

COOPERATIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING OF GEOGRAPHY UNDER THE EHEA

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The university is in flux, resulting from greater knowledge available to society that has emerged with globalization. The working methods of teachers must adapt to new needs of the European Higher Education Area.

This article aims to clarify what is cooperative learning, explain the advantages and disadvantages of its implementation learn the main techniques and present the results of a project of educational innovation which has experimented with these techniques in two different areas of geography; the methodology values the opinion of students and teachers on cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning is not a new technique but the European Higher Education Area can serve, and in some cases serving in Spain, to extend the use of these techniques to the teaching of many disciplines, including geography.

First it has been crucial to define what is meant by "cooperative learning" because in the last twenty years there have been a number of concepts that refer to this type of activity. We opted for a broad definition understood as the model in which several students work together and share the workload equitably as they progress toward learning outcomes (Barkley, Cross and Howell, 2007).

This cooperation promotes and enhances learning, however, it cannot be forgotten that the implementation of cooperative learning and development requires a complex and slow process that requires a lot of activities by the teacher (guide students, forming groups, structuring the learning task, evaluating collaborative learning, etc..) and a series of specific resources. To help teachers in the structuring of the activities required to perform the set of skills involved in cooperative learning in the university these techniques have been used by various disciplines, including geography.

Until recently the teaching of geography in the university has been characterized by an almost absolute dominance of the teaching-learning methods versus expository

methods of research. This approach necessarily calls for direct intervention of teachers and students (lectures, seminars, practical classes, external training or mentoring), and is characterized by being essentially deductive, the teacher describes facts, concepts, relationships, and generalizations so that students understand and assimilate.

There is no ideal method to teach geography, in fact this is a discipline suited for the use of a variety of teaching techniques, however, over the years, and the focus has been on theoretical and practical classes in which the usual model has been the exhibition lecture. However, the strong socio-economic changes described and experienced by the educational environment in recent years, demands the search for alternative teaching and learning models that adapt to current academic and institutional situations, hence the need to choose to use theories wider learning which is in accordance with the precepts of current educational policy, in their quest to avoid passivity of students and discard way methods.

Geography is ideally suited to these conditions, since it has a multitude of resources that allow the student to approach the geographical knowledge through their own experience, through contact with reality to be explained. For students could be extremely fruitful use by teachers in the methods of investigation and discovery, as these would encourage them to engage in the subject and consider it as a discipline capable of solving problems of various kinds (regional, social economic, etc.). This would be an effort by teachers not only in the recycling of the contents to display, but above all, in the form of teaching and professional staff time. The effort also mentioned the responsibility of the Administration, especially since many of the techniques and procedures requiring a series of tools and resources that are expensive and lacking many classrooms, as previously explicit.

The application of these techniques has begun to generalize in the context of Spanish university reform in the European Higher Education Area and the belief that educational innovation involves a change of values, beliefs and ideas that underpin the relationship between teachers and students.

In some Spanish universities in geography teachers have been interested in this innovation process and in this context presents a case study may be of interest to split the teaching community. The research was conducted at the University of Malaga in the context of an Educational Innovation Project developed in the academic year 2007-2008 and which focused on cooperative learning.

The results were evaluated interchangeably by students and faculty and served to shape a series of conclusions regarding cooperative learning in college geography.

This learning method has strengths and weaknesses but it seems clear from the experience made and collected the literature, which is one of the best ways to work the skills related to cross-cutting skills and abilities as well as the development of attitudes and values in the discipline of geography and others. In the current scenario of change in the university, cooperative learning is well suited to the new requirements of the

European Higher Education Area, and hence the extension and implementation of these techniques among university professors.

In addition to these circumstances, cooperative learning has a number of advantages that clearly reflected the research presented:

- An emphasis on social interaction and learning motivating factor.
- Active and responsible role taken by the student to the task and responsibility in work involving a better individual and group performance in both qualitative and quantitative, and so on.
- Its effectiveness to achieve mastery of social skills such as the media, peer relationship, coping with the difference, and so on., Which translates into the fact that encourages students to learn to accept each other and cooperate, which helps to make them feel members of a group and experience to the group wide range of positive feelings, while increasing their personal safety to feel supported by him.
- The stimulation of various learning, encouraging activity directed towards previously established goals, as demonstrated (Fabra, 1994).
- Facilitate the intellectual and emotional development of students, which can perform various exercises and activities that constitute a solid base upon which experimentation can build their world view and the development of science.
- Improve the climate or atmosphere of the class, reducing stress and anxiety by achieving a relaxed and stimulating atmosphere so both students and teachers can work comfortably and effectively.
- Provides security for teachers, who feels how students gradually are becoming responsible for their learning to understand that when they learn, are not responding to the demands of teaching but their own internalized demand expansion and development.

Despite all these positive aspects, the success of this learning model will depend on the degree of planning and structuring of the educational process, in order to avoid becoming a frustrating and negative when not properly addressed some of its drawbacks. Indeed, the biggest drawback for this model comes from the teachers, because to achieve the same good teacher must possess a number of previous features Lopez (2005) synthesized in a way with words, intuition to capture the group's status, ability to organization and synthesis, nerve to confront conflict and some doses of humor. And it is essential that the teacher train the students in terms of basic skills for interaction and cooperative work. Either way, the teacher must believe in the possibilities offered by this method in the learning process of students (about the organization, socialization, integration, etc.) And go for it without reservation and this

is certainly more important because despite the efforts of the teacher, student, and even without the minimum conditions that the administration should make, and now is declining, a type of learning is highly recommended in the field of geographic and related disciplines.