

## APPENDIX: Survey of Attitudes to Classroom Activities

Type of Activity	Is this kind of activity being used/has it been used in your class?	How much do/did/would you enjoy this kind of activity?	How effective do/did/would you find this kind of activity as a learning technique?
<p><b>Pair-work Activities</b> This involves students working in pairs on a range of activities designed to learn vocabulary or grammar, or build fluency, and may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and practice of new vocabulary or grammar material</li> <li>• Practice of textbook dialogues, readings and exercises</li> <li>• Creative conversation and information exchange conversational activities</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	5 <input type="checkbox"/> A lot 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very much	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat effective 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very effective
<p><b>Small Group Activities</b> This involves students working in small groups on a range of activities designed to learn vocabulary or grammar, or build fluency, and may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and practice of new vocabulary or grammar material</li> <li>• Practice of textbook dialogues, readings and exercises</li> <li>• Creative conversation and information exchange conversational activities</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	5 <input type="checkbox"/> A lot 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very much	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat effective 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very effective
<p><b>Whole Class Activities</b> This involves the whole class being involved, with the teacher, in a range of activities designed to help students learn vocabulary or grammar, or build fluency, and may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translation of vocabulary, grammar, or text passages</li> <li>• Explanation of vocabulary or grammar in English</li> <li>• Repetition with grammatical transformation of sentences into present, past forms, etc.</li> <li>• Question and answer sessions with teacher and students</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	5 <input type="checkbox"/> A lot 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very much	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat effective 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very effective

of interaction that takes place, and also in determining the effect of this interaction on the acquisition process (Chaudron, 1988: 9).

It has been suggested, for example, that learners, when involved in conversation exchanges with other non-native speakers (NNSs), become more intensely involved with meaning negotiation than they do with native speakers (NSs) (Varonis and Gass, 1985; Pica and Doughty, 1985). Long (1981; 1983) argues, in his Interaction Hypothesis, that acquisition is facilitated by such interactional adjustments as meaning negotiation. Despite the lack of clear-cut empirical evidence, there seems to be a general assumption that the greater amount of interactional modification there is, the more rapid and successful acquisition will be (Ellis, 1991: 111).

With regard to foreign language teacher training, Doff (1988) sets out a list of claims made for groupwork and pairwork: compared to whole class activities, groupwork and pairwork are often said to lead to more language practice, more learner-involvement, more learner security, and more mutual help among learners (p.140). But is this the reality?

Chaudron (1988: 187), in his review of research into second language classrooms, sums up the studies comparing groupwork with teacher-fronted activities, and concludes that, in some cases, equivalency has been found between these two activity types. Chaudron argues that, even if other studies have shown groupwork to be advantageous regarding the amount of interaction or production, teacher-fronted activities still have a potential advantage in terms of the extent and accuracy of input provided, as well as the appropriateness of feedback. In addition, Strong (1983) suggests that monolingual groups may gain less from groupwork by taking earlier recourse to their first language. As Chaudron stresses, contrasts between different learner and teacher groupings need more exploratory and replicational studies. The study presented here responds to this call by investigating three different learner groupings.

It is not our intention in this study to support or dispute any of the claims that have been made in favour of the effectiveness or otherwise of any given classroom language task or interaction type. Instead, we are concerned with finding out how, if at all, learner attitudes correspond to any of these claims. Essentially, this involves

investigating learners' own perceptions of what they gain from different types of classroom interaction: specifically, whole class, groupwork and pairwork. In particular, we are interested in learners' professed enjoyment of such activities, and how they perceive the effectiveness of them, and whether they tend to equate enjoyment and effectiveness.

The importance of how learners see the components of the learning process should not be underestimated. Quite apart from the long established recognition of the role of attitude and motivation in the process of second language learning (e.g. Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Garrett, Giles and Coupland, 1989), recent work in the field of Language Awareness has brought to the fore the value of getting learners to reflect on what they consider to be effective learning, and their perceptions of themselves in the learning process (Holmes and Ramos, 1992; McKenzie, 1992; Toncheva, 1992). Such data can be of value to the learners themselves, perhaps ultimately to enable them to assume greater control over their learning, or to influence teachers, course designers, materials designers etc., and thus the future direction of their learning.

## 1 Expectations

We expected that beginners (i.e., students who have studied for 6 months) would prefer the three activity types in the following rank order: whole class; groupwork; pairwork. This was based on the observation by Tyacke and Mendelsohn (1986) that lower level learners tend to be much more dependent on their teachers and on the linguistic code than higher level learners. Hence, lacking communicative competence, and lacking confidence in meaning-focused activities, we could expect them to prefer the largest groupings. (It has to be stated, though, that whole-class activities can be designed which are meaning-focused, and that, conversely, pairwork activities can be entirely form-focused.)

