

Chapter 1

Constructing knowledge together

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*Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success. (Henry Ford)*

Summary

In this chapter, we briefly explain what we propose as a working definition of cooperative and collaborative learning and why it is important. This chapter gives an overview of how the premise of constructivism provides an important axis for collaborative and cooperative work. We also examine how this type of approach easily fits with online language learning projects. Basic points for setting up online collaborative projects are given, however these examples are quite general in this chapter. Specific examples of how collaborative and/or cooperative learning can be explored with network-based learning are provided in Chapters 3 and 4, which describe some ICT tools in more detail.

Constructing knowledge together: collaborative or cooperative learning?

Collaborative learning requires working together toward a common goal. This type of learning has been called by various names: cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, peer learning, or team learning. What they have in common is that they all incorporate group work. However, collaboration is more than co-operation. Collaboration entails the whole process of learning. This may include students teaching one another, students teaching the teacher, and of course the teacher teaching the students, too. More importantly, it means that **students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own** and that reaching the goal implies that students have helped each other to understand and learn.

On the other hand, **cooperative learning is a process meant to facilitate the accomplishment of a specific end product or goal through people working together in groups.** Inevitably, cooperation and collaboration seem to overlap, but in the cooperative model of learning, the teacher still controls most of what is going on in the class, even if the students are working in groups. Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is aimed at getting the students to take almost full responsibility for working together, building knowledge together, changing and evolving together, and of course, improving together.

The basis of both collaborative and cooperative learning is **constructivism**: knowledge is constructed, and transformed by students. The learning process must be understood as something a learner does by activating already existent cognitive structures or by constructing new cognitive structures that accommodate new input. Learners do not passively receive knowledge from the teacher; teaching becomes a transaction between all the stakeholders in the

learning process.

We are not proposing that one approach is better than the other. We do state, however, that they should be understood as two different approaches. What must be recognised is that the approach must fit the learning context it is being applied to. Inevitably, what will determine the best approach will depend upon the level of preparation and skills of the students and teachers involved. (This is also related to the choice of ICT mode as we discuss in Chapters 3 and 4). It is our understanding that teachers interested in setting up collaborative projects are interested in working towards student autonomy and self-directed learning. Teachers and/or students may not be prepared or have the ideal conditions to set up a collaborative learning project right away, but it can be seen as a goal to strive for. To simplify things, we could take Brufee's (1995) distinction between foundational and non-foundational knowledge; we would relate non-foundational knowledge with the collaborative learning approach.

Collaborative learning shifts the responsibility for learning to the student, in the role of "researcher" and self-directed learner. In order to work towards a collaborative learning approach, the teacher must fully understand their students' preferred learning styles and their own conceptions of learning. This can help the teacher decide where and how to start an online cooperative/collaborative project.

For ideas on how to "fit" an ICT tool to your teaching approach, see Chapter 3.

Foundational knowledge and non-foundational knowledge:

Foundational knowledge is understood as the basic knowledge (e.g. what is correct spelling; what is correct language use; historical facts, etc.). According to Brufee (1995), this is best learnt through cooperative learning structures, usually at younger ages.

Non-foundational knowledge can be understood as knowledge, which is derived through reasoning, questioning, discussion and negotiation of beliefs.

The benefits of collaborative learning

According to proponents of collaborative learning, the fact that students are actively exchanging, debating and negotiating ideas within their groups increases students' interest in learning. Importantly, by engaging in discussion and taking responsibility for their learning, students are encouraged to become critical thinkers (Totten, Sills, Digby & Russ, 1989). Many researchers have reported that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is being taught. Moreover, they retain the information longer and also appear more satisfied with their classes (Beckman, 1990; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Goodsell, *et al*, 1992).

