative practices, and collaborative practices".

³ See the Interview questions in the Appendix I.

⁴ A basic research through Google Scholar provided 6,700,000 results for "group work" against 3,320,000 for "collaborative learning" (on 22 May 2019).

⁵ For a historical perspective, see Leavitt, M. (2017). Envisioning the Journey: Conceptualizing a History of Giftedness. In *Your Passport to Gifted Education* (pp. 3-17). Springer, Cham.

gifted, bright, high achieving, brilliant... the terms are controversial and still causing international debates⁶. In the awareness of the main differences among all these categories, for the purpose of this study all these terms go under the umbrella of “high achieving” or “outstanding”, considering both the hard work student and the gifted student as standing out from the norm and possibly needing extra attention when included in group work activities.

⁶ For a more detailed explanation, refer to “Group work and high achieving students” section of this work.

1. Review of literature of previous studies on group work

Group work is nowadays a consolidated practice used as a means of learning at all levels of most educational systems (Chiriac and Granström, 2012), for any subject taught in the International Baccalaureate (IB) and a common tool for teaching languages since the introduction of the communicative language teaching method in the late 1970s (Spada, 2007). Group work, also known as *collaborative learning* or *cooperative learning*, is a pedagogical practice, part of the so-called *learner-centered methods* (that includes also project works and portfolio), as they aspire to an active participation of the learner. Learners are asked to work together towards a common goal: solve a problem, complete a task or create a product, as described in Laal and Ghodsi (2012).

Learner-centered methods are used in most modern curricula for Secondary Education, in fact benefits of these methods during adolescence, an age in which people become more independent and skillful, are listed and studied by ample literature. As an example, it is worth mentioning Meece, Herman and McCombs (2003): in their research they found that “the use of learner-centered teaching practices may be particularly beneficial for creating learning environments that are better matched to the developmental needs of young adolescents” (Meece et al., 2003). Moreover, group work prepares students to develop their collaboration and teamwork skills in order to meet the growing demand by employers that students entering the workforce have leadership and group experience (Coers, Lorensen & Anderson, 2009). Besides, Bobbitt et al. (2000) noted: “the structural shift toward teams that is occurring in many businesses should be reflected in today’s classroom training” (Bobbitt et al., 2000).

According to Johnson (1991) students should be grouped in small teams for working together and maximising their own and each other’s learning. In addition, Johnson (1991) noticed that group work helps to increase the effort students commit to learning and achievement, also because students involved in “caring and committed relationships within which they are held accountable for exerting considerable effort to learn and given the help, encouragement, and recognition they need to sustain their efforts to achieve”. Although he stated group work help to obtain higher achievement than when working as individuals or in a competitive setting, he

also emphasises the role of the teacher. For helping the collaboration to happen, the teacher must “carefully structure learning groups” (Johnson, 1991).

Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) in their work called *Group dynamics in the language classroom* tried to give a definition of “group” and consequently of “group work” in an educational environment (although more precisely in the context of language classroom). Using previous definitions provided by Brown (2000) and Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998), they identified common features among “groups”, considered in psychological terms, like: members interaction, common perception of unity and commitment, official shared purpose, reasonable amount of time spent together, internal regulation and accountability for members’ actions. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) therefore indicated that language classes groups could be considered “groups” according to that definition⁷ (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

The literature on the pedagogical practice of group work is considerable: the topic has been widely researched⁸ and advocated by different perspectives and disciplines (social and behavioural sciences: psychology, pedagogy, sociology, economics, political science...) and, as Johnson (2000) stated: “It is rare that an instructional procedure is central to such a wide range of social science theories”⁹ (Johnson, 2000). Just to exemplify the popularity of the topic, Johnson and Johnson (2009), could state in 2009 that “More than 1,200 research studies have been conducted in the past 11 decades on cooperative, competitive and individualistic efforts” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Moreover, it

⁷ “The question, then, is: Are language classes real groups? In the psychological sense? They certainly are as they display all the above features: class groups are characterised by considerable interaction amongst the students; they distinctable recognisable units with which learner identify strongly, they have an official purpose; they usually operates for months if not years; they are highly structured and a student’s good or bad achievement/behaviour usually reflects well/badly on the other class members” (Dörnyei, Z., & Murphey, T. (2003). *Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge University Press. P. 13)

⁸ Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009) state that this success “largely rests on the relationships among theory, research, and practice”

⁹ “The widespread use of cooperative learning is due to multiple factors. Three of the most important are that cooperative learning is clearly based on theory, validated by research, and operationalized into clear procedures educators can use. First, cooperative learning is based solidly on a variety of theories in anthropology (Mead, 1936), sociology (Coleman, 1961), economics (Von Mises, 1949), political science (Smith, 1759), psychology, and other social sciences. In psychology, where cooperation has received the most intense study, cooperative learning has its roots in social interdependence (Deutsch, 1949, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989), cognitive-developmental (Johnson & Johnson, 1979; Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978), and behavioral learning theories (Bandura, 1977; Skinner, 1968). It is rare that an instructional procedure is central to such a wide range of social science theories.” Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. B. (2000). *Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis*.

has attracted much attention because of a large body of research that indicates students gain both academically and socially when they have opportunities to interact with others to accomplish shared goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Lou et al., 1996; Slavin, 1996). (Gillies & Boyle 2010, p. 933).

In fact, according to several studies¹⁰, working in groups is beneficial for students on several aspects of their learning process: they acquire new thinking, social and linguistic skills. Therefore students gain both academically and socially: through interaction they develop new linguistic and analytical competencies that help to build more sophisticated language to express themselves and by working in groups they learn how to support each other and work for a unanimous purpose¹¹. Numerous benefits for cooperative learning have also been described by Pantiz (1999) and Johnsons (1989). Pantiz (1999), for example, lists more than 50 benefits. Based on their studies, Laal and Ghodsi (2012) conducted a deeper analysis and divided those multiple benefits of collaborative practices in the classroom into four categories: social, psychological, academic, and assessment.

Despite its many advantages, supported by valid academic extensive research, it is also true that teachers and students perceptions on group work are not always positive. As Le, Janssen and Wubbels (2018) affirmed, when examining the effectiveness of CL¹², researchers have noted challenges experienced by the students are: unequal individual participation in group tasks and students' lack of communicative and collaborative skills.

¹⁰ One of the systematic literature reviews of the benefits of group work is Laal, M., and Ghodsi, S. M. (2012). Benefits of collaborative learning. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences*, 31, 486-490.

¹¹ Gillies, R. M., and Boyle, M. (2010). Teachers' reflections on cooperative learning: Issues of implementation. *Teaching and teacher Education*, 26(4), 933-940, p.933: "Through interaction students learn to interrogate issues, share ideas, clarify differences, and construct new understandings (Mercer, Wegerif, and Dawes, 1999; Webb and Mastergeorge, 2003). In so doing, they learn to use language to explain new experiences and realities which, in turn, help them to construct new ways of thinking and feeling (Barnes, 1969; Mercer, 1996). Moreover, when students work cooperatively together, they show increased participation in group discussions, demonstrate a more sophisticated level of discourse, engage in fewer interruptions when others speak, and provide more intellectually valuable contributions (Gillies, 2006; Webb and Farivar, 1999). By working cooperatively, students develop an understanding of the unanimity of purpose of the group and the need to help and support each other's learning which, in turn, motivates them to provide information, prompts, reminders, and encouragement to others' requests for help or perceived need for help (Gillies, 2003a; Gillies and Ashman, 1998)"

¹² CL stands for *Collaborative Learning*.

Similarly, teachers also encounter challenges while organising collaborative activities, such as designing appropriate group tasks, composing groups, managing class time, and enhancing and monitoring productive collaboration. (Ha Le, Jeroen Janssen & Theo Wubbels 2018, p. 103).

Therefore, in the quest to improve group work, group composition has been investigated also from different perspectives. An interesting proposal is improving and applying computational tools for enhancing inter-group homogeneity and intra-group heterogeneity. A multi-objective heuristic search strategy for group formation can be found in Garshasbi, Mohammadi, Graf, Garshasbi and Shen (2019).

To add a last important point for further reflection: teacher training and teacher role both play an important part in group work. In fact, Chiriac and Granström (2012) indicated in their study of students' perceptions of group work that great value is given to the role and the leadership of the teacher during group work. According to the students taking part in the research, the teacher has to decide on: group size and composition, allot time, and guarantee a calm location. Besides, the teacher needs to train the students in the mode of working in groups, has to give understandable tasks and train the students to report group work. The teacher must also be responsible and not leave the students to their own devices when it comes to forming the work of the group. Another students' indication was that assessment of group work: it needed to be formulated beforehand as regards to form and content. In addition, students expect the role of the teacher in group work to be that of an arranger, and of a constant supporter during the course of the group work. Therefore, teacher training is crucial. Gillies and Boyle (2010) pointed out that one of the implications of their study was that for achieving high-quality group work it is necessary that teachers are trained in collaborative teaching and in the skills needed to implement cooperative learning in their classroom.

1.1 Group work in International Baccalaureate (IB)

IB stands for International Baccalaureate that is an international school curriculum, established for the first time in 1968 and taught in over 140 countries by schools representing a wide variety of educational contexts and traditions (IBO, 2019). Programmes of IB include Primary Years (PYP, ages: 4 - 11), Middle Years (MYP, 11- 16), Career-related (CP, 16 - 18) and the Diploma Programme (DP, 16 - 18) and are offered worldwide in both international schools and schools in national systems (IBO, 2013). In International Baccalaureate schools, activities in small groups are encouraged as considered a crucial opportunity for building up the “profile of IB learner” promoted by IB organization and part of the “approaches to teaching” IB teachers are required to use in class.

One of the peculiarities of International Baccalaureate education is that all IB programmes aim to

develop internationally minded people who, recognizing their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better and more peaceful world.
(IBO 2013, p.2)

“The profile of IB learner” is composed of ten attributes that try to raise that awareness on the students. These ten attributes of the IB learner are: inquirer, knowledgeable, thinker, communicator, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-taker, balanced and reflective. Although each of those attributes can be seen important when setting a group task in class, those related to group work are especially “communicator” and “inquirer”. “Inquirer” is defined as an attribute for students who know how to learn independently as well as with the others while “communicator” is a student who, among other things, “can collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups” (IBO, 2013).

Additionally, not only are students encouraged to take part in group activities and focus on collaboration skills, but also teachers are invited to focus on teamwork. In fact, one of the six approaches to IB teaching is

focused on effective teamwork and collaboration. This includes promoting teamwork and collaboration between students, but also refers to the collaborative relationship between teachers and students. (IBO 2017, p.6)

As it is stated by the International Baccalaureate Organization in the document “What is an IB education?”, those approaches to teaching and learning are

deliberately broad, designed to give teachers the flexibility to choose specific strategies to employ that best reflect their own particular contexts and the needs of their students. (IBO 2017, p. 6)

Therefore IB teachers can experiment with different settings and strategies for designing their lessons and achieving the aim of “collaboration” among their students. Moreover, one of the recommendations for teachers in the classroom is to facilitate students to “collaborate with teachers and peers to plan, demonstrate, and assess their own learning” (IBO 2019, p. 17). Furthermore, collaboration is a key element of learning in the Diploma Programme and a vital part of one of the peculiarities of the IB Diploma Programme: a subject called CAS. CAS stands for Creativity, Activity and Service and it is one of the core activities of the Diploma Programme (16 - 18 years). It is a practical subject that enables students to engage and provide a service to a specific need of their inner or broad community, giving the chance to use and explore their interests and passions, personalities and perspectives, through a variety of individual and group activities. In this compulsory subject, IB students are encouraged to make use of their skills like self-determination and collaboration (IBO, 2019).

