Teaching Strategies and Prejudice Toward Immigrant and Disabled Students

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Abstract—The teacher's attitude plays a decisive role in promoting the development of the non-native or disabled student and counteracting hypothetical negative attitudes and prejudice towards those who are "different". The objective of the present research is to measure the relationship between teachers' prejudices towards disabled and/or immigrant students as predictors of teaching-learning strategies. A cross-sectional study involved 200 Italian female teachers who completed an anamnestic questionnaire, the Assessment Teaching Scale, the Italian Modern and Classical Prejudices Scale towards people with intellectual disability (ID), and the Pettigrew and Meertens' Blatant Subtle Prejudice Scale. Confirming research hypotheses, data underline the predictive role of prejudice on teaching strategies, and in particular on the socio-emotional and communicative-relational dimensions. Results underline that general training appears necessary, especially for younger generations of teachers.

Keywords—Disabled students, Immigrant students, instructional competence, prejudice, teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE teaching process represents a complex activity and involves the presence of an asymmetric educational relationship, characterized by actions intentionally produced by two poles, namely the teacher who transmits knowledge and the students who seek and desire to learn. The purpose of the teaching activity is to bring about a change in the student's learning, motivating him to want to learn. In accordance with the Organization for Economic Co-operation (OCSE, 2005) there are no single set of skills and behaviors that are universally effective for all types of students and school situations. In fact, in examining the activity of teaching, it is essential to consider two interconnected elements: on the one hand, the teacher's effectiveness and, on the other, the choice of ways in which teachers perform their duties.

Although it is difficult to identify the unique definition of "effective teacher", several authors have tried to provide their own interpretations, by investigating characterizing aspects. Longo and Zanniello [1] argue that the teacher's effectiveness is understood actions aimed at directing teaching, programming, and the choice of a personalized methodology and the evaluation. Morganti [2], on the other hand, underlines that the effective teacher is the one who possesses a range of skills that allow him/her to evaluate the effects of the teaching practices and to select, through his/her abilities (emotional, communicative, social and prosocial), the most appropriate and responsive actions to the needs of the students, so that they

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reach the pre-established development goals.

The common basic assumption in the various definitions concerns the idea that teaching is characterized not only by disciplinary contents and specific techniques, but, above all, by methodologies that concern different aspects of the teacher's personality and professionalism.

An effective teacher is one who masters two types of interconnected skills: the first, disciplinary, referring to the teacher's scientific-didactic and curricular sector and the second, socio-emotional, referring to the teacher's defining peculiarities, such as personal, psycho-demographic and technical-instrumental aspects [3]. Disciplinary and socio-emotional skills influence the third element that must be considered in the teaching activity, which is the teaching style.

The teaching style is the set of needs, beliefs and behaviors that the teacher assumes in the classroom. This pertains to how information is presented, interacting with students, managing school assignments, and supporting the learning process [4].

The figure of the teacher plays a crucial role in interaction with students; he questions one's own orientations, values, ideas and prejudices. The attitude that the teacher takes in the classroom appears fundamental in order to establish a good environment in their relationship with students [5].

Chiari maintains that elements of a good classroom atmosphere, namely justice, equality, mutual respect, represent prerequisites for good scholastic learning, but also for the acquisition of the sense of social identity, of civil belonging of every citizen, which makes him capable, not only to work in collaboration with others, but to have real experiences of democracy [6], [7].

The teacher's attitude plays a decisive role above all in promoting development of the non-native or disabled child, and counteracting hypothetical negative attitudes towards those who are "different". For these reasons, integration should assume attitudes of exchange, reciprocity and coexistence while maintaining one's identity intact [8].

The teacher's primary task is to strengthen a cooperative style and to promote the development of shared values and authentic community life in the classroom [6], [7], in which the fundamental component is constituted by diversity and from multiple points of view.

