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PEER ASSESSMENT TO ENGAGE RELUCTANT STUDENTS IN  
GROUP WORK IN THE EFL CLASS

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## **PREFACE**

One of the problems teachers can face when involving students into group work is the reluctance of some students to participate in it. This flaw of group work can make this activity unattractive to both teachers and students who make most contributions to the work being done by a group.

The present thesis is aimed at the analysis of reasons that make students reluctant in the classroom and to reveal the potential of peer assessment activities to engage reluctant students in working in a group. The thesis considers whether the inclusion of assessed group tasks with the assessment being done not only by teacher but by peers as well can reinforce students' participation in group work assignments and change their attitude to group work as a form of cooperative study.

The research paper consists of four parts. The Introduction discusses the problem of having reluctant students in the classroom, reasons for this problem to occur in students' behaviour and the problem of getting reluctant students involved in group work. Also the introductory part presents peer assessment activities as one of possible solutions to the problem of engaging reluctant students into group work. Chapter I "Group Work And Peer-Assessment In The EFL Class" uncovers the pedagogical value of group work inclusion in class activities as well as one of the flaws of this activity— reluctance of students to participate in it. Also the chapter discusses the role of assessment in the students' learning process and it focuses in particular on one of its variations called peer assessment. In Chapter II "Peer-Assessment Implementation In Group Work in the EFL Class to Involve Reluctant Students" lesson plans and results of the experiment conducted among students are presented, depicted and evaluated. The Conclusion sums up the results of the research and comments on the hypothesis of the research.

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years teaching practices have changed significantly. Earlier the main focus was on the activities of teacher in the lesson, but nowadays teachers' role is to encourage participation, dialogue and interaction with course materials and with each other (Jaques 2000: 45). Encouraging participation is a challenging and often difficult task for teacher, because there are always students in the class who do not want to participate and struggle to avoid doing tasks assigned by teacher. Such students are usually called the reluctant ones.

### **Reluctant Students: Who are They?**

Reluctant students are the students who are “feeling or showing doubt about doing something; not willing or eager to do something” (Merriam-Webster Learner’s Dictionary 2015: line 1,2). But it does not always mean that reluctant students do nothing in the class. According to the definition of the word *reluctant* given in Today’s English Dictionary, students doing something reluctantly, they “do it, but are not happy about doing it” (1995: 681). Thus, reluctant students are not only the ones who skip participating in classwork, but also reluctant students are those who participate but not the way teacher expects them to do it or their participation is minimal and does not meet requirements.

Different authors have different opinions about the reasons affecting students’ behaviour in the lesson and making them being reluctant. One of the opinions is suggested by Asha Sharma in her article devoted to motivation of reluctant students in class. In her article about reluctant learners Sharma discusses the problem of students’ reluctance connecting it to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (2008: para 5). She reminds the basic principles which form the hierarchy and insists that only when the lower needs (physiological, safety, belonging and esteem needs) are satisfied the higher ones (self-actualization needs) become important. Students will not feel the need to achieve at school if their basic needs of good nutrition, health and emotional security are not satisfied. According to McLeod (2014: para 7), “every person is capable and has a desire to move up the hierarchy toward a level of self-actualization”. But the progress is often disrupted by failure to meet lower level needs. Different life experiences cause an individual to fluctuate between the hierarchy levels. Maslow’s theory is undeniable and it creates an idea that students become reluctant not because they just do not want to participate and learn, but

they have unsatisfied lower level needs, not all of which teacher can satisfy in class. The number of students in a public school class in Estonia is big, and tracing the needs of all students seems to be extremely difficult. Sharma (2008: para 21) insists that every teacher should understand the physical and emotional needs of every student and work out a strategy to motivate him/her. Also she supports this idea with the words Maria Montessori (as cited by Sharma *ibid*: para 21) once said: “If education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man’s future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual’s total development lags behind?” Thus, Sharma reminds the readers about the true contemporary teacher’s role in education, which does not only include the transfer of knowledge to students but also implies promoting individual’s development, guiding and assisting them in their pursue of getting knowledge and developing their skills. The phrase about the necessity to learn and fulfill the physical and emotional needs of every student may sound too unreal, because the number of students in class is usually big and to involve everyone is not always possible, but it should become every teacher’s goal, which will not be reached with every student, but at least teacher will try and maybe somewhere succeed.

The other author researching the reasons why some students are reluctant to learn is Nancy Protheroe. In her article “Motivating reluctant learners” (2004), Protheroe suggests focusing on the students’ self-efficacy when trying to cope with their reluctance. She insists that students’ beliefs in their capability to accomplish definite tasks- known as self-efficacy- directly affect their motivation to learn. According to Protheroe (2004: 47), “self-efficacy starts with students believing that what they are working on is meaningful...they need to know why what they are learning is important”. Thus, the teacher’s main task is to explain to students the relevance of their learning and show the importance of their participation in classroom activities. Protheroe lists the factors hindering students’ self-efficacy. They are lack of relevance (belief that school work is unimportant), fear of failure (students believe that it is safer not to try), peer concern (students trying to appear “cool” to their peers by not trying to learn), learning process (the learning pace is too difficult for them), lack of challenge (apathy from the assignments which are below their ability), emotional distress or expression of anger against the parental or teachers’ pressure (*ibid.*). Concluding her article, Protheroe suggests that in order to raise students’ self-efficacy teacher should explain the relevance of learning, involve students in the learning process

through allowing reasonable choices in assigned activities, help students set goals and always encourage reluctant students with congratulations, acknowledgements and non-evaluative responds (ibid.: 47-48). Reluctant students should not be left aside; they need to be actively engaged by instructional approaches designed to maximize the possibilities for engagement. Reluctant students should be challenged and supported; they need to feel safe enough in the classroom to take risks of participation. Also, Protheroe reminds that the reasons why a definite student is reluctant in lessons are often complex, and teachers need to consider not only the student in isolation but also the interaction between the student and the classroom or school environment, as it has a great influence on the students' attitude towards learning and school (ibid.: 48). The environment prevailing around students is of great importance that is why teachers should always try creating as positive atmosphere in the classroom as possible and making the relationships among students and teacher friendly and trustworthy. It is a great challenge for teacher to create a supporting and friendly environment in the classroom and not every teacher has enough inner abilities and character qualities that can help to succeed in creating such kind of environment. But even an attempt of teacher to do it deserves praise because good relationships and positiveness in the classroom can change not only students' attitudes towards school, learning or a definite subject, it can also change students' attitudes towards life itself.

Wilbert J. McKeachie and Marilla Svinicki (2006: 45) have also studied the reasons for reluctance to occur in students' behaviour and come to the conclusion that "most students are used to being passive recipients in class". They call such students in their article as nonparticipants. It is one of the states that reluctant students can present in the classroom. According to McKeachie and Svinicki, the reasons for nonparticipating in class activities are "boredom, lack of knowledge, general habits of passivity, cultural norms- but most compelling is a fear of being embarrassed" (ibid.:46). This embarrassment usually comes from fear of being wrong and being criticized by other students in class or teacher, and this can become a big barrier for a student to becoming an active participant in classwork. Also this embarrassment depends on how well students know each other and their relationships. The friendlier relationships are the more open students are in the classroom. McKeachie and Svinicki suggest getting acquainted as an aid for reducing the fear of embarrassment in students. They insist that once students understand that they are among their friends, they will risk expressing themselves without any fear of being criticized (ibid.). But making the atmosphere in class totally friendly is not always

possible. The relationships among students are usually already formed at the moment of coming to class, and it is not always possible to change or improve them. But still teacher can try doing it, because the benefit of improved class relationships is enormous and very influential. Also McKeachie and Svinicki suggest rewarding infrequent contributors at least with a smile; they are sure that such kind of reward helps encourage participation even if the contribution needs correction or development (ibid.). This reward system can work as a motivation tool in the hands of teacher, but only when properly implemented (its overuse can on the contrary have a negative effect). There are different techniques which different authors suggest to teachers for motivating their students to participate actively in class, but none of these techniques will turn every student into an active, verbal participant (McKeachie et al 2006: 48). Thus, there are students whose general habits of passivity do not respond to different techniques which teachers try using in order to overcome the reluctance problem in their classroom. Also, cultural norms or the lack of knowledge in addition to the habit of passivity can obstruct students from changing their behaviour in class. But this is not the reason for leaving nonparticipating students without any attention.

The number of reasons forcing students to become reluctant in class is very big. Having reluctant students in the classroom teacher does not usually have enough time or opportunity to analyse students' involvement and establish the reasons that make students to behave this way. Revealing the reasons for students being reluctant implies very profound knowledge of psychology, that is why teachers usually are not qualified enough to make conclusions about inner obstacles that obstruct students from being active participants in the learning environment. But what every teacher can do is to try using different methods and techniques for increasing students' motivation and as a consequence their involvement in classroom activities.

### **Group Work Value in Class, its Advantages and Disadvantages**

To be intrinsically motivated students need to be interested not only in the subject they are studying but in the activities they are presented as well (Harmer 2001: 53). But those activities should not be only interesting; they should also be practical and educational. Jaques (2000:54) has defined several principles of good practice, and according to him the main principle is encouraging cooperation among students in the classroom and active learning. He insists that good learning is considered to be better when being collaborative and social, rather than competitive and isolated. Also he adds that sharing one's own ideas



and responding to other's reactions improves thinking and deepens understanding (ibid.). The National Curriculum of Estonia also highlights the importance of developing in students of upper-secondary school cooperation skills (National Curriculum 2011: 2, para 5). The tasks designed for developing independent learning should necessarily be accompanied by the tasks based on cooperation and communication. Group work has a great potential in encouraging this cooperation among students and making learning collaborative and social. But it is important to mention that cooperation means each and every member of the group taking a part and sharing responsibility for its success (Jaques et al 2007: 2). Otherwise the pedagogical value of this activity can be lost.