Focusing on IB subjects, collaboration and interaction are central to the teaching and learning practice in International Baccalaureate Education. As an example, we can cite the syllabus for Language A (a subject in which the main language and its literature are analysed, similar to “English” in English-speaking countries curricula). It states:

Collaboration is particularly important in studies in language and literature as the use of language involves interaction amongst people. In addition, our reception of any text depends on the community of readers to which we belong. Finding meaning in a text

is a collaborative process. Even an individual working through a text is influenced by past readings and experiences with others and, as Michael Ondaatje points out in *Running in the Family* (2009), “a literary work is a communal act”. (IBO 2019, p. 62)

Besides, among the teaching examples and recommendations provided, group work is explicitly cited, advising teacher to “use a variety of strategies to create in-class groupings that allow for collaboration and growth” (IBO 2019, p. 62).

1.2 Group work in the language classroom

Designing a language syllabus is a headache in modern times, when new language learning methodologies and researches are published and advertised almost every day¹³. Nevertheless, the large majority of curricula for teaching languages are designed following a student-centered approach. In this theoretical context, group work progressively gained more space, especially in opposition to the traditional teacher-led approach, as working in groups increased the interaction among students. Collocated in this frame, group work for language learning became a common and promoted practice in almost all the curricula and at any level, and many researchers (Kagan, 1995; Kessler, 1992; McGroarty, 1989, 1993) established the theoretical relevance of cooperative learning in the language classroom.

Anyone who is familiar with language learning methods history knows that any new approach or pedagogical practice intended to reinvent the way we learn language is destined to be replaced by a new one or a different version of the previous one after short time. However, among all the innovation the communicative method brought to the language classes, group work resisted, although mainly for increasing the number of opportunities for speaking. In this section there is a literature review of the factors that resulted in incorporating group work in the modern communicative language classroom.

As Richards (2005) explains, our understanding of the processes of second language learning has changed and improved considerably in the last 40 years, and the communicative teaching method was part of these big changes. In fact, earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence, lessons were prepared viewing language learning as a process of mechanical habit formation. For a long time the requirement for language students was to produce correct sentences and not making mistakes, and as a result they could form good habits. Errors were to be avoided through controlled opportunities for written and oral production, and by memorizing dialogs and performing

¹³ “Driven by social media and learning networks, education is moving outside the classroom walls and the roles of teachers and parents are moving with it”(Leavitt 2017) says Leavitt about gifted learners, but we could apply that to language teaching as well.

drills. In that traditional classroom situation, learning was seen under the control of the teacher.

In recent years, the communicative method changed the perspective of language teaching and learning. This modern approach is seen as the result of processes such as: interaction between the learner and users of the language, collaborative creation of meaning, creating meaningful and purposeful interaction through language, negotiation of meaning as the learner and his or her interlocutor arrive at understanding, learning through attending to the feedback learners get when they use the language, paying attention to the language one hears (the *input*) and trying to incorporate new forms into one's developing communicative competence, trying out and experimenting with different ways of saying things (Richards, 2005). The interaction, the negotiation and the collaboration necessary for the communicative method cannot be practiced individually or solely with the teacher, but they need a collective situation: the group.

Methodologists agreed that the traditional approach was limiting the possibility of learning speaking skills as in the traditional lessons “repetitive imitation, drills and memorization of dialogues formed the primary focus of classroom activities” (Long and Richards, 1987). On the contrary, conversational interaction produced in group activities seems to be qualitatively and quantitatively different from that which goes in teachers dominated lessons (Long & Richards, 1987, p. 189) and as conversation is a big part of a second language learning, group work became a very popular and advocated practice (Richards & Lockhart, 1996).

In order to practice the target language, we need to be placed in a communicative situation in which we need to solve a problem or complete a task, using the language. This was the theoretical base for one of the most successful trends in modern language learning included in the communicative method, called “task-based learning”, that started to be practiced in the early eighties. As Willis (1996) pointed out, working together for completing a task helps the learners to explore a variety of language they barely have the chance to use in other language learning approaches and class situations, especially the most traditional ones. Being in a group forces students to communicate in order to proceed and obtain a result. In that situation, students focus more on “fluency and getting the meaning somehow” (Willis 1996,

p. 55) and the language they use is “spontaneous, exploratory, ephemeral”, developing and improving the quality of their oral communication in L2 (second language) (Willis 1996).

Willis highlighted that for most Second Language Acquisition researchers there are four key conditions enabling language learning: exposure to a rich but comprehensible input of real language, opportunities for real use of language, motivation and focus on language form. For Willis (1996) and task-based learning supporters, a lesson in which a group of students has a task to complete using the target language meet all these conditions for achieving successful language learning, and we can easily see the great success of this practice by opening a modern language book for learning Western European languages: at the end of each unit there is always a “project” meant to be completed by a group of students working together. For Poupore (2016) in order to fulfill all these requirements (rich but comprehensible input of real language, opportunities for real language use, motivation and focus on language form), also task conditions are relevant, as they must be: “associated with the use of imagination, planning time, humorous content, difficulty level, and multiple task outcomes” (Poupore 2016). Similarly, according to Lotan (2003), a “group-worthy task” requires considerable expertise and significant investment of time and effort, as it needs to be: open-ended, multidimensional (meaning: a task allowing multiple ways for showing competence), providing significant content and with clear evaluation criteria (Lotan 2003). However, it is also true that the talk that occurs within small groups of students is much less structured than teacher-led talk, as Barnes (1999) pointed out. Furthermore, in Poupore (2016) investigation “it was discovered that 59% of total group work dynamics behaviors were nonverbal and 41% verbal” (Poupore 2016, p.11)

In addition, Long and Porter (1985) stated that the use of group work in second language learning is supported by “sound” pedagogical arguments¹⁴ that they categorised as: increasing opportunities for practising the target language, improving the quality of student talk, individualising instruction, creating a positive climate in the classroom and increasing student motivation. In fact, working in a team increases the individual practice time each student has

¹⁴ For an early brief review of these pedagogical arguments: Long, M., & Porter, P. (1985). Group Work, Interlanguage Talk, and Second Language Acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(2), 207-228

to use the target language (the researchers provided the example¹⁵ of a secondary classroom of 30 students. If the language lesson is 50 minutes and we consider it normal that the teacher would talk for half of it, it means that each student would have less than a minute to practice the target language, Long & Porter, 1985). Besides, working in groups avoids the pressure and anxiety of speaking in front of an audience and this is important for particularly shy or linguistic insecure students. Moreover, while completing a task students may have to use the target language to suggest, infer, qualify, hypothesize, generalize, or disagree. They can also develop such skills as topic-nomination, turn-allocation, focusing, summarizing, and clarifying.

A relevant study for secondary school language learning and group work was conducted by Azizinezhad, Hashemi and Darvishi (2013)¹⁶. They studied how to enhance junior high school students' language learning through cooperative learning and according to their findings, group work is "an effective teaching method in foreign/second language education" (Azizinezhad, Hashemi & Darvishi, 2013). Summarising Krashen and Kagan investigations, Azizinezhad et al., (2013) inspected cooperative learning and language acquisition through three vital variables of *input*, *output*, and *context*, which contributed to language acquisition to a great extent (Krashen, 1985; Kagan, 1995). Azizinezhad, et al., (2013) drew the conclusion that cooperative learning had a "dramatic positive impact on almost all of the factors critical to language acquisition" (Kagan, 1995), as language acquisition was fostered by input that was comprehensible (Krashen, 1985), developmentally appropriate, redundant, and accurate (Kagan, 1995). Following Kagan¹⁷ suggestions, the small group setting allowed a far higher proportion of comprehensible input, because the speaker could adequate the speech to the appropriate level to the listener to negotiate meaning. In general, Azizinezhad, Hashemi and Darvishi (2013) identified five major factors that can make cooperative learning successful: positive interdependence, individual accountability, quality of group processing, teaching of cooperative skills, and teaching of social skills.

¹⁵ Long, M., & Porter, P. (1985). Group Work, Interlanguage Talk, and Second Language Acquisition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 19(2), 208.

¹⁶ Azizinezhad, M., Hashemi, M., & Darvishi, S. (2013). Application of cooperative learning in EFL classes to enhance the students' language learning. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 138-141.

¹⁷ Kagan, S. (1989). The structural approach to cooperative learning. *Educational leadership*, 47(4), 12-15.

On the other hand, it is useful to take in account also the emotional aspect of group work. In their exploration of different group dynamics in the language classroom Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), recalled the typical problems and students feelings of the first day in a language classroom when students are grouped for the first time. They identified common negative feelings among the students: general anxiety, uncertainty about being accepted and about their own language competence, awkwardness, anxiety about using L2 and about comprehending what they have to do (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003).

It is also interesting to note that group work in language classroom can be beneficial for a linguistic aspect even when that was not the intended or the primary desired outcome. As an example, it is worth to mention Ghaith (2003) research. Group work (used as in the “Learning Together cooperative model”) was explored as a prompt to increase academic self-esteem, and decreasing feelings of school alienation among 56 EFL¹⁸ Lebanese high school learners. The results indicated no statistically significant differences between the control and experimental groups on the dependent variables of academic self-esteem and feelings of school alienation. However, the results revealed a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group on the variable of the foreign language (English) reading achievement¹⁹.

¹⁸ EFL stands for (English as a Foreign Language) the teaching of English to people whose first language is not English, and who do not live in an English-speaking country, (Longman).

¹⁹ Ghaith, G. (2003). Effects of the learning together model of cooperative learning on English as a foreign language reading achievement, academic self-esteem, and feelings of school alienation. *Bilingual research journal*, 27(3), 451-474.

1.3 Group work and assessment

Like many other activities done in class at secondary school level, group work tend to be more effective when assessed. Healy, Doran and McCutcheon (2018) pointed out that assessment “acts as a motivator of student effort”²⁰ for group task as students might not otherwise be willing to engage (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Ramsden, 1992).

In case of introverted students or students lacking in confidence, it is difficult to see them engaged in collective learning or oral presentations when those activities are not assessed.

According to Hand, Sanderson and O’Neil (1996) assessment is the most powerful signal sent to students and it focuses the attention of students on what is perceived to be important²¹.

Students generally accept assessment as they consider it to be part of their school life, and do not have an overly negative view of assessment, according to the findings of Peterson and Irving (2008). Students also found it motivating for striving to high level of performance, as Healy, Doran and McCutcheon (2018) described.

However, assessing the work in group activities is not only a necessity for improving student engagement and performance, but also because teamwork skills are required in preparation for future employment, as Strom and Strom (2011) pointed out.

Also Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart, and Tio (2016) strongly support this statement, providing the example of medical professionals and health care workers who are constantly required to work in teams²².

Nevertheless, assessing group work does not appear to be an easy task.

