TEACHING TEAMWORK

THE COOPERATING TO LEARN / LEARNING TO COOPERATE PROGRAM

JOSÉ RAMÓN LAGO Y PERE PUJOLÀS

The CA / AC Program revolves around cooperative learning, which is a way of structuring the
different training activities of the different areas of the curriculum to promote interaction between the participants. It also revolves around teamwork in addition, of course, to being based on the necessary interactions between teachers and students, and in individual work.

Historically, in educational practice, asymmetric interaction has been given greater importance than
that which is established between the educator and the student, along with the effort and personal, individual work of the student. The better the educator's interventions on the student and the greater the student's effort, the higher the level of development and learning that the learner achieves. From this perspective, little importance, if any, is given to the more symmetrical interactions that can be established among the students themselves. Teamwork that can be carried out throughout the educational process is considered a waste of time from a practical point of view. This perspective is still very ingrained in many educational institutions.

However, since Piaget (1969) - and other educational psychologists — it has become abundantly clear that the symmetrical relationships and interactions between peers who learn, whether young children, teenagers, or adults, is just as important as the more asymmetric relationship between them and their teacher. From an intellectual point of view, the relationship between equals is the most apt for favoring a very real exchange of ideas and discussion and promoting behaviors capable of educating the critical mind such as objectivity and discursive reflection.

Therefore, in the learning structure behind the program presented in this document, in addition to (not instead of) the educator-learner interaction, great importance is attached to educating-educating interactions and consequently, in addition to (not instead of) individual effort and work,
great importance is also attached to teamwork. It is not, of course, about substituting one thing
for another, but about adding something else to what is already being done.

In addition, the Training / Advice Process on the CA / AC Program starts from the basis that there must also be close interaction and teamwork between the teaching staff of the same educational
center and different centers, as well as between teachers and professionals from other related services related to education.

In this document, we present a broad outline of the contents of the three areas of intervention of the
CA / AC Program (Area A: Group cohesion; Area B: Teamwork as a resource; and Area C:
Teamwork as curricular content).
INTRODUCTION

Research on Attention to Diversity (GRAD) at the University of Vic - Central University of Cata-

luña (UVic-UCC) is within the framework of the funded R&D Projects known as the PAC Project. This Program consists of a set of actions that are offered to teachers to structure the work of students in their classroom cooperatively and teach them to work and learn as a team (Pujolàs and Lago, 2007; Pujolàs, 2008).

We have named this program the CA / AC Program (Cooperar para Aprender / Aprender a Co-

Operate — Cooperating to Learn/Learning to Cooperate), inspired by the title of a book by Robert Slavin and other authors, because it reminds us of the double dimension from which we contemplate cooperative teamwork: as a resource for learning ("Cooperar para Aprender ") and as content to learn (" Aprender a Cooperar ").

The didactic resources of this program are focused around three areas of narrow intervention which are closely related, as can be seen in figure 1 (Pujolàs, 2008):

