Introduction of co-operative learning to Grade 4 learners in some disadvantaged schools

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The nature of co-operative learning among Grade 4 learners who, for the first time, were confronted with a task-based approach in the social sciences was investigated. The investigation was undertaken in three schools in Mangaung, a typical disadvantaged community. The main source of qualitative data consisted of transcriptions of the audio-taped verbal interaction of learners working in groups. For the purposes of this article six events were chosen from the corpus of transcriptions. These events are presented in the original Sesotho with translations in English in a turn-by-turn format. The verbal interaction is analysed in terms of the speech acts performed by the learners in turn-taking. The communicative analysis reveals the way in which learners spontaneously took on social roles by fulfilling certain functions and were actively involved in a meaning-making process during which collaborative and goal-directed learning took place.

Introduction
The political transition in South Africa brought along a change in the education system. Through Curriculum 2005, which started in Grade 1 in 1998, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) was gradually implemented. The move from a content-based to a learning-centred approach that is outcomes-driven, is in line with large-scale educational innovations in many countries around the world (Elen & Rosseel, 1999:1-2). In South Africa the proposal for OBE emerged in 1996 and teachers were confronted by “a curriculum discourse completely foreign to their understanding and practices” (Janssen, 1999:7). They had to become acquainted with new goals, a new discourse and most of all, a new conception of learning and instruction.

The changes that the implementation of OBE brings to the classroom may be drastic not only for the teacher, but also for the learners. Instead of a teacher standing in front of learners transferring content to passive listeners, there is a facilitator organising groups of learners who are actively involved in the learning process. Co-operative learning enhances the principles of co-operation, critical thinking and social responsibility. The question that comes to the fore is: Can learners make the sudden shift to the new way of learning?

This article reports on a qualitative investigation into the nature of co-operative learning among Grade 4 learners, who were confronted with a task-based approach in the social sciences for the first time. The investigation was undertaken in three schools in Mangaung. The schools are situated in a disadvantaged community similar to many others in South Africa. Generalisation of results is, however, not a goal in this type of research, as it would have been in a positivist, statistically driven study (Falits, 1997:149). The main concern is description, understanding and explanation (Merriam, 1988:7; Henning, 1995:128) of the real situation in the classroom.

Objectives
The investigation had the following objectives:
1. To study the behaviour of learners in a group in terms of their interaction and communication.
2. To describe the social roles that learners assume as a result of working in groups.
3. To describe the learning processes which take place in the groups.

Theoretical background
Classrooms as found in the schools in Mangaung can be described as “extremely traditional” (Messerschmidt & Mahlomaholo, 1999:9; Messerschmidt et al., 2000:7-8). Teaching methods reflect a behaviouristic view on learning and instruction. In sharp contrast, the new way of teaching is based on a social constructivist view. An in-depth analysis of the underlying philosophy and the merit of each view falls outside the scope of this article. For the purpose of the current study the OBE framework with its social constructivist underpinnings is accepted as a given in the present educational context. Discussions of the different forms of constructivism and the meaning, assumptions and implications of social constructivism can be found in literature as explicated by Gergen (1995), Cobb (1996), Spivey (1997), and Ma-sithela and Steyn (1999). A social constructivist view on learning is expressed by De Corte (1996:9). He characterises learning as “a constructive, cumulative, self-regulated, goal-directed, situated, collabora-
tive and individually different process of meaning construction and building of knowledge.” For the purpose of the current investigation we accept the working definition of Masithela and Steyn (1999:23), who interpret social constructivist theory of learning to mean that “learners co-construct shared meanings within a process of negotiation and even conflict through mainly language engagement.” During negotiation, personal meanings expressed in a group are shaped by the audience and mutually contextualised. In this process language plays an important role.

Co-operative learning is an instructional design in which learners work together in a group towards a common goal. The social interaction between the members leads to the solving of a problem, the making of a decision or the completion of a task. (De Corte et al., 1990:335; Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997:128; Gawe, 2000:190). In the present study learners had to complete tasks and the approach was therefore "task-based".

The benefits of co-operative or group learning are described by Johnson and Johnson (1974:213-240), McNally (1977:129-130) Slavin (1996:353-354), Avenant (1990:184) and Gawe (2000:203-204), to name but a few. The most salient advantages of co-operative learning seem to be the development of both intellectual and social skills. The learners’ understanding and skills, in the learning area being taught, are improved. They are all likely to succeed through helping each other. They learn to listen and respect one another. They develop co-operative group skills and learn to appreciate different individuals and cultures. The social and intellectual aspects of co-operative learning are not easily separated. Joyce and Weil (1972:30) point to the combination of “a view of society and a view of intellectual process” in interaction-oriented models of teaching.

