Supporting innovation in assessment to change teaching methods: a professional training course.

Sostenere l'innovazione nella valutazione per cambiare la didattica: un percorso di formazione professionale.

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ABSTRACT ITALIANO

Il 4 dicembre 2020 la scuola italiana è travolta dall'Ordinanza Ministeriale 172 (OM172). Le scuole, dopo la formazione online (gennaio – marzo 2021) cercano di costruire percorsi formativi chiedendo aiuto all'università. Questo contributo descrive 2 percorsi formativi, uno svolto da una docente universitaria e una dottoranda, e l'altro da una formatrice dello stesso gruppo di ricerca. Si è scelta una metodologia mixed-methods con questionari, focus group, diari di bordo, elaborati delle docenti, lesson plan e interviste semi-strutturate. Il presente contributo si concentrerà su un aspetto della ricerca e cioè paragonerà alcune scelte metodologiche dei percorsi formativi e presenterà considerazioni preliminari su come queste abbiano condizionato attitudini e consapevolezze dei docenti rispetto al cambiamento. L'attivazione dei partecipanti attraverso attività in aula e a casa e riflessione dialogica; il feedback formative fornito sui compiti svolti dalle docenti; il Lesson study; l'ampio uso di esempi, analogie e metafore nel materiale formativo, hanno dimostrato efficacia nel promuovere apprendimento trasformativo.

ENGLISH ABSTRACT

On December 4, 2020 the Ministerial Decree 172 (OM172) hit Italian schools like a runaway train. Schools, after the online training (January - March 2021) looked for universities' help to plan professional development paths. This paper describes two trainings, one carried out by a university professor and a doctoral student and another by an independent trainer from the same research group. To investigate the application of the decree we chose a mixed-methods methodology with questionnaires, focus groups, logbooks, lesson plans, and some semi-structured interviews. This paper will present a small part of the research, namely compare the methodological choices of these trainings and present preliminary considerations on how they affected teachers' attitudes and perspectives toward change. Participants' activations through homework, workshop activities and dialogic reflection; formative feedback provided on teachers' work; Lesson study on teaching activities and observational tools; designing of training materials with extensive use of examples, analogies and metaphors, have shown effectiveness in promoting transformative learning.

Introduction

On December 4, 2020 the publication of Ministerial Decree 172 (OM172) and attached guidelines hits Italian schools like a runaway train. This general unpreparedness may come as a surprise, since June 6, 2020, No. 41 conversion law anticipated the change.

It could be said that without the ordinance and guidelines, schools did not have enough elements to change the approach to assessment. Yet is this really the case?

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Earlier legislation, e.g., National Curriculum Guidelines (2012), Legislative Decree 62/2017, DPR 275/1999, already had many elements of this reform: formative assessment; punctual learning objectives leading to competence goals; construction of a school-based curriculum. Many have seen in this decree, the final brick to complete the wall rather than a breakthrough (Nigris & Agrusti, 2021). This being the case, the reasons for the disorientation must be investigated. Various authors highlight the poor evaluative culture of Italian primary school teachers (Calvani & Trinchero, 2019; Agrusti, 2021; Benvenuto, 2003). Naïve ideas about evaluation are already formed pre-service as early as personal experiences on school desks (Ciani & Rosa, 2022). Extensive literature on pedagogical formats and teachers' habitus confirms how teachers, as professionals in action (Schön, 1993), also rely on frame of reference during their work. Implicits they are often unaware of (Perrenoud, in Altet et alii, 2006; Pentucci, 2018). If they do not emerge, if organizational frameworks and system boundaries do not change, the risk is to have "innovation without change" (Barnes in Russel & Mumby (eds.), 1992). Professional development structured to trigger reflection on habitus and pedagogical formats could foster transformative learning (Mezirow, 2016) and thus support innovation with change.