As any other classroom activity group work does not only have advantages, disadvantages also exist in such kind of activity. One of them is the preference of separate students to work individually (Weimer 2008: para 2). But the modern world dictates its tendencies, where the prevailing number of professions requires good experience in working in groups. Thus, it is important to start developing this skill already at school level, preparing students for studying in college and for future work, where group work also prevails. The other disadvantage of group work is that "someone always winds up doing the majority of the work" (Hooker 2014: para 3). Students who want a better grade do the majority of work, and the reluctant ones just use those people for getting a good grade. And even when a group work activity is not planned to be assessed, reluctant students can use more diligent students to avoid working and shift all responsibility to the last ones. Thus, group work allows students to choose their level of participation, making some individuals completely passive (Harmer 2001: 117).

### **Peer Assessment to Engage Students into Learning**

Group work has a great pedagogical value only in case if everyone is actively participating. But it is a rather difficult task for teacher to involve every student into a group activity and to be sure that everyone is taking an active part in a group assignment. Reluctant students need to be challenged and actively engaged by different teaching methods and techniques designed to maximize desire and motivation for engagement. One of such techniques in group work can become grading based on peer assessment activities. The interest in peer assessment is mainly driven by changing conceptions of learning and teaching. Contemporary approaches emphasize the active engagement of students in their own learning, learner responsibility, a dialogical and collaborative model of teaching and

learning (Spiller 2012: 2, para1). As Hughes (2010: para 4) suggests, school should prepare students for lifelong learning which “requires a shift from their current passive roles-being assigned tasks, being given feedback and so on- to more active roles in making judgments about the quality of their own work and that of others”. The National Curriculum of Estonia for upper secondary school highlights the importance of involving students in the process of assessing their companions, which helps students to develop their skills to set their own objectives, to analyse their learning and behaviour according to the objectives and increases motivation for learning (2011: 12, para 1).

There are many variants of peer assessment, but it generally involves students providing feedback to other students on the quality of their work. According to the definition given by Spiller (2012: 10, para 2), “peer assessment requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event which students may have been involved in determining”.

Peer assessment has been studied in terms of its influence on writing skills of learners. The issue was analysed by J. Berggren (2015: 58-69) in a study, where she focused on how students can improve their writing ability by acting as peer reviewers. Her findings revealed that although spelling and grammar did not seem to benefit from reviewing, this activity provided the students with an additional perspective on their own writing. Also the findings proved that peer assessment helped to improve writing skills both to the students who commented and to the ones who received the feedback. Peer assessment was revealed being helpful in developing self-assessment skills and critical thinking as well. In addition to that, peer review activities in writing were mentioned to be an invitation to students to contribute to teaching and to be active participants in the learning process. The other study of peer assessment activity was held by Huahui Zhao (2014). In her work, Zhao studied the influence of peer assessment on the writing quality, but by making peer assessment teacher-supported. The use of peer feedback was analysed by comparing the first against revised drafts of the writing assignments. The study evidenced that when being teacher supported and guided peer feedback reaches rather high quality. Zhao used the following teacher support strategies: the teacher trained students in how to provide constructive feedback on peers’ writing, the teacher encouraged students to highlight problematic areas (where the students were unable to provide revision suggestions), the teacher always commented on the appropriateness of peer feedback by

circling correct revisions and crossing out the wrong ones. Zhao added that in order to find appropriate support strategies, students' concerns and suggestions should be taken into consideration prior to their use. Also, her study revealed that students eagerly participated in peer assessment activities and confirmed the usefulness of teacher supported peer assessment (Zhao 2014: 155-169). The studies conducted by Zhao and Berggren have proved the positive influence of peer assessment on the development of writing skills and on the quality of text revision. Both studies support the idea that students eagerly take the role of teacher in the classroom activities, obtaining more power and directly participating not only in learning but also in teaching process. If inviting students to take an active part in assessment practices is a very effective teaching tool in writing assignments, why not to try using it in other classroom activities, and in particular in group work assignments. Assessing work done by other group members while a joint assignment can probably change students' attitudes towards the necessity of participation and contribution making. Being a big field for studies, peer assessment can be implemented in group work activities used in EFL classes for revealing the usefulness and appropriateness of its implementation.

It is quite a debatable issue, whether grading motivates upper secondary school students for studying and doing assignments properly or not. On the one hand, students of upper secondary school are getting closer to getting diplomas and entering university. On the other hand, teenage students are said to become more problematic and less disciplined, disregarding rules and responsibilities (Conner n.d.: para 4). There are different opinions on the subject of grading importance to students especially of teen age. Schwartz (2011) is in favour of punishing and rewarding with grades; at the same time Weimer (2012) claims that grading does not motivate learning and it is a wrong thing to focus on in teaching. The controversy of the motivational aspect of grading makes this field interesting and open for further research.

The active engagement of students into the learning process is a feature of the progressivist form of assessment, where the emphasis is on peer-evaluation and self-evaluation. Students should be encouraged to examine and evaluate their completed assignments with the help of their peers, in order to see how they might be improved. With such kind of assessment strategy students are expected to learn how to learn (Clark 1987: 53). In addition to that, peer evaluation helps to lessen the power imbalance between teachers and students and can enhance the students' status in the learning process (Spiller 2012: 11). Unfortunately, many teachers still tend to retain all the power in the assessment

process. According to Spiller (2012: 2, para1), assessment processes in which teacher holds all the power and makes all the choices limit the potential for learner development. That is why such teachers need to start thinking about assessment which aligns with the ideals of progressivism.

In an EFL classroom peer assessment can be regarded not only as an alternative assessment practice but as a separate learning activity as well, which can invite students to contribute to their own learning and teaching as well. But like any other learning activity it should be carefully planned by teacher before being implemented in class. Also students may be unfamiliar with this kind of activity and will need to be acquainted with peer assessment thoroughly before assessing.

According to Berggren (2015: 59), even though the use of peer assessment activities in the EFL classroom is a relatively large research field, such assessment practices are still underused in schools. She claims that the reason for that is the uncertainty regarding the implementation and efficacy of assessment made by students in the foreign language classroom. This uncertainty is not surprising, because when delegating the power of assessment to students teacher takes risks of having students being assessed wrongfully. Especially this risk is higher when speaking about grading. According to the study reported by Jones and Tanner, students are generally honest and accurate when assessing their own and peers' works (2006: 75). Also a meta-analysis of 48 peer assessment studies conducted by Falchikov and Goldfinch comparing the marks from peers and teachers revealed that students are generally able to make reliable judgments (Liu 2013: 188).

Honesty and accuracy are very important aspects in peer assessment, without them peer assessment will have no pedagogical value, and it can even become harmful when considering emotions of students who can be assessed unfairly poorly. Nevertheless, such kind of dishonesty can be minimized. Students in advance should be instructed about the importance of their criticism to be fair; their opinions may be advised to be supported by examples and explanations. Such preliminary instructions can lessen the uncertainty of teachers about implementation and efficacy of peer assessment.

Taking into consideration the usefulness of implementing group work activities in class, the inevitable presence of reluctant students in groups and the ability of peer assessment to motivate students and make them active participants the following hypothesis can be formulated for the present research:

The inclusion of peer assessment activities in group work assignments can reinforce the involvement of reluctant students in the learning process and make them actively contribute to the work being done by their group.

## CHAPTER I

### GROUP WORK AND PEER-ASSESSMENT IN THE EFL CLASS

#### 1.1 Group Work Inclusion in Lesson Planning

##### 1.1.1. Why to Use Group Work in Class

A famous idiom states “Two heads are better than one“, meaning that a potential group can be more productive and creative than individuals on their own (Phrase Dictionary: para 1). Taking that into consideration, grouping students in the classroom can be very useful.

Group work usually involves groups of students formally working together on projects or assignments (Group work 2016: para1). Collins English Dictionary gives the following definition of the notion *group work*: „teaching or learning in a group setting with the aim of developing students individually through group cooperation“ (2016: para. 1). Cooperation is a key word in group work, it is a main factor influencing the success and productivity of the work being done by a group. The definition of *cooperation* is people working together to achieve results or people helping each other to achieve a common goal (Your Dictionary 2016: para1). Cooperation in its turn implies communication, without good communication cooperation cannot succeed.

The reasons for group work to have a great potential in the classroom are numerous. Harmer (2001: 117) suggests the following advantages to consider: group work dramatically increases the amount of talking for students, it provides a good chance of different opinions and varied contributions, it encourages broader skills of cooperation and negotiation, it is more private than work in front of the class, it promotes learner autonomy by allowing students to make their own decisions in the group. Davis (1993: para 1) adds that students working in groups „tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats“. Also she insists that when students feel connected, engaged and included they feel more satisfied with their courses (ibid.). Burke (2011: 88, para 2) suggests that groups have more information than a single person and stimulate creativity. This increased information derives from the variety of backgrounds and experiences that different group members possess.

When assigning works in groups teachers usually have high expectations which are not always realised. Teachers want groups to produce quality work, better than what students can do individually. In order to succeed that a lot of work should be done, a lot of important issues should be considered in advance. Group work requires very careful

planning and preparation, without it group work can frustrate students and turn this activity into a waste of time in the class. When putting students in groups does not mean that they are engaged and learn something. Group work is much more than just students' connection and positioning in the classroom.

