



*“ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL”
CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS*

**International Association for Intercultural
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About Proceedings

This document contains 20 articles submitted from participants of the IAIE conference “Another Brick in the Wall” in Amsterdam, 11-15 November 2019. In total, the Conference content was divided into 8 strands. However, not all strands submitted papers for the Proceedings. Below are represented the following:

Strand 1. Intercultural Competence

Strand 2. Bilingualism and Multilingual Education

Strand 3. Cooperative Learning and other interactive learning approaches

Strand 6: Education relating to migrants and refugees

Strand 7. (Global) Citizenship Education

Strand 8. Miscellaneous

The Proceedings are organized as it follows:

First, all abstracts are displayed per strand. Consequently, the whole article, including abstract, main text and graphs, as well as notes and references, are included. All abstracts and articles can be found in the Content table below.

The Conference Proceedings were prepared by Ivona Hristova and Hana Alhadi.



Introduction by The IAIE President

As President of the International Association for Intercultural Education, I would like to once again thank everybody who helped contribute to these Proceedings. A large amount of work went into this publication. But special thanks go to Hana Alhadi and first and foremost Ivona Hristova.

These Proceedings are the final outcome of the IAIE Conference ‘Another Brick in the Wall?’ that took place in Amsterdam from November 11- November 15, 2019. The conference itself represented a blend of inspiring field trips (e.g. Black Heritage tour in Amsterdam, a VIP visit to the Anne Frank House and a visit to the International Criminal Court), some 40 workshops and more than 150 presentations and panel discussions. Close to 400 educators participated from some 25 countries.

The conference allowed teachers, students and academics to share insights and experiences, and to be exposed to the state-of-the-art research on issues relating to diversity and education.

The Conference was a true collaborative effort between the IAIE and a number of other organizations active in the fields of Intercultural Education, human rights education, education about sexual diversity, democratic education, active citizenship education, global education, bilingual and multilingual education, and related fields. These organizations include the Denise School, the Hellenic Association for Intercultural Education, International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE), the Rutu Foundation, Learn to Change: Change to Learn, the Korean Association for Multicultural Education (KAME), the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), Euroclio, and human-ed. We once again thank our partners and look forward to collaboration once more in our future conferences.

Recent events continue to highlight the importance of the work that everybody in this field is doing. The papers published in these proceeds will certainly provide clues and guidelines as to how we be better prepared for the challenges facing us in the coming years.

Warmest wishes to all,

Barry van Driel

President IAIE

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Giovanna Malusà. Challenges experienced by teachers in implementing cooperative learning activities after brief in-service training

ABSTRACT

Educational research has for many years demonstrated that cooperative learning fosters the development of social and cognitive skills in students. In the Italian classroom, however, largely transmissive methods still prevail and teachers are faced with numerous challenges when trying to put into practice what they have learned in dedicated training courses. This research intends to explore the difficulties experienced in the classroom one year after a short (10-25 hours) experiential training course, through a quantitative survey that involved 102 elementary and middle school teachers, investigating their beliefs and perceived self-efficacy and discussing the main challenges that emerged at the relational and organizational levels.

Keywords: In-service teacher education; Cooperative Learning; Training transfer; self-efficacy; beliefs; elementary and middle school

Sebbene la ricerca educativa evidenzi da tempo i vantaggi dell'apprendimento cooperativo nel facilitare lo sviluppo di abilità sociali e cognitive negli studenti, nella scuola italiana prevalgono ancora modalità prevalentemente trasmissive e gli insegnanti sono posti davanti a numerose sfide quando cercano di riproporre in classe quanto appreso in corsi di formazione dedicati. Questa ricerca intende esplorare le difficoltà incontrate in classe un anno dopo una breve formazione esperienziale (10-25 ore), attraverso uno studio quantitativo che ha coinvolto 102 insegnanti della scuola primaria e secondaria di primo grado, indagando le loro credenze e l'autoefficacia percepita e discutendo le principali sfide emergenti a livello relazionale e organizzativo.

Parole chiave: formazione insegnanti in servizio; apprendimento cooperativo; transfer formativo; auto-efficacia; credenze; scuola primaria e secondaria di primo grado

Introduction

Educational systems are increasingly being called upon to prepare students to become democratic, committed, tolerant citizens, and to develop the social skills that are indispensable for life in our ever more complex societies (Kankaraš & Suarez-Alvarez, 2019; OECD, 2010, 2015). In its *Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2017), UNESCO also stresses the absolute strategic importance of education, which it calls a “powerful agent of change”, declaring that

teachers must adopt a “*transformative pedagogy that engages learners in participative, systemic, creative and innovative thinking and acting processes in the context of local communities and learners’ daily lives*” (ibidem, p. 52)

Research on education (Buchs & Butera, 2015; D. W. Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Mendo-Lázaro, León-del-Barco, Felipe-Castaño, Polo-del-Río, & Iglesias-Gallego, 2018; Sharan, 2017; Slavin, 2014) has for some time emphasised the contribution of cooperative learning not only to the development of cognitive skills, but also to the building of positive relations between the members of a group: planning cooperative learning paths enables the valorisation of difference (*education for otherness*) (Briançon, 2019), giving plenty of space to a plurality of skills; it places the group itself at the centre of the educational activity, encouraging mutually beneficial relations between the participants (*win-win*); facilitating a sense of social belonging, the cultivation of self-awareness and the sense of an “us”, building up knowledge and collaboration around a defined objective and fostering the social and intercultural skills (Ferguson-Patrick & Jolliffe, 2018; Malusà, 2014, 2017; Milani, 2019) needed in today’s societies.

