

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN EFL ACTIVITY  
BOOKS

Bachelor's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract	
<p>Yhteistoiminnallisella oppimisella tarkoitetaan toimintatapoja, joiden avulla pyritään yhdessä työskentelemällä ja oppimalla saavuttamaan ryhmän yhteiset päämäärät. Termin voidaan katsoa olevan eräänlainen opetusfilosofia, joka kattaa useita eri yhteistoiminnallisuutta tukevia opetusmenetelmiä tai aktiviteetteja. Olennaista yhteistoiminnalliselle oppimiselle on, että ryhmän jäsenet ovat vastuussa toistensa taitojen kehittymisestä samalla tavalla kuin omasta oppimistaankin. Samalla ryhmän jäsenet harjoittavat ihmissuhde- ja ongelmanratkaisutaitojen kasvokkain tapahtuvassa vuorovaikutuksessa kanssaoppijoiden kanssa laatien lopulta itsearviointin ryhmän toiminnasta.</p> <p>Koska yhteistoiminnallista oppimista kirjallisissa oppimateriaaleissa ei tiettävästi ole tutkittu, oli tämän deskriptiivisen tutkielman tavoitteena selvittää, miten suomalaisissa peruskouluissa käytössä olevissa englannin kielen oppikirjoissa hyödynnetään yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen periaatteita. Tutkimusaineistona toimi kolme peruskoulun 9. luokan englannin harjoituskirjaa, <i>Smart Moves 3</i>, <i>Top 9</i> ja <i>Spotlight 9</i>, joista ainakin kaksi jälkimmäistä ovat yhä käytössä perusopetuksessa. Näistä kirjoista valittiin yhteensä yksitoista tehtävää, joiden sisältöä, tehtävätyyppejä ja yhteistoiminnallisuutta analysoitiin viitaten saatavilla olleeseen teoriaan yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen ominaispiirteistä.</p> <p>Tutkimuksissa tunnistettiin ainakin kuusi erilaista aktiviteettityyppiä, joiden voitiin katsoa tukevan yhteistoiminnallista oppimista. Runsaimmin edustettuna olivat suulliset vuorovaikutustehtävät, mutta yhteistoiminnalliseen oppimiseen ohjeistettiin myös muun muassa kääntämis- ja aukkotehtävissä.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The power of collaboration is undeniable. Be it a business company or a sports team, neither will succeed if the individuals in it do not join their efforts for the greater good. The same holds good for classrooms as well; learning collaboratively can not only be more entertaining, but also more effective when compared to individual learning. Especially in language learning authentic communication between other language speakers is an essential part of the learning process and cannot easily be replaced by anything that can be done individually.

Previous research on collaborative learning has focused mostly on teaching methods and classroom procedures. In addition, the effects of collaborative learning and its sub-approaches such as cooperative learning have been studied, with mostly positive results (see e.g. Crandall (1999) and Ashton-Hay and Pillay (2010)). In relation to different learning contexts and materials, computer mediated collaborative learning has been in the interest of researchers (e.g. Beatty and Nunan 2004). However, little information on how collaborative learning is realised in written learning materials is available. Considering the perceptible role of published textbooks in the teaching of most school subjects, particularly that of second and foreign languages, it is important to consider how the activities provided in them promote teaching and learning methods that are demonstrably effective, such as collaborative learning. Therefore, I have conducted this study to analyse how the activities featured in English language schoolbooks support collaborative learning.

For this purpose, I will examine three EFL activity books published for the 9th grade in Finnish comprehensive school. The analysis will focus firstly on identifying the types of activities that make use of collaborative efforts, and secondly on evaluating which language skills they practice. Most importantly, I will assess the quantity of collaborativeness in the activities, with the theory for successful collaborative learning presented in this paper as my main criteria.

## **2 COLLABORATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

Collaborative learning is an educational method with several different descriptions and approaches linked to it. This chapter will firstly focus on defining what is meant by collaborative learning by discussing some of its most commonly used definitions. Secondly, the central elements of collaborative learning will be listed and explained to further illustrate what is expected from collaborative learning procedures. Thirdly, the topic will be approached from an affective perspective, dealing with the effects and benefits collaboration has on such things as learner performance and learning outcomes. Finally, the focus will be more specifically on collaborative learning in terms of language learning, particularly on foreign and second language learning. Additionally, some typical activity types used in collaborative language learning will be outlined.

### **2.1 Definitions of collaborative learning**

The general consensus on the meaning of the term 'collaborative learning' is that it stands for learners working together to reach a shared goal. However, considering the number of different conceptions on collaborative learning, it is challenging to exhaustively define what is meant by the term. Although it is occasionally used as a synonym for cooperative learning, and the two terms can be seen as similar in meaning, they follow, as several sources affirm, slightly different principles. For example, Matthews, Cooper, Davidson and Hawkes (1995: 36) illustrate the differences between collaborative and cooperative learning in terms of the role of the teacher, the involvement of students, and the relationship between the teacher and the students. They clarify that in comparison with cooperative learning, collaborative learning is less organised by the teacher, as the students are given more responsibility of their own learning and evaluation.

Panitz (1996) distances collaborative learning even further from cooperative learning as he suggests that the former is more of a philosophical approach rather than merely a pedagogical one, where mutual respect and responsibility between group members is built on cooperative efforts. Oxford (1997) similarly infers that collaborative learning is based on building

functional learning communities that focus more on the learner's adjustment to the community than on concrete learning procedures, as in cooperative learning. Collaborative learning can then be, as Oxford (1997) concludes, associated with social constructivism, which focuses on the whole learning process as opposed to single tasks to be completed.

