Lingue e Linguaggi
Lingue Linguaggi 41 (2021), 233-248
ISSN 2239-0367, e-ISSN 2239-0359
DOI 10.1285/i22390359v41p233

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND MIGRANT PUPILS: INTERPERSONAL EFFECTS OF COOPERATIVE GOAL STRUCTURES

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Abstract – The article discusses the interpersonal effects of cooperative *goal structures* in classrooms with a large number of immigration background students. A *goal structure* could be one of the relational patterns that supports the migrant pupils and their classmates to accomplish school-related goals. A cooperative *goal structure* emphasizes positive interdependence between classmates. The main purpose of the research-invention is to remove the interpersonal barriers and promote better peer relationships between migrant and non-migrant pupils. We measured the cooperative goal structures' effects through two variables: a) collaborative interaction; b) relational structure. For the collaborative interaction, we observed a positive result. Upon the collaboration offered by migrant students, the analysis yielded a statistically significant effect: Wilks Lambda = .80, F (2, 68) = 4.43, p <.001. With regard to the received collaboration, the outcome was: Wilks Lambda = .73, F (2, 64) = 11.37, p <.0005. As to the second variable, the study showed the improvement of the mutual relationship between migrant and non-migrant students and the overall increase of social density index in the classrooms. The paper proposes a new direction of development: integrating different levels of schoolbooks linguistic complexity within cooperative *goal structures*. Two methods can facilitate the control of linguistic complexity: the computing of *linguistic indexes* and *text-layering*. Both methods can help educators to scaffold reading difficulty levels for diverse students.

Keywords: Inclusive education; Goal structures; Empirical evidences; Linguistic indexes; Text-layering.

1. Introduction

UNESCO (1994, 2008) portrays students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), all the kids that experience failures in school. These students have an

[1] The article is the result of the collaboration of the two authors, who shared its design and revision. The first author edited the Introduction, paragraphs 2, 3, 3.1, 3.2 and Conclusion. The second author wrote section 4 and revised the entire article.

immigrant background, a specific learner disorder, a severe learning difficulty in some subject matters or a developmental temporary difficulty. Being an immigrant, having a learning disorder or a severe learning difficulty (i.e. in reading, math, etc.) leave these students in a condition of at-risk of failure that obstacles the learning and personal growth (Gentile, Pelagalli, 2016; Gentile, Ciabattini, 2017).

In 2012, the Italian Ministry of Education University and Research (MIUR) approved a legislative act known as the Ministerial Directive on the "Intervention tools for pupils with special education needs and the territorial organizations of inclusive education". In 2013 a new normative measure was approved, known as the Circular n.8 (dated March 6th, 2013), which provides indications for schools on how to apply SEN policies in everyday schooling.

On the basis of these legislative measures, and following the international frameworks (OECD, 2004), the country has introduced three sub-categories of special needs: disabilities, specific developmental disorders, cultural, linguistic and socio-economics disadvantages. As a consequence of this new categorization, there has been an increase in the number of students identified with SEN (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, Colognon 2018).

Unfortunately, the system has focused more on the process of identification rather than on the commitment to transform schools in environments where all kids are recognized as people with rights and learning needs. To reduce the negative impact of this trend, we propose to assume an inclusive education perspective. The basic premise is that inclusive education is a process of transforming teaching, starting with the identification and removal of barriers on learning and participation (Booth, Ainscow 2011), turning classrooms into learning environments "where all students can flourish" (D'Alessio, Grima-Farrell, Colognon 2018, p. 17).

In this paper, we showed the interpersonal effects of a research-intervention addressed to remove interpersonal barriers between migrant and non-migrant pupils through cooperative *goal structures*. The research project strived to implement the national policy in the SEN field, in which it states the Italian classrooms are settings with a high number of diverse students (MIUR, 2012a, b; 2013). We designed an inclusive education model for classrooms with high rates of first-generation and second-generation migrant students. In these school settings, the cooperative *goal structures* might encourage a "mutual recognition" between cultures and people (Cerrocchi 2014, p. 84). We measured this dimension through two variables: a) collaborative interaction; b) relational structure.

2. Goal structures

The basic premise of *goal structures* is the promotion of positive relationships within the classrooms. The peer relationships between students with SEN and their classmates are positively or negatively associated with learning outcomes, depending on the way classroom achievement goals are structured.

