Chapter 3
Cooperative Learning for Cohesion, Inclusion, and Equity at School and in the Classroom

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Abstract This chapter presents a proposal on how cooperative learning can contribute to the development of cohesion, equity, and inclusion. The proposal has been developed in Spain, from the 1990s up to the present day, with the *"Cooperating to Learn, Learning to Cooperate" program* and the "Helping to Teach to Cooperate" strategy. In the first part, we will deal with the main scientific references that underlie this proposal, paying special attention to some reviews that analyse the links between cooperative learning and inclusion. In the second part, we will present the Program and the three areas of intervention that it proposes: group cohesion to create cooperative teams, learning in cooperative teams and learning to cooperate in a team, detailing its references, its objectives, the general criteria for its implementation and some advantages and difficulties often pointed out by teachers. In the third part, we will explain the main characteristics of the "Helping to teach to Cooperate" strategy, focussing on how to support teachers in improving cooperative, inclusive educational practices; we will explain the four stages in which the strategy is developed and some thoughts that teachers have had about this process.

Keywords Cooperative learning · Spain · Student participation · Inclusion · School support · Equity · Cohesion

Cooperative Learning as an Instrument for Inclusion: Theoretical References and Context

School is one of the fundamental contexts in which the socialization of children develops. It is a space in which situations are generated and experiences are promoted so that students may grow, develop, and live together, respecting individual

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differences and accepting that these differences are an enriching element of their development. In this sense, the school that is vigilant about individual differences, and works to respect them, advances towards inclusion. However, to achieve such a challenge the school must have strategies and new methodologies aimed at promoting the inclusion and participation of all students.

Currently, the most important methodological transformation that must be provoked in a school is to displace the central role that teachers and the subjects they teach have traditionally had, and to place the students and their learning at the very heart of the entire educational process. It is necessary that this is not only considered by didactic methodologies but by the organisation of the school itself. The exchange of ideas, the negotiation of different points of view, the confrontation of opposing positions, the processes of mutual help etcetera, are situations that develop from teamwork, and enable the construction of new knowledge between different members of the same team. Undoubtedly cooperative learning is one of the educational recommendations that teach students to move towards greater inclusion and therefore must be promoted (Azorín & Ainscow, 2018).

These considerations give rise to talk about cooperative learning as an effective resource and potent means of promoting cohesion and encouraging the presence, participation, and achievement of all students. Gillies (2016) defines it as a pedagogical method that promotes learning and socialization among students. Teachers are no longer the focus of teaching because this focus is now on the students who learn by cooperating with their peers (Sharan, 2002).

The Law on the Regulation of the General Education System (LOGSE), which came into force in Spain in 1992 and which extended compulsory secondary education to the age of 16 and opted for a comprehensive and diversified curriculum, generated the need to seek educational proposals in line with this educational model. In the year 2000, after some experiences of training about the different strategies for attention to diversity in nursery and primary schools, a group of teachers and research professors created the GRAD (the Group to Research Attention to Diversity, University of VIC-UCC). In this context and because of three research projects, the *Cooperating to Learn, Learning to Cooperate* (CLLC) program, a strategy aimed at improving inclusion in schools, was created, and developed (Pujolàs, et al. 2013).

Principles, Models and Areas of Cooperative Learning

According to Gillies (2016), cooperative learning is a pedagogical practice that improves the socialization and learning of all students. Review studies of various meta-analyses conducted by this author indicate that after examining the effects of small-group learning, the academic and social benefits are greater when students work together cooperatively as opposed to working individually or in competition.

The Theory of Social Interdependence developed by Johnson and Johnson (2009, 2016), also known as the "Learning together model", explains the conditions

required for cooperation to develop in an effective way and specifies its basic components: positive interdependence, individual accountability, face-to-face promotive interaction, interpersonal and small group skills, and group processing. Another important reference on cooperative learning is the "Team model" proposed by Slavin (1995, 2012, 2015), which indicates three essential elements: team rewards, individual responsibility, and equal opportunities for success. Currently, the model incorporates the teaching of social and metacognitive strategies as equally relevant variables.

