

## ***El potencial del aprendizaje cooperativo y la educación para la paz para promover competencias sociales en la educación superior***

*The potential of cooperative learning and peace education to promote social competences in higher education*

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### **Resumen**

Este artículo ofrece una propuesta para enseñar en una lengua extranjera usando algunas actividades cooperativas que promuevan los principios de la educación para la paz y la adquisición de competencias sociales en la educación superior. El aprendizaje cooperativo se ha estado implementando de manera satisfactoria en los últimos 60 años en todos los niveles educativos incluida la Universidad debido a su sólida fundamentación teórica, los principios que propone y sus aplicaciones prácticas. Trabajar en pequeños grupos con el fin de realizar las distintas actividades cooperativas que se proponen implica promover la comunicación y la resolución de conflictos como competencias sociales. Además, este artículo destacará la importancia de gestionar los conflictos de forma pacífica y respetando las diversas opiniones, que son los principios básicos de la educación para la paz. Proponemos la realización de actividades cooperativas que potencian la paz como ejemplo para trabajar temas sociales en la enseñanza universitaria de modo que el alumnado mejore su capacidad crítica al reflexionar sobre temas como la pobreza, la guerra, la globalización, el género, los derechos humanos o el racismo. Finalmente, se preparó una encuesta con el fin de conocer la opinión del alumnado sobre las actividades cooperativas diseñadas y las competencias sociales que se adquieren al realizarla. Las respuestas del alumnado muestran que son conscientes de la importancia de aprender competencias sociales para la vida.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje cooperativo; ciudadanía; competencias sociales; educación para la paz; estudios ingleses.

**Abstract**

This article offers a proposal to teach in a foreign language subject using some cooperative activities that promote the principles of peace education and the acquisition of social competences at tertiary education. Cooperative learning has been successfully implemented in the last 60 years for teaching at different educational levels including the Higher Education studies due to its solid theoretical foundation, the principles it proposes and its practical applications. Working in small groups in order to accomplish the different cooperative activities proposed implies the promotion of communication and conflict solving as social competences. Moreover, this paper will highlight the importance of managing conflicts in a peaceful way and respecting the different opinions, which are basic principles in peace education. We propose the establishment of cooperative activities which enhance peace as an example to work on social issues in University education so that students improve their critical capacity when reflecting on issues such as poverty, war, globalization, gender, human rights or racism. Finally, a survey was conducted in order to establish students' opinions about the cooperative activities designed and the social competences they acquired in doing them. Students' answers show that they are aware of the importance of learning social competences for life.

**Keywords:** Cooperative learning; citizenship; social competences, peace education; english studies.

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**1. Introduction**

The University of the 21st century needs to prepare students for the demands of the labour market. This requests important changes in the teaching-learning process such as the use of active methodologies, the promotion of different types of competences and the relationship between what is taught in the classroom and real life (Barkeley, Cross & Major, 2008; Barahona, Gratacós and Quintana, 2013; Martínez Lirola, 2013, 2017; Rué, 2007).

The mentioned changes imply new roles for lecturers because they need to be facilitators, guides or tutors instead of assuming the traditional role of source of knowledge (Martínez Lirola, 2007). Consequently, there are also changes in students' roles because they become the protagonists of the teaching-learning process by being active and taking decisions while they learn (Boni, Lopez-Fogues y Walker, 2016; Moss, Barletta, Chamorro and Mizuno, 2015). Students are independent learners, active researchers in the process of learning new knowledge; moreover, they are also able to take decisions while they learn.

Lecturers need to design activities that are framed in active methodologies so that students acquire competences that will be useful for the labour market, such as working in groups (Cavazotte, Moreno & Hickmann, 2012; Farh, Seo, & Tesluk, 2012). For this reason, this article offers a proposal of some cooperative activities that take into consideration the principles of peace education (hereafter PE) so that students are able not only to work together in order to accomplish a common goal but also to solve possible difficulties and conflict in the learning process in a peaceful way. In this sense, this article can be of interest to lecturers and researchers of different subjects due to the social nature of the activities that will be presented in section 4.