Teachers, however, struggle to implement cooperative learning methods²² (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Moges, 2019; Mukuka, Mutarutinya, & Balimuttajjo, 2019; Salim, Abdullah, Haron, Hussain, & Ishak, 2019; Sharan, 2010) and mainly transmissive methods still prevail²³ in Italian classrooms (Cavalli & Argentin, 2010; Novara, 2017).

Some authors (Sharan, 2010; Tarozzi & Torres, 2016) attest the need for experiential pathways that enable teachers to really master the active strategies that are indispensable in the 21st century’s increasingly complex environments (Portera & Grant, 2017). In Italy, a few years ago, in-service training was made obligatory (in Law 107/2015) and a three-year plan was mapped out – subsequently also underlined in the next triennium – which valorises non-frontal initiatives connected with active methodologies for inclusive, collaborative teaching (MIUR, 2016), and reaffirms the state’s recognition of the strategic importance of training for the development of schools’ human and professional capital.

²² Cooperative learning activities have to entail: cooperative skills, face-to-face interaction, group processing, positive interdependence, individual and team responsibility.

²³ An Italian survey – conducted by the IARD Institute (Research Network on conditions and youth policies) on over 3,000 teachers – underlines that over 70% primary school teachers often teach frontal lessons, while only 30% introduce cooperative learning methods into their classroom; this percentage increases considerably in secondary schools (Cavalli & Argentin, 2010).

Despite this, educational pathways often fail to give teachers the necessary tools for promoting active methods in schools (Malusà, 2019b). While a lack of adequate training seems to be among the principal causes of the ineffectiveness of their intervention (OECD, 2010; Sleeter & Grant, 2009), it is also true that other variables (personal, organisational, systemic, socio-cultural) can facilitate or hinder the promotion of active, innovative teaching methods in the classroom.

Some authors have investigated the challenges experienced by teachers endeavouring to use cooperative learning, through an in-depth analysis of their beliefs and values (Kohn, 1992). The important part played by a teacher's beliefs when s/he is implementing cooperative learning activities also emerges from a recent intercultural study carried out by Pescarmona (2017), which focuses on the barriers to equity that beliefs and habits can reinforce and suggests that teachers have to develop a heightened sense of "agency" to facilitate innovation at school.

Jolliffe & Snaith (2017) collected attitudinal data at the beginning and end of a teacher education programme, analysing the emerging structural challenges, which were time pressures and curricular alignment; the same difficulties emerged from a study by Buchs, Filippou, Pulfrey and Volpe (2017), who examined the beliefs of more than 200 elementary school teachers in Switzerland who had implemented cooperative learning strategies in their classes after a two day training workshop on this approach.

The present study was largely inspired by the above mentioned research (Buchs et al., 2017), although its context (northern Italy) is different, and the phenomenon is examined taking into account the effect of another variable, that of perceived self-efficacy – understood as "*a future-oriented belief about the level of competence a person expects he or she will display in a given situation*" (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 787) – the influence of which has also been demonstrated in other studies (Aiello, Pace, Dimitrov, & Sibilio, 2017; Jolliffe & Snaith, 2017; Miller, Ramirez, & Murdock, 2017).

Research question

This study explores the difficulties elementary and middle school teachers find in implementing cooperative learning activities in their classrooms, one year after a short period (10-25 hours) of experiential in-service training with Scintille.it, a private Italian teacher education enterprise approved by the Italian Ministry of Universities and Research (MIUR). In particular:

RQ1. About a year after a short experiential training course in the implementation of cooperative learning methods, which of the methods explored are the teachers who participated still using in their classes? And how frequently?

RQ2. What are the main difficulties experienced by teachers when engaging their classes in cooperative activities? Are there differences between elementary and middle schools?

RQ3. What are the links between their beliefs, their sense of self-efficacy, the difficulties they experience and the activities they offer?

RQ4. What further training needs do the teachers express?

Method

First step: teacher training

In 2017 and 2018, 15 courses (involving 435 participants) were monitored. Each 10-25 hour training course consisted of 4 sessions on:

- Cooperative learning principles
- Introduction to social skills
- Introduction to the “Leaning together” model
- Cooperative learning activities educational planning

Various experiential learning (Sharan & Sharan, 1987) activities were proposed: cooperative games (Cohen & Lotan, 2014), five fingers, place map, gallery tour, numbered heads together, inside-outside circle, think-pair-square-share (Kagan & Kagan, 1992), *Learning together* model (D. W. Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994), *Jigsaw* (Aronson & Goode, 1980), and general discussion.

