The Effects of Cooperative Strategies on Shy Children's Engagement in Oral Activities

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Teaching Context

Level: Elementary School (Grades 1 and 2) Class Size in April: 12 (6 boys and 6 girls) (8 first graders and 6 second graders) Class Size in August: 14 (6 boys and 8 girls) (8 first graders and 6 second graders) Class Size in March: 11 (6 boys and 8 girls) (7 first graders and 4 second graders) Class Duration: 120 mins. 1x week Textbook: Our World 2 Focus Group: It consists of three members based upon language level (weaker, average, and higher).

Challenges

In the first semester, some of my students had specific difficulties with three key aspects of their learning: group dynamics, group norms, and mindsets. Firstly, the focus students had low levels of rapport with classmates of the opposite gender and of different ages. Secondly, their contributions to group work were affected by low levels of group cohesion. And lastly, they had fixed mindsets which make it difficult for them to not obsess over mistakes.

Objectives (Final Semester)

- 1. By March, I wanted about (90%) of my students to respond positively to the survey regarding shyness and speaking English.
- 2. By March, I wanted about (80%) of my students to respond positively to the survey regarding attitudes towards mistakes in English.
- 3. By March, I wanted about (75%) of my students to respond positively to the survey regarding group participation in English.

Literature Review

Dialogue and the Development of Children's Thinking: A Sociocultural Approach (2007)

The challenge posed was that collaboration in classrooms is often unproductive and inequitable. Students lack the guidance and strategies required to effectively solve problems in a group setting. In order for students to develop into more dialogic thinkers, Mercer, Neil & Littleton (2007) cite the Thinking Together Approach with two general requirements for group activities: exploratory talk and co-constructed ground rules. Exploratory talk encompasses a wide set of talking strategies including giving reasons, seeking clarification, listening to others, giving questions. It's important that these strategies are taught through modeling and dialogue with the teacher and social interaction amongst peers. Co-constructed talking ground rules are simply the behaviors that the class has decided leads to productive talk. Examples include respecting each other's opinions, one person talks at a time, asking why if we disagree, etc.

The researcher's main findings confirmed Vygotsky's theory of social interaction shaping intellectual development through language were correct. By students adopting more useful talking strategies, the students had become more dialogic thinkers. By using common ground rules for discussion, students were able to hold more reasoned discussions. In conclusion, the collaboration in the classroom was more productive and equitable.

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success (2006)

When comparing fixed and growth mindsets, Carol Dweck (2006) concluded that a growth mindset would lead to better academic success. She outlines how the two mindsets diverge in their responses to classroom circumstances: Those factors are challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, and success. A growth mindset embraces challenges rather than avoids them. A growth mindset leads to persistence rather than avoidance when faced with obstacles. A growth mindset sees effort as the path to mastery rather than pointless. A growth mindset learns from criticism rather than ignoring it. A growth mindset is inspired by others' success rather than feeling threatened by it. All of these aspects comprise the learning process.

Group Dynamics in the Language Classroom (2003)

Dornyei & Murphey (2003) analyzed group dynamics in the classroom and more specifically, how cohesiveness led to more motivation. Group life can be separated into two clear aspects: goal-oriented behavior and socialization. Goal-oriented behavior is what group members do in order to accomplish their goal. The socialization aspect is different because it is fueled by cohesiveness. Cohesiveness is the bond linking group members to each other and to the group as a whole. A group exhibiting high levels of cohesiveness is 'mature.' When examining group cohesiveness there are three components to consider: First, is interpersonal attraction, or a desire to belong to the group because you like the other members. Second is commitment to the task, or a desire to belong because of interest in the task. And third is group pride, or a desire to belong to the group because of a prestige to its membership.

Teachers' strategies for enhancing shy children's engagement in oral activities: necessary, but insufficient? (2020)

Nyborg, Mjelve, Edwards & Crozier (2020) researched how shy children reacted to different teaching strategies and how that affected their engagement in oral activities. The problems were usually identified as psychosocial in nature by the teachers. Anxiety was often determined as the key contributor in keeping shy students from participating before, during, and after oral activities. Teachers chose to address the concerns by attempting to reduce anxiety in the classrooms. Creating an inclusive classroom was a popular response that required teachers and students to be more attune to shy students' psychosocial needs. Careful primary school practices were used such as being sensitive with feedback, monitoring progress, and allowing extra time for preparation. Although these strategies had some measure of success, they did restrict the student's ability to experience certain learning opportunities in the classroom. Exploration and uncertainty in learning sometimes went unmet in favor of avoiding feelings of confusion and frustration.