Figure 1. Areas of intervention
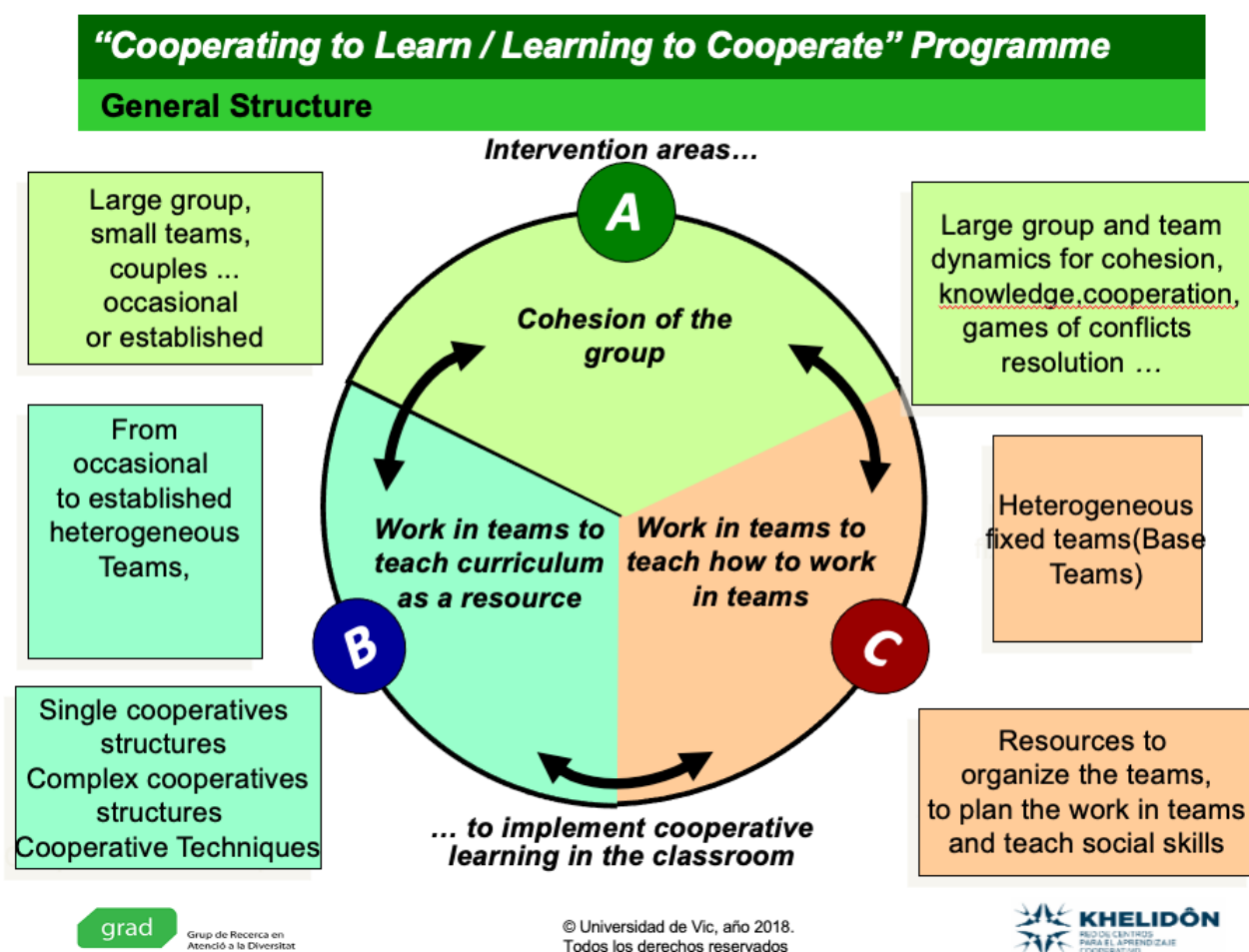of the CA / AC Program

Figure 1. Stages of the Training / Consultation Process

Area of intervention A includes all actions related to group cohesion. The objective is that little by little the students in a class become aware of themselves as a group and become once again a small learning community. This area of intervention should constantly remain in focus. The cohesion of the group is an aspect that cannot be ignored, since at any moment, certain problems or difficulties may arise that disturb the classroom climate and make the reestablishment of a more suitable climate necessary.

The CA / AC Program includes a whole series of actions aimed at gradually improving the classroom climate, which is fundamentally carried out during tutoring (group dynamics, cooperative games, activities …).

It seems appropriate to insist on this area of intervention, since the cohesion of the class group and a classroom climate that is conducive to learning are necessary, although not sufficient, conditions for being able to apply a structure for cooperative activity. If the group is not minimally cohesive, or if most of the students do not have an affective bond and a predisposition to mutual help, it will be difficult for them to understand what we propose when we ask them to work as a team, helping each other so that everyone can learn to the best of their ability, instead of competing to see who the best in the class can be. Therefore, at any time, but especially during the hours dedicated to tutorial action, it is very important to do activities and other group dynamics that favor this cohesion and promote a climate suitable for learning.

Area of Intervention B covers all actions that use teamwork as a resource for teaching. Working in this way, student can learn the contents of the school curriculum better as they help each other. In relation to this area of intervention, we cannot expect students to work correctly and effectively as a team just because we tell them that they should work together instead of individually. For teamwork to work correctly, two conditions must be met: equitable participation of all the members of the team, and simultaneous interaction between all of them. That is why the CA / AC Program offers a series of cooperative structures (that is, different ways of structuring or carrying out teamwork) that ensures the two conditions that we have just mentioned are met.

The sporadic (i.e., occasional) performance of a cooperatively organized activity is an interesting way of introducing cooperative learning. However, to obtain the real benefits that this way of organizing classroom activity undoubtedly contributes to student learning, you need to structure the class cooperatively more often. In this sense, the occasional application of a cooperative structure when carrying out a learning activity can help teachers feel increasingly confident with these structures and motivate them to use them more frequently. As teachers use these structures with greater confidence, it becomes possible to organizing didactic units by combining a few of them.