Our expectations were also that elementary learners (those who have studied for 18 months) would have the same preferences as beginners, for the same reason, but the differences among the preferences might be smaller. It was expected that intermediate level learners (30 months of study) would, however, prefer to be given the freedom to use their abilities in more communicative activities that allow for more creative use of language. They might be more favourable

to learner-centred activities and less favourable to teacher-centred activities. Hence, an order of preference of pairwork, groupwork and whole class work was anticipated. (The terms 'beginner', 'elementary', and 'intermediate' which we use here are those used by the language schools where this study was carried out, and relate directly to the number of months each student has studied for. At the time the study was carried out, there were no students available from higher levels.)

## 2 Method

The subjects (Ss) were 34 Brazilian adult students of English as a Foreign Language (from a total student population of 400) studying at two private language schools in neighbouring Brazilian coastal towns. 12 were randomly selected from each of three groups: beginners (6 months of study); elementary (18 months); intermediate (30 months). One student from elementary and one from intermediate declined to participate due to prior commitments.

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Subjects by Group

Level	Age Range	Mean Age	Male	Female
Beginners	16 - 25	18.3	6	6
Elementary	16 - 36	23.5	4	7
Intermediate	16 - 52	23.2	5	6
All subjects	16 - 52	21.6	15	19

The identification of three levels of learners in line with the length of time they had spent studying was deemed reasonable, since all students study for three hours per week, and go through the same series of textbooks, each of which is paced to last a specific number of hours. At the end of each textbook, students are tested and are only allowed to progress to the next level if they score 70% or more on the tests.

## 3 Materials

Since the data in this preliminary study was to be collected at a distance, a questionnaire and a covering letter were compiled. These were administered in Portuguese. The covering letter introduced the study, showed Ss how to respond to the items (e.g. by ticking the box of their choice), and assured anonymity and confidentiality.

The questionnaire (see Appendix) listed, described and gave examples of the three types of classroom organization under consideration: pairwork; groupwork; whole class activities. Ss were asked if they had experienced such activities in class, although, in fact, through earlier interviews with the teachers, it had already been ascertained that they had. Two further items asked them to rate these activity types on five-point scales according to how enjoyable and how effective they found them. Open items then followed in which Ss were asked to explain their ratings. It should be noted here that the class sizes for these students usually averages out at about 15, with 20 as the maximum, and 10 as the minimum.

#### 4 Procedure

A female colleague (R) resident in Brazil was responsible for collecting the data. She was a NS of Portuguese, also fluent in English. She was not known to Ss before the study, and was introduced to them by the directors of the schools (who were not themselves present during the data collection). Written instructions were supplied to Ss in Portuguese and English. These were read out by R, who checked that all Ss understood. The data were collected over ten days, with Ss attending at times that suited them, either singly or in groups.

#### 5 Results and Discussion of Quantitative Data

Practically 100% answered yes to the question whether such activities had been used in class. It has already been noted that this had been checked in advance in interviews with the teachers. This has importance regarding the second part of the questionnaire, where Ss are asked, for example, how much they DO/DID/WOULD enjoy such activities. Strictly speaking, three questions were being asked, and one of them a hypothetical one (WOULD), which is known to elicit different responses in comparison with non-hypothetical questions (Baker, 1988). However, it is unlikely that this affected results in our study, since, by ensuring that Ss had experienced all such activities, the hypothetical WOULD alternative was in effect eliminated. The semantic difference between the remaining DO and DID is arguably negligible in this context.

Table 2: Mean Scores for Effectiveness

Level	Pair work	Group work	Whole class
Beginners	3.58	3.33	4.67
Elementary	4.00	4.00	4.64
Intermediate	4.55	4.00	3.82

Table 3: Mean Scores for Enjoyment

Level	Pair work	Group work	Whole class
Beginners	3.50	3.17	4.67
Elementary	4.00	4.18	4.55
Intermediate	4.55	3.91	3.64

It is superficially evident from Tables 2 and 3 that, in terms of rank orders of preference, expectations were largely fulfilled, apart from beginners ranking groupwork rather than pairwork least favourably, for reasons which are apparent below in the discussion of the open-ended data. As expected, too, the differences between these mean scores is smaller for the elementary learners than the beginners.