2.1. Social interdependence

A *goal structure* is a relational condition that emphasizes proximal connections between students' goals. A relational view of *goal structures* is consistent with Deutsch's (1949) social interdependence theory. Following this perspective, the theory considers the goals in terms of content and school-related desired outcomes (Johnson, Johnson 2006): mastering subject matter, earning an excellent grade, striving for a high achievement, etc. (Urdan, Maehr 1995). Therefore, a *goal structure* is a relational pattern that might support migrant students and their classmates to accomplish together school-related goals.

There are three relational patterns associated with social interdependence.

- *Positive interdependence.* This relational pattern defines cooperative goal structures. It occurs when students perceive that they can achieve their goals if and only if the other classmates with whom they are cooperatively connected also reach their goals.
- *Negative interdependence*. This second relational pattern defines competitive goal structures. It takes place when students perceive that they can reach their goals if and only if the other classmates with whom they are competitively associated fail to achieve their goals.
- *No interdependence*. The third pattern characterizes the individualistic goal structures. It exists when students perceive that they can obtain their goal regardless of whether other students accomplish or do not accomplish their goals.

Consistent with an inclusive point of view, the cooperative *goal structures* are means to remove the interpersonal barriers between student at-risk and their classmates. D. W. Johnson and R.T. Johnson (1974, p. 214) define a cooperative *goal structure* "as one where the goals of the separate individuals are so linked together that there is a positive correlation between their goal attainments." In designing a cooperative *goal structure* for a learning activity, ten types of positive interdependence should be taken into account (Comoglio, Cardoso 1996; Gentile 2016). The *goal structure* - associated to one or more types of positive interdependence - is the operational mechanism

that might influence achievement and social outcomes. Table 1 provides ten operational definition of positive interdependence.

1.	**Goal**	Students work together to achieve a common outcome.
2.	**Reward**	Students work together for a purpose to receive a reward (an award, an excellent grade, a teacher praise or a positive feedback, etc.).
3.	**Resources**	To achieve a common goal, students depend on differentiated competences and skills (interdependence of skills) or materials (interdependence of materials).
4.	**Task**	Although students have a unique purpose to achieve, they are assigned parts of the task to be carried out individually, but clearly aimed at the same objective.
5.	**Roles**	During a cooperative task, students play roles useful for the good functioning of the group.
6.	**Fantasy**	During a cooperative task, students feel committed to generating ideas, especially when the task requires to be creative. Soon after group members discuss the ideas.
7.	**Identity**	During a cooperative task, students feel belonging to the same group, as if they were part of a team.
8.	**Against an external force (competition between groups)**	During a cooperative task, students compete with pupils from other groups.
9.	**Evaluation**	During a cooperative task, students receive a weighted assessment based on the results obtained by each.
10.	**Celebration**	Students that complete a task and reach an outcome perceive that what has been achieved does not depend on individual's effort, but everyone with their commitment has helped the group to achieve it. This awareness stimulates the desire to celebrate group success.

Table 1
Ten operational definition of positive interdependence.

2.2. Achievement and peer relationship

Following social interdependence theory (D.W. Johnson, R.T. Johnson 2005), *goal structures* affect the relation between achievement and peer relationship. Some types of *goal structures* create the conditions under which one enriches the other; other ones generate the conditions under which one hinders the other (Roseth, *et al.* 2008).

Table 2 summarizes the three *goal structures*, the associated relation patterns, and predicted outcomes. When students are linked cooperatively their actions will tend to foster the success of classmates, providing help and support, sharing resources, acting in trusting ways.

Positive interdependence (cooperative goal structure) promotes greater achievement and more positive peer relationships compared with negative (competitive goal structures) or no interdependence (individualistic goal structures).

Roseth and colleagues (2008) performed a meta-analysis in which have been included 129 papers with 593 Effect Sizes (ES) from 148 independent studies. The study shows "a strong, positive correlation between positive peer relationship ESs and achievement ESs. The standardized coefficient ($\beta = .57$) indicates that a one unit increase in positive peer relationship ES is associated with an average increase of .57 units of achievement" (p. 235). Briefly, the cooperative goal structures are associated with a positive relation between peer relationships and achievement.