Area of intervention C, the final area, starts from the basis that, in addition to being a teaching resource, learning to work in teams is a content to be taught itself. This area includes actions aimed at teaching students, in an explicit and systematic way, to work as a team, in addition to using, on a regular basis, this way of working to organize the activity in the classroom. For this reason, apart from the school curriculum itself, it is necessary to teach students to work as a team in a more structured way, while still using teamwork as a teaching resource. In this way, students have a continuous opportunity to carry out normalized (not forced) to practice, and consequently to develop many other basic competencies, especially those related to communication.

To this end, the CA / AC Program contains, finally, the description of two very effective teaching resources. These are the Team Plans and the Team Notebook. Teaching the content of teamwork - as one of the main competences which, among other basic competencies, the student must develop during their

education – cannot be attributed to any one specific area. Such transversal content runs the risk of not being taught in practice in any explicit way: despite being everyone's responsibility, they are not anyone's specific responsibility. Determine when and how we will teach students to work collaboratively should therefore be a decision of the center's operational programming.

These areas of intervention that we have just described are, of course, closely related: when we intervene to unite a group (field of intervention A) we contribute to create the necessary, although not sufficient, conditions so that students can work as a team (intervention area B) and want to learn, in addition to learning to work in this way (intervention area C). Likewise, if we use cooperative structures within intervention area B, we are also helping to bring the group closer together (field of intervention A) and creating a situation in which students learn to work as a team (field of intervention C). Similarly, if we put the emphasis on teaching teamwork (intervention area C), given that in this way we will make better use of cooperative structures in field of intervention B, we also contribute to better uniting the group (field of intervention A).

2.1 Area of intervention A: Group Cohesion

Behind the concept of cooperative learning there are certain values such as solidarity, mutual help and respect for differences ... These values, however, cannot grow, or can only grow with difficulty if we have not prepared the ground beforehand. For example, a group may be full of tensions and rivalries between colleagues, with people who are marginalized, excluded, or not valued enough. In a group such as this it would sounds a bit strange or out of place to ask students to form groups of four to help, encourage, and respect each other, and not be satisfied until everyone had progressed in their own learning. Many times, this way of organizing the class – around cooperative learning teams - just hasn't worked out. This is not because cooperative learning is not good, but because the group in which it is applied is not minimally cohesive or prepared.

Additionally, it is very difficult to apply cooperative learning in all the various subjects from one day to another, without prior notice or with minimal preparation. Generally, most students who want to progress, who are motivated and have a good capacity to learn and a greater degree of autonomy, prefer to work alone. Also, many people think that organizing cooperative teams inside the classroom is to somehow go against the current: today's society is increasingly competitive and individualistic, and it seems normal to go about your own business and work in your own interest, and there are people who are perfectly happy to do without others in order to achieve their goals. In a group of students who have, to a greater or lesser degree, these characteristics of competitiveness and individualism, it is perceived as something strange and out of place to propose that they help each other and cooperate.

However, cooperative learning teams have been found to work very well with some groups. These are usually very cohesive groups, in which all students have a friendly relationship, to a greater or lesser extent. They have been together for a long time and have built up strong emotional ties over the years. So, before we give up working cooperatively in loosely cohesive groups, what we must do is schedule activities to get them ready to work cooperatively in a way that they do not find it so strange. This can then advance the group in the direction of greater group cohesion. It is necessary to have appropriate resources, since cohesion is an initial and necessary, although not sufficient, condition for structuring the group cooperatively.

Indeed, in most cases, before introducing cooperative learning, we will have to do some minimal preparation with the group. Little by little, a favorable climate should be created for cooperation, mutual help, and solidarity, with the aim being to gradually increase the group's awareness that everyone forms part of a small learning community. In essence, it is about programming a series of group dynamics and other activities that favor this climate and contribute to creating this collective awareness. We understand group dynamics as the set of operations and elements that cause a certain effect on the participants in a

particular group, depending on the needs of a moment: for example, that they get to know each other better, that they interact in a more positive way, that they are motivated to work as a team, that they make consensual decisions together, etc.

As can be seen, what is intended with the interventions of Area A, is to discover what aspects are related to the cohesion of a particular group, what is happening in the group that hinders cohesion, and then schedule a activities and group dynamics which are aimed at overcoming those identified weak points.