A two-way ANOVA showed significant effects, in the cases of both effectiveness ( $p = 0.028$ ) and enjoyment ( $p = 0.026$ ), for interactions between classroom organization and student level. Tukey tests revealed no significant differences between any of the pairs of means. So, for example, the rank order results set out above are to some extent academic: since there are no significant differences between the rankings, there are effectively no rankings to consider. From our analysis, we are therefore only able to conclude that the three groups of learners respond with a significantly different pattern of preferences for the three types of activities. A glance at Figures 1 and 2 enables one to see that it is the intermediate learners that have the most differing pattern. It is possible to speculate from this that, if an advanced group had been included, more significant differences would have emerged.

Figure 1: Perceived Effectiveness of Classroom Activities

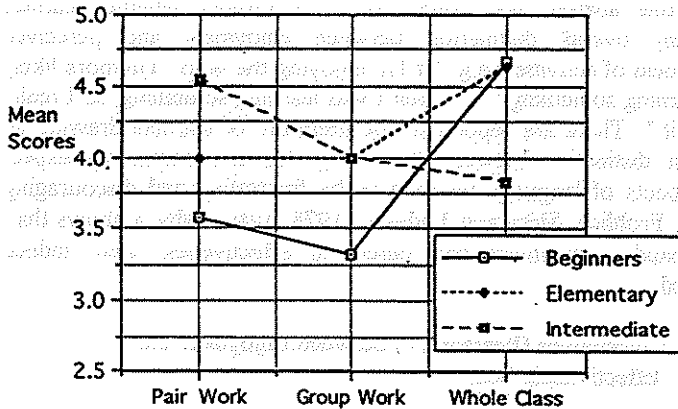
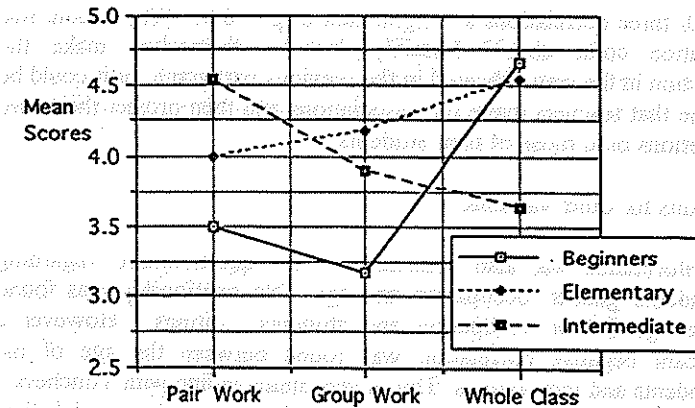


Figure 2: Professed Enjoyment of Classroom Activities



There was also a near-significant result ( $p = 0.055$ ) for the perceived effectiveness of classroom organization alone (not for enjoyment). The student sample as a whole (without regard to the three different levels) perceived whole class work as being more effective. But here perhaps (considering the results for the intermediate learners), if advanced students had been included, this result would not have

approached significance.

Further analysis was conducted to investigate whether learners made any overall distinction between enjoyment and perceived effectiveness of activities: e.g. "If I'm enjoying the work, I'm more likely to be learning something." or "I felt I was learning something, so I really enjoyed it." There are reports in the literature of learners drawing an important distinction between these: e.g. learners commonly expect some aspects of language learning to be frustrating and discouraging (Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco, 1978: 12f). Table 4 shows that, in this study, enjoyment and perceived effectiveness were indeed associated.

Table 4: Correlations (Pearson's  $r$ ) between Enjoyment and Effectiveness Scores

Pair work enjoyment vs. effectiveness	0.99
Group work enjoyment vs. effectiveness	0.65
Whole class enjoyment vs. effectiveness	0.93

All three correlations are significant at  $p = 0.01$ . Why should this association come about? Possibly, learners themselves make the connection in the way indicated in the previous paragraph, or it could be the case that teachers make the associations and then project their own conceptions onto those of their students.

## 6 Results for other variables

Information was also collected, on the questionnaire, regarding respondents' gender, occupation and age. No relationship was found between gender or occupation and students' ratings. However a significant negative correlation was found between the age of the respondents and their ratings. This is very much in line with Toncheva (1992:144): "Adult learners usually have their own ideas and beliefs about language learning and the ways in which they personally learn best." Our results showed that older learners were less likely to consider whole-class activities enjoyable or effective.

In addition, prior to the student survey, teachers had been asked what proportion of teaching time they spent on each type of classroom



organisation. This information is set out in Table 5.