After this introduction, this article offers a section that explains the connections between cooperative learning (hereafter CL), social competences and peace education. Next, it is presented the research design paying special attention to the context and the participants and the

methodology used. Section 4 describes some activities that promote cooperation and peace education in a language subject. Finally, the article finishes with the discussion and some conclusions based on the study.

## 2. Theoretical background: approaching cooperative learning, social competences and peace education

Cooperative learning is an active methodology that gives students the opportunity of working with their classmates while they learn, as Barkeley, Cross & Major (2005, p. 4) make clear: “[...] co-laborating is an important feature of collaborative learning. The meaning of the Latin-based term collaborate shines through as clearly today as in antiquity: to co-labour. All participants in the group must engage actively in working together toward the stated objectives”.

Johnson and Johnson (1989, 1994, 1997, 2007, among other studies) are the main authors on CL. They (1994) established the following principles of CL: positive interdependence, face to face interaction, individual and group accountability, interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing. These principles contribute to the fact that students are active and acquire not only contents but also different types of competences and interpersonal skills that can be useful in life, expressed thus by Divaharan and Atputhasamy (2002, p. 73):

Cooperative learning helps students to develop interpersonal skills (Slavin, 1987) such as: getting to know and trust team members; communicating effectively and clearly; providing support and challenging fellow team members; and engaging in constructive conflict resolution (Johnson and Johnson, 1994). In addition, these social skills may help students to acquire a sense of social responsibility (Vermette, 1988).

CL implies that students work together in order to accomplish a common goal. Working cooperatively requests the development of different types of competences apart from the acquisition of contents. Traditionally, emotional competences have been neglected in higher education (Barblett & Maloney, 2010; MacCann, Lipnevich & Roberts, 2012) but some authors have highlighted their importance in the last decade (Goleman, 1998, 2006; Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; Hay Group, 2002; AUTORA, AÑO; Mikolajczak Brasseur & Fantini-Hauwel, 2014; Peñalva-Vélez, López-Goñi & García-Manso, 2016; Ramos, Chiva y Gómez, 2017). Emotional competences are understood as the ability of human beings to regulate emotions. Tallón and Sikora (2011, p. 40-41) categorise emotional competences as personal and social, as we can see in the Table 1.

Table 1.

*Classification of emotional competences based on Tallón and Sikora (2011).*

Personal competences	Social competences
Self-knowledge, security, self-control, adaptability, sincerity, optimism, initiative, motivation to achieve a goal and resistance.	Understanding others, political consciousness (which alludes to who has the power in a group), communication, cooperation, leadership, influence and management of conflicts.

Since we are interested in designing activities that help students to be prepared for the demands of the labour market, we are especially interested in social competences. These competences are understood as the integration of thoughts, feelings and behaviors to accomplish certain social and interpersonal outcomes. In this sense, students will develop social responsibility, which will facilitate their critical and constructive participation in social processes. In fact, these competences are useful in educational and social contexts and they contribute to students' development as social citizens, which is essential in a critical global citizenship education.

Out of the different social competences proposed, we are going to design some activities (see section 4) that allow the development of communication and management of conflicts not only for their utility for the labour market but also because these competences are clearly connected with the principles of peace education.

Peace education has been developed in the last 70 years as a way of pointing out the importance of teaching about social problems such as racism, gender discrimination, war, poverty, among others. Bringing these topics into the classroom contributes to the development of emotional competences because students are invited to think about different social realities and to respect differences among human beings. In fact, it is education whose main purpose is to be "directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms". It promotes "understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups" and furthers "the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948, art. 26).

Moreover, PE is the process of promoting the values, skills and attitudes that are necessary to bring about changes in behaviour that will enable human beings to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural. PE contributes to resolve conflict peacefully and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national, or international level (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009; Barbeito Thonon, 2016). These ideas are essential in order to promote peace in the classroom at the higher level.