In Strom and Strom (2011) work called *Teamwork skills assessment for cooperative learning*, it was highlighted the lack of assessment tools, especially because of the confusion of what “teamwork skills” are and how to identify them. (In their research, they conduct a field test of 303 high school students and teachers, and their observation concerned:

whether individual members of their cooperative learning group attend to teamwork,

²⁰ Healy, M., Doran, J., & McCutcheon, M. (2018). Cooperative learning outcomes from cumulative experiences of group work: differences in student perceptions. *Accounting Education*, 27(3), p. 286.

²¹ Hand, L., Sanderson, P., & O’Neil, M. (1996). Fostering deep and active learning through assessment. *Accounting Education*, 5(2), 103-119.

²² “Medical professionals need to collaborate with colleagues and other health care workers. It is therefore important to address the competency role of “collaborator” in medical education”. Dijkstra, J., Latijnhouwers, M., Norbart, A., & Tio, R. A. (2016). Assessing the “I” in group work assessment: State of the art and recommendations for practice. *Medical teacher*, 38(7), p. 675.

seek and share information, communicate with teammates, think critically and creatively, and get along with teammates). (Strom & Strom, 2011)

Moreover, Strom and Strom (2011) also call attention to the fact that Secondary teachers are subject specialists and therefore most qualified to judge work *products* submitted by student teams; on the other hand, unfortunately

teachers do not qualify as the best judges of group dynamics because they are seldom around to witness group interaction and, even when present, cannot understand how individual initiatives impact teammates. (Strom & Strom 2011, p. 235)

The latter is amongst the many studies indicating that assessment in collaborative learning, whilst necessary, is problematic for teachers.

Ross, Rolheiser and Hogaboam-Gray (1998) investigated teachers feelings toward collaborative work evaluation. Expression of guilt, anxiety and uncertainty were frequent in their findings²³.

In the first part of their research, Ross et al, (1998) cited many previous researchers who highlighted the problem of assessment of group work, discovering some strengths and weaknesses. The critical aspects of group work assessment are connected with the weight of the individual performance while the positive aspects are related to a better retention and the possibility of effectively assessing the comprehension as students were encouraged to clarify the concepts through peer explanation or reformulation.

Webb found that group discussions while completing a test over-estimated individual performance (Fall, Webb & Wise, 1995; Webb, 1993). But she also discovered that group tests revealed information about students concept understanding that was not accessible in individual testing (Webb et al., 1995). Billington (1994) found that having pupils agree on test answers increased student retention over individual test taking.[...] These studies suggest that student assessment may be problematic for CL teachers. (Ross et al., 1998)

In general, it seems that assessing group work presents difficulties because of uncertainty and

²³ Ross, J. A., Rolheiser, C., & Hogaboam-Gray, A. (1998). Student Evaluation in Cooperative Learning: teacher cognitions. *Teachers and teaching*, 4(2), 299-316.

confusion teachers have about “how” and “what” to assess (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2011).

The dilemma appears to be: should teachers assess the collaboration and teamwork skills (the process) or the result (the product)? Or both?

As an example, Frykedal and Chiriac (2011) in their work called *Assessment of students' learning when working in groups*, disclosed results that

teachers have difficulties in concretising and verbalising what and how they assess.

The teachers also experienced uncertainty and contradictory demands concerning assessment of students in group work. (Frykedal & Chiriac, 2011)

Another issue is how to assess appropriately the individual contribution to a team, as investigated by Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart and Tio (2016).

In a more recent similar research, Le, Janssen and Wubbels (2018) raised another issue: assessing only group productivity will leave behind unconfident students. In their investigation about perceived obstacles to effective collaboration by teachers and students, they identified assessment among the three antecedents to obstacles of collaborative learning.

The third antecedent (assessment) can be linked with the obstacles, for example, competence status. When teachers primarily concentrate on group productivity without simultaneously assessing the collaborative performance, group members may not be urged to strengthen social interaction and mutual help in order for everyone to benefit from collaboration. As a consequence, low-status students may feel unconfident to participate in collaborative work, thereby not benefiting from the collaboration. (Le et al., 2018)

Two additional issues in defining group work assessment emerged during the screening and analysis of the literature conducted by Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart and Tio (2016) and are worth mentioning: student behavior (or attitude) and group composition. Both problems have been investigated by other studies like Takeda and Homberg (2014); Dingel and Wei (2014); Spatar et al. (2015). Students indicated grading systems that take free-riding behavior into account are preferred over systems that do not (Maiden & Perry, 2011).

Other studies also indicate that teachers and students regard the free-riding issue as an important topic (Maiden & Perry, 2011; Spatar et al., 2015) as well as group composition.

In Healy, Doran and McCutcheon (2018) findings, group work is the least favoured form of alternative assessment activity by the students. Students taking part in the research were

concerned with the perceived lack of reward for effort, and also identified time-management and free-rider issues (Healy et al., 2018).

Also in the IB education, group work assessment is a delicate topic. In the teachers guidelines for assessment, assessing collaborative tasks is defined as “one challenging area” (Frykedal and Chiriac, 2011). Expectations are that all students work together in completing an activity and they consider it enriching and formative as this aspect will be encountered in students future workplace. The difficulty seems to lie in the type of group assessment with a low possibility to identify the individual’s role and contribution to the whole group task. Therefore only group tasks where individual contributions can be identified are recommended to be used, whilst groupal grading should be avoided. For International Baccalaureate students grades are especially important as they determine and guarantee their future career opportunities and university entrance.

Given the individual nature of the way that IB results are used to make selection decisions, in general we do not think this is a fair approach to take and so generally try to avoid group assessments where individual candidate achievement cannot be measured. This approach can create cultural bias as the idea of individualism is traditionally a western European ideology. The IB recognizes this issue but sets it in the context that even in alternative cultures the assessment outcomes are often used to determine individual selection decisions (IBO 2018, p.97).

1.3.1 A common type of group assessment: Peer Assessment

It seems that one of the most controversial aspects of group work is to ensure that each student is contributing and equally participating.

As evidenced by relevant studies like Healy, Doran and McCutcheon (2018), when working in groups, students are concerned not to be fairly assessed, not only because of the potential free-rider problem.

Group work was seen as being particularly problematic, with problems evident in the structure of groups, the nature of the tasks, and the manner in which groups functioned, which all reduced their perceived effectiveness.

Concern was also expressed about the grading of group work; including not only free-rider issues but also that the marks did not reflect the time and effort involved in managing group work and the loss of individual control over their ultimate grades.

The complexity and nuanced nature of these issues suggests that they are unlikely to be solved if interventions to group work only address the free-rider problem. (Healy, Doran and McCutcheon 2018, p. 480)

Consequently, finding reliable group assessing procedures for determining individual contribution is a focal point for the successful group work.

A common practice is peer assessment, especially promoted among teachers both in the United Kingdom and within schools following a Western style curriculum and programmes, such as those of the International Baccalaureate (Foley, 2013).

Peer assessment consists in students providing feedback to fellow students, or, in a more sophisticated academic language, “arrangement for learners to consider and specify the level, value, or quality of a product or performance of other equal-status learners” (Topping, 2009).

It is used for group work assessment as it helps to identify and isolate individual contribution of the students and consequently reward them fairly.

This assessment practice is considered to be an “an important component of a more participatory culture of learning” (Kollar & Fischer, 2010) and a valuable formative assessment tool by teachers, but not without limitations (Foley, 2013; Carvalho 2013²⁴).

²⁴ Among the findings of Carvalho (2013): “a group perceived peer assessment results and final marks to be

Ample literature exists on modern peer assessment, especially at higher education level. For its role in secondary schools, Mellor (2012) and Foley (2013) suggest to connect it with the “Assessment for Learning” movement²⁵ that encourages assessing students in a way that students take more responsibility for, and a role in their own learning.

Furthermore, it is highly valued by International Baccalaureate as being required by all IB Diploma schools via their Standards and Practices document for authorised schools, which indicates that learning at the school involves students in both peer and self assessment (IBO, 2004).

However, peer assessment is not a new phenomenon as it seems. In fact, Gaillet (1992) pointed out that already George Jardine, professor of logic and philosophy at the University of Glasgow from 1774 to 1826 had extensively described: the role of the teacher in the peer-editing process, the rules peer-editors should follow, methods of reporting criticism to other class members, ways to solve differences of opinion between critic and author and the advantages of such a system of examination.

In their literature review, Van Zundert, Sluijsmans and Van Merriënboer (2010), indicated that what really constitutes *peer assessment* is too broad and no clear, moreover, without knowing the variables and conditions it is impossible to measure the benefits.

Several research reviews have already recognised the large variety in PA²⁶ practices, but explicit relations between variables that underlie the PA practices, such as conditions, methods, and outcomes, have rarely been investigated (i.e., the variables are not held to account for causes and effects. (Van Zundert et al., 2010)

In fact, peer assessment can be conducted in many ways but cannot be reliable and valid without considering the role of interpersonal variables like psychological safety, value diversity, interdependence, and trust as Van Gennip, Segers and Tillema (2010) investigated in their research.

unfair, and reported incidents of friendship-marking and conflict arising from peer assessment“ Carvalho (2013).

²⁵ For a detailed explanation on Assessment for learning movement and connection with peer assessment, also known as “AfL” see McDowell, L., Sambell, K., Bazin, V., Penlington, R., Wakelin, D., Wickes, H., & Smailes, J. (2006). Assessment for learning: Current practice exemplars from the centre for excellence in teaching and learning in assessment for learning. *Northumbria University*.

²⁶ PA stands for Peer Assessment.

In the long discussion about peer assessment validity and reliability, it might be interesting to note secondary students' perceptions of it. According to the findings of Peterson and Irving (2008) "peer and self-assessment are not acknowledged and understood as legitimate assessment forms" (Peterson & Irving, 2008, p.248) by students in Secondary schools (that research was conducted among students of four Secondary schools in New Zealand in order to find their conceptions of assessment and feedback). Indicating that students value their teachers grades and feedback more than their peers.

Additionally, Foley asks:

Can students make an objective assessment of their peer's work when they will not only be acutely aware of the other student's overall ability but may also wish to protect their feelings and avoid destabilising the specific social dynamics of the group? (Foley 2013, p. 202)

Moreover, another relevant issue is raised by Brown, Irving, Peterson and Hirschfeld (2009). Their study shows that students did not define "assessment" with student-centered, alternative assessments (e.g.: peer-assessment, portfolios, and self-assessment) or teacher - student interaction (e.g., conferences, checklists, questioning, observation), although they are claimed to raise student academic performance (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Crooks, 1988). Instead students associated the term *assessment* with test-like practices. Furthermore, the students associated informal assessment practices with being "irrelevant" (Brown, Irving, Peterson & Hirschfeld, 2009). Thus, the researchers expressed their concern, as, while teachers are being encouraged to use this type of more informal assessments, "students perceive those assessments as being anti-learning" (Brown et al., 2009, p. 99).

The question seems to be: is peer assessment worth it? Kennedy (2005) tried to find an answer, pointing out in his study that some students are reluctant to judge their peers while others seem keen to "mark down those who had not done a fair share" (Kennedy, 2005). He also found a "dysfunctional effect", with some students willing to dominate and manipulate the task to their own advantage. In his conclusions, he must admit:

Though the use of peer assessment in courses involving group projects has been claimed by many to help solve the problem of unequal contribution by group members, the evidence suggests that the approach is of dubious worth in this

connection and introduces a whole new set of inequities and problems. (Kennedy, 2005)

Similar deceiving findings are also in Foley (2013) who investigated peer assessment in IB environment (International School of Lausanne, Switzerland), adding that friendship and complex social dynamics among students in such a small school could also play a role. In his conclusions, he reckons that “the wide range of perceived benefits anticipated by Sadler (1998) and Topping (1998, 2009) did not materialise in this study” (Foley, 2013).