		Outcomes	
Goal structure	**Relational pattern**	*Achievement*	*Peer-relationships*
Cooperative (positive interdependence)	Promotive Mutual help, sharing resources and information, and acting in trustworthy and trusting ways.	Higher[a]	More positive[a]
Competitive (negative interdependence)	Oppositional Obstructing goal attainment, withholding and/or hiding resources and information from each other, and acting in distrustful and distrusting ways.	Lower[b]	Less positive[b]
Individualistic (no interdependence)	None Indifference to others' goals, efforts, and outcomes.	Lower[c]	None[c]

[a] Cooperative versus competitive and individualistic goal structures.
[b] Competitive versus cooperative goal structures.
[c] Individualistic versus cooperative goal structures.

Adapted from: C.J., Roseth, D.W., Johnson, & R.T., Johnson, (2008). Promoting Early Adolescents' Achievement and Peer Relationships: The Effects of Cooperative, Competitive, and Individualistic Goal Structures. Psychological Bulletin, 134(2), p. 225.

Table 2
Goal structures, relational patterns, predicted outcomes.

3. Effects of cooperative *goal structures*

The effect of cooperative *goal structures* was investigated through a research-intervention carried out in the municipality of Prato (Gentile *et al.* 2014). Prato is the Italian province with a higher number of migrant students than the local school population: 26,8%, equal to 10,307 pupils (MIUR, 2020). The Chinese pupils are over half of the migrant children who attends the Prato schools (56,4%), followed by Albanians (16,2%), Moroccans (5,7%), Romanians (5,3%), Pakistanis (4,3%), Nigerians (2,3%), Bangladeshis (1%), and other foreign countries (8,8%). At the end of 2018, 86 ethnic groups attended Prato's schools (Formazione Innovazione Lavoro 2019).

The research involved 808 primary and low secondary school pupils enrolled in 31 schools, divided into three area networks, named "Center", "North-West", "South-East". The total number of classes was 35. The intervention was divided into ten sessions for each classroom, in which ten activities were realized and organized around three different educational phases: relational games, teaching and learning curriculum, feedback and assessment. Each activity was based on cooperative *goal structures* (Gentile 2016).

The hypothesis of the research-intervention was the following: the cooperative *goal structures* can encourage a "mutual recognition" between cultures and people (Cerrocchi 2014, p. 84). We operationalized this dimension into two variables: a) collaborative interaction; b) relational structure. Collaborative interaction implies the collaboration offered and received during an interaction between migrant pupils and their classmates. The relational structure reflects the network of reciprocal relationships between the members of a classroom in different interpersonal situations.

Following these premises, the research had two purposes: a) measuring the number of collaborative behaviors that occurred between non-migrant and migrant pupils during the ten sessions; b) testing the changes in the relational structure within the classrooms following a pretest posttest quasi-experimental design.

3.1. Collaborative interaction

The first series of data was collected following a pattern of repeated observations: ten observations, one for each teaching session. The focus was on the collaborative interaction between migrant pupils and their classmates.

The total number of pupils observed was 100. Observers rated 12.4% of the pupils participating in the project: 100 pupils out of 808 in total. Teachers selected the observed pupils choosing in each classroom a maximum of three not-Italian citizenship students whose presence in the

school was at least two years and whose level of linguistic competence varied from A2-B1. The two threshold values – presence in Italy and the level of linguistic proficiency – were judged to be two essential criteria for participating in the collaborative interactions during learning activities. For each student, the observers recorded the total number of collaborative behaviors offered and received during the two hours of a classroom session. The data were collected during the ten classroom sessions (Gentile *et al.* 2014; Gentile *et al.* 2016).