The ideas of collaborative learning presented above provide a rather vague picture of which aspects of learning the term is seen to involve. Dillenbourgh's (1999: 9) definition of collaborative learning is among the most specific ones, as he mentions four features that can serve as the criteria of evaluation when determining the meaning of the word 'collaborative'. He states that situations, interactions, and learning mechanisms as well as the effects of collaborative learning should all be considered when using the term, and emphasizes that in a collaborative context the parties involved, who are equal in status, must work together towards a shared objective via collaborative procedures. As in the definitions of collaborative learning mentioned earlier, Dillenbourgh (1999: 11) too differentiates between collaborative and cooperative learning, explaining that collaboration requires group members working together, whereas in cooperation the workload is divided between the group members.

While these definitions view collaboration and cooperation as separate from each other, Smith and MacGregor (1992: 11) view collaborative learning as a superordinate for several different educational approaches:

"Collaborative learning" is an umbrella term for a variety of educational approaches involving joint intellectual effort by students, or students and teachers together. In most collaborative learning situations students are working in groups of two or more, mutually searching for understanding, solutions, or meanings, or creating a product. (Smith and MacGregor 1992: 11)

This theory suggests that cooperative learning should not be distinguished from collaborative learning, but rather be understood as one of its sub-approaches, allowing broader usages for the term 'collaborative learning'. For this reason Smith and MacGregor's definition of collaborative learning serves as the basis of the analysis in this paper.

## **2.2 The basic features of collaborative learning**

As it has been discussed above, group work is a significant element of collaborative learning. Yet, it is important to remember that not all group work is necessarily supportive of collaborative learning. In order for a group activity to be considered successfully collaborative, it must fulfil certain criteria. Johnson and Johnson (1999: 75-88) list five fundamental elements of cooperative learning that educators should consider when applying collaborative approaches: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. First, positive interdependence is a primary factor of cooperation, as the success of the group requires all participants to complete their share of the workload. All group members have been assigned a specific role in the group with relation to their personal abilities, thus the group cannot function without all of its members' participation, as everyone's input is equally important. Positive interdependence can be divided into nine specific interdependence types (Johnson and Johnson 1999: 77). Second, individual accountability emphasizes the fact that all members of the group, regardless their role during the collaborative learning activity, should afterwards be able to perform a similar task on their own. It should therefore be ensured that everyone in the group gains new knowledge and skills from the collaborative activity in order for them to have the capacity to do the same on their own later. Third, face-to-face promotive interaction is needed for the group to both accomplish concrete tasks as well as for mutual support. Fourth, interpersonal and small group skills should be taught and practised, as collaborative learning involves not only working on different tasks, but initially working together in a group. Finally, group processing is a way to evaluate the group's success in order to see which procedures were helpful and which ones need improvement, hence an important phase in developing the group's functioning. Providing a clear idea of where collaborative learning activities should aim at, it is on these five elements that the analysis on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) activity books presented in this paper is founded.

### **2.3 The effects of collaborative learning**

Whenever examining and applying an educational approach, one should be aware of not only the characteristics of the approach, but also its effects and benefits. The learners are naturally the ones who benefit from collaborative learning the most, although the methodology is advantageous for the whole classroom climate as well. The effects and benefits discussed in this paper are presented mostly from the perspective of second and foreign language learning, however, it is likely that the same benefits apply to other fields of education likewise.

Crandall (1999: 233-234) presents an overview of the reasons to use collaborative learning in the context of second and foreign language learning. For example, collaboration in the language classroom is believed to lower learners' anxiety level; therefore, students are likely to be more actively involved in class activities, as increased opportunities to plan and practise their answers and language with the group prior to performing to the whole class. Moreover, Crandall points out that collaboration in the language classroom requires learners to adjust their speech according to the other group members' requests of clarification, which results in producing more coherent language use that is easier for everyone involved to understand. To reinforce this argument, it has been found that collaborative learning can also improve learners' critical thinking (Gokhale 1995; Crandall 1999: 239). Crandall (1999: 234-235) concludes the discussion on the benefits for learners by noting how peer support has a positive effect on learners' self-confidence and self-esteem as well as their motivation in a way that collaboration and mutual encouragement creates a safe, supporting atmosphere for students to participate in class, which furthermore leads to a higher motivation level to do so. As for the learning environment, collaborative learning is likely to increase the quantity and quality of learner performance, create a favourable climate for intercultural communication, and promote learner-centered classroom procedures and learner autonomy (Crandall 1999: 235-240).

Laal and Ghodsi (2012: 487-488) approach the matter from a different perspective as they recite the benefits of collaborative learning collected from various sources in four main categories. The first category is called social benefits, and it refers to the effects collaboration has on the learning community such as increased cultural appreciation and better climate for

learning. The second category holds the psychological benefits of collaborative learning, and besides the effective factors on learners' self-esteem and anxiety discussed in the paragraph above, it also includes the increase in positive student attitudes towards teachers. The third category by the name of academic benefits emphasizes the improvement of learning outcomes, and the fourth category calls attention to diversity of evaluation methods that collaboration provides for both teachers and students. Considering the number of benefits that collaboration has on different areas of learning, it is justifiable to use it in language teaching, as well as in other education, which on its part provides a motive for the research presented in this paper.