For collaborative learning to be effective, there should be both "group goals" and "individual accountability" (Slavin, 1989). This means that the collaborative learning task must ensure that **every group member** has learnt something. Ideally, a collaborative learning task would allow for each member to be responsible for some concept necessary to complete the task. This implies that every group member will learn their assigned concept and will be responsible for explaining/teaching this to other members of the group. As most teachers have discovered, we usually learn more by teaching than we ever learnt as "learners"! Indeed this sentiment is backed up by research - it has been consistently found that **students who learn most are those who give and receive elaborated explanations** about what they are learning and how they are learning it (Webb, 1985).

Why online collaborative learning projects?

According to (Vygotsky, 1978) students can perform at higher intellectual levels in

collaborative situations than when working individually. Let's also add to this theory the fact that **group diversity** can contribute positively to the learning process. This is because students are faced with different interpretations, explanations or answers about what they are studying and this forces them to "re-think" their own viewpoints. It now seems clear that incorporating network-based learning into the process of collaborative learning can be very beneficial in terms of knowledge and experience students will be working with a diverse student group and this interaction may bring them to re-formulate some of their ideas (Bruner, 1985).

Moreover, research demonstrates that network-based collaboration may provide opportunities for more equality in group work than actual face-to-face group work (Cohen, 1994; Johnson, Johnson and Holubec, 1993; Kessler, 1992) since in the latter approach group "decision-making" is often contingent upon which student has the loudest voice or who has the most confidence in the target language. ICT tools such as discussion boards or weblogs (just to give two examples) can equal the playing field in some respect because students who might be shy at voicing their opinion face-to-face now have the opportunity to express themselves and can take their time and think out carefully exactly what they wish to say.

If we are truly interested in preparing our students to be responsible citizens in an increasingly technologically advanced society, then our way of teaching our students must reflect this. However, **it is not just a question of getting our students to sit down in front of a computer and begin chatting with a school partner in another country** or asking them to find information about a country the teacher has arbitrarily chosen. The projects and activities the teachers ask the students to take part in **should reflect the current and future needs of the learner**. The students in today's classrooms will be future job-seekers and that means learning to use not only the technological tools available today. Students must be made aware that advances and changes in technology can and should be embraced as new possibilities. One of these possibilities is using ICT tools as a means to effectively organized their work, in particular, **working in a distanced team**. Analysts of the future job market already speak of the need for future workers to be able to adapt to this type of work environments. By putting emphasis on **teamwork through ICT tools**, the students will learn to think creatively, to solve problems, and to make decisions as a team. Furthermore, they will be in control of technology and not slaves to it.

Whether it is through collaborative or cooperative learning, getting students to learn to work together in the classroom and with other students in another part of the world, teachers must help their students learn to interact positively with people who are different from themselves and who may not think the same as they do. Through online collaboration, students may come to see the importance of taking responsibility for their own learning and feel empowered to do so while learning to respect the opinions and work of their online partners. Of course, we must remember that a feeling of confidence is a very important factor for ensuring that students will be willing to participate and contribute in online interaction. It may be a good idea to make sure that the learners have some prior experience in small online exchanges before 'diving into' a full telecollaborative project. We will go into more detail on preparing online interaction in the next section.

Taking collaborative learning beyond the classroom walls: Getting started

Few teachers will find themselves in an ideal context for implementing a full collaborative learning process in which students are completely autonomous and all the team members negotiate and decide the tasks or activities on their own; however it can be a goal to strive for.

We will describe setting up an online *cooperative* project, with the idea that this type of learning process can **eventually be “handed over” to the students** as a fully collaborative learning project. Firstly we will provide some tips on how to come up with a good project idea, followed by steps to follow during the planning stage. In the implementation stage, we describe how to set up groups and manage the group work and then we describe a few things to keep in mind when finishing the project. As we’ve said, this is only a general sketch of setting up collaborative projects; we will go into much more detail about online projects in other chapters.