Focusing on the importance of learning in cooperative teams, Cohen, and his collaborators (cited by Baker & Clark, 2017) observed that students performed self-evaluation considering as important perceptions they received from the environment. These perceptions contributed to construct their expectations about their competence and that of their colleagues, and this aspect was highlighted as a necessary condition to make cooperative learning in small groups effective.

Cooperative Learning and Inclusive Education

One of the focuses of interest and research in cooperative learning has been its usefulness as an instrument for the education of students with disabilities and learning difficulties, both in specific contexts and in ordinary classrooms. Two reviews of this research have been especially relevant for extracting some of the criteria or conditions that make cooperative learning a useful tool for inclusion.

Putnam's analysis (2015) shows the continuing importance of research on cooperative learning as a strategy for inclusion. From a review of 40 research papers and meta-analyses that have been carried out, we can highlight three. The first is Tateyama-Sniezek's (1990) study on the impact of cooperative learning on students with disabilities, analysed by the repercussions it had and the responses that followed. In this study it is stated that only 50% of research investigations indicate that cooperative learning has a favourable effect on the improvement of academic results of students with disabilities. A second study by Stevens and Slavin (1995) concludes that Tateyama-Sniezek's results fail to consider the fact that to improve learning we need to ensure that programmes incorporate the principles of cooperative learning. McMaster and Fuchs (2002), in the third study in question, noted that the programs that incorporate cooperative learning and those which have the greatest impact on learning are those of the greatest duration, typically more than 1 year, those that assess academic, social, and attitudinal performance, and those that are carried out in mainstream, rather than special, classes. This is probably because ordinary class groups are more heterogeneous and thus promote more peer support; it is worth pointing out, however, that more research is needed to confirm these results. Putnam's review finds that when cooperative learning incorporates structured cooperative teaching strategies, such as those proposed by Johnson et al. (1993), Slavin (1995) or Kagan and Kagan (2009), it is possible to consider the students most in need of support and introduce the essential components of

cooperative learning already mentioned. However, as this author points out, teachers are not always able to introduce them.

The second meta-analysis relevant to how cooperative learning can be used as a strategy for inclusion, although with a different orientation, are those of Ashman (2008) and Ashman and Gillies (2013). These authors also review the meta-analyses mentioned above and conclude that there are no absolute certainties regarding the use of cooperative learning with students with diverse learning abilities. They suggest that it is necessary to analyse how cooperative learning contributes to the improvement of learning by paying particular attention to the specific diverse educational needs that are associated with the different learning abilities of the students. They insist that, for students with diverse skill levels to be able to take advantage of cooperative learning, it is necessary to teach certain social skills.

Putnam (2015), Ashman (2008) and Ashman and Gillies (2013) seem to agree on the need to collect more scientific evidence on how cooperative learning can respond to the inclusion of students most in need of support. On the one hand they propose increasing research in ordinary classrooms where there are students with varying abilities and competencies and, on the other, to observe in detail how the 5 conditions or principles of cooperative learning are met to verify that the impact on the improvement of learning is the result of this instructional strategy.

Cooperating to Learn, Learning to Cooperate for Cohesion, Inclusion and Equity

The origin of the CLLC Programme lies in the research projects[1] on cooperative learning and inclusion carried out by Pujolàs and his collaborators (Pujolàs, 2008; Riera, 2010; Soldevila, 2015; Pujolàs, et al. 2013). The contributions of Johnson and Johnson (2016) on the instructional use of cooperative teams in which students work together to maximize their own learning and that of others, the cooperative instructional strategies proposed by Kagan and Kagan (2009) and the teaching methods devised by Slavin (2012) were highly influential in its formulation. Building on these, Pujolàs describes cooperative learning as "the didactic use of small, heterogeneous teams of students within a classroom, using activities which are structured so as to ensure the most equitable participation of all team members, and the simultaneous interactions between them, in order to learn – each to the maximum of her or his abilities – the contents of the curriculum and how to learn in a team" (Pujolàs, 2008, pp. 136–141). A similar line of integration of different components of learning around cooperative learning was recently proposed by Jacobs and Renaldya (2019).

[1] Project PAC-1: An Inclusive Didactic Program to help students with diverse educational needs in the classroom. Evaluative research (Reference: SEJ2006-01495/EDUC).