In conclusion, teacher's often chose to focus on the psychological aspects of how a shy child will react to an activity and perhaps not enough attention was paid to the academic aspects of said activity.

Children's friendships and learning in school: Cognitive enhancement through social interaction? (2006)

Kutnick, Peter & Kington (2006) examined how classroom-based friendships could affect joint activity work. The nature of the friendships in the classroom were heavily influenced by gender and ability. Female friendships were generally more based upon factors like interpersonal trust, loyalty, fairness, and the ability to work well with others. Male friendships were generally more devoid of educational factors and friendships were decided more based on the action of doing the activities.

The results were that female friends working together demonstrated the highest levels of performance followed by boys partnered with an acquaintance, then girls partnered with an acquaintance, and lastly male friends paired together. Considering whether friendships enhance the joint activities reveals that friends working together is not enough.

What I Did

In the first semester my lessons were organized according to four learning sessions: review, bookwork, team-building activities and project sessions. The review sessions were designed around speaking activities that reviewed the grammar from the previous class and an opportunity to introduce new grammar that built upon what they'd previously learned. I thought that speaking activities would be best done first while the students had the most energy and could also serve as a way to activate their English schemata. Bookwork sessions consisted of output exercises from the textbook. Writing and new grammar were the focus. Reading was also incorporated into the bookwork sessions. Team-building activities were organized during the 15minute break time in the middle of the lesson. These were meant to build relationships between students and offer a new setting for learning. Lastly, the project sessions were at the end of the lesson and meant to be an opportunity for the students to use their grammar while completing a craft or task.

Beginning in the second semester I changed the organization of the class according to four new learning sessions: speaking, writing, reading, and project sessions. I chose to forgo the review sessions because I found that there was not enough time being paid to the new grammar being taught. During the summer, I started implementing Focus-on-Form activities. Bookwork sessions were replaced with writing sessions which still consisted of output exercises but now they were mostly from original worksheets I had made to better reflect the way in which I was teaching the speaking session. Team-building activities were replaced by reading sessions because by this time icebreaker games and physical games had accomplished their goals of building relationships between students. As well, reading had been pinpointed as an area of concern for some students and required more time in order to address the issue. Lastly, project sessions were expanded from single class activities focused on the daily grammar teachings to four-class long activities that were meant to utilize all of the grammar used throughout a unit.

I wanted my speaking activities to give my students the skills necessary to participate in the project sessions productively. The goal of the speaking activities was to introduce/practice the grammar that would be built upon in successive classes. Learner brainstorming was re-evaluated for the second semester and was meant to cover the start of the class before model dialogues were introduced. The idea is that brainstorming for young learners is an oral exercise where the instructor "takes the concepts expressed in the first language and transforms them into the second language (Van Patten, 211). Our class was instead tasked with drawing their vocabulary and then having classmates or the instructor supply the correct word. Model dialogues were re-evaluated in order for them to better align with the grammar necessary to complete the projects. Treating these speaking interactions as subgoals can better illustrate their role in the overall class hour goal. As stated by VanPatten, "Upon completing a subgoal task, instructors and learners know that they have completed an important part of a set of materials that is moving toward a concrete end. In other words, the completion and recycling of subgoals

helped the students build upon what they learned in the previous class. Activities like brainstorming and focus-on-form were meant to help prepare my class for their project sessions.

I wanted my scaffolded writing activities to act as output exercises where students could have their writing evaluated. The goal of the writing activities was to have the students write the grammar they had learned from the speaking activity. Scaffolding was necessary in the second semester because some students found the textbook too difficult to interact with. Original worksheets better helped link my speaking exercises to my writing exercises and were easier to access because of their simplicity. I refer to Krashen's *input hypothesis* in helping me see that my textbook was not comprehensible to my students and needed to be simplified for the language to be acquired (1982). Along with scaffolding, visual aids were beneficial because it helped the students broaden their vocabulary without having to pause without having to inquire. Mental blocks associated with translating, spelling, and creativity could be overcome and help the activity be completed quicker. By scaffolding the activities, the students could stay engaged and finish the activities on time.