Getting a project idea and project partner

Where ideas come from is obviously beyond the scope of this handbook but it does hold true that many ideas occur at moments when you least expect it – while you are in your classroom, having a coffee break in the teachers’ lounge, watching a film and so forth. Try to hold on to the idea (jot it down on a sheet of paper for later consultation) and then go from there. Brainstorming is another way of coming up with ideas, especially when you know the general area that you want to work in.

Here are some tips for finding a project idea.

- Have a look at the standard criteria in the project area. This can be school, national or European level. By seeing the benchmarks expected at your students’ level you may be inspired for the project design.
- Find out about the interests of your students or aspects of their daily life and try to match these interests to the project design.
- Tie the project to an event going on in the school or partner school or the local community.

For more information on finding project ideas, go to our ‘Ideas Bank’ following Chapter 5.

It is probably best to look for project ideas within parameters that you are familiar with, in other words, make sure you have some knowledge about the topic yourself. Look for inspiration around you – you could build on or expand a previous project, go to local conferences for new ideas, look at events at your school or community that inspire you or go online to do some research about other projects.

Finding a partner can, of course, happen under different circumstances and the best way to find a partner cannot be generalised. In some cases, the partners may know each other personally and may have even worked together before, in other cases they may have ‘found each other’ through online partner searches or, they may have ‘met’ through contacts both partners have in common. Similarly, the way in which the collaboration begins will be particular to each case. If partners have the opportunity to meet face-to-face, then that is always a good time to begin planning, although this may not always be possible. One of the partners may already know what he or she wants to do and is looking for a partner to ‘fit’ the project profile. Or perhaps the potential partners are simply interested in carrying out an online project but are not certain, at this point, the outline of the project. In any case, it is essential that the partners take the time to get to know each other before beginning the project (Salmon, 2000) if they have not met before or only informally. This ‘social interaction’ can best take place through text chats, emails or voice chats. (For more information on the different phases of projects, including the ‘getting to know each other phase’, see Chapter Two, Salmon’s Model of Online Learning).

There are several websites designed as portals for schools looking for Internet partners. Many of these portals provide examples and reports about successful projects and ideas which can inspire new projects. Some excellent examples are iEARN; NickNacks Telecollaborative Projects; Kidlink and Kidproj. For information about online science projects in a very large network, see Global SchoolNet Foundation. Although this site is mainly dedicated to science

projects, it provides information about collaborative learning, examples of successful projects and access to possible partnerships. It can be an interesting source for language teachers interested in Content, Language and Integrated Learning (CLIL) projects. **A list of more ideas for finding partners and sites which provide information about partner contacts can be found in the Idea Bank following Chapter Five.**

Preliminary stage (planning the project)

Carefully plan each stage. Whenever a teacher is interested in implementing cooperative learning, the first step is to **consider each stage involved in the group work so that the teacher is ready to give support whenever needed.** This means keeping in mind the topics, activities or projects which are part of the regular curriculum and deciding which ones would best adapt to the collaborative work the teacher would like to implement. This also means considering how the students will be organised in groups during the collaboration. You need to keep in mind the following questions in order to organise your project into our curriculum:

- Will the students do the activities during class time, outside of the class, or a bit of both?
- Have you included this work into the regular teaching plan?
- What is the overall scope of the project? (How long will it take, when will you start, when will you finish and so on).
- Have you discussed this with your project partner?

We will often mention the need to discuss and plan with your project partner. You can find more details about how to build an efficient partnership in Chapter 2.

When deciding the scope of the project, you will need to consider the duration (e.g. a week to a month or most of the semester) and the breadth of the project (are you going to cover one topic or several integrated topics?). The scope will help determine the number of stages, which must be planned.

Once you have a topic or idea – work backwards from there. Go from the idea to curriculum needs & desired output, etc.

Let your students know what you are doing. Make sure your students understand why you are asking them to participate in an online project and the underlying learning process. Plan time into the beginning of the project to advise and explain to your students about the project.

