

## Strategic Elements of Diversity Management in the Educational System - Case Study: CLIM

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### Abstract

*CLIM stands for Cooperative Learning in Multicultural Groups, and proposes a certain structure of the teaching contents, based on the pedagogical principle of creative – cooperative learning (CCL). It can be also considered a strategic element of diversity management in a school, whenever one can meet different cultures, ethnics, native languages, political views or religions.*

*The purpose of the hereby study is to analyse the efficacy of this method – does it really enhance group cohesion and an inclusive atmosphere, where all the participants feel themselves and appreciated for what they are?*

*The methodology involved the inquiry through questioning, with a questionnaire as the research instrument. The results showed that using this method when teaching, integrating values and positive attitudes – cognitive flexibility, teamwork, tolerance towards differences, critical approach to cultural stereotypes, interest in discovering socio-cultural and professional life-related aspects - may lead to improved relations among the participants in the education process.*

**Key words:** school diversity, diversity management strategy, education

**J.E.L. classification:** I2

### 1. Introduction

CLIM is the acronym for *Cooperative Learning in Multicultural Groups*, and proposes a certain organisation and structure of the teaching contents, regardless of the subject taught, based on the pedagogical principle of creative – cooperative learning (CCL). Besides its proper instructional purpose, this approach can also be considered a strategic element of diversity management in a school, whenever in the classroom or the teachers' room one can meet different cultures, ethnics, native languages, political views or religions.

Using this method when teaching different subjects, all the abilities of a person can be enhanced and involved, such as oral production skills (in a foreign language class), written production skills (reading, listening, spelling and literacy) and complex competences will be build, integrating values and positive attitudes – cognitive flexibility, communication skills during teamwork, tolerance towards differences, critical approach to cultural stereotypes, raising interest in discovering socio-cultural and professional life-related aspects.

Regarding CLIM as a strategic element of the management of diversity in terms of adults involved in education (in a school), using this method represents an opportunity for managers to organize debates on internal policy applied to schools, to create working tools - documents within different school boards and work teams.

Thus, the hereby study created the premises for the analysis of efficacy of this method – does it really enhance group cohesion and an inclusive atmosphere, where all the participants feel themselves and appreciated for what they are?

## 2. Literature review

The CLIM method was first used in Belgium, in primary schools, in 1995, aiming at a response to the needs for intercultural educational in the form of partnerships within heterogeneous groups, combining the didactical process based on the principle “all together in the same class” with the one where the academic content is presented through direct interaction among students. (Pétursdóttir, 2018) Pursuing this principle, this method is part of a socio-constructivist approach, the interaction factor being a key element of the learning process. The participation of all students in a class in group work is a necessary condition for ensuring equal access to the 21<sup>st</sup> century competences. In other words, working together in small heterogeneous groups in order to solve a task achieves the purpose of higher self-esteem, mutual respect and degree of inclusion, by developing true interpersonal relationships. (Ichim, 2021). Research (Cohan & Lotan, 1995; Freeman et al., 2014, McManus, 2001) has shown that we learn more and better when explain the information to others than when we only listen or present. Group work creates the context for better learning, but does not guarantee the effective participation of each student. Cohen (1997) states that cooperative learning is the most efficient approach of heterogeneous classrooms. According to Pétursdóttir (2018, p. 35), there are more than 280 studies on the impact of cooperative interaction and social support on the quality of relationships, showing that intercultural education can thus be achieved. Paelman (2001) presents the status given to the student as a factor of succes when using CLIM.

According to Petursdottir (2018), there can be identified the following phases (stages):

1. The introductory task: the teacher's objectives are to define the concepts/ notions to be taught and learned, to form the groups, to assign the roles, to explain each intervention of the students involved and the possible role exchanges or group reconstructions, and finally, to offer the details of the task to be fulfilled.

2. Expressing students' impressions on the concepts/ notions to be acquired – this task may be parted into two stages: (a) the student's free individual expression based on a support (word list, drawing, diagram, sketch, Q-sort, picture-based-lecture) then, consequently (b) the exchange within each group of students of the different impressions, followed by a confrontation or debate. This task is aimed at developing an initial level of reflexion regarding the concepts/ notions to be dealt with and at stimulating the intrinsic motivation.

3. Individual, independent reading of the resources given by the teacher/ activity coordinator, each of these resources giving a different perspective on the concept/ notion. Therefore, the coordinator should plan for at least four files of resources (based on the number of students per group) which are to enhance certain abilities, thinking processes, practical abilities related to the concept/ notion to be acquired.

4. Cross analysis among the students who have had the same resources. This task should increase the comprehension degree, the level of accessibility of the problem to be discussed and the cooperation abilities.

5. Going back to the group - or creating new groups in order to insure that all the resources are present in each group – and sharing the key elements of each of the documents.

6. Solving a problem-situation which mobilises the knowledge and the abilities previously acquired, but also personal, experience-based information and values which constitute the involvement of the diversity traits in this particular methodological approach. Each problem-situation is different in each group.

7. Plenary presentation of the conclusions and solutions – the teacher/ coordinator can motivate students to present the information/ data in an original manner, such as role-play, drama, video, experiment.