In conclusion, it appears that peer assessment, although an interesting student-centered pedagogical practice, cannot solve all the issues connected with group work assessment as it is not perceived as valid as teacher evaluation and it cannot replace it.

1.4 Group work and high achieving students

What happens when in the group there is a particularly brilliant student who stands out from the rest? How well they fit working in a group with peers? Outstanding students have been defined by literature²⁷ and curricula designers with many different names: talented, gifted, bright, high achieving... the terms are controversial and can create psychological constraints for children and families due to “labelling” an individual (Leavitt, 2017). As explained in the Terminology section, for the purpose of this study we will group all these terms under the label “high achieving” or “outstanding” considering both the hard work student and the gifted student as standing out from the norm and possibly needing extra attention when including them in group work activities.

(However, Heller, 2004, states that “giftedness and talent – both terms are used synonymously according to the recent literature (cf. Heller, Mönks, Sternberg & Subotnik, 2000/2002; Sternberg & Davidson, 2004)” (Heller, 2004). Furthermore,

there is no universally agreed definition of students who would be assessed as Gifted and Talented. Some accepted terms are genius, more able, exceptionally able, very able, gifted and talented, bright, virtuoso and high flyer. (The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Northern Ireland, 2007)

is the definition provided by The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Northern Ireland (2007) on the guidelines for teachers for working with Gifted and Talented Pupils). Leavitt (2017) explains the beginning of the studies on giftedness and the modern research on the topic in this way:

There have always been children who do not fit in with their peer group. In 1916, American psychologist, Lewis Terman published a revision of what is now known as the Stanford–Binet Scale, the first IQ test. Although Alfred Binet originally designed the test as a measurement of abilities for students who were experiencing difficulty in

²⁷ For a historical perspective, see Leavitt, M. (2017). *Envisioning the Journey: Conceptualizing a History of Giftedness*. In *Your Passport to Gifted Education* (pp. 3-17). Springer, Cham.

school, it evolved to measure the opposite end of the spectrum and was used to screen ‘intelligent’ candidates for army officer recruitment during World War I. Terman’s intelligence scale led to the further development of creativity tests and became a springboard for numerous studies of the relationship between intelligence and creativity. Today, many researchers and educators include creativity in their definition of giftedness. (Leavitt, 2017)

Again Leavitt (2017) indicates that today there is still an international debate around the identification of a gifted individual, largely due to different cultural interpretations and various definitions and models of giftedness. According to British Mensa's gifted child consultant Lyn Kendall:

Generally, bright children learn more quickly than their peers, require less reinforcement of a topic and are able to study things at a greater depth. How we cater for the academic needs of these children is a matter of heated debate. (Kendall, 2019)

As Heller (2004) explains, identifying a bright student is difficult as well as it is supporting him or her in the learning journey (also in Ferrari, 2001). This complexity is the result of controversial discussions for experts and lay people alike. Questions vary from: What is to be identified? (Relevant diagnostic variables along with conceptual problems) Why is the identification attempted? (For special gifted programs or for intervention purposes?) How can gifted and talented students be identified? (Measurement instruments and decision strategies concerning being gifted or not, the fit between individual (learning) needs and social (instructional) conditions of gifted education). When should gifted children be identified? (Heller, 2004). Although all those questions are answered in deep in Heller (2004) research, summarising, we can say that gifted students identification is necessary not only from an educational perspective of talent nurturance but also to prevent possible personal and social problems (isolation, behaviour issues reacting to the lack of challenges...).

In VanTassel-Baska (1986) review of effective curriculum and instructional models for talented students, indicated which feature of each model could be more useful to implement and integrate, finding that “acceleration and in-depth as well as broad-based enrichment

opportunities are all valuable for the gifted”(VanTassel-Baska, 1986). However, Leavitt (2017) argues that acceleration may cause some gifted students to feel distressed because they lack the necessary life experiences to comprehend certain intellectual concepts, even if they are cognitively advanced. A way that those needs could be met is choosing an appropriately challenging level for their studies, for example High Level in IB Diploma Programme or Advanced Placement (AP) and they are popular choices among gifted students (Vanderbrook, 2006; Hertberg-Davis & Callahan, 2008). In the Diploma Programme of International Baccalaureate students are required to choose six subjects and they can decide the level: Standard (SL) or High level (HL). Higher level means more teaching hours (240 periods instead of 150), content is studied in greater depth and significant qualitative and quantitative work is required for HL students. For example, in Language A HL students are expected to study two more literary works and to write an extra essay (IBO 2019, p.7). Therefore, high level subject could be a good fit for high achievers.

Joining the above information about high achievers and the benefits of collaborative learning discussed in the previous sections, it seems comprehensible to wonder if small groups are beneficial for high achievers in the same way they seem to be proven for other learners. In fact, Poupore (2016), investigating the group dynamics in L2 interactive tasks, states:

These benefits are in many ways dependent upon a well-functioning group environment with a positive socioemotional climate. When a small group of learners is assembled in a language learning task, an intangible group energy emerges that can either facilitate or impede the learning benefits that it may engender. (Poupore, 2016)

Besides, in Adams-Byers, Whitsell and Moon (2004) research, investigating the perceptions of gifted students about groups, the results were that talented students perceived homogenous grouping more positively with respect to academic outcomes.

So, is grouping with other talented students the best way of teaching outstanding students? According to Williams (2017), who conducted an extensive literature review on teaching practices for supporting the development of academic talent, the answer might be as simple as saying: “Decades of educational research have made it abundantly clear that the most

important contributor to academic talent development is *good teaching*” (Williams, 2017). For Williams (2017), the way teachers behave, their skills and attitudes, and the conditions they create for learning encourage, inspire and promote learning. It is especially important for a teacher working with outstanding students, to create a climate that resist complacency and provide continuous challenge. Hattie (2009) also insists on the flexibility of teachers and on appropriately challenging teaching. Adding that

The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occurs when teachers become learners of their own teaching and when students become their own teachers they exhibit the self-regulatory attributes that seem most desirable for learners: self-monitoring, self-evaluation, self-assessment, self-teaching. (Hattie, 2009)

Unfortunately, studies about outstanding students and group work are rarely focused on Secondary schools and on dynamics among this type of students and their peers. However, some researchers and educators support heterogeneous class groups (Davidson, Davidson and Vanderkam, 2004), while others (Gross, 2009; Heller & Schofield, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Rogers, 2007) consider mixed- ability groupings restricting development opportunities. According to Kerry and Kerry (2000) and O’Connell Schmakel (2008), academically talented students are more likely to report their school experience as being repetitive and easy. Under these circumstances, highly able students are likely to underachieve.

A different perspective is provided by Chiriac and Granström (2012), as they indicated that as a result of their research, high-ability students seem to benefit from providing elaborated responses to low-ability students who, in turn, receive instructions and valuable information in a language they are able to comprehend. Supposition can be made that the four common obstacles to collaboration identified by Healy, Doran, and McCutcheon (2018) can be valid also for outstanding students: students’ lack of collaborative skills, free-riding, competence status, and friendship.

2. Methods

The main purpose of this study was to obtain not only increased knowledge of how International Baccalaureate teachers assess individual learning occurring in group work, but also explore how teachers manage the emerging challenges, especially those related to the differentiation for high achieving students and to the language.

To obtain those information, data was collected using the technique of interviews.

10 teachers of different disciplines of IB curriculum were interviewed in May 2019 about their opinions and experiences using group work. A big part of the questions involved the perceived effectiveness and fairness of groupal assessments for advanced students and the role of the language.

In addition, because this study is part of the Secondary Teaching master research at Navarra University, this study followed the ethical guidelines suggested by Navarra University, for example, informed consent (the researcher provided the teachers with written information about the purpose and procedure of the study, and all the participants consented to participation) and anonymity (the researcher ensured the participants' statements could not be traced back to them).

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted on the collected data.

2.1 Context of the study

The 10 teachers who agreed to participate in the interview are all currently teaching at the IB Secondary School branch in a London school called “International Community School of London”²⁸, an International Baccalaureate World School situated in central London, United Kingdom.

Founded in 1979, the school offers all three IB programmes from the age of 3-18 years old since 2006, and it considers itself a “diverse community” having students belonging to over

²⁸ All the information reported can be read on the official URL of the school website is <http://icschool.co.uk/> (Retrieved on 19/05/2019)

65 different nationalities²⁹. Since 2017 the school became integrated to NACE group, a group of more than 50 international schools worldwide.

The Secondary school includes MYP and DP with 89 students in total.

The school counts with a Modern Languages Department made up by 5 teachers. All the language teachers have an extended experience in IB and in other national curriculums (French and British), all have between 7 and 25 years of teaching experience.

The languages offered are Spanish, French and Mandarin, all of them are taught following the guidelines of Language B curriculum (similar to Foreign Language/ Second Language curriculum in state schools). English is taught as Language A (first language: in this subject the focus is on the literature and high level language analysis) and Language B (same curriculum of a foreign language, for students who are not English native speakers). The school provides also English lessons (EAL) for students who are beginners in English.

The Language B curriculum is divided in High Level or Standard Level: students can opt for an advanced study of the foreign language (High Level or HL) or a normal paced one (Standard Level or SL).

Classes are in general quite small: the interviewer with the lower number of students had five students and teachers with the highest number of students declared about 50 students in total. In general, the rest of the teachers had a number of students varying from 6 to 30. One of the participants explained that also that number of students can change considerably during the school year, due to the inherent nature of an International School: “Because they come, they leave during the year, it is a shame, but normal in International Schools” (T3)³⁰.

During the all staff meeting of the 8th of May, all the staff of the school was informed that this study was taking place and its purpose, they were as well informed that the participation was on volunteer bases and not compensated.

The 10 participants (5 female and 5 male teachers) all share an extensive teaching experience, ranging from a teacher with 7 years of teaching experience (T4) to a teacher with 37 years of experience (T5). The rest of the teachers had more than 10 years of teaching experience

²⁹ For this information about the school: the section “About” of the school website <https://icschool.co.uk/about> has been consulted. (Retrieved on 19/05/2019)

³⁰ T3 means he was the third interviewed teacher.

(between 11 and 21 years). Except for T6, who has only taught IB curriculum for 12 years in all his teaching career, they all started their teaching path in different school systems before approaching to the IB. In fact all the interviewees, although declaring a long teaching career, indicated their experience teaching in an International Baccalaureate school between 2 and 12 years. The majority of participants are currently³¹ teaching at both Lower and Upper Secondary School: at Middle Years and Diploma level (MYP and DP), while T1 only teaches MYP and two teachers (T7 and T9) working only at Diploma level. Besides, 8 out of 10 teachers agreed to answer the optional question about their subject, providing a better understanding and contextualisation for their following answers.