To give learners an idea of what projects are and what they should be aiming to produce, it is good to have examples of past projects: a powerpoint presentation or a homepage, for example.

- It is important that the learning intentions are understandable to the students. It's feasible to use technical language when discussing the learning intentions, but make sure they are introduced gradually and are explained completely.
- When discussing the learning goals, put them into a meaningful context. While it may be true that many students already feel that learning a language is important, you should

not assume that this is so for all students. So you could frame specific learning goals inside a wider context of 'being able to communicate with others' for example. You might get students to add their own ideas of what this means for them.

Train the students to work together. Time may be needed to get the students "trained" in working together. Thinking about each stage of the collaboration requires the teacher to think "outside the box". Activities should be considered from the point of view of individual tasks which, as a combined effort, make a whole. Think of the seven dwarves – each one was busy with his own task, but all the labour was completed at the end of the day.

- Make sure you have allocated time for training in group work.

- Decide with your project partner whether this will be done together as part of the project or if it is done before the project actually begins. Set your timetable accordingly.

Have an alternative plan. One must always plan for contingencies. Incorporating online collaborative learning projects into the curriculum requires a lot more strategic and logistic planning from the teacher than face-to-face plans. Have alternative plans for “risk” situations (e.g. an individual in the group cannot or does not complete his/her task; or planned synchronous contact with the project partners fails due to technical difficulties, etc.)

Training students in group dynamics

This may be the first time your students have been asked to work in collaborative learning groups. Before beginning the online project, students may need training in group dynamics. You can find some steps for preparing your students for group collaboration in the Idea Bank at the end of this handbook (following Chapter 5).

Double-check the objectives. Make sure that the work is relevant to the students’ objectives. Students, even younger ones, usually know when they are doing “busy work” or when they are working on something which is integral to the objectives of a course. Language teachers can easily be lured into false security when implementing online projects because they may think that the fact that the students “are using the language” is a goal in itself. While this may be so at first, the novelty of online work will soon lose its appeal if the students do not see a reason for continuing. However, if the students are using the language to build or discover new knowledge with their online companions, they will be motivated to continue and to take more and more risks with the target language.

Be self-critical. The difficulty of integrating an online collaborative project into the objectives of the course may be compounded by the fact that the teachers are working with one or more partner classes at a distance. Inevitably, the class objectives in each case will be different. It will be necessary to find an online project that is relevant for all the classes involved. Perhaps the easiest way is to **practice what you preach! As teachers, you will need to collaborate with your teacher partners – this will mean negotiating the activities, the design of the project, the methods, the assessment, the timetable and deadlines, etc – even before the project begins.** You might even consider setting up a contract similar to the one your students make (see box on autonomy on the next page). You can find more information about building efficient partnerships in Chapter 2.

Match tasks with skills and abilities. It is important that the activities and tasks are adapted to the students' skills and abilities. This can be more difficult if the partner classes have different levels, however it does not have to be an obstacle for collaborative learning. Collaborative learning is about **teaching each other** so varying skills and abilities can be incorporated into the activities.

- Activities should also be scaled – students should start with relatively easy tasks at the beginning and then gradually increase the difficulty level as students progress in their knowledge in both the topic and ability to collaborate.
- If the students are going to teach each other, work out the timeline and activity plans carefully with your project partner.

Taking stock of the situation

You should have a clear picture of your own and your students' working situation before you enter a transnational collaboration. So you should ask yourself these questions:

- Have your students been engaged in collaborative work before?
- Have your students tried to use ICT tools in their daily work?
- How long have your students been taught the foreign language you want to use in the collaboration?
- Which resources are available as far as ICT support? (Technicians, number of computers, time available...)
- Do the head teacher and your colleagues support the idea of the transnational collaborative project?