Group work can have the following purposes: learning from each other, mutual support, sharing ideas, creating something, making decisions, pooling resources (Jaques et al 2007: 84). Group maintenance includes aims like: creating a sense of belonging, generating a sense of trust and openness, establishing a spirit of cooperation, creating interest in, commitment to and enthusiasm for the subject and the task all of which contribute to a student's engagement and willingness to learn (ibid.: 85). It is important to include in the syllabus such kind of activities which are enjoyable, challenging and stimulating such underused faculty as imagination.

The variety of tasks which can be assigned to a group to complete is very big. Students can be assigned to write a group story or a poem, they can prepare a presentation or discuss some question or problem, they can role-play a situation, they can make a poster and so on. The creativity of teachers in developing group tasks really astonish. And it is not surprising because to motivate students and to raise interest in them for completing the assignment is not an easy task. Teachers do not always have to create those tasks by themselves, they can look for them on the Internet or in the library. The task selected or created for group work should be challenging: a too easy task can make one person do all work on his/her own, a too difficult task may result in interpersonal conflict (Jaques et al 2007: 111). Group work can not only add variety to the lesson planning, but it can have a very beneficial effect on dynamics and atmosphere in the classroom, making students be involved and busy. But this involvement, unfortunately, is not a guaranteed result.

#### 1.1.2. Problems with Involvement and Participation

The basic principles of group work are shared interaction, shared power and shared decision making (Toseland et al 1984: 40). Ideally, all members of a group should be involved and interested in the work being done. But as Falchikov (2005: 204) states, social presence of others leads to a reduction in pressure to work hard and is identified as the cause of decrease in effort.

As mentioned above, cooperation is a key word in group work. Cooperation in group work means each and every member taking a part and sharing responsibility for its

success (Jaques et al 2006: 2). According to Falchikov (2005: 220), positive interdependence and individual accountability are the main features differentiating true cooperation. Individual accountability is said to be achieved when all individuals take on the responsibility for doing a fair share of work and for moving the group closer towards its goals. As Falchikov (ibid.: 200) states equality of participation and active involvement by all group members is essential for individual learning in the context of collaboration, but she also regrets that this condition is not always met.

Group members often tend to search security and protection from one individual on whom they can depend, assuming that some sort of magic resides on the leader and he/she can save the group by making the majority of work (Jaques et al 2007: 7). Having a leader is very important for a group, but it does not mean that he/she should be responsible for all the work that should be done by the group.

Students in groups should share responsibility for achievement, thus decreasing the risk of personal failure and increasing support for individual persistence. Group learning involves shared goals and that leads to the student's increased sense of responsibility and provides a supportive atmosphere for learning (Jaques et al 2007: 60). According to Jaques and Salmon (2007: 60), student's willingness to participate may be affected by formal or informal feedback given by fellow students, they should feel accepted and valued by staff.

Toseland and Rivas (1984: 257) claim that assigning members specific roles can help them become actively involved in the work being done by their group. They insist that "roles that encourage members to become dependent on one another for task accomplishment and roles that place them in the position of representing the group to a larger constituency increase the attractiveness and cohesion of the group, and help members feel that they are part of a collective effort that is of vital importance for effective agency functioning" (ibid.).

### 1.1.3. Composing Groups

One of the challenges in planning group work is deciding how groups will be formed. There is no limit to the way in which teachers can group students in the classroom, but the most important requirement to be fulfilled is that groups should be formed so that all students have equal opportunities to participate and feel included. But unfortunately it is not that easy to make. When forming a group sex, personality and relationships may be taken into account, but no one can be sure what mixture will lead to effective participation.



Individual members are said to contribute differently according to who they are grouped with (Jaques et al 2007:26). Thus, when composing groups teacher cannot always anticipate the results of students' cooperation, he or she can only make some guesses and make reasonable choices sometimes based on previous experience or personal preferences.

Weimer (2014: para 5) claims that most students prefer forming their own groups, and in some studies those groups appear to be very productive. According to Falchikov (2005: 204), self-selected groups report lowest levels of interpersonal conflict compared with instructor constructed or mixed groups. But also Weimer (2014: para 5) adds that if the goal is for students to learn how to work with others whom they do not know so well, then teacher should form groups. Of course, conflicts between individuals can affect group productivity and may take time, but the requirements of the contemporary world imply people being able to work with different people, regardless of own preferences or likes. That is why it is important for students to learn working in groups beyond their choice.

According to Harmer (2001: 120-122), groups can be created based on friendship, streaming, chance and changing groups. When grouping students based on friendship, teacher puts friends with friends, rather than risking the possibility of students working with others whom they find unpleasant or difficult. Streaming means deciding whether students should be grouped according to their ability and dividing students by level or behaviour. Teacher also can group students by 'chance', for no special reasons of friendship, ability or level of participation. Changing groups implies changing a group while an activity continues. Students can start working in pairs, then in groups of four, then in groups of eight and so on.

How to group students with different abilities and tempo levels depends totally on the choice of teacher. Scientists do not give a single answer to this question, arguing about putting weak and strong students in one group. According to Jaques and Salmon (2007: 26), mixing more intelligent students with the slower ones can enable a teaching process between the students. Duflo (2009: para 1) also agrees with the following statement claiming that „students benefit from learning with higher-achieving peers“. But at the same time Harmer (2001:125) warns teachers that weak students may be lost when grouped with better classmates, thus gaining nothing from the assigned activity. Falchikov (2005: 207) also adds that high ability students may be disadvantaged by working in mixed-ability groups (receiving lower grades), whereas lower ability students are said to gain from the work in mixed ability groups, doing better in examinations after having worked in mixed

ability groups. Thus, it is not clear who benefits or loses when working in groups where students are of different abilities. This indefiniteness gives teachers freedom to make their decisions based on their own preferences and predictions. Teachers can group students however they like, but it is important to observe groups, noting how often each student speaks and how actively he/she participates in group work. According to Harmer (2001: 125), if two or three observations reveal a continuing pattern it is important to take an action and change group members.

The important variables in groups are seating position, talkativeness, personality of the participants and a kind of leadership (Jaques 2000: 36). As Jaques (2000: 7) states, with 2-6 members in a group little structure and organization is required, the leadership is liquid and the differentiation of roles begins with increase in number. Actually, the differentiation of roles can begin even in smaller groups. Students can distribute the roles casually, assigning roles to group members by themselves. But such casualness is not always effective in group work, because certain students can tend to assume too much responsibility, while other students may be reluctant to contribute to group work. Weimer (2014) recommends teachers to assign roles, especially when students are new to group work. She claims that group member roles and responsibilities hold students accountable and respecting all members of the group. As Weimer (2014: para 7) states, teacher can decide on the necessary roles and suggest them to groups. But Weimer warns that by assigning roles to students teacher should realise that it does not guarantee that students will assume those roles. The roles of group members depend on the goals of an assignment, the size of a group, the individual characteristics of group members. Different scientists give different names to roles; to sum up them they are *leader, speaker, recorder, material manager, time keeper, facilitator, checker* and so on. Brame (2015: para 12) offers to rotate roles on a regular basis, giving students an opportunity to try to apply different roles. According to Brame (ibid.), the assignment of roles can even help to avoid such problems in group work as dominance by a single student or conflict. Thus, role assignment to group members can be very helpful in group work and is worth considering. What is also important is to note that different specific roles do not relieve students from brainstorming, providing experience and knowledge and solving a problem. Everyone should be responsible for participating in the aforesaid activities.

#### 1.1.4. The Importance of Good Communication

An interaction pattern is of great importance when students start working in groups. Students should strive to facilitate the development of group-centred rather than leader-centred interaction patterns. In group-centred patterns, members freely interact with each other. Whereas in leader-centred patterns communication is directed from members to the leader or from the leader to the group members (Toseland et al 1984: 60). Toseland and Rivas (ibid.: 60) also add that the group-centred communication pattern increases social interaction and members' commitment to group goals.

When grouping diverse individuals to work together, challenges such as communication and relationship issues can result. As Jaques (2000: 61) suggests, communication is much more than the process of passing and receiving information. He claims that most errors in communication occur because of psychological rather than logical factors. The feelings, attitudes, behaviours and relationships of those involved in communication usually determine whether it is effective or not.

Jaques and Salmon (2007: 21) claim that personal likes and dislikes of fellow members have a great influence on the effectiveness of group work, as it demands from people the ability to get on with each other, to be able to handle interpersonal problems rather than to avoid them. Personal likes and dislikes affect directly interpersonal interaction within the group. Toseland and Rivas (1984: 60) assert that "positive emotional bonds such as interpersonal liking and attraction serve to increase interpersonal interaction, and negative emotional bonds reduce solidarity between members and result in decreased interpersonal interaction". Thus, emotional bonds that develop between group members are important factors for teacher to notice and manage, factors which should be carefully considered.

According to Jaques (2000: 61), good communication implies "a degree of trust and openness between participants"; without them mutual understanding and influences are liable to distortion, and as a result cooperation is unlikely. But being a key word in group work, communication is very important, that is why teachers need to develop a strategy for teaching students to work together.

David Jaques and Gilly Salmon (2006: 21) warn that students can face a clash of interests or a disjunction of aims while doing group work; they insist that it is important to control and take care of the emotions and feelings of students in the learning. When

organising group work teacher should consider handling emotional reactions of students and supporting them in dealing with conflicts.

