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The IARA Model Proved Effective in Emotional Literacy, Characters Strengths Awareness, and Cohesion among Italian Children

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Abstract: Literature highlights how education in the twenty-first century begins to advocate multiple new concepts, such as new technology, new pedagogies, interdisciplinary curricula, open learning, etc. Among these concepts, the recognition and awareness about one's character strengths are demonstrated to improve emotional management and individual/group's quality of life. We studied three fifth-grade Italian classes using an emerging educational model called IARA to verify if it can truly improve emotional literacy, characters strengths awareness, and cohesion in ten-years children. To demonstrate its efficacy, we used Bloom's Taxonomy and Sociogrammatic study. We proved that the IARA could be an efficient model to improve one's character strengths and class milieu awareness.

Keywords: positive psychology; sociogram; taxonomy; emotions; classmate

1. Introduction

Emotions play an important role in everyday life, guiding our behavior during the whole lifespan [1,2]. The subjective experience is linked to the felt emotions (i.e., intrapersonal), the environment in which someone lives, and the interpersonal context (i.e., interpersonal; [3,4]). The literature has highlighted the relevance of emotion recognition and regulation in influencing subjective and group well-being [5,6]. This is true until the complete development of psychic maturity, which happens only with the achievement of emotional intelligence [7,8]. In particular, developing emotion recognition in children is fundamental to improving relationships with others and, consequently, the so-called collaborative intelligence [9,10].

The first six years of a child's life are very thorny because the personality takes shape [11]. Indeed, literature demonstrated that failing in-group inclusion predicts school absences, long-term drop-out, and other social–emotional problems [12–15]. In turn, these factors predict unemployment, social exclusion, poverty, mental illnesses, psychiatric disorders [16–18], and bullying [19]. This latter factor, bullying, can cause immediate consequences in a child's life [19] and adverse outcomes in adulthood [20,21].

Education in the twenty-first century begins to advocate multiple new concepts, such as new technology, new pedagogies, interdisciplinary curricula, open learning, and others [22,23]. Educational variables undergo the massive presence of new problems. In educational contexts, prevailing over one the others result in a new symptom of oppression.

The hegemony of violence is on the rise from an early age and also these reasons have led us to try to use this educational–emotional approach [10,24]. Within these new concepts, the capacity of being aware of the other's character strengths (CS) is cited as a new and different kind of education. CS awareness improves emotional regulation, group-life quality, and, finally, resilience [25,26]. CS are frames of mind related to oneself, to others, and the environment [27]. These positive qualities (that characterize an individual's thoughts, feelings, and actions) promote one's well-being and that of others [28]. It has been demonstrated that CS can change after some powerful events, such as a feeling of sorrow or a big achievement [29]. Moreover, CS can become a mediator in developing self-efficacy and subjective well-being, even during pandemic events [30–32]. Furthermore, the stable growth of one's CS awareness is directly proportionate to self-efficacy [33,34], which allows, in turn, the improvement of self-confidence and the relationship with the "*alter*" [27]. Many studies also proved the CS ability to enhance subjective well-being by reducing depression, anxiety, and stress levels [35–37].

A new educational model, called the IARA, emerged in the latest years [38]. This model is based on psychosynthesis, a transpersonal psychoanalytic theory that focuses on personal growth and development through practical techniques such as mindfulness, guided meditation [39,40], and CS [41]. The transpersonal approach is considered "the second-generation of mindfulness-based interventions" because it takes account of the whole person [8], including the natural tendency to transcendence and human cooperation [42].

IARA has been proven to be incisive for empowerment, self-awareness, and self-efficacy [43–46], especially in fields where psychological well-being is essential [47,48]. For these reasons, we decided to use the sociogrammatic analysis and ad hoc questionnaire based on Bloom's taxonomy. The sociogrammatic analysis was conducted according to Moreno [49]. The sociogram is a useful tool to highlight the dynamics (implicit and explicit), which typically develop within each group. Moreover, it promotes reflection and awareness of changed perceptions with respect to interpersonal and interclass relationships. The original Bloom's taxonomy [50] has changed and developed a lot over recent years [51]. Throughout a long pathway, characterized by research and meta-cognition, we moved from factual knowledge to abstract knowledge, always respecting the four fundamental periods: factual period, conceptual period, procedural period, and meta-cognition period. Bloom and Krathwohl's proposal, in 1956 [50], was based on a holistic comprehension of the individual.

Therefore, this investigation aimed to verify if the IARA model can improve CS awareness and cooperation/cohesion between fifth-grade classmates. Moreover, we sought to determine if IARA can: (i) enhance CS awareness by children; (ii) improve the exploration among children; (iii) improve some cognitive characteristics (memory, understand, evaluate, create, apply and analyze the learned knowledge about CS).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

A sample of 61 fifth-grade students (24 boys, 37 girls, average age of 10 years) was recruited from an Italian Primary school to participate in this investigation. Five students that did not attend or fill out questionnaires were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 56 students who were divided into three sub-samples according to their class: Class A (*n* = 18), Class B (*n* = 23), and Class C (*n* = 15).

2.2. Procedures

After receiving academic and local ethics committee authorizations and the school principals' approval, parents were thoroughly informed about investigation purposes and activities in the first organized meeting with the principal investigators. Parents then gave their written informed consent for children to participate. Parents were also informed

that the data would be confidential, available only to investigators, and used only for investigation purposes.

This investigation consisted of two phases: (1) intervention phase-four sessions with IARA intervention from October to November 2018 with 15 days apart from each one. Each session lasted about ninety minutes in this phase, and (2) post-intervention phase-two testing sessions, one at the beginning of January (post-1) and one at the end of May (post-2) 2019.

Between the *Intervention phase* and *Post-intervention* phase, a retention period occurred. In this period, children are expected to retain the gathered information and store it in long-term memory to be readily retrieved. To assess the amount of information that children retained, we conducted a post-intervention phase with two testing occasions. In this stage, we recalled previous sessions through guided meditation, and we performed a Sociogram analysis and Bloom's taxonomy questionnaire (see for synthesis, Figure A1, Appendix A). After the investigation was over, one last meeting with parents was organized in June. In this meeting, investigators presented the main findings of the investigation.

2.2.1. Intervention Phase

First session (early October). The first meeting focused on increasing awareness of one's individuality and CS. A circle of paper and paper strips was given to every child. Then, a huge colored poster was affixed and titled with the class name in the classroom. Children were given a brief introduction to the activities and were informed that they would complete short questionnaires about CS and their relationships with other classmates. The educator then started introducing the concept of CS by saying: "We are going to play a game called *The game of Pearls*. The CS described earlier are the pearls, and the first pearl is represented by yourself: the pearl represents yourself throughout your name". Therefore, children were asked to write down their names on a paper strip with the freedom to use colors, symbols, illustrations, etc. At the end of this activity, each student must keep the creation. Later, the paper circle (that represents the pearl) was given to the children, and they had to listen to the story "*Me and recovered pearl*" (Box A1, Appendix A). This story reflects many analogies between the Ego (as the psychic instance) and the inner self qualities hidden or present. At the end of the story, the children remain in silence for a few minutes and imagine the possible end of the novel. Then, on one surface of the paper circle, the children had to color the pearl, and on the other surface, they had to write down one CS. Finally, the children can attach all the paper-colored circles to the poster.