Implementation stage (getting the project going)

Once you have designed the ‘workflow’ (activity sequences or ‘project map’; see page 23 and the Idea Bank) of the project and negotiated the management issues with your partner, you are ready to involve your students in the initiation of the project. Again, this is just a brief outline of the main steps, which you will encounter when implementing the project and it is written to help you conceptualise how to carry out the project. However, there are many issues to be considered which we go into more detail in other chapters. In this outline, we focus mainly on getting your students ready for collaborative work, especially in the case of students who are not used to this kind of activities.

Clarify what everyone is going to do. If the group is not used to this kind of activities, the teacher must carefully explain how the groups will operate and clearly specify each group task (see box on training students in the ‘Idea Bank’). Make sure that the group is aware of the objectives of the task and that any relevant concepts which they may need to be defined.

There are different ways to set up the groups. The teacher can set up the groups or allow the groups to decide their members themselves. Some teachers may prefer to pre-select the groups according to skills or past performances.

Teachers should be aware of group size as well. Usually having more than four members per group decreases the chance for collaborative work. These numbers should be kept in mind as well when setting up the online partnerships. The same rule can be applied when considering the amount of time available for the online collaboration: the less time available, the smaller the groups should be (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991).

Helping students towards autonomy

Depending on the group autonomy, the teacher may have to provide very precise instructions about the learning process. (This is not collaborative learning but it may be necessary in the beginning). Instructions should include:

- how to get started
- what type of participation is expected from the learners
- how the task will end

The instructions may be included on a hand-out sheet, which lists the key elements of the collaborative process so that students can refer back to it throughout the process.

If the students are used to collaborative work, the students can negotiate the work among themselves.

It may be helpful to ask the students to draw up written contracts which outline the members' obligations to their group, including deadlines.

Making changes to the groups should be avoided. It is important to keep the groups together, even when things are not going well with the group. Even if the group specifically asks to be re-assigned, the teachers should resist. Changing groups may break the dynamics of all the groups. Furthermore, the members of this group will not learn to resolve problems, which is an essential part of collaborative learning. Giving in to changes can also undermine the students' belief in the importance of collaboration.

Get the students to set up/understand their plan of action. How much autonomy students

have in deciding their own tasks and assigning the roles will depend on the skills and capabilities of the students. In the case where students are given the autonomy to decide their own tasks, the students should decide on activities for getting to know their online partners. (This activity may be orchestrated by the teacher if the students are not at the stage to do so themselves.) Students should be allowed time to negotiate their tasks. Written commitment from each group is suggested. **(An example of a weekly planning sheet for students can be found in the ‘Idea Bank’ following Chapter 5).** If students are not at the

point of full collaborative learning yet, or do not have the language skills necessary to negotiate the tasks with their partners, it may be necessary to assign them different “roles” that will help them to work together to construct knowledge (Figure 1).

The teacher may have to provide “prompter” sheets with linguistic cues for the roles such as: ‘Come on! You’re late with your assignment ...’. Worksheets for the different roles can also be given out (as shown in figure 1).

Figure 1

Group member	Group members in country B
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Initiator</i>: Receives instructions from the group and communicates them to the group 2. <i>Researcher</i>: Finds information about the group 3. <i>Reporter A</i>: Reports findings 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Information compiler</i>: Gets the information and previous knowledge from the group members 2. <i>Group motivator</i>: encourages everyone to participate in the activities 3. <i>Reporter B</i>: keeps track of what the group is doing.

Don’t expect students to be outgoing and friendly on cue. Even though we are pushing for collaborative learning, we should not expect even the most autonomous students to “pick out” their own online partner. This is akin to asking students to introduce themselves to a total stranger at a party and then start to work immediately. The teacher should decide if it is best to directly assign the online partner or group. This should be discussed and decided by the collaborating teachers before beginning the project. Give the students time and activities to get to know each other before they have to begin working together. This is vital to the well being of the project. Different activities can be designed that combine “getting to know each other” and “partner-picking” at the same time. **You can find examples of ‘ice-breaking’ activities that can be used for setting up partnerships at the same time in the ‘Idea Bank’ at the end of this handbook.**

Make sure the students understand their responsibilities and possible consequences. It should be made clear to the students that their work plan includes a plan for dealing with members who do not fulfil their responsibilities. If the students are writing their own work plan, they should decide the way they wish to deal with such members. Teachers can give some reasonable suggestions, as students may be overly zealous or afraid of retaliations.