This pedagogical proposal is created to promote the dignity of human beings so that violence is avoided and peace is highlighted (Andersson, Hinge & Messina, 2011; Castillo Rocha, 2018). In this sense, PE highlights active participation, respect for diversity and the importance of giving equal opportunities for all human beings. In addition, PE promotes values towards peace that include non-violent means of solving conflict in the classroom as one of the key aspects to be taken into consideration during the teaching-learning process.

Most of the studies on PE done in the last decade have concentrated on the importance of this pedagogy in conflict resolution (Bar-Tal, 2002; Chaudhuri, 2015; Danesh & Danesh, 2002a, 2002b, 2004; Davies, 2005; Isumonah, 2005; Sandy, 2001). There are also studies that highlight the advantages and principles of such education (Bajaj & Chiu, 2009; Danesh, 2006; Harris & Morrison, 2003; Page, 2004, 2008; Salomon & Nevo, 2002; Tal-Or, Boninger, & Gleicher, 2002). In addition, other authors have published some practical experiences framed in PE (Clarke-Habibi, 2005; Galtung & Udayakumar, 2013; Salomon, 2002; Timpson, 2002). All these studies have in

common the importance of the respect of diversity and the peaceful means of solving conflicts so that students can be active citizens in society.

### **3. Research design**

This article combines some of the principles of peace education with a cooperative methodology so that students are able to work in groups at the same time that they can apply the principles of PE during the whole teaching-learning process and, especially when there are conflicts in the groups. Our main research questions are the following: In what way can the principles of PE be used in cooperative activities? How can CL and PE contribute so that students can acquire social competences such as communication and conflict solving?

This article has two main objectives: a) to integrate cooperative learning and peace education in an English as a foreign language (EFL) subject through the design and development of some cooperative activities and b) to help students develop some social competences that will be useful in their future career by doing the activities proposed.

#### **3.1. Context and participants**

The research presented in this paper was done in the core subject English Language V, which is taught in the third year of the degree in English Studies (Grado en Estudios Ingleses) at the University of Alicante. The subject is taught 60 hours in the classroom and there were 90 hours where students are asked to do individual or group work in order to acquire the contents and competences requested in the subject. The subject was designed to help students develop the five skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and interaction) at level C1.

English Language V was taught four hours per week, one hour was theoretical and three were practical. The theoretical one was devoted to work with the main aspects of academic writing so that students could deepen into the main characteristics of the main texts types in English taking into consideration their formal and functional aspects. In this way, they would be able to use them in the right context taking into consideration the communicative end of each text type.

Students were asked to prepare a cooperative oral presentation on a social topic of their choice in the second hour so that they could put into practice their oral skills by presenting in front of an audience. The third hour was used to revise grammar. Every week students were asked to prepare some grammar exercises at home after the lecturer had given a short explanation of the grammatical point under study. Finally, the fourth hour was used for students to participate in a debate prepared by the same group of students who had organized the oral presentation.

There were 102 students registered in the said subject during the academic year 2016–2017, 89 women and 13 men. Most of the students were 21 years old. All of them have studied English in the first two years of the degree, which means that they acquire level B1 in the first year and level B2 in the second year. The majority of the students wanted to be high school lecturers in Spain but there were also students who wanted to teach English or Spanish abroad. In addition, there were also students whose main aim would be to work as translators and interpreters.

### 3.2. Methodology

The methodology followed is mainly qualitative-descriptive because the teacher took notes on students' participation, questions, difficulties and challenges during the teaching-learning process. This methodology is adequate and relevant to observe students' progress during the teaching-learning process. The teacher decided to choose cooperative learning as an approach to pedagogy due to the large number of students registered in the subject. Consequently, the lecturer organized different activities that promoted the participation of the different group members and that allowed the combination of some of the principles of CL and PE (see section 4). Moreover, the lecturer also designed some social competences such as communication and conflict solving so that students could deepen on them during the teaching-learning process. These competences were selected due to their relationship with the principles of CL and PE and their utility for students' career.