It is interesting to understand the role of the prejudice and stereotype in the school context. From studies carried out, it is shown that teachers tend to place prejudice outside the school, they try to prove themselves open, available and free of negative attitudes [8]. The almost non-existent form of

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prejudice among teachers suggests that there is a need to give a self-image that is adequate for the professional role, which requires an attitude of openness towards others.

Whether prejudice is explicit or implicit, accurate or not, students' perception on themselves influences their cognitive and behavioral growth and, in many cases, can influence choices of deviant conduct. Whether the teachers' judgment is accurate or not, being in a vicious circle of individual and social responses significantly affects the student's cognitive and behavioral growth [9].

The influence of possible presence of prejudice towards disabled or immigrant has been shown to be even stronger than student's internal variables [10]. It is appropriate that objective and subjective evaluations should be integrated so that the child feels that he is considered as a whole and is worth more than his negative results (or behaviors).

In accordance with the literature, the present research investigates the relationship between latent and manifest prejudices of teachers towards disabled and/or immigrant students as predictive variables for teaching-learning strategies, hypothesizing that: a) the presence of non-native students and those with disabilities can influence socio-emotional, communicative and strictly didactic teaching strategies; b) the predictive role of prejudice on teaching styles and strategies.

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

A. Participants and Procedures

The research involved 200 Sicilian female teachers, aged between 22 and 59 years old (M = 41.83; SD = 8.04), who worked in four school stages: kindergarten, primary, middle and high school.

Inclusion criteria comprised the desire and satisfaction of participating in the research. The consent of the school authorities was sought before the distribution and withdrawal of the tools

The questionnaires were anonymous and the participants were provided with the following information: the purpose and structure of the study, voluntary participation, the guarantee of anonymity and the free will to withdraw from participation, without disadvantages at the time of withdrawal. All participants provided written informed consent.

B. Instruments

Participants completed an anamnestic questionnaire, the Assessment Teaching Scale (ECAD – EP), the Italian Modern and Classical Prejudices Scale (MCPS-IT) towards people with ID, the Pettigrew and Meertens' Blatant Subtle Prejudice Scale.

The ECAD-EP questionnaire [11] arises from the need to create a valid and accurate tool, able to identify and measure the teachers' strategic skills. It is a questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale (from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree") consisting of 58 items grouped into three factor dimensions: Factor A (Socio-emotional dimension), Factor B (Communicative-relational dimension), and Factor C (Didactic dimension).

The Modern and Classical Prejudices Scale-Italian Version [12] was adapted from the original 19-item Modern and Classical Prejudices Scale [13] to assess prejudice about people

with ID. The tool distinguishes two forms of prejudice: explicit/classical and implicit/modern. The classical form refers to direct and overt prejudices (e.g.: "People with ID commit crimes"); the modern one, to underline hidden prejudices (e.g.: "Most people with ID are not victims of discrimination").

The Subtle and Blatant Prejudice Scale by Pettigrew and Meertens [14], in the Italian version by Arcuri and Boca [15], consists of 20 items, divided into two subscales: ten items to explore subtle prejudice, divided into accentuation of cultural differences, denial of positive emotions towards immigrants, and protection of traditional values; to which are added ten items that investigate the blatant prejudice, characterized by a sense of threat, denial and anti-intimacy towards the immigrant person [16].

C. Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted with SPSS 26.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive analysis was used in order to measure mean scores. The multivariate analysis of variance was used in order to value the influence of independent variables (years of experience, presence or absence of students with disabilities and/or immigrant) in ECAD-EP subdimensions.

The same analysis was carried out to measure the influence of independent variable on prejudice towards people with ID and immigrants.

The hierarchical regression for separate blocks was used in order to explore the predictive contribution of the prejudice on the self-perceived instructional competence, including anamnestic data (in the first block) and prejudice toward non-native and disabled students (in the second block).

III. RESULTS

A descriptive analysis was conducted in order to investigate the anamnestic data. In reference to the school stage, 43% of participants worked in the high school, 37% in kindergarten, 19% in a primary school, and only 1% teachers in a middle school. The participating teachers in the research had an average experience of 3.91 years (with a range between 1 and 23 years and standard deviation equal to 4.76). The average number of students for each classroom was equal to 16.19. Furthermore, 63% declared to have students with intellectual and/or physical disability, and 46 % with immigrant students.