8. A general conclusion – the coordinator revises the key points to be remembered regarding the theme or the concept, answers the questions which might occur, underlines the difficulties the parties have met, and formulates feed-back regarding the behaviour of the participants, their cooperation (what was appropriate and worked and what did not). Rarely does the teacher/ coordinator need to intervene during the stages 2 through 7; sometimes, there are questions or a necessary revision of the calendar, if some more or less time is to be allowed.

Within each group, each student is given a certain role and specific tasks; these roles permit the group to work independently from other groups or the teacher; the tasks and the roles are customized to the personal abilities of the students, so that they are not placed in a failing position (Ichim, 2020). Consequently, it is compulsory that a role is not repeatedly given to the same student when the method is used systematically by a teacher. According to Cohen (2017), it is important that each participant try a new, different role, the most frequently proposed being: (a) the facilitator (the person to animate the group and conduct the fulfillment of the tasks given by the coordinator), (b) the presenter (responsible for the drafting of the information and plenary reporting), (c) the material/resources manager, (d) the synchronizer (timekeeper, referee and harmoniser); a fifth role could be obtained by dividing one of the statutory roles, such as the synchronizer (timekeeper, referee) and the harmoniser (to observe the others, cheer up and help whenever necessary).

### 3. Research methodology

**The aim** of the study is to measure at low scale the use of CLIM as a strategic element of the management of diversity in terms of young adults involved in education (in a school), in terms of diverse group cohesion, mutual respect, and an inclusive atmosphere, where all the participants feel themselves and appreciated for what they are.

**The objectives** are: (a) to measure the initial level of inclusion, cohesion and mutual respect; (b) to use exclusively the CLIM method during a month of teaching for the experimental group (group A), and (c) to measure the level of the same three social values given by both groups at the end of the study (named in the hereby study *final level*).

**The method** used was the inquiry through questioning, the instrument was the questionnaire. The answers were gathered through the means offered by Google forms and the quantitative analysis was realised using the Eviews program.

**The study was devised as following:** Two high-school ninth grade-classes of students got involved in the study, 56 students altogether, grouped in two 28 student-groups, A and B; they all answered the same set of initial questions - a questionnaire with 3 questions/statements, in order to identify what the level of inclusion, cohesion and mutual respect was in each group. After one month of participation in the author's experimental classes - 3 times a week, 12 sessions - , during which group A were pedagogically approached exclusively using CLIM, and group B exclusively classically (although group work was used to solve tasks), both group of students answered the same set of questions in order to measure the final values and, thus, revealing the pursued results.

**Data analysis** - for group A, the final score was that 28 out of 28 students increased with at least 1 point, which represents a 100 % efficacy of the CLIM approach, compared to the score given by group B which only improved for 10 and, respectively, 11 students out of 28, which represents a 35.71 % and, respectively 39,28 % efficacy of the classic pedagogical methods (including group work) when aiming at the three concepts: group cohesion, inclusion and mutual respect.

### 4. Findings and discussions

Final results of Group A. In terms of the three objectives of the questionnaire (mutual respect, cohesion in the classroom, and inclusion in the classroom), 100% improved appreciation: 28 out of 28 respondents changed their answers into a better value.

Final results of Group B. In terms of the three objectives of the questionnaire, in group B, 39.28 % improved appreciation: 11 out of 28 respondents changed their answer into a better value for the concept of mutual respect; 35.71 % improved appreciation: 10 out of 28 respondents changed their answer into a better value for the concept of cohesion in the classroom, and 35.71 % improved appreciation: 10 out of 28 respondents changed their answer into a better value for the concept of inclusion in the classroom.

The results could be based, though, on more factors, external to the study, as students underwent the approach only during their English classes, and were exposed to different other interventions from other teachers, including their council - teacher, whose impact has not been measured.

The CLIM method has not been used in this study for larger group management, such as teachers in a school, which will constitute the next step for the study, to be undergone in the future.

The coordinator/ teacher must be vigilant regarding the group competence, reaching the highest level of heterogeneity possible and offering each participant the possibility to experiment each role, allowing the groups to be independent from the leadership and control of the teacher.

The pedagogical principle at the core of the CLIM activities combines the intellectual challenge with student-centred tasks in order to teach – learn – acquire a specific, often scientific concept. The diverse tasks are to allow the mobilisation of the personal abilities, competences and views of each participating student. The main criterion for the role choice is Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. Although it might be obvious that the linguistic abilities are primarily underlined, it is equally important to involve and practice other abilities, such as logic, artistic expression or body language (see the TPR (Total Physical Response) method).

All these constituents require a high level of organisation, so that each participant, each role and each group, according to the personal information of the students. At the same time, the idea of competition among the groups involved in a CLIM project may not be excluded from the students' motivation sector, although the main concern should be not to create the same group with students exercising the same roles, so that the competition does not turn personal.

## 5. Conclusions

The results of the study show that, if consistently applied within a specific, heterogeneous, diverse group, the CLIM approach can improve the degree of cohesion, inclusion and mutual respect of the members of among the members of the group.

Consequently, in terms of diversity management, it is expected to produce a diminishing in the possible conflicts issued by cultural or ethnic differences, enhance the advantages of being different and accepting that each and every person is no but a treasure to be discovered.

## 6. Acknowledgement

This work was co-funded by the European Social Fund, through Operational Programme Human Capital 2014-2020, project number POCU/993/6/13/153322, project title “Educational and training support for PhD students and young researchers in preparation for insertion into the labor market”.

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