According to Slavin (1990:95) researchers agree that co-operative learning can produce positive effects on achievement but disagree on the conditions under which the approach is effective.

Methodology
To achieve the research objectives a qualitative study was undertaken, which is connected to a larger research project, the Phaphamang Language Project. This international project, undertaken by two universities in South Africa and two universities in Belgium, addresses questions on the learning effects and learning processes related to two educational approaches, i.e. learning-centred versus content-based education (Elen & Rosseel, 1999:4-5). For each approach teachers who were specially trained for the project presented twelve history lessons of one hour each at three schools. The co-operative learning, reported on in this article, occurred in the learning-centred lessons of the project. The design of the larger project was quasi-experimental. An intervention was made for the teaching of one subject according to two teaching
approaches, but the class groups were kept intact. For the larger pro-
ject quantitative data were collected on the performance of learners in
the two approaches in the field of English, Sesotho and History and
qualitative data on the instruction by the teachers. In this article we
concentrate solely on co-operative learning aspects.

The lessons were tested during a pilot study in a school similar to
the three participating schools. The successful implementation of co-
operative learning during the lessons was hampered by two major
problems, i.e. the classroom environment and the language of instruc-
tion. Teachers had to handle large numbers of learners (between 45
and 49) in a classroom that was too small. It was extremely difficult
to arrange the furniture for group work. The teachers could not easily
access the groups. During the jigsaw technique (Gawe, 2000:202) the
situation became worse. The learners struggled to move to their new
groups and some of them took their chairs with them. The learners
were not used to the new approach (that was followed only for the
teaching of History). The lack of resources at the schools forced the
project teachers to bring along all the material and teaching and
learning aids.

The official medium of instruction, chosen by the parents and
governing bodies of Mangaung schools, is English from Grade 4. The
learners, however, could neither understand the explanations of the
teachers, nor the instructions for the co-operative tasks. Teachers had
to use more and more Sesotho. The advice of the researchers was to
keep to code-switching, meaning the use of the two languages for
different functions and to avoid code-mixing, i.e. giving the same in-
formation in both languages or mixing different languages in one
sentence (Daems & De Corte, 2000:2). In the group the learners
communicated in Sesotho. According to Wessels and Van den Berg
(1998:15), this is to be expected and allowed in an OBE environment.
For the purpose of the investigation reported on in this article, one
group of learners was chosen randomly at each of the participating
schools. To provide tape-recorders and operators for each of the eight
groups in one classroom would have been impractical if not impos-
sible. The three selected groups were followed throughout the investi-
gation. The verbal interaction was audio-taped (Motstisi, 2001:38).
Word for word transcriptions were made and analysed. Data obtained
from video-tapes, field notes and class observations will be discussed
where relevant. The nature of co-operative learning is explored by
studying the verbal interaction of learners during group work. This
places the study within the framework of applied conversation ana-
lysis. “Talk-in-interaction” is not studied in its own right, but with a
wider educational concern (Heap, 1997:218-219).

The transcriptions are presented in a turn-by-turn format. The
turns are analysed on the basis of Speech Acts Theory. In each turn the
speaker performs certain speech acts, e.g. making statements, asking
questions, making requests, issuing commands, giving reports, expres-
sing agreement or disagreement, etc. (Searle, 1972:39; Searle, 1980:
22-23; 66-67). In each turn the speaker uses one or more linguistic
forms, each with a specific intention. Each linguistic form used in a
specific context thus has a linguistic function or pragmatic meaning.
An assumption made in this study is that by describing what learners
do with words, inferences can be made on how they are learning in the
group while working on a task. A social and a learning dimension are
expected to be found in the events of co-operative learning (cf. also
objectives 2 and 3).

Interaction

To illustrate the nature of the interaction in the groups, six events of
co-operative learning are chosen and discussed below. Due to limited
space it is not possible to describe all the events. Two events are cho-

Event 1: “Monuments” at school B
Each group receives a picture of a building in Bloemfontein, which
they have to identify.

picture. (Is this a court here that I see? In the
picture.)

[2] Nthabeleng: Ee, ke court. (Yes, it’s a court.)