#### **2.4 Collaborative language learning**

It is reasonable to argue that one cannot fully learn a language without communication. Likewise, equally justified is a claim that communication, at least if it aims to be successful, is not possible without collaboration. So significant is the role of collaborative learning in language education that it can, along with cooperative learning and interaction, be described as one of the “three strands of communication” in foreign and second language teaching (Oxford 1997: 443). In the context of foreign and second language learning, collaborative learning is often associated with communicative language learning, as pointed out by Richards and Rodgers (2001: 193). According to them, collaborative language learning seeks to build naturalistic, elaborate, and motivating language learning environments that, by the use of interactive activities, help learners in taking advantage of different ways of learning and communication. The philosophy behind collaborative language learning is, therefore, that language use is learned and meanings are created in authentic, collaborative communication with other learners, as opposed to traditional teacher-orientated studying from books (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 194; Ashton-Hay and Pillay 2010: 343). In addition, collaborative learning is designed to give teachers the tools to enable all this, as well as function as an approach that can easily be used in various contexts and different kinds of classrooms (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 193).

There are several classroom activities developed for collaborative learning, most of which can easily be applied to collaborative language learning. Crandall (1999: 229-232) discusses a

number of common cooperative activities and how they relate to language learning. Among the most frequently used activities is Jigsaw, where group members each hold different pieces of information that they first elaborate in 'expert groups' with other learners holding the same information, and then, having returned to their home groups, the group members combine their knowledge to fill in the information gaps and thus complete the task. In language learning this type of information gap activities can be used, for instance, as a listening or reading comprehension task or, especially when groups are asked to consider different perspectives of one topic, to promote higher-thinking skills in the target language. Another well-known cooperative activity Crandall (1999) mentions is think/pair/share, a task that involves learners to work at different stages of planning, sharing, and developing their ideas individually, in pairs and finally with the whole group. Learners are thus offered numerous chances to practice the content and language of their output based on the feedback they receive from their peers. For brainstorming language teachers may use, as Crandall suggests, Roundtable or Roundrobin, where learners share their individual knowledge and ideas with the rest of the group. Either in writing, as in the former activity, or orally, as in the latter, each learner contributes to the task in turns until time is up or no one in the group has anything new to add. While the activities discussed above can be carried out during one teaching period, Crandall (1999) also names a few activities that require a longer period of time to complete, and thus offer a great opportunity for language development. For example, group investigation includes not only several stages of planning, researching, and developing their projects but also practising academic language skills. Similar kind of extensive contribution is involved in collaborative writing, an activity developed particularly language learning in mind. In collaborative writing learners practice their individual skills in writing and negotiation as well as in socializing as they work on either their own products or on joint texts produced in collaboration with other learners.

### 3 THE PRESENT STUDY

#### 3.1 Research questions

As noted above, it seems that research on collaborative learning in written learning materials has not been made prior to this study. Therefore, the aim of this study is to fill this gap in research by gathering information about how collaborative learning is used in Finnish EFL activity books for the 9th grade in Finnish comprehensive schools. The analysis on the activities found in the activity books is done according to the following research questions:

1. What kind of activities support collaborative learning in Finnish EFL activity books?
2. Which language skills are practised in the activities?
3. How do the activities support collaborative learning, i.e. how do they fulfil the criteria set for successful collaborative learning?

#### 3.2 The data

The data collection used for this study consists of three activity books for Finnish 9th grade EFL learners (aged 15-16) in the comprehensive school: *Smart Moves 3* (Folland et al. 2008), *Spotlight 9: Fact and fiction* (Haapala et al. 2012), and *Top 9* (Blom et al. 2013). These books were chosen because they represent three different schoolbook series by different authors for the same level in the comprehensive school, thus providing a decent, if a little narrow, overview of the EFL activities designed for Finnish 9th grade learners. Moreover, apart from *Smart Moves 3* that was first published in 2008, the books are fairly recent and presumably still used in schools, therefore showing how collaborative learning is applied to in the present-day Finnish EFL education. For a broader view of the state of collaborative learning in Finnish EFL activity books, more data should be examined; however, according to the nature and length of the present study, the research was restricted to three activity books. A total of eleven activities have been selected for further analysis, two from *Spotlight 9*, four from *Smart Moves 3*, and five from *Top 9*. The activities are listed below in Table 1, with reference

to their contents and the abbreviations used in later chapters.

Table 1. Textbook activities

Types of activities	Textbooks		
	Smart Moves 3	Top 9	Spotlight 9
<b>Information gap / (simplified) Jigsaw</b>	SM3.1 SM3.2	T9.1 T9.2	
<b>Group investigation</b>	SM3.2		
<b>Translation</b>		T9.3	S9.1 S9.2
<b>Collaborative writing</b>	(SM3.4 simplified)	T9.4 T9.5	
<b>Roundrobin</b>	SM3.3	(T9.4/1c)	
<b>Oral communicational</b>	all the activities	all the activities	all the activities

### 3.3 The methods of analysis

The data of this study is analysed by using descriptive analysis in order to answer the research questions stated above. Since the aim of the study is to find out how collaborative learning is supported in Finnish EFL activity books, the analysis is based on the theoretical framework for collaborative learning presented in this paper. Furthermore, the analysis will draw on the five fundamental elements of collaborative learning by Johnson and Johnson (1999): positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. These elements thus serve as the criteria for selecting the activities as the sample collection. In other words, the activities analysed below have been chosen for further analysis and regarded as supportive of collaborative learning based on whether they are considered to fulfil one or more of the said criteria. Basically this means that I looked for activity instructions as well as actual activities that suggested or required collaboration between two or more students. Additionally, the activities have been chosen and examined based on whether they resemble or can be applied to any of the traditional cooperative activities discussed in section 2.4 in this paper.