I wanted my reading activities to be cooperative in order to help the students work together and learn to read. The goal of the writing activities was to have the stronger students teach the weaker students and bring their level up. Pre-reading activities like visual storytelling, chronological puzzles and predicting exercises were used to introduce the story or atleast elements before reading took place. Pre-reading activities were important because it gave the weaker students an opportunity to engage with the readings without having to read them. These pre-reading activities could benefit the stronger readers as well according to Allan Paivio's dual coding theory. The theory's principle is that recall and recognition are enhanced when presenting information in both visual and verbal form (1971). Shadow reading was also organized where weaker and stronger students were paired off and the latter would read while the former repeated afterwards. Shadow reading was a tool that was meant to give the weaker students an opportunity to listen to their partners and benefit from that kind of relationship. By keeping the activities reasonably challenging and cooperative in nature, students could benefit from reading in class.

The project is meant to be an opportunity for the students to combine everything they've learned from the unit and use them to accomplish a proficiency goal. The students learn how to work cooperatively and exchange ideas using the grammar they'd learned. The first major change that transpired this semester was the extension of projects over an entire unit and having a proficiency goal during the final class. The amount of grammar being learned was overwhelming for some students so more opportunities to recycle grammar lessons and build upon what they'd learned could be beneficial. A major factor effect of the workload was demotivation. In order for long-term projects to sustain student motivation and succeed, one of Dornyei, Muir and Henry's requirements was for an intricate framework with subgoals and

progress markers to be present (2016). Secondly, group roles were meant to be a way for students to gain responsibility and have a specific way to contribute to the group. Dornyei and Murphy suggest that consciously assigning roles can "increase the learning potential of the group and foster the development of abilities in different members (119). The project proficiency goal is meant to be attainable and summarize the unit being learned.

Results

After the first semester, group cohesion had improved enough so that students were willing to work with each other. After the second semester, the students were more able to and thus more willing to engage with activities. The changes in responses on the March survey showed that speaking English and participating in new activities had less 'no' responses than in August. This signals a small shift towards regression. The students were more willing to work with different people as the first semester finished. By the second semester, pauses and silence were more commonly attributed to confusion and a lack of understanding with activities. For myself, the data and observations were not congruent. In actuality, I felt shyness was no longer an issue affecting my student's learning abilities. Action Log responses and survey responses were similar in the cases of all three focus students. They all reflected similar feelings to August with little to no difference. Student #9 took on more of a leadership role during activities despite being a younger student. Student #10 was much more comfortable speaking with different partners once he had a script to refer to. Student #11 was much louder and participatory in class. I thought the strides made by each of the students in the second semester were not adequately represented in the results from the survey or action logs. I saw that similarly to Kutnick, Peter & Kington's (2006) research on friendships' effect on joint activity, that students working with friends was not enough to enhance performance. Student's working with acquaintances allowed more attention to be paid on the task and offered less opportunities for distraction. Once students were more familiar with activities and the learning environment they were more willing to engage with activities.

After the first semester, you could see students spending less time contemplating their responses or writing out answers. The idea of perfecting the work was no longer an affecting concern. The changes in responses on the March survey showed that attitudes towards making mistakes were more positive than in August. The difference was slight but across all three questions it was positive. Mistakes were simple enough to correct for students but the added process of quality control was not always responded to as positively. I believe the data was accurate but it didn't reflect how students responded to mistakes or underachieving outside of grammatical English. This is irrelevant because penmanship can affect writing as much as spelling. Action Log responses and survey responses were similar in the cases of all three focus students. They all reflected similar feelings about mistakes from August with little to no difference. Student #9 was still affected when she didn't have enough time to finish her project

or the result didn't match what she expected. Student #10 was much more comfortable speaking and had fewer pauses when he was accompanied by a script. Student #11 also liked having her script handy but would sometimes not use it. I thought the results were accurate. The students were still worried about embarrassing themselves by making a mistake but giving them more control with scripts and visual aids helped relieve their anxiety. Similar practices employed by Nyborg, Mjelve, Edwards & Crozier (2020) yielded similar results whereby teachers reduced the anxiety associated with the activity through practices such as sensitive feedback, more preparation time, and scaffolding. By creating a more forgiving environment for the students, their initial responses to mistakes changed. As mentioned, embarrassment amongst peers seemed to be more of a concern rather than not living up to personal standards concerning their English education.