The courses were led by 9 different trainers.

Second step: evaluation of the training

At the end of the course, the participants completed an online satisfaction survey about the training, which consisted of 10 simple items with open questions and a 10-point Likert scale.

Post-training results (Malusà, Matini, & Pavan, 2019) indicate high levels of satisfaction ($\mu=8.82$; $Mo=10.00$; $SD=1.18$), interest ($\mu=9.15$; $Mo=10.00$; $SD=1.04$) and declared participation by teachers in group work ($\mu=9.03$; $Mo=10.00$; $SD=1.12$); the trainers were seen as attentive to the needs of the participants ($\mu=9.35$; $Mo=10.00$; $SD= 0.89$); there was a significant correlation between satisfaction and perceived engagement (0.748 $p<0.01$ -Two-

Tailed), independent of the training schedule and whether the teachers came from elementary or middle schools.

Third step after one year: implementation at school

Sample

12-18 months after the training courses, the participants were sent another, more detailed, online questionnaire, to which 102 people (23.44%) responded: 29.4% middle school teachers and 70.6% elementary school teachers²⁴, from 46 schools located in 5 different Italian regions (Trentino Alto-Adige, Veneto, Emilia-Romagna, Liguria and Umbria). Teaching experience range: 1 to > 30 years (15.7% 1-10 years; 34.3% 11-20 years; 22.5% 21-30 years; 27.5% > 30 years), in different disciplines. 28.4% of the teachers have just one class; 46.1% have two; 14.4% 3 or 4; 10.8% have more than 4. Respondents were asked to focus on the experiences they had had during the last 3 (teaching) years.

Measures

This self-report questionnaire consisting of 70 items (Cronbach $\alpha > .70$) with a 5 or 6-point Likert scale and multiple choice questions was selected to investigate beliefs (de Vries, Helms-Lorenz, & van de Grift, 2014), perceived self-efficacy (Moè, Pazzaglia, & Friso, 2010), frequency of cooperative vs traditional strategies (Buchs et al., 2017); difficulties experienced (Buchs et al., 2017; Wafaa, 2011) and training needs (Malusà, 2019a) (Table 1). The questions in each array followed a random order.

The questions on the above areas were preceded by a first section consisting of 10 questions regarding participants' personal data (educational qualifications, years of teaching, work place, number of classes, materials, previous training).

The estimated time needed to fill out the questionnaire was 20-25 minutes.

Table 1- Dimension values of Cronbach alpha coefficient

<i>Dimensions test</i>	<i>Cronbach α</i>	<i>No. items</i>	<i>point Likert scale</i>
<i>Beliefs</i>	.763	8	6
<i>Perceived self-efficacy</i>	.887	9	6
<i>Frequency of cooperative vs traditional strategies</i>	.752	12	5
<i>Difficulties experienced</i>	.936	23	5

²⁴ In Italy elementary school is attended by children aged from 5/6 to 10/11; middle school by 11 to 13/14 year olds.

In particular:

(a) Pedagogical beliefs

8 items (translated and adapted to the Italian context) were selected from De Vries et al.'s questionnaire (2014), 4 *subject matter-oriented beliefs* and 4 *student-oriented beliefs* (ibidem, p. 357).

(b) Perceived self-efficacy

8 items in Italian from the array by Moè et al. (2010, pp. 90-91) were selected. This survey is a validated translation of a similar questionnaire devised by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) on student engagement and class-management. Another item was added to these, on the respondent's overall perception of their self-efficacy (in the work environment).

(c) Frequency of cooperative vs traditional strategies

Drawing on studies by Buchs et al. (2017) and Ghaith (2018), some questions were adapted to the Italian context: on the content of the monitored training courses, they identified 12 teaching strategies for use in class, divided between cooperative and traditional approaches.

(d) Difficulties experienced

The research cited by Buchs et al. (2017, pp. 300-301) and by Waafa (2011) were the reference points for the identification of 23 items connected to this dimension, which consisted of one question, with multiple suggested replies: "*What is the biggest challenge that you face when using active methods at school?*", and 2 arrays of questions on a 5-point Likert scale:

- "*In your experience, what level of difficulty do you encounter when introducing these activities in the classroom (on a scale from very difficult to very easy)*". An "*I don't know*" option was included, useful in cases where the teacher does not know a particular teaching strategy. The question was followed by 6 items.
- "*Indicate the level of difficulty you experience in... (choose from very difficult to very easy. If you do not know this method, put 'I don't know')*". 16 items followed, referring to the difficulty of implementing principles of cooperative learning and peer interaction (6), locus of authority (2), teacher as facilitator (2), alignment with the curriculum (2), planning (3) and evaluation (1) (Table 2).

(e) Training needs

Drawing on previous studies (Malusà et al., 2019), 8 possible educational methods for improving teachers' professional skills were identified.

Data Analysis

The data analysis includes reliability, descriptive and correlation analyses between the observed variables. The statistical package SPSS v.21 was used for the analysis.

