

Training in Learning Communities

UNIT 6



INTERACTIVE GROUPS

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UNIT 6

INTERACTIVE GROUPS

In this unit, Interactive Groups as a Successful Educational Action are presented. Various types of group organisation in classrooms are considered, and details of those which promote academic success are given. To this end, different types of student groupings are described and compared as clarified by INCLUD-ED (2006-2011). The impact of various group forms on the academic performance of students is also considered.

Interactive groups are a way to organise the classroom based on evidence given by the international scientific community and contrasted with the practice in the classroom in many centres and at different educational levels. We give some examples to clarify what they are, how they work and what they are not.

6.1. Groups in the classroom

The international scientific community has, for a long time now, identified what type of classroom organisation is most efficient in generating maximum learning opportunities for everyone and, equally, which forms of classroom organisation often lead to school failure and social inequality.

A review of European education systems was conducted as part of the initial stage of research for the INCLUD-ED Project. Part of the research was aimed at identifying the organisational structures of student bodies in various European education systems and assessing what impact such structures may have on educational performance. The international scientific community contributed to research and, after reviewing findings, three forms of student body groupings were identified: mixture, streaming and inclusion.

	MIXTURE	STREAMING	INCLUSION	
Based on	Equal opportunities	Difference	Equality of results/Equality of differences	
Group	Heterogeneous	Homogeneous	Heterogeneous	
Human Resources	1 teacher	More than one teacher	More than one teacher	
Together or separated?	Together	Separate	Together	Separate
	1) Mixed ability classrooms	1) Classroom activities are organised according to ability level. a) ability groups in different classrooms b) ability groups in the same classroom 2) Remedial groups and support are segregated from the regular classroom.	1) Heterogeneous ability classrooms with reallocation of resources	2) Inclusive split classes with mixed-ability students

Source: INCLUD-ED, 2009, p. 37

There are also other research studies such as the I+D, MIXSTRIN project (CREA, 2009-2011) which assess how and to what extent grouping approaches as defined by the international scientific community such as 'mixture', 'streaming' and 'inclusion' are used to organise students in education centres in Spain. The MIXSTRIN project results were one of the sets used in the theoretical basis for the INCLUD-ED research.

6.1.1. *Equal opportunities in access: mixture*

Most people are used to the most common style of classroom organisation in education centres. It is the picture of a classroom with twenty to thirty children of a similar age. The classroom is diverse, since there are students who have various learning levels, who face various learning challenges and who come from diverse cultural, religious and family backgrounds. There is only one teacher in the classroom. This arrangement is what is defined here as *mixture*.

This is the traditional way in which the classroom is organised, in which all students are included. It is usually heterogeneous as far as learning levels are concerned and the class has just one teacher. The premise on which this type of organisation is based is that of offering equal opportunities in access to education for every child, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Questions arise here as follows: Is a lone teacher able to teach each and every child in a mixed classroom in the most effective manner? Can the said teacher manage the diversity in a mixed classroom to consistently offer each child the required attention? Do children with difficulties receive all the attention they require from the teacher?

Research shows that the mixed group does not allow teaching staff to adequately respond to the ever growing diversity of requirements of classrooms. Consequently, what frequently occurs is that the students who perform well are the ones who understand the teacher clearly whereas those students with certain difficulties start to struggle because they do not understand. They become demotivated, distracted and bored, sometimes becoming disruptive. Ultimately these students may stop studying entirely or drop out of school. In view of these shortcomings, alternative groupings are proposed: *streaming* and *inclusion*.

6.1.2. Attention to diversity based on difference: streaming

As an alternative to mixed groups with the intention of accommodating difference and diversity in the classroom, some countries have developed several varieties of homogeneous grouping, so-called *streaming*, which is defined as an approach to adapt the curriculum to several groups of pupils based on their skills in the education centre itself (European Commission, 2006, p. 19).

'For instance, in an ordinary classroom of 24 pupils, in some the staff will work with 17 of them considered as 'easy' in certain subjects, whereas another teacher will take care of 7 regarded as 'difficult', normally immigrants, members of minority groups, children originating from depressed environments. Another possibility of homogeneous grouping lies in the permanent separation of the student body as per their performance in every single subject. If a centre has two groups of 24 pupils aged the same, those 24 performing better than the rest, will be grouped in one classroom and the rest in the other' (INCLUD-ED, 2011, p. 54).