#### 1.1.5. Procedures for Group Work

The role of teacher in group work does not end with the decision which students should work together. Teacher's involvement is required not only before the activity starts, but also during and after it.

The procedures employed before the activity starts include instructing and involving students into group work. Harmer (2001: 58-59) suggests the use of the 'engage-instruct-initiate' sequence for organising students to do various activities. The first thing teacher needs to do when organising group work is to get students involved and ready. It usually means making it clear to students that something new is going to happen and that the activity will be enjoyable and interesting. Harmer proposes to say something like *Now we are going to do this because...* Teacher should offer a rationale for the activity, otherwise students will not see the reason and importance of completing the task and being involved. After engaging students teacher should give necessary instructions, saying what students should do, in what way, etc. Some assignments can even require demonstration of what is to be done, especially needed when doing a new kind of activity. But when the activity is familiar, such demonstration will be unnecessary. The instruction step is followed by initiating the activity, by telling the students how much time they have got and exactly when they should start. It is very important at the instructional step that all students have understood and agree on what the task is.

While students are working in groups teacher has to observe what students are doing, guiding and assisting them when necessary. But it is critically important not to be too intrusive when observing students. As Harmer (2001: 62) suggests, drawing too much attention can distract students from the task they are involved in. Harmer suggests several options for observing students while they are doing group work. One of the options is to stand at the front or the other side of the class, keeping an eye on what is happening and noting who seems to be stuck or disengaged. An alternative option is to go round the class watching and listening to specific groups, intervening when it is necessary or helping students with suggestions. Harmer also adds that when students are working in groups teachers have an ideal opportunity to work with individual students who can benefit from teacher's attention, thus filling the gaps in their knowledge and helping them to learn

(ibid.: 123). The decision on how to observe students working in groups totally depends on teachers' choice and needs of students.

When groups stop working together teachers need to organise feedback. The type of feedback that teacher selects depends on the type of an assignment which the students need to accomplish. Harmer (2001: 60) suggests telling the students in advance how and what for they will be assessed. Students should have a clear idea of what they need to concentrate on.

#### 1.1.6. Assessing Group Work: Shared Group Grade and Its Flaw

Depending on the objectives of an assignment, teacher should consider what he/she is going to assess. Teacher may decide to assess the final product of a group (e.g. design, report, and presentation) or he/she can decide to assess group processes (e.g. ability to meet deadlines, communicate effectively, and contribute fairly) (How can I assess n.d.: para2).

It is a challenging issue to assign individual grades for group efforts. According to Jacques (2000: 226), teacher can only award a grade to the whole group, because he/she may not have an idea about how much each student has contributed to the work done by a group. A shared group grade can be advantageous to teachers, but it can be disadvantageous to students. A shared group grade is the easiest to implement - it does not require any additional work aside from grading the work done. A shared group grade enforces group responsibilities - the group succeeds or fails together. But, unfortunately, a shared group grade has disadvantages, which need to be considered by teacher. First, individual contributions are not reflected in the distribution of grades. Second, poor students may benefit from the work of hard-working and diligent students. Finally, successful students may be dragged down by poor students (Methods for Assessing n.d.: para 4). Consequently, such disadvantages to students need to be minimized and individual contributions should be taken into consideration.

## **1.2 Involving Students via Peer Assessment**

### **1.2.1. The Role of Assessment in Teaching and Learning**

Assessment has a lot of functions which aim to improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching. In the list of main pedagogical aims of assessment Jones and Tanner (2006: 4) include motivating students, holding them accountable and giving students an appreciation of their achievements and encouraging success. Jones and Tanner assert that students “may learn by thinking about the task being used for assessment” (ibid.: 6). In other words, students may be motivated by accomplishing the task which they know will be assessed afterwards. The communicative aims of assessment include “providing information to parents about their children’s progress against nationally agreed standards” and “providing information to other teachers, educational institutions or employers about individual students’ knowledge and skills” (Jones et al 2006: 3). Such provision of information may influence students’ attitude towards a particular subject and increase his/her diligence or effort in accomplishing assigned tasks. Concluding the article about the value of assessment Jones and Tanner (2006: 6) assure that assessment in the classroom will never be a precise science. Learning and academic performance depend on social and emotional factors as well as cognitive ones. What a student can do depends on the context he/she is in, social expectations of the classroom or situation, his/her emotional needs and background knowledge and abilities as well. Thus, it is impossible to be hundred percent sure that in a definite class situation assessment practice will have positive effect on students’ behaviour and participation.

Falchikov (2005: 2) adds to the list of aims of assessment the potential of assessment practices to prepare students for life. Preparation in this context is narrowly focused on employment, career advancement and competition.

### **1.2.2. Grading Versus Comment Giving, Feedback**

According to Harmer (2001: 101), teachers can assess their students’ works using comments or assigning grades. Comments can be given in writing, orally or both. Depending on the type of assignment teacher decides what kind of feedback is needed, whether grading or comment giving.

Falchikov (2005: 171) highlights the importance of feedback to students claiming that students pay more attention to feedback that has a social dimension than to teacher’s mark. According to Falchikov (ibid.), positive feedback leads to feelings of well-being and

energy in students, while feedback which identifies deficiencies arouses anxiety and depression. But without negative feedback students will not have an opportunity to find their mistakes and correct them. To lessen the effect of negative feedback Falchikov (ibid.: 172) suggests delivering positive feedback before negative one.

According to Harmer (2001: 101), students are likely to respond better to private assessment which leads to a successful future action than to public recognition. Thus, Harmer suggests communicating with the student about his/her achievements or failures privately, without acknowledging members of class about achievements of separate students.

### 1.2.3. Peer Assessment as an Alternative Assessment Practice

Spiller (2012: 10-12) highlights the following benefits of using peer assessment in class: peer assessment encourages collaborative learning through interchange about what constitutes good work; students engaged in peer assessment heighten their own capacity for judgment; students receiving feedback from their peers can get a wider range of ideas about their works to promote development and improvement. Also she reminds that peer assessment helps to lessen the power of teacher in the class and enhance the students' status in the learning process. Morgan (2005: 29-31) adds that peer assessment increases learner autonomy. Students take more responsibility for their work and become less dependent on teacher. Also, Morgan emphasizes the ability of a peer assessment activity to develop critical awareness. She maintains that peer assessment helps students to become aware of other people' problems and view own works more critically.

Jones and Tanner (2006: 65) assert that "learning to assess the work of others through peer assessment is a developmental first step in learning how to assess yourself". Peer assessment "helps students to see their efforts in the light of the whole situation and against the means by which the quality of performance will be viewed, and to govern their efforts accordingly" (ibid.: 69). In other words, students knowing how their efforts will be assessed will be able to take control over those efforts and over the feedback, which they will receive from their peers. Jones and Tanner (2006: 69) believe that criticism from peers may be more influential than from teacher. According to Jones and Tanner (ibid.: 76), such criticism can influence students' beliefs about themselves as learners, help them to improve their performance through their own efforts and motivate them to take control of their own learning. But it is important to consider again the importance of such criticism

to be fair. Unfair criticism can turn positive influence promoted by Jones and Tanner into negative one, destroying students' self-confidence and motivation to learn and participate. Students in advance should be instructed about the importance of their criticism to be fair; their opinions may be advised to be supported by examples and explanations. Liu (2013: 188, para 2) suggests using comments rather than marks when asking students to judge someone's work.

As noted by Spiller (2012: 3), active participation by students in assessment design, criteria, choices and making judgments is a sustainable preparation for subsequent working life. She insists that peer assessment processes can help students to learn how to receive and give feedback which is an important part of most jobs in the contemporary world.

When implementing a peer assessment activity in the EFL class, it is important to make sure that everyone is familiar with this kind of activity. If it is new to the class, it is important that students are introduced to the concept of peer assessment. As an aid to peer assessment activity Falchikov (2005: 128-129) suggests implementing assessment criteria. Assessment criteria may be supplied by teacher or students can discuss and negotiate the criteria by which they will judge work of their peers. What is more, there seems to be a strongly held view that "assessment is more reliable, students are more involved and learning enhanced when students take part in deriving their own criteria". Falchikov insists that for making correspondence between peer's and teacher's marks, it is necessary to involve students in the generation of criteria (ibid.). It is extremely important for teacher to make sure that all the criteria are clear to students before starting assessing. Falchikov reminds that teacher can prepare model answers, marking schemes, rating scales or evaluation forms which can help students to make their judgements. All the listed above forms should fit in with the needs of students and should include the aspects which need to be taken into account when assessing. Sometimes it is important for teacher to demonstrate appropriate responses and instruct students what kind of features to focus on. Students may even need guidance in how to word their comments in an unthreatening and inoffensive way, because peer assessment is closely connected with the feelings of students which can be badly hurt. As Spiller (2012: 12) suggests, students become better at peer assessment with practice. Thus, periodically including peer assessment activities in lesson plans teacher can develop assessment skills in their students and make this activity more attractive and useful for the last ones. The research outcomes provided by Falchikov (2005: 201) prove that fact showing that students learn with time the skill of assessing peers, the



ability to peer assess was improved after several times of using it in the lessons. In addition, Falchikov (ibid.: 198) assures that peer assessment can be successful in any discipline area and at any level. Thus, the age of students cannot be an obstacle in implementing a peer assessment activity in the class.