Table 2 – Difficulties experienced by teachers in implementing cooperative activities

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Items</i>
Principles of CL and peer interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – giving feedback on the way in which the students work together – working directly on the social skills necessary for group work
Locus of authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – giving each member of the class responsibility – establishing a sense of team responsibility – introducing complementary tasks in a small group (positive interdependence) – assigning roles and tasks in the group – allowing students to work autonomously without my direct supervision – delegating some of the teaching to the students
Teacher as facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – observing the students while they work cooperatively – managing potential discipline problems
Alignment with curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – using the books on the curriculum to engage the students in cooperative tasks – finding activities that fit into the curriculum
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – finding time to plan cooperative structures and activities – finding time to introduce cooperative activities into the classroom – team planning cooperative learning activities
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – assessing each student's acquisition after group work

Results

Results related to question 1

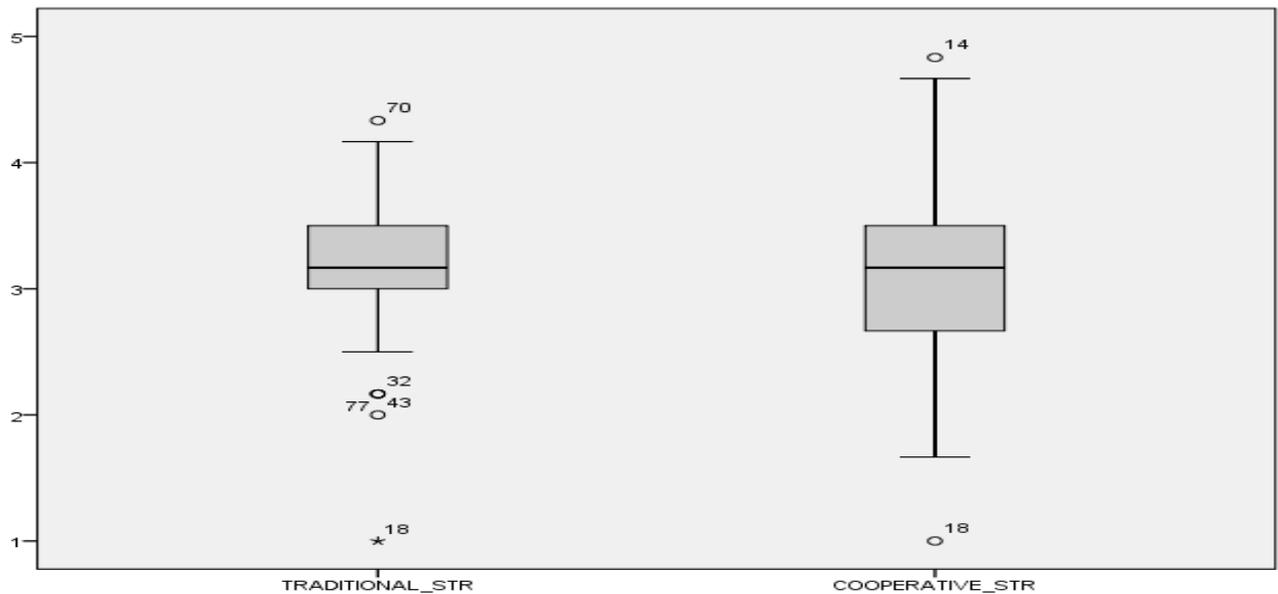


Figure 1 – Traditional vs cooperative strategies described by teachers (5-point Likert scale) (N=102)

Although traditional teaching methods still persist, cooperative strategies are also being adopted (Figure 1); teachers organise pair work ($\mu=3.91$; $Mo=4.00$; $Ds= .76$); while activities in small structured groups are less common ($\mu=3.38$; $Mo=3.00$; $Ds= .89$): 14.7% of teachers organise them rarely; 42.2% every so often; 32.4% often and only 10.8% very often (Table 3).

Table 3 - Instructional strategies and their total frequency (absolute) and by school stage (5-point Likert scale) (N=102)

Instructional Strategies	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Primary school teachers		Middle school Teachers	
					Mean	Median	Mean	Median
Cooperative games	3.19	sometimes	3	0.99	3.47	3.50	2.50	3.00
Competitive games	2.56	sometimes	3	0.95	2.60	3.00	2.47	2.00
Circle time	2.92	sometimes	3	1.13	3.18	3.00	2.30	2.00
Discussions with teacher	3.76	often	4	0.73	3.83	4.00	3.60	4.00
Jigsaw	2.50	seldom	3	1.12	2.49	2.50	2.53	2.50
Individual study	2.84	sometimes	3	1.01	2.88	3.00	2.77	3.00
Work in pairs	3.91	often	4	0.76	4.00	4.00	3.70	4.00
Individual work	3.36	often	4	0.89	3.47	4.00	3.10	3.00
Frontal lesson	3.43	often	4	0.69	3.44	3.50	3.40	4.00
Cooperative structures	2.82	sometimes	3	0.87	2.97	3.00	2.47	3.00
Learning together	3.38	sometimes	3	0.89	3.51	3.00	3.07	3.00
Informal team	3.16	sometimes	3	1.02	3.26	3.00	2.90	3.00

Results related to question 2

The teachers find it easiest to introduce pair work ($\mu=3.87$; $Mo=4.00$), while the Jigsaw strategy is perceived as the most difficult ($\mu=2.22$; $Mo=2.00$) (Table 4).

