

GROUP ACTIVITY – NEEDS IN TEENARGERS EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This paper brings to the attention of teachers the issue of group learning activity by combining the results of a research conducted to identify the level of satisfaction and the level of pupils' involvement in learning, remedial activities, counseling activities and of extracurriculars, carried out under the ROSE project, in high schools in Romania and of direct observation, during the special inspections for granting the didactic degree I and the evaluations ARACIP (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education). The questionnaire was administered to a batch of 760 high school students and direct observation was done during 134 lessons.*

Keywords: *group activity; cooperation; collaboration; interrelation; student needs;*

1. Introduction

One of the themes frequently addressed by theorists and practitioners of education is group work: collaborative work, cooperative learning as a need to meet the expectations expressed by the labor market and the current social context.

Nevertheless, in Romanian school, very little group work is used as a way of organizing learning, although it has many positive valences and contributes to the formation of life skills necessary beyond the school activity.

Among the teachers, it is very widespread that only competitive relationships generate a proper motivation for learning, for performance.

The most convincing arguments for stimulating group activity in school are: the results of numerous research, as well as the effects observed by teachers who introduced specific learning methods in small groups in class. Through the activity in small groups are practiced a series of abilities:

- cooperation with group members to carry out common tasks: collecting, interpreting and evaluating information on various issues;
- recognizing some types of interpersonal relationships, behaviors, roles and attitudes;
- identifying their own expectations for the activities carried out;
- evaluation of some types of psychosocial behavior;
- analyzing the possibilities of personal development for assuming roles in the social vine;
- analyzing the characteristics of one's own personality and the personality of others.

Through this paper, we propose an argumentative approach, through which we succeed in changing the paradigm among the educational community.

Considering learning, work specific to school age, we will approach group work as a learning and development activity.

2. What do research on cooperative learning say?

Since 1898, when the first research on this theme was carried out, numerous experimental research and correlation analyzes have highlighted the differences between cooperative learning, individualistic learning and competitive learning.

The results of these researches reflect:

- from the point of view of the obtained achievements: greater availability at the effort to succeed, implicitly, better results for all pupils, intrinsic motivation, involvement in pregnancy, better dosing of the time available for the task, critical thinking;
- in terms of interpersonal relationships: Deeper and warmer relationships among colleagues by enhancing team spirit, appreciating and valorizing diversity, by developing empathy and cohesion at the working group level;
- from the point of view of personal identity: strengthening self and self-identity, developing social skills, improving self-image, developing the capacity to cope with adversity and stress.

In the last decades, researchers have dealt with setting up the group as a learning environment, highlighting the high efficiency of groups of students who have a common learning task.

Small group training is an increasingly useful alternative, as frontal training limits instructional options. In frontal activity, almost necessarily, the didactic framework becomes the focal point. Indeed, it is difficult, though not impossible, to avoid training with a large group centered on the teacher. There are times when frontal activity is entirely appropriate, but we can also predict that much of the time will be devoted to procedures of producing and maintaining order.

By dividing the class into small groups, the responsibility of each student towards the group increases greatly. Also, the actual time of involvement of a pupil and the importance each pupil receives in one hour in class grows. Instead of representing the 25th part of a class of 25 students, the student represents a quarter of a group of 4. In theory, the actual time a student has to express his / her opinion to interrelate with others increases considerably. And involvement means development.

Learning through co-operation is the use of small groups for instructional purposes, so that, working together, pupils maximize their own learning as well as other colleagues.

Through such an organization of learning situations, pupils depend in a positive way on one another and this positive interdependence leads them to devotion to the group.

Other essential elements of cooperative learning mentioned in the literature are (after Johnson, D.W., Holubec, E.J., Johnson, R.T., 1998):

- individual responsibility. Each student is responsible for both what he teaches and the help he gives to other members of the group to accomplish a task;
- Face-to-face stimulus interaction. Students promote success to each other;
- skills and interpersonal skills, indispensable for working in small groups;
- reflection and evaluation of how the learning group works.

Learning collaborative groups focus on maximizing the academic success of all members of the group.