#### 1.2.4. Peer Assessment of Contribution to Group Work

Assessment has an important part to play in drawing the attention of students to the importance of effective group work and their part in it, where it is accompanied by self and peer assessment and group grades, providing strong motivation to take full part in (Jaques et al 2006: 2). Falchikov (2005: 201) sees peer evaluation as an essential element for encouraging continued group participation. The extent of peer involvement and complexity of implementation can differ. Teachers can use peer assessment as a simple measurement of group participation which does not influence grades, or they can involve students to provide feedback and grade which will influence the student's grade.

As Falchikov (ibid.: 203) states, the main problems that group work may bring are the students' reluctance to participate and 'resentment that weaker students are being carried by the group and receiving inflated grades at the expense of more capable students. Peer assessment activities can increase student's ownership of the assessment process (Jones et al 2006: 66). In group work such kind of ownership may bring assurance to students who actively participate that their efforts and diligence will not be awarded to the ones who did not care enough about the work. Every person's work should be assessed according to his/her contribution; it is unfair to reward equally all members of the group for the work been done by separate individuals who are able to succeed. But at the same time it is important to remember that different people have different abilities, and especially this fact should be always considered by teachers who assess students' works using one scale for everyone. Thus, it is not possible to punish a student who is not able to perform perfectly, but it is possible to assess his/her attempts to participate and to make contributions, even if those contributions cannot be scaled at the highest level or lack knowledge or skills.

Students should give honest grades that truly communicate what a student has done during group work. To lessen the danger of dishonesty in peer assessment, Spiller (2012: 13) insists on making those peer marks to be only one of a number of different marks awarded to a specific product or process. Teacher can start with a shared group grade and

only then do necessary corrections based on peer assessment when assigning individual grades.

Falchikov (2005: 201) considers two forms of peer assessment in groups: an open discussion of individual contributions by group members and private rating by peers. According to Falchikov (*ibid.*), students prefer rating group members privately.

#### 1.2.5. Can We Trust Grades

The most important expectation from any assessment is its reliability. If teacher has a reliable measure, everyone's grade indicates a very specific performance, and all students whose performance is the same get the same grade (McKeachie et al 2006: 127).

When using grades, it is important to know how valid the measures to generate them were (*ibid.*). Some students may give or take away points for peers' actions that have little or nothing to do with measures of contribution to group work. For example, students may make deductions for ideas which they consider inappropriate and useless. Students should be able to recognize effort and to reward that effort even if it is not excellent. The biggest danger of peer assessment is dishonesty in assessing. According to Falchikov (2005: 199), there is a negative effect of friendship (or enemy) on peer assessment. She maintains that friendship has the capacity to bias peer assessments often leading to over-marking (*ibid.*: 205). Lack of objectivity can also occur in a situation where students not liking each other will be assigned to assess each other. Also Falchikov (2005: 201) proposes using multiple raters, maintaining that assessments by multiple raters are more reliable than those of individuals. Having the variety of different opinions does not only decrease the likelihood of getting "a rogue result", but it is said to increase "the confidence of those being assessed that they are being treated fairly" (*ibid.*). Also Falchikov (*ibid.*: 219) suggests requiring students to justify their ratings and making them explicitly link criteria with judgements. This can undeniably lessen the degree of dishonesty and increase the reliability of peer assessment. Also Falchikov (*ibid.*: 220) insists that enabling peer assessment to be made in private can encourage greater honesty.

Using such assessment method as peer assessment teacher should definitely be very careful when receiving reviews or grades given by students to their peers. The fairness of assessment is a very subjective issue; even teachers do not always assess students fairly. The trustworthiness of a peer assessment activity raises another question of the validity and usefulness of this activity in the classroom.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **PEER-ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN GROUP WORK IN THE EFL CLASS TO INVOLVE RELUCTANT STUDENTS**

This chapter describes the implementation of peer assessment in group work in practice in order to prove that it can be used successfully to reinforce the involvement of reluctant students in the learning process and to make them actively contribute to the work being done by their group in the EFL class. The study is conducted by means of observing and analysing two different group work assignments: the first one without assessment organized and conducted by a practicing teacher and the second one with peer assessment implementation organized and conducted by the author of the paper. Additionally, practicing teacher's and students' opinions are presented and discussed.

#### **2.1 Research Methodology**

##### **2.1.1 Participants, Criteria for Making Research Outcomes**

In order to verify the trueness of the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the research an experiment was conducted with a case study. The study was based on the observation of students' involvement during ungraded and graded group work. According to Cohen's sample types diversity (Cohen et al, 2007: 113), the sample used in the research was a non-probability sample, targeting at a particular group which simply represented itself but not a wider population. The case studied the involvement and participation in group work assignments of particular students in upper secondary school in a particular EFL class. The experimental group consisted of Narva Pähklmäe Gymnasium students of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The number of participants of the experimental group was 18. The participants were 16-17 years old with the intermediate language proficiency level.

The class of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade was chosen because the 10<sup>th</sup> grade is the first year of study in the upper secondary school, the stage where students have enough time for working in groups. At this stage students should learn and get prepared for effective group collaboration during classroom activities. The skill to work effectively in groups will be useful at university and at future work. Grades 11 and 12 were excluded from the research because at these stages students are considered to make the majority of work independently, thus preparing themselves for final state and school examinations.

The research was based on the comparison of the involvement of students in ungraded and graded group work assignments. The main group for observation was reluctant students, but the following research also revealed the influence of grading on the level of performance of all the students taking part in the experiment. First, the students had to participate in an ungraded group assignment. Then, the students had a group assignment, which after completion was assessed, but the assessment was done not only by the teacher - the students were asked to assess the involvement of their group mates in the creation process and this peer assessment affected the grade, which every student had. The main requirement for the second group assignment was the following: the students in advance were notified that their work in group and contribution would be assessed by their group mates and each student would have a separate grade for group work which would totally depend on his/her involvement. The research design had 2 basic objectives: to function as a teaching assignment and to provide the data necessary for the analysis in compliance with the aim of the research.

The observations of ungraded and peer assessed assignments were based on the criteria, specifically derived for judging students' engagement in group work. The definitions of the terms "reluctant" and "reluctant students" presented and discussed in the introductory part of the present thesis prove that reluctant students are not only the ones who skip participating in classwork and do nothing in class, but also the ones whose participation level is at a minimal level and who do work unwillingly. This fact made it impossible to judge the students' involvement in group work only by noting whether the student had participated in group work or not. The researcher needed to estimate the level of involvement of every student and decide if there were reluctant students during group work assignments or not and how willing or unwilling they were while participating. The development of the criteria for judging students' engagement in group work was based on the study of main principles of group work in learning, which were mentioned in the introductory part of the present research paper and discussed in Chapter I. The most important words associated with group work in education and presented in Chapter I are *cooperation, communication, negotiation and contribution*. As it was mentioned in Chapter I, the purposes of group work can be: *learning from each other, mutual support, sharing ideas, creating something, making decisions, pooling resources* (Jaques et al 2007: 84). Toseland and Rivas (1984: 40) insisted on *shared interaction* being the main principle of group work. While Jacques and Salmon (2006: 2) added that cooperation in group work

means each and every member taking a part and sharing responsibility for its success. All the points presented above allowed to create and formulate the criteria needed for evaluating students' engagement in group work and as a result the successfulness of implemented group work in pursuing educational goals.

The criteria used for evaluating students' efforts, cooperation and discussion during two group work assignments implemented for experimental purposes in the present research are presented in Table 1. Also Table 1 includes descriptors which were used for evaluating each criterion with explanations.

Demonstrates involvement in discussion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Does not demonstrate involvement at all</li> <li>2- Tries to show involvement, but does not offer anything</li> <li>3- Demonstrates sporadic involvement in discussion</li> <li>4- Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement</li> <li>5- Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement in discussion</li> </ol>
Attempts to make contributions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Does not contribute to discussion</li> <li>2- Makes irrelevant contributions</li> <li>3- Minimally contributes when called on</li> <li>4- Contributes well to discussion, offers and supports suggestions, thinks through own points</li> <li>5- Contributes in a very significant way, suggests new ways, ask comments, analyses the work done by the group</li> </ol>
Proposes new ideas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Says nothing during assignment</li> <li>2- Rarely says something that is not relevant</li> <li>3- Proposes ideas, but without elaboration and infrequently</li> <li>4- Suggests new ideas, explaining them, but not very frequently</li> <li>5- Always suggests new ideas, the ideas are novel and frequent</li> </ol>

Takes one of the roles in a group and fulfills it	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Resists to take one of the roles in a group</li> <li>2- Takes one of the assigned roles but doesn't fulfill it</li> <li>3- Takes one of the roles, but fulfills it not carefully or unwillingly</li> <li>4- Takes one of the roles and fulfills it, but sometimes is being helped by others</li> <li>5- Willingly takes one of the roles and perfectly fulfills it</li> </ol>
Assists other team members when needed	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Does not offer help or respond when called</li> <li>2- Tries to respond when called but does not offer too much</li> <li>3- Makes infrequent offers to help, often responds when called</li> <li>4- Frequently offers help and frequently responds when called</li> <li>5- Always offers help and always responds when called</li> </ol>
Works amicably with others as a team member	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Displays disrespect to other group members</li> <li>2- Interrupts too much, does not acknowledge cues of annoyance from other group members, rambles</li> <li>3- Not disruptive, but rather passive in showing interest for others' ideas and is rather inattentive to others</li> <li>4- Is mostly attentive to others, responds thoughtfully to other students' comments</li> <li>5- Is very attentive to others, doesn't dominate, shows interest and respect for others' contributions and views</li> </ol>

*Table1. Criteria for judging students' engagement in group work with the descriptors.*

Every student taking part in a group assignment was separately observed and evaluated based on all 6 criteria. The evaluation criteria were rated from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest level of involvement and participation and 5 being the highest one. While observing a student, an arithmetic average was made on the basis of the points given per each criterion.

