

Solidarity in interactive groups in a Learning Community of Spain

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Abstract

The Learning Communities are an educational project. Its aim is to achieve quality education for children, youth and adults. The method to complete this goal is educational activities as interactive groups. In this paper, we present the solidarity of the students in interactive groups. For this reason, we use the critical communicative method. The research techniques are communicative observation and document analysis. The data has been obtained a learning community in Spain. The results of the analysis show that in interactive groups, the students help each other. Likewise, they cheer up and wait for each other.

Keywords: Group learning; quality of education; dialogue; values.

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Introduction

Learning Communities are an educational model that generates changes in school culture. One of the most significant changes is dialogical teaching, which aims to teach different principles. For example, solidarity and equal dialogue. Learning Communities are an educational model that generates changes in school culture. Given this reality, we analyze the principle of solidarity in the interactive groups of a Learning Community in Spain. This community is in a rural environment. Another goal is to identify if the learning

appears in other classroom activities.

The second aim is prove that the learning of the interactive groups is real, because it appears in other moments of learning.

1 Theoretical framework

In the Learning Communities, the community (teachers, families, volunteers and students) participates in the center's decisions to achieve a quality education for all. In different studies on this project, established that is an educational model that integrates people with different realities (social, economic, etc.) This is achieved through an egalitarian education based on democratic consensus^[3].

The first Learning Community appears in Barcelona in the year 1978. In this case, the neighbors of the La Verneda Sant Martí the neighborhood organized themselves to create a School for Adults. This school guarantees the social and educational inclusion of all its students^[7].

Later, the Learning Communities began in other Spanish cities and in other countries. An example is Brazil with the EMEB Antonio Stella Moruzzi, EMEB Janete M. Martinelli Lia and the EMEB Dalila Galli^[5]

In Learning Communities around the world, students learn in interactive groups. In the interactive groups, the students are in small heterogeneous groups. Each group is coordinated by a volunteer, whose function is to promote interactions and support among students. Others participants are the teachers. Their task is to distribute the learning time in parts of twenty minutes. In this way, schoolchildren change their activity. The teacher also worries about the good development of the session^[2].

According to Oliver and Gatt (2010) ^[6] the interactive groups are:

This form of inclusive grouping consists in the distribution of students in heterogeneous groups. The students remain in the same classroom. For this, the entrance and full participation of family members and volunteers is available. In this way, students are not separated by level.

This type of organization of the class increases the diversity of the interactions between students and adults (p.282).

Some research on interactive groups ^[8] shows that is an educational action aimed at the inclusion of students. This action also allows the community to develop social, academic and communication skills.

The interactive groups have as a theoretical basis the dialogical learning, which has seven principles. There are: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity and equality of differences.

- Offer the same opportunities to all people.
- Guarantee non-competitiveness, trust, non-imposition and mutual support.
- Provoke the participation of the people of all status (social, economic, etc.).
- Transform the cultural and social conditions of those who have less.
- Improve coexistence and promote multiculturalism among participants.

The social framework of the Learning Communities and of the interactive groups is the information society. In this society, people learn through new technologies. And thanks to these more and more people are accessing knowledge. In the information society, students demand prominence in learning, and parents want to be part of the education of their children. Likewise, school knowledge and knowledge of daily life are fundamental.

2 Method

To achieve the objectives of the study, we use the communicative method. Some authors^[4] establish that this method builds scientific knowledge through dialogue with the participants.

We dialogue with the participants at the end of each observation. The observations took place during the sessions of the interactive groups. Now, the perspectives of all the participants (teachers, volunteers and students) were considered.

The data collection techniques were communicative

observation, group interview, in-depth interview and document analysis.

In communicative observations, we share our interpretations and collect the opinions of the Community. Their opinions helped us to elaborate interpretations of the results.

The group interview was a dialogue with the participants, but for scientific purposes. We conducted the interview without differentiating between the researcher and the people investigated. In the interview in depth we follow the same procedure; but, it was individual.

The analyzed document is a school newspaper. This is prepared every quarter of the school year by different members of the Community.

