

## PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENTIATION & COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Bento de Jesus Caraça Professional School, in Porto, as many other schools in Europe faces a huge problem: early school leaving. As a consequence, the school direction proposed us the challenge of introducing **cooperative learning** and **pedagogical differentiation** in our classes. We started this project the previous year and we are still developing it.

Cooperative learning is based on **positive interdependence** (all the students need each other and their efforts are done towards a common objective); **face to face interaction** (the groups must have 4 elements maximum so that they can all look at each other); **individual accountability** (all the students are responsible for their tasks but also for the other group members' tasks); **equal participation** (all the students have to work equally and should not be in the shadow of a group member).

This type of work has to follow important rules: groups should only have **4 elements** and must be **heterogeneous**. Students with more difficulties must be working with high level students. These groups can be built based on evaluation marks or even learning styles.

Each student has a **role in a group**: leader, timekeeper, materials manager and speaker. These roles must alternate, so that they all experience different roles. All the tasks that are given are **clocked** in the computer's monitor as a way of controlling the time they have for each task. It may seem that this is a way of pressuring students but it does not work like that, as it is only a way of organizing activities. During the development of their tasks they receive **colored cards**. If they respect all the social and academic rules established, they will get a green card. A yellow one is given to those who are not respecting the rules fully and the red to those who really need to change their way of working. These cards are just a way or regulating students' work in class. If they have a doubt they should try to solve it before calling the teacher. If they cannot find the solution together, then any of the students will be chosen by the teacher to ask the **"team question"**. All this creates cohesion, commitment. They know that if "they don't swim together, they sink" (Johnson & Johnson)

Pedagogical Differentiation is based on the fact that all the students are different, **learn differently** and have **different rhythms** that should be respected. To sum up, "one size does not fit all". Therefore we provide them different activities with different difficulty levels, we choose the contents that may be more meaningful to them and provide them meaningful learning moments. Class strategies are as different as possible and evaluation is not only based on tests. It is discussed with them and they can choose between a test, a project, the construction of a portfolio among others. They even have challenging tasks that are facultative but at the same time rewarding.

In our school we tried to join both models (cooperative learning + pedagogical differentiation) when possible because we think that is the best way of respecting the differences of a group inside it. This enables us to make school more interesting to students in a century full of challenges. This enables us to include students in school, thus respecting the fundamental human right that is the **Right to Education**.

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