After the first semester, you could see students' answers move towards being more positive in how they viewed group participation. That seemed to stagnate in the second semester. The changes in responses on the March survey showed that attitudes towards group participation actually regressed a little bit. With a few more students replying negatively of their role in group work. The amount of talking in English changed a little bit but for the most part there was increased participation in the form of writing. I believe the data was accurately showing how my class performed in the project sessions in regards to speaking English. However, in terms of participation, I thought they improved. Action log responses were a little bit all over the place with one week a student being satisfied with their group and the next being unsatisfied. The surveys were much more middling with conservative responses being the norm for all three focus students. Student #9 would try to start discussions but a less motivated student could easily find a way to distract and demotivate her. Student #10 was much more engaged in group work and found himself using English much more frequently than before. Student #11 really seemed to enjoy the projects once it became clear what she needed to do to succeed (lesson goals). I thought the results were accurate. It wasn't like the projects were a huge success with the class and more often than not they were tired before the lesson started.

After the second semester, students' attitudes towards group work did not improve as much as expected in their minds but there were gains that could be seen. Even though these gains were not properly tracked in surveys.

What I Learned

The effects of shyness on students' learning is tied to their relationship to the learning environment. Thus, with a new learning environment students must gain comfortability before engaging with the activities to their best abilities. I found that pair work really helped the students interact more in their speaking activities and led to new interactions. Student-student interaction was crucial in getting the student's comfortable with each other and having them form relationships that informed their interactions. Usually students feel anxiety when starting something new and require time to accept new relationships and environments. Icebreaker activities helped those students that were hesitant to join class activities and offered them opportunities to learn about each other. By changing the setting and task to something more familiar and low stakes, students felt more comfortable sharing about themselves and building relationships. Dornyei and Murphy say "[ice breakers] help set [class] members at ease…learners identify with each other more easily when they see the others moving, hear their voices, talk to them, and establish personal relationships during the first few classes.(30)" I found that shyness was a challenge that didn't have a long-term presence. The true challenge appeared to be associated with embarrassment amongst peers.

I learned that most students' were not internalizing the problem as much as initially thought and that the real fear came from embarrassment. In order to make the teaching environment more safe for students to share, I employed delayed corrective feedback. This was shown to be successful as the total time of activities decreased in the second semester. Waiting for pauses in activities to give feedback made it easier for students to accept the mistakes. By not singling out students in front of their friends they were more willing to continue. As well, the effect of reflective activities such as spelling lists helped students write freely without dwelling on the correctness of their spelling. Having vocabulary lists made corrections and revisions a cooperative exercise that put the mistakes in a different light. Some were glad to revise in groups because it showed that all of them made mistakes. Peer editing is a useful tool but may be perilous with young learners. The problems of students being demotivated and retreating from activities was mostly addressed once they saw that the environment was safe and that mistakes wouldn't be followed by embarrassment.

In the case of group work, I realized by the second semester that the results were not what I had envisioned. I identified two new challenges that preempted my original theory of lack of cooperative skills. Firstly, I saw that the grammar being taught was not being used during project sessions. I only realized in the last couple of months that strong lesson goals and proficiency goals were necessary to structure lessons in a way that would benefit the project sessions. This included spreading projects over classes rather than just one. I wasn't recycling the grammar enough and the previous sessions (speaking, writing, reading) weren't helping build towards a proficiency goal. Van Patten writes about "a lesson that is represented by an interactive information exchange task [that] allows an instructor to map out the lesson, specifying subgoals along the way." I needed the information task to be my project session and the subgoals teh represent the preceding speaking, writing and reading sessions. I also realized that some students needed some form of assistance in case they forgot the grammar. This would take the form of model dialogues from the previous speaking sessions. Some students would refer to the script often at first but then slowly become less reliant on it. However the presence of the script gave them a sense of comfort. This also was the case for vocabulary and the eventual availability of

flashcards for activities. VanPatten said "Visuals such as photos and drawings 'anchor' the input in the here and now," (39) Having the flashcards available made it easier for binding the vocabulary to its meaning once introduced. As well, it helped them when they may have been focusing their attention on the grammar.