At first sight the criteria chosen may seem very equivalent or difficult to be distinguished when a student is observed and evaluated, but, in fact, the 6 criteria have differences and need to be regarded separately. The first criterion is the demonstration of involvement in discussion. It is important to mention that the demonstration of involvement in discussion should be judged objectively. Simple sitting among the other members of the group and attentively looking at them does not mean that it is involvement, which is actually needed in group work. The demonstration of involvement implies an interest in what is being done by the group and the sense of responsibility for the work being done cooperatively. The second criterion is formulated as attempts to make contributions. In this criterion not only useful contributions are assessed, but even small attempts should be noticed and rewarded, no matter how strange, simple or silly they might be. Because different students can contribute differently, for some of them even attempts can be difficult and energy consuming. The third criterion connected with the proposal of new ideas should be also regarded specifically. The quality of the ideas should not be regarded too strictly. Some ideas proposed can be very good and useful, while others can be rather questionable and useless. The quality of the ideas can depend on the abilities or knowledge of the students, which often vary. That is why, it is important to notice all the ideas proposed by the students, even if they are doubtful. The fourth criterion is connected with the distribution of roles in the group and the fulfillment of those roles. Simple assumption of a specific role in a group does not necessarily mean its total fulfillment. Every member of the group must not only take some role, but he/she must take a full responsibility for fulfilling that role and helping a group to complete the assignment successfully. The fifth criterion points assistance to other team members. Some students may not propose good and interesting ideas or actively participate in the discussion, but they still can somehow assist other group members. The ways of assistance are various: some may help finding needed words in the dictionary, some may help decorating the poster and some may prepare a presentation. Even in case when the roles are equally assigned students may assist other members of the group doing not their part of work. And

the last sixth criterion is connected with amicability. The intellectual abilities of different students vary, that is why not all students are able to produce some part of work efficiently, but still some of the students may at least be able to work amicably with others. The following ability is very important nowadays, as the majority of jobs require this ability. That is why the ability to work with the other team members should be noticed and evaluated. To sum up, even though the criteria chosen may seem very similar to each other, they have specific differences which should be separately regarded and evaluated.

### 2.1.2 Observing Group Work without Assessment

It is important to mention, that it was necessary to wait for several months before attending a particular EFL class and observing a group work activity organized and conducted by a practicing teacher (A. Ananina) with who it had been previously agreed upon. Ananina explained such a long wait with rarity of group work activity inclusion in lesson planning. She complained that during group work the students were usually too noisy and the conduction of group work demands careful and time consuming preparation.

The topic of group work organized and conducted by the practicing teacher was “Family special occasions”. There were 6 groups, each group having 3 members. The groups were formed by the teacher, based on chance (for no special reasons of friendship, ability or level of participation). The students sitting closer to each other were put in one group. The teacher did not assign roles to students in their groups and did not propose students to do it by themselves. It was up to the students to decide whether they needed that division of roles or not and they were free to make the division by themselves.

The teacher had 6 separate pieces of paper, each paper having its own special occasion written in front. The occasions chosen were New Year, Valentine’s day, Graduation party, Easter, Birthday party and Mother’s/ Father’s day. The teacher randomly distributed different family occasions to the groups, without letting students choose based on their own preferences or chance. The students, working in groups, were asked to describe one of the family occasions which they were given based on the following criteria: when it was celebrated, which traditions were associated with specific occasions, what they ate and how they had to be dressed. The students also could add their own criteria to the proposed list, making their work more profound and interesting. No drawings were needed to complete the following assignment. Only a written text was needed and graded.



The group work assigned had a particular time limit; it was maximum 20 minutes long. The limitation of time forced students to concentrate and quickly get to work. Also the students had a word minimum limit, which they had to reach, and this limit was 150 words. To help students in their writing the teacher gave them a dictionary, which the groups one after another could use during their work. After 20 minutes the students submitted the filled papers to the teacher.

It is also important to notice that before setting to work the students together with the teacher discussed Halloween using the same criteria and requirements as they had for their group assignment. Thus, the teacher directed the students' efforts and made the assignment clearer and more understandable to them.

The teacher in advance notified the students that they would have a shared group grade where both content and grammar would be assessed.

The group work activity was finally successfully conducted by the practicing teacher and all the necessary data was gathered.

### 2.1.3 Planning and Implementing Group Work with Peer Assessment

Two months later, the second group work activity the goal of which was to reveal the value and usefulness of the peer assessment activity addition to the group work assignment was carried out in the same class with the same students participating in it. This group work activity was specially planned and implemented as a part of the present case study.

The assignment had to be adapted to the requirements of the working plan composed at the beginning of the school year by the practicing teacher and the topic which needed to be studied at the time of the group work implementation.

The topic of the lesson was "Birthday Parties". Before the group work assignment the teacher introduced the topic to the students, gave necessary vocabulary to them and presented a text on the topic, which could help the students to accomplish the group assignment successfully.

The students in advance were notified that their individual efforts made during the group work activity would be assessed separately, using a peer assessment activity. Individual ratings by peers were used in the experiment instead of open discussions to avoid interpersonal conflicts in class. The grade assigned by the peers was planned to influence each student's total grade for the group work assignment, combining a shared

group grade with the grades provided by the peers and calculating as simple arithmetic means.

The students were not involved in the defining of the criteria of excellence to the performance in a group work activity. The criteria of excellence to the performance in a group work activity were developed on the basis of the peer evaluation form available at the Internet site “Cooperative Learning: 7 Free PDF Assessment Instruments” at <http://www.dailyteachingtools.com/cooperative-learning-evaluate.html> (see Table 1). The advantage of the evaluation form is in its clarity and comprehensiveness.

# Peer Evaluation Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Write the names of your group members in the numbered boxes. Then, assign yourself a value for each listed attribute. Finally, do the same for each of your group members and total all of the values.

Values: 1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree

Attribute	Yourself	1.	2.	3.
Was dependable in attending group meetings.				
Willingly accepted assigned tasks.				
Contributed positively to group discussions.				
Completed work on time or made alternative arrangements.				
Helped others with their work when needed.				
Did work accurately and completely.				
Contributed a fair share to weekly papers.				
Worked well with other group members.				
Overall was a valuable member of the team.				
<b>Column Totals</b>				

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*Picture 1. Peer evaluation form.*

The sample includes 9 criteria for peer evaluation: attendance of group meetings, acceptance of assigned tasks, positive contribution to discussions, completion of work on time, helping others, accuracy of work, contribution to weekly papers, working well with others and being a valuable member of the team. The most important criteria for the forthcoming group work assignments were chosen from the list of criteria, the ones which could be observed and assessed by the peers. Some of the criteria were restated and some were added.

The criteria used for evaluating the contribution of each student to the work done by group are presented in Table 2. The values used for the criteria can also be found in the form.

<b>Criteria</b>	Name	Name	Name	Name
Actively participated in discussion				
Contributed useful ideas				
Assisted other group members when needed				
Was an overall valuable member of the group				
Worked well with other group members				
Fulfilled his/her part of the work				
<b>Total points</b>				
<b>Values: 1= very poor    2= poor    3= satisfactory    4= good    5= excellent</b>				

*Table 2. Peer Assessment of Contribution to Group Form.*

For the following group work assignment, groups were formed of three students in each group. The principle of making groups was the same as in the previous group work activity conducted by the teacher of the class. The students sitting closer to each other were combined together without letting the students form their groups independently. The students were imposed to learn working in groups beyond their choice. As a result, there were 6 groups each consisting of 3 students. The following group formation made the research outcome calculations easier and more reliable, as it allowed to observe the involvement of the same students in the same groups but in different circumstances.

The students in each group were of different abilities and knowledge level, nevertheless they had to combine their abilities and knowledge in such a way that to produce a fully accomplished assignment. The students were asked to assign group roles to each member individually, on the basis of the proposed list of roles, which were the leader,

the speaker and the recorder. As the groups consisted of 3 students maximum the following roles were the most useful to produce a good result.