Table 4 – Perceived difficulties (5-point Likert scale) (N=102)

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	MEAN	MEDIAN	SD
COOPERATIVE STRUCTURES	2.65	quite easy	1.16
COOPERATIVE GAMES	2.92	quite easy	1.11
CIRCLE TIME	2.93	quite easy	1.36
JIGSAW	2.22	difficult	1.32
LEARNING TOGETHER	3.00	quite easy	0.95
PAIR WORK	3.87	easy	0.79

They assign roles and tasks ($\mu=3.04$) and monitor students' work ($\mu=3.02$) without difficulty; but say (48%) it is difficult both to make time for cooperative activities in their own classrooms ($\mu=2.28$) and for working together ($\mu=1.92$) to design tasks (2.23) with positive interdependence ($\mu=2.05$) (Table 5 and 6).

Table 5 - The greater challenge (%) (N=102)

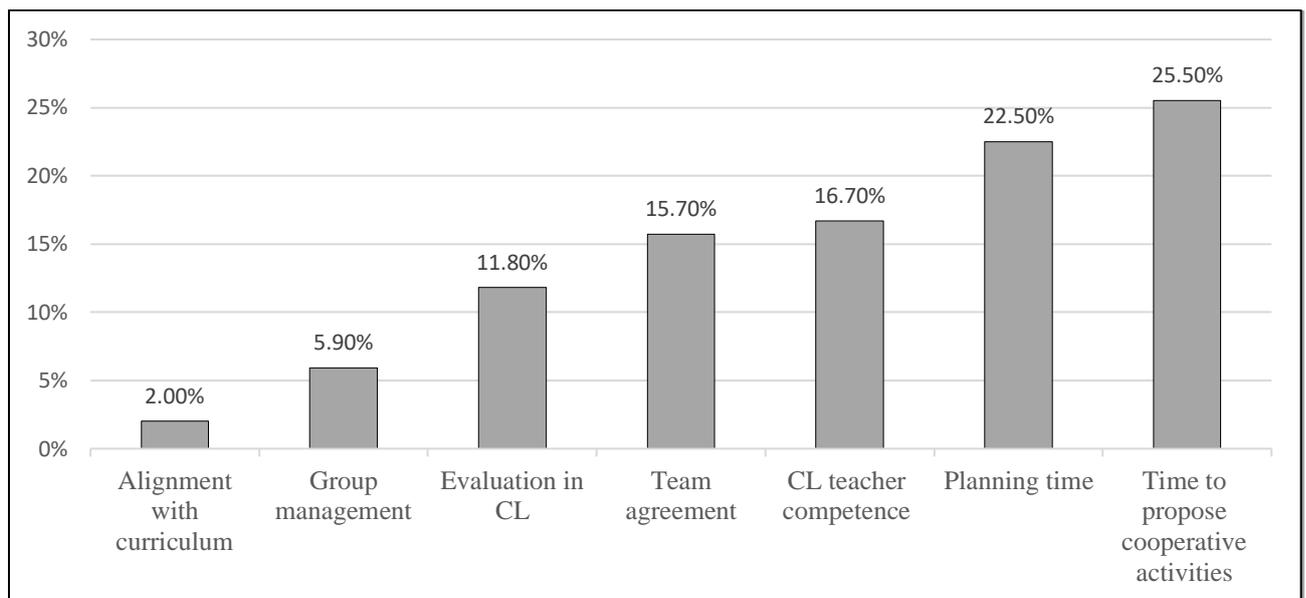


Table 6 – Perceived difficulties in implementing cooperative learning activities (N=102)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>SD</i>
Giving feedback	2.72	quite easy	.93
Working on social skills	2.49	difficult	.89
Considering individual responsibility	2.77	quite easy	.88
Assigning roles and tasks	3.04	quite easy	.87
Considering team responsibility	2.46	quite easy	1.07
Introducing positive interdependence	2.05	difficult	1.29
Not direct supervision	2.60	quite easy	.94
Delegating teaching	2.47	difficult	.98
Monitoring	3.02	quite easy	1.01

Managing discipline problems	2.58	quite easy	.99
Using official didactic material and books	2.62	quite easy	1.22
Planning activities that fit into the curriculum	2.81	quite easy	.91
Time to plan CL activities	2.23	difficult	.94
Time to introduce CL activities into the classroom	2.28	difficult	1.00
Team planning	1.92	difficult	1.11
Individual evaluation	2.39	difficult	.91

Differences between school stage (elementary v. middle)

At the two school stages the most frequently reported difficulties are similar: the exception being the time variable and evaluation of activities, seen as more difficult by the middle school teachers (Table 7).

