Composition and formation of cooperative learning teams

Teamwork is an essential element of a cooperative activity structure. Therefore, the composition and formation of cooperative learning teams is one of the most critical elements of this didactic approach.

Generally, cooperative learning teams are made up of four students, maximum five. The composition of the teams should be heterogeneous (in terms of gender, ethnicity, interests, abilities, motivation, performance, autonomy...). To a certain extent, each team should reproduce the characteristics of the whole class group. In terms of ability-performance-autonomy-interest-motivation, the aim is for one student to have a high level in these aspects, two students a medium level, and another student a lower level.

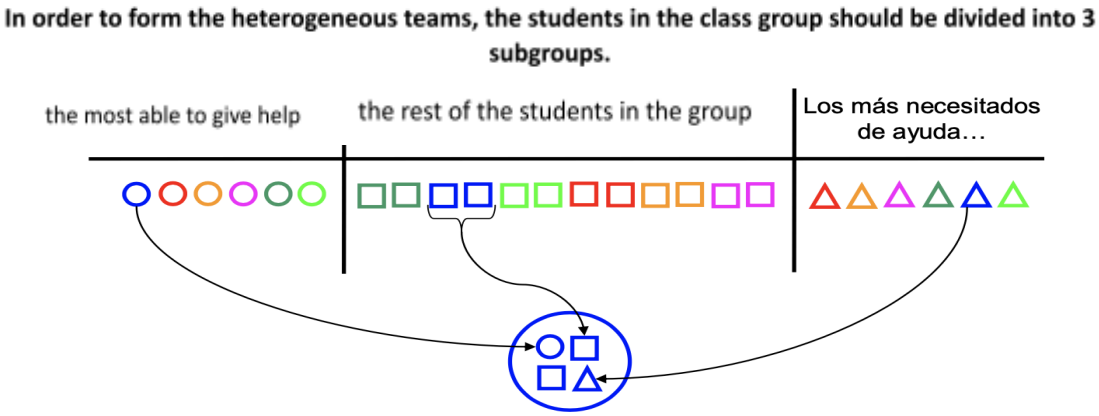
In order to ensure the necessary heterogeneity, it is most usual that the team of teachers distributes the participants in the different teams, taking into account, of course, their preferences and possible incompatibilities. For this purpose, information obtained through a sociometric test can be useful.

https://www.sometics.com/en/sociometric-questionnaire

A simpler formula than the sociogram is to ask participants which three partners they would like to work with in the programme sessions, thus making it possible to identify those who have been chosen the least or those who have not been chosen at all. In this case, it is necessary to think very carefully about which team to put them in, making sure that it is one with someone they have chosen and who is willing - duly guided by the teacher - to lend them a hand and help them integrate into the team.

A common way of forming core teams - so called when teams remain stable over a considerable period of time, usually a school year - is as follows: students are divided into three columns. In the column at one end, a quarter of the student body is placed (as many as the number of teams of four students we want to form, i.e. the number that results from dividing the total number of students by four) of participants, taking care to place in this column those who are most capable of giving help (not necessarily those with the highest performance, but above all those who are most motivated, most able to excite and encourage others, to "stretch" the team...). In the column at the other end are placed the quarter of students most "in need" of help, the least autonomous and the least motivated. The other two quarters (the

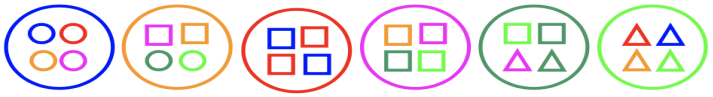
other half of the group) are placed in the middle column. Each team is formed with one student from the first column, two from the medium column and one from the third column, taking care also to balance the other variables: gender, ethnicity, etc.



In this case, the group is divided into a certain number of heterogeneous teams, which is the most appropriate when it comes to learning something new: the teacher teaches them something and when the time comes to carry out the proposed activities to apply it, learn it and check to what extent they have understood it or not, in each team there is a more capable and motivated person, or one who has been more attentive, who explains it to the rest of the team. There comes a time, however, as when they have already learned, even at different levels, what they are being taught, it is convenient that students in the same class group, from time to time, have the opportunity to work in teams of a more homogeneous composition. In this case, the teams can carry out exercises or activities more autonomously - as long as they are adjusted to their level of competence - and the teacher has the possibility of attending to some of these sporadically formed teams in a more personalised way, either to reinforce or revise what they have learnt, or to introduce new learning with the more advanced ones.

heterogeneous composition teams	

Distribution more suitable for learning something new

homogeneous composition teams	

More appropriate distribution when practising something learnt, at the level at which it has been learnt, and to reinforce some learning for a certain group of students or to introduce new learning to others.

The based teams

When the organisation of the class in heterogeneous learning teams is fix, these are called basic teams, and they become the basic grouping of students in a class group. These stable basic teams are essential when we move on to Intervention Domain C: that is, when we set out to teach them, explicitly and systematically, to work in teams. Four or five students who form a team will hardly learn to work in a team if they do not have the continuous opportunity to work together; they will hardly learn to overcome the problems that arise when working in a team -which is what teaching them to work in a team is all about- if they change teams every now and then....

However, this does not mean that whenever they work in a team they should always work in the based teams. Sporadically, and for a very specific purpose, as we have just said, they should have the possibility of working in more homogeneous teams. In this way, without ceasing to have their basic team as a reference, all the pupils in a class group have the opportunity to work with all the classmates in their group.

Over time, these core teams become increasingly better organised and consolidated as teams, so that they should become the first point of reference for the members of a class group.

When the center is inclusive, it is quite possible that in some class groups there may be some students with greater learning difficulties and with a lower degree of autonomy. Logically - following the guidelines of the "logic of heterogeneity" described in the first part of this document - these students should participate fully within the group and should therefore form part of a based team.

In order to do so, however, they need to have the appropriate support, both from the other members of the team and - logically - from the teaching staff. In this case, it usually works well that in the team where one of these students with more difficulties and a lower degree of autonomy participates, a member of the team, in turns, takes the role of "helper" and "looks after" the person most in need of help, which is part of the internal organisation of the based teams.

SOURCES:

- ➔ https://tknika.eus/
- ➔ Pere Pujolàs and José Ramón Lago (Coordinators). THE CA/AC PROGRAMME ("Cooperate to Learn / Learn to Cooperate") FOR TEACHING TO LEARN IN TEAMS: Implementation of cooperative learning in the classroom. University of Vic.
- ➔ Pere Pujolàs and José Ramón Lago (2018). Learning in cooperative learning teams. The CA/AC Programme ("Cooperate to learn/ Learn to cooperate"). Barcelona: Octaedro.