Half of the interviewed teachers are teaching linguistic disciplines (English as Language A, English EAL³² or Modern Foreign Languages as Language B) and half of them from non-linguistic disciplines. (However, due to the multilingual nature of IB classrooms³³, IB organization states that “Every DP teacher is a language teacher”³⁴ (IBO, 2015). In this study interviewed teachers are subject specialists of: EAL (*English as an Additional Language*), Individuals and societies, French and Spanish, English as Language B, Maths (two teachers), Film, and English Language and literature (Language A).

³¹ During the school year 2018/2019.

³² EAL stands for *English as an Additional Language*. It is “the teaching of English to people who live in an English-speaking country, but whose first language is not English” according to Longman (2017).

³³ In the Language policy of the Secondary school it is clearly stated that “Many of our young students at International Community School could be called ‘global nomads’”, ICS Secondary Language Policy, retrieved at <https://icschool.co.uk/about-ics/category/policies-guides-and-reports>, on 20 May 2019.

³⁴ “Multilingual classrooms are fast becoming the norm, with students having increasingly diverse language profiles. All DP teachers need to be able to build on these profiles, understand how their diversity is a potential resource for learning, and develop every student’s academic language”. IBO (2015) “Every DP teacher is a language teacher”. Retrieved from URL:

https://xmltwo.ibo.org/publications/DP/Group0/d_0_dpatl_gui_1502_1/static/dpatl/guide-every-dp-teacher-is-a-language-teacher.html (18 May 2019)

2. 2 Interviews

Question wording of the interview was prepared following the indications of Harrison (2017) *Questionnaire Design Tip Sheet*. (See “Appendix I” for the full list of questions). Therefore: questions were ordered in a way to minimize the impact of previous answers on the following by starting with general introductory questions easy to answer and providing a title to the different sections (*Demographics, Assessment and Talented students*). Besides, questions using leading, emotional, or evocative language were avoided (for example in question 18 “*What could you have done differently?*” instead of asking “*What went wrong?*”) as well as technical terms (*group work* was used throughout the questionnaire, instead of “*collaborative work*”, “*cooperative learning*” etc. Additionally, in question 1.a the phrase “Can you think of any *exceeding expectations* or being *particularly brilliant?*” was preferred to less transparent, more controversial and less universally understandable terms such as *advanced* or *gifted*³⁵). Moreover, in order to prevent avoidance of the open-ended questions, it was asked to answer orally in the meanwhile the interviewer was recording the answer. Also for multiple choice questions that were written, participants were always given the option of answering orally and provide more context and explanation for their choice.

Attitude questions (for example n. 8 “*How would you define the outcome of that activity? (1 : below expectations - 7: exceeding expectations)*” and n. 13 “*Thinking of that project/ assessment, you think it was successful (1 - some degree of failure - 7 extremely successful)*”) were given a scale of 7 points to improve the precision of the data and unambiguous labelling was provided. For multiple choice questions, in order to avoid the *recency effect* (respondents tend to choose the first answer, Harrison 2017) that may occur when questions are read, questions were not only read but also a copy of the questionnaire was always left in front of the respondent for him/her to read and it was clearly indicated that the items were placed in alphabetical order (therefore, random). Participants were also encouraged to take their time to re-read the question and when preferred they could reply orally.

³⁵ Although the controversial term “gifted” induce to caution especially when talking to students, due to the risk of labelling, as indicated by Keller and Hany in Heller, K. A., & Hany, E. (2004). Identification of gifted and talented students. *Psychology Science*, 46(3), 302-323.

In order to maximise the number of participants and not too heavily interfere with their workload, questionnaire was kept short: 36 questions and all of teachers taking part were previously informed by email and in the staff meeting that it would have taken between 20 and 30 minutes to complete.

Before taking part in the interview, interviewees were asked to read a statement about purpose and confidentiality of the research. In the statement it was clearly indicated that

taking part in this survey is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You can decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions. If you decide to take part, you are also free to stop at any time. (Appendix I)

At the end of the paper participants had to acknowledge their consent by selecting the box ‘Yes, I agree to participate’ if they wanted to continue. By doing that they were also indicating that they understand the information provided and agreed to participate³⁶.

Interviews were conducted individually, in quiet classrooms or teachers offices inside the school ICS of London, in the range of days between the 8th and 15th of May 2019. All the interviews were conducted in English, although it is not the first language of the interviewer nor of some of the teachers. However, being the working language³⁷ of the school and the language of this study, none of the participants expressed concern about this potential issue and all were comfortable answering and providing example or further explanations for unclear statements.

Participants were all assigned a protocol number³⁸ at the beginning of the interview and given the choice to decide if answering questions that could potentially identify them as n. 4.b “*What is your subject?*” However, in order to refer to the informants in an easier way, the protocol number assigned to them at the interview is switched to a shorter code: T1, T2 etc (T stands for Teacher).

³⁶ Full statement is provided at the end of this study on the “Appendix I” section.

³⁷ As stated in the Language Policy of the school, ICS Secondary Language Policy, retrieved at <https://icschool.co.uk/about-ics/category/policies-guides-and-reports> , on 20 May 2019.

³⁸ The protocol number was assigned according to the order of the interview, as it follows: number of the interview in that day, followed by the number of the days of the beginning of the interviews and the date. For example : 01.01.11.05.2019 means it is the interview number 1 of the interviews day number , happening in the date 11 May 2019.

Protocol Number	Code
01.01.08.05.2019	T1
01.02.10.05.2019	T2
02.02.08.05.2019	T3
01.03.13.05.2019	T4
01.04.14.05.2019	T5
02.04.14.05.2019	T6
03.04.14.05.2019	T7
01.05.15.05.2019	T8
02.05.15.05.2019	T9
03.05.15.05.2019	T10

The questions were informed by previous studies undertaken by Gillies and Boyle (2010), Chiriac and Granström (2012), Baines, Blatchford, and Kutnick (2008), Gillies (2008) and Gillies and Boyle (2006) that indicated that teachers (and students) did experience difficulties implementing cooperative learning.

In particular, the items in question n 15 (“Possible obstacles you find when planning group activities”) are the “possible obstacles” taken from the ones identified by Australian teachers in a similar study by Gillies and Boyle (2010).

For question n 16 (“*When doing group activities as part of an assessment what is your biggest concern?*”) the list of items/concerns was taken from the “problems” identified by Swedish teachers and students when experiencing group work, in a similar research conducted by Chiriac and Granström (2012). In their findings, the aspects and subcategories promoting and inhibiting high-quality group according to teachers and students were especially: complain, conflict, content, focus, group composition, group size, language, location, participation, performance, responsibility role of the teacher, task, time, transparency (Chiriac & Granström, 2012).

For the questions related to identification of talented/ gifted/ high achieving students, the reference was Heller and Hany (2004) and the items mentioned are part of their model³⁹: the teacher's checklist for intellectual giftedness proposed by them has been entirely repeated here in questions 1.b ("According to you, that student is: *(1 very high, 2 average, 3 poor)*") as well as the teacher's checklist for creative giftedness 1.c ("Which of these dimensions apply to him/her? *(1 very high, 2 average, 3 poor)*").

In the questionnaire used for this study, there is a particular interest in how teachers dealt with the challenges experienced when using group work in the IB class (if any), especially when high achieving students and linguistic aspects are involved, as this information is relevant to teachers' decisions to either implement or not implement this pedagogical approach in their classrooms and to seek for further training.

Each interview was fully transcribed and checked for accuracy by the author.

The transcribed interviews allowed to identify recurring regularities in the data that could be used to identify meaningful categories (Guba, 1978). Coding and recoding took place when the author reviewed and revised the data to ensure that the identified themes or categories were representative of the interview data.

2. 3 Data analysis

To analyse the interview data a qualitative approach⁴⁰ was used. The author read all the transcripts several times to gain an overview of the data. During the readings, notes were made along with possible emerging themes, following the indication of Maguire and Delahunt (2017).

³⁹ Heller, K. A., & Hany, E. (2004). Identification of gifted and talented students. *Psychology Science*, 46(3), 302-323.

⁴⁰ Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (2012). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. New Brunswick, NJ: AldineTransaction.

3. Findings

In this section, the major findings of this study are highlighted and limitations and areas for future research are discussed.

The 10 participants come from different backgrounds and had different experiences, therefore their teaching styles vary: 3 of them (T1, T6 and T9) declared that most⁴¹ of their habitual lessons is group work, three other teachers (T2, T4 and T7) said that their lessons are mostly individual and the rest said that “it depends” on the lesson and it is a mix of individual, pair and group activities. It is also true that due to multiple factors like the small size of the school and the optional nature of some subjects, using individual, pair or group work is not always a teacher’s free choice. As an example, T3 explained: “It depends, if it is one-to-one, independent work is required, if we have more than 2 students we try to make sure there is some interaction. Some lessons we want them to work more individually, some to share information” (T3).

Although random, due to the voluntary nature of the choice of participants, there is a fortunate circumstance: all the teachers involved declared not only to regularly use group activities but also having used them recently in their lessons. This is evidenced by the fact that three of them (T7, T8 and T10) reported having done a group activity the same day of the interview, three other teachers (T2, T5 and T6) the day before, three of them (T1, T3 and T9) that week, and only one saying (T4) “a couple of weeks” before the interview.

Besides, the total of the participants declared they would like to do “more” group work in their classes than they do now, and most of them have a positive attitude towards group work, like T2 saying that “It promotes interpersonal skills, empathy, challenge”.

⁴¹ “Most” was defined as: more than 50% of the lesson. Question 5 of Appendix I.

3.1 Teachers perceptions on Group work in International Baccalaureate (IB)

All the teachers taking part to this study had International Baccalaureate teaching experience for several years: the least experienced in IB declared 2 years of experience (T2 and T4) while the most experienced 12 years (T5 and T6).

When explicitly asked about their opinions on using group work in class and the IB curriculum, the most common answers were “encouraged” and “positive”. Furthermore, all the teachers opinions indicated that the International Baccalaureate “lends itself to group work” and to create “positive group experiences” (T9). T8 also declared that promoting group work is good for IB: “I think as the world is going, I feel very happy to use group work, people need to collaborate, and should be encouraged.” The only doubtful voice was T4, the only teacher, though stating that group work in the IB is “perfectly doable”, saying that there is “Anything of IB particularly against any other system” (T4).

On the other side, when asked about their concerns when using group work, most of the teachers expressed discomfort about the pressure of the IB curriculum, seen as a constraint for two main reasons. The first being that the students will be assessed individually at the end of their IB school career (at the end of the second year of the Diploma⁴², with an official exam whose external grade will determine their chances to pursue the career they are aspiring to, gaining them access a prestigious university or not) and the second one being the potential contradiction between promotion of group work and collaboration for informal assessment and the individual nature of formal assessments, especially at Diploma level. T7 summarises that issue by saying: “In the end they can’t be assessed as a group” (T7).

In fact, three teachers (T5, T6 and T10) in particular talked about the lack of clear criteria and rubrics for assessing students when they do group work in their subjects.

T5 expressed concerns about the lack of criteria in her subject, as resulting easily in extra planning time: “IB does not have many rubrics for group work assessments, so I have been creating a lot. [It is] time consuming but I want students to be engaged”, T6 and T10 clearly pointed out the same issue: “In English [it] is quite difficult to assess the group, and you end

⁴² More information on assessment in International Baccalaureate are at the section “Group work in International Baccalaureate”, in the first chapter of this study.

up assessing individually” (T10) and “IB definitely promotes group work for discovering learning and ATL⁴³. It allows teachers to informal assessments, however the IB curriculum don’t support group work for summative and formal assessment in maths” (T6).