[3] Tumelo: Lekhetho, ha o isotelle picture, o a kula?
(Lekhetho, you are not looking at the picture, are you?)

[4] Puleng: Ke paramente mona. (This is a parliament
here.)

[5] Nthabeleng: Ke court wena. (It’s a court, man (you)).

[6] Palesa: Eno ke church. (This one is a church.)

[7] Puleng: Ae! (No!)

told you (plural) that it is a court, not a church.)

[9] Tumelo: May be ke … ke le bolelletse hore ke court
pictureing moo. (May be it is … it is I told you
that it’s a court.)

[10] Teacher to group: Ke eng picturing? (What’s on the picture?)


[12] Teacher to group: Le bebeletse kee kee kee ya le jwetsitseng?
(How do you know, who told you?)

[13] Tumelo: Ha ho motha, mme. (Nobody, ma’m.)

hahwe ka 1929, le a bona e decoratwe hante
jwag? … (O.K., it’s a court, the Appeal Court.
It was built in 1929. Do you see how nicely it is
decorated.)

Tumelo takes the lead in [1] and ventures an opinion on what the pic-
ture is of. Nthabeleng agrees that it is a court in [2]. In [3] Tumelo ad-
dresses Lekhetho who does not pay attention and asks if he is ill,
thereby trying to involve a non-participant. The next turn is taken by
Puleng who disagrees with Tumelo and Nthabeleng by making a new
agreeing with the statement of Puleng in [4]. Palesa gives a different
opinion, thereby disagreeing with the previous speakers in [6]. Puleng
disagrees with Palesa by just saying “No!” in [7]. Nthabeleng and
Tumelo reaffirm their statements in [8] and [9], respectively. The
teacher assesses the group in [10] by asking what the picture is about.
Tumelo answers in [11]. The teacher asks how they know this in [12]
and again it is Tumelo who answers in [13].

The learners engage in a debate on the identification of the build-
ing in the picture. The simplicity of the task is reflected in the straight-
forward communication. Except for [3] the contributions of the lea-
ners (agreement or disagreement) follow a logical pattern in that the
answer usually is a reaction to the previous statement. Turns [1], [2],
to the fore as a leader. Tumelo initiates the debate, encourages partici-
pation and gives feedback to the teacher. Three other learners partici-
pate. Only one learner does not take part.

Event 2: “Important People” at school B
The teacher hands out pictures of people about whom they have al-
ready talked. The learners have to provide more information on each
person. The first 11 turns of the verbal interaction are as follows.

[1] Palesa: Morena Moshoeshoe! (King Moshoeshoe!)

[2] Puleng: Ke tha bua no.1. (I’ll be the first to talk.)

[3] Palesa: Dr. Chris Barnard e ne e le doctor ya da opera-
tion. (Dr. Chris Barnard was a surgeon.)


[5] Puleng: Morena Moshoeshoe o ne a thusa batho a ba
kopanya a tlosa madimo ya sethjaba sa Basotho.
Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 27 years. When was he born?

Lucas Radebe is a soccer player.

O ne a dula ka Soweto, nou o dula ka England. (He used to stay in Soweto, but now he stays in England.)

O bapalla ... O bapalla ... (He plays for ...)

Leeds United.


In this event learners act as researchers. They report back on the research they have done. They discuss and integrate information and report back. In the process they refer to their sources by quoting their grandparents. This situates the learning in a cultural context. Mpho initiates the discussion and keeps order. She takes her work seriously. Palesa engages in quality control. Tebogo tries to joke. There is a scribe in the group, but this person cannot be identified from the verbal interaction.

Event 4: "Important People" at school C

Each group receives a poster with a row of pictures of important people and an envelope containing pieces of paper with information concerning the people. The task of the learners is to paste these pieces of paper onto the right spaces on the poster.

In [1] Thabo: Ke bishop mona. Bea pampiri ya bishop moo. (Here is a bishop. Paste the paper of the bishop here.)

The teacher interrupts with instruction on the completion of the task. The learners organise themselves. It is Mpho who identifies the king of the Basotho nation and the premier. We follow the group again from turn [10] onwards.

In [10] Mpho: Enwa ke bishop. (This one is a bishop.)

In [11] Tebogo: Ae, re nte reiosa. (No, we are making a mistake.)

In [12] Mpho: Palesa, what is his name?

In [13] Palesa: Ha ke tsbe. Hana enka ke mang? Ke ea se nang dilemo. (I don’t know. Who is this one? He is the one without the date of birth.)