On the other hand, Italian schools are periodically under pressure both to improve their performance and to smooth out geographical inequalities (OECD-Pisa; Invalsi). OM172 apparently tries to both nurture in teachers a culture of assessment and support an educational shift in schools. It moves from a 0-10 grade system to a descriptive and criterion-base assessment, with explicit reference to learning objectives, defining their level of acquisition according to 4 dimensions. Prof. Nigris, coordinator of the ministerial working group, points to the "epochal change" in assessment as a driver of innovation in instructional design and practice (webinar15/12/2020). This idea is echoed in the literature. Castoldi highlights how the innovation efforts found in schools on the teaching level are not accompanied by changes to the assessment plan, while there is a "carryover effect that characterizes the assessment moment, so a change in this area tends inevitably to be reflected in changes on the design and teaching level" (2009, p.9).

The decree establishes a criterion-based evaluation for primary school. There are 4 levels of proficiency in reaching clearly defined learning objectives (Mager, 1975). Four dimensions, i.e., the use of resources, autonomy, continuity and known or unknown situation, drive the definitions of the levels. These dimensions become key in the observation process. Moreover, there is a renewed emphasis on how data is collected. Intentional observation and documentation of multiple settings, project works, spontaneous activities, real life requests become key (Nigris et alii, 2019; Rinaldi, et alii, 2011). The decree highlights the connection between learning objectives and evaluation and puts students and their learning processes at the center of school action (Ebel, Frisbie, 1965/1991; Agrusti, 2021).

Methodology

Schools, after an initial phase of online training (January - March 2021) looked for sources of professional development. A mixed group of 11 among university researchers, internship supervisors for pre-service teachers and doctoral students organized one of

such training as a research effort. The aim was deconstructing the decree, presenting each step in active learning units and analyzing the difficulties teachers would face. The lessons learned from this first experience became shared knowledge among the group and base for the design of further courses. 3 members of this group were involved in designing and implementing other professional development courses. For instance, a Direzione Didattica, combination of primary school units, located in a town in central Italy (from now on Es2) requested a training on the topic carried out by a university professor and a doctoral student. The training took place from November 2021 to April 2022. At the same time a Istituto Comprensivo, combination of school units from pre-primary to lower-secondary school, located in a town in northern Italy (from now on Es1) requested a similar training path, but carried out by another member of the original team. The same doctoral student had the possibility of taking part in the training as a member of the trainers' internal support team.

These trainings and further actions are part of a bigger research with multiple research questions as presented in table 1.

TAB. 1: GLOBAL RESEARCH DESIGN

Research question	Methodology	Tools	Unit of analysis
What, if any, are the elements of continuity between ideas of teaching and learning, culture of assessment, sense of self-efficacy, way of coping with the changes imposed by OM172 of the teachers encountered during professional development?	Mixed-Methods	Survey with open and closed questions	Individual teachers in 4 school institutions
OM172 wants to produce substantial and lasting changes in assessment and thus in teaching: what characteristics must effective training on these issues have for this to happen?	Qualitative: case studies	Observations, focus groups, in-depth interviews	Es1 and Es2
	Qualitative: case study in research-training	Observations, planning, and documentation produced	Two Italian teachers working in fifth grade classrooms at the same school
What happened after two years? What causes the resistances in the decree implementation? Are we facing "innovation without change"?	Mixed-Methods	Observations, focus groups, in-depth interviews, surveys	Es1 and Es2

This paper will focus on one the second question, i.e., OM172 wants to produce substantial and lasting changes in assessment and thus in teaching: what characteristics must effective training on these issues have for this to happen?

Each educational institution was treated as a case study. "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) […]" (Creswell, 2013, p.97). Es1 and Es2 are clearly bounded systems, because they gather students, teachers, and staff from a specific area, spending at least a school year together. Moreover, they share a common leadership, internal regulation, habits, tools, a history. Each training course and its consequences can be treated as instrumental case studies aiming at understanding the decree implementation and the role of professional development in the process.