Second session (late October). The second meeting focused on a particular characteristic of the CS; they can be visible or hidden, even if the hidden ones are present in a person. A huge white poster, a paper circle, and seven paper strips of different colors were handed to each student. Firstly, by beginning with a recap of the last session, children share thoughts, emotions, and sensations about the past days. Then, the educator conducted the guided meditation exercise ("*The pearl in the heart*"; Box A2, Appendix A); this exercise aims to get in touch with the CS (that are represented by the pearls). In the beginning, it is essential to explain to the children that this exercise can help them encounter their inside pearl and close their eyes in half if they are afraid of something. The students were invited to pay attention to everything related to the pearl: words, lights, sensations, sounds, and similar. In the end, the students had few minutes to elaborate on the experience. Then, the students had the task to write down on a paper seven CS that they had seen in the pearl or CS that they think they have after seeing the pearl. If a student could not effectively write all the seven CS, the educator provided help to find all the CS. After that, all the children had seven CS, and they recovered the paper circle and the strips. They had to write each CS on a strip and their name on the circle to obtain a sun with seven sunbeams. Children had to be careful to attach the strips with the CS at the right surface of the circle because the name and the CS should be visible together. Finally, it is essential to leave some moments for the children to think about the activity. During this time, the educator helps the children reflect upon the fact that the sun created by them can shine without showing neither the CS

nor the name: these are hidden, not eliminated. The students kept the sun for the sessions to come.

Third session (early November). During the third session, the relationship Me–Others is introduced with paying attention to the fact that the ensemble is a resource and that sharing a CS does not mean losing that CS, but it means a possible enrichment. Firstly, the educator summarized the last session and focused on the thoughts, sensations, ideas, emotions experienced. The guided meditation (called *"The pearl in the heart"*, see Box A2, Appendix A) was proposed again, remembering that children could completely close their eyes or half-close them if they were afraid of something. In the end, few minutes are necessary to elaborate on the experience. After the reflection, each student collected the sun, and they were free to share everything thought or experienced. In the center part, the educator employed a new game called *"Pearl necklace"*. The educator paired the children by taking from a box containing all the names. Seven paper strips were delivered to each pair. Each student had to write three CS of choice on three strips and share them with the other student. On the latest strip, the educator had to write down a CS that could combine each couple. Then, all the strips were attached to create a chain, explaining to the children that all the CS were shared within the couple throughout this manner. Next, the couple must exchange the chain describing what they were feeling. From the relationship Me–Others, finally, they moved to the relationship Me–Group. The students had only one strip, deciding which CS they wanted to share with their classmates. Finally, a class chain was created with all the strips and the students had to remain in a circle and exchange the chain to another. The meeting ended by talking about the thoughts and the emotions that they had felt. The chain was attached in the classroom.

Fourth session (late November). The fourth session aimed to create a "CS Box". Firstly, the educator conducted the guided meditation called *"The pearl in the heart"* (Box A2, Appendix A). Then, each child had the task to think about two CS that they wanted to share with their classmates. They wrote these two CS on two little paper strips and inserted them in a box (the "CS Box"). It is important to highlight that it is difficult to be aware of others' CS, but all people have CS also if they do not show them. Therefore, children were encouraged to reflect upon this latter concept and share everything kept in mind, also if they had discovered other's new CS during these meetings. The educator stimulated the debate, preserving the positive climate in the class. The "CS Box" remained in class, and each child was free to add some CS that they discovered in their pearl, other classmates, or in the teachers. Teachers would use the "CS Box" as a starting activity in the morning. Finally, the students had to write down seven CS that the educator would show to the parents.

2.2.2. Post-Intervention Phase

Post-1 (late January). The first testing session began, as usual, with the guided meditation where the educator narrated the story of *"Me and recovered pearl"* (Box A1, Appendix A). Then, two new instruments were administered to the children: the IARA Character Strengths Questionnaire (IARA-CS; Table A1, Appendix A), and the Sociogrammatic Test (Table A2, Appendix A). Students were then asked to talk about ideas, sensations, emotions that had emerged during this investigation.

Post-2 (late May). The second session took place during the month, representing the conclusion of the five-year primary school and the anticipation of the next triennium. Firstly, the educator conducted *"The pearl in the heart"* exercise (Box A2, Appendix A). Then, students were administered for the second time with Sociogrammatic Test and IARA-CS. Finally, students were asked to reflect on the investigation.

2.2.3. Parent Meetings

Parent meetings at the beginning and the end of this educational investigation were important. Meetings were helpful to make the parents aware of which activities were proposed to the children. Moreover, parents provided active support at home to the

children discovering the CS during the intervention. The parents presented the intervention outcomes during the final meeting, and they were asked to participate in similar activities. Educators read both the history of *"Me and recovered pearl"* and the history of *"The pearl in the heart"* (Boxs A1 and A2, Appendix A). Finally, parents were demanded to write their own and sons/daughter's seven CS. This list of CS was then compared with the list written by the children in this last meeting.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Sociogram

The suggested model is based on an accurate definition of sociometric behavior: every group member's choices, refusals, and ignoring (behaviors) are made in preparation for the reciprocity. In other words, every student chooses, refuses, or ignores a classmate who would choose or ignores them in turn [49]. So, questions like *"Who do you think choose you to go on a trip?"* or *"Who do you think choose you to do the homework together?"* are examples of reciprocity that anticipates the choices to undertake. Then, students were invited to fill in the sociogram questionnaire (Table A2, Appendix A) without restricting the number of choices/refusals. In this way, behavior is accurately described as an ignored one or as exploration; in the first case ignoring another classmate means disregarding the other; in the second case, exploration includes both the choice and the refusal. Therefore, the questions are directed to investigate the cohesion index and the exploration/ignoring efficiency index. In this way, it is possible to observe a shift in the relationship strategy, which the CS acknowledgment could influence. This study focused on emotional–relational questions (Table A2, Appendix A; questions number 1 to 5 and 7) and aim-related questions (questions 6 and 8). The following indices were created:

- **O**: non-reciprocal choice carried out by an individual during the exploration (e.g., a child has been chosen or refused by someone that he/she had ignored).
- **A⁻**: non-reciprocal choice (e.g., an active choice which is not exchanged).
- **A⁺**: reciprocal choice (e.g., an active choice which is exchanged).
- **AR⁻**: non-reciprocal rejection (e.g., an active refusal which is not exchanged).
- **AR⁺**: reciprocal rejection (e.g., an active refusal which is exchanged).
- *****: ignoring behavior that both individuals exchange.
- Four different representative functions are identified starting from the latter assumptions (Table 1):
- **f1**—Summation of explorations ($\sum A^+$, AR^+)
- **f2**—Summation of non-reciprocal explorations ($\sum A^-$, AR^-)
- **f3**—Summation of reciprocal ignoring behaviors ($\sum *$)
- **f4**—Summation of non-reciprocal choices ($\sum 0$)

The four functions satisfy the entirety of the possible sociometric behaviors within the group, according to the formula: $f1 + f2 + f3 + f4 = n - 1$ (Table 1). These assumptions could be re-elaborated to isolate the sociometric behavior principles and the related dynamics (Tables A3 and A4, Appendix A).

Each classmate position would be helpful to visualize the most important group sociometric indices:

- **Cohesion index:** this index relates the exploration frequency in the group with the ignoring behavior frequency. Under the unit, the ignoring behavior prevails; above the unit, explorations prevail.
- **Exploration efficiency index:** this index relates the number of the correct explorations with the total number of the explorations. The index takes a value from zero to one; the higher the value, the more correct explorations are.
- **Ignoring behavior efficiency index:** this index relates the number of the correct ignoring behaviors with the total number of the ignoring behavior. Values around the unit mean that most of the ignoring behaviors were correct.

Table 1. Sociogram analysis performed for the present investigation.

CHILD-REN	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	f1	f2	f3	f4
1		A−	A−	A−	A+	A−	AR−	AR+	A−	A−	A+	A−	A−	A−	A−	A−	A−	*	A−	3	14	1	
2	O		*	O	*	A−	O	A+	*	*	*	*	*	O	AR−	O	*	*	*	1	2	10	5
3	O	*		O	O	*	O	O	*	AR−	*	*	AR−	A+	O	*	*	*	A−	1	3	8	6
4	O	A−	A−		AR+	*	AR+	AR+	*	*	*	*	AR−	A+	AR−	*	AR−	AR−	A−	4	7	6	1
5	A+	*	AR−	AR+		AR−	A+	AR−	*	A−	*	A+	A+	O	AR−	AR−	A+	*	*	6	6	5	1
6	O	O	*	*	O		O	O	*	*	*	A−	*	AR−	AR−	A+	O	*	AR−	1	4	7	6
7	O	AR−	AR−	AR+	A+	AR−		AR+	*	*	A−	O	*	AR+	AR−	AR+	AR−	AR−	AR−	5	8	3	2
8	AR+	A+	AR−	AR+	A−	A−	AR+		AR−	A−	*	A−	AR−	AR+	O	A−	AR−	AR−	AR−	5	11	1	1
9	O	*	*	*	*	*	*	O		A+	*	O	*	O	*	*	*	*	AR−	1	1	12	4
10	O	*	O	*	O	*	*	O	A+		A+	A−	O	O	*	*	A+	*	*	3	1	8	6
11	A+	*	*	*	*	*	O	*	*	A+		A+	*	O	*	A+	O	AR−	*	4	1	10	3
12	AR−	*	*	*	A+	O	AR−	O	A−	O	A+		A+	O	*	*	AR−	*	*	3	4	7	4
13	O	*	O	O	A+	*	*	O	*	A−	*	A+		O	AR−	AR−	O	AR−	*	2	4	6	6
14	AR−	A−	A+	A+	AR−	A−	AR+	AR+	A−	AR−	A−	A−	AR−		O	AR+	A−	A−	A−	5	12		1
15	O	A−	A−	O	O	A−	O	AR−	*	*	*	*	O	A−		AR+	O	A−	A−	1	7	4	6
16	O	A−	*	*	O	A+	AR+	O	*	*	A+	*	O	A+	AR+		O	*	*	5	1	7	5
17	AR−	*	*	O	A+	AR−	A−	O	*	A+	A−	A−	A−	O	AR−	AR−		*	*	2	8	5	3
18	*	*	*	O	*	*	O	O	*	*	O	*	O	O	O	*	*		*			11	7
19	O	*	O	O	*	O	O	O	O	*	*	*	*	O	O	O	*	*				8	10
TOTAL																				52	94	119	77

Legend: A+: reciprocal choice; AR+: reciprocal rejection; A−: non-reciprocal choice; AR−: non-reciprocal rejection; O: non-reciprocal choice made during an exploration; *: ignoring behavior exchanged by both subjects.

2.3.2. IARA-CS: The Bloom's Taxonomy-Based Questionnaire

According to what was exposed in the Introduction about Bloom's Taxonomy, we created an ad hoc taxonomy questionnaire (Table A1, Appendix A) called IARA-CS. The tool investigates six different areas:

- *Recall and Recognize* (item 1, 5, 9, 13): this area investigates how much the children have been fully aware of and memorize what they learned.
- *Understand* (item 2, 6, 10, 14): this area carries the children to a cognitive level and helps them translate, paraphrase, represent and give a category to everything learned.
- *Apply* (item 3, 7, 11, 15): this area investigates the ability to implement and use learned during everyday life.
- *Analyze* (item 4, 8, 12, 16): this area investigates the ability to use the learned knowledge to understand new concepts throughout conscious criticism. In other words, it is given importance to discrimination and integration.
- *Evaluate* (item 17, 18, 19, 20): it is related to critical and evaluation skills.
- *Create* (item 21, 22, 23): the capacity to create new outcomes from the past knowledge.

The open questions content was analyzed starting from five categories in agreement with meanings present in literature: Friendship [52], Kindness [53], Self-esteem [54], Self-Awareness [55], Mutual aid [56]. Based on the theoretical categories identified, it was possible to outline the results of the content analysis by reporting short significant textual units for each category.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

The *t*-test for paired samples was used to compare differences in the sociogrammatic questionnaire between post-1 and post-2 after confirming data normality with the Shapiro–Wilk test. Therefore, data were presented as mean ± standard deviation. Moreover, the cohesion index, the exploration index, and the ignoring behavior index for each class were considered. The proportion of missing data for IARA-CS was <4% for nine variables in IARA-CS after the investigations were concluded. The missing value analysis using Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test was run on variables included in the analysis to control missing data from the IARA-CS. Results indicated that the data were most likely missing at random rather than systematic bias as MCAR test was not significant (pre-test: Chi-square = 57.74, p = 0.93; post-test (Chi-square = 104.74, p = 0.7). Data were then analyzed using McNemar's test to verify "yes" and "no" answers for all questionnaire items. Additionally, to determine the meaningfulness of the results and

strength of association, odds ratio (OR) and corresponding confidence interval (CI) of 95% were also calculated for each item.). Fischer Exact (2 × 3) test was used, with (2 × 2) Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons to determine differences between groups in both testing sessions (post-1 and post-2). Kuder–Richardson test (KR20) was used to assess internal consistency for questionnaire sub-scales on dichotomous variables.