In any event, we must not fall into the opposite extreme of wanting to prepare the group so much before introducing cooperative learning, that we never see its members as sufficiently willing to work in that way. As we have already said, the three areas of intervention that we have highlighted are very closely related. As the group accumulates small positive experiences of working in cooperative teams, their cohesion as a group will also increase, and the more cohesive the group is, the more successive teamwork experiences will be fruitful.

Where, when, and how to work on group cohesion
Working on group cohesion is not a matter of simply performing a few isolated actions. Rather it is something that we must consider in the day-to-day running of the group while we carry out the different programmed activities, either during tutoring periods, or in class when teaching different areas of the school curriculum. Depending on how it is presented, everything we do in class can contribute to improving group cohesion. In any case, most of the actions corresponding to area of intervention A, proposed as tasks in the CA / AC Program, can be carried out during tutoring hours: activities to demonstrate the importance and effectiveness of teamwork, group dynamics that promote mutual knowledge, that improve relationships between students, and that help them make consensual decisions regarding things that affect the whole class group, etc.
These activities and group dynamics are, of course, not programmed without criteria, but after having analyzed the state of the class group in terms of its cohesion, and after having identified the weak points of the cohesion of a particular group. In other words, you must first identify the climate of the classroom, the relationship between its members, the value given to teamwork, solidarity, respect, etc. Nevertheless, working on this aspect of group cohesion should not only occur during group tutorials. Many other moments can be used: class assembly; the greeting in the morning, and the farewell in the afternoon; these can become specific moments of reflection motivated by some noteworthy event, some conflict that has appeared, or something similar.

In addition, we can use many other activities whose chief and primary goal is working with the contents and competencies of a determined area of the school curriculum, and which, depending on how they are carried out, can also be useful, as a secondary goal, to help bring the group together. For example, in the area of arts and crafts, building a class mascot with materials that all the students in the class have brought; in the areas of language and mathematics, introducing activities in which students have to exchange materials which each one has to be able to complete the task that has been set; highlighting aspects of the group such as mutual aid, collaboration, or the value of differences in activities proposed for working in different areas; students from immigrant families could be asked to explain something about their country of origin or their culture thus providing a first-hand account of what other members of the group could only have learned through other more indirect means, etc. All this, without a doubt, can contribute to a more coherent class group and improve the classroom climate or environment.

Group celebrations
Group celebrations deserve a special mention given their enormous contribution to improving the classroom climate and group cohesion. We have already stated this clearly on another occasion.

Having a group celebration every time something is achieved thanks to the efforts of everyone in the group is a very important element of cooperative learning: it allows group members to feel that they have achieved their objectives because they have made sure that everyone - each according to their abilities – has made progress with their learning. Based on this observation, feelings of being valued and respected

are indispensable conditions for students to reaffirm their commitment to learning and to renewing their enthusiasm to work and to be part of a cooperative team and of a class group that has increasingly become a small learning community. Likewise, they are essential so that students can reaffirm their personal conviction of feeling more and more capable: some thanks to the help of the others when it has been necessary, and others satisfied for having contributed to the learning of their peers.

We are convinced that, in general, it is necessary to introduce more elements of celebration into the class (always provided there is something important to celebrate, of course). These group celebrations are more frequent in nursery and primary education, less so in secondary. Postman (2000) offers the opinion that, from the point of view of an entity that exclusively values "economic" utility, any school activity of a festive or celebratory nature that does not have a strictly academic purpose is considered "a futility or an ornament, because it is the loss of valuable time". However, not really celebrating collective success is surely the equivalent by losing an unbeatable opportunity to reinforce the much-needed desire of many students to learn.

Analysis dimensions of the degree of cohesion of the group
In the CA / AC Program, five different dimensions are considered, all of them related to what, in general terms, we call group cohesion.

They are as follows:
1. The participation of all group members and consensual decision-making.
2. Mutual knowledge and positive and friendly relationships between the students in the group.
3. Mutual knowledge and positive and friendly relationships between 'ordinary' students and students with a disability or from a different cultural origin.
4. The predisposition to teamwork and the belief that this is something important in modern-day society that is more effective than individual work.
5. The disposition towards solidarity, mutual help, respect for differences and coexistence.

For each of these dimensions, the program offers teachers a series of actions (activities of both reflection and group dynamics) that can be useful when working on these dimensions with students. Logically, it begins with those aspects that, in reflection and analysis on the cohesion of a specific group of students – carried out at the beginning of the training process(es) – are considered the most urgent, those that focus on the weak points of a particular class group.