As defined by Creswell these cases are explored "over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (ibidem). Data was collected during training as logbooks, exercises, quizzes, lesson plans, learning path designs. At the end of the training courses 5 focus groups were carried out, namely 2 focus groups in Es1, one for the support team members (Es1A) and the second with volunteers from the faculty (Es1B) and 3 in Es2, 1 with members of the school evaluation board (Es2A), 1 with LS pilot teachers and volunteer teachers who had participated in the active training (Es2B), 1 with member of the faculty, who had only participated to plenary sessions (Es2C). The complexity of the subject matter, which brings together aspects already investigated in the literature with others related to the characteristics of change, led us to carry out a thematic analysis of the data, with categories generated both from theories and inspired by the data itself (Braun, 2006; Rabiee, 2004). Both focus groups and interviews were analyzed with the same themes and categories as presented in table 2.

TAB. 2: THEMES AND SUBCODES FOR FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS ANALYSIS

Themes	Subcodes	Inteviews	Focus Group
Keywords			
	Negative	X	X
	Positive	X	X
	Neutral	X	X
Negative Aspects			
	We will go back soon	X	
	Critiques to the design	X	X
	Lack of tools	X	X
	Relations outside schools	X	X
	Too quick and not reflecxive enough implementation	X	X
	School choices?	X	X
Positive aspects			
	Possible changes	X	X
	Past not to be missed	X	X

	Team dimension	X	X
	Relations outside schools	X	X
work in progress			
	Special needs education	X	X
	Building relationships with parents	X	X
	Dialog with the past	X	X
	Descriptive judgment is it?	X	X
	No clarity in the reform	X	X
New awareness			
	Observation and evaluation	X	X
	Criterion-based evaluation	X	X
	Role of learners	X	X
	Recursive processes		X
	Change in teaching methodologies	X	X
Training			
	References to training	X	X
	References to webinar	X	X
	Acquired understandings	X	X
	Positive notes	X	X
	Negative notes	X	X
	Efficiency elements		X
	Multiple voices	X	X
	lesson study – yes		X
	lesson study – no		X
Efficacy perception			
	Resistence to change	X	
	Between theories and practical applications	X	X
	More training	X	X
	Organizational and structural changes	X	X
	confusion and insecurity	X	X
	Transformative insecurity	X	X
Online log for grades		X	
Generative questions	X	X	

The training

In Es 1 the trainer suggested training methodology, organization, and schedule. The school involved all 54 primary school teachers. The trainer requested the establishment of a support group made up of 7 teachers, with the purpose of doing an ongoing evaluation and reflecting on how to proceed. 3 teachers per each school unit and the doctoral student were members of the commission that met 3 times for a total of 5 hours. The commission did not co-design the intervention, but rather shared opinion with the trainer, who partially re-arranged the materials and activities she had already prepared, to accommodate some of the group's thoughts and requests. The path articulated through:

- 3 online plenary session for all faculty members (6 hours);
- 4 online labs (8 hours in total) where groups made up of 5/7 teachers analyzed and co-designed activities with the trainer skipping through the different session 2 out of the 4 times.

For the 7 teachers involved the support group meetings became part of the training, as they presented an opportunity of deeper reflection on the decree, both as individuals and within the group.

TAB. 3: ES1 TRAINING SCHEDULE

Date	Typology	Participants
October 28, 2021 – 2h	Preparatory meeting / coordination	Support group and trainer
November 4 2021 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainer
November 9 2021 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainer
November 11 2021 – 1h 30'	Preparatory meeting / coordination	Support group and trainer
November 22, 2021 – 2h	Workshop	Staff divided in 8 groups and trainer
1 dicembre 2021 – 1h	Extra meeting for students with special needs	Special needs commission and trainer
1 dicembre 2021 – 2h	Workshop	Staff divided in 8 groups and trainer
9 dicembre 2021 – 2h	Workshop	Staff divided in 8 groups
15 dicembre 2021 – 2h	Workshop	Staff divided in 8 groups
7 gennaio 2022 – 1h 30'	Preparatory meeting / coordination	Commission and trainer
January 25 2022 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainer

The first two plenary sessions presented the decree briefly, and focused on examples of activities that could be given in school and how they should be evaluated. It introduced concepts such as formative assessment and evaluation, the difference between collecting data and measuring on the one hand and evaluating on the other, designing activities to build competences and not only to promote knowledge. The second meeting focused on instructional design, without losing track of specific learning objectives, from the preliminary actions to the evaluation.