Qualitative content analysis could have been used as the method of analysis if the aim had

been to find differences in the use of collaborative learning between the different activity books. However, the aim in my study, as stated above, is to merely see how Finnish EFL activity books make use of collaborative learning in general, which is why I chose to analyse the data descriptively. As my study is solely focused on collaborative learning activities in existing written learning materials as they are presented in them, I chose not to compose questionnaires or interviews to find out how those activities are used in Finnish EFL classrooms; however, this could potentially be the continuation of the present study.

## 4 ANALYSIS

In the present study my aim was to find out how Finnish EFL activity books for the 9th grade in comprehensive school employ collaborative learning. In this chapter the results and analysis of the study are discussed. First, the types of activities that support collaborative learning are outlined. Second, I analyse the language skills that are practised in the chosen activities. Finally, the data is examined with regard to their support to collaborative learning, based on the criteria set in section 2.2 of this paper. Throughout the chapter I reflect my findings to the theoretical background presented in Chapter 2. A noteworthy detail from the data that should be remembered while reading the analysis is that only in two of the activities (SM3.2/Figure 4 and SM3.4/Figure 11) do the students work in groups, as is typical for collaborative learning; in the rest, students worked in pairs.

### 4.1 Types of activities

Considering the amount of data I had for this study, collaborative learning was supported in a relatively wide range of activity types. Among the eleven activities I collected as my data, I identified a total of six different types of activities. All of the data fell into one main category of oral communicational activities, and could be further divided into one or more smaller categories based on the tasks assigned in them. This division was made due to the fact that even though every activity from the data requires oral communication between two or more people, it was not, in most cases, the main task to be completed, but merely a channel for performing the main task assigned in the activity. *Spotlight 9* and *Top 9* even made use of



9 Työskentele paris kanssa. Toinen on B ja kääntää sivulle 244. Kysele puuttuvat tiedot pariltasi englanniksi. Kirjoita suomeksi. Vuorotelkaa. A aloittaa.

Who? What is...like? Where?

A

	Tanya	Ravi	Anita
kuka:	Ganeshin täti		Mayan pikkuserkku
millainen:		sisäänpäin suuntautunut	
kiinnostunut:		vaihtoehtomusiikista	
työpaikka:	kilpa-ajaja		lumimiehen metsästäjä
työn hyvät puolet:		hiljaisuus	
työn huonot puolet:	joskus vaarallista		pilkatuksi tuleminen

Figure 2. An information gap activity from *Top 9* (T9.1):  
 Work with your partner. One of you is B and turns to page 244. Ask your partner for the missing information in English. Write in Finnish. Take turns. A starts. (Blom et. al. 2013: 127)

2b Piirrä kaatopaikalle kolme asiaa lisää ja kerro parillesi englanniksi, mitä kuvassa on ja missä. Pari piirtää ohjeiden mukaan.

There is an umbrella next to the sculpture. There are two flies on the left side of the treasure chest.

Figure 3. A drawing activity from *Top 9* (T9.2):  
 Draw three more things on the dump and tell your partner in English what there is in the picture and where. Your partner draws according to instructions. (Blom et. al. 2013: 20-21)

This activity type is similar to the Jigsaw (see 2.4), although these activities lack the 'expert groups' where students are offered the chance elaborate on their knowledge on the topic before helping others to fill in their information gaps. In these activities, the required information is given to the students in the form of correct answers (T9.1 and SM3.1) or

imagined by the students themselves (T9.2), meaning there would be little to discuss in expert groups. Therefore, I would refer to these activities as *simplified* examples of the Jigsaw. However, this element is fulfilled in SM3.2 (Figure 4), a group investigation activity, where students in small groups compile a poster or an advert, or perform an oral presentation about a topic of their choice, which in this case is the country of England and its different geographical, historical, and cultural aspects. As pointed out by Crandall (1999: 230), Jigsaw in the language classroom can be applied to, for instance, country reports, where expert groups choose to elaborate on different areas of a country in order to prepare a presentation for other students.

**4. Project time!**

Etsikää lisää tietoa Englannista. Jakaantukaa 3–4 hengen ryhmiin.  
Valitkaa alla olevista aiheista jokin ja tehkää juliste luokkanne seinälle.  
Voitte tehdä myös matkailumainoksen tai suullisen esityksen.

– Englannin luonto	– Englannin ruokakulttuuri	– teatteri, elokuva
– Englanti maailmanvaltana	– Englannin urheilu	– TV-sarjat
– Englannin kaupungit	– Englannin musiikki	– Englannin kuninkaalliset

Figure 4. A group investigation activity from *Smart Moves 3* (SM3.2): *Find more information about England. Split into groups of 3 or 4. Choose one of the topics below and compose a poster for your classroom wall. You can also make a tourist advert or an oral presentation.* (Folland et. al. 2008: 248)

Following the Jigsaw and other information gap activities, translation activities formed the second most popular activity type in the data with a total of three examples. These included translating sentences and phrases from the target language to Finnish together with a partner (S9.1/Figure 5), from Finnish to English individually with the assistance of a partner (T9.3/Figure 6), and summarizing the contents of a new text book chapter to a fellow student (S9.2/Figure 7). The exercises promote collaborative learning in different ways; while in S9.1 (Figure 5) students collaborate on translating the same sentences, in T9.3 (Figure 6) they work on translating individually assigned phrases while helping their partner to translate theirs. In S9.2 (Figure 7) students read the same text and look for the same information, after which they are asked to tell their partner what they learned from the text.