Table 5: Mean Percentage Time for Classroom Organizations

Level	Pair work	Group work	Whole class
Beginners	13%	14%	71%
Elementary	20%	19%	61%
Intermediate	34%	30%	38%

To what extent did learner preferences reflect these proportions of time spent on the activities? Pearson's  $r$  coefficients were 0.73 for the association between the proportion of classroom time and the learners' perceptions of enjoyability, and 0.82 for the association between the proportion of classroom time and the learners' judgments of effectiveness. Hence the associations are indeed strong. Why should this be?

One possible explanation could be that commonly performed activities are uppermost in the minds of the students. Another is that, since these are commonly performed, the students are giving the answers they feel are expected of them. It is even possible that teachers are themselves sensitive to the preferences of their students, and respond to them unconsciously in their lesson and course planning. The open-ended data included in this study do not resolve this question.

## 7 Results and Discussion of Open-ended data

Above, we saw that, when the different levels of the students were taken out of the equation, there was an overall near-significant perception across the board for whole-class work being most effective. However, we also saw that the intermediates' pattern of preferences differed significantly from the other two. For example, Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how the clearly common judgment of whole class work by the beginners and elementary learners diverges from the judgment by the intermediates. The open-ended items on the questionnaire give some insights into these preferences.

As regards whole class activities, four beginners and three elementary learners said they found them enjoyable and effective because they were all forced to participate, while two other beginners

and three other elementary learners felt their English improved because they had to pay close attention to their teacher. Intermediates felt differently, though, with two stating that whole class work, especially repetition work, was monotonous and something they had already been doing for a number of years.

Beginners were negative about pairwork, with three saying their proficiency was too low for them to be able to sustain conversations in pairs, and two adding that pairwork often lapses into native language dialogues. The first of these observations was echoed by two elementary learners, and the second by three others. However, the elementary learners were a little more divided, with two of them maintaining that pairwork encourages the individual to speak out. This lack of agreement among the elementary learners is also reflected in the high standard deviations of 1.612 for both enjoyment and effectiveness of pairwork. The intermediates were relatively positive, of course, with three saying that they thought pairwork was effective and enjoyable because it allowed learners to use the English they already know.

For three beginners, groupwork was "not very enjoyable or effective as only one or two members of the group were able to participate effectively". Two elementary learners added that groupwork was too uncontrolled. Two intermediates, on the other hand, felt groupwork was useful for debating.

These open-ended data are revealing. Intermediate learners report the gains in involvement and practice that are so often claimed to arise from pairwork and groupwork (see Doff, 1988:140). In contrast, however, beginners and elementary learners tend to feel more involved and able to give more attention in whole class activities. Strong's (1983) observation is supported here: some beginners and elementary learners report that they are unable to sustain pairwork activities in the second language, and, in their monolingual groups, often switch to the first language. It is possible, of course, that teachers are not implementing pairwork and groupwork in a satisfactory way in the classroom (see for example, Byrne 1986:77), but here our concerns are with the realities experienced by learners. In practice, it is questionable how far learners at these levels are benefiting from meaning negotiation, the exception being the few learners who reportedly dominate these groupwork activities.

## 8 Conclusions

The study we have reported above is an initial foray with a small number of Ss and a somewhat blunt instrument. For example, the categories of classroom organization were rather imprecise. Nevertheless, this early work casts some light on the development of new preferences at different stages of learning, and on some mismatches between learners' judgments about classroom organization, and some of the claims often made. We cannot maintain that the learners are correct, or incorrect in their perceptions of effectiveness. We do feel, though, that direct insights into student perceptions and preferences are an essential component of second language pedagogy. Information from such insights is important to teachers who want to use approaches which take account of the needs of their students, to materials writers and course-designers, and to the learners themselves who want to contribute actively to their own learning processes.

Our research programme will build on this pilot study by observing and recording at closer quarters, aiming at more specificity regarding activity types, and with direct observation and immediate data gathering in classroom activities in progress. For the time being, we hope that we have shown that there is much more in the voice of the learner that is worth listening to. \*

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## NOTES

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## APPENDIX: Survey of Attitudes to Classroom Activities

Type of Activity	Is this kind of activity being used/has it been used in your class?	How much do/did/would you enjoy this kind of activity?	How effective do/did/would you find this kind of activity as a learning technique?
<p><b>Pair-work Activities</b> This involves students working in pairs on a range of activities designed to learn vocabulary or grammar, or build fluency, and may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussion and practice of new vocabulary or grammar material</li> <li>• Practice of textbook dialogues, readings and exercises</li> <li>• Creative conversation and information exchange conversational activities</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	5 <input type="checkbox"/> A lot 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very much	5 <input type="checkbox"/> Very effective 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat effective 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Not very effective
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