Table 7 – Relation between difficulties and school stage (%) (N=102)

<i>The greater challenge</i>	<i>Elementary school teachers</i>	<i>Middle school teachers</i>
Difficulty in evaluating the cooperative activities	9.7%	16.7%
Incompatibility with the established programme	2.8%	
Need for lengthy preparation	22.2%	23.3%
Little theoretical knowledge of active methods	1.4%	
Little concrete experience of active methods	15.3%	16.7%
Little control over the relational dynamics that emerge	8.3%	
Little agreement with colleagues	15.3%	16.7%
Limited time for introducing cooperative activities in classroom	25.0%	26.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Results related to question 3

Post-training results indicate high levels of perceived self-efficacy, with pupil-oriented beliefs greater than subject-oriented beliefs (Fig. 2), but significantly correlated to each other ($r=.502$ $p < 0.01$) (Table 8).

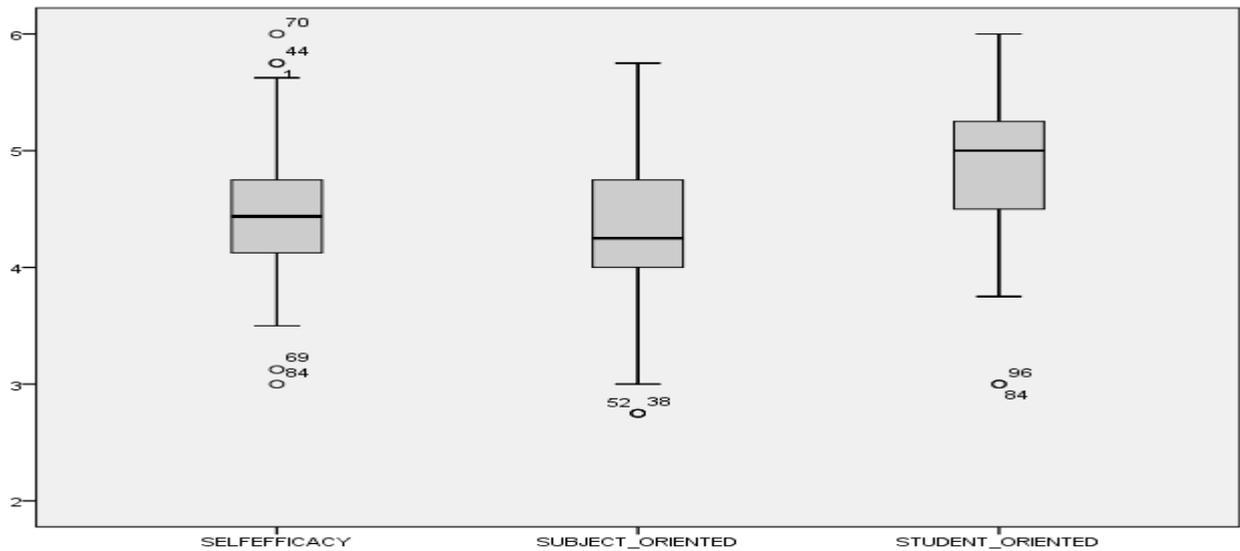


Figure 2 - Self-efficacy, belief orientation (subject oriented vs student oriented (6-point Likert scale) (N=102)

The correlation analysis (Table 8) clearly demonstrates the existence of a significant correlation between belief in an activity and the frequency with which that activity is carried out, confirming the results of Buchs et al. (2017) in an Italian context. In other words, the teachers who believe in co-built (student-student-teacher) learning processes say that they use cooperative games, *Circle time*, cooperative structures and the *Learning together* model more frequently with their classes. A high self-efficacy score also enables a teacher to work more frequently with the *Jigsaw* model, considered by teachers to be the most complex. Unsurprisingly, cooperative activities are used most rarely by those who perceive them to be difficult/very difficult.

Table 8 - Correlation between teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, perceptions of difficulty and frequency of educational strategies (N=102)

	Beliefs		Self-Efficacy	Difficulty
	Subject oriented	Student oriented		
Cooperative games	.131	.395**	.230*	.645**
Competitive games	.066	.174	.177	
Circle time	.161	.411**	.294**	.763**
Discussions with teacher	.058	.249*	.271**	
Jigsaw	.050	.136	.325**	.752**
Individual study	.083	.015	.122	
Pair work	-.081	.137	.177	.607**
Individual work	.013	.028	.083	
Cooperative structures	.115	.335**	.199*	.516**
Frontal lessons	.086	-.035	-.098	

Learning together	.029	.280**	.312**	.664**
Informal groups	.027	.280**	.024	
<i>Subject oriented</i>		.502**	.502**	
<i>Student oriented</i>	.502**		.499**	

** $P < 0.01$ (Two-Tailed). * $P < 0.05$ (Two-Tailed)

The question arises as to which of the aspects connected to a teacher's perceived self-efficacy have a significant correlation with their perception of the applicability of cooperative learning methods in their classes. Table 9 shows a correlation both with aspects of managing the class group (i.e. with confidence in one's ability to manage disruptive behaviour) and with engagement with students, in particular in item 5 (helping students to think critically) and 8 (knowing how to stimulate unmotivated students).