Project: Keys to learning in cooperative teams as a strategy for social cohesion, inclusion, and equity (EDU2015-66856-R).

The educational resources that allow us to move in this direction consist of three areas of intervention, according to Pujolàs (2008):

- Area A which includes all the actions linked to the cohesion of the class group in general and especially the teams.
- Area B which covers actions characterized using teams as a resource for students to learn through cooperation.
- Area C which includes all actions which are designed for students to learn to cooperate as a team.

In the presentation of each area, we refer to didactic proposals of the program, which are only a sample of each of the areas that it's described in Pujolàs and Lago (2011).[2] Likewise, the examples are drawn from centers that belong to the "Khelidon Network for cooperative learning", led by GRAD.[3]

Area A: Cohesion in the Creation of Cooperative Teams

This consists of a group of actions related to creating a healthier climate or environment in the classroom and favourable to cooperation, mutual help, and solidarity in learning to with the objective of the students becoming progressively aware of the emotional and cognitive community in which they live, which is essential for harmony, equity, and inclusion in the classroom (Tharp et al., 2002).

The resources for achieving such an environment, favourable to cooperative learning, are the dynamics of cohesion that also allow the promotion of a vision of teamwork as an opportunity for the cognitive, social, and affective development of all students. These aims agree with the Slavin (1995) model where cohesion feeds back to the team goals, and with Ashman and Gullies' (2013) proposal about the need to teach social skills to students so that they can take advantage of cooperative learning situations.

By way of example, Table 3.1 presents some assessments mentioned by teachers when they introduce cohesion dynamics in the classroom. Assessments are presented relating to the Interview and Manuel's Team.

The Interview This allows the development of mutual knowledge and positive relationships and affection between all students. In this dynamic, teachers and students elaborate a series of questions about a topic that they are interested in learning about. Having agreed on the questions, students interview each other in pairs. The pairs are configured according to the educational intention of the teachers: they can be couples at random, friends, or be chosen by considering gender, sociocultural origin, and language etc. At the end, the interviewers introduce the interviewees to the rest of the class.

[2] A detailed description of the CLLC program can be consulted at http://cife-ei-caac.com/es/

[3] http://khelidon.org/en

Table 3.1 Teachers' assessments of cohesion dynamics

	Difficulties	Positive aspects
The interview	Some students have difficulties in collecting the answers of the classmate in writing or they reply in monosyllables. (5th year primary education)	In addition to the motivating language practice, the fact that the selections are random, and the children do not choose who they work with, makes them relate to others who they might not choose themselves. (5th year primary education)
	Depending on what questions are asked, the degree of sincerity may not be reliable, but if the questions are asked in a gradual way and require only superficial information, little by little they help the students to become more involved and open themselves up to a greater degree. (5th year primary education)	The immediate interchange of information meant that each student gave his or her answers confidently and was highly effective. (5th year primary education)
Manuel's team	In this group there is a lot of rejection of group work, the students only bring up obstacles and problems when working in a group and this prevents them from reaching the desired goal. (5th year primary education)	The dynamic has worked quite well, and the students have managed to reach the general conclusion that working in a team gives us more ideas than working individually, but the students have not yet come to develop the need for or feeling of wanting to work in a team. (5th year primary education)
	They've started in a closed and inflexible manner. They have a very negative mindset about group work. (3rd year secondary education)	Individually it has been difficult for students to come up with clear arguments. In contrast, in a group they have been able to listen, comment, clarify and expand on other's contributions. We must continue to create more dynamics of this type so that students are more open to this way of working (3rd year secondary education)

Manuel's Team This is oriented towards developing the willingness to perform teamwork and to consider this work as both valuable and a strategy which is more effective than individual work. The dynamic starts with students reading on their own about a case in which a team had difficulty in cooperating. The students are then asked to link what they have just read to their personal experiences. The connections they make should allow them to identify first individually, then as a team and finally in the class group, the advantages, and disadvantages of group work. The dynamic ends by showing how, as the individual student's work is contrasted with that of the rest of their colleagues (both in their team and class group), the list of ideas they have generated expands.