The staff broke down into 8 small groups and were asked to put into use the theories and tools presented during the plenary.

The group had to start analyzing an activity to determine learning objectives, resources, possible learning path; second step was evaluating one of such activities as it had been executed by real students; the third step was planning a learning path starting from a long-term learning outcome and breaking it into smaller units. The material produced during the workshop was shared with the trainer who did not present it nor analyze it. The activities analyzed came from teachers' daily practice. They were mostly executional and did not present opportunity for building abilities or evaluating using the 4 dimensions. In the last plenary session, a group leader presented impressions and ideas that had emerged during the workshop and the trainer commented on it partially.

The research and training course in Es2, carried out almost entirely online, consisted of:
- 3 plenary meetings, involving the whole faculty (6 hours);
- 6 workshop meetings (12 hours); and a Lesson Study (LS) cycle (6 hours) (Bartolini & Ramploud, 2018) for a smaller group of 30 faculty members.

The institute's request was to equip teachers with representations; teaching, observational and synthesis tools; and organizational and working arrangements necessary to implement OM172. The core group of 30 teachers was involved in activities inspired by a transformative model of professional development, based on hands on activities, reflection, collective design practices, tailored to promote teachers' agency and awareness. The gains accrued by the core group have been and will be transferred to the rest of the staff in a cascading model (Kennedy, 2005). The shared plenaries, built on the workshop preliminary finding and the creation of a community of practice, among the 30 teachers involved in the workshop training support this transmissibility of content and awareness. This group of teachers has acted as a flywheel of transmission to the various school organizing bodies.

TAB. 4: ES2 TRAINING SCHEDULE

Date	Typology	Participants
November 23 2021 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainers
December 21 2021 – 2h	workshop	Active training group (30 teachers) and trainers
January 12, 2022 – 2h	Workshop	Active training group and trainers
January 19, 2022 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainers
January 24, 2022 – 2h	Workshop	Active training group and trainers
January 28, 2022 – 3h	**LS**	Active training group and trainers
February 10 / 11 2022	**LS**	Active training group and doctoral student
Febraury 24, 2022 – 2h	Workshop	Active training group and trainers
March 2, 2022 – 2h	**LS**	Active training group and trainers
March 16, 2022 – 2h	Workshop	Active training group and trainers
March 23, 2022 – 2h	workshop extra	Active training group and trainers
April 5, 2022 – 2h	Plenary session – frontal training	Faculty and trainers

The training was organized also to accommodate the progressive requests of the teachers collected through continuous dialogic interactions. The workshop foresaw an activation of teachers both in class with group assignments and at home with homework specifically designed to reflect on the content of the workshop and push the discussion forward. This homework became the base for the new lesson during which anonymous examples were discussed, but also was an important self-reflection tool, since it was returned to the author with extensive feedback from the trainers.

The professional development course started with a roundup on the OM172 in the plenary session and then during the workshops dealt with instructional design based on clearly defined learning objectives, instructional design remodulation to include the 4 dimensions. At this point during the plenary session there was a recollection of the workshops and a theoretical presentation on observation and its tools. The next workshops focused on building and testing observation tools, to be used during class work, especially focused on the 4 dimensions. Instrumental for the reflection and implementation of this observation tools was the Lesson Study (LS) cycle.

LS is a methodology of teacher professional development, originated in the Far-east, but currently used world-wide, and researched by the Department of Education and Humanities of the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia since 2012. During a LS cycle, a lesson designing session, which includes 5 to 10 different professionals such as teachers and educators and often researchers as facilitators, prepares a 1-hour lesson to be executed by one of the teachers. The planning phase usually lasts 3 hours and includes decision on observation focuses and tools. Then the lesson is carried out while being observed by members of the group and filmed. The third and final step is a 2-hour collective reflection on what was observed during the lesson paving the way for the lesson redesigning (Bartolini, Ramploud, 2018).