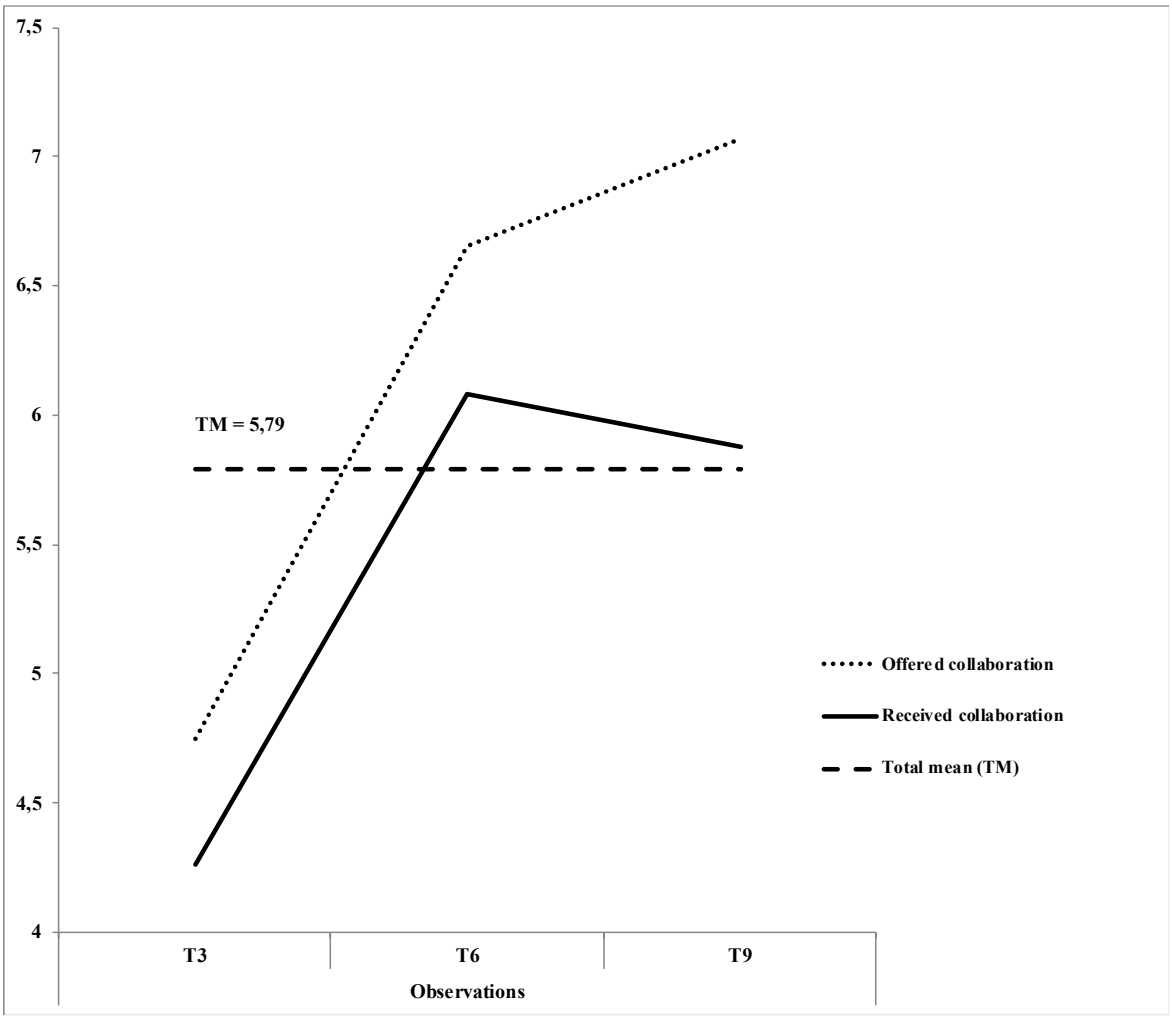

Figure 1
Average values of offered/received collaborative behaviors
by migrant students: 3 observations x 100 students.

Figure 1 shows the results of meeting three, six and nine. In the third meeting, the lowest value was observed in both the offered and received collaboration: 4.75 and 4.26 points. An increase, however, was observed after halfway. In the observation number six, we recorded an average of 6.65 offered collaborative behaviors, and 6.08 received collaborative behaviors. Finally, observation number nine recorded 7.07 behaviors for the offered

collaboration, the highest value over the ten meetings, while the received collaboration an average of 5.88 behaviors. The data was tested trough an ANOVA procedure. The test produced positive results. For the offered collaboration by migrant students, the ANOVA yielded a statistically significant effect: Wilks Lambda = .80, F (2, 68) = 4.43, p <.001, with an ES equal to .19. (Exceeding the threshold of .14, it can be considered a high ES, Pallant 2007). For the received collaboration, the outcome was: Wilks Lambda = .73, F (2, 64) = 11.37, p <.0005, with an ES equal to .26.

3.2. Relational structure

The structure of interpersonal relationships was measured by a Moreno's sociogram (Comoglio, Cardoso 1996). The question addressed to the pupils was the following: «These are your classmates. With whom do you do these things? ». The pupils indicated their classmates concerning three situations:

- "During break, I'm with ..."
- "In class, I work and collaborate with ..."
- "I talk about what I like to do with ..."