Table 9 – Correlation between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their perceptions of the applicability of cooperative learning (N=102)

No. item	How well do you think you can deal with the following situations?	CL applicability
<i>Efficacy: classroom management</i>		
1	Get students to obey classroom rules	.098
2	Control disruptive behaviour	.293**
<i>Efficacy: student engagement</i>		
3	Adapt lessons to the particular needs/profile of the class	.125
4	Provide challenges for the most able students	.105
5	Help students to think critically	.373**
6	Support and help the students in greatest difficulty	.179
7	Awaken and sustain students' confidence in their own potential	.078
8	Stimulate unmotivated students	.325**

** $P < 0.01$ (Two-Tailed)

Table 10 focuses on the different aspects already flagged by Buchs et al. (Buchs et al., 2017) as possible challenges faced by teachers endeavouring to implement Cooperative Learning strategies. The present results reveal a significant correlation between these issues and teachers' perceived self-efficacy and confirm that a lack of time – for team planning, or the introduction of cooperative activities in class (planning), or the subsequent evaluation of these activities – is perceived to be the biggest difficulty.

Table 10 – Correlation between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and potential challenges for implementing cooperative learning (5-point Likert scale, from 1=very difficult to 5= very easy) ((N=102)

	Descriptive statistics			Correlation analysis
	Mean	Median	SD	Self-efficacy
Principles of CL and peer interaction	2.59	2.58	.76	.394**

Locus of authority	2.53	2.50	.87	.250*
Teacher as facilitator	2.80	3.00	.86	.369**
Alignment with curriculum	2.72	2.50	.92	.288**
Planning	2.14	2.00	.83	.299**
Evaluation	2.39	2.00	.91	.295**

** $P < 0.01$ (Two-Tailed) * $P < 0.05$ (Two-Tailed)

Results related to question 4

The teachers involved favoured discussion groups with colleagues and/or an expert, and in-class support from an expert as they experimented with cooperative learning. Online training ($\mu=2.38$), and purely theoretical training ($\mu=2.20$), appear to be of little interest (Table 10).

Table 11 – Question: What would help you to be able to make greater use of cooperative learning? (4-point Likert scale) (N=102)

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
More purely theoretical training/education	2.20	of little interest	2	.82
More experiential training (hands on+theory)	2.97	of considerable interest	3	.93
Support in the classroom from a competent/skilled colleague	2.96	of considerable interest	3	.92
Support in the classroom from an external expert	2.71	of considerable interest	3	.92
Materials for study and/or classroom use	3.24	of considerable interest	4	.82
Individual sessions/meetings with an expert (coaching)	2.78	of considerable interest	3	.89
Periodic discussion group with colleagues and/or an expert	3.02	of considerable interest	3	.83
Online training	2.38	of little interest	2	.98

Discussions and conclusion

From an initial reading of the results it emerges that the brief experiential training given only partially succeeded in influencing the teaching methods of the participants. One year after the training, the teachers said that they were (still) mainly using traditional methods (frontal lessons, whole class discussions with teachers, pupils studying/working alone), and just complementing these with certain interactive activities. Most popular – routinely (often or very often) organised by more than 80% of respondents – is pair work, while over 40% said that they used small structured groups; the more complex cooperative activities (*Jigsaw*, for example) were only occasionally explored, in the primary schools *Circle Time* and *cooperative games* were also more frequently introduced: the latter are often or very often used by half of the primary teachers vs 16.7% of middle school teachers.

The (relative) optimism of the first descriptive results can be partially explained as follows. Above all, because of the experiential method at the heart of the training offered by Scintille.it, a private organisation which has, over time, developed a learning path (Matini & Pavan, 2015) which is very popular among participants, for just these elements – workshops/labs and direct involvement in role-play (Malusà et al., 2019). However, at the end of the course, the middle school teachers were less confident than their primary colleagues about the transferability of the teaching methods proposed²⁵. Almost 40% of participants, moreover, has already done some training in cooperative learning. And, too, the teachers who attended the course had chosen to do so, reporting a high level of prior interest ($\mu=9.15$ on a 10-point Likert scale) on the satisfaction survey. And Italian teacher training (whether during the initial training or during in-service sessions) rarely integrates such approaches – paradoxically, active methodologies are often taught to teachers using traditional teaching methods!

Even granted the above factors, the implementation of cooperative activities in class, however, is still difficult. The analysis reveals that the teachers in the sample have experienced many challenges, at a variety of interconnected levels (Doise, 1982).

a) The intrapersonal level

Teachers' beliefs and their perceived self-efficacy demonstrate a significant correlation with the sort of teaching methods that they use in class, confirming previous results (Buchs et al., 2017) on the role of *student oriented* beliefs.