Työskentele parin kanssa. Lukekaa tehtävän G3 lauseet ja suomentakaa ne.

Figure 5. A translation activity from *Spotlight 9* (S9.1):

*Work with a partner. Read the sentences from exercise G3 and translate them.* (Haapala et. al. 2012: 103)

**3** Työskentele parisi kanssa. Toinen on B ja kääntää esille sivun 247. Sanokaa suomenkieliset sanonnat ja lauseet vuorotellen englanniksi. Pari auttaa ja tarkistaa. A aloittaa.

**A**

1. noin 40 miljoonaa lammasta	11. sama määrä perunoita
2. compared to only four million people	12. the national colour of Ireland
3. ensimmäinen lammasmaala	13. johtuen sen rehevästä vihreästä maaseudusta
4. right up until the 1980s	14. internationally successful
5. tämä uhanalainen laji	15. erityisissä tilaisuuksissa
6. the national symbol	16. the ancient origins of golf
7. he käyttävät sitä usein itse	17. nykyaikainen urheilulaji syntyi
8. the first country to introduce	18. a traditional Scottish dish
9. 1500-luvun loppupuolella	19. turisteille kerrotaan usein
10. by the 19th century	20. longer than

Figure 6. A translation activity from *Top 9* (T9.3):

*Work with your partner. One of you is B and turns to page 247. Say the Finnish sentences and phrases in English by turns. Your partner will help and check [the translations]. A starts.* (Blom et. al. 2013: 241)

Lue tekstikirjan sivut 130–131. Kerro parille suomeksi, mitä saat selville seuraavista asioista.

- |                             |                                  |              |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 sademetsien sijainti      | 4 kameleontit, liskot, jaguaarit | 7 kasvit     |
| 2 latvuskerros              | 5 kenttäkerros                   | 8 hyöty      |
| 3 hämähäkkiapinat, kolibrit | 6 hyönteiset, sammakot, käärmeet | 9 tuhoaminen |

Figure 7. A translation / reading comprehension activity from *Spotlight 9* (S9.2):

*Read textbook pages 130-131. Tell your partner in Finnish what you find out about the following matters.* (Haapala et. al. 2012: 171)

Two exercises from the data supported collaboration in the form of collaborative writing (see 2.4). Both activities approach the same theme, film shooting, but from slightly different perspectives, using various collaborative tools. In T9.4 (Figure 8) students use oral brainstorming techniques based on a picture and questions provided in the book to plan and

write their co-produced imaginary filming diary. In T9.5 (Figure 9), however, students draw on personal experiences, as they collaboratively write a film scene based on real-life events from the previous day that they are asked to share with each other. Several stages of collaboration take place in this activity: firstly, the students use oral communication to talk about their day, which is then summarized in writing by a fellow student, followed by negotiation on what sort of film could be made out of the stories, and finally, when the students have agreed on a storyline, they write a film scene in collaboration and perform it to the rest of the class.

**1c** Millaista elokuvaa kuvauspaikalla on filmattu? Millaisia hahmoja siinä esiintyy? Millainen juoni siinä on? Millaisia vaatteita tai millaista rekvisiittaa siinä tarvitaan? Kertokaa englanniksi vuorotellen.

**1d** Kirjoita parisi kanssa ote kuvauspäiväkirjasta vihkoosi englanniksi. Miten kuvaukset sujuivat? Miten näyttelijät onnistuivat?



Figure 8. A collaborative writing activity from *Top 9* (T9.4):

- 1c) *What kind of film have they been filming on the location? [---] Take turns in describing in English.*  
 1d) *Write a filming diary in your notebook in English with your partner. (Blom et. al. 2013: 202-203)*

**9a** Kerro parillesi englanniksi eilisen päiväsi tapahtumat. Parisi kirjoittaa kertomastasi pääkohdat vihkoon englanniksi. Vuorotelkaa. Keskustelkaa, millaiseen elokuvaan päiväsi sopisi.

a drama	draama
a comedy	komedial
a tragedy	tragedial
a detective story	salapoliisitarinal
a soap opera	saippuaoperal

**9b** Kirjoittakaa elokuvan kohtaus, jossa käytätte tehtävän 9a tarinoita. Esittäkää luokalle.

Figure 9. A collaborative writing activity from *Top 9* (T9.5):

- 9a) *Tell your partner in English what happened yesterday. Your partner writes down the main points in his/her notebook in English. Take turns. Discuss for what kind of film would your day be suitable.*  
 9b) *Write a film scene with your partner where you use the stories from exercise 9a. Present it to the class. (Blom et. al. 2013: 207)*

As mentioned above, most of the activities in the data used oral communication as means of completing the primary tasks. Yet, this is not to claim there were no activities that could be

classified as genuine oral communication activities. For example, in SM3.3 (Figure 10) students pair up to discuss the theme of the new chapter, hobbies, by orally listing English words for hobbies in turns until they run out of words they know. Titled 'Warm-up', this activity is a typical example of a Roundrobin activity that, according to Crandall (1999: 230), can be used for means of sharing and deepening mutual knowledge. Moreover, the collaborative writing activities mentioned above possess conversational elements as well; activity 1c in T9.4 (Figure 8) is another Roundrobin activity, and activity 9a in T9.5 (Figure 9) makes use of free conversation.