One of the most common forms of *streaming* is that of grouping based on levels of performance inside and outside the classroom in some or all subjects in order to incorporate and manage student body diversity. The justification for this approach is that by creating homogeneous groups, it is possible to adapt classrooms to the particular needs of each student and to provide them with more customised teaching. Here, students considered more able benefit from a more intensive teaching pace whereas students considered as having

difficulties can benefit from reinforcement. There are two main types of homogeneous groups:

- **Homogeneous groupings outside the classroom:** In cases where some students of one class are experiencing more difficulties than others in terms of either performance or behaviour, they are frequently removed from the classroom for key subjects and offered reinforcement. However, when a subject is not considered key, they may remain in the classroom or centre for external schooling and share resources. In level groupings, the classroom is split into different groups. For example, Group A may be 'top level of performance' and Group B may be 'lower level of performance'. In this case, for key subjects, Group B is removed from the main classroom either because they are considered disruptive or perhaps because they are to receive reinforcement teaching.
- **Homogeneous groupings inside the classroom:** At other times, the student body is grouped homogeneously according to learning level but within the same classroom, splitting up 'those who perform better' and 'those who do not'. This occurs when the centre has available support staff, for example EAL teachers and educational psychologists. Subsequently, each of the two groups follows a different curriculum. The group with more difficulties does adapted activities and their learning goals are lowered. Scientific literature refers to this practice as *grouping by learning level in one classroom*.

The various homogeneous groupings are summarised in the chart below as follows:

HOMEGENEOUS GROUPING TYPES	DESCRIPTION
1. Organisation of learning activity groupings according to performance level	Teaching is adapted to different student needs and learning paces.
	High- and low-performance level students are grouped separately in the same or in different classrooms.
	Grouping by performing levels is normally used for key subjects teaching. It is more common in secondary education and often leads to several educational itineraries.
	This grouping may have negative consequences on schooling success and in social integration .
	Student body assignment groupings are often made according to personal decision of school centre staff.
	Lower level groups commonly include a higher percentage of students considered as having vulnerable circumstances than higher level groups.
2. Reinforcement or support group separation from core group	Groups are formed for children with special educational needs or for students at risk of social exclusion.
	Selected students are separated from the core group at times to receive educational support.
	Groups containing students in need of special education support commonly include a higher percentage of students from immigrant and minority backgrounds as well as those who have little command of the teaching language than in the main groups.
	One potential consequence is that students in support groups become negatively labelled long-term. There may also be reduction in teaching level and goals.
3. Individual exclusion curricular adaptations	Official curriculum is adapted to the learning level of a particular pupil or group of pupils in the form of a reduction in difficulty level of teaching.
	Decision is frequently made with closed student groups including special education pupils, immigrants and those who must acquire the teaching language.
4. Exclusion	Selective subject studies can lead to social and academic inequalities in the future due to reduced subject area opportunities .
	Learning itinerary selection shows correlation with family socio-economic status and expectations of excluded students.

Source: INCLUD-ED, 2011, p. 47

A question arises here as to why, if certain students are segregated into lower levels as, for example, Groups B and C, in order to receive reinforced teaching so that they may again reach the required school level, the levels of learning objectives and the curriculum are in fact often reduced.

In reality, the education centre is *adapting the curriculum to different groups of students in accordance with their performance, within the same centre* (Wöbmann & Schütz, 2006). On this note, for several decades, it has been demonstrated that *streaming* actually promotes school failure and coexistence problems (Oakes, 1985).

In his book, *La Nueva Desigualdad Cultural (The New Cultural Inequality)*, Flecha (1990) devotes a full chapter to the analysis of this correlation with the title *Diversity through generalist education as a link to other inequalities*. In 1992, US author, Slavin, founder of the schooling programme Success For All, also concluded with the following: *... skill level groups must be terminated because they are inefficient, they are useless for many students, they inhibit development for respect, intercultural friendship and understanding. They destroy democratic values and contribute to a stratified society* (Braddock & Slavin, 1992).