In the following table appears the number of techniques for the study.

Chart 1 Techniques of research

Techniques of research	
Communicative observations	OBC1CDA; OBC2CDA; OBC3CDA; OBC4CDA; OBC5CDA; OBC6CDA OBC7CDA; OBC8CDA
	8
Group interview	1
Interview in depth	1
Analyzed document	1
Summation	11

Finally, the following table (table 2) details the participants in the interactive groups and the pseudonym. Add pseudonyms are an ethical criterion that must be followed in investigations ^[1].

Chart 2 Coding of the names of the participants

Participants of the Study	
Teachers	
«A», «AB» y «L».	
Volunteers	
«AC», «BA», «S» and «Y».	
Students	
Graduates	«An», «C», «E» and «N».
Fourth grade of primary	«Cr», «Di» and «V».
Fifth grade of primary	«DN» and «Ne».
Sixth grade of primary	«P» and «St».
Summation	18

To the previous table, we must add the participation of one of the author of this work. This person was a volunteer of the Learning Community.

2.1 Characteristics of the context

The school is in Segovia (a city in Spain). It was a rural school, attended by few children. But, the arrival of the project (Learning Communities) favored the increase of children enrolled. The study is of the following years: 2012-2013 and 2013-2014.

The data were collected during two consecutive academic courses. We participated in the interactive groups on Fridays. Every Friday the school organized a 3-hour session. During the first hour and a half, the students learned Mathematics, English or Language and Literature. They did not learn everything at once, but every Friday they learned a subject. After about half an hour, the students talked to select the interactive group captain. This meant that he had done his job very well for all the seasons of activities. The final hour was a time for the evaluation of the session. Teachers, volunteers and students participated in it.

In the Learning Communities of this study, the composition of interactive groups changes every week. In this way, all students have the opportunity to interact and learn with all their classmates.

The following figure represents the functioning of the interactive groups of the school:

The participants of the figure have different tasks:

- The students have to wait and support their classmates. Also, they have to rotate each group
- Volunteers promote dialogical interactions among students. The volunteers are inside of each group. But, unlike students, they do not rotate for each of the groups.
- The teacher supervises the tables to ensure that students and volunteers perform their function.

3 Outcomes

Before starting with the outcomes, we want to say that in the context studied the interactive groups are made by mixing different Primary courses. The theoretical referents do not say that the union of levels is part of the intervention. Yet, the adaptation was necessary because in the school there were not enough children per course.

In the interactive groups, the adults (teachers and volunteers) coordinated the learning without being the protagonists. The volunteers interact with the children. The students had the role of protagonists to favor their development and their academic progress.

3.1 Solidarity for the social progress of the student

In the interactive groups of the center, solidarity allowed the social progress of the students, because the volunteers reduced the competitiveness among the students from a communicative level:

... I am the first to say the changes that students should make-: It is the group where I have observed the least inequalities of cooperation. But, «An» still does not understand that it is more important to collaborate than to be the first.

After my words, “A” adds-: Students must be more concerned about their learning than about competing.

«S» is aware of that fact-: At my table, «An» has also asked me if the other students have been able to reach the solution of the mathematical exercise. (OBC3CDA).

But, the students were supportive without the support of the volunteers. We find several examples of acts of solidarity of this type. For example, students supported each other when a classmate was slower in solving tasks:

«E», who has not yet finished with his task, sees

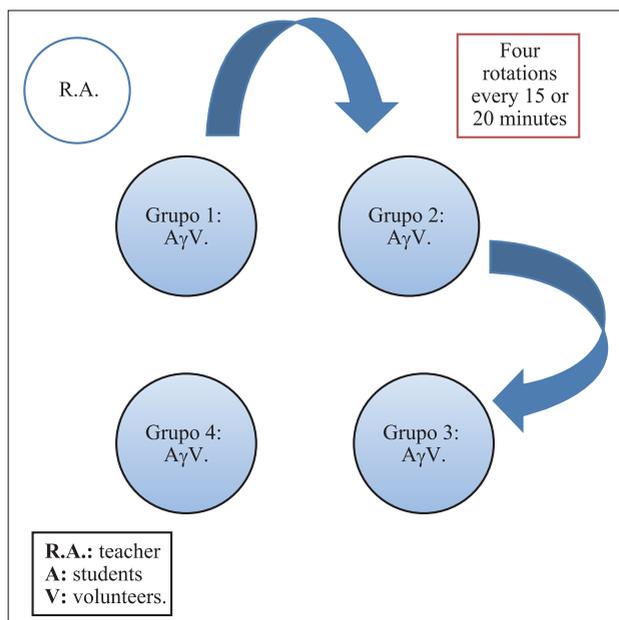


Figure 1 Participants of the interactive groups

The total learning time is about four parts of fifteen or twenty minutes. In each part, the students do a different task. For example: logic, arithmetic operations, etc. Thus, students learn academic and social content in less time, because they change their activity and volunteer every few minutes.

that «P» is slower than the rest of the group- «P», have you gotten stuck?

«C» gives encouragement to «P» -: Come on «P»! (OBC4CDA).

The students reinforced the appropriate responses of the classmates. This action improved the mood of all children:

... «C» gets up from his chair to help «V» [...].

-Eyes are a sight like nose to...? - asks “C” to “V”.

-Smell -replies «V».

-Paris is to France as Madrid is to...? -asks “C” to “V”.

-Spain -contests «V».

-Is sheep a flock like fish to...? -continues to ask “C” to “V”.

-Bank-replies «V».

-Very well «V»! You know everything! «C» exclaims.

«C» looks at me and says: -he does it very well.

-I’ve seen him, very good «V» - I say to the student. The face of «V» becomes more cheerful. (OBC6CDA).

We observe other attitudes of solidarity of the students. For example, the behavior of guiding the disoriented student or having more patience with the slower student:

...Soon «C» and «DN» see that «V» is a bit lost.

-Do you know what is the first person, «V»? - asks “DN”.

-No, “V” says.

-It is when you refer to yourself -comments «DN». (OBC7CDA).

...«Ne» is having difficulties with the conjugation of the word «would stop»¹. «E» says «Ne»-: Start to conjugate like this: I would stop, you would stop, he would stop, etc., to know the person to whom the verb refers.

-It’s third person-says «Ne».

-«Ne», until you understand it, we will not continue - says «E». (OBC7CDA).

In each of the examples we see that the mutual support between the students is fundamental to solve the academic tasks.

3.2 Solidarity for the academic progress of the student

The activities proposed in each of the tables were of three types:

i) Tasks that began being cooperative and concluded individually;

ii) Individual activities, in which there was the possibility of asking for help to other members of the table;

iii) And cooperative tasks.

We also detected that, in each of these activities, there were two types of support:

i) Intra-level support (students of the same educational course);

ii) And inter-level (students of different educational courses). Next, we will propose examples of the three forms of activity.

- Cooperative activities that end individually:

...”A” shows me and clarifies two of the three tasks that will be carried out:

- In table two, students of different levels will have to cooperate to gather the *Lacasitos*² by color.

Afterwards, each student will have to make an individual graph with the numerical results... (OBC1CDA).

-Tasks with individual objectives in which you can receive help:

When group two sits at my table (today is table two), I say to the students-: Today you must do the tasks individually, but you can help them when you need it... (OBC4CDA).

...In these activities, “AB” wants the students to complete the tasks individually, and then correct the mistakes among all. (OBC5CDA).

-Cooperative exercises:

When the children of the three groups are entertained reading the activity, I say «A» -: I do not have more sheets for the rest of the groups. Before the students continue to fill out the exercises, “A” tells me: “Today is one sheet per group to work more deeply in collaboration”. Immediately, I realize the error and remove the sheets that do not work. (OBC2CDA).

The three types of activity were based on the two types of support (intra-level and inter-level). An example of the first type of support is the following:

I appreciate how “N” and “C”, sixth grade students, are helping each other to solve the

1 It is an example of conjugation of verbs in Spanish

2 Candy of chocolate

exercises. This help is of a communicative type. (OBC1CDA).