It is worth mentioning that the total of the participants declared they would like to do “more” group work in their classes than they do now. Interestingly, when asked what prevents them from implementing it, four teachers out of ten indicated that the “curriculum pressure” is an *obstacle*⁴⁴ to their willingness of doing *more* group activities in class.

3.2 Teachers perceptions: Group work and the language

Some of the interviewed teachers were language teachers, therefore they provided a more grounded explanation for their choices about when and how to use group work in their classes, mostly explained with the communicative method, (illustrated in the first chapter of this study), in which group tasks are seen as a way to increase speaking production time.

Nevertheless, all the teachers, even the ones with non-linguistic subjects, provided answers showing that they have reflected upon the linguistic aspect when setting group activities and they have considered it crucial for a successful group work. This awareness is probably due to the nature of the International School, where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds⁴⁵.

The interviewees were all concerned about the linguistic differences and abilities among their students, and they had different strategies in place to overcome this difficulty and improve the communication during group work.

In fact, T2 frankly stated that “It is very important [that] they can communicate amongst their peers, if they can’t do that it’s a mess”, T7 said that there is “confusion [when] a group is not

⁴³ ATL stands for Approaches to Learning.

⁴⁴ “*Obstacle*” was the word used in the question 15 of Appendix I: “Possible obstacles you find when planning group activities [...]”.

⁴⁵ ““Every DP teacher is a language teacher”, IBO (2015) see the section “Interviews” of this study.

able to communicate” and T8 also recognised that “When students are weak in a language it could be a barrier” (T8).

In general, all the participants expressed concerns on the linguistic abilities of learners and frequent answers included concepts related to the students feelings and impact on their personalities using words like *pace*, *confidence* and *embarrassment*.

As language is part of the delicate and complex construction of an identity, all the teachers seemed to be aware that they have to be sensitive and their role is to ensure that the different linguistic abilities do not become a barrier in such a fragile age.

They all expressed doubts and opinions on how to overcome the linguistic differences and heterogenous levels in the classroom, which are the norm in international schools, showing sensitiveness towards the feelings of less competent students.

In fact, T6 explicitly talked about students with “no confidence in English” who are also shy and potentially embarrassed for their lack of language knowledge. In the case of those students

“it can be difficult in their confidence, this is when a teacher should set a lesson to give the target language and vocabulary to scaffold those students needs and group them with students who are more willing to help and not to embarrass them” (T6).

Moreover, T5 introduced the idea of “dominant students” who speak very well the language because they are native and tend to prevaricate non-natives. In a group situation among peers it can be difficult to detect who is always speaking and how to encourage those who are not. Besides, T5 interestingly added the consideration that classmates tend not to be very patient: “students who are dominant tend to be overtaking the others, [...] and not having the patience the teachers might have with them” (T5).

Differences in language levels can result in a difference of pace among students, generating pressure and defense mechanism like resignation or low esteem on the students with lower abilities, as T3 states: “sometimes they do not work at the same pace, if they go too fast, the low achievers will think it is too fast“. T4 also indicates that “someone will take over, and the other will be too happy to leave things and not take part.”

Talking about the different strategies in place, teachers talked about a mindful group composition and extra help provided beforehand by the teachers for students with lower linguistic abilities. T5 and T8 said that they tried to pair students with the same native language in order to facilitate translation of concepts, while T6 when talking about students with “no confidence in English” said that group work is beneficial as “students of different language abilities can help each other” and also that the teacher should scaffold and provide extra help with the key-vocabulary students do not know, in order to prevent embarrassment. Most of the interviewed teachers used words related to the semantic field of “communication” when talking about the benefits of group work.

In fact, they all highlighted the importance of communication in order to complete a task in group. T4 also stated that group work “should allow them to become better communicators” and T1 considered interaction crucial for improving linguistic competencies: “For learning a language you need communication, you cannot communicate by yourself. Reading, translating are individual” (T1).

When specifically talking about the usefulness of group work for learning a language, language teachers had clearly more to say, even though they had different opinions.

For example, T1 enthusiastically pointed out the many reasons why group work is beneficial when studying a foreign language: it helps the teacher to reduce Teacher Talking Time, allowing the students to speak more, moreover students have to rephrase and use the language in order to give each other instruction and even for students with special needs, group work is helpful as they can increase their confidence.

“I love group work, they develop their independence, my Teacher Talking Time is minimal, they have to give each other instruction, it is mainly them who do the production. Benefits are for all the involved [students], unless they have severe SEN⁴⁶, but even the SEN can improve a lot: feeling comfortable make them feel more confident” (T1).

However, other interviewed language teachers had more cautious opinions. T3 recognised the value of group work in the language learning process, “It can buzz some students, give them some leadership and build confidence, a different way to approach the requirements” but also

⁴⁶ SEN stands for Special Education Needs.

highlighted the challenges of fitting group work in a tight time frame and properly addressing different pace occurring when two or more different language levels are present in the class (it “can be sometimes time consuming, sometimes they do not work at the same pace, if they go too fast, the low achievers will think it is too fast”, T3 and “when you plan group work it requires more time than other lessons”, T6). While T4 and T5 admitted that even if second language teachers tend to think group work is extremely beneficial for all language learners profiles, they think that for lower level students group work can be an excuse for hiding and doing less. ”I would like to think they found it useful, but they get frustrated and they can also stop and lay back doing nothing” (T4) and

“The lower ability students, try not to be too involved and be ok with [what] the others are saying, so when monitoring group work I make sure they are bringing something on their table. Some of them feel overwhelmed, because everybody else knows more. So I have to give them encouragement” (T5).

3.3 Teachers perceptions on Group work and assessment

All the teachers involved in this study answered positively to the question “Have you ever used group work as part of an assessment?”.

Among them, there were different methods for grading: only two teachers graded the obtained results with a group grade, while all the others said the grades were individual or a mix of group and individual grades.

T1 explicitly indicated that the grade for that group assessment was composed of four criteria, one was “collaboration” and was assigned to the group, while the other three criteria were for the individual students results.

T6 explained that he found difficult to identify the individual part in a group task and that he would have used more group assessment if it was allowed by IB, highlighting a change in the curriculum about that: “The only concern is because MYP and DP have very strict rubrics on how to do an assessment, if you do group work [it] will be more difficult to differentiate what they have produced individually and that everybody is assessed according to the same standards. In the former MYP it was possible to do project learning, they were assigned a specific role and they have to produce an assessment.”

It seems that most of the activities proposed by the teachers for a group assessment involved a final performance or a final product to be displayed and shown to others: presentation (T1 and T10), debate (T3 and T5), realization of a film (T9), performance (T7)...

The large majority of the teachers seem to be satisfied with the outcome, with three out of ten assigning seven points on a scale from 1 to 7 (1 being the most negative and 7 being the most positive) and the rest of teachers rated 5. Only one teacher gave 3 to that assessment experience (“In all honesty, about 3, it was to get through the speaking assessment very quickly. My Head of Department was doing it in her previous school, [it was a department strategy], [but] I felt as a teacher I could not assess them properly”, T4).

(T3 also emphasized that the perception of the result could be influenced by the small class size, that prevent some extension of the activities like competition:

I would say 5, for a 7 I would have put it earlier, in a class of 20 students we would have worked in group of 5. We would have done a competition, maybe with a creative writing, and at the end [we would have said] who have done the best. So, yes, it was good, but the nature of it...). (T3)

It is interesting to notice that almost all the group assessments considered successful by the teachers consisted in presenting a content already studied and developed in class, in a different, often more creative, new form.

For example, T10 described a group activity done for “checking if they actually read a book” in which they had to present those books to younger students. T10 was particularly impressed by the positive results and the commitment shown by the students in that particular project:

[I liked] the way it went in a direction I was not thinking in the beginning, it was incredibly creative, the students [were] really enjoying, they were investing a lot of extra time in their project, they loved that. I made them to show it to younger students, it was a nice way to have students from different ages all together. (T10)

Another useful strategy is assigning different “roles”, that is used by T9.

T9 explained that in his subject students need to be able to make a film. For doing so, they have to pick a role: director, cinematographer, screenwriter and editor. “Two people can’t be in the same role. and they have to work [all] their roles during the two years” (T9). Also for

T4 roles could help to improve the group work practice: “I suppose I could have given specific roles”.

However, “roles” do not solve all the problems, as they do not prevent outstanding student feeling frustration: “I often found they get a bit frustrated, if they really want to do well, [if they are] with the people [that] do not put that much effort” (T9).

In general, group assessment seems to be controversial for the interviewed teachers as group work is a requirement for the curriculum but there are not clear criteria on how to assess (“IB does not have many rubrics for group work assessments, so I have been creating a lot”, T5; “In English [it] is quite difficult to assess the group, and you end up assessing individually”, T10) and both teachers and students know that “in the end they can’t be assessed as a group” (T7) because of the individual nature of the high selective and rigorous final exam the IB Diploma students will sit. As T6 and T4 said:

“MYP and DP have very strict rubrics on how to do an assessment, if you do group work will be more difficult to differentiate what they have produced individually and that everybody is assessed according to the same standards”. (T6)

And “At the DP level, we are preparing them for an exam, I think you want to work with them individually, because they are going to take an individual exam”, T4).

However, teachers have shown creative strategies and planning in order to overcome the difficulties, like preparing sophisticated rubrics, assigning roles, organizing an audience.

3.3.1 Teachers perceptions on Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is another focal point for all the interviewees, in which teachers beliefs, curriculum requirements and teachers practice do not always align.

The entire group of participants answered *yes* to the question “Have you ever tried peer - assessment?”.

The vast majority commented that peer assessment is useful and beneficial when students are trained for it with clear criteria, and have been provided a checklist. (“It works well, they give good feedback if they have been trained doing that and have the rubrics”, T5).

Some teachers highlighted the benefits of using it: students can see what they could have done (T8 and T9), they can engage more in other students' performances (T1) and it seems to provide objectivity as peer assessment "takes away the teacher's opinion" (T7 and T3), avoiding the feeling of not "being liked by the teacher" ("especially for students who think they are not liked by the teacher, they can see it is not that, it is that they are not meeting the requirements", T3).

T8 also comments that it helps the students to understand how the others are doing: "they need to check what others have said in that particular question, and realise the mistakes others are making". T2, although considering peer assessment useful, provides a different perspective, noticing that students are not always reliable when they provide feedback to each other as they "can often be honest [and they] can often be more critical" (T2).

On the other hand, some teachers are not fully convinced of the value of peer assessment, as they noticed that students tend to prefer the opinion of the teacher over the peers.

T6, in fact, said that:

"[it] depends on the age group and what is the purpose, if it is meaningful it can be effective, otherwise it is always a task that need me to solve it. With the younger ones it is effective, [it helps] reflecting on their work. The older ones prefer [the teacher]".
(T6)

Language teachers T4 and T10 were also concerned about the difficulty of relying on students for correcting features of a language they do not master completely. In fact, T4 said: "In languages it is difficult to recognise errors, in some classes it can be problematic, [for]the strongest [student it] can be useful, but not for the others" and T10:

"I don't think it particularly work for English, the marking of English is quite subjective, and open to interpretation (for example "Sophistication"). I don't think students will make justice". (T10)

3.4 Teachers perceptions on Group work and high achieving students

When talking about outstanding students working in groups, the interviewed teachers had very different opinions, with some of the teachers explicitly admitting that group work is not beneficial for that type of students (T2 and T5).