2.2 Area of intervention B: Teamwork as a teaching resource

Let's suppose that the group is already ready (or more ready, since it is difficult to be completely ready) and willing to carry out activities cooperatively, having done what has been said in relation to field of intervention A before proposing to the group that they work in cooperative teams. We have carried out a series of actions to bring the group closer together and sensitize them to teamwork. This, however, despite being necessary, is not enough. It is not just because of the mere fact that the group is very cohesive that the students will then spontaneously begin to work together in a cooperative way. The most common occurrence is that resistances arise because it is difficult for students to work in this manner; at heart they tend to be individualistic and even competitive, following the orientation they have had from the teaching that they have generally received up to that point.

This is a very important question. We have already noticed that the simple notion that they must work as a team, helping each other, and working together, is not enough. Each may go their own way: some may do something, and not have the rest of the team with them, others may take advantage of working together with others to copy what the others do without worrying about learning it. We need something that somehow forces them to work together, to count on each other, and not to be content until

all team members have learn or know how to do what they are learning. We do this by using what we call cooperative activity structures that ensure the fair participation of all members of a team and the simultaneous interaction between them when they work in team.

The actions of the first level of intervention (of intervention area A) are not exclusive to the cooperative structuring of learning. They can be done, and should be done, if necessary, even if we do not apply them to teamwork. We must consider them as necessary but not essential actions which are insufficient to end up structuring educational activities cooperatively. At the second level, we have to take another step and use work in small teams of students as a learning activity resource to ensure cooperation, equitable participation, and simultaneous interaction, and thus better learn the contents of the school curriculum and better achieve the objectives of its different departments. That is why we must carry out the actions covered by intervention area B: using teamwork as a resource to achieve the objectives of each area.

Let's take an example: the class teacher, or the teacher of a certain department, has structured the course content so that is consists of several didactic units (DU) or topics of variable duration. In each DU, the sequence is roughly always the same: the presentation of the didactic objectives, an initial explanation, and a series of activities that the participants must carry out, alternated with specific explanations by the teacher to solve doubts or clarify certain aspect of the contents covered. Instead of structuring this teaching individually, the teacher can carry out these same activities cooperatively by dividing the students into teams of four and using, for example, the cooperative structure known as 1-2-4: first students solve each exercise individually, then they discuss it two by two and finally the four students reach an agreement. In this way the teacher can best ensure that every student participates and that they interact with each other.

What this area of the CA / CA Program offers is a set of cooperative structures (some simpler, like the 1-2-4 that we have just mentioned, and other more complex ones that we call techniques, such as Research Groups or The Jigsaw Classroom). All these structures specify the concrete steps that the students must perform when they work as a team so that everyone can participate and, at the same time, everyone can interact to the maximum extent possible.

The actions in this area should constitute short, positive, real experiences of teamwork for the participants, so that they can see that working in this fashion is more pleasant and effective because they have the immediate help of their colleagues and, they can work the way they want to by discovering the most appropriate way to carry out each activity together.

When such experiences are positive, the participants themselves will ask to be able to work in this way more often. Additionally, these experiences, which are short because they only last part of a class session, can help us to identify the weak points of teamwork in general, or of one team in particular. From there, little by little, we can model the internal functioning of the teams – highlighting what they do correctly and correcting what they did not do so well – and progressively introduce the elements that help the internal organization of the teams and make it possible for them to function more effectively. These elements are already part of intervention area C (which we write about next) where the students must work in team in such a way that everyone can and does participate and, above all, everyone interacts as much as possible.

One of the fundamental pillars of the structural change proposed by the CA / AC Program is teamwork, which involves the participation of all the students and the interaction between equals in addition to – in positions of reduced importance – teacher-student interactions and students working as individuals. However, we need to keep in mind that not everyone has the same specific qualities or is easily able to learn how to work in small teams, which can be more difficult than it may initially seem.

That is why it is not enough to simply make students work as a team during class sessions, just as is the case with many other competences that we must develop in education. It is true that you learn to speak by speaking, and to write by writing; but the spontaneous practice of these skills is not enough to develop them to the maximum: for students to learn to speak and write correctly, it is also necessary to teach these competencies in a systematic and persistent way. The same thing happens with learning teamwork: it is not enough that students learn to work in team by practicing teamwork, or by working as a team to carry out the activities of the different sessions. It is necessary that, in addition, we teach them in a systematic, structured, orderly, and persistent way. Students must be shown what it means to form a work team and how they can organize themselves more effectively so that their team performs to the best of its ability, and so they themselves obtain the greatest benefit from this way of working.