3. Results

3.1. Sociometric Measures

Regarding question number 1 (*If a trip was organized, which classmate would you choose to bring with you?*), significant differences were found between post-1 (2.47 ± 1.81) and post-2 (1.75 ± 1.65) in the first function (f1, *p = 0.012*; $t_{(64)}$ = 2.59). Another significant difference was found in the third function (f3, *p = 0.007*, $t_{(64)}$ = 2.79) regarding question number 1: the post-1 (9.97 ± 4.57) decreased compared with the post-2 (11.38 ± 4.94). Additionally, regarding question number 5 (*Within your classmates, to whom would you confide a secret?*), post-1 (17.43 ± 2.56) decreased significantly (*p = 0.01*, $t_{(64)}$ = 2.67) to post-2 (18.12 ± 2.8). Additional differences were observed in the first function regarding question number 6 (*Within your classmates, who would you choose to do your homework?*): post-1 (0.95 ± 1.18) increased relative to the post-2 (0.72 ± 0.97); *p = 0.05*, $t_{(64)}$ = −1.96. Further, post-1 (0.92 ± 1.12) decreased relative to the post-2 (0.6 ± 0.84); *p = 0.05*, $t_{(64)}$ = −1.98, in the first function of the question number 8 (*Within your classmates, who had you indicated at the question number 6 in order to do the homework together?*). General indeces in Tables A3 and A4 are subdivided by classroom as follow: Table A5, Class 5A; in Table A6, Class 5B; Table A7, Class 5C; see Appendix A.

3.2. Bloom's Taxonomy

Closed Questions

Table 2 represents post-1 and post-2 responses in IARA-CS for each classroom. Children showed no significant difference between testing occasions using the standard measure of significance (*p* < 0.05). Additionally, there were no significant differences between post-1 and post-2 when the overall sample of participants was observed (Table 3).

Table 2. Post-1 and post-2 results in IARA-CS for each classroom.

		Classroom A (*n* = 18)				Classroom B (*n* = 23)				Classroom C (*n* = 15)			
	Item#	*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*	*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*	*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*
Remember	1	100	100	/	/	95.7	95.7	1.05 (0.96–1.15)	1	93.3	93.3	/	1
	5	72.2	77.8	3.67 (0.35–38.03)	1	78.3	73.9	1.5 (1.08–2.08)	1	60	73.3	0.4 (0.03–5.15)	0.73
	9	100	94.4	/	/	91.3	91.3	1.11 (0.96–1.27)	1	100	100	/	/
	13	50	44.4	1 (0.16–6.42)	1	52.2	65.2	1.14 (0.21–6.37)	0.55	46.7	53.3	0.13 (0.01_1.32)	1
Understand	2	66.7	55.6	1.4 (0.2–10.03)	0.73	73.9	87	1.5 (0.11–20.3)	0.45	66.7	66.7	1.56 (0.17–14.65)	1
	6	66.7	66.7	3 (0.38–23.68)	1	95.7	87	1.16 (0.98–1.37)	0.63	80	80	2.5 (0.14–42.8)	1
	10	94.4	77.8	1.31 (1.01–1.7)	0.38	91.3	87	1.17 (0.98–1.39)	1	100	93.3	/	/
	14	82.4	76.5	1.4 (1.01–1.96)	1	69.6	73.9	0.37 (0.03–3.91)	1	66.7	46.7	3.33 (1.29.8.59)	0.25
Apply	3	100	76.5	/	/	78.3	87	1.2 (0.98–1.48)	0.73	100	80	/	/
	7	88.9	83.3	1.23 (0.97–1.56)	1	82.6	87	1.18 (0.98–1.44)	1	86.7	86.7	1.18 (0.94–1.49)	1
	11	94.4	88.9	1.13 (0.95–1.35)	1	78.3	73.9	2.33 (0.28–19.17)	1	78.6	50	2.4 (0.17–34.93)	0.22
	15	94.4	77.8	1.31 (1.01–1.7)	0.38	82.6	95.7	0.75 (0.43–1.32)	0.25	86.7	86.7	1.18 (0.94–1.49)	1

Table 2. *Cont.*

	Item#	Classroom A (*n* = 18)				Classroom B (*n* = 23)				Classroom C (*n* = 15)			
		*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*	*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*	*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*
Analyze	4	88.2	82.4	1.25 (0.97–1.61)	1	91.3	91.3	1.11 (0.96–1.27)	1	100	73.3	/	/
	8	88.2	82.4	1.25 (0.97–1.61)	1	82.6	91.3	1.12 (0.96–1.3)	0.69	73.3	86.7	1.22 (0.93–1.52)	0.69
	12	88.9	94.4	1.07 (0.94–1.21)	1	78.3	82.6	1.25 (0.1–15.5)	1	92.9	71.4	1.44 (1–2.08)	0.38
	16	100	83.3	/	/	78.3	73.9	1.5 (1.08–2.08)	1	80	73.3	1.5 (1–2.24)	1
Evaluate	17	66.7	66.7	3 (0.38–23.68)	1	82.6	73.9	1.46 (1.1–1.98)	0.75	64.3	64.3	2.25 (1.08–4.67)	1
	18	16.7	27.8	1.38 (0.1–19.95)	0.69	13.6	18.2	2.67 (0.18–39.63)	1	33.3	40	3.5 (0.37–32.97)	1
	19	50	55.6	0.14 (0.02–1.26)	1	60.9	56.5	0.5 (0.08–2.84)	1	46.7	66.7	6 (0.48–75.34)	0.38
	20	55.6	66.7	1.4 (0.2–10.03)	0.73	55.6	87	0.61 (0.05–7.88)	0.06	71.4	42.9	0.14 (0.01–2)	0.34

Legend: OR (95%CI)—odds ratio with 95% confidence interval; *p*—McNemar's test significance level; p1—post-1; p2—post-2.

Table 3. Post-1 and post-2 results in IARA-CS for overall children.