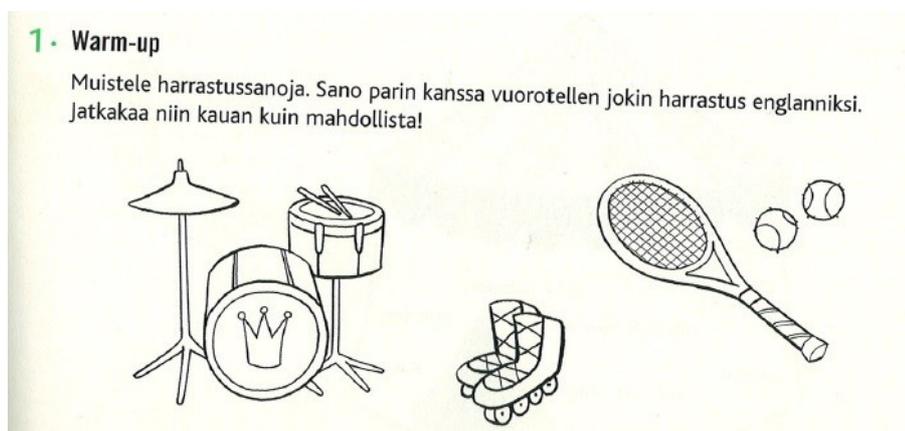


Figure 10. A Roundrobin activity from *Smart Moves 3* (SM3.3):  
*Try to remember hobby related words. Take turns with your partner in saying a hobby in English. Go on as long as possible!* (Folland et. al. 2008: 103)

One activity remained that failed to perfectly fit into any of the categories discussed above. Considering that the task is to compile a set of commands and prohibitions using the imperative form, the remaining activity (SM3.4/Figure 11) could be labelled as a collaborative writing task. I hesitated to do so, however, seeing that the length and nature of the text students are asked to produce is less extensive than in typical collaborative writing tasks such as the ones analysed above. In addition, the instructions do not specify whether the commands are to be produced in writing or orally. On the other hand, if the task should be performed in writing, the process of completing the task resembles that of the collaborative writing process; despite that the task is less extensive than in typical collaborative writing tasks, group members are, nevertheless, obliged to negotiate and socialize with each other to complete the task successfully. If this is the case, I would therefore describe this activity a *simplified* collaborative writing task, as I did earlier with the simplified jigsaw activities.



in any kind of oral conversation activities, in Roundrobin it is less of a necessity than in typical dialogue exercises, as the task could technically be completed even if the interlocutors did not understand each other.

Writing skills were promoted particularly in two activities. The general procedures of these collaborative writing activities have already been discussed in section 4.1, however, greater attention should be brought to the writing tasks themselves, namely to what type of writing is required in them. As text types, the final products of these activities are significantly different; in T9.4/activity 1d (Figure 8) students write a filming diary, that is, a narrative report that could be compared to a fictional story, whereas the outcome of T9.5/activity 9b (Figure 9) is a scene of a film, presumably supposed to be written in the form of an actual film script, complete with roles, lines and stage directions. Working on various text types such as these allows students to experiment with different collaborative strategies in order to find the ones that they believe to be most suitable for completing the task in question. For instance, having clear roles for each student in the scene and applying them throughout the task may ease the writing process as well, in comparison to the process of writing a narrative collaborative text, where compromises are likely needed to be made.

A remarkable detail from the data is that there was only one activity that could be categorised as genuinely supportive of grammar skills. It can, of course, be assumed that grammatical accurateness is expected even in those activities that practise mainly other language skills and contents, but in SM3.4 (Figure 11) the focus is clearly on a certain grammatical element, which in this particular case is the imperative. The lack of collaborative structure based activities is surprising, considering the fact that students would be likely, in several ways, to benefit from working on them together. Collaborative grammar activities might, for example, help students to better understand and process grammar structures, when explained by fellow students.

The translation activities (S9.1/Figure 5, T9.3/Figure 6, and S9.2/Figure 7) proved to be problematic in terms of analysing the language skills practised in them. The major challenge was in judging whether translating is, in these cases, the skill that is being practised or the method used to practice other language skills. As the length, nature, and topic of the current

study did not allow in-depth analysis on whether translating is an independent language skill itself, I thus attempted to fit these activities into the five categories presented above. Most suitably, these activities could be treated as supportive of grammar skills, as knowledge on the structures of the target language is highly beneficial in translating. The difference between these activities is, however, that they make use of various channels; in T9.3 (Figure 6) students translate the phrases orally, meaning they practise their oral skills, while S9.2 (Figure 7) is fundamentally a reading comprehension activity. In S9.1 (Figure 5) it is unclear whether the task of translating sentences from a previous exercise is to be done orally or in writing, making it more difficult to claim which specific language skills are needed to complete the task.

### **4.3 Support to collaborative learning**

Based on the five elements of positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing (Johnson and Johnson 1999), I evaluated to what degree the activities in the data are supportive of collaborative learning.

#### **4.3.1 Positive interdependence**

A majority of the activities promoted at least one type of positive interdependence. For instance, positive resource interdependence was most evidently realised in the information gap activities (see 4.1). In these activities, students are dependent on each other for the missing information they hold that is needed to finish the assignment. For this, students must join their information or resources together, so that it becomes shared information. When stated like this, it could be possible to interpret the reading comprehension task (S9.2/Figure 7) as supportive of positive resource interdependency as well. Although there is no noticeable information gap, students must, in this activity as well, share their resources for more thorough understanding of the new textbook chapter. As they explain to each other what they learned from the text, they thus fill in the so called gaps in each other's knowledge they might be unaware of having.