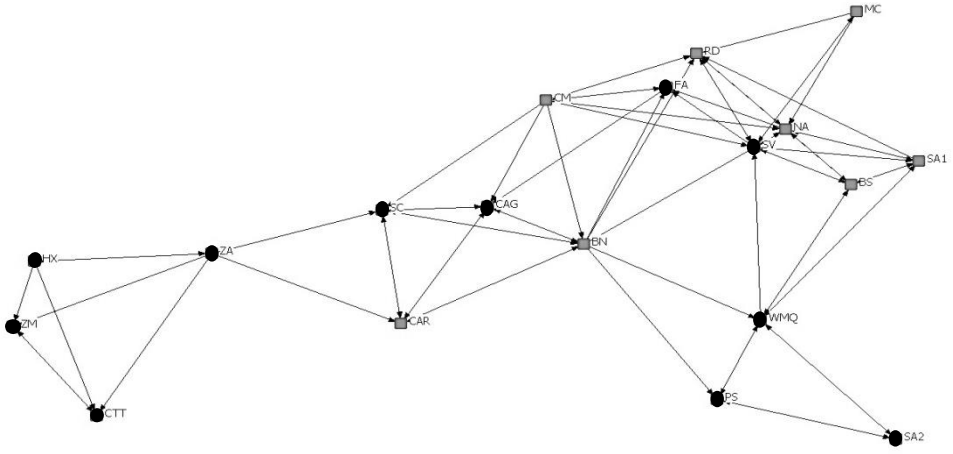

Figure 2a
Pre-test: relational graph of "In class, I work and collaborate with ..."
One of the class involved in the project
(Black circle = Migrant pupil, Gray square = Non-migrant pupil) - *N* = 22.

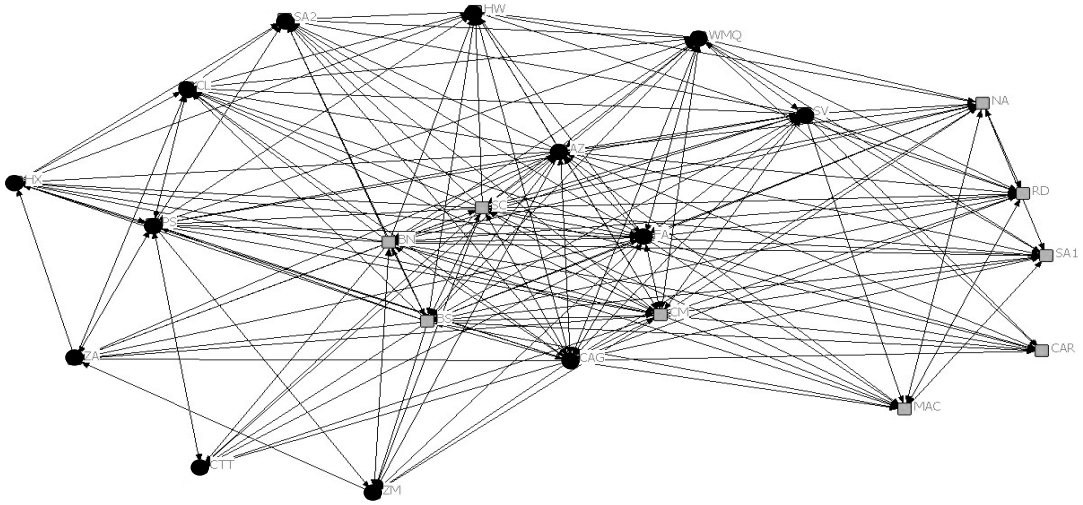

Figure 2b
Post-test: relational graph of "In class, I work and collaborate with ..."
One of the class involved in the project
(Black circle = Migrant pupil, Gray square = Non-migrant pupil) - *N* = 22.

The data were collected two times: before and after the intervention. The data collections covered 98% of the pupils involved in the research, 795 out of 808. The statistical analysis was based on two procedures: the processing of the relationship graphs and the density index (Borgatti, Everett, Johnson 2017).

Figures 2a and 2b show the relational structure before and after the intervention, revealed in one of the 35 classes.[2] The increase in the number of mutual relationships is visible in the passage from the first to the second measurement. In the second measurement, it improves the amount of total respective ties; furthermore, it appears the presence of a relational nucleus including three non-migrant and three migrant pupils. This sub-group lies in the center of the network.