In our case, the focus of the planning involved the dimensions of decree 172. The group decided to work on the understanding of a wordless book called "an invisible walk". In a nutshell, the book tells the story of a walk only through the traces the walkers have left in the snow. Pairs from second and third grade classes had to answer questions connected to specific pages of the book and then try to find common answers with their classmates through discussion. The observers focused on autonomy and the use of resources using tools designed by the group for the purpose.

The final step of the training was the construction of an evidence-based descriptive judgments. This part took one extra meeting and became more controversial than trainers had anticipated.

Analysis

The professional development regarding evaluation, structured in Es1 and Es2 were similar for: total length of the course; number of meetings and hours; background ideas on the decree and the desirable learning outcomes of a training on the topic.

The main differences lay in:

1. number of teachers involved: in Es1 the whole staff, in Es2 30 teachers with a conscious plan involving a cascade model to involve the rest of the school;

2.   theoretical framework: in Es1 the trainer sketched different scenarios based on teaching material used in other schools, letting the themes emerge from experience; in Es2 the trainers broke down the theoretical elements in subsequential steps and used them to build the training, confirming understanding of the previous step before moving to the next one;

3.   connection to school practices and documentation: in Es1 the trainer presented a standardized course making some adjustments based on the support group ideas, in Es2 the training was designed with the school leadership and based on the school practices and documentation tools;

4.   role of learners: in Es1 it was hard to start a discussion during the online plenaries, with 54 teachers connected and the trainer was not involved during the workshops, in Es2 the direct dialogue with trainers was granted due to group size, the presentation of contents through an inquiry model, leading participants to develop answers together;

5.   feedback on home and workshop assignments, use of visual metaphors and LS in Es2.

Both during the training and from the focus group there emerged a generalized negative atmosphere in Es1, which was very different from the opinions voiced in Es2. All the coded negative expressions on the decree were outed in Es1 focus groups (see table 5). Negative keywords represent almost the totality of expressions used in those focus groups to present the decree. Teachers in Es1A had only 2 positive and 2 neutral comments out of the 19 keywords they used to characterize OM172, teachers in Es1B had only 1 positive out of 14 coded segments. In Es2A and Es2B the opposite occurred with 8 positive and 3 neutral keywords for Es2A and 9 positive and 6 neutral keywords for Es2B. Es2C words were mostly neutral (9 out of 11) and 2 positive ones.

TAB. 5: CODING OF DECREE 172 DEFINITION THROUGH KEYWORDS – QUESTION1: WHICH WORDS WOULD YOU USE TO CHARACTERIZE DECREE 172 AND THE CHANGES INTRODUCED IN SCHOOLS?

Subcoding	Example of coded segments	Es2 – A	Es2 – B	Es2 - C	Es1 - A	Es1 - B	Totali
Positive	Systemic change; progress; restart	8	9	2	2	1	22
		36%	41%	9%	9%	5%	31%
Negative	False changes; formal change; incoherent; improvised; left alone	0	0	0	15	13	28
		0%	0%	0%	54%	46%	40%
Neutral	Secret progress; descriptive judgment; known un-known; back to the past	3	6	9	2	0	20
		15%	30%	45%	10%	0%	29%
	TOTAL	11	15	11	19	14	70
		16%	21%	16%	27%	20%	100%

Es2C focus group members training was limited to 6 hours of plenary sessions. Yet even this small and not very interactive training made a lasting impression, since in the focus group they referred to the training experience, while answering other questions, which

made no direct link to the professional development course (References to training: 2 segments). In general, all Es2 focus groups had such references: 13 in Es2B and 9 in Es2A. In Es1A there were only 5 of such references and in Es1B 0.

A set of interesting data emerges from the answer to the specific question on training: "Thinking of the professional development courses on Decree 172 you have participated in, either self-chosen or organized by your school, which elements have in your mind been key to familiarize with the new evaluation? Which professional development opportunities have been less effective?" The coding is summarized in Table 6.