Secondly, I saw that cooperative learning would be difficult when some of the students were still not mature enough to work productively as a team. I learned the importance of teacherchosen pairings and groups as a way of not only developing new relationships and interactions but also to integrate 'loners' more successfully. For example, students prefer to be paired with friends however the temptation of eschewing the activities to socialize are too great sometimes. Dornyei and Murphy (2003) mention a teacher named Tim explaining teacher-chosen pairings are needed because "the mixing of students reduces the power of cliques. (32)" I also found that assigning roles to students is in many cases too much responsibility. By having students cooperatively complete each role (speak as a group, write as a group...) then they could share the responsibility. They also identify role strain, and how "some roles can be too demanding (in terms of the knowledge or ability they need) for certain people to play them effectively (123). The role of the group is to be able to help each other but if someone is always requiring assistance then the burden can become too heavy on the group. By creating worksheets that allowed all group members to write at the same time or a system of how to divide speaking duties in a presentation, all the students could participate. Upon the completion of my second semester, I was able to see that the maturity of my class and groups were not sufficient enough to teach cooperative strategies without first employing heavily structured activities and allowing for lots of time.

Future Issues

After my first year doing Action Research, I was better able to diagnose and address some of the challenges that were plaguing my class. Considering the project session specifically, I was able to see that inadequate information exchanges between students, lack of motivation in material, and difficult task premises were all factors that kept my students from succeeding.

Group cohesiveness was at low levels and students' group behavior was ineffective. Students' interpersonal rapport was not established enough to induce effective communication within the group. Proper group behavior/manners were unknown to many students. Consensus around a group goal was never attained. Individual responsibility towards the group and goals were never recognized. Because of these deficiencies, groups were not mature enough to properly engage with the project.

The interpersonal attractions of the group were still not developed enough to motivate students to genuinely express their opinions and feelings. Divides in the class based upon age and gender were noticeable and dictated engagement patterns. Additionally, regrouping after each class disrupted any gains made in student relationships from previous classes. Proper 'ground rules' for cooperative work were not well-established and led to ineffective discussions plagued by one student enforcing their vision upon the entire group. With a lack of participation, the projects would inevitably result in few exchanges of genuine information that could have resulted in building group rapport.

Commitment to the task was low because interest in the task was low. There was little to no consensus on goals considering that related discussions were often dominated by a few individuals. The result was that goals were unclear for most group members and intrinsic motivation was low. Group roles were not well developed with the only role of significance being that of group speaker. The group speaker would usually be the same student that dominated discussions and could therefore explain their goals sufficiently. As for the other students, without effective roles, there was little responsibility afforded to them. All these factors contributed to a negative emotionality for some students and an absence of group pride.

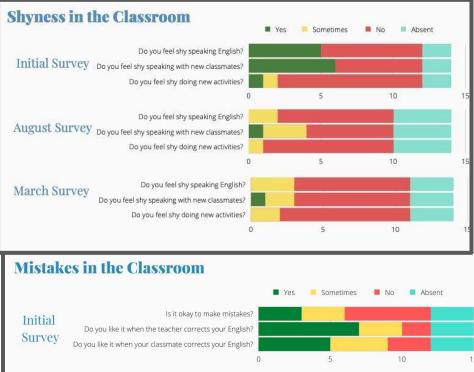
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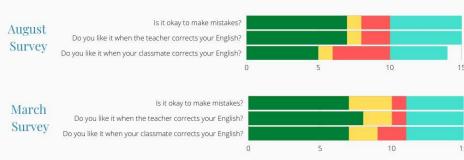
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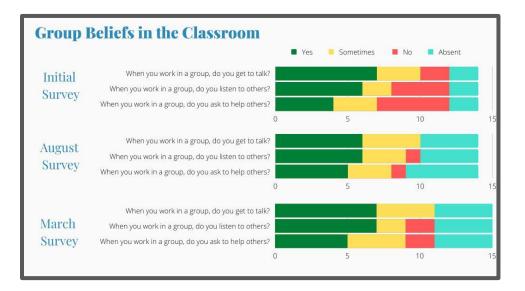
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Appendix