Furthermore, the teachers who reveal a high level of self-efficacy say that they use cooperative methodologies more frequently: these methods require that a teacher be able to manage a group, and anticipate disruptive behaviour. Indeed, monitoring, an essential part of this methodology (D. W. Johnson et al., 1994), puts the teacher in the role of permanent “participant observer” in the class group which – taught to assume an active role through the progressive development of distributed leadership – becomes a crucial resource not only in conflict situations but also in groups with a range of different learning levels, more generally. The *efficacy in relation to student engagement* or the *knowing how to challenge the most able students cognitively*, while simultaneously including and supporting the weaker members of the class, presupposes a capacity to use socio-cognitive conflict (Butera, Sommet, & Darnon, 2019) as a learning tool in an inclusive, non-competitive climate in which *process* is more important than *product* (i.e.

²⁵ Logistic regression models, even though the explained variance is limited ($R^2=.085$), show that the teachers perceived the primary school environment to be one of the key predictors of didactic applicability (Malusà et al., 2019, p. 20).

than results), although results are still expected. And the – highly heterogeneous – multicultural classes in Italian schools today can only be managed by teachers who possess these skills.

The teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy say that they also use the more complicated cooperative structures (*Leaning Together* and *Jigsaw*), managing to introduce the fundamental elements of cooperative learning (interdependence, peer interaction) into the activities they implement and to situate themselves effectively as facilitators of a learning process that is co-built with the students (*student-oriented belief*). The results, however, reveal a significant correlation between *subject-* and *student-oriented* beliefs, often both present in the same teacher, who finds her/himself having to justify (to themselves more than anyone else) the values of some didactic choices, at times not shared by their colleagues (Assen, Meijers, Zwaal, & Poell, 2019).

b) The interpersonal level

Insufficient time was, according to the teachers in the sample, the greatest challenge that they faced (or was this an excuse?). There is not enough time – either to plan cooperative activities in collaboration with fellow teachers (team planning), or to introduce them into the classroom, according to Buchs et al. (2017). These factors suggest both a deep-seated methodological insecurity and problems in evaluating the cooperative activities that are implemented, above all in middle schools, despite the fact that in Italian school “planning and evaluation for skills” (D.Lgs. 62/17 and DM 183/19) are provided for (MIUR, 2012, 2019).

c) The organisational level

The rigidity of (particularly middle) school organisation is another underlying issue in observed process. Italian primary schools have been recognised – by various scholars (Capperucci & Piccioli, 2015) in recent decades – as unfortunately becoming more and more like middle, or even high, schools (a sort of “*secondarization*”) (Besozzi, 2014, p. 200). The flexible organisation and relational approach of the primary school shifting towards the more strict, impersonal structure of the higher levels, with overly fragmented weekly time tables and up to 7 or 8 “*specialized*” teachers, who do not share teaching one class with consistent educational “*micro-contracts*” (Carugati & Selleri, 2001). The planning of a cooperative activity, attentive to and respectful of the rhythms of the children, undoubtedly requires more than the 50 minutes typically allotted to each lesson in Italian schools: experiential learning that includes a metacognition phase can only take place within flexible time and space frameworks that encourage transversal skills.

The lack of time to plan together and share strategies that the teachers have highlighted is becoming an ever greater problem, as teaching teams get bigger and bigger, and the “*bureaucratization*” of schools continues apace (Spector, 2018).

Periodic discussion groups with colleagues and/or an expert to discuss and try to resolve problems appears to be a training method that would suit the teachers’ need for simple, easily organised, cooperative strategies (Ferguson-Patrick & Jolliffe, 2018).

In conclusion, the teachers say that the main challenges they experience regard (intra/inter)personal relations, planning/design issues and organisational rigidity; in the light of these findings, it would appear appropriate to extend the training courses to include simple cooperative structures that teachers can use in the short-term. Above all, however, the urgency of organising more flexible timetabling, which accommodates the nature of particular tasks/activities, is highlighted. Only thus can learning experiences that feel coherent, and involve active interdisciplinary modalities that help to develop students’ social and transversal skills, be designed.

In their educational mission, schools are called upon to innovate, to find what Steven Johnson (2010) called “*the adjacent possible*”. There are no easy answers to the problems that arise in the complex educational and organisational dynamics of today’s schools. Analysing the large body of educational research on the challenges faced by teachers implementing innovative methodologies, Baloché and Brody point to the importance of

examining beliefs; identifying problems; utilising research as a foundation for innovation; understanding context and thinking incrementally; building communities for inquiry, experimentation, and support; being willing to fail; and recognising when something does not work (Baloché & Brody, 2017, p. 281),

while reminding us, above all, of the “*commitment to cooperation, access, and equity*” that underpins all of the above (ibidem), dimensions which recall the educational *mission* of an effective teacher (Korthagen, 2004), the inner core of an “*onion model*”, in the layers of which, moving from inside out, are found first identity, then beliefs, then competences and, finally, behaviour, that can be directly observed by others.

While teacher training still focuses primarily on methodologies, without including an experiential path that explores the deeper levels of the beliefs, or better still, the values and the educational mission (Malusà, 2019b; Tarozzi, 2014), the innovative impact will be limited and short-term.

Notes

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