The cooperative activities that students had to carry out during the semester were the following: the cooperative analysis of texts connected with peace education and global issues, the preparation of a cooperative oral presentation and a cooperative debate based on social topics, the evaluation of the oral presentation done by another group and the participation in two group tutorials. All these activities are framed by the principles of PE and CL.

The social nature of the activities selected contributes to developing students' social competences, critical skills and also to their awareness of social issues. Students were asked to organize themselves in groups of six people in order to accomplish the designed tasks at the beginning of the semester. Each group had to have a group coordinator, i.e., a student to be in contact with the lecturer during the learning process to answer questions. Working in groups gave students the opportunity of enriching from others' opinions and learning from the pros and cons of working together in order to accomplish a common goal. Students' participation in these activities was 15% of the final grade. The designed activities took place during the first two weeks of the semester, and each activity was done during two practical hours; the language used in the classroom was English.

The active pedagogy chosen during the teaching-learning process highlights that students acquire not only content but also competences. Moreover, it also involves promoting an egalitarian and cooperative relationship between students and lecturers, which contributes to the construction of an active citizenship and to the promotion of dialogue and interaction in the classroom. Therefore, this article presents an example of an active pedagogical proposal in which students are the protagonists of the teaching-learning process.

Once the activities had been done, students were asked to complete an anonymous survey of 14 questions at the end of the semester so that the lecturer could see students' opinions about the pedagogical approach chosen, what they had learned with it and other aspects (see section 5 for a summary of students' answers and appendix 1 for the questions). The survey was prepared at the end of the semester and it was based on the notes taken by the lecturer during the teaching-learning process. These notes concentrated on how students participated and on the main strategies used by students to negotiate meaning and to solve conflicts. Moreover, these notes shed light on the way leadership was established in the groups and on how the different activities

contributed to the acquisition of students' social competences apart from content. In this sense, the survey offered some quantitative data that helped to understand the contribution of the activities designed to students' learning.

The different questions of the survey were designed to make students think about the main aspects that the lecturer had taken into consideration to design the pedagogical proposal based on cooperative learning and peace education presented in this article. Data were collected at the end of the teaching-learning process and they were analysed manually.

#### **4. A proposal of activities that promote cooperation and peace education**

The following activities have been designed in order to integrate some of the principles of CL and PE so that students can acquire social competences that will allow them to communicate effectively, to cooperate and to solve conflicts. Promoting cooperation in the classroom implies that students have to work together in order to accomplish a common goal. Due to the limitation of space in this paper, this section will just offer three of the activities students have to prepare during the semester; the rest will be analysed in future studies. These activities are innovative because they contrast with previous experiences in the same subject. In the past, teaching was mainly based on the correction of grammar exercises, and interaction in the classroom was rarely promoted.

##### **4.1. The cooperative debate**

Every week one group was asked to present an oral presentation and a debate on a social topic following the guidelines explained in the classroom. Social topics allow students deepen on global issues such as racism, ecology, gender violence, etc. In this sense, students are aware of the challenges of society and of the social changes that should take place in order to build a better world.

The cooperative debate was a very useful technique that allowed not only the promotion of interaction in the classroom but also the development of critical skills and effective ways of communication since students are given opportunities to ask questions about the social topic under discussion, to be critical with the different points of views shared and to express their opinions clearly.

At the beginning of the semester the lecturer explained some techniques that can be used to promote communication and active participation in debates so that students could use them when organizing their own ones. The purpose of debates was to promote interaction in the classroom and critical thinking by giving students the opportunity of speaking English and organizing their ideas about a current topic. Moreover, students were asked to justify their arguments and to respect the different points of view. Some of the techniques are the following:

For example, students could be divided into small groups (about five or six people each) so that they could discuss their answers to various questions; each small group should have a group leader to share the answer with the rest of the classroom. Moreover, some games could be prepared so that students could practice their English and have fun in the classroom. Another

useful technique would consist of dividing students in two big groups so that half of the class would support the topic under discussion and the other half oppose it.