Recurrent utterances included terms in the semantic field of “leadership” (T1, T3, T5, T7), the expressions “end up doing most of the job” (T2, T8) and “feel frustrated” (T4, T9) were frequent along with the fact that they should “not know” they are considered the most capable (T6 and T10).

In general, teachers admit that involving outstanding students in group work is not an easy task as they often feel frustrated when working in mixed ability groups. For this reason, the interviewed teachers employ different strategies to prevent or minimise that feeling.

The vast majority of the participant teachers think group work is still a learning experience for the outstanding students, even if they admit this type of students do not gain much academically, as T6 states: “We still focus on taking other people's perspectives, to negotiate, problem solving. They still learn a lot but not necessarily academic skills”.

Some of the used strategies appear to be: homogeneous ability groups (T10 and T4, “Grouping them by abilities is super useful for helping and focusing on them”, T4), using that student as an assistant for the teacher (T1) or a model for other students (T3), differentiation and extension (T1, T2, T3 and T8), asking what that student prefers (T9) and assigning a leadership role (T6 and T7).

However, taking a closer look to all these strategies, there seems to be a mismatch between what is said it could be beneficial and past or other teachers’ experiences.

For example, the same ability grouping can be helpful, however T5 shared a difficult past experience about pairing two outstanding students: “most of the time they make it work, but once they kept arguing because they both wanted to be right” (T5).

It is interesting to notice that when asked about composing groups in an ideal class of 12 students with 4 high achievers, 4 standard abilities and 4 with low abilities, “mix” was the word most of the teachers used (6 of 10 teachers), with some relevant reasons like:

The [lower ability student] will be pulled up and learn a way of thinking that characterizes the [high achiever]. The [high achievers] will clarify their thoughts by reflecting. (T6)

However, when asked what they think works better for a specific outstanding student in their classes, answers changed. Five out of eight teachers⁴⁷ considered assigning that student a different task (T1, T2, T3, T8) or a leader role (T5). T6 said that in his subject (maths) outstanding students tend to work better alone⁴⁸ and in the past he used to have a specific one-to-one program for them. While T8 said this student will work better with similar ability peers. Finally, T9 had a different approach: asking who they want to work with, adding that usually they work better with the preferred peers.

Another common mentioned strategy is using that student as an “assistant”(T1) or a “model”(T3) for the peers. Although taking into account the need for differentiation and different skills, it might become a burden for the teacher as it requires extra planning, like T2 indicated: “I have to prepare suitable learning resources”. This is also due to the fact that outstanding students might need extra resources or extension activities for finishing earlier than the rest: “There is one student with stronger abilities and she was the example for the work of the others, she finished first and then I checked her work” (T3).

Difficulties seem to arise because of the limits given by group work, as T2 said: “Perhaps they are quite limited in what they could do. There is a constraint, often talented students do not like that constraint”.

T10 added that group composition is crucial, to avoid dominance and laziness: “Generally I tend to group [high achievers] in similar group, simply because [the high achiever] tends to do everything and [the lower ability student] to sit back”.

Identifying the needs of outstanding students appears to be difficult, maybe also because teachers show different opinions on “who” those talented students are. When asked if in their

⁴⁷ Two teachers declared not having any outstanding student in the current year, this is the reason the total in this case is eight and not ten.

⁴⁸ T6 was explicitly referring to some specific students he worked with in the past that had difficulties in behaviour and communication because of autism. In those cases, the teacher referred having worked a specific individual program with them as they did not benefit from being with peers when doing academically relevant tasks. “In that case [a student in the past] he was in the autistic spectrum, we gave them a specific one - to -one program, and followed their interest, to stretch their knowledge. They often tend to struggle in groups or in a classroom, they found difficult to collaborate in groups” (T6).

classes there were any in the current year, three teachers out of ten said “no” while the other seven teachers provided the initial for the students they thought were particularly brilliant and none was matching (in a small school of only 89 students, this is a particularly impressive data).

Finally, it is also true that we cannot assume all the talented students prefer working by themselves, as talent can be on different aspects of the personalities. In fact, T7 mentioned that her “particularly brilliant student” was “very good socially” and “she enjoys interacting with others, although she is very focused, and creates work independently very well, she enjoys exploring and sparkling ideas” (T7), therefore a specific strategy for that student when working in group was not a perceived need.

3.5 Unexpected findings

Although the main focus of this study was to explore teaching practices and teachers’ opinions when using group work with outstanding students, other topics emerged from the interviews that are worthy to be mentioned as could propel new studies or modify teaching practices: the “average” students, the conflict and friendship issue when composing groups, the reflection of negative experience as a student in teachers’ practices, the need for control of teachers and teachers training on group work.

One of the main lateral topics emerged in the participants interviews is the low knowledge of “average students”. While we were focusing on “brilliant”, “talented” and “outstanding” students in the interviews versus the lower ability students, some of the participants expressed concerns about the considered “standard student”. In fact, when asked how to group an ideal class of 12 students in which 4 were outstanding, 4 were standard and 4 with low abilities, teachers seem to have little idea on how to serve better the middle section of the class. T1 clearly stated: “We don’t know all their abilities”.

Trully, it seems that this category of students are rarely looked after in detail. Taking their perspective, T8 said: “They will think: well I am less strong than this one, and stronger than the other, the weak one will mess up our results”. An interesting observation also came from T9, who described these students like the real “loose cannons” in group work:

They don’t think about the team, [they are] in the middle, they change quite frequently, the [high achievers] are always super, but the middle ones they decide every lesson if they want to focus or not. (T8)

The uncertainty about that profile of learners came out from teachers’ descriptions. For some teachers, standard students are proactive and willing to contribute, like T2: “They will want to think: How can I help, How can I get involved“. On the contrary, for other teachers they are eager to accept the leadership of the high achiever, as T3 stated: “the [high achiever] will be the leader telling them their strengths and everybody should be able to have a proper role in that. If they manage to reach the outcome, they will not feel inferior”. T5 was the most experienced teacher interviewed and said:

Usually [they] are quite ok at working with everybody, some are quite willing to help, some of them want to be taught. They end up being the average because they are not the strongest and not the weakest. (T5)

Declaring that we barely have a clear knowledge of who those students are, although we define them by who they are not. It seems worthy to investigate this aspect: who are the “standard” students? How can we design our group activities if we neglect what we think is the biggest portion of the class?

Another interesting topic was: conflict and friendship. Those two aspects emerged from the interviews as affecting the result of group work. Conflict was a focal point for 5 of 10

teachers involved in this study, who listed it as a “concern” preventing them from doing more group activities in class. T5, who was also the most experienced teacher taking part in the interviews, provided the following explanation: “With the class I am talking about there are issues with their friendship, now they have had some issues so they do not want to talk with each other” (T5). Besides, talking about past experiences with groups, she said that “there have been times [with] conflicts when I have thought that group composition could have been done better. But I also think they should be able to work together” (T5). Friendship⁴⁹ and conflict seem another aspect worth to be explored, especially for students going through the delicate age of teenagerhood when the social acceptance plays a crucial role.

Other interesting lateral observation we could draw from the interviews are the reasons teachers gave for being reluctant at using group work. One was the avoidance of group work because of past negative experiences of teachers when they were students. T4 said: “In my head more [group work] will be nice, I just wonder sometimes how effective they are and also I personally as a child did not enjoy working into groups”. In general, we can say that all teaching practices that are slightly deviant from the norm of the traditional frontal lesson might need to be approved first by our own experience as a student in order to be considered meaningful and effective for our students. It seems that as teachers we might need more training and to be proven wrong in order to experiment more or new dynamics in class. Another reason for avoiding group work that emerged from the interviews was the fear of “losing control” of the class. T10 admitted: “I am reluctant because of some students, they [...] finish [earlier], extra planning is involved, basically my own control on that” (T10). T7 also talked about the difficulty of letting the students explore new paths. When talking about what could be improved in group activities, she declared: “[Perhaps] Not trying to answer the question myself, sometimes it might be better to let them to explore” (T7).

⁴⁹ Foiley (2013), a work discussed in the first chapter of this study, expressed similar concerns, probably because both schools (International Community School of London and International School of Lausanne) share the nature of being small schools and International Baccalaureate: both aspects determining complex social relationships among students.

A last but important lateral observation is about teacher training, as the information collected using the questionnaire (about challenges experienced when using group work in the IB class, especially when high achieving students and linguistic aspects are involved) could be considered relevant to teachers' decisions to either implement or not implement this pedagogical approach in their classrooms and to seek for further training. Interviewed teachers had different opinions on their training about group work and talented students, although generally confident about being enough trained: two of them declared feeling “well trained”, while the vast majority said they feel “in between” among feeling prepared and needing further training. Only two of them ticked the box saying “not knowing how to approach a good strategy but not willing to take further training”.

This confidence called attention, as it was the last question of a questionnaire in which many verbal expressions of uncertainty (Auger and Roy, 2008) were used by all the participants while describing their practices and the effect they might have on students. “Probably/possibly” (5 times), “don’t know” (4 times), “could be/ maybe/ might/ perhaps/ chances are” (13 times) were recurrent along with expressions indicating willingness of improvement like “could have done...” (13 times) or “might be better”/ “would have worked better” (7 times).

3.6 Limitations

Some limitations of this study are: the voluntary nature of participants, the small size of the school and the possible “acquiescence bias” (Wagner, 2010) that could happen when interviewed people are questioned about their beliefs and opinions and they are lead to answer what they think the interviewer wants to hear. Participants were volunteers, therefore only a portion of the teaching staff of the school, so it is difficult to assume that all the school follows the same practices and it was impossible to conduct a quantitative analysis.

Class size concerns all the teachers and affects the planning of group work, in fact all the teachers referred to this issue in their answers, as for some of them, especially teachers with optional subjects like foreign languages, classes can be composed of just one student. Moreover, T1 and T3 talked explicitly of the difficulty of organising group work with a number of students that is constantly changing (different ages, maturity, language) and sometimes there is an even number.

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the teaching practices among IB teachers when using group work. The participants were 10 IB teachers who voluntarily answered a questionnaire about their experiences and opinions about group work. Interviews were conducted in the International Community School of London, in the Secondary school branch, in May 2019. The main focus was to explore how group work is used in different subjects in IB, how “outstanding” students respond to this type of task and if language plays a role.

The main findings from this study on teachers’ perceptions about group work in International Baccalaureate can be summarised as follows: a mismatch between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ actual practice related to the question whether group work is beneficial for talented students was found in this study.

Interviewed teachers seem to have a clear understanding of “why” group work is required, although with differences among disciplines and teachers attitudes (some embrace this practice more enthusiastically than others). All the participants are aware of the need to provide opportunities for students to collaborate, not only because it is a clear requirement of the International Baccalaureate curriculum but also because the future employment will expect students to be trained in collaboration and leadership.

However, many teachers have a less clear understanding of “who” they are involving in group works, therefore the “what” and “how” are affected.