	Item#	Total (*n* = 56)				
		*p*1 (%)	*p*2 (%)	OR (95%CI)	*p*	KR20
Remember	1	96.4	96.4	53 (1.76–1596.72)	1	
	5	71.4	75	0.61 (0.15–2.55)	0.84	0.21
	9	96.4	64.6	1.06 (0.99–1.13)	1	
	13	50	55.4	0.65 (0.22–1.87)	0.72	
Understand	2	69.6	71.4	1.58 (0.46–5.4)	1	
	6	82.1	78.6	3.17 (0.72–13.87)	0.79	0.42
	10	94.6	85.7	1.18 (1.1–1.32)	0.23	
	14	72.7	67.3	1.56 (0.45–5.35)	0.66	
Apply	3	90.9	81.8	1.25 (1.09–1.44)	0.3	
	7	85.7	85.7	1.2 (1.1–1.36)	1	0.45
	11	83.3	72.2	2.47 (0.56–10.86)	0.21	
	15	87.5	87.5	1.19 (0.12–11.71)	1	
Analyze	4	92.7	83.6	1.21 (1.07–1.38)	0.27	
	8	81.8	87.3	1.18 (1.05–1.34)	0.63	0.49
	12	85.5	83.6	0.7 (0.08–6.47)	1	
	16	85.7	76.8	1.37 (1.15–1.63)	0.38	
Evaluate	17	72.7	69.1	0.46 (0.11–1.93)	0.85	
	18	20	27.3	2.83 (0.71–11.27)	0.45	0.03
	19	53.6	58.9	0.61 (0.21–1.78)	0.72	
	20	60	69.1	0.52 (0.15–1.75)	0.46	

Legend: OR (95%CI)—odds ratio with 95% confidence interval; *p*—McNemar's test significance level; KR-20—Kuder–Richardson test, p1—post-1; p2—post-2.

All internal consistency coefficients (KR20) values for the IARA-CS were below 0.70, which is considered poor reliability.

Figures 1 and 2 represent classroom comparisons for IARA-CS in post-1 and post-2. There was a significant difference between groups for sub-scale Apply (*p* = 0.03) in post-1 only. Additionally, in post-2, a significant difference between classrooms was found for sub-scale Evaluate (*p* = 0.03).
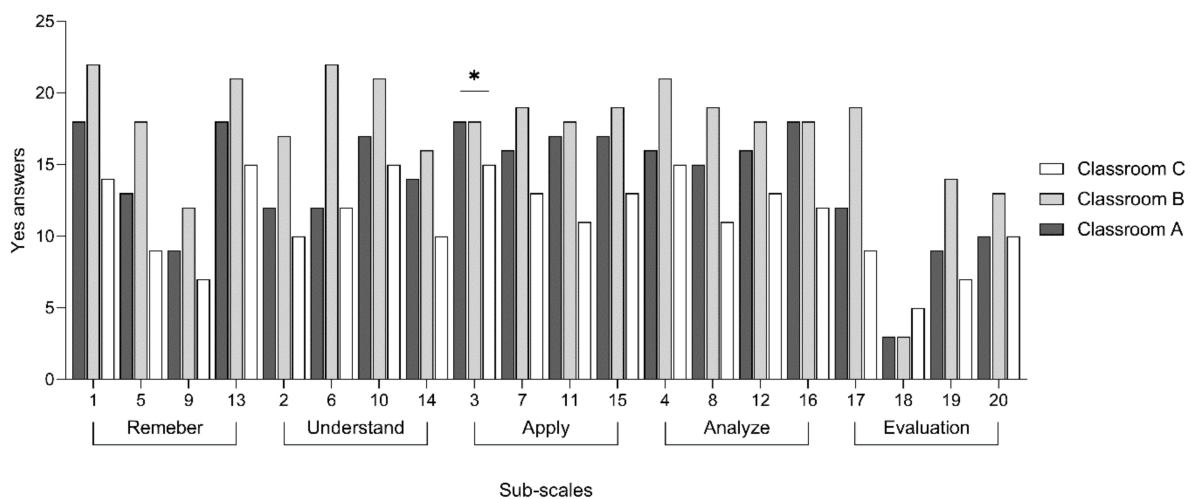
Figure 1. Comparing IARA-CS responses between classrooms at post-1; * = $p < 0.05$.
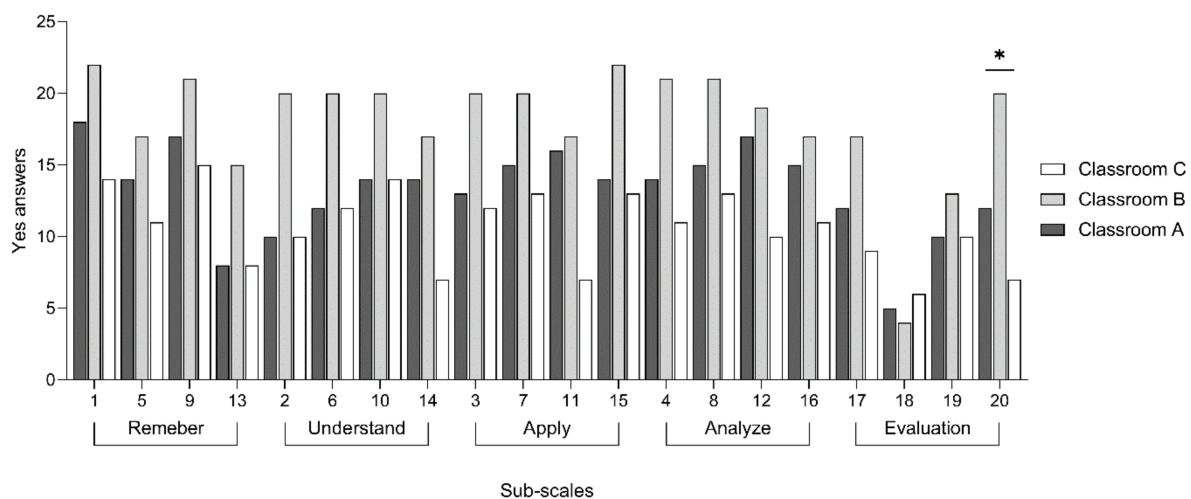

Figure 2. Comparing IARA-CS responses between classrooms at post-2; * = $p < 0.05$.

3.3. Open Questions

The open questions make it clear how much the CS are valuable resources to improve relationship ability and socialization. It is a shared opinion that sharing the CS prepares for a rich emotional life. Furthermore, it was possible to trace back the responses (IARA-CS) to common themes (Friendship; Kindness; Self-esteem; Self-awareness; Mutual Aid). In the following lines, we present some representative phrases:

- Friendship: throughout my CS, I can make new friends/I feel part of a larger family.
- Kindness: being kind is helpful to make new friends.
- Self-esteem: showing the CS is important to make myself known/I feel stronger.
- Self-awareness: my CS can improve me/I discovered I had qualities I did not know I had.
- Mutual aid: knowing one's own and other's CS is useful to understand each other and help us more/CS can give us strength and help us protect each other.