This activity also allowed the development of active listening because students had to listen carefully to other students' opinions before they could decide if they agreed or disagreed. In this sense, students were given many opportunities to work on critical thinking by using this practical section as an opportunity to express their ideas and contrast them with those of their classmates.

Sometimes students disagreed with their classmates' opinions. Whenever this happened, the lecturer encouraged students to put into practice the principles of PE such as respect for the different opinions and active listening so that others' points of view could be understood. Students were always asked to think about what they could learn about other points of view. In addition, the lecturer gave importance to respect opinions that were different to the one they had so that students could broaden their perspective. The lecturer also emphasized that disagreeing was positive because it gave students the opportunity of understanding different points of view and different ways of looking at the topic under discussion. In addition, this activity promoted the principle of PE that highlights the importance of peaceful conflict management (see section 5). In fact, the lecturer gave importance to the reflexive capacity of students.

## **4.2. Group tutorials**

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) promotes that lecturers and students share the responsibility in the teaching-learning process. It is also essential that students receive feedback while they learn so that they can take decisions that made them improve their skills. For this reason, it was decided to use group tutorials in order to supervise the different steps followed by students to accomplish the proposed tasks, the progress made by the different group members and the acquisition of competences. However, in a classroom there are usually a few students who do not actively participate in the group and do not actually contribute to the making of decisions. In this case, group tutorials are also used to make sure that all students are contributing to the tasks assigned.

The different cooperative groups had two group tutorials during the semester: one before the oral presentation and debate and one after it. In the first one, students had the opportunity of asking the lecturer for advice if they had any doubts about the preparation of the different tasks, how to organize the information in the oral presentation or how to make everybody in the classroom participate in the debate.

The second tutorial took place after students had made the oral presentation and facilitated the debate. The lecturer asked the group how they felt accomplishing both activities in the classroom, if there had been any difficulties in the group, the main positive things they had done and some features that they would possibly improve. Finally, students were asked what grade they should receive; this gave students the chance of discussing their grades with the lecturer and of paying attention to the main aspects that were necessary to take into consideration when evaluating cooperative activities like the ones under analysis.

Group tutorials were also useful for students to share with the lecturer some possible conflicts they had in their groups. In this sense, lecturers needed to be professionals who



recognized their emotions and understood the emotions of others, who made decisions taking into consideration the consequences, and who could control their emotions so that they could be as objective as possible when solving conflicts among students.

### **4.3. Cooperative analysis of Mandela's speech of inauguration as president**

At the beginning of the semester, the lecturer explained the main cohesive devices in English (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction and lexical cohesion) and their use was illustrated with examples from authentic texts based on social content. After that, the lecturer wanted that students could analyse the cohesive devices explained in a text on a social topic such as poverty, war or gender violence. In this sense, the analysis of the topic contributed to the promotion of peace as an alternative to solve social problems as the ones already mentioned.

The classroom was divided into groups, and each group was given several paragraphs of similar length of the speech of inauguration as president given by the South African president Nelson Mandela, on 10 May 1994 in Pretoria. In this way, students were given the opportunity not only of observing the main cohesive devices that make the speech so powerful and full of meaning but also they could deepen into the ideology of Nelson Mandela.

The analysis of the speech made students be aware of the discrimination that black people suffered during the apartheid IN South Africa and of the divisions between the white and black population, which did not contribute to the promotion of peace during decades. The fact that Mandela promoted peace with his life, his writings and his speeches helped students develop their critical thinking and social awareness because his ideology and work made students think of the different ways in which a human being can be committed with society. Consequently, students contrasted the ideology of apartheid based on racial discrimination and injustice with Mandela's ideology, which is based on peace, equal rights for every human being no matter what their race, gender or social class was.

This activity was useful to highlight cooperation in a language subject because the fact that each group was only given some of the paragraphs for the analysis meant that they needed information from the other groups in order to understand the complete discourse. In this way the final result of the activity depended on the work done by every group. Hence cooperation was promoted in the classroom instead of competition.