The transformation of interpersonal relations - observed in this class – has been confirmed by a second indicator: the density index. The density is a value that varies from 0 to 1. A value of 1 indicates the maximum level of interpersonal bonds reached by a class group. On the contrary, a value of 0 indicates the absence of reciprocal ties (Cordaz 2005). Always examining the second relationship situation - "In class, I work and collaborate with ..." – among the 35 analyzed classes, 26 achieved an improvement in the index; three show a stable situation; in six, it appears a decline (Table 3).

[2] In Gentile *et al.* (2014), we reported all relationship graphs of the 35 classes involved in the research.

				Pre-test		Post-test	
Area network	**School**	**Grade**	**N**	M	SD	M	SD
Center	*Ciliani*	2th	25	.17	.37	⇧ .22	.75
	Collodi	4th	25	.17	.37	⇧ .29	.46
	De Andrè	5th	25	.15	.36	⇧ .24	.43
	Mazzei	5th	21	.15	.35	⇧ .16	.37
	Malaparte	6th	23	.11	.32	⇧ .17	.37
	S. Caterina	6th	26	.16	.37	⇧ .19	.40
	Mazzoni	7th	28	.16	.36	⇧ .27	.44
	Lippi	7th	24	.13	.34	⇧ .18	.39
	Guasti	3th	25	.11	.31	⇩ 0.9	.28
	Filzi	4th	18	.21	.41	⇩ .14	.34
	Mazzei	5th	22	.18	.38	⇩ .13	.34
North-West	*Rodari*	3th	22	.32	.47	⇧ .35	.48
	Buricchi	3th	25	.06	.24	⇧ .21	.41
	Puddu	4th	20	.51	.50	⇧ .72	.45
	Borgonuovo	4th	23	.24	.43	⇧ .27	.45
	Da Vinci	4th	18	.16	.36	⇧ .23	.42
	Puccini	5th	18	.27	.44	⇧ .30	.46
	Don Bosco Lero	6th	21	.11	.32	⇧ .20	.40
	Don Bosco Narnali	7th	22	.28	.45	⇧ .54	.50
	Fermi	7th	27	.21	.41	⇧ .25	.43
	Cim	3th	23	.44	.50	⇩ .41	.49
	Mascagni	3th	17	.17	.37	⇩ .15	.36
	Gandhi	5th	24	.30	.46	⇨ .29	.46
	Zipoli	7th	23	.19	.39	⇨ .20	.40
South-East	*Le Fonti*	4th	22	.14	.35	⇧ .17	.37
	Manzi	5th	21	.70	.46	⇧ .82	.39
	Manzi	5th	25	.17	.38	⇧ .27	.45
	Manzi	5th	22	.22	.41	⇧ .24	.42
	Ammaniti	5th	23	.12	.33	⇧ .23	.42
	Pacetti	6th	22	.18	.39	⇧ .26	.44
	Marcocci	6th	27	.13	.34	⇧ .16	.37
	Tintori	7th	18	.21	.41	⇧ .41	.49
	Sem Benelli	8th	21	.14	.35	⇧ .35	.48
	Poli	3th	24	.15	.36	⇩ .13	.34
	Poli	5th	25	.18	.39	⇨ .18	.39
N = Number of subjects - **M** = Mean **SD** = Standard Deviation ⇧ = Improvement ⇩ = Decrease ⇨ = Stability							

Table 3
Relational structure and density index
Pre-test, post-test x Schools/Classes and area network.

As said above, the 35 schools were grouped into three area networks. The availability of this information made it possible to assess whether the area

networks variable might have affected the observed outcomes. An ANOVA test was carried out between and within schools. The purpose of the analysis was to test if the observed findings could be due mainly to the intervention, to the school context (area network), or, finally, to an interaction between intervention and school context.

The first finding showed a non-significant interaction between the density index - measured before and after the intervention - and the school context. Wilks' Lambda was equal to .94, F (2, 31) = .98, p <.383, with ES equal to .058. Secondly, the main effect appeared in the shift between before and after the intervention: Wilks' Lambda was equal to .60, F (1, 32) = 20.79, p <.0005, with an ES of .39. Finally, the search for an effect given by the influence of the area network alone was not confirmed by the ANOVA: F (1, 32) = 2.29, p <.117. The findings suggested that the change in the relational structure was due to the inclusive teaching model.