The information gap activities fulfilled the criteria also for positive task interdependence. As students are responsible for each other's ability to complete the task, they must complete their own task of assisting their partner by providing them with the information they need. Similarly, in the phrase translation activity T9.3 (Figure 6) support from the partner is a central part of the activity, although the interdependency here is not as great as in the information gap activities. Unlike in information gap activities, in this translation activity the resources needed to perform the task, that is, the sentences to be translated, are already provided in the exercise, and the partner's responsibility is merely to 'help and check the answers'.

There were two activities in the data where positive role interdependence was realised, although in slightly different manners. Of these two, in T9.3 (Figure 6) this is done more explicitly by stating that students, in turns, must take the role of 'helping and checking the answers'. In the other activity (T9.5/activity 9b / Figure 9.) students are asked to take roles more implicitly by acting out the film scene they had written together. It can be supposed this includes students taking different roles in the scene, although 'role' in this sense refers to 'impersonation of a character', whereas in T9.3 it is understood as a 'duty'. Nevertheless, in both activities, playing these roles is a significant part of performing the task.

Activities that require more thorough planning and compromising naturally benefit from group members having mutual objectives to achieve. Decent examples of these kinds of activities from the data are the collaborative writing activities (T9.4/Figure 8 and T9.5/Figure 9), where positive goal interdependence is, if not a necessity, at least implied. The imperative form in the second person plural used in the instructions of both activities suggests that students are to reach a consensus on the details of the text they are writing. Therefore, it could be inferred that attaining mutual ideas and goals is vital to the task, meaning both students must commit to reaching these goals. Using this reasoning, positive goal interdependence is also fulfilled by S9.1 (Figure 5), where the instructions specifically order students to work with a partner and to translate the sentences together by using the imperative form in second person plural. Likewise, in SM3.4 (Figure 11) there are shared goals to be achieved, as group members are asked to work together on the same task of compiling sentences in the imperative form, although the instructions are directed to individual students, in the first

person singular.

Although the examples above demonstrated positive interdependence decently, there was one activity where a more diverse set of positive interdependence types is likely to occur. The group investigation (SM3.2/Figure 4) could be seen to fulfil the criteria for at least four different types of positive interdependence. Firstly, positive goal interdependence is supported in the premise that students, again, share the goal of completing the task successfully. Secondly, as is typical to group projects, it is to be assumed the work load in this activity is divided into different areas of expertise to facilitate the working process; thus, positive role interdependence is maintained. Thirdly, like positive role interdependence, positive task interdependence is enforced by the fact that the project cannot be completed unless every group member plays their role, that is, finishes the task they have been assigned. Finally, environmental interdependence is structured when the group congregates in the same physical space to work on the project, which can help them bond more effectively in comparison to the regular classroom environment. There is no mention of doing this in the instructions, but considering the extent and nature of the activity, it is safe to suppose the groups are required to leave their usual learning environment, or at least their language classroom, to gather the appropriate materials and supplies.

One activity in the data (SM3.3/Figure 10) failed to evidently fulfil the criteria for positive interdependence. To perform this Roundrobin, it appears there is no great need for students to be bound with each other to the extent of the previous examples. For instance, there is no clear goal to be achieved, as the task of listing hobbies could go on for as long as students can think of new words. Neither are students committed to specific roles or duties. Perhaps the only way in which positive interdependence is involved here is that at least two people are needed for the activity to be useful; attempting to perform the task alone would be pointless, as the opportunity to learn new vocabulary from other students would disappear.

#### **4.3.2 Individual accountability**

The second primary element of collaborative learning, individual accountability, appeared to be a more challenging requirement to meet. Individual accountability was not truly featured in

any of the eleven activities in the data, that is, none of them involved students to perform the same task individually after first having performed it in groups.

In two activities, however, this is realizable. One is the group investigation activity (SM3.2/Figure 4), where, for the successfulness of the final presentation of the project, it should be ensured that each individual in the group is equally informed of the contents of their product. Even if the workload has been divided so that all students have their own specific areas on which to focus, students should, nevertheless, be able to talk about the subject areas that are not in their responsibility. The other activity where this can also be expected is the imperative activity (SM3.4/Figure 11). This exercise should be carried out in a manner that assures that after practising the imperative in groups, every student in the group knows how to form the imperative and is able to form it by themselves. Without applying collaborative strategies, this would come to nothing, as having one student do all the work would violate this and all the other principles of collaborative learning.

In the translation activity T9.3 (Figure 6) and the reading comprehension activity S9.2 (Figure 7) students are especially instructed to give assistance to their partner. In this sense, these activities take individual accountability into account, but only partially, because the initial tasks (translating sentences, finding out about a new textbook chapter) are done individually instead of collaboratively.

### **4.3.3 Face-to-face promotive interaction**

All the eleven activities were able to support face-to-face promotive interaction. This is not surprising, considering that the data consisted of oral communicational activities that are to be performed in class. Face-to-face promotive interaction is particularly crucial in activities with a high level of positive resource interdependence (SM3.1/Figure 1, T9.1/Figure 2, and T9.2/Figure 3), as the resources students possess are most efficiently delivered face to face.

Group investigation (SM3.2/Figure 4) was the only activity where face-to-face promotive interaction is not an absolute requirement for the entire duration of the activity, which supposedly is spread on more than one class. Naturally, there is no doubt working on the

project face to face is highly recommended. The danger of neglecting face-to-face promotive interaction is real, however, if students divide the workload between each other and do their share individually, for example at home, without consulting other group members. If carried through in this manner, the activity no longer promotes collaborative principles.