In [15] Palesa: Ee. (Yes.)

In [16] Mpho: Ene ha ke nala, le a bona ke nte ke dipasa jwag? (I am not reading, can you see I’m getting them right?)

In [17] Teacher: Etsang kapecle le qete. (Finish up quickly.)

In [18] Thabo: Otjhung hore enwa ha na a dilemo hee! (Which means this one has no date of birth.)

In [19] Mpho: Le a bona lona le nte le bapala, le tlo presenta. (You see you people are playing. You will have to present this work to the class.)

In [20] Tebogo: Bitso la motho ko ke mang, he? (What is this person’s name, please?)


In [22] Teacher: O.K., keep quiet and stop writing. Come and tell ... Thabo is the first to act by identifying the bishop in [1] and instructing a fellow learner to paste the appropriate piece of paper onto the poster. Mpho carries on with the task in [10] by identifying a person as bishop (as Thabo did in [1]). Tebogo disagrees with her monitoring the group in [11]. In [12] Mpho asks information from Palesa in [12], but Palesa does not know the answer. She says so in [13] and then apparently moves to another person asking who he is. She then reasons that the unknown person must be the one without a birth date. She also expresses doubt in this case. In [14] Mpho expresses her doubt, probably under the influence of Palesa and wants her performance checked by asking if the pieces of paper are in the right places. Palesa answers in the affirmative in [15]. In [16] Mpho again asks Palesa to check her work. The two girls are involved in quality assurance. This reflection on learning can also be seen as meta-learning.

In [22] the teacher ends the groupwork and gives instructions for feedback.

The complexity of the task is reflected in the interaction. There is evidence of reasoning (making deductions). The self-regulating characteristic of learning comes to the fore where learners are reflecting on their own learning. The intertwining of the social and learning dimensions of co-operative learning is evident in the disagreement in [11]. Tsebogo comments on the group’s performance (“No, we are making a mistake”) rather than on the truth value of the proposition in [10], which would be “No, this one is not a bishop.”

Event 5: ‘Clan Names I’ at school A
The learners had to discuss their clan song in their group and choose one person to present the clan song to the class. For preparation they had to ask their grandparents for information.

[1] Lehlohonolo: Ke mokwena wa ha Modibeli, ya sa jeng sengwathwana sa maobane. (I am a crocodile of Modibeli who does not take food prepared yesterday.)

[2] Motlatsi: Ha re utlwe na o reng wena, huela hodimo. (We can’t hear what you are saying. Speak aloud.)


[4] Zolenzima: Hee lona banna le reng ka seboko sa rona? Re Bakwena ba sa jeng dijo tsa maobane. (Hey man, what have you said about our clan song? We Bakwena we do not take yesterday’s food.)

[5] Motale: Ke mang ya tla bua bakeng sa group ya rona? (Who is going to talk on behalf of our group?)

[6] Lehlohonolo: Ke wena monna Motale. (It’s you man, Motale.)

[7] Motale: Ee, haeba le tla ntjwetsa hone ka reng. (OK, only if you tell me what to say.)

In [1] Lehlohonolo opens the discussion with a citation from the clan song. The second speaker, Motlatsi does not react to the information in [1], but states in [2] that he cannot hear the speaker and requests him to speak louder ([2]). In [3] Motale keeps order by addressing someone who is joking, probably Motlatsi. In [4] Zolenzima returns to the learning content. He makes sure what the first speaker has said. Motale organises in [5] by asking who is going to give feedback. Lehlohonolo indicates Motale in [6], who agrees in [7] on condition that the others tell him what to say.

In only two of the turns the learning content is mentioned. The others revolve around organisation. Motale is obviously the leader who organises the learners in the group. This event differs from the others in the relative amount of time that is spent on organising compared to learning. From a learning perspective the productivity or efficiency of the group can be questioned. It is possible that the large amount of organising may be part of the growing pains in the new learning mode. Another possibility is that the learners in this group or in the whole class are not well disciplined. Only a study of much larger extent in which this group is followed for a longer period, will clear the issue.

Event 6: ‘Clan Names II’ at school A
For the second lesson on clan names new groups were formed according to the jigsaw technique (Gawe, 2000:202). The teacher gives the following instruction:

“Now I am going to give you envelopes. Ka hara dienvelope tsena you are going to find cards with numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 jwalo-jwalo. (Inside these envelopes …). People with the same number on their cards must sit together in a group and discuss what you talked about in the groups where you were before. I mong le e mong a bue ka clan song ya hae groupong e njhta. (Each one of you must give his/her clan song in the new group.) Only part of the communication is given here. Motale was part of the group, representing the Bakwena. The others came from different groups.