In the framework of solidarity actions, inter-level help was also established:

In this table «P» is disoriented, that is why «A» says: - If you feel lost doing the exercises why do not you ask for help from a partner? «N», one of the older students at the table, decides to help «P» through dialogue. (OBC1CDA)

At ten past five, group one sits at table three to perform the activities. Since “E” and “Ne” have difficulty understanding the final goal of the task, “A” recommends “Cr” -: Why do not you try to help your partner?

«Cr» says «Ne» and «E» -: You must do the counting and put the word in the correct result. (OBC1CDA).

Also, in the mixture of educational levels, the students accelerated their academic learning:

There are people who think that being together the courses by cycles can be something negative in our teaching. I can say, from my own experience, that this is not the case. When I was in the lower course of the cycle, I also attended to that teacher’s explanation. The following year I would remember something more than what was explained to me and this would not be so complicated for me to understand. For example, in the 6th grade they were giving the division with decimals and me, being in 5th grade, also learned about that. (Virtual Newspaper of the Learning Community March 2013).

As we see, the acceleration of academic learning is the result of the help of the student who knows to the student who does not know. Now, since the ideas indicated, it seems that the help is from highest to lowest. Against this vision we propose a case destined to explain this idea:

«BA» joins for a moment to say -: Group three has worked well, but «N» and «DN» have the most involvement. I think is normal because «Di» is younger than the other kids and does not have the possibility of helping them. “AB”, “S” and I do not agree with this idea, among the three we tell that the other day “Cr” helped “An” in an exercise in mental operations. (OBC4CDA).

3.3 Solidarity actions external to interactive groups

3 Grammar exercise in Spanish

The permanent volunteers saw that the solidarity learning of the interactive groups was extrapolated outside:

I have seen it in certain children. For example, the other day, in the Physical Education juggling class, 6th graders helped 3rd graders - says “AC”. (Group interview: Comments of «AC»).

- I have seen some cases: the other day “Ne” did not have time to finish the gift on Father’s Day, and “N” stayed with her at recess to help her - says “A”. (OBC5CDA).

We witness the advances in student solidarity in a non-interactive class of Spanish Language and Literature. Now, a kid of the older students of the school helped to one of the students of a lower course:

In the next activity, the students must identify which words are badly divided. “Ne” has to answer the exercise, but says the answer with fear- “Carroza is wrong (in the exercise the word is divided as follows: *car-roza*³).

-Why is it wrong, «Ne»? -question «L».

“Ne” is thinking for a while, but does not know the answer. «St» helps his partner-: You cannot separate double letters. (Communicative observation outside the interactive groups: OBC8CDA).

In the three previous examples, we can see the inter-level help to which we have referred in the interactive groups. But, in this occasion, help appears outside of this activity. The tutored libraries are another educational action. In them, the volunteers observed the solidarity development of the students:

Yes, because in the afternoon, in the tutored libraries, the children listen and ask for help. Before, they did their homework and if they did not know they went to the mother, the father or the adult who was closer. Now they ask among the companions: See? Do you know? They even get up from the chair to explain it to each other. (Depth interview).

4 Conclusions

In the interactive groups, the students learn to be supportive because they put into practice three actions:

- i) The students have high expectations of the other children;
- ii) Children help each other;

iii) All students are concerned about the welfare of the group.

The indicated actions have benefits for the group of children. The first solidarity action allows the group of schoolchildren to feel valued. The second action allows children with difficulties to be able to help and receive help. It also allows help between children of different levels. The last action is necessary to reduce competitiveness and improve coexistence. On this matter, children were not prepared to take others into account, at first. Yet, afterwards, they seek that the non-egalitarian behaviors did not take place. From these ideas, we can say that the interactive groups allow the students to develop prosocial behaviors.

Likewise, the participants become more supportive outside the groups, because they take care of the others. Besides, they feel that they belong to a community.

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