These assessments show that:

- The dynamics, depending on how the teachers manage them, can be useful for the development of the purposes to which they are linked. For example, in the

case of the Interview, if the composition of student pairs is left to chance and encounters between diverse students is not encouraged, relations between children from different backgrounds may never occur. In this sense it is important that teachers reflect on the objective of the dynamics, plan them, and manage them accordingly.

- The use of dynamics allows teachers to generate a certain positive perception in all students, even in those class groups which are the most resistant to cooperative work.
- These dynamics, however, are not effective if they are only used in an occasional and anecdotal manner since any change requires sustained intervention over time.

Area of Intervention B: Learning in Cooperative Groups

This covers actions aimed at using teamwork as a resource for the students to learn cooperatively. For this the program uses cooperative activity structures. The structures of the program model and guide the interaction between students and guarantee the necessary conditions for teamwork: positive interdependence, individual responsibility, equal participation, and simultaneous interaction (Kagan, 1999).

It takes as reference Kagan's proposals to generate simple cooperative structures that last one session, but that often connect with the contents worked in other sessions. And complex cooperative structures that take as references the proposals Slavin (1995) or Sharan (2002) that require detailed planning and development over several weeks. The guidelines for these structures have been developed and oriented towards inclusion by Spanish teachers in our research (Pujolàs, 2008). These guidelines take into account the considerations regarding the intervention in the interaction patterns such as those proposed by the research of Gillies and Boyle (2010); Webb, et al. (2021), and Buchs et al. (2021).

In Table 3.2. we show some common assessments of teachers regarding the use of structures. Specifically, results are presented which relate to Shared Reading and the Rotating Page.

Shared Reading The students read one text in turn, in groups of 4. Once student 1 has finished reading, student 2 is responsible for explaining, commenting, or summarizing what has been read. Students 3 and 4 then decide whether the explanation, commentary, or summary by student 2 is appropriate or not. If they do not agree, they will give their opinion and present it for later evaluation. The process is repeated until all the members of the team have read, explained, and evaluated each of the parts of the text.

The *Rotating page*. Students work on the same task in teams of 4. One member of the team begins to make his or her contribution on a "rotating" page while others look at what he or she is doing, helping, correcting, or encouraging if necessary. Then pass the folio to a team-mate who repeats the same process. The task ends when all team members have contributed to it.

Table 3.2 Teachers' assessments of cooperative activity structures

	Difficulties	Positive aspects
Shared reading	When there is a student who encounters difficulties in reading or reads more slowly, they get confused and do not really understand what has been read. (3rd year primary education)	All students are aware of what has been read. (3rd year primary education)
	Some team members get tired of helping those who have more difficulties, and the teacher must intervene. (4th year primary education)	Different skills can be worked on. (4th year primary education)
The rotating page	Students find it hard to understand that work is not individual. (3rd year primary education)	Everyone can participate thanks to the support of their peers. Sharing ideas helps the students to clarify them. (3rd year primary education)
	The difficulties appear in the students' differing ideas. (4th year primary education)	The students value their results, correct them, and take pride in helping to resolve their partner's errors. Sharing their ideas. (4th year primary education)

From the above results to advance equity and inclusion:

- It is important that teaching-learning activities which are organized in cooperative structures are designed so that all students can participate. We refer both to the design of the task: complexity, duration, and materials needed, as to the way in which participation is structured: order, responsibility etc. It is vital to make sure that the students who find it the most difficult to both participate and learn receive the necessary support from teachers and especially, from more capable classmates.
- It is necessary that the group-class agree on rules for teamwork, as well as establish roles that facilitate their self-regulation, thus avoiding issues such as not respecting taking turns when speaking or not being willing to listen to others' ideas.

Area of Intervention C: Learning to Cooperate as a Team

This area is about teaching students the necessary skills to manage learning in cooperative teams in an increasingly autonomous and self-regulated way. This is achieved by helping them build team awareness and providing them with the tools to plan, monitor and evaluate their individual and joint progress. The instrument that allows them to achieve these goals are the Team Plans that include identifying features, objectives, roles, and personal commitments. Team Plans are periodically evaluated to identify areas of possible improvement. This continuous evaluation allows us to respond to one of the main challenges of cooperative learning: the formative evaluation of students (Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Gillies & Boyle, 2010).