4. Discussion

Our study demonstrated the efficacy of IARA in improving classmate collaboration, awareness, and development of CS. Psycho-pedagogical interventions working on these characteristics showed increased cross-cultural well-being levels worldwide [57–59]. Many studies have proved that CS awareness is associated with satisfaction and the quality of

life [60] and with mental well-being [61] by reducing psychological and psychopathological symptoms [35–37,62]. It has also been demonstrated that there is a correlation between increased well-being in childhood and the next academic performance [63]: IARA could be thought to be useful to increase well-being in childhood and lay the foundation for adult well-being.

Furthermore, IARA has ad hoc meditation which can be counted among the various guided meditation techniques [64]. In general, these techniques improve awareness and attention to one's emotional activations [65–67], which improves emotional regulation and relationship quality [68,69]. We chose guided meditation because the children would go towards the passage of the school cycle. With this regard, Duan [70] demonstrated that high-CS awareness-level individuals employ better psychological and social resources and decreased stress levels. In addition, Duan and colleagues [58,60] showed that individuals with high-CS awareness had increased vitality levels. They perceive the adverse events as less harmful and improve their resilience. Although the stress level related to the passage of the school cycle was not investigated, sociogram and Bloom's taxonomy seem to demonstrate an increasing self-reflection capacity and decreasing ignoring behavior, indices belonging to well-being.

Furthermore, Seligman and collaborators [71] demonstrated that increased CS awareness is associated with increased psychological well-being and social skills. Regarding the last point, sociogram analysis brings out every student who chooses, refuses, or ignores a classmate, and vice-versa. The sociogram data tell us that children varied their explorations significantly, improving some of them. In one question—*Within your classmates, to whom would you confide a secret?*—we demonstrated an increase in post-1, which, however, decreased in post-2. We infer that the intervention phase at first contributed to the increase in summation of explorations and then decrease in the post-2 because children have strengthened the choice of the same classmate to confide a secret. Our inference seems to be supported by another question—*Within your classmates, who would you choose to do your homework?* However, exploration increased from post-1 to post-2 in a less intimate question, defining the possibility of collaboration. If, on the one hand, the intervention on qualities increased the explorations, on the other hand, it could have strengthened the search for those companions who, possessing a certain quality, deserved to receive the confession of a secret, an indirect sign of the increased awareness about CS.

The importance of schools in assisting youth in developing social, cognitive, and emotional skills is not stressed enough. Twenty-first-century schooling has been conceptualized in many different ways and has multiple components, such as new technology, open learning spaces, interdisciplinary curricula, and new pedagogies. In close cooperation with the pedagogy issues necessary for the definition of the new paradigm of education and social context, the proposal within this research project represents a possibility to achieve a critical and deep reflection. All the topics examined by the Genevan philosopher Morin [72], which always support the evolution dynamics, the comprehension of the human being and the mindset and especially the growth combined with the learning, become even more fundamental during the pandemic events [73].

Furthermore, the changes suggested by Baldacci [74] allow us to re-elaborate all the proposals that would intervene within an educational–social curriculum [75]. Moreover, the IARA model and Bloom's Taxonomy are helpful to understand the fact that educational difficulties nowadays need to be thoroughly examined to be understood entirely. In this systemic field, the normative pedagogy encounters different sense issues described in other moments by many authors, such as Illich [76], Hall [77], and Eco [78]. Close to the centenary of the Brazilian educator of suppression, Paulo Freire [79], these concepts would represent some keys of reading and some pedagogy interpretations and, probably, they would offer hope and development in a whole person conscientization view [80–83].

The activities promoted with IARA in educational contexts favor students' understanding from the emotional point of view, creating a greater and significant cognitive bond [76]. Critical thinking stimulates the understanding of the differences between peo-

ple, recognizing individual specificities in an ethno-pedagogical perspective [77], a way to foster analysis and understanding of classroom dynamics and possible future psycho-pedagogical interventions. The use of technology in classrooms in an exaggerated way can lead to a flattening of thinking, destroying the complexity of human beings and trivializing learning itself.

Regarding the psycho-pedagogical approach, we are aware of the Strath Haven Positive Psychology Program [27,84]. This program was developed in the USA and is designed to teach school children the necessary skills to create positive emotions and identify and use their own CS. However, this program consists of 20–25 lessons and uses a questionnaire. Peterson and Seligman's [27] Values in Action (VIA) consists of 240-item. Additionally, when reduced [84], the questionnaire consists of 120-item based on 24 CS. IARA compared to Strath Haven, has two advantages: (1) every child is invited to say their qualities and; children are stimulated to get to know others CS through classmates, and the teacher (in this way, he can discover more than 24 character qualities), and (2) IARA consists in four 90 min intervention long sessions and two "recall" sessions; the tools used for interventions are less specific about CS, but more open to children perceptions (i.e., we planned open-questions). With significant, robust, and promising results, positive psycho-pedagogical interventions have been implemented in various settings: (1) across the different school systems; (2) coeducational settings; (3) single-gender schools; (4) students at an age range from 5 to 19; (5) various ethnicities. With all the positive features that psycho-pedagogical interventions bring, we hope that academic curricula can take—as Pawelski [85] said—a "positive turn in the topics studied. Future teachers should present topics and subject matter that seek to understand human flourishing: the literature curriculum could study hope and gratitude as topics in their analysis of character and text; the cultural and religious curriculum could explore meditation practices; Art history could study joy, empathy, and creative expression.

The psycho-pedagogical literature confirms that IARA is a well-structured approach that is useful for teachers who care about the flourishing of children. Along this line, Palmer [86] published an interesting article entitled: "Teaching with heart and soul reflections on spirituality in teacher education". Teachers should increasingly acquire the close synergy between teaching and positive emotions, insisting on the development of CS and on the fact that these are useful for the well-being of oneself and others.

5. Conclusions

The IARA model proved to be a useful tool to improve CS awareness and cooperation/cohesion among fifth-grade children. Responses highlight a greater self-efficacy and inclination to help others, and openness towards the other. However, more studies are necessary to verify if and how these achievements are kept, influencing long-term life quality. Future investigations should have a larger sample size, a longer follow-up, and a questionnaire involving teachers and parents. Moreover, it can be useful to use a mixed-method study to explore better the awareness by teachers, parents, and children on CS. The mix-method approach through data triangulation could test and confirm, for example, a coherence perception about CS among teachers, parents, and children.

Limitation of the Study

As aforementioned in the text, we are aware that a Values in Action Inventory of Strengths-120 (VIA-IS-120; [27,84] also exists in the Italian version. However, this tool (created to measure the CS) has two main concerns: it requires the presence of an adult and consists of 120 items, too long questionnaire for ten-year-old children. On the other hand, researchers collected pretest and posttest data, including 2-year follow-up data, for the students and their teachers and parents [27]. Another weakness of the present study is the lack of baseline information and no follow-up assessment.