In accordance with earlier literature regarding student groupings, vulnerable social groups are often over-represented in low level groups. Authors such as Dewey pointed out at the beginning of the 20th century that *'dividing the system and giving the others, the less fortunate, an education mainly devised as specific training for work, means treating schools as agencies for transferring old classifications between work and pleasure, culture and service, body and mind, ruling and guided classes'* (Dewey, 1930, p.372). In other words, streaming serves to convey and perpetuate attitudes of social segregation by transferring it to classrooms in the form of educational segregation.

Homogeneous grouping or *streaming* has various effects (INCLUD-ED, 2009, p. 26):

1. Effects on learning:

- Homogeneous grouping does not increase but rather decreases overall levels and quality of output of the student body in school centres where it is implemented.
- Homogeneous groups increase differences amongst pupils as far as performance is concerned.
- It benefits those pupils that perform better, or those whose results are not influenced by the homogeneous grouping.

- Homogeneous groups have a negative effect on learning and on the performance of the students who obtain poor results by reducing both curriculum quality and learning pace, thus also reducing time invested in teaching activities.
- Homogeneous grouping decreases learning opportunities and student performance by restricting curriculum quality, variety and learning pace.
- Homogeneous grouping increases the risk of school failure.

2. Effects on expectations and self-esteem of students:

- Homogeneous grouping reduces the expectations of groups who are considered to be performing poorly.
- Homogeneous grouping reduces academic self-esteem and overall self-confidence.
- Homogeneous grouping contributes to classification, segregation, stigmatisation and social stratification.

3. Effects on peers during learning process:

- Homogeneous grouping decreases the learning and the achievement of the student body, since it reduces the positive effect that those students performing well have over those with a lower learning level.

4. Effects on movement between levels:

- Homogeneous grouping decreases the possibilities of mobility towards higher levels and decreases the satisfaction linked to group belonging.

5. Affected students:

- Students from vulnerable groups are more likely to be placed in lower level groups.
- The segregation of students with disabilities does not improve their learning outcomes but decreases their opportunities for learning.

6.1.3. *Equal opportunities in access and results: inclusion*

We have looked at the case of a classroom where all the students are together with only one teacher and a classroom where they are separated into homogeneous groups (with educational psychologists, EAL teachers, etc.) both in and out

of the classroom; we will now see how the student body gets organised in a **heterogeneous way, redistributing and reorganising existing resources** in the best possible manner to meet the needs of the whole student body efficiently, without the need to separate or segregate them through learning levels. If there are specialists (educational psychologists, EAL teachers, etc.) they go in the standard classroom. If the students are grouped, it is always done in an inclusive manner and in heterogeneous groups.

'Inclusive pupil groups are very rewarding since they foster instrumental learning (in every subject) and also assist the student body in their emotional development as well as improving learning values.' (INCLUD-ED, 2011, p. 54)

In this sense, we understand that *'the educational actions of an inclusive approach are those which give the necessary support to the whole student body as such, maintaining at the same time a common learning environment and reorganising the available resources'* (INCLUD-ED, 2011, p. 56). Inclusion implies:

- No segregation.
- Resources available in the education centre are used to assist in diversity in the classrooms benefiting the whole student body.
- All students participate actively in the learning process with the support of the teacher as well as the material and human resources to hand. No child is left behind.
- Inclusion not only provides **equal opportunities** but is also strongly committed to **equal results** for all students.

There are five forms of inclusion as follows:

TYPES OF INCLUSION	DESCRIPTION
1. Heterogeneous ability classrooms with reallocation of human resources	Consists of providing more support through reallocated resources in regular classrooms containing a diverse student body. Most frequently it is the teaching staff who provide this support although family and community members can help in the classroom as well.
	Interactive Groups have been found to be a very effective way of implementing a heterogeneous ability classroom with reallocation of human resources.
	In Interactive Groups the heterogeneous classroom is organised into small and heterogeneous groups of students, each with an adult (a teacher and/or volunteer) who promotes supportive interactions among students. The classroom teacher takes care of the management of the classroom and provides extra support when necessary.
2. Inclusive split classes	Different teachers are in charge of various heterogeneous groups of students. An inclusive split classroom would involve, for instance, two heterogeneous groups of students containing 12 students each.
	This is often done for specific subjects (e.g. languages and mathematics) and allows for organizing the classroom differently and reducing the student-teacher ratio.
3. Extending learning time	Providing for more learning time or extra academic activities is more common for students who live in socially disadvantaged areas or have a minority background.
	In practice, this can be provided for by creating a longer school day. Students and their families can receive help through family support or private lessons at school or at home. Educational activities can be offered over holiday periods and after normal school hours throughout the school year.
4. Inclusive individualised curriculum	The inclusive, individualised curriculum is not orientated towards reducing expected learning. Instead, teaching methods are adapted towards facilitating student learning.
5. Inclusive choice	Learning is not based on student ability but on preference and does not lead to a dead end.
	The inclusive classroom does not reduce student future educational and social opportunities but in fact guarantees equal opportunities.

