TEAM-BASED LEARNING (TBL): BETWEEN MAIEUTICS AND EDUCATIONAL DESIGN

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ABSTRACT
The article deepens the topic of Team-Based Learning (TBL), as a possible teaching method useful for designing learning-teaching processes according to the distinctive features of positive interdependence, work in small groups and cooperative learning. The key constructs of educational guidance, reflexivity in action and teach design are here problematized in a perspective that tries to decline the pedagogical and didactic perspectives.

KEYWORDS
Team-Based Learning; teaching; learning; reflexivity; guidance.

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1. A Brief Introduction

The complexity of the relationships established today between learning and teaching processes requires a multi-perspective view of teachers' professionalism, which is no longer substantiated by declarative skills, but rather by deontological, methodological, and investigative skills that interpret teaching as a design science (Laurillard, 2012). It is important, therefore, to develop procedural dimensions of teaching capable of intentionally promoting processes characterized by reflexivity in educational, formative, and didactic contexts. Reflexivity has become a significantly important theme in recent years within educational sciences, due to its components that give meaning and significance to actions during their execution (Schön, 1983).

Although it is now established that teaching is no longer a mere act of transmitting knowledge, but rather as a process of co-constructing complex, shared, and participatory personal and collective meanings, teaching still struggle to adapt to the heterogeneity of the school universe. This requires a critical revision of those *folk pedagogies* (Bruner, 1996) that continue to shape the way the school world (and the university) is interpreted, both from within and from outside.

It is about giving a pedagogical direction that can serve as a framework for teaching; in other words, a real change in teaching methods involves not only the most current advancements in various forms of learning but, even more so, a profound rethinking of the roles and functions of being a teacher today.

This is because, even in the school, most prefer to use pre-packaged *scripts* rather than critical, reflective, and metacognitive horizons capable of guiding didactics (Schön, 1983); moreover, education at school goes far beyond mere instruction, being, by its own epistemology, a process that centers on the identity dimension, made up of what one knows and can do but, above all, of how one thinks about being and becoming (Dewey, 1910). It becomes of paramount importance to train teachers to work reflectively on themselves and their students (Cunti, 2014), which can enable them to understand the sense of educational and didactic action that needs to be articulated precisely in the complexity and fluidity of the phenomena characterizing the current historical context. All this can only require the adoption of the reflective posture mentioned earlier, capable of critically reviewing both prevailing cultural frameworks and the methodological choices adopted over time.

2. Team-Based Learning as Methodological and Reflective Choice: Between Pedagogy and Didactics

Making methodological and reflective choices that consider the complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary school means knowing, familiarizing, and implementing protocols and methods that firmly hold what is taught, how it is learned, when it is done, and under what conditions. It is from these premises that, among the multitude of methods and strategies to be implemented in daily teaching, Team-Based Learning (TBL) has been chosen for further exploration. TBL is, at the same time, a pedagogical framework and a teaching method that uses the *flipped classroom* (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) to support the renewal of contemporary teaching design, even at the university. It is a methodology that uses small group to make the learning-teaching process as heuristic, active, and collaborative as possible (Michaelsen & Sweet, 2011).

TBL places metacognition at the core of teaching, stimulating curiosity and positive interdependence. Its history dates to the 1970s, thanks to the intuition of Larry Michaelsen and colleagues who, in response to the significant increases in the size of university classes, proposed dividing them into small groups to continue supporting the maieutic aspect – made up of the ability to make decisions, encourage shared discussions, and promote heuristic and in-depth reasoning (Michaelsen et al., 1982). Moreover, if from a pedagogical point of view, the act of teaching means leaving a mark on the life of another (Bertolini, 1983), then on the methodological side, it is essential to make fundamental choices that create sets and settings increasingly adequate and, obviously, specific to the characteristics of contemporary schools.