Groups should regularly report on their progress. This can be in the form of outlines, drafts, worksheets to fill out, “newspaper” articles, discussion board reports, group minutes, oral presentations, or many other methods which not only help the teacher to be informed about the groups’ progress but allows the students to learn or assimilate skills (presentations, article writing, etc.). The progress updates should be shared online. The collaborating teachers should also make sure that they maintain open communication about progress and/or problems in each participating class.

Final stage (closure)

Once you have finished the activities, it is time for closure. One of the aspects of closure is, of course, assessment. How to assess collaborative learning can be challenging because the teachers are assessing the learning process and not just the end product. Involving the students in the process, through group evaluation, peer evaluation and self-assessment, is one alternative. The teachers involved in the online collaborative project can ask their students to

assess their group's work, for instance, but the students should give reasons for their evaluation, not simply 'give marks'. This can be done as a team report (written collaboratively) and/or an individual report. Different ICT formats can be incorporated into the assessment process: e-portfolios, online voting systems, news articles, etc. The teachers involved should also self-assess the project and ask for student feedback. **We discuss assessment in more detail in Chapter 5.**

Include assessment in the initial planning. You will need to consider how the final products will demonstrate the student proficiency in the areas you are interested in. For instance, if you are interested in your students' improvement in 1) writing skills and 2) oral presentation then you could include a video recording of students' presentations, which can be shared with the partner class. This can be accompanied by additional information about the videos, which the students have to write.

Here are some ways to ensure participation of all the members of the group:

- Anonymous assessment of the other group members - anyone who is reported as not working by the majority of the group members may receive a lower mark
- Members can vote to dismiss a student from the group. In such cases, the group member must negotiate a way to participate or take a failing mark for the project
- Ask for random presentations of group work from different members of the group – anyone who is not collaborating will not be able to give a report.

Have the students collect examples of their own work. These can be evaluated by the teacher only or between peers or self-assessed. Some ideas are:

- Journal entries
- Emails
- Chat transcriptions
- Interview transcriptions
- Reflective texts
- WebPages
- Collaborative WikiPages

Provide guidelines for students to self and peer assess. Ideally, the teacher's role in collaborative work is to be a 'guide' for the work to be done, rather than 'only decision-maker'. You can negotiate with the students the areas that they will assess and discuss with the students the different criteria that everyone agrees are 'good standards'. Here are some elements, which might be included as guidelines for the assessment reports:

- Participation (quality and quantity)
- Preparation (collaboration)
- Punctuality (interpersonal skills)
- Respect (interpersonal skills)
- Contribution of ideas (collaboration)
- Creativity (problem-solving)
- Commitment (collaboration)

Consider using rubrics for measuring achievement. If they are well-written, rubrics can provide a clear description of the levels of performance. It also helps the students to know what is expected of them. It is easier for the students to understand these expectations if the rubrics

are accompanied by examples – for instance you might give samples taken from your students’ work before the project began and use it to explain how to apply the rubrics. Rubrics can also help the teacher organise the project because they clearly show the expected outcomes. This means that the teacher will have to plan carefully the tasks and project design in order to help the students reach those final products. We provide further explanations of writing rubrics in Chapter 3 in the section describing Languagequests. You can find tips on writing rubrics and an example that uses Bloom’s Taxonomy (1956) in rubrics in the ‘Idea Bank’ at the end of this handbook.