During the whole activity, the lecturer emphasized that the Discourse of Inauguration as President by Nelson Mandela (Asmal, Chidester & James, 2004) is a text that promoted a peaceful ideology, and therefore, it contributed to introduce peace education in a language subject so that students could think of the importance of reconciliation, justice and peace in order to improve their society.

## **5. Results and discussion**

Cooperative learning was chosen because it promotes cooperation, problem-solving, respect for differences and participation. The classroom thus becomes a place where explicit

reflection and discussion on social topics is promoted and where values and social competences are highlighted. Students develop the capacity to show empathy for and tolerance of others and gain knowledge of the world by being critical of the social topics discussed in the classroom.

### **5.1. Qualitative aspects**

The different activities designed intend to combine the principles of cooperative learning with those of peace education so that students may acquire different social competences that they can use effectively in the labour market. Out of the different social competences presented in section 2, we are going to concentrate on communication and conflict solving because they are clearly connected with the promotion of peace.

a) Communication: students needed to exchange ideas, to complete the different tasks and to explain their work in the classroom. Communication was connected with the principle of CL called face-to-face interaction; this was essential in order to interact with the lecturer in group tutorials and to complete the different cooperative activities because students had to express their opinions about how to prepare the oral presentations and debates. They also had to take decisions about what materials to use, how to organize the information in a coherent and cohesive way, etc. Promoting communication and interaction may allow students to acquire and develop essential interpersonal and small-group skills such as negotiating and conflict solving, which are essential for peace education. The different activities (see section 4) were effective in this respect because students were asked in a survey at the end of the semester if they liked the combination of PE and CL as active pedagogies (95% offered a positive answer) (see question 1 the survey in appendix 1).

In addition, they were asked about what they had learned with this pedagogical proposal (question 2) and 93% pointed out that they had developed strategies to solve conflicts peacefully and to negotiate with their classmates. Students were also asked in the survey how the three cooperative activities described in section four contributed positively to improve their communicative competence (question 3). Students pointed out that they had improved the competences because they needed to use English in order to negotiate, summarize and defend their work; the said activities gave students the possibility to defend arguments orally in English in front of people; to encourage the reflexive capacity of students and to defend the work done from possible criticism; to be able to apply theoretical knowledge of English grammar to practical and real situations in the classroom; to be able to communicate in fluent written and spoken English; to work as autonomous and critical learners and to undertake research.

Dialogic and participatory forms of communication were highlighted in the activities proposed. Following Ellis (2008), we observed how the cooperative activities proposed contributed to social integration because they promoted interaction in the groups, critical thinking and the exchange of ideas among students. These characteristics are sought after by employers because they want professionals who are competent in interpersonal skills such as communication. In this way, different ideas can be discussed and problems can be solved peacefully so that group work is successful. Consequently, the fact that students were active and used the foreign language to prepare the activities requested seem to facilitate the acquisition of

language and competences. This may make them more employable because they are able to use English to negotiate, to interact in different social situations and to participate in group discussion and in active listening.

b) Conflict management: students needed to negotiate with their classmates and to take decisions throughout the teaching-learning process. This sometimes involved the necessity to solve conflicts. Conflict management is related to the principle of CL called interpersonal and small-group skills because conflicts are normally connected with interpersonal misunderstandings.

Whenever there were conflicts in the groups, the principles of PE were applied because conflict in the classroom and in groups was addressed peacefully. The lecturer emphasised that conflicts would be solved by negotiating and listening to the different points of view whenever there were different opinions, so that students could do the same in their personal life.

In addition, the lecturer highlighted the importance of dialogue as a key to solving conflicts, to dealing with social topics and to promoting peaceful interaction in the classroom. Consequently, communication was not only used by students to express freely their ideas on the topics but also to solve conflicts that appear in the groups when students disagreed or had different opinions on organising a task. Moreover, dealing with social topics promoted values that contributed to the integral development of students as human beings, such as honesty, understanding and empathy.