#### **4.3.4 Interpersonal and small group skills**

No matter how well developed the activities used in collaborative learning are, they are practically useless if students do not have the required interpersonal and small group skills in their repertoire. As briefly discussed in 2.2, it is, therefore, highly recommended that these skills be taught and practised in collaborative learning activities. A total of nine activities in the present data appeared to practice these skills; however, in none of the activities these skills are explicitly taught.

In activities such as group investigation (SM3.2/Figure 4) and collaborative writing (T9.4/Figure 8 and T9.5/Figure 9) where students work on a task together, they simultaneously practice negotiating and compromising, which Johnson and Johnson (1999: 83) mention to be some of the collaborative efforts that will help students reach their mutual goals. Another effort they mention is the capacity for clear and accurate communication, which is best realised by information gap activities, as the completion of the tasks is partially due to the successful communication between students. SM3.1 (Figure 1) and T9.2 (Figure 3) even provide concrete example phrases students can use when explaining words to their partner, but in the other activities no such aid is offered.

#### **4.3.5 Group processing**

Group processing, as the final essential element of collaborative learning, was seemingly promoted in none of the activities. Not once were students instructed to evaluate or reflect on their performance as a group. However, this is understandable, seeing that group processing is most efficient in cases where students work in the same collaborative group for a longer period of time. In single schoolbook activities such as the ones that make up the data for this study, students are likely to collaborate only for a relatively short duration, and often with

different people from one activity and class to another.

In spite of this, in some cases there are ways within the activities themselves in which group processing could potentially be carried out. In the information gap activities, students can effortlessly evaluate each other's performances by simply checking the correct answers; if the gaps have been filled appropriately, it usually indicates the task has been a success and students have understood each other correctly. On the other hand, if students have failed to come up with the correct answers, it suggests there have been misinterpretations, meaning something should have been done differently.

To summarize the findings of this study, it was first discovered that the diversity of activity types in which collaborative learning was used was fairly large, varying from information gap to collaborative writing and translation activities. Next, it appeared that out of the five language skills (including grammar), the activities practised mainly speaking and listening, with a few exceptions of writing and grammar, and practically none of reading. Finally, it was found that a majority of the activities were able to support some but not all of the basic features of collaborative learning.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

In this study I examined the state of collaborative learning supported in Finnish EFL activity books. Using descriptive analysis, the aim of the study was to analyse firstly what types of activities typically support collaborative language learning, and secondly which language skills are practised in them. Furthermore, the collaborativeness of the activities was evaluated based on the basic features of cooperative learning according to Johnson and Johnson (1999). The conception of collaborative learning presented in this study was based on Smith and MacGregor's (1992) idea of collaborative learning as a superordinate term for several different educational approaches. The data for this study consisted of activities collected from three EFL activity books for the 9th grade in Finnish comprehensive school from different series.

The analysis revealed that although collaborative language learning is most commonly

realised in classroom activities other than those provided in schoolbooks, the range of activity types in which collaborative learning was supported was wider than it could easily be expected. The activity types that were featured in the data varied from information gap activities to those of translation and oral communication, covering decently a small number of traditional collaborative learning activities, such as the Jigsaw, Roundrobin, and collaborative writing. However, some of these activities resembled their traditional equivalents only partially, which is why I used terms *simplified* Jigsaw and *simplified* collaborative writing task to describe them more accurately.

The five language skills referred to in this study were practised unevenly in the activities, which is a significant but an expected notice. Considering the interactive nature of collaborative language learning, it was unsurprising that speaking and listening were practised in all of the activities, and in a majority of them they were the main skills being practised. In contrast, there were two activities that supported writing skills, and none that essentially practised reading. Additionally, there were translation activities that were ambiguous in the skills they practised. Perhaps most interestingly, there appeared to be only one grammar activity that made use of collaborative learning, which raises questions about why collaborative learning is infrequently employed in grammar activities, despite its potential advantages for foreign language learning. This could be because it is believed that content and grammar are most effectively learnt alone, with reference to the common perception that grammar is an individual unit of a language, separate from other language skills.

There was great variation between different activities and the degree to which they supported collaborative learning differently. A majority of the activities were able to promote some of the basic features of cooperative learning decently, although none of them could do it exhaustively. A curious finding was that the Roundrobin activities (SM3.3/Figure 10 and T9.4/Figure 8) did not appear to support any of the five cooperative features, apart from face-to-face promotive interaction that was realised in all the activities by default. This is interesting because Roundrobin is a generally considered as a traditional collaborative learning activity.

Considering the fact that according to my knowledge no previous research has been done on

collaborative learning in written learning materials, the present study provides a valuable overview on the state of collaborative learning in Finnish EFL schoolbooks. In addition, activity book designers as well as teachers might find the information presented in this study useful when thinking of ways to improve EFL learning materials or looking for materials most suitable for their needs. However, seeing that collaborative learning is usually considered as a general classroom procedure structured by the teacher, it was to be expected that collaborative learning would not be initiated to the same extent in written learning materials, thus the findings of this study should not be regarded as a wholly truthful picture of how collaborative learning is applied to Finnish EFL classrooms. Moreover, it should be remembered that due to the length of the present study, I was able to analyse only a portion of the potentially collaborative activities in the books, meaning their true degree of collaborativeness could not be demonstrated.

Therefore, in order to receive more thorough information about the state of collaborative learning in the Finnish EFL classroom, future research on this area could be continued by concentrating more on classroom procedures and how the collaborative activities in language school books are put into practice. This could take the form of qualitative research, where the data could be gathered, for example, by conducting a field study on how the activities are used in language teaching, or interviewing language teachers on how they use the collaborative activities provided by existing learning materials in their teaching.

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