Each group was asked to imagine and draw the birthday of their dream with a detailed explanation based on the ideas discussed and given prior to the assignment. The important ideas which needed careful explanation were the following:

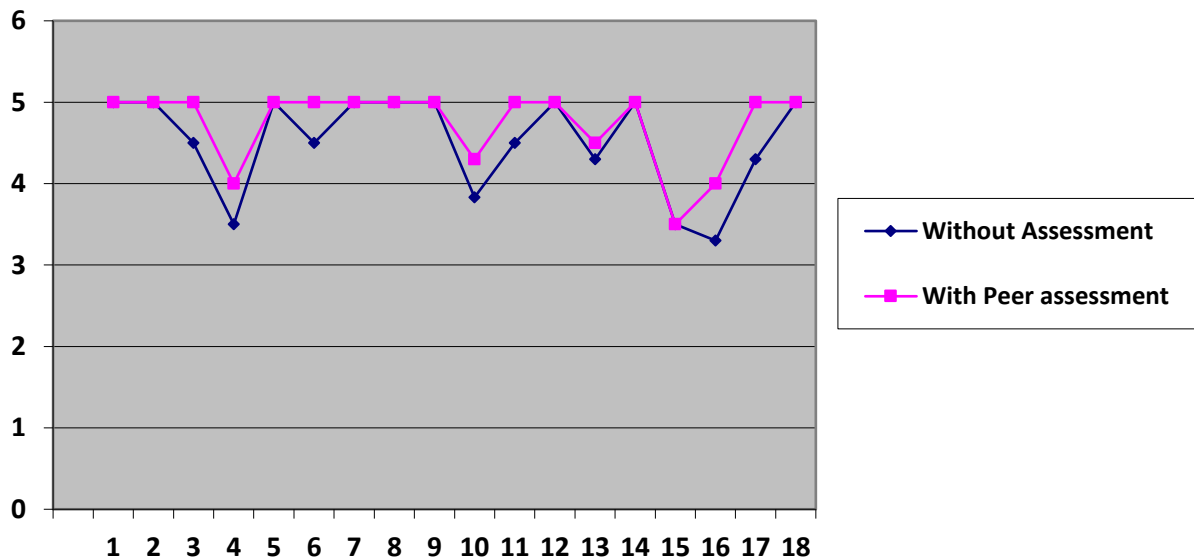
- Where would the students be that day?
- Who did they want to spend their birthday with?
- What would they do during the day and in the evening?
- What would they have to drink and eat?
- Why was this birthday so desirable and what would make this birthday special?

The students were given big pieces of paper and crayons to produce colourful posters to their imagined birthdays, which they had to present to the rest of the class. The following activity was planned to encourage not only group work, but also creativity and innovation. As there were only 3 students per a group, the students had approximately 30 minutes to prepare their posters. The presentation of the group work results and posters took 25 minutes (each group had approximately 4 minutes to present their works and answer the questions).

After the students had finished their group work assignments and presented the results to the rest of the class, the peer assessment of contribution to group forms were distributed to the students and the instructions to using such forms were introduced. The peer assessment of contribution to group form is presented in Table 2 of the present research paper. The students had to write the name of each group member in the columns, then assign a score of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest grade, 5 the highest) to each group member for each criterion and finally total the scores for each member. On the back of the sheet the students were asked to write any comments they wished to make in the target language - English. The criteria had been thoroughly discussed with the students before they started their assessment. The differences among the main points presented in the criteria and the ways of differentiating them were explained to the students. The students had approximately 5 to 7 minutes for the peer assessment activity.

## 2.2 Research Outcomes

The graphs presented in Figure 1 depict the change in the rate of the students' involvement and participation in group work with peer assessment and without it. The first graph presents the data gathered during the group work assignment without a peer assessment activity, while the second graph presents the data gathered during the group work assignment after which the peer assessment activity was implemented.



*Figure 1. The comparison of data gathered during group work assignments without assessment and with peer assessment.*

There are 2 axes in Figure 1 which help to make the comparison between the involvement of students during group work assignments without and with peer assessment implementation. The vertical axis indicates the level to which the students met the criteria while demonstrating their involvement and participation in group work. There are 5 levels in the vertical axis which are similar to the grading system used at school, where the lowest level of involvement and participation is 1 and 5 is the highest level. The horizontal axis in Figure 1 stands for the number of students participating in the assignments developed for the present research.

The comparison of two graphs makes it clear that the rate of improvement in the students' involvement during the group work assignments with a peer assessment activity and without it is not very crucial. But still the graph clearly shows that the improvement is present and this presence is definitely positive.

It was very interesting to find out that there were no students absolutely reluctant during both group work assignments. Absolute reluctance is considered to be a total ignorance of the assignment and the work done by the group, depending on others and letting them do all the necessary contributions. It was discussed in the Introduction of the present research paper that reluctant students are not only the ones who do nothing in class; students doing something reluctantly, do it but without sufficient effort and initiative, participating at the minimal level and not meeting the requirements of the teacher. When the student does the task, not meeting the requirements of the teacher and using minimal effort while doing it, he or she can be considered to be reluctant in class and this minimal involvement of the student in the assignment accomplishment is an indicator whether he or she can be considered as being reluctant or not. Both graphs presented in Figure 1 (without assessment and with peer assessment) demonstrate positive involvement in the group work assignments of all the students participating in them. There were no students absolutely ignoring the assignment, all the students were involved and tried to make contributions. The level of participation and diligence of different students in class slightly differed, but still all the students were working and showing their involvement. The highest average grade for participation and involvement estimated while assessing research outcomes was 5 and the lowest one- was 3, 3. The grade 3 at school is regarded as satisfactory and is rather acceptable at school in class. The student who got the lowest grade was not showing the absolute reluctance (ignorance of the assignment); he was participating, but his efforts were much smaller than the efforts of the other students participating in the group work activities.

The analysis of peer assessment of contribution to group forms revealed the diligence of the students in filling all the necessary columns and giving all the required scores to all group members for each criterion. The majority of students even tried to write comments about the involvement and participation of other students on the back of the peer assessment of contribution to group forms. The comments were written in English, thus the students while accomplishing this assignment were not only giving simple scores to other students and helping the teacher to give fairer individual grades, they were also practicing their writing skills in the English language as well. Not many comments were grammatically correct, but the usage of words was rather satisfactory. The comments were checked together with the practicing teacher. The teacher carefully analysed the content of the comments and concluded that the comments were rather unbiased. The practicing

teacher noticed the same faults as the students pointed out in their assessment forms. After that the practicing teacher corrected the errors in the grammar and the vocabulary used in the comments and distributed the forms for error analysis to the students.

The analysis of the results of the present research with the practicing teacher revealed the following: the students participating in the research tried their best to present themselves during the assignment with peer assessment. The practicing teacher of English language of the researched students said that they did not often have group work assignments. Usually they had 2-3 group work assignments half-yearly and during each group work assignment at least 2 students were usually noticed being reluctant. And those two students were defined by the teacher as being absolutely reluctant, making no contributions and putting no effort into group work. Knowing that they were being observed, the students who usually presented reluctance during group work assignments tried to participate and show their involvement. This unanticipated involvement disrupted the clarity and reliability of the experiment, but made the lesson more educational and informative, as all the students were attentive and involved.

The conclusions made by the practicing teacher after observing the involvement of students during group work assignments without peer assessment and with it were summed up in *Group Work and Peer Assessment Practicing Teacher Questionnaire* presented in Table 3 and discussed orally during a separate meeting. The attitude of the practicing teacher, who participated in the experiment, to group work activities, grading and peer assessment as a tool to involve reluctant students in group work activities was revealed in the answers to the questions formulated in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed on the basis of key ideas discussed and researched in the present paper.

<b>Circle the answer which reflects your opinion. Please answer honestly.</b>	
Do You often use group work in Your class?	<b>Yes/No</b>
Have You ever used peer assessment in your class?	<b>Yes/No</b>
Do you find peer assessment valuable for including reluctant students in group work?	<b>Yes/No</b>
Peer assessment in group work helps to give fair grades to students.	<b>Yes/No</b>
The students are concerned about their grades.	<b>Yes/No</b>



Graded assignments make students work harder.	Yes/No
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Table 3. *Group Work and Peer Assessment Practicing Teacher Questionnaire*

There were 3 yes/no answer questions and 3 yes/no statements listed in the questionnaire which definitely needed a more detailed discussion. All 3 questions and 3 statements were aimed to support the ideas discussed and researched in the present paper. The first question listed in *Group Work and Peer Assessment Practicing Teacher Questionnaire* was the following: Do You often use group work in your class? As it was previously mentioned, the interviewed teacher usually plans 2-3 group works half-yearly. She considered it to be not often. The reason for planning group work activities rarely were the noise during group work assignments and the presence of the reluctant students who wasted academic time depending on other students in group. The second question was aimed to reveal whether the practicing teacher had ever used peer assessment in her class or not. The practicing teacher, who participated in the present research, had never implemented peer assessment activity before. She observed it for the first time with the researcher and made several conclusions. The reasons for not using peer assessment activities in class were that she did not believe in its efficacy and always regarded it as waste of academic time. Also she doubted the fairness of the grades assigned by students to their classmates. She thought that the students would assign higher grades to the ones they like and lower grades to those whom they dislike. Every teacher has a choice whether to include or not different activities in the lesson, and it was her decision not to include peer assessment activities into her lessons. But after observing the group work assignment with a peer assessment activity she answered positively to the third question asked in *Group Work and Peer Assessment Practicing Teacher Questionnaire* about the value of using the following activity during group work assignments. She said that she found peer assessment valuable for including reluctant students in group work. She agreed that a peer assessment activity is not only informative in terms of grading, but it is interesting and engaging for the students. Then, the questionnaire had a statement with which a teacher had to agree or disagree. The statement was the following: *Peer assessment in group work helps to give fair grades to students.* The interviewed teacher agreed with the statement presented above and said that she had noticed that the grades given by the students to their peers were rather fair: they did not try to give higher grades to their friends and lower to the ones whom they liked less. Also she noticed how engaged they were while assessing others and how

attentive they were while observing the work of the others. Thus, the teacher agreed that peer assessment in group work helped to give fair grades to students and noticed how relaxed were the students who earlier worried about the unfairness of grade distribution in group work assignments. Students who are very diligent in their studies and want to get the best results often feel insecure being in a group with less responsible classmates. The peer assessment activity included in the research helped to bring some comfort and security to the most diligent students. The next statement presented in *Group Work and Peer Assessment Practicing Teacher Questionnaire* was connected with the concern of the students about their grades. It was interesting to find out whether peer assessment could have an influence on the students being connected with the grades they receive for the group work assignment. When discussing the concern of the students about their grades, the teacher, who participated in the research, answered that that concern was usually at a very high level. According to her, the grades are the best motivators to study for students and graded assignments definitely make students work harder (the last statement in the survey was said to be true). Even the laziest students try their best when it comes to getting grades. But group work assignments are the assignments which usually suggest no assessment or a shared group grade assigned to the whole group. Consequently, the students trying not to participate are usually secure and their grades do not suffer from their reluctance. According to the interviewed teacher, the problem of some students being reluctant during group work assignments usually obstructed her from choosing this method of cooperative learning and implementing it in the lesson. She understood how effective this method could be to the majority of students, but she did not want to give a chance to some of the students to be reluctant in her class. The simplicity of implementation of the peer assessment activity after the group work assignment and the involvement and great interest of students in this activity made her believe in the usefulness of its implementation in the lesson.