Source: INCLUD-ED, 2009, p. 42-43.

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The associated effects of an inclusive classroom organisation are as follows (INCLUD-ED, 2011, p. 48):

1. Effects on performance:

- Dialogic learning through heterogeneous grouping has a beneficial impact on academic performance for both students who traditionally achieve high results and those who achieve lower results.
- Students showing lower levels of performance benefit from the working rhythms of more advanced groups.
- When the classroom and resources are properly organised, students with disabilities and learning difficulties achieve improved academic results and develop a higher self-esteem in integrated classes than if separated from the group.
- The integration of students with disabilities does not impact negatively on the performance of their peers and provides new learning opportunities for everybody.

2. Other effects:

- The relationship of equals fosters mutual respect, acceptance of diversity in terms of culture, gender, disability and achieved learning level as well as solidarity and an attitude of collaboration in the student body overall.
- Dialogic learning improves attitudes of cooperation and altruism and improves behaviour.
- In heterogeneous groups, students with disabilities receive increased support and experience, increased opportunities for interaction, therefore developing better quality relationships, improved social skills and skills for living independently in the future.

Further information:

Molina, S., & Ríos, O. (2010). Including students with disabilities in Learning Communities. *Psychology, Society & Education*, 2 (1), 1-9.

6.2. Interactive groups

As described above, Interactive Groups are one approach for implementing inclusive groups in the classroom. Furthermore, Interactive Groups are based on dialogic learning and abide by its seven principles: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, meaning creation, solidarity and equality of differences (Aubert, Flecha, García, Flecha & Racionero, 2008). Scientific research has confirmed the results of Interactive Groups which have been published in scientific journals such as the *Cambridge Journal of Education* (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013) and the *European Education Research Journal* (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015), among others.

6.2.1. Characteristics and functioning

Interactive Groups are an approach to organising the classroom into small and heterogeneous groups with a redistribution of available human resources.

Small and heterogeneous groups: Groups usually consist of six or seven pupils. As an indication, size depends on the total number of students in the classroom, the number of adults and the criteria set by the staff. Heterogeneity is guaranteed regarding knowledge level, skills, gender, culture, language and so on. The more heterogeneity there is, the better. Students with special educational needs or with language challenges because, for example, they were born outside the country are not ignored but, on the contrary, actively take part in the same Interactive Groups as their peers (Molina, 2007).

Redistribution of resources: In Interactive Groups, various adults participate. They do not each take responsibility for a group with a certain difficulty or learning level, but they encourage interaction in what remains a diverse student body and support its learning dialogically. Each group works with an adult. The adult could be a centre staff member, a specialised educational professional, for example an EAL teacher or educational psychologist, a university student doing work experience or a community volunteer. As always, the more heterogeneity there is the better. If there is a diversity of people from different cultures with varying experience and academic levels who communicate in different ways, learning is shown to improve.

Implementing Interactive Groups requires the optimisation of available resources to respond to the needs of the student body efficiently, without the need for separating, splitting or segregating them. The reallocation of human resources requires using them, without exception, in an inclusive manner in the classroom with the aim of maximising learning for the benefit of everyone.

How do they work?

Interactive Groups are often used in the learning of core subjects such as languages (national and foreign) and mathematics although they also work effectively in other fields such as physical education.

With the students grouped and an adult assigned to each group, the session is divided into short periods of fifteen to twenty minutes. In each period, each group must undertake a specific instrumental activity. These activities are done on rotation, so that within one session each small group has experienced four sessions, each one run by a different adult. Working in this manner accelerates learning through significantly boosting the number of interactions students engage in with people both similar and different from themselves.