Table 3.3 Teachers' assessments of team plans

	Difficulties	Positive aspects
Team plans	In this team there is a student with ADHD and behavioural disorders. He is socially accepted by the other children, but at the work level it is increasingly difficult for them to want to welcome him into a group (Kindergarten 5 years)	Assigning roles means that the work is distributed more evenly and as a result participation increases. The students' feeling that they belong to a work group increases. This improves the performance and efficiency of the group. (first high school)
	The most difficult thing is to help each member of the group understand what it means to help, participate, and collaborate, since without adult accompaniment the team members would not have valued all aspects properly. (Kindergarten 4 years)	The success of the choice of the team members is clearly shown by the fact that they have a reflexive, calm and patient attitude to children like JP. They have a deft touch. They have made JP feel part of the group and know how to deal with him, despite the occasional minor conflicts that arise (5th year primary education)
	The students outline their commitments and evaluate teamwork without serious reflection. Often, they act impulsively or base their evaluations on what happened during the last moment of the activity (2nd year secondary education)	It is good for children to see that everyone has things that can help with advancement, that we all have such things, and for them to know the tasks and roles that each must have to be able to work cooperatively (Kindergarten 5 years)

As has been done with areas A and B, we will discuss the impact of the introduction of Team Plans in schools. In Table 3.3 we present some examples of assessments that allow us to reflect on both the difficulties and positive aspects of the Team Plan about learning and inclusion.

The analysis of the teachers 'responses indicates that:

- Usually, difficulties are blamed on the skills or abilities of the students, with little reflection on the support that is needed so that teams can learn to assess the degree to which they are cooperating and can consequently develop proposals for improvement.
- At the beginning it is difficult for the students to understand the content and purpose of the objectives, roles, and personal commitments. Successively reviewing and assessing each of these components will enable them to be becoming aware of their educational value so that they will learn to take decisions based on them that are increasingly oriented to the values that sustain cooperative learning: solidarity, trust, mutual understanding, acceptance, and mutual help. It is worth noting at this point, that the active participation of the students in the learning process, as well as in the decisions to which that process is linked, facilitates the involvement of all pupils, and improves their educational outcomes (Rotgans & Schmidt, 2011).

- Learning as a team is more difficult when it calls for the inclusion of students who are in greater need of educational support as the teams must develop the required cognitive and socio-emotional skills. These skills must be taught and modeled systematically by the teachers since it is the teams that must be able to put in place the mechanisms necessary to learn by cooperating (through positive interdependence, individual responsibility, equitable participation, and simultaneous interaction). If this is achieved, initial rejections end up being transformed into opportunities for the joint construction of knowledge and mutual acceptance.

Support for Teaching Cooperation

The "Support for Teaching Cooperation" (STC, in Spanish) strategy has been developed as a part of the research project of the CLLC Program that we have just presented. The strategy has been designed because it has been observed how it is argued in Pujolàs et al. (2013), that support for the development of cooperation in the classroom is necessary, understanding that support as an accompaniment to the process of individual construction and development which the teacher performs in the classroom. Likewise, "support for the process of collaborative work among teachers" is essential to how we understand the collective development of cooperative learning in a school.

The STC strategy is based on four main references: Reflections on Change and Improvement in Schools (Fullan, 2001); Teacher Collaboration Training Programmes (Ainscow et al., 2000; Schulte & Osborne, 2003); Support Groups Between Teachers (Parrilla & Daniels, 1998) and, finally, the strategies and sequence of "Lesson Study" for the joint preparation of lessons (Elliott & Yu, 2008).

The processes of support for the development of cooperative learning in schools (Pujolàs, et al., 2013), some partial results of research projects (Lago, et al., 2014), and the contrast with the contributions of other research on cooperative learning (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Buchs et al., 2017), have allowed us to develop a collaborative strategy to support the improvement of cooperative learning (Lago & Naranjo, 2015) that allows incorporating elements of the experiences of collaboration with the centers (Lago & Soldevila, 2020) and turns it into a strategy in constant evolution.[4]

This strategy for the development of cooperative learning is structured in 4 stages which, apart from the first, are typically implemented throughout a school year with the following objectives and components:

- A first stage of awareness-raising to connect the need to introduce changes and improvements in the teaching-learning processes that have been detected by teachers with cooperative learning and the proposals of the CLLC Program. In this way all the teachers in a school can evaluate the need to carry out a process such as the one espoused by the STC strategy.