4. Integrating goal structures and linguistic complexity

Evidence suggests that inclusive education is not the usual way to teach in the classrooms (Associazione TreeLLLe, Caritas Italiana, Fondazione Agnelli 2011; D'Alessio 2011; Ianes 2019). Any theoretical or methodological solutions that help remove the barriers in learning and participation provide advances in inclusive education (Meijer 2001). Our professional and research experience suggests that migrant students can meet a second barrier: the school texts (Troiano, Gentile, Pona 2019). We propose to integrate a cooperative goal structure-based model with the analysis of the linguistic complexity of schoolbooks.

Different methods can support the implementation of this line of intervention. For example, DYLAN TextTools (v.2.1.9) software elaborates several indexes like average sentence length; average word length; lexical morphosyntactic and syntactic features; readability index (Dell' Orletta *et al.* 2011; Dell'Orletta *et al*. 2014; De Mauro, Chiari 2005; Lucisano 1992; Lucisano, Piemontese 1988). These software outputs could be successfully used to simplify school texts to facilitate access to content areas of immigration background students with reading comprehension difficulties.

A second method is *text-layering*. It consists of textual complexity decrease, with the scope to make the processing of linguistic information more efficient (Pienemann 1998). Different *linguistic facilitation* strategies can help to design a layered text (Pona 2016; Troiano, Gentile, Pona 2019): keywords repetition, essential vocabulary improvement, sentence length reduction, redundancy, content reorganization, graphic strategies (paragraph partition, readable fonts, bold type, and italic usage, etc.) and extra-linguistic elements (images, tables, color contrast, etc.). The new text appears as a

multi-text with different levels of reading difficulty. This cognitive setting can help teachers to scaffold the reading difficulty levels for each student (Caon 2016; Troiano 2019).

This new direction could support students' cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1979). This level of language learning is critical for migrant students' achievement. Migrant students need time and support to develop academic ability in subject areas. Thus, we need to remove the cognitive-linguistic barriers that reduce access to the content area. Academic language learning isn't just understanding content or acquiring vocabulary: it implies cognitive processes such as "comparing, classifying, synthesizing, evaluating, and inferring" (Lillywhite 2011, p. 35).

5. Conclusion

The article discussed the interpersonal effects of an inclusive teaching model based on *goal structures*. The research involved 808 primary and secondary school pupils enrolled in 31 schools. On the one hand, the cooperative goal structures emphasize the collaborative interaction between migrant pupils and their classmates; on the other hand, they change the relational system of multilingual classrooms, identified – after the intervention - in improving the total number of mutual ties and density index.

The main scope was to remove the interpersonal barriers and promote better peer relationships between migrant students and their non-migrant classmates. A cooperative *goal structure* emphasizes positive interdependence. The promotion of this interpersonal patterns can explain the effects observed in the 31 classrooms. Furthermore, consistently with literature evidence, we could suppose that a right level of interpersonal cohesion, assured by cooperative *goal structures*, might affect achievement in classrooms with a high amount of immigration background students (Roseth *et al.* 2008).

The paper proposed a new direction of research: integrating into the cooperative *goal structures* diverse linguistic complexity levels. We can support the reduction of schoolbooks difficulty through *linguistic indexes* and *text-layering*. Both methods can help educators facilitate the access of schoolbooks contents in multilingual classrooms, where different levels of linguistic proficiency associate with different levels of cognitive readiness. With this teaching component, pupils can have the chance to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency (Cummins 1979).

The integration of cooperative *goal structures* with different levels of text difficulty might reduce interpersonal and linguistic barriers, promoting higher achievement and better peer relationships for all students. If we improve the interaction between *text-layering* and cooperative *goal*

structures, we might cultivate better learning conditions. The expectation is to reduce the impact of obstacles associated with schoolbooks and peer relationships, while the hope is to promote a positive identity as students who can learn (Lemley *et al.* 2014), especially for migrant students.

We see inclusion as a commitment to teaching students in a high-quality learning environment (Grima-Farrel, Bain, McDonagh 2011). This educational perspective goes beyond students with SEN (Thomas, Loxley 2001). It means changing classrooms into learning environments "where all students can flourish" (D'Alessio *et al.* 2018, p. 17).

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