Structure

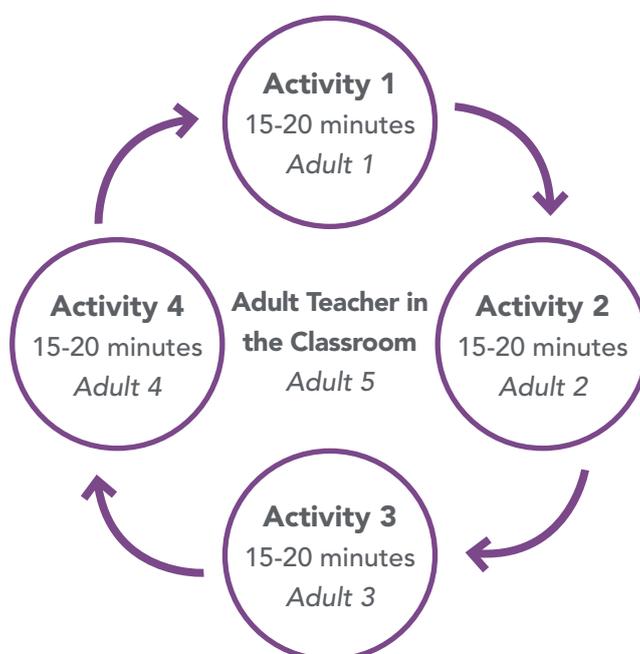


Table1. Activity process of Interactive Groups

As can be seen in the diagram above, the Interactive Groups session process is as follows:

- Every child in the group participates in short activities which are 15 to 20 minutes long.
- Groups cooperate through dialogic interaction (egalitarian dialogue) to resolve learning activities; that is to say, dialogue is strengthened by being based on the power of reasoning, rather than how much a child knows or doesn't know.

- The teacher assumes overall responsibility for the classroom and the session in terms of designing and coordinating activities, classroom management and providing support.
- Both staff and volunteers maintain high expectations regarding the pupils.

The following demonstrates the dynamics of running Interactive Groups for a secondary school:

The teacher has prepared four different activities to work on aspects of language covered in class during the week, thus consolidating learning.

(1) *Reading comprehension activity:* A short narrative text is looked at which pupils read individually and then comment on its meaning. Next, they answer several questions about the reading and correct them together, talking to one another.

(2) *Oral expression activity:* Using a series of paintings showing various passages from *The Odyssey*, students must recall which passages they are referring to and explain exactly what happened in that part of the story. Each pupil has a particular painting. They have to explain to the others what happened using their image. The rest of the group review what the speaker is saying by first taking due note of his/hers statements, then commenting where relevant on their vocabulary, voice, tone, posture and so on and making suggestions for improved verbal expression.

(3) *Written expression activity:* Pupils write a short letter to *Don Quixote of la Mancha* to try to convince him to give up reading books about chivalry. They must advise him, explaining and giving reasons for the problems they foresee. When they have finished their letters, they exchange them and correct each other's, commenting on both the positives and negatives of their writing.

(4) *Spelling and glossary activity:* This activity has three parts as follows: 1) Pupils write down a brief dictation in a Word document on their laptops. Working together, they must correct the words underlined in red or green and find out from others how to spell them correctly. 2) They comment on the words they did not know or know how to spell and, for the words which no-one knows, their meaning is checked in an online dictionary. 3) Pupils who discover the meanings first have to think of a sentence using the word and then they dictate it to their classmates.

The class lasts for one-and-a-half hours. Therefore, each activity only takes 20 minutes. Before class, the teacher welcomes the volunteers. Each volunteer is responsible for one of the activities so they distribute the four activities, asking them which one they prefer. Volunteers at this point clarify any doubts and queries they may have. Then, the class begins with each volunteer sitting with a different group. They establish the activity with the children and then assist,

encourage and motivate them to interact with one another. When twenty minutes has passed, the teacher either asks the students to move to a different activity or the volunteers to take their respective activity to another group. The process is then repeated.

For more information:

García-Carrión, R. & Díez-Palomar, J. (2015) Learning communities: Pathways for educational success and social transformation through interactive groups in mathematics. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(2), 151-166.

Valls, R., & Kyriakides, L. (2013). The power of interactive groups: how diversity of adults volunteering in classroom groups can promote inclusion and success for children of vulnerable minority ethnic populations, *Cambridge Journal of Education* 43(1), 17-33.