[4]The current version can be consulted at http://cife-ei-caac.com/es/asesoramiento/

- A second introductory stage to observe and validate how cooperative learning helps to overcome some of the difficulties and needs identified in the previous stage. This involves planning in teaching teams, making self-reports of reflection and joint evaluation, performing group cohesion activities, carrying out a didactic sequence organized in teams with four cooperative structures, and a second didactic sequence with four other structures and, as a result, implementing a Team Plan with the criteria described in point 3.2.3 of this chapter.
- A third stage, or generalization stage, that turns cooperative learning into an instrument that structures classroom activities and makes cooperative learning the benchmark for the school's educational program. Each teacher develops a plan to generalize cooperative learning with a class group, in at least one subject, with sequences of cooperative structures and team plans throughout the course. This generalization plan serves in turn as a support for other colleagues who are beginning to introduce cooperative learning.
- A fourth stage, the consolidation stage, where a permanent model of training and improvement in cooperative learning is created, in which every schoolteacher, individually and in conjunction with the rest of the academic staff, identifies which improvements need to be made in each of the areas of cooperative learning to expand and deepen their use. The consolidation stage continues for several years in a school and acquires its full effect by linking cooperative learning to other innovations made in the same centre.

This process is developed with different itineraries and rhythms in different schools. In Table 3.4 we can see the evolution through 3 stages of 3 groups of educational centres. In a group of 73 schools that started the introduction, in 2015; 59 progressed with the generalization stage in 2016 and 20 reached a part of the consolidation stage in 2017. Similarly, of the 65 schools that began the introduction stage in 2016, 55 reached the generalization stage in 2017 and 37 the consolidation stage in 2018. And finally, of the 59 schools that started the introduction stage in 2017, 49 were at the generalization stage in 2018 and 20 got to the consolidation stage in 2019.

The evaluation reports that teachers carry out individually and as a team at the end of the stages of introduction, generalisation, and consolidation described by Lago and Naranjo (2015), provide 4 important indicators about the advantages and disadvantages of the strategy that can serve as a guide for improving the development of cooperative learning as a strategy of cohesion, inclusion, and equity:

Table 3.4 Continuity of the centres in the CL implementation process

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Introduction	73	65	59		
Generalisation		50	55	49	
Consolidation			39	37	20

- Some teachers justify their difficulties in introducing cooperative learning in the self-reports that they make at final of each phase of the introduction of the activities of each area, described in the previous section. They explain that the "individualism" of some students prevents their engagement in cooperative activities.
- The joint work between the teachers of planning and evaluation of cooperative activities is one of the factors that drives some schools to advance towards the generalization of cooperative learning. However, this momentum is affected when new teachers are incorporated into existing teaching teams.
- The step of performing a particular activity in a didactic sequence to perform 4 cooperative activities at key moments of that sequence, can be difficult because some teachers believe that they should only be performed sporadically and not in a planned and systematic way throughout the didactic sequences. This is a major difficulty in moving towards the generalization of cooperative learning.
- Despite such difficulties, on analysing the impact of cooperative learning in schools that had completed the generalization stage in 2018, in which we reviewed 59 teacher evaluation questionnaires, we found the following results: on a 5-point Likert scale, 84% believed that cooperative learning contributed a great deal, or sufficient to facilitate mutual understanding between students; 81% thought it raised awareness of team work and the development of the values of solidarity and respect for differences; 70% felt that it motivated students towards learning; 52% were of the opinion that it increased the presence of the pupils at risk of exclusion in the classroom; 62% said that it facilitated the participation of students who encounter the most barriers in classroom activities and 63% related that it promoted progress in learning and the academic performance of all students by comparing their initial and final states.

Although over the years we have found some tools for reflection that have allowed us to advance the implementation of cooperative learning, we consider that data presented in this chapter show us which things continue to be the main challenges in advancing cohesion, inclusion, and equity.

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