[5] Motale: Ho neng re o mamese, o se ke wa re nahana hore ke wena feela. (We have been listening to you for a long time. You are not the only one here.)


[7] Lerato: Ae, Bakatse ba bitswa Basia. (No, the people of the cat are called Basia.)

[8] Tshope: Ke Mofokeng, ke ja bohobe ka metsi a pula. (I am of the people of the hare. I eat bread with rainwater.)

[9] Motale: Ke mang No. 6? (Who is No. 6?)

[10] Noko: Ha le mamele lona. (You (plural) are not listening.)

[11] Motale: Bua o isite seboko sa hao ke mang? No. 3 bua! (Speak, what did you say your clan name is, No. 3?)

[12] Thabo: Ae, no. 3 ke mma, ke Mosia mma. (No, I am No. 3 and I am a Mosia.)


In [5] a learner is called to order. In [6] a member of the group identifies himself as a member of the Basia, which he calls Bakatse. The next learner corrects him in [7]. Turn [8] is not a reaction to the previous turn, but is an addition to the body of knowledge on clans. There is no reaction on the new information, which probably means it is accepted. Turn [9] has to do with the organisation and the group waits for a further contribution. In [10] someone tries to keep order by accusing others of not paying attention. In turn [11] Motale does a kind of revision by checking if No. 3 can give his clan name correctly. He however addresses the wrong person and No. 3 comes forward. The learner in [13] is not eager to co-operate.

In this event learning is again situated in the cultural context of the learners. The learning is also cumulative in the sense that learners first learned about their own clan, thereafter extending their knowledge to include other clans.

Summary
The descriptions of the learning events reveal that the learners were co-constructing shared meaning through language. Mostly the speech acts consisted of making statements, giving information, agreeing or disagreeing, and coming to conclusions. These types of speech acts are known as representatives. Here “the speaker is committed, in varying degrees, to the truth of a proposition” (Crystal, 1998:121). In the present study the propositions contain details of the learning content. There are also speech acts where the learners are commanding, asking questions, requesting, insisting on collaboration, etc. These types of speech acts where “the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something” are called directives (Crystal, 1998:121). Directives were mainly used to keep the group going.

Social roles
The verbal interaction also reveals the social system emerging within the groups. Each classroom forms a miniature society with hierarchical or authority relationships, roles of teachers and learners and norms for behaviour (Joyce & Weil, 1972:15). In a traditional classroom the teacher is leader, organiser, main or sole source of information and transmitter of knowledge, while the learners are passive listeners. A traditional teacher seems to take responsibility for the learners’ learning. In an OBE classroom small societies are formed within the society of the classroom when co-operative learning takes place. Many of the roles associated with a teacher now rest with the learners, while the teacher becomes facilitator, advisor and only one of the possible sources of information.

While working together in the groups towards a common goal, i.e. the completion of a task, the Gr. 4 learners took on certain roles. In the overall data seven roles were identified: leader, organiser, scribe, reporter, quality controller, source of information and listener. In acting out those roles learners made certain contributions and took on certain responsibilities. The acting out of roles is seen by Gawe (2000:195) as “distributed leadership”.

[2000:195] as “distributed leadership”.

Messerschmidt
Leader
The task of the leader included initiating the discussion, encouraging members to participate, keeping order, warning, propelling the discussion and closing the discussion. He/she was a link between the teacher and the group. A typical expression you would expect from a leader were the words of Motale in a lesson on “My School”:

Ha re arabengetse tsoana ka pala. (*Let’s quickly answer these questions.*)

Motale led the group of school A throughout the lessons (Motsitsi, 2001), even though he did not contribute much factual knowledge (cf. Event 5). Tumelo of school B and Mpho of school C acted as leaders on occasions (cf. Event 1 and Event 3).

Organiser
The organiser paid attention to detail on the performing of the given task, e.g. making sure that the scribe had a pen and glue. The function of timekeeping was included in this role. In the person of Motale this role overlapped with the leadership role. Different group members contributed to the organisation, even the shy ones as can be seen from the words of Khetang at school A in the lesson on “Schools Then”:

Khetang: Ho thwe “stop”. (*We are told to stop.*)

Motlatisi may also be considered to be organising when he asks a learner to speak louder (Event 5, turn [2]).