6.2.2. Dialogic learning in Interactive Groups

As previously mentioned, Interactive Groups have at their core the key elements of interaction and dialogue (dialogic learning). Authors such as Vygotsky, Bruner, Wells, Freire and Flecha (refer to Unit 2) consider interaction and dialogue as tools which mediate the learning process. Thus, Interactive Groups turn into sub-communities of mutual learning (Elboj & Niemela, 2010; García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015), which aim for understanding based on the validity of claims.

Comprehension and understanding

Pau and Toni, two pupils participating in an IG, explain here how they try and make sure everybody comprehends the problem.

Pau: *'But instead of telling them this is so, so, so and so, you help them by saying, hey you, what do you think this is? So the question is being debated until a good conclusion is reached with valid reasons.'*

Toni: *'Or later, after being corrected, there is someone who didn't reach the same conclusion and he or she is not in agreement.'*

Pau: *'Then you have to say, 'It is like this.' ... and we try to make them understand that it is so for a number of good reasons that we list.'*

Validity of reasoning

A child taking part in an IG says, *'We all talk amongst ourselves and we see therein how the rest were wrong, then we meet to review it, to find out where our mistakes were to not repeat them anymore. All of us speak to each other very politely, no one yells, no one fights.'*

Adults participate in improving dialogic interactions. They contribute with their cultural intelligence to the learning process, foster relationships of solidarity and help overcome stereotypes (Tellado & Sava, 2010; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). Frequently mothers or grandmothers, for example, participate in Interactive Groups and help the students in solving problems or reading tasks that not even they could solve. Despite their task being that of encouraging students to help each other to carry out their work, this does not mean they must be experts in academic subjects. In many cases, they have enough knowledge that in other circumstances would be wasted, for example when relatives of immigrant students have good command of English and/or other languages. Again, their role is that of fostering quality and egalitarian interactions amongst the student body to solve their tasks.

An example of volunteers fostering interactions:

Volunteers encourage the students to try and make interventions that help others to better understand how to resolve each particular task:

'No, but tell them why, explain it to them, talk amongst yourselves, it is fine you know the answer, but let the rest say what they think.'

6.2.3. In short: What an Interactive Group is and what it is not

In order to clarify potential confusion in the features and application of Interactive Groups, the following chart summarises the characteristics of Successful Educational Actions as well as the characteristics of other approaches which might be confused with them.

WHAT ARE THEY?	WHAT ARE THEY NOT?
A way of organising the classroom	A methodology
Small groups of students heterogeneously grouped to include learning levels, culture, gender, and so on	Cooperative groups
Groups where relationships amongst pupils are established through egalitarian dialogue.	Flexible groups
Each group contains an adult for example a teacher, a relative or another volunteer. Pupils' learning depends more on overall community interactions rather than traditional classroom-style interactions.	Dividing the class into groups with only one adult, the teacher, as a reference
Participation of volunteers in the classroom provides improved learning opportunities thus increasing children's motivation for learning and producing a good working atmosphere.	Only for students with a low level of learning who have previously been removed from the classroom.
All children in the group work on the same task.	Homogeneous groups of distinct learning levels without removing students from the classroom.
Both staff and volunteers maintain expectations of the students.	Heterogeneous groups in one classroom which includes highest performance level students
All children learn, even those especially skilled, because helping others requires an exercise in metacognition that increases the consolidation of knowledge to the point of being able to explain it to other people.	In interactive heterogeneous groups, children with different learning levels are given different tasks. No interaction between pupils while the task is being undertaken.

Source: Learning Communities website

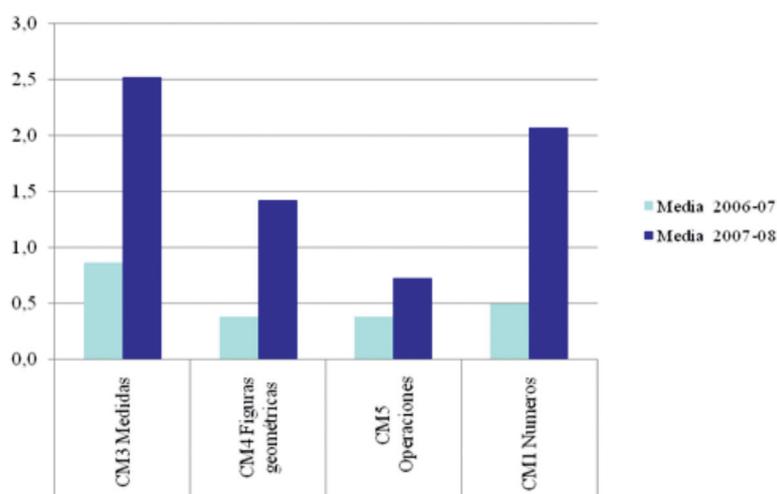
Furthermore, the following chart summarises the roles undertaken by teachers and volunteers in Interactive Groups:

The roles	
Teacher	Volunteers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizes the class. • Defines the groups. • Prepares the activities. • Prepares the evaluation sheets. • Guides the volunteers. • Establishes the time for the activities. • Supervises all the IG. • Is not a volunteer in one group, but overlooks all the groups. • Concludes the class with a common idea for all the IG. • Establishes the evaluation criteria. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains the activity to each IG. • Facilitate interactions in IG. • Makes sure all members participate. • Stimulates and teaches cooperation. • Makes sure children do not bother each other and do not copy. • Supervises and supports. • Gathers the activities of all and gives them to the teacher. • Informs the teacher about the development of the activity. • Collaborates in the evaluation. • Is not a teacher.

6.2.4. Impact of Interactive Groups

The Interactive Groups exemplify how successful educational actions manage to improve the results in different dimensions of learning: both in instrumental learning and in the improvement of coexistence in the classroom (Flecha, 2015, García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015).

The following chart shows results obtained in external tests for mathematics in a selected case survey from the INCLUD-ED project after Interactive Groups were carried out together with other actions in 2006-07



Source: INCLUD-ED results

In order to explain such outcomes we must go back to dialogic learning principles: it is through dialogue that further excellence is achieved. It is through dialogue and solidarity that everyone, even someone who had previously experienced difficulties, learns. Students already achieving better results also learn more because they are explaining the subjects to their schoolmates. This exercise in metacognition contributes to the consolidation of knowledge and, at the same time, it improves communicative competence and practicing of values.

Interactive Groups generate enormous solidarity in daily practice, which cannot be compared to specific workshops or lessons on solidarity. This solidarity carries from classes into the corridors and playground. Assisting others with tasks week after week fosters effective coexistence in the classroom and in the school as a whole.

An example of experience from Paideuterion School:

It is quite remarkable at primary level that when somebody finishes their schoolwork, they do not show off for being the first one to complete it but he/she asks who they may help. A volunteer said: 'Children work at an incredible pace, they try not to leave any exercise halfway through and they do not let anyone else finish their tasks for them, but it comes naturally. There is no need to say anything to them; I don't have to ask them to shut up or anything. It is amazing.'

Vázquez, T. & Cidoncha, G. (2011). ¿Este año hacemos grupos? Suplemento *Escuela*, 1,5.

ChiPE Project: Let school children speak

The EU-funded ChiPE (Children's personal epistemologies: Capitalising on children's and families' knowledge in schools towards effective learning and teaching) project aimed at testing INCLUD-ED's methods. Specifically, the ChiPE team planned to determine whether Successful Education Actions would work in the United Kingdom. The study was further intended to test whether such application strengthened pupils' personal knowledge and beliefs via interaction with other students' views.

Researchers studied six English and two Spanish primary schools in various locations with varying socioeconomic circumstances and education levels. A total of fourteen teachers, thirteen other adults and around three hundred and fifty students took part.

Experiments showed a reversal of the traditional teacher-pupil talk ratio with 75% of children doing about 80% of the speaking. Such expression was usually complex and interactive with children justifying their views using their existing cultural knowledge. Engagement was sustained for about an hour.

The project team concluded that a pupil-focussed dialogic environment improves academic achievement, produces complex linguistic constructs and encourages students to draw upon their knowledge. Furthermore, the technique was seen to produce discussion about moral, taboo and/or difficult topics, and yielded positive social relationships. Parents were strongly in favour and teachers were amazed at the students' level of engagement and enthusiasm.

Information on the ChiPE project is available on: http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/175142_en.html

To find out more:

Elboj, C. & Niemela, R. (2010). Sub-communities of mutual learners in the classroom. The case of interactive groups. *Revista de Psicodidáctica*, 15(2), 177-189.

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