When teachers were asked what their students would have thought of their group composition (group composition is considered a key point by most studies, for example by the mentioned⁵⁰ Dijkstra, Latijnhouwers, Norbart and Tio, 2016), few provided a clear answer. The participants tended to affirm that high achieving student would have felt “frustrated” because of the pressure of doing most of the work, while “low ability” students would probably expect the former to lead and take control and they would probably try not to get too involved, finally the “average” students would decide if committing or not.

⁵⁰ Detailed information on this study can be found in the first chapter, under the section “Group work and assessment”.

In such a depressing predicted scenario the easiest solution could be modifying the group composition, however most of the interviewed teachers firmly stick to “mixing the abilities”, as considered a good pedagogical practice. Many interviewed teachers reported in fact that high-ability students seem to benefit from providing elaborated responses to low-ability students who, in turn are taught in a simpler and different way, generally aligning with the findings of Chiriac and Granström (2012). However, many researchers⁵¹ like Gross, 2009; Heller and Schofield, 2008; Robinson, 2008 and Rogers, 2007 consider mixed- ability groupings restricting development opportunities.

These findings align with previous literature in the field. In fact, in a similar study already mentioned in the first chapter of this work, Frykedal and Chiriac (2011) explored the assessment of students' learning when working in groups, disclosing results that

teachers have difficulties in concretising and verbalising what and how they assess. The teachers also experienced uncertainty and contradictory demands concerning assessment of students in group work. (Frykedal and Chiriac 2011, p. 343)

Also attitudes towards peer assessment seem to align with previous relevant literature. Teachers taking part in this study confirm the findings of Peterson and Irving (2008) in which students of four Secondary schools in New Zealand declared to prefer and consider more legitimate the assessment coming from the teacher, indicating that students value their teachers grades and feedback more than their peers. It is also true that the interviewees show a high commitment in developing criteria and checklist to help students to assess their own work and peers work, as it is a useful tool for avoiding subjectivity and increasing awareness of students on what they are doing and how their classmates are responding to their same task. Besides, group work for second language acquisition is confirmed to be an extremely helpful tool, especially for the interaction and speaking increased time. On the other hand, it does not seem very useful for more reflective activities like reading and translating.

Finally, what is the answer to the question: “*Is group work effectively used in International Baccalaureate for outstanding students?*” based on the opinions provided by the teachers of International Community School of London?

⁵¹ All these studies are mentioned and explained in the section “Group work and high achieving students”, part of the first chapter of the present study.

The answer is complex, and should be divided into three different sections: what interviewed teachers think of outstanding students in general when working in groups, what teachers think of the outstanding students they know and what interviewed teachers consider “effective” for outstanding students.

First of all, we should answer “No”. This is explained by the fact that when asked about outstanding students in general, the vast majority of teachers had very negative opinions about them working in groups. In fact, two teachers out of ten clearly said that this type of students do not benefit from group work (T2, T6). Teachers also recognised outstanding students tend to feel “frustrated” (T4, T9), that they will end up doing most of the work (T2, T8) or be the dominant leaders (T1, T3 and T10) and take over (T5). Moreover, T5 said that in the past she had “issues with [high achievers] taking too seriously their leadership role” (T5).

On the other hand, when asked to reflect about a specific student during this current school year who teachers recognised as “brilliant”, teachers shared ideas on how to “effectively” make that specific student work in groups. For the large majority of the teachers that student will be treated “differently”: be the teacher assistant (T1), the model for the others (T3), have different task or at a higher level (T1, T2, T3, T8) or being asked who they will prefer to work with (T9). Thinking about these authentic classroom situations, the answer to the main question “*Is group work effectively used in International Baccalaureate for outstanding students?*” will be again “No”, because if the student is working differently with no or little collaboration involved and with a different expected outcome it can no longer be considered a “group” work.

Finally, we need to point out that interviewed teachers considered “leadership” as a valuable skill for the outstanding student. Therefore, as a possible answer to the main question of this study, we can add that group work could be *effectively* used in IB for outstanding students for improving their leadership skills.

Teachers agreed that leadership and collaboration will be useful skills in the future employment for the students, and being collaborative and capable to work in a team are also

important attributes of the profile of IB learners, although they are not strictly related to academic knowledge. However, it appears there are no clear criteria for teaching and evaluating leadership. In general, what is required or expected from a leader differs from the definitions interviewed teachers provided about what they have seen happening on a social level in group work where an outstanding student was involved: dominate, argue, end up doing most of the work, think they are better than the others... It might be a challenging but rewarding idea to train IB teachers to design and implement activities in which the outstanding student is not only told or expected to be “a leader” but perform tasks similar to those of a “project manager” at work. If International Baccalaureate manages to provide a clear definition of tasks for improving leadership and a precise indication on how to evaluate it, we could have an “effective” use of group work also for outstanding students. They will not improve a lot on a strictly academic point of view but develop an important social skill.

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that almost all the group assessments considered successful by the teachers consisted in presenting a content already studied and developed in class, in a new, often more creative, form. It seems that the best situation for group work is when students are not learning anything new, but just re-elaborating previous content. Positive results are also linked to the possibility to show that knowledge in public. A good practice could then be allocating group work at the end of a didactic unit, after the formal assessment, and make sure that the outstanding students can develop their leadership skills and are evaluated on them, while others re - organize the content they have learned.

In general, these findings show a complex scenario in which IB teachers have been reflecting over their own teaching practice and tend to plan accordingly. Most of the teachers seem conscious of the difficulties their students face when included in a group work. Although the teachers interviewed provided relevant and consistently reflected answers for explaining what and why they do in class, the study could be enlarged with more interviews and class observation. For further studies, it could also be interesting involving a larger school and asking the students (belonging to all the categories identified: the high achievers, the low abilities and the “standard”) their opinions about group work and how *effective* they consider it.

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Appendix I - Questionnaire used in the interviews

My name is Alessandra Rosina and I am a trainee teacher at the University of Navarra in Spain (UNAV). I am conducting a research study on the use of group work in the IB Programme and its impact on “talented” students, as part of my final dissertation for the Master in Secondary Teaching (*MUP: Máster en Profesorado de Educación secundaria obligatoria, Bachillerato, FP, enseñanza de idiomas*).

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to learn about how group work is used in different subjects in IB and how “talented” students respond to this type of task. I am asking you to take part because teacher feedback is critical.

Nothing in this survey will be used in any way to assess you as a teacher. The purpose of this survey is to learn more about group work and “talented” students.

Who is conducting this survey? This is an independent research study. It is being conducted by me, supported by Professor Breeze.

What I will ask you to do: If you agree to take this survey I will ask questions about your experiences teaching and your thoughts on the different aspects of grouping activities and their impact on “talented” students. This interview will take 20-30 minutes to complete.

Compensation: You will not be compensated for your participation in this survey. I will thank you, though, for taking the time to provide feedback. Your participation will be crucial for completing my research so results will be shared with you at the end of June if you wish so.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this survey is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You can decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions. If you decide to take part, you are also free to stop at any time.

Confidentiality: Your answers will be kept confidential. Any information provided will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored with a protocol number so that it is not possible to identify individual respondents.

If you have questions: If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact me at arosina@alumni.unav.es.

Statement of Consent: Please select ‘Yes, I agree to participate’ if you would like to continue with the survey. By continuing on with this survey you are also indicating that you understand the above information and agree to participate.

Yes, I agree to participate

No

Thank you!

Alessandra Rosina

Number of protocol: _____ Date: _____ Name (optional): _____

Demographics:

1. How long have you been teaching? ____
2. How long have you been teaching IB? ____
3. How many students do you have? ____
4. Do you mostly teach

MYP

DP

4. b (Optional) What is your subject? _____

5. Thinking of the current school year: do you define the activities in your lessons mostly*:(*mostly= more than 50% of your lessons. Items are in alphabetical order.)

groups

pairs

individual

whole class

lectio magistralis

6. Thinking of the current school year: the last time you used a group* activity in your class was...

--

**more than 2 students working together, could be anything from a single activity in a lesson to a full project.*

7. Could you describe briefly how many students were involved and what they were learning?

--

8. How would you define the outcome of that activity? (1 : below expectations - 7: exceeding expectations)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

9. What were your expectations?

--

Assessment

10. Have you ever used group work as part of an assessment?

Yes

No

11. If yes, how many students were in the groups?

--

12. Grades were:

Individual

Group

13. Thinking of that project/ assessment, you think it was successful:(1 - some degree of failure - 7 extremely successful)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

14. If possible would you do group activities in your classes:

more often

less often

15. Possible obstacles you find when planning group activities: (Items are in alphabetical order.)

curriculum pressures

range of students

environmental restrictions (time, furniture...)

16. When doing group activities as part of an assessment what is your biggest concern? {Put them in decrescent order starting from 1 (biggest concern). If some of these do not apply to you write 0. Items are in alphabetical order}

___ complain
 ___ conflict
 ___ content
 ___ focus
 ___ group composition

___ group size
 ___ language
 ___ location
 ___ participation
 ___ performance
 ___ responsibility

___ role of the teacher
 ___ task
 ___ time
 ___ transparency
 ___ _____

17. Thinking of a recent experience with group work, what was positive?

18. What could you have done differently?

19. Have you ever tried peer - assessment?

Yes

No

20. What is your opinion about it?

21. Given a class of 12 students in DP in your subject, 4 are high achievers/talented (H), 4 are average (M), 4 are low achievers (L): how could you group them? (ex: HHH, HMLL, LLLL, etc)

22. What will H students think of their team?

23. What will M students think of their team?

24. What would L think of their team?

25. Why would you group them in this way?

Talented students

Think about your students.

1.a Can you think of any exceeding expectations or being particularly brilliant? (If No, go to n.2)

Yes

No

1.a (o) . Can* you write the first letter of his/her name? (**Not** the surname)

* Optional. This might help the school to identify the student for further support but not relevant for the purpose of this research.

1. b According to you, that student is: (1 very high, 2 average, 3 poor)

	1	2	3
Logical / analytical thinking			
Abstract thinking			
Mathematical thinking			

Scientific / technical thinking			
Language skills (rich vocabulary, fluency of expression, talent for foreign languages)			
Learning ability (quick understanding, retentive memory, accurate reproduction, active learning)			
Powers of deduction, combination etc.			
Broad knowledge			
Consolidated special knowledge in one or more domains.			

1.c Which of these dimensions apply to him/her? (1 very high, 2 average, 3 poor)

	1	2	3
Curiosity, quest for knowledge			
Imagination, ability to think in alternatives			
Creative and inventive thinking			
Originality, search for extraordinary problem/task solutions			
Flexible thinking, spiritual agility, ability to consider a problem from various points of view			
Self-sufficiency, independence of thinking and opinion			
Interest-oriented, independent solving of problems			
Multiplicity of interests			
Stability of interests			

1.d When it comes to put that specific students in a group, what do you do?

1. e In your opinion, is group work for that student:

beneficial

not beneficial

1.f Why?

1.g How can this student show all his/ her potential in your subject?

2. Thinking about your career and talented students do you consider yourself:

- not knowing how to approach a good strategy but not willing to take further training
- somehow lacking of training, but willing to know more
- well prepared and trained
- _____

3. Thinking of the IB curriculum and evaluation system, how do you feel about using group work?

4. Regarding language competences, what are the pros and cons of using group work?

Any comment? (Optional)