TAB. 6: CODING ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASPECTS SUMMARY

	References to training	References to webinars	Acquired understandings	Positive notes	Negative notes	Effective elements	Multiple voices	lesson study - yes	lesson study – no
Es1B	0	0	0	1	5	1	7	0	0
Es1A	5	1	2	3	8	2	2	0	0
Es2C	2	0	1	5	2	9	0	0	0
Es2B	13	0	3	4	1	4	1	5	1
Es2A	9	1	12	10	1	4	4	4	5
Total	29	2	18	23	17	20	14	9	6

Es2C participants expressed positive comments on the training received (positive notes: 5 segments) and made explicit reference on to the gains they had and will acquire through exchange with the colleagues who did the workshop. The positive ideas on the professional development course appeared more in Es2A (10 segments) and Es2B (4 segments) than in Es1A (3 segments) and Es1B (1 segment). The opposite happens for the negative comments: they appear more in Es1B (5 segments) and Es1A (8 segments), than in Es2A and B (1 segment each) and Es2C (2 segments).

In Es1 teachers criticized the teaching methodology utilized (too much of a lecture style), but also the topics. One teacher said: «the training with XXX has focused on how to plan effective tests and activities, we could have done it in less time and could have focused on something else» (1-B-5), and others agreed that the training had been interesting, but had not given them practical tools to comply with their evaluation duties. Es2A and B critiques were on technical issues, and Es2C participants complained about the lack practical activities, which is understandable since they only participated to the plenary sessions.

Es2A is the group that expressed the highest number of new understandings gained through the training (acquired understanding: 12 segments). These understandings, that emerged to a lesser extent also in Es2B and C, span from the centrality of planned and structured observation as a data collection tool, to the necessity to plan step by step to reach a clearly defined learning objective and how a criterion-based evaluation can help in gaining objectivity. The dimensions, as indicators to identify how students manifest their learning, support clarity for everyone involved. Another concept gained through the

training is how to include the dimensions in the instructional design and how to observe them. The gains outed in Es1A had to do with a generic recognition of the centrality of students' learning processes and a new gained freedom from grades and standardized tests.

Teachers could sketch the elements of a training effective for their needs. All focus groups highlighted the need to start from practical aspects and provide concrete recipes. Yet, in Es2 teachers specified this need for visualizing with metaphors, discuss concrete examples, try to practice the content learned during training. These practical examples are the keys to support a common discussion and reflection among teachers during training, but they also help personal growth if they are analyzed by the trainer and receive concrete feedback. The LS worked very well as a common experience leading to common reflection on observation and dimensions. The negative comments expressed by some teachers had more to do with the timing of the cycle. This methodology, unknown to all teachers, disrupted the training path a bit, it derailed its natural course and development, focusing teachers' attention on other aspects not directly connected with the decree. Although it proved to be an effective learning tool, it should have been places toward the end of the path or separated from it.

Es2 teachers highlighted the connection between their school documents, tradition, habits, and the training. To them it supported deeper understanding and the feeling of concreteness. Teachers in Es2 emphasized that reflecting as a group on the decree, reading it together and reflecting on wording and implication had been an unexpected plus. Even teachers, who thought to have read it carefully before, felt that they had gained a deeper understanding.

In spring 2022, when the focus groups were carried out, teachers' professional development connected with the decree was still incomplete both in Es1 and Es2. All teachers expressed doubts, the needs for future professional development, further reflection on evaluation and to put into practice what they had learned. Yet, while for some teachers the confusion and uncertainty prevailed, others saw uncertainty as an opportunity to transform and evolve, an engine of change. These different points of view are exemplified in table 7.

TAB. 7: CODING ON EFFICACY

Focus group	Confusion and uncertainty	Transformative uncertainty
Es1B	4	0
Es1A	5	2
Es2C	1	2
Es2B	1	3
Es2A	1	5
Total	12	12

In Es1 confusion and uncertainty prevails over transformative uncertainty, while in Es2 the opposite occurs. Here an example of transformative uncertainty: «So, rather than being

more certain, I am certain of my uncertainty and so I know I have to take a further step, in order not to stay still, because this change leads us to change ourselves and so I see this uncertainty as a first step» (2-A-5). As for confusion and uncertainty «I am still confused, so it is hard for me to talk about potential. I feel this thing was damped on me and it has been very, very hard» (1-A-2).