To sum up, the research proved that the inclusion of peer assessment activities in group work assignments reinforces the level of involvement and participation of students in work being done by their groups. The majority of students was satisfied with the implementation of the peer assessment activity and found the activity reliable and fair. But still the outcomes of the research differed from the expected results. It was assumed at the beginning of the experiment that there would be at least two students out of 18 who would ignore the assignment and depend on other group members. As in both group work

assignments the degree of participation of the students was quite high, the hypothesis can be claimed to be half true. The hypothesis was based on the reinforcement of the involvement of the reluctant students in the learning process with the inclusion of peer assessment activities following the group work assignments. But as the participation of the students in both group work activities was rather high it is impossible to make an affirmative statement about the total trueness of the hypothesis presented at the beginning of the present research paper. But still the research proved that there was an increase in the involvement of all the students participating in group work assignments after the inclusion of a peer assessment activity and thus it can be concluded that a peer assessment activity following the group work assignment done in the EFL class can increase the involvement of reluctant students in the learning process and make them actively contribute to the work being done by their group.

## CONCLUSION

Reluctant students is a problematic group in class which requires constant attention of teachers and concern. Reluctant students, i.e. students who either are not willing to do something or do it unhappily, might be present in every EFL class. The reasons making students reluctant are numerous and it is not always possible to find and eliminate them. Teaching a reluctant student is a challenging task for every teacher. Teachers search for different methods, implement different activities pursuing the goal of involving reluctant students in the learning process. The reasons for reluctance to occur in the students have been studied and discussed by researchers Asha Sharma (2008), Nancy Protheroe (2004), Wilbert J. McKeachie and Marilla Svinicki (2006), but the ways of fighting this reluctance are difficult to be found in the scientific literature. The present study has a particular focus on peer assessment activities used during group work assignments and their ability to involve reluctant students in the learning process and make them actively contribute to the work being done by their group.

The National Curriculum of Estonia for upper secondary school highly recommends involving students in the process of assessing peers. In addition, the National Curriculum of Estonia highlights the importance of developing in students of upper-secondary school cooperation skills, which can be done through involving them into group work activities. These two recommendations of the National Curriculum of Estonia made it interesting to combine them and see how this combination can work for involving reluctant students in group work assignments. It was decided to implement a peer assessment activity following a group work assignment and see whether a peer assessment activity can influence the involvement of reluctant students into the group work assignment or not. In order to see the difference in the involvement of the reluctant students it was important to have the first group work assignment without a peer assessment activity.

Group work is based on key principles, such as shared interaction and decision making (Toseland et al 1984: 40), cooperation meaning each and every member taking a part and sharing responsibility for its success (Jaques et al 2006: 2), equality of participation and active involvement by all group members (Falchikov 2005: 220). But it also has some pitfalls which have to be considered while preparing group work activities. These pitfalls are decrease in effort and reduction in pressure to work because of the presence of others in group (Falchikov 2005: 204) and search for security and protection

from individuals on whom the students can depend (Jaques et al 2007: 7). When organizing group work activities with peer assessment it is crucial to pay attention to the composition of groups; to the procedures employed by teacher before, during and after the activity including instructing, observing, assisting and involving students into group work, and to the feedback. To prepare a peer assessment activity it is important to consider the ways of assessing peer work, whether it will be grading or comment giving, whether it will require peer assessment forms or not.

The role of assessment in learning and teaching is recognized by teachers and educators as an important formative tool to reveal students' level of achievement and provide them with qualitative support and guidance of how to improve their language mastery level. A particular focus is placed on the role of peer assessment in group work activities and how they can involve reluctant students. The analysis of the researches on the topic of peer assessment and group work to involve reluctant students (Jaques David (2000), Falchikov Nancy (2005), Spiller Dorothy (2012), etc.) can be summarized as follows:

- Group work has a great potential in the classroom, but with careful planning, preparation, implementation, guidance and supervision;
- Equality of participation and active involvement of all group members is not usually met in the classroom;
- Teacher can only give a grade for the whole group, having no idea how much each student has contributed to the work done by a group;
- Peer assessment is a good alternative to teacher's assessment, giving benefits to students and teachers and increasing student's ownership of the assessment process;
- Peer evaluation is an essential element for encouraging continued group participation. Peer evaluation can be used as a simple measurement of group participation that does not influence grades, or students can be involved to provide feedback and grade that will influence the student's grade.

An experiment with a case study was conducted in order to prove the hypothesis stated at the beginning. The group of upper secondary school students were involved in the experiment. Two different group work assignments were conducted and the students were observed in order to prove that peer assessment can be successfully used to reinforce the involvement of reluctant students in group work assignments: the first one without any assessment and the second one with peer assessment implementation. The observation of

the involvement of students in group work assignments was based on the criteria made for evaluating students' efforts, cooperation and discussion during group work assignments which were supplemented with the descriptors for each criterion.

The results of observations were compared and analysed, leaving the hypothesis to be half-true. The observation revealed that there was an improvement in the students' involvement during the group work assignment with a peer assessment activity. The rate of improvement in the students' involvement during the group work assignment with a peer assessment activity was not very crucial, but the improvement was present and it was definitely positive. The observation also revealed that there were no absolutely reluctant students during both group work assignments, totally ignoring the assignments and depending on others. Even the practising teacher was impressed by the active participation and involvement of those students who were previously often noticed to be reluctant during group work assignments. The degree of participation of all the students taking part in the experiment during both group work assignments was quite high, leaving the expectations of the author of the present research paper unmet and the hypothesis to be half-true. Nevertheless, a peer assessment activity proved to be useful during group work assignments in the EFL class. The research also revealed the diligence of the students in filling the peer evaluation forms and giving all the required scores to all group members for each criterion. The peer assessment appeared to be rather unbiased with the students taking part in the experiment. In addition to that, the research also revealed the concern of the students of upper secondary school about their grades that actually motivates them to take an active part in group work assignments and to become concerned members of the group.

The findings that were achieved during the experiment prove that a peer assessment activity following a group work assignment done in the EFL class can increase the involvement of reluctant students in the learning process and make them actively contribute to the work being done by their group. However, it is important to remember that to be successful in increasing involvement of reluctant students a group work assignment with a peer assessment activity has to be carefully planned prior to its implementation. Teachers should choose appropriate group work assignments and decide upon the methods of peer assessment, whether it should be grading or comment giving, written or oral, private or public. Different peer assessment forms can be supportive for

students. They can guide them in their assessment practise and help giving fairer grades to peers.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Üheks probleemiks, millega õpetaja võib õpilaste grupitöösse kaasamisel kokku puutuda, on mõnede õpilaste vastumeelsus osaleda grupitöös. Niisugune ilming rühmatöö puhul võib tekitada negatiivset suhtumist rühmatöösse nii õpetajatel kui ka õpilastel, kes kõige rohkem panustavad töösse, mida grupp teeb.

Töö eesmärk on analüüsida põhjuseid, mis mõjutavad õpilaste vastumeelsust klassiruumis ja näitavad vastastikuse hindamistegevuste potentsiaali, et kaasata vastumeelseid õpilasi grupis töötamisel. Uurimistöös kaalutakse, kas hinnanguline rühmatööde hindamine, mida teeb mitte ainult õpetaja vaid ka eakaaslased, võib tugevdada õpilaste osalemist töögruppide tööülesannetes ja muuta nende suhtumist grupitöösse ühistundeks.

Uurimistöös koosneb neljast osast. Sissejuhatuses vaadeldakse õpilaste vastumeelsust klassitöö vastu, põhjusi, miks niisugune probleem ilmneb õpilaste käitumises, ja probleeme, kuidas vastumeelsed õpilased osalevad grupitöös. Veel sissejuhatav osa tutvustab vastastikust hindamistegevust ühe võimaliku lahendusena vastumeelsete õpilaste tööle kaasamiseks. Esimene peatükk “Gruppitöö ja vastastikune hindamine” avab klassitööde kaasamise pedagoogilise väärtuse klassi tegevustes ja selle tegevuse ühe puuduse- õpilaste vastumeelsuse selles osaleda. Ka selles peatükis käsitletakse hindamise rolli õppeprotsessis. Peatükk keskendub ühele hindamisvariandile, mida nimetatakse vastastikuseks hindamiseks. Teises peatükis “Vastastikuse hindamise rakendamine EFL- klassi grupitöös, et kaasata vastumeelseid õpilasi” on esitatud, kujutatud ja hinnatud õppetunni plaane ja õpilaste seas läbiviidud katse tulemusi. Kokkuvõttes võetakse kokku uuringu tulemused ja esitakse kommentaarid uuringu hüpoteeside kohta.

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