From this perspective, TBL seems particularly functional in relating the more philosophical and pedagogical aspects underlying the learning-teaching process with its more methodological and didactic components. On the one hand, TBL finds its theoretical framework in maieutic – thus based on questions and answers that proceed by refutation, aiming to gradually lead to the unfoundedness of the most rooted beliefs (Dolci, 2011) – on the other hand, its actual implementation is achieved through structured, operational and procedural models that well adapt to reflecting and researching in the construction of competent teaching professionalism (Castoldi, 2015). Finally, and not least, working in small groups, developing positive interdependencies, activating flipped classrooms, using debate, gamification, and feedback, implementing cooperative learning activities, can represent didactic intervention methods that are well suited to more adequately managing the complexities emerging in the classroom.

Nihilism, learned helplessness, distrust of the future, skepticism towards formalized education is just some of the distinctive features found by most in our classrooms (Galimberti, 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Therefore, returning to the pleasure of learning with others requires a profound rethinking of how teaching is done today, which scripts continue to be used for convenience or simple expedient, which reflective and metacognitive strategies to implement, which teaching methods to adopt to counteract formative drifts and cultural horizons of this type, now almost prevalent.

Through TBL one can thus move away from rhetorical and moralizing positions on teaching, in favor of others that recognize, rather, the criterion of truth concerning the falsity of its assumptions: thus, moving to a certainly more comprehensive and student-centered way (Jones, 2007; Rogers, 1983) of understanding the learning-teaching process, which is certainly in line with what, for some decades now, European policies have been trying to do in terms of initial and in-service teacher training.

More than knowing, today, it is probably necessary to promote that learning of Deweyan memory (Dewey, 1910), which needs to be realized at school, through teaching methods such as TBL, among others, which for its maieutic connotation seems particularly fitting to a pedagogical and didactic discourse that holds together the processes of instruction, educational guidance, and the quality of personal and social development of students. Moreover, the learning process – as a species-specific trait that allows the subject to oscillate in continuous co-adaptation between self and environment (Bateson, 1984) – pushes the subject to seek forms of continuous homeostasis between self and others, between the internal and external world, between education and work, which recalls what the subject thinks of being, what one's is capable or not of doing, what efforts to make at all costs, when to push a little further, when to give up definitively.

Beyond more or less modifiable aspects of one's way of being and thinking, those characteristics of contemporaneity that push most to attest to the present should not be underestimated, what efforts are made every day to find one's place in the world, often leaving room for a renunciatory attitude and distrust towards the future (Galimberti, 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), what strategies are adopted (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which, among others, should now be educationally learned (Cyrulnik & Malaguti, 2005).

And it is precisely on the quality of education provided, both at school and university, that the wonderful game of human development is played. Thus, promoting significant learning through daily teaching that can guide students to future choices can become a precise task of teachers, when the pedagogical theme

of guidance and the related didactic actions to be implemented are assumed as the most functional path to this end, among which TBL seems to be very suitable.
The openness to alternative ways of thinking about teaching professionalism, the knowledge, internalization, and metabolization of alternative teaching methods such as TBL, the effectiveness in terms of evaluation, the sharing of learning between and within groups, allows us to affirm that learning to think of oneself as a teacher must first and foremost pass through those training contexts specifically designed for the formation of future cohorts of teachers, in a recursive and dialectical circle between pedagogy and didactics that lays the foundations for the competent construction of images of the professional Self that are mutable, unfinished, and perpetually evolving.

3. Teach & Guide with Team-Based Learning: A Pedagogical Perspective

TBL can be a valid example, certainly not the only one. It involves guiding students to question perspectives of meaning, implicit knowledge, and widespread beliefs, both as individuals and as students, to build ways of learning that can develop creative and divergent thinking, capable of developing autonomous decision-making skills for themselves and their future through teaching.
The development of critical-reflective and metacognitive skills activated through TBL seems particularly fitting to this perspective. The discourse here assumes a dual value: on the one hand, it aims to raise the quality of the teaching, and on the other, it wants to meet the pressing demands that policies and institutions today require of schools in terms of guidance. After all, guidance is an essential quality of contemporary education that, over time, has been thought of and organized in very different ways and times. When to start guidance activities, according to which organizational methods, whether this should constitute a part of didactics action or a separated activity, are just some of the educational issues that have closely touched this theme.
However, on the pedagogical side, it is interesting to underline that, probably, *educating is guiding*. It means, then, that good education can be considered such when it becomes an authentic guide for the individual, pushing them to a continuous critical and reflective exercise on their existential condition. It is a careful and certainly not easy search, a care of the Self, thus made of a continuous oscillating pendulum between identity and otherness, which needs to be educated in a certain sense, opening the way to cooperative and laboratory didactic activities. With this expression, it means that quality education is authentically emancipative

