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Introduction of Cooperative Learning to Move Towards Inclusive Classrooms Through a Process of Advice: P.A.C. Project

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Our paper presents some of the results of PAC[i] Research Project, whose purpose was to verify how Cooperative Program to Learning_Learning to Cooperate (CL-LC[ii]), contributes to the improvement of educational practices that promote educational and social inclusion of all students. One of the objectives of this project was to investigate which characteristics and conditions of the training/advice processes for the introduction of the cooperative learning program helps a effective development of that. This research in the field of improving educational practices, is one of the signs of identity of the CIES network (Collaboration in Educational and Social Research) which belongs to the Research Group on Care Diversity at the University of Vic who developed the research project.

The Program CL_LC (Cooperating to Learn_Learning to Cooperate) is based on the principles of cooperative learning, following the approach of Kagan (1999) and Johnson and Johnson (1997), and it has been developed by the GRAD, as proposed Pujolàs, 2008. The program articulates a set of educational resources organized into three closely related areas of intervention: the intervention area A with resources linked to the cohesion of the group, the intervention area B which contains a series of structures of cooperative activity to implement the curricular learning of the curriculum areas, and the area of intervention C, which includes actions aimed at teaching pupils and students, in an explicit and systematic way, to work in teams.

The main question of investigation related to the formation advice focused on whether the introduction of CL_LC program through a process of training/advice facilitates permanent improvements to the inclusion of students in the teaching practice of teachers and their school in general. Specifically, three sub-questions were proposed: a) Does it promote the development of "improvement contents" from the practices of teachers who develop substantial elements of their educational model? b) Does it allow the development of "improvement content" to adapt and innovate some elements of the CL_LC Program? c) Does it introduce "improvement contents" resulting from the difficulties encountered by teachers through all phases and tasks of the training/advice process?

The theoretical framework of research on training/advice for innovation is the concept of the meaning of the change process, its key components and phases that Fullan (2002) provides, Ainscow's, Hopkins', and West Soutworth's (2001) research on school improvement and the programs focused on cooperative learning made by Slavin and Madden (1998).

[i] PAC project: Programa didáctico inclusivo para atender en el aula alumnado con necesidades educativas diversas. Una investigación evaluativa. Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia (Referencia: SEJ2006-01495/EDUC)

[ii] Original title: Programa Cooperar para Aprender/Aprender a Cooperar.

Methodology, Methods, Research Instruments or Sources Used

To answer the research questions we develop an advice/counselling strategy, instruments of data collection and an analysis methodology consistent with the theoretical framework and assumptions.

The components of the advice processes examined in previous research (Lago & Onrubia, 2010) and reflection in the analysis process of introduction of cooperative learning in educational practices (Pujolas & Lago, 2007), allowed us to design a process of advice for the implementation of the CL_LC program. It was held in 7 phases, each with specific tasks and procedures, one phase focused on negotiation advice and training in the Program CL_LC, and six focused on the design, development and monitoring of dynamics, of the cooperative structure, of a Teaching Unit with cooperative structures, the Plan Team and Team Notebook in a teaching Unit, respectively, and finally a phase on evaluation of the content and process of training and the development of proposals for continuity.

Data collection was performed with 5 tools: two assessing questionnaires (one initial and one final), two self-reports (one done by the advisers and one done by a teacher) and two discussion groups (one with students and another with teachers).

Conclusions, Expected Outcomes or Findings

The data analysis allowed us to observe different aspects of research questions grouped in 3 sections:

- a) Regarding the development phase of advice and improvements in inclusive educational practices, it was observed how participants discriminated the impact of different types of strategies such as aid for development or improvements in the classroom.
- b) According to the research questions some clues/keys to the different rates of introduction of the improvements were found, some ways of adapting resources according to the conceptions of teachers were identified and an incidence of cooperative learning in the different items of school inclusion studied were seen, but uneven.
- c) The contributions of the participants in the self-reports and especially in the discussion groups provided concrete approaches and strategies in an introductory first stage, a second generalization stage and a final consolidation stage of cooperative learning to change it into an instrument of inclusion.

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