The lecturer explored the distribution of power in the groups in order to create an environment of peace in which leadership is shared and negotiation becomes the key strategy for group organisation and conflict solving. The activities proposed helped develop a positive climate in the classroom that contributed to the positive behavior and relationships of students. This avoided many conflicts, and those that appeared were handled in a nonviolent way to respect the rights of all involved. Moreover, our teaching proposal is an example of integration of language content with cooperative learning, peace, social topics and human rights in the curriculum.

The cooperative activities designed in the subject English Language V allow the application of the principles of PE (e.g., integration, respect for diversity, peaceful conflict solving) as well as the development of a number of social competences that students will need in their future careers (Goleman, 1995, 1998, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Wang, Young, Wilhite, & Marczyk, 2011).

## **5.2. Quantitative aspects**

At the end of the academic year, once students had done all the cooperative activities designed, they were asked to complete an anonymous survey so that the lecturer could know their opinion about the methodology used in the subject and the acquisition of social competences that are connected with peace education, i.e., conflict solving, leadership, cooperation and communication. The following paragraphs offer the survey's analysis.

Of the students who were evaluated with cooperative activities, the great majority, 74%, got a B, 8% got an A, 11% got a C and only 7% failed the subject. The different cooperative activities seemed to contribute positively to an improvement in students' communicative competence apart from social competences. This was done by giving students the opportunity to communicate, to cooperate, to solve conflicts and to be leaders when presenting their oral presentation and debate.

In essence, they acted like the lecturers of the group when giving their presentation on a topic of their choice. Moreover, they had to put their social skills into practice in order to manage time, answer questions and have students participate in the debate.

There were very few cases in which students were so uncomfortable working in groups that they did not develop social competences and can even fail to acquire the target language. A survey was prepared in order to gauge students' opinions about the cooperative activities designed in English Language V and the social competences they acquired with them. Apart from the answers to the first three questions of the survey referred to in the previous paragraphs, we offer the main results of the rest of the questions below.

For question four, the great majority of the students (94,93%) considered that it is positive to develop social competences apart from learning content in courses at the University because these competences were connected with real life and will be useful for their future as professionals. The other 5,06% answered in the negative because they considered that these were something to be learned in the labour market.

When students were asked if there were conflicts in their groups (questions five, six, and seven), 30,37% provided a positive answer and 69,62% provided a negative one. All groups except one solved the problems by talking in the group; the other one talked to the lecturer asking for help in order to find a solution to the conflict. The main conflicts pointed out were disagreement in the topic and the lack of cooperation of some group members. The groups that had no conflicts thought that the main reasons for that were that the group members held similar opinions or that they were open minded, responsible and organized. In question eight students were asked how they saw conflicts. It is significant that 74,68% saw them as an opportunity to learn, whereas 25,31% perceived them as a problem to be solved.

In question nine, students were asked about the necessity of having a leader in order to prepare for the cooperative activities proposed in English Language V; all of them answered yes. Most (64%) answered that the leader in their groups had appeared naturally (question ten); 13,33% said that the leader was the person who knew more about the topic chosen for the oral presentations and she or he suggested she should perform this role. In four cases the leader was voted in (5,33%), and 2,66% considered that the leader was imposed. Finally, there were some cases (14,66%) in which students felt that there were different leaders depending on the tasks to be done and the different steps of the oral presentations. In addition, in question number eleven, students were asked about the main attributes that a leader should possess. The answers were heterogeneous: empathetic (62%), somebody with initiative and a good communicator (55%), tolerant and responsible (48%), patient and a good listener (33%).

One of our main interests was to discover the major techniques used by students to cooperate in groups (question twelve). More than half (65,82%) answered that they divided the tasks, whereas 35,44% made it clear that they took into consideration the main skills each group member possessed. Apart from the previous answers, 48,10% pointed out that they held meetings in order to organize their cooperative work and emphasized that they used Facebook or WhatsApp to be in contact.

It is significant that 79,74% of students gave a positive answer in question thirteen when asked if they learned more and were better able to apply theory to practice when they worked in cooperative groups. The main reasons they gave were that learning was normally easier and more entertaining, that they could practise their English and that they could acquire competences. However, 26,58% offered a negative answer because they said that working alone gave them the opportunity of doing what they wanted and of being independent when taking their decisions.