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A.D.G.; investigation, A.D.G., W.S.; data curation, A.D.G., W.S.; writing—original draft preparation, A.D.G., W.S.; writing—review and editing, A.D.G., C.M., V.Z., W.S. and G.K.; visualization, A.D.G.; supervision, A.D.G. and A.M.P.; project administration, A.D.G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The paper reports a study that was conducted in accordance with APA ethical standards. In line with the ethical standards of the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all parents of the children involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The dataset of the study is available upon request of interested parties.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest. The study is presented clearly, honestly, and without fabrication, falsification, or inappropriate data manipulation.

Appendix A

Box A1. Me and the Recovered Pearl.

This novel talks about Ego; one day, this child discovered a great treasure, or rather, he discovered it at night because there is even more tranquility during the night. Ego was sleeping calmly in his bed, and he was dreaming something particular. He was dreaming that he had discovered a very special place, which probably he had never seen before in reality, but others had talked about it yet: it was the secret place. However, nobody had ever managed to explain Ego exactly where this place was because the street was totally forgotten on awakening. It was only known that this place supervised children's desires and treasures. Ego understood that he was exactly in that place during the dream because he was very fine and was not even a little afraid. Perhaps some lights were needed, but, looking better, somewhere an object lighted up as soon as Ego had entered, but I can not tell you if the object was on the right or on the left, in front of Ego or behind him, near or far.

While Ego was moving closer to the object little by little, the light became stronger and stronger. Ego was already near enough to the object when he realized that there was a tiny bright circle thing in front of him. Intrigued but afraid, the ego moved by the child courage and curiosity, he tried to grab the object. Suddenly, a circle of smooth pearl appeared on his hand. Now the pearl was on his hand, and Ego believed that he could have watched it endlessly, without being tired. He discovered that inside the pearl, in turn, there was a world to be explored, but the most beautiful thing was to find out that the world cited before took shape thanks to Ego's emotions and feelings! His glee, his joy, his enthusiasm, his creativity, his generosity. Being a child was making special and alive that world inside the pearl, which was above the palm of one hand. Ego had discovered his treasure, his world made by his qualities.

Then, he thought: "I want to show it, I want my pearl could help everyone being so special!". But how could he bring it with him, remember all about this treasure, and show it outside this secret place? He thought about it a moment, he gripped the pearl strongly in his hand, and he brought it near his heart while he was closing his eyes.

Ego woke up in his bed with a lively memory of the dream, many emotions and feelings inside his heart: his desire came true! He managed to bring the biggest and the most precious treasure from the secret place because this treasure was inside him, inside his heart, and it was impossible to lose it. It belonged to him: it was Ego himself and his qualities!

He was full of happiness and gratitude and did not want to forget the wonderful discovery, so he jumped out of bed, collected a paper, and began to draw the pearl with his favorite colors. Then, he thought of donating the pearl to other children. Therefore, he decided to put it in the backpack and bring it to school. When Ego entered the classroom with his classmates, he noticed that someone had affixed a strand at the school. They were very curious, and they sat down silently without noting the absence of the teacher. Suddenly, they looked around as if they were thinking the same thing. They opened the backpack and . . . magic! Every child extracted a pearl drawing! Ego understood that all the children had made the same dream (but was it actually a dream?). He understood the strand's role. He wrote his name on the pearl while the other children were doing the same; then, he stood up and hung up the pearl. When the teacher arrived, the class was unusually calm, and it was shining with a thousand colors: a pearls line appeared in front of her. She understood that every pearl represented a child and the children's worlds.

At that time, she remembered the dream that she had made when she was a child. She looked at her hand and, suddenly, she found her pearl with a tear of happiness again.

Box A2. The pearl in the heart.

Find a comfortable position, lean the back to the chair and lean the hands on the thighs.

Do not cross the arms or the legs. Close your eyes and pay attention to your breath. It is calm and pendular. Do not increase or decrease it. Do three deep breaths. The air enters from the nose and exits from the mouth. Feel the calm, lightning, loving air entering throughout each breath. Feel how the cells release what they do not need anymore.

Imagine that our mind can go down and down throughout the neck, shoulder, and chest until the heart.

We can observe ourselves tiny version in the heart. We can enter and find a safe place to be used as a shelter every time we need it. We are in our hearts, and we notice light filtering from a corner that draws our attention while we look around. We move closer, and we discover a pearl. We look at it, and we notice that our face is dazzled by all the colors. Now, we take control of the pearl and . . . magic! On its surface, we can observe one or more qualities of ourselves! We can also see some words or images. We grip the pearl in our hands, and we thank it for all we have seen. Lovingly we replace the pearl, but we know that we can return every time we need it. Bring your attention again to the breath and get in touch with your body that it is leaning on the chair. When you are ready, open your eyes and come back to the here and now.
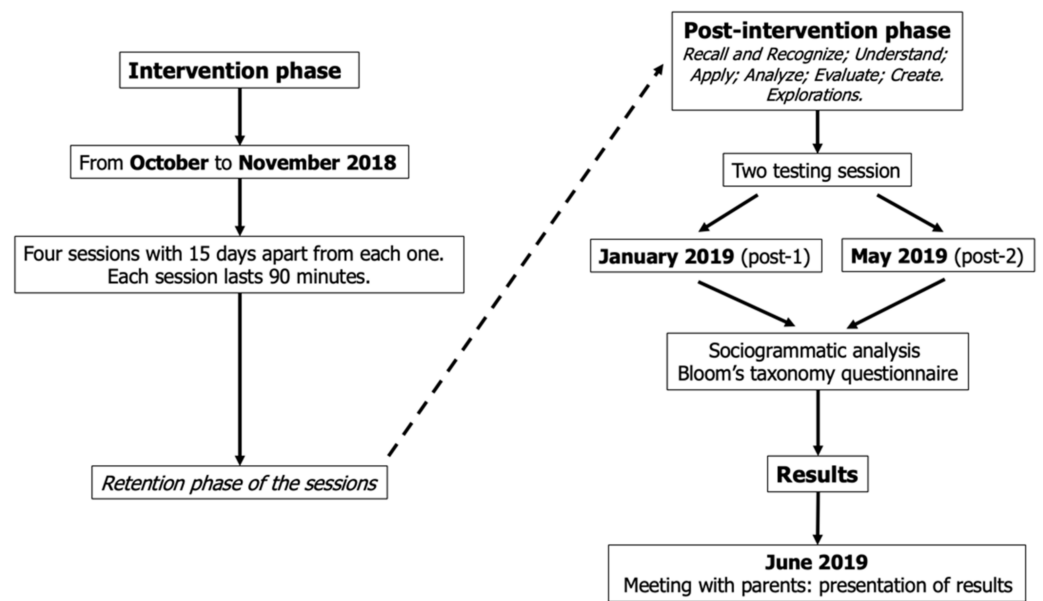
Figure A1. Flowchart of intervention stages.