Discussion

We will now present some preliminary answers to our questions: OM172 wants to produce substantial and lasting changes in assessment and thus in teaching: what characteristics must effective training on these issues have for this to happen?

The decree offered a unique opportunity for training teachers on issues that really mattered to them and that had an immediate application. This sets the perfect stage for a training to produce lasting changes (Altet, 2006; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). Yet, the analysis clearly shows differences between Es1 and Es2. Teachers in Es1 express much more negativity about the decree and about the quality of the training received. In general, they expressed a more superficial understanding of the reform, have acquired less new understandings from training, showed a greater level of confusion. Teachers in Es2 showed a greater awareness both on the reform and on the characteristics of effective training. These finding clearly support the idea that a reflective a transformative training will increase levels of competence, agency, and self-efficacy among teachers (Kennedy, 2005; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The collective reflection on action helps the emergency of habitus and implicit pedagogical format, thus making teachers aware of them and creating the conditions for change.

The creation of a community of practice through training has a positive effect on school in general. Even those teachers who had only participated in the online plenary training but had a chance to share thoughts with colleagues from the workshop group (Es2C), showed positivity toward the decree and its implementation, a clear vision of the positive aspects connected to the new evaluation and the type of further training they would need. Moreover, they commented positively on the quality of training, thus leading to believe that even the way in which a lecture on theoretical framework is organized can make a difference. Their explicit reference to formats such as metaphors, examples, and the clarity of exposition, would sustain this idea. The positive involvement of all Es2 focus group participants on the training and the decree implementation seems to support the overall methodological choices made by the trainers.

Although teachers in Es2 still showed uncertainties and the need to deepen their understanding of the reform, they demonstrate a positive outlook. The idea that the difficulties and uncertainty they were facing was the engine for a positive change is persistent in their words. This could be an indication, together with the deeper understanding of criterion-base assessment, that we are facing transformative learning (Mezirow, 2016). In Es1 this uncertainty is mostly perceived as fruitless and troublesome. The teachers seem to be refusing to work, reflect, spend time in understanding and putting the decree in practice. This sets obviously the stage for "innovation without change", since in the school contest real change depends on teachers' efforts and reflection on recursive

trials and errors ((Schön, 1993; Perrenoud, in Altet et alii, 2006; Barnes in Russel & Mumby (eds.), 1992).

Teachers in Es2 globally showed a greater appreciation for the format of the training and found less critical aspects in it. While even those Es1 teachers who showed appreciation for the training, inevitably added a negative comment. While satisfaction with the training is only one of the possible indicators of quality, when it comes to teachers professional development it is still a central one (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Conclusion

This paper described 2 trainings on decree 172 by indicating the strengths and weaknesses that emerged from the logbooks and presented preliminary considerations that emerged from the focus groups with respect to the impact training had on teachers' perspectives. Comparing the courses design and teachers' attitudes and ideas as they emerged from the focus group, we could identify elements of training effectiveness.

Those key elements were: organization of the theoretical framework in sub-units presented with a clear and intentional progression; dialogic reflection on all aspects; activations through homework and workshop activities; formative feedback provided on teachers' work; different experimentation with teaching activities and observational tools both during LS and in individual teachers' class activities; designing of training materials with extensive use of examples, analogies and metaphors.

Effective training is an essential element in promoting a lasting systemic change such as the one Decree 172 aims to foster. This article presents characteristics of training that supports teachers' agency and self-efficacy as agent of change. Further research would be needed to establish whether these initial gains are lasting, or they diminish over time, and whether certain individual characteristics foster or hinder the process.

Note

Chiara Bertolini wrote Introduction and Conclusion, Laura Landi wrote Methodology, The training, Analysis and Discussion. Both researchers designed training and research and shared the analysis.

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