when it includes a guiding function for the other, supporting them in their choices and helping them understand what space to carve out in the world (Habermas, 1973). Educational qualifications need to be consistent with their professional placement, or at least this is what we all would hope for. And if this no longer happens? What could be the consequences on the identity level, both personal and professional? What personal resources need to be educated? What opportunities to seize, but above all, how to hit the target?

The answer is not simple, and that is why some have tried to address the theme of guidance from another perspective, such as the one that, for example, emphasizes the importance of system actions centered on employability (Harvey et al., 2002), thus on professional placement that is not mere matching, but dialogue, situativity, and exchange of good practices between higher education and work-related contexts.

All this is because, despite the significant criticalities characterizing contemporaneity being a rather widespread experience, still today, as the level of educational qualification increases, the risk of remaining in the grip of unemployment decreases (Almalaurea, 2022). Graduates enjoy significant employment advantages compared to secondary school graduates during adult life, as noted by ISTAT (2022), according to which the employment rate of the 20-64 age group is 79.2% among graduates, compared to 65.2% of those with a diploma. Supporting what has just been said is also OECD documentation (2021) two years after the COVID-19 pandemic, according to which a graduate still manages to earn 37.0% more than a secondary school graduate.

At this point, we well understand that the issue concerns the unexpected, change, growth, when the degree, as just highlighted, still constitutes that extra card to play in the world of work, in life. It is, therefore, about learning to inhabit the present time, through an authentic cultivation of the Self that allows individuals to design their existence, to nurture their needs/desires and try to correspond/realize them (Cunti et al., 2015), in other words, to be conscious actors of their life project, making their way through the many difficulties that contemporaneity places on our path.

And can all this perhaps happen with and through teaching? Certainly yes, provided that the school, as well as the teachers themselves, think of themselves in other terms, evidently also putting into play methods and didactic strategies to support more comprehensive and guiding teaching, seeking meaning and significance for themselves and their existence. Not surprisingly, the guidance has long been associated with the metaphor of the compass (Loiodice, 2004) or the North Star (Amudson, 2009), as stable reference points for choosing one's path. Obviously, on

the pedagogical side, seeking one's path certainly has a different value; in this sense, if on the spatial side one is sure to walk the right path because the cardinal points specify where we are, on the educational side this discourse falls short, when orientation means much more than being guided by external signals.

Guidance is not only to be understood as instrumental reflection for choosing secondary schools, universities, or a work field. Guidance fits into a broader framework of adult life planning (Guichard, 2005), also through training and work opportunities where personal aspirations, relationships inside and outside formal education (Savickas et al., 2009), the clarity of information about study paths and the world of work (Patton & MacMahon, 2006), family conditions and aspirations (Cunti & Priore, 2021), and so on, are embedded.

Thus, it is about transitioning towards a criterion of human development, with the fundamental condition that the subject is given the opportunity to experiment with their personal abilities; in this sense, Amartya Sen (2000) draws a line of continuity between the subject's ability to act and their freedom to choose, thus, to be, which inevitably calls into question the identity sphere. Capability and freedom can only directly challenge training contexts, as an integral part of authentic human development; formal training contexts are entrusted with the arduous task of promoting capabilities (Nussbaum, 1999), that is, the set of resources a person has (or could potentially have), their ability to use them, thus, to act to plan their existence.

It is precisely in this specific educational context that the work of guidance through TBL fits, as well as the desirable formative outcomes in learning and teaching settings duly designed to promote, among other things, personal resources and life skills useful for the autonomous and conscious planning of one's life project. In these terms, guidance becomes much more than indicating the path, but building it together, through the effective organization of learning-teaching processes that assume guidance through teaching as an essential quality of contemporary education.