Finally, in question fourteen, the majority of the students (81,01%) considered that lecturers were prepared to help them acquire social competences such as being able to solve conflicts, to be a good leader and to cooperate in group work because of their experience. Nevertheless, 18,98% think that the latter abilities were not and specified that it was not their job, or that it depended on their abilities and their personalities.

This section has paid attention to some of the main social competences that students acquire with the cooperative activities proposed and their relationship with peace education. In addition, the analysis of the survey has made clear students' opinions about this type of learning. Their answers show that they are aware of the importance of learning social competences for life in general and for the labour market in particular. Therefore, teaching using cooperative activities that promotes socio-emotional competences should be promoted and given as much importance as is teaching academic competence.

## **6. Conclusions**

CL and PE promote real and authentic learning that can be supervised by group tutorials throughout the whole teaching-learning process in order to observe that some important social competences such as communication or conflict management are accomplished and that the principles of CL and PE are present. In this way, learning becomes a dynamic and useful process because it provides students with opportunities of interaction, of acquiring competences and of putting into practice what they have learned, which can be transferred to the labour market. Consequently, the proposal of activities presented in this article can be transferred to other subjects.

The subject English Language V promotes PE and CL, thanks to the pedagogy used by the lecturer, the philosophy used to organize and develop the curriculum and the kinds of activities that students are required to do throughout the semester. Teaching with the principles of PE means that lecturers have internalised these principles themselves and that they are an example through their behaviour and discourse in the classroom. In this way, lecturers become models to be imitated by students and become examples of integration of peace theory, conflict resolution and PE in a language course. This is one of the challenges of PE.

There is a clear link between CL, PE and the acquisition of emotional and social competences such as communication, conflict management, empathy or leadership because students are asked to work as a team to obtain a common goal. The social nature of the cooperative activities selected in the subject English Language V contributes to the development of different social competences in students such as empathy, cooperation or communication. The said competences contribute to the development of students as critical and global citizens, which involves that they are not only

aware of the necessity of transforming the world but also of the importance of their active role in order to advance in social transformation. These competences are essential for working in groups in the classroom and in the labour market. In addition, students develop tolerance and respect for diversity when they hear opinions different from their own in the classroom. At the interpersonal level, students work on resolving conflicts when there are problems or misunderstandings in the groups.

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#### **Appendix: Survey on social competences and cooperative learning**

1. Did you like the combination of PE and CL as an active pedagogy? – Yes –No
2. What have you learned with this pedagogical proposal?
3. How did the different cooperative activities contribute to improve your communicative competence?
4. Is it positive that apart from learning contents you develop social competences (i.e. the capacity to be a leader, to solve conflicts and to cooperate in groups) at the University? – Yes – No –Why?
5. Were there conflicts in your group? – Yes –No
6. If the answer is yes, how were they solved?
  - Talking in the group
  - Talking to the lecturer
  - Nothing was done
  - Other ways (PLEASE, SPECIFY)
 Specify the conflicts you had:
7. If the answer is not, why do think that there were no conflicts?
8. How do you see conflicts?
  - As an opportunity to learn (and be tolerant, empathetic, patient, etc.)
  - As a problem to solve
9. Was it necessary to have a leader in each group in order to prepare the cooperative activities proposed in this subject? – Yes –No
10. How was the leader chosen in your group?
  - It was voted

- One person suggested she/he should be the leader
- It came naturally

Other ways of choosing the leader. PLEASE SPECIFY

11. In your opinion, what are the main attributes that a leader should have?

12. How did you manage to cooperate in your group?

- You divided the tasks
- You took into consideration the main skills each group member had
- Other ways (PLEASE, SPECIFY)

13. Do you learn more and are able to apply theory to practice when you work in cooperative groups? – Yes    -No    -Why?

14. Do you think that lecturers are prepared to help you to solve conflicts, to be a good leader and to cooperate in group work? – Yes    -No    - Why?