Table A1. Ad hoc IARA-CS based on Bloom's Taxonomy.

Yes/No Questions
1. Are you aware of having one or more character strengths?
2. Could you draw one of your character strengths?
3. Do you believe in the usefulness of your character strengths for your classmate relationships?
4. Could you recognize many other character strengths in your classmates?
5. Is there a character strength that you know to have more than the others?
6. Do you think that your classmates could have some hidden character strengths that they do not show?
7. Do you know that you can not always show your character strengths?
8. Do you know that you will continue to hold it if you do not show character strength?
9. Do you believe that your character strengths could improve your relationships?
10. Can you recognize at least one of your classmates' character strengths?
11. Did you easily create the pearl chain with your classmate?
12. Did you think that the pearl added by the teacher was useful to the pearl chain built with your classmate?
13. Did you remember two character strengths that you shared with the class?
14. Do you also believe your classmates hold your best character strength?
15. Are you able to use your character strengths correctly with others?
16. Are you aware that the character strengths you shared with the class have not been lost?
17. Can you recognize some classmates' character strengths that you do not hold?
18. Do you believe it can be useful not to show the character's strengths?
19. Did any classmate write a character strength that they do not hold?
20. Can you recognize your and an adult's character strengths?
Open-ended questions
21. Do you think your positive qualities could improve your relationships? How?
22. Which other qualities do you know?
23. Throughout which activities would you spread your positive qualities in your life?

Table A2. The sociogram's questions created ad hoc.

If a Trip Was Organized, Which Classmate Would You Choose to Go with You?
1. If a trip was organized, which classmate would you not choose to go with you?
2. Within your classmates, who did choose you to go on a trip together (question number one)?
3. Within your classmates, who did choose you not to go on a trip together (question number two)?
4. Within your classmates, to whom would you tell a secret?
5. Within your classmates, who would you choose to do the homework together?
6. Within your classmates, who did choose you to tell you a secret (question number five)?
7. Within your classmates, who did choose you to do the homework together (question number six)?

Table A3. The sociogram test, including the cohesion index, the exploration index, and the respective formulas.

Value	Definition	Formula	Possible Results	Significance
Cohesion index	This index relates the explorations frequency with the frequency of the ignoring behavior	$(f1 + f2)/(f3 + f4)$	Low cohesion index if <0.5	Ignoring behaviors prevail
			High cohesion index if >0.5	Explorations prevail
Exploration efficiency index	This index relates the correct explorations with the total number of the explorations	$(f1)/(f1 + f2)$	Low exploration efficiency if <0.5	Non-reciprocal explorations prevail
			High exploration efficiency if >0.5	Correct explorations prevail
Ignoring behavior efficiency index	This index relates the correct ignoring behaviors with the total number of the ignoring behaviors	$(f3)/(f3 + f4)$	Low ignoring behavior efficiency if <0.5	Non-reciprocal ignoring behaviors prevail
			High ignoring behavior efficiency if >0.5	Correct ignoring behaviors prevail

Table A4. Dynamic group periods based on the cohesion index.

Value	Definition	Dynamic Period	Significance
Low cohesion	High ignoring behavior efficiency with low exploration efficiency	Initial period	Despondency of the initial ignoring pole and onset of the exploration phase
	High ignoring behavior efficiency with high exploration efficiency	Intermediate period with sub-groups	The sub-groups purpose is to improve the reciprocity and escape from the ignoring behavior
Middle cohesion	Low ignoring behavior efficiency with low exploration efficiency	Central period	The central period reflects a standstill in which the relational dynamics are changing
	High exploration efficiency with high ignoring behavior efficiency	Intermediate period with sub-groups	It represents the passage from the central to the final phase, in which the reciprocal explorations prevail. This period is characterized by high cohesion, high exploration efficiency, and high ignoring behavior efficiency
High cohesion	High exploration efficiency with low ignoring behavior efficiency	Final period	In this part, the explorations prevail, and the ignoring behaviors, if present, are not reciprocal

Table A5. 5A results relative to the cohesion index, exploration index, and ignoring behavior index.

Questions	Indices	January	Relation	May
1	Cohesion index	0.33	<	0.56
	Exploration efficiency index	0.28	<	0.34
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.75	>	0.72
3	Cohesion index	0.26	<	0.32
	Exploration efficiency index	0.35	<	0.38
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.87	>	0.83
5	Cohesion index	0.08	<	0.11
	Exploration efficiency index	0.30	>	0.27
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.95	>	0.92
6	Cohesion index	0.13	<	0.14
	Exploration efficiency index	0.40	>	0.39
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.92	>	0.91
7	Cohesion index	0.09	>	0.08
	Exploration efficiency index	0.58	>	0.51
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.96	>	0.96
8	Cohesion index	0.11	<	0.12
	Exploration efficiency index	0.36	<	0.42
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.93	>	0.93

Table A6. 5B results relative to the cohesion index, exploration index, and ignoring behavior index.

Questions	Indices	January	Relation	May
1	Cohesion index	0.30	<	0.44
	Exploration efficiency index	0.22	<	0.38
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.82	>	0.77
3	Cohesion index	0.25	<	0.31
	Exploration efficiency index	0.22	<	0.35
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.81	>	0.81
5	Cohesion index	0.08	<	0.12
	Exploration efficiency index	0.40	=	0.40
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.95	>	0.93
6	Cohesion index	0.09	<	0.15
	Exploration efficiency index	0.30	<	0.42
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.94	>	0.91
7	Cohesion index	0.07	<	0.09
	Exploration efficiency index	0.44	<	0.53
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.96	>	0.95
8	Cohesion index	0.09	<	0.14
	Exploration efficiency index	0.38	<	0.46
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.94	>	0.92

Table A7. 5C results relative to the cohesion index, exploration index, and ignoring behavior index.

Questions	Indices	January	Relation	May
1	Cohesion index	0.74	>	0.61
	Exploration efficiency index	0.36	>	0.31
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.61	<	0.66
3	Cohesion index	0.45	>	0.33
	Exploration efficiency index	0.42	>	0.32
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.71	<	0.80
5	Cohesion index	0.11	>	0.09
	Exploration efficiency index	0.24	>	0.14
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.92	<	0.93
6	Cohesion index	0.18	>	0.13
	Exploration efficiency index	0.24	<	0.26
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.87	<	0.91
7	Cohesion index	0.11	>	0.08
	Exploration efficiency index	0.29	<	0.38
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.92	<	0.95
8	Cohesion index	0.09	=	0.09
	Exploration efficiency index	0.21	<	0.28
	Ignoring behavior efficiency index	0.93	<	0.93

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