Transferring the discourse into daily teaching practice, we mean that quality teacher training embraces a formative mission of extraordinary pedagogical value, which is colored by a quality of educational and didactic action that requires, on the one hand, theoretical frameworks of reference that frame the phenomenon from a more comprehensive, critical, and hermeneutic perspective and, on the other hand, *evidence-based* best practices that serve as useful indications for increasingly conscious and competent personal and professional action.

4. Teach & Design with Team-Based Learning: A Didactics Perspective

Setting aside many of the pedagogical theories inspired by the theoretical frameworks mentioned earlier (citing them all would certainly be impossible for us), it seems particularly interesting here to recall the contribution of Diane Laurillard in didactics (2012), redefining the concept of learning and teaching. From this perspective, teaching is no longer considered a simple act of transmitting knowledge, but a *design science*, a complex and strategic activity that requires meticulous planning and continuous adaptation to the needs of students.

Laurillard places the processes of interaction and feedback between teacher and student at the center of the didactic process, emphasizing that learning is not a linear process, but rather a continuous dialogue in which the teacher must be able to adapt to the specific needs of each student. It goes without saying that this requires a different teacher profile from the traditional one, where not only pedagogical competence is required, but also a deep understanding of classroom dynamics and different learning modes, paying attention to individual differences among students and different learning contexts. Laurillard's teaching model strongly emphasizes the interaction between teacher and student and the importance of feedback as an integral part of the learning process, based on the idea that learning occurs through a continuous cycle of action and reflection, in which students not only acquire knowledge but actively rework it through dialogue and comparison with the teacher and their peers.

In some papers (Kim et al., 2019), it is highlighted how online learning platforms have been modified to incorporate real-time feedback tools, interactive chats, and discussion forums, thus reflecting Laurillard's dialogic learning model. It has been noted, in fact, that this type of interaction not only improves student engagement but also fosters deeper and more meaningful learning, as it allows students to continuously reflect and review their ideas considering the feedback received (Bates, 2019). This approach can not only improve the effectiveness of learning but also promote student autonomy and responsibility, better preparing them for the world of work, where the ability to self-learn and adapt is fundamental.

In a historical context thickening with rapid technological and social changes Laurillard's theories offer valuable guidance for addressing the challenges of contemporary didactics. As highlighted by Bates (2019), Laurillard's approach to design learning and technology integration represents one of the most promising responses to the needs of an educational system that must be flexible, adaptable, and capable of responding to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. On the teacher training side, the complexity of the learning-teaching

process has thus elevated didactics to a true science of design (Laurillard, 2012). In this sense, overcoming the determinism between learning and teaching has invested teachers with the burden/honor of designing their professional actions, as an epistemological and deontological possibility to act on categories such as time and space. All this obviously requires a meaningful reflection on didactic design models that start from some questions regarding the constraints and possibilities of formal training, the implicit that guides the way students learn, how learning should be oriented, which methodologies, methods, techniques, and strategies to use for teaching that meets these needs. TBL seems to be very suitable in line with this perspective on teaching and designing.

5. Team-Based Learning in action: The Modules

Team-based learning consists of modules that can be taught in a three-step cycle: preparation, in-class readiness assurance testing, and application-focused exercise (Michaelsen et al., 1982). It consists of 5 essential components, with an optional last stage called peer evaluation.

Individual Pre-Work: the students are asked to study independently, before going to class, the material that the teacher has assigned to them (some pages of a textbook or documents stored on a platform, for example).

Individual Readiness Assurance Test (I-RAT): the students answer a written test consisting of about 10 or 20 multiple-choice questions of a mainly notional nature. This individual phase is intended to ensure the student's preparation. The students should answer using a grid that allows them to attribute his level of certainty to each answer. For each answer they have 4 points available that they can distribute depending on the certainty of the answer. If they are certain that the right answer is the letter A, they write 4 next to the letter A. If they are in doubt between two letters, they can attribute two to one letter and two to another letter. At the end of the I-RAT the teacher collects all the sheets with the students' answers.

Team Readiness Assurance Test (T-RAT): students gather in small groups of 5 or 6 people, previously formed by the teacher based on criteria identified by him and aimed at creating highly heterogeneous groups. Students answer multiple-choice questions in groups. Usually, they do not immediately agree on the answer to the questions, therefore they must discuss among themselves. If they answer correctly on the first attempt, they obtain the maximum score for that question, otherwise they have other attempts each of which involves a penalty in the score obtained. In

this phase the students teach each other and learn from each other according to the constructivist model.