Allow yourself and your partner time to reflect on the experience. Hopefully your experience in elaborating an online collaborative learning project will not be a ‘one-time’ thing. Like any new experience in teaching, it will take some time for you to feel comfortable with it and to feel that you really know how to get the most out of the experience. One way of ensuring progress and improvement is to share your reflections about how you felt the experience went and to provide your partner the same opportunity. It is important that you allow each other to voice your opinions (positive and negative) but it is equally important that you maintain your focus on ways to improve the project coordination and try to keep ‘personal’ issues out of the evaluation. More details and guiding questions can be found in Chapter 5 and the ‘Idea Bank’.

Plan a ‘Wrap-up’. Just as most film directors already know, coordinating the activities of a team that has been working together for some time in a creative process (and with everyone carrying out different, but equally important tasks), the participants involved need to have some sort of ‘closing activity’. Without this type of closure, students may not be able to recognise as easily the benefits they got from the experience and they will not be as willing to become involved in similar experiences in the future. A ‘wrap-up’ allows them the chance to review and reflect upon the things they learnt, what they enjoyed, what they would change for improvements and to savour the personal aspect of having made contact with partners outside their usual circle of acquaintances. A ‘wrap-up’ is good for the teachers involved as well as it can be a means of celebrating a positive experience or can help diminish negative aspects of the experience if things did not go as well as expected.

Points to keep in mind: What makes a good collaborative activity?

Ideally, tasks should encourage students to reflect and discuss "why" – that is, they should reflect on how they came to their solutions of each problem they encountered. Students should learn to listen carefully to comments, opinions, suggestions and criticisms from other members of the group and learn to “re-think” their own judgments and opinions, when and if necessary. The collaborative learning activities should provide students with opportunities to analyse, synthesize, and evaluate their ideas together. This means facilitating discussion and interaction so that students are forced to go beyond mere statements of opinion.

Network-based learning is an excellent way to design tasks that include ways of exchanging this information in groups, whether synchronously or asynchronously. The teacher should remember, however, that the best method for exchanging information and opinions as well as the choice of ICT tool for doing this will depend on the group personality, local constraints, age of students, objectives of the overall project and many other contextual factors.

The task should ensure positive interdependence. This is one of the most important factors to collaborative learning. Students should know and understand that their interaction in the

group is linked to the others in such a way that success can only be achieved by everyone contributing their part. Knowing that one's participation is essential for the whole group can be a powerful motivational factor (Kohn, 1986).

This may mean assigning each member of the group a different role, but each role must be crucial to the overall activity. Inevitably, this may require prompting and preliminary exercises in vocabulary and phrases for lower levels of language learners, but the students will have the possibility of putting this knowledge to use in authentic texts. It can also allow the teacher(s) to distribute the tasks according to each student's individual abilities: students who enjoy doing research can be assigned this role; students who are very organised may be assigned to the role of reporter and so on. Roles can also be rotated so that everyone has a chance to try out a different role. The teacher should try to find the best strategies for promoting interdependence with their group. These might include specifying common rewards for the group, encouraging students to divide up the labour, and formulating tasks that compel students to reach a consensus (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith, 1991).

The project helps the students develop interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication should not be confused with good language skills. Effective interpersonal communication means that group members communicate with each other on a regular basis, and are careful to ensure that their communication is clear and relevant (Johnson and Johnson, 2000). Of course, the autonomy of making contact with the other partners will depend on the ages of the students and the resources of the school. If the students are young, then times and methods of communication between the collaborative groups will probably be decided by the teachers and will be contingent upon class schedules and computer resources. With older or more autonomous students, group collaboration may be the responsibility of the students themselves. In this case, interpersonal communication is essential and could even be considered a factor for final assessment. Students should be trained in the different means of communication: on-line messenger services, e-mail, discussion boards, audio and video chats, etc. However, in many cases, it may be our students who instruct us on the latest technology! You could even begin the idea of collaboration by giving your students the opportunity to teach what they know!