Scribe/Secretary/Record keeper
This person prepared the documents that had to reflect the activities of the group. Usually this consisted of writing down information upon which the group had agreed. In the case of the lesson on “Important People” this person pasted the pieces of paper with information onto the right place on the poster. The scribe is often quiet. His/her function is deduced from the words of others.

Reporter
Inter-group as well as intra-group reporting took place. After the completion of each task, feedback was given to the class. This can be seen as inter-group reporting. Group members indicated a reporter, who sometimes was the group leader, as in Event 5. On several occasions members reported to their group on research they had done. In the second lesson on “Clan Names” each member of the new group had the responsibility to report on his/her clan by giving information discussed in the original group. In the lesson on “Schools Then” learners reported on the information they had collected at home.

Quality controller
The person who took on this role was responsible for quality assurance. Not only the correctness of information was assessed, but also the neatness of the work. Palesa in school C wanted the written work to be neat (cf. Event 3). Mpho, also in school C, reminds her group that the work should be presentable (cf. Event 4).

Listener
From the turn taking in the interaction it is clear that all the learners were listeners and mostly active listeners in that they reacted to other learners’ statements and questions. Those who did not listen were called to attention by their peers.

Source of information
This role is traditionally associated with the teacher. In Events 3 and 5, after having done research at home, each learner becomes a source of information for the group. Again during the jigsaw in Event 6 each learner had to provide information on his clan to the new group.

Learning processes
There is evidence of the construction of knowledge, cumulative in the sense that the prior knowledge is taken into account, self-regulated in the monitoring function and goal-directed in the sense of performing the task for the outcomes.

The verbal interaction revealed that learners presented information to the group, while their peers listened. The information was negotiated in the sense that there was agreement or disagreement and adjustments and corrections were made. An example of the debate on information or knowledge was to be found in the completion of the task on “Important People”. In this task deductions were made (Event 4). In the task on “Schools Then” learners had to do their own research with the community as a resource. They collected information individually, constructed a body of knowledge together in the group and made comparisons between the new, co-constructed knowledge and their previous knowledge of the life-world (Event 3).

Although most of the cognitive learning revolved around facts, there is evidence of a constructive and collaborative learning process. The situated nature of learning became evident in that it took place in a cultural context, where members of the community became resources (cf. Events 3, 4, and 5). Learning was also situated in the social context of the groups (cf. section on social roles). Learners built upon their experiences (e.g. of schools today) making learning cumulative. There were instances where the group members monitored their work, which may point to a touch of the self-regulating characteristic of learning. Doing their own research may be one of the ways in which learning is individually different. In all the tasks learners worked together towards the achievement of certain goals or outcomes (Motsitsi, 2001:49). Collaboration and goal-directness were the most prominent characteristics of learning observed in this study. In spite of the humble beginnings of co-operative learning the characteristics of learning in a social constructivist sense were present (De Corte, 1996:9; Masithela & Steyn, 1999:23).

The success of the co-operative learning was dependent on a common language that learners could understand and express themselves in. Sesotho, the home language of the majority of the learners in Manguang schools, was used for meaning-making. Even the teacher used Sesotho when talking to a group (cf. Event 1, turn [2]). This language was not the official medium of instruction of the schools. The teacher tried to use English, but when explaining the tasks, had to switch to Sesotho. With the exception of one sentence (Event 4, turn [12]), the only evidence of the official medium of instruction in the co-operative learning events, were the English terms embedded in Sesotho sentences. The effects of code-switching and code-mixing between the mother tongue and the language of instruction in the South African context need the urgent attention of researchers. This research should be based on in depth studies of the interaction in real classrooms.

Conclusion
In this study the nature of co-operative learning among Grade 4 learners who, for the first time, were confronted with a task-based approach in the social sciences was investigated in three schools in Manguang. The verbal interaction of learners working in groups to complete a given task, was recorded, described and analysed.

The investigation showed that the learners coped with co-operative learning, despite it being a totally new approach implemented in an unfavourable classroom environment. They revealed the necessary social skills to function in a group working towards a common goal. They enacted roles traditionally associated with the teacher. By sharing information and knowledge they were engaged in a meaning-making process (through a common language) and their learning was clearly collaborative and goal-directed. When confronted with the task-based form of co-operative learning, they were able to make the sudden shift to the new way of learning. It is clear that the learners showed the potential to learn in an OBE environment.

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