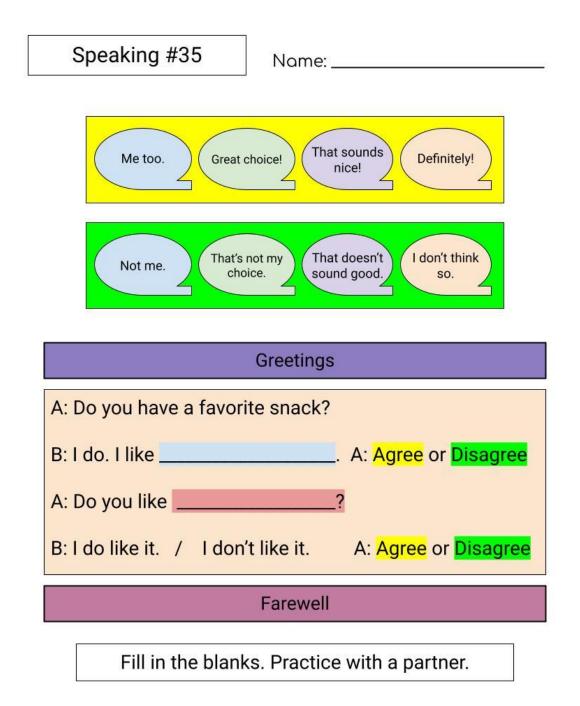


Surv	rey #2 Nome:	Yes Sometimes No
1.	Do you feel shy speaking English?	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Do you feel shy speaking with new classmates?	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Do you feel shy speaking during new activities?	1 2 3 4 5
4.	Do you feel shy speaking in front of the class?	1 2 3 4 5
5.	Do you feel shy speaking in pairs?	1 2 3 4 5
6.	Do you feel shy speaking in groups?	12345
1.	Is it okay to make mistakes?	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Do you like answering questions?	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Do you like speaking loudly?	1 2 3 4 5
4.	Do you like it when the teacher helps you?	1 2 3 4 5
5.	Do you like it when your classmate helps you?	1 2 3 4 5
1.	Do you get to talk during group work?	1 2 3 4 5
2.	Do you listen to others during group work?	1 2 3 4 5
3.	Do you encourage others during group work?	1 2 3 4 5
4.	Do you ask to help others during group work?	1 2 3 4 5
1.	Who are you shy around?	1
	I'm shy aroundbecause	3
2.	How do you feel when the teacher corrects you?	
	I feel because	
3.	Do you like talking loudly or quietly in groups?	
	I like talkingbecause	

Lesson Plan #35:

Lesson	Time	Interaction	Activity and Procedure
English Conversation and Grammar	45 (15) (5) (5) (20)	S-S T-Ss S-S Ss	Jobs Vocabulary and Clarifications 1. Bingo Game a. Board game with ingredients cards 2. Model Dialogue (Input) a. "What is your favorite snack?" b. Agreeance (CS) 3. Grammar (Noticing) a. When to agree/disagree in an answer 4. Task/Writing (Output) a. Interactions with three different students b. A group task making a grocery list
Listening/ Reading	15 (5) (5) (5)	T-Ss Ss Ss	Weird Snacks 1. Pre-listening Task a. Teacher reads the story b. Students ask discussion questions. 2. Reading Task a. Students read the story 3. Output a. Students highlight keywords from the story
Class Project	45 (20) (25)	S-S S-S	Ordering food from a restaurant 1. Planning a. In small groups, students discuss what ingredients they like. 2. Action a. In small groups, students write out a list of ingredients they like.

Total time: 105 minutes S-S: 65 Ss: 30 T-Ss: 10 Break: 15



Nome: _____

Your parents will be coming home late.

There is no food at home.

They ask you to buy food from the

supermarket.



You have enough money to buy 7 things from

pages 148-149.

What will you buy?

1. I like _____

2.	
3.	2
4.	
5.	
6.	a
7.	

Reading #35

Name: _____

Our first snack is called Hakarl. It is from Iceland. It is actually shark meat that has been cooked for 5 days. Some people say it tastes like cheese. I don't like it because it smells bad.

Our second snack is called Jing Leed. It is from Thailand. It is actually grasshoppers that have been fried. I like it because it is crunchy! It is one of the most popular snacks in Thailand.

Our last snack is called scorpion suckers. I don't like it because it is dangerous. It is actually a lollipop with a scorpion in the middle of it. Be careful!

Do they like the snack? Why? Have you tried/seen any of these snacks? Do you want to try any?