To use collaborative learning in the classroom, we need to plan and implement four specific actions (Ulrich, C., 2000, p. 74):

1. Take some pre-instructive decisions regarding:

- what are the objectives related to the pupils' social skills;
- how large the groups are, how we structure them, as long as we offer;
- how we can better arrange the classroom so that it is suitable for working in small groups;
- instructional materials that we need;

- what roles we attribute to group members.
- 2. Let's clarify what students have to do during a cooperative activity:
 - formulating concrete tasks;
 - explaining to children the positive interdependence;
 - what are the group work skills that insist at a certain time and how they improve over time.
- 3. Lead the lesson because although students work in groups, they must:
 - track and monitor clusters;
 - intervene where needed;
 - enrich the tasks and help students work more effectively in the group.
- 4. Organize and organize activities after work in small groups where:
 - evaluate what they have learned;
 - evaluate how well they worked as a group, what progress or difficulties they encountered in the personal learning process, which corrections and enrichments can be brought.

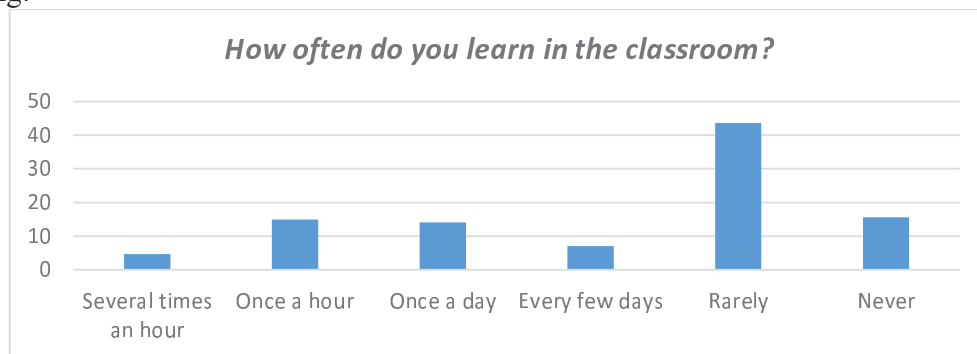
3. Research presentation

The direct observation of lessons, as school activities and the interview, by using a questionnaire were used as research methods.

The information gathered during the 73 special inspections for obtaining the first degree did in 13 counties and the city of Bucharest, 61 ARACIP evaluations carried out in school institutions and the administration of the questionnaire were used, to 760 pupils from 22 high schools, in the counties of Alba and Hunedoara, in which students were asked to improve satisfaction and efficiency in remedial, counseling and extra-curricular activities, as well as to identify the level of involvement in learning activities carried out under the ROSE project.

78% of pupils, at least in one of the three situations (remedial, counseling and extracurricular activities) suggested that the use of teaching strategies based on collaboration and learning cooperation: teamwork, group learning, peer support, working group.

To the question, „ How often do you learn in the classroom? ” the results were the following:



From the observation of the 134 lessons, it results that only 15% of the assisted activities are constantly using group learning, in an effective combination with frontal activity and individual work.

Research results confirm that group learning activity, although it is a need expressed by students, a pre-subject often approached in methodical and in-service training, a requirement of national educational policies, a labor market requirement in terms of expectations that employers they have to graduates, it is very rare and never (59.2%) used in class as a way of organizing learning.

4. Recommendations for an effective cooperative activity

For the successful use of cooperative activity, it is worth considering the following recommendations:

- Examine your beliefs and pedagogical goals! Think about the question: "Why is cooperative learning exciting and important to me as a teacher?" You need to reflect on the fact that it is important for your practice to introduce cooperative learning, motivate it for the effectiveness of teaching and learning in your classes, and convince your colleagues about the value and the effects of such a change.
- Establish and share with your classmates the methodical benefits! Why would cooperative learning be required in the heterogeneous classes in terms of student performance? In what sense would cooperation learning be a positive change?
- Proceed progressively! Gradually introduce class change; first enter the activity in pairs, then activities in small groups! And students need time to adapt to a new situation for them, where solving with one another a task does not mean cheating.
- Prepare for these changes to take a long time! To make cooperative learning a reality, it takes a lot of time and effort both on your part and on your students. Effects on children will not be immediately visible. Some of your colleagues may be amazed at the "bustle" of your class. Make sure that you "fool" means that students learn together, performing specific tasks!
- Talk to colleagues and parents!
- Look for collegiality not isolation! Find partners in school with whom you can work together, share ideas and materials with which to organize interracial lessons, make comments and give feedback!
- Apply new ideas! Practice forces teachers to be pragmatic. Inform not only your colleagues but also your students' parents about the changes you intend to enter!
- Build a cooperative learning model! For both you and your colleagues is important to build an implementation plan together. What goals do you propose? Which student grouping criteria do you use? How do you monitor and evaluate your activity? What anticipated effects?
- Review educational policies and procedures used in school! The introduction of cooperative learning is mentioned in national documents and provisions. At school level, it is necessary to adjust the timetables so that the teachers sometimes have two hours or even a day at their disposal to carry out certain projects. This is easier to achieve in grades I to IV.
- Link cooperative learning to your own responsibility and professional development! Even though the idea of cooperative learning is new in school, there is nothing strange about trying to respond to the needs of pupils as much as possible, creating learning situations that are diverse and appropriate. Take responsibility for the changes introduced in your class and make the most visible results at school level (after Ulrich, C., 2000).

5. Perspectives and recommendations

Depending on the pupils' needs and the objectives pursued, grouping can also be done according to differentiation criteria: learning style, intelligence type, activity rhythm.

Often it is necessary to have heterogeneous working groups, from the point of view of intellectual potential, organizational capacity, labor power. For this we will, as group leaders, choose as many groups as we need. We will use different criteria or selection criteria, for example: Ionel, because he worked very nicely on the homework, Ghita because she had the initiative of classroom cleanliness, Ileana for helping Crina in the math exercises. They will, in turn, choose a colleague with whom they will form the working group. This way, students from each category will be chosen: very good, good and with modest potential.

In addition to realizing the heterogeneous groups that we have proposed, such a strategy is an opportunity to positively strengthen the behaviors we want to generalize (neatly written themes, cleanliness initiative, support for colleagues).

Optimal grouping and deployment of cooperative work is particularly useful for modular furniture. Arranging the meals will be based on the teacher's anticipated interaction needs and obviously the space available.

While there is no possibility of grouping pupils (due to fixed furniture, for example), interactive activities can be carried out in pairs for:

- discussing a text, an image, a task, a problem;
- providing support for solving an exercise, a problem;
- asking questions about a topic;
- conducting a dialogue;
- evaluating and / or correcting the topic of each;
- summarizing a lesson at the end of the hour;
- advancing some conclusions;
- comparison of notes;
- performing an experiment.

Also in a cooperative learning activity, the learning strategy can be used: "Thinking alone. I work in pairs. Communicate "where an individual task is worked for a period of time, then the views are changed at the level of the pair, then at the group level to get ideas, more and more interesting, more elaborate conclusions.

Monitoring and intervention work is an open and cooperative attitude. It is the time when the educator can convince by attitude that he does not "hunt the mistakes" (according to De Landsheere, G., 1975, p.33) but helps them to achieve learning, harmonizing to their needs. It is time to cultivate a relationship of trust, dominating by positive stimulation.

Use activity in small groups, as a first step, as an exercise, to overcome negative emotional states as they have a point of view, to argue in public. In the small group, students feel more comfortable, more relaxed, more secure, less exposed to colleague criticism.

For the most emotional of the group, suggest them to choose the group they want to work with. Make the members of the group in which they want to work your allies, being aware of your purpose, helping them become support for them.

The combination of small, individual and frontal work enhances dynamism, attractiveness, motivation, and adds to learning efficiency.

6. Instead of conclusions

Cooperation is essential for the efficiency of any learning or practical activity. Cooperation does not depend spontaneously. It must be taught and built. It takes a long time to build cooperation, measured in months, not in days or weeks. The key to success in building cooperation in the classroom is a sustained and consistent effort undertaken by the entire group of classroom teachers aimed at this goal.

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