So, we see that teamwork is not just a teaching resource (as we have highlighted in the field of intervention B), but also one more content that we must teach (as we intend to highlight in the field of intervention C). Given this fact we must teach this competence in at least the same systematic and persistent way as we teach the rest of the competences of the different areas.

Teaching our students to work as a team basically consists of three aspects: 1) helping them to clearly specify the objectives that are being proposed and the goals that must be achieved; 2) teaching them to organize themselves as a team to achieve these objectives (which involves the distribution of different roles and responsibilities within the team and the distribution of the different tasks, if it is to be something that is shared by everybody); 3) teaching them to self-regulate the way their own team works: identifying what they don't do correctly and what prevents them from achieving their goals and giving them the means to progressively overcome these negative aspects so that, through practise, they learn the social skills essential to work in small groups.

More specifically, teaching teamwork means taking these aspects into account:

A. For teamwork to be effective, the first thing that students in a team must be clear about are the objectives they pursue: to learn and help each other to learn. Being clear about these objectives and joining together to better achieve them is equivalent to increasing what is technically known as the Positive Interdependence of Purposes.

B. The exercise of different roles within the team is also very important, if not essential: a coordinator, secretary, person in charge of materials, spokesperson, assistant, etc. To accentuate what is known as the Positive Interdependence of Roles, it is necessary that each member of the team be assigned a role and know exactly what they need to do, and what their responsibilities are in performing it. Likewise, if the team must do or produce something (for example a written work, a mural, or an oral presentation) it is necessary that the work to be done is distributed between the group members so that everyone participates in the work and thus increases what is technically called the Positive Interdependence of Tasks.

C. Little by little, these work teams - which when they stabilize, we call base teams - become the basic units of distribution of the participants. These teams are no longer sporadic, formed to carry out the activities planned in a class session as a team, but rather are stable teams that work together whenever the teacher requires it. As they work together, they get to know each other better and become better friends, which increases their Positive Interdependence of Identity. To increase this identity, different resources can be used: for example, naming the team, having a team logo, keeping team papers in what we call the team notebook, etc.

D. Among the social skills of working in small groups we can mention the following:
listening carefully to colleagues, using a soft tone of voice, respecting one's turn to speak, asking questions, behaving correctly, sharing things and ideas, asking for help correctly, helping colleagues, finishing tasks, being attentive, controlling work time, etc. These social skills can become personal commitments, understood as the personal contribution of each member of the team to the proper functioning of the team. The periodic reviews that the team makes about the progress of the group helps in this regard.

Additionally, the sequencing of this learning in this way is not determined by topics of variable duration, but rather by successive team schedules that may have a more regular character and a more stable duration (a month, a month and a half, a term ...). At each planning stage, the team develops a team plan, which becomes the fundamental means of working on this field of intervention. A team plan is a declaration of the goals that each team proposes for a specified period. In it, they state the position or role that each of them will perform, the specific objectives that they will try to reach and the member's personal commitments (related to some special skill that must be perfected). During the term of a given team plan, and at the end of this period, the students meet to evaluate it, review the operation of the team during this period, identify what they are doing particularly well and what needs to be improved, and determine, based on this assessment, the objectives and personal commitments of the next team plan.

This way of proceeding requires that the basic team be stable, and that its component members remain together long enough to be able to carry out different team plans, so that they can gain the opportunity to change the things that did not quite work and consolidate the things that they did well.

Little by little, plan by plan, the operation of the teams improves because they are internalizing and consolidating social skills related to teamwork: relationships between participants become more positive because they know each other better, respect each other more and have a friendlier disposition towards each other. In this progressive manner, the students learn to work as a team because they organize themselves and function better as part of a cooperative work team.

What the CA / AC Program offers in relation to this area are the instruments (the Team Plan and Team Notebook) and the necessary guidelines to teach students to work as a team.

4   REFERENCE AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

POSTMAN, N. (2000): The End of Education: Redefining the value of school. Vic: Eumo.
PUJOLÀS, P. (2003): Different Students Learning Together: Cooperative learning teams in the classroom. Vic. Eumo.
PUJOLÀS, P. (2008). 9 Key Ideas: Cooperative learning. Grao: Barcelona.
PUJOLÀS, P. i LAGO, JR (2007). "The Cooperative Organization of Educational Activities." In J. Bonals, and M. Sanchez-Cano. Psychopedagogical Counseling Manual. Barcelona: Graó