Clarification Session: during the discussion the students may realize that some questions are not formulated perfectly and therefore they are wrong, but they believe they are right. They therefore have the possibility to appeal through a specific form that the teacher prepares previously and gives them together with the questions. The reasons for an appeal can be multiple. The teacher referred to contradictory texts, intentionally wrote the question badly to check if the students noticed and incorrectly formulated the question due to a defect in form. The teacher collects all the appeals, examines them at the end of the lesson and, if the objection is upheld, awards the missing score only to the group that appealed.

Mini lesson: the teacher can reread all the questions aloud in the classroom, focusing on each one and giving a mini lesson, to be sure that everyone has understood the essential basic knowledge, or simply focus on the topics in which the students had the most difficulty.

Team Application (T-APP): the teacher presents all the groups with the same problem and asks a series of multiple-choice questions, which must not be aimed at verifying knowledge of content, but rather at assessing the ability to apply knowledge in a problematic situation. For each question, students have a few minutes to discuss among themselves and agree on the right answer. At the teacher's signal, all groups raise the laminated sign with the chosen letter corresponding to the right answer. The teacher does not immediately communicate the right answer but questions the various groups asking them to illustrate and justify their choices. Another way to conduct the Team Application is called “gallery walk” and requires each group to prepare a poster to be displayed along the wall so that each group can come and read and evaluate it.

Peer Evaluation: students are asked to evaluate themselves among peers, with respect to some criteria that may have already been chosen by the teacher or that could instead be shared in the first meetings.

Conclusions

Cooperative learning activities can be a particularly fruitful form of educational interaction for achieving significant objectives. The psycho-pedagogical framework that served as a premise to this article has highlighted how a renewed pedagogical and didactic vision that focuses on emotional-affective and cognitive involvement in teaching is a valid alternative to the traditional lesson. It does not mean that the

ex-cathedra lesson should be abolished and demonized (quite the opposite), rather it should be integrated and completed with a series of methodological choices to develop an educational project that welcomes complexity as a distinctive feature of the contemporary.

A traditional way of understanding teaching, in fact, in some ways still present in exclusively transmissive teaching models, urges students to isolate knowledge in watertight compartments, just think of the division of school hours according to the study of disciplines and not according to the transversal in-depth study of phenomena; if on the one hand this organization urges students to operate analytical forms of knowledge, certainly useful, on the other, it ends up ignoring the complexity of the natural and cultural world, characterized instead by an articulation such as to require an equally complex study approach.

An excessively analytical and fragmented teaching program, which translates into teaching methods that are only of a transmissive type, encourages the construction of a thought that is not very flexible, codified in schemes that are not very creative and not very available to welcome the unexpected and divergence; in short, it does not favour the construction of a systemic approach and complex thought (Morin, 1991). From this perspective, knowledge could be declined in situated terms, to use the words of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1990) who, at the beginning of the 1990s, theorized, within a cultural and philosophical perspective, the concept of situated learning and communities of practice. Learning is situated because it is closely linked to the cultural contexts in which it occurs; changing the forms of access to knowledge, then, necessarily means redesigning methodological and didactic strategies in favour of new horizons in which, at this point, the use of collaborative teaching methods, here TBL becomes an educational topic, centred on a quality of relationship in which the subjects are present in the group with all of themselves.

Transferring the discussion to didactics, therefore regarding the learning-teaching processes, the individual contribution of each single student represents the opportunity to work with, face and solve problems together and enhance an intrinsic motivation that situates learning in contingent conditions. Thus, the emotional-affective components of learning acquire a decisive role, because the acquisition and processing of knowledge occur in a significant way if accompanied by the pleasure of learning. The school context is, in fact, a context in which the formal dimension linked to knowledge is accompanied by a “hidden” dimension, made up of the co-presence of emotional states, which could encounter in the relationship with teachers a very valid form of help and social support, obviously if appropriately recognized and supported.

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