

## CLIM: “Cooperative Learning in Multicultural Groups”

After *Gudrun Petursdottir*,

Director of the Institute for Sustainability and Interdisciplinary Studies

University of Iceland.

Adaptation by the Agroenvironment Education team at Montpellier SupAgro, Florac.

The CLIM method was introduced as a new learning project in Flemish primary schools in 1995. CLIM aims to respond to the needs of intercultural education by promoting partnerships within heterogeneous groups. It combines an educative process based on the ‘living together’ question, with tuition of academic content through interaction between students. It is therefore part of a socio-constructivist approach with the interaction factor being considered as a key element in the learning process. Participation of all students from a single class in working groups is considered as a necessary condition for equal access to skills. In other words, working in small heterogeneous groups and working together to complete a given task is aimed at motivating students to learn by increasing their self-esteem, therefore learning more and in better circumstances than they would individually. The students can also develop true interpersonal relations and go beyond the barriers that the individual approaches generally deployed may raise.

Working in a group does not, however, guarantee effective participation by each student. The status given to the student within the group is a factor for the success of CLIM. Within each group (general 4 to 5 members), each student is allocated a role and given tasks to carry out. These roles enable the group to operate autonomously without, in principle, assistance from the teacher. The tasks and roles are of varying levels of difficulty, enabling each member to express his/her skills without being placed in a position of failure. It is therefore necessary not to give the same role systematically to the same student when CLIM is used regularly by the teacher. It is important that each participant tries the different roles, the most frequently proposed being those of facilitator (the person who animates the group and orchestrates the completion of the different tasks allocated by the trainer), presenter (responsible for producing reports and leading plenary presentations) and manager of materials/resources, timing manager and harmoniser (who arbitrates in the event of conflict within the group). The teacher must therefore be vigilant with regards to the constitution of the groups (aiming for the highest level of heterogeneity possible) and to the allocation of the roles (enabling each student to experience each of the different roles). The teacher must also accept the fact of delegating his/her responsibility of leader, to the groups.

The principle focuses of activities of a CLIM involve combining an intellectual challenge with tasks centred on learning a specific concept. The different tasks must enable mobilisation of multiple capacities amongst the students in order to ensure participation of each individual. The concern of valorising the different types of intelligence (initially defined by Howard Gardner) is often cited by the users as that which should be used for selecting which tasks to allocate to which students. Whereas CLIM places a strong accent on linguistic skills, other skills such as logic, artistic and corporal should be mobilised too.

All the tasks proposed by the teacher are summarised on a resource file. The different tasks must stimulate the student towards learning a given notion or concept. The creators of CLIM recommend enabling a rotation of roles after the completion of each task, and also the formation of new work groups in order to avoid inter-group competition. This does require a significant level of organisation though and we recommend changing roles and groups only between each CLIM project (which means planning several CLIM processes during the year and recording which groups have already been formed and which roles have already been allocated and to whom). We also consider that competition can be a positive factor in the learning process. The primary concern is

therefore not to create groups that act over the long term which could lead to the integration of long term competitive behaviour.

Amongst the different tasks within CLIM, we have distinguished the following phases :

**1. The introductory task** : this is short, the objective of the teacher being to define the notions/concepts to be acquired, set up the groups, allocate the roles, explain the way each student intervenes in the process and any role rotations or group reconstructions and, finally, to distribute details of the tasks to be completed.

**2. Expression of the students' impressions of the notion/concept to be acquired** : this task can be divided into two phases: (1) an individual expression by the student using an ad-hoc support (list of words, drawing, diagram, Q-sort, photo-language...) then (2) exchange within each group on the different impressions, followed by a confrontation or debate. This task is supposed to develop an initial level of reflexivity with regards to the notion/concept to be acquired and boost the student's motivation.

**3. Individual reading of the various complementary resources proposed by the teacher**, each of which offers a certain insight into the concept/notion. If the nature and origin of the resources are similar from one group to another, they should be different for each student. The teacher therefore needs to plan for 4 to 5 resource files (depending on the number of students per group) which highlight certain skills, thought processes, practices... relative to the concept/notion to be acquired.

**4. Cross analysis between students who have had the same resources.** This task should increase comprehension.

**5. Return to the group (or creation of new groups** ensuring that all the resources are present in each group) and sharing between the students of the key elements in each of the documents.

**6. Resolution of a situation-problem that mobilises the skills acquired in the previous tasks,** but also knowledge based on experience and values (in relation to the concept/notion) that the students may put forward.

Each situation-problem is different from one group to another.

**7. Presentation in a plenary session of the conclusions from the problem situations.** The teacher may motivate the students to imagine original presentation methods (theatre, role play...).

**8. A conclusion by the teacher.** This reviews the key points to be retained on the concept/notion, to reply to any outstanding questions, to highlight the difficulties encountered during group work sessions and to question the behavioural aspects of cooperation (what works, what doesn't).

It is rare that the teacher needs to intervene during phases 2 to 7. He/she may need to answer certain questions or control the timing (if the time taken for certain tasks is much longer or shorter than planned).