In reference to the ECAD-EP scores, the ANOVA was carried out in order to verify the influence of years of experience on socio-emotional, communicative-relational, and didactic factors. The first ANOVA shows that, with reference to the Factor A, experience influences only the communicative adaptation (F = 1.62, p < .05). With reference to the Factor B, experience seems to influence the ability of conflict resolution (F = 1.63, p < .05). Finally, with reference to the Factor C, experience's teacher influences the control capacity (F = 1.61, p < .05).

The MANOVA was carried out in order to verify the influence of presence of students with disabilities and/or immigrants on socio-emotional, communicative-relational, and didactic factors. The analysis shows how: the presence of

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foreigners influences the teacher's empathic abilities (F = 5.73, p < .05), communicative adaptation (F = 4.42, p < .05) and his communicative sensitivity (F = 4.44, p < .05). In different way, the presence of disabled students seems to influence all sub-dimensions, that is: coexistence (F = 8.13, p < .01), empathy (F = 3.37, p < .05), communicative adaptation (F = 12.98, p < .001), communicative sensitivity (F = 10.69, p < .01), mediation (F = 13.62, p < .001), affective bonding (F = 13.28, p < .001), group dynamization (F = 11.66, p < .001), and self- efficacy (F = 9.15, p < .01).

In reference to the emotional factor, the same data analysis underlined that the presence of students with disabilities influences: greater use of non-verbal communication (F = 7.59, p < .01), assertiveness (F = 7.59, p < .01), executive leadership (F = 13.75, p < .001), the use of paraverbal communication (F = 6.18, p < .05) and executive leadership (F = 10.54, p < .001).

Similarly, the presence of foreign students influences all subdimension, that is: the use of non-verbal (F = 6.60, p < .05) and paraverbal communication (F = 3.60, p < .05), assertiveness (F = 6.60, p < .05), executive (F = 5.83, p < .05) and affective leadership (F = 4.86, p < .05), and the ability to resolve conflicts (F = 6.36, p < .01).

With reference to strictly didactic factors, the MANOVA shows how: the presence of students with disabilities seems to influence the grade of instructional control (F = 18.78, p < .001), planning (F = 10.88, p < .01) and adaptation to new situations (F = 3.22, p < .05). Similarly, the presence of foreign students seems to influence only the ability to plan (F = 6.67, p < .05), and the control (F = 5.50, p < .05).

In reference to the second hypothesis, a block multiple regression was conducted, including as predictive variables the years of experience, the presence of students with disabilities and foreigners (in the first block) and the possible presence of classical, modern, latent and manifest prejudice of the teachers (in the second block).

Table I shows the predictivity of independent variables on the socio-emotional factor (Factor A). Table II underlines the predictivity of independent variables on the communicative-relational factor (Factor B). Table IIII shows the predictive role of independent variables on the didactic factors (Factor C).

TABLE I
MULTIVARIATE TWO-STEPS HIERARCHICAL MODELING OF BURNOUT ON THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL FACTOR

Variables	R	Ad. R	SE	β	T	p
Experience Age	.33	.11	.01	.12	1.69	.09
Disabled Students			.13	.26	3.67	.00
Immigrant Students			.14	.06	.81	.42
Experience Age	.45	.20	.01	.14	2.08	.04
Disabled Students			.13	.24	3.53	.00
Immigrant Students			.13	.05	.71	.48
Classical Prejudice			.11	.06	.69	.49
Modern Prejudice			.15	.16	1.68	.09
Manifest Prejudice			.08	-.29	-3.76	.00
Latent Prejudice			.08	.12	1.74	.08

Note: Dependent variable: Factor A
Abbreviation: β, beta standardized coefficients; SE, standard error.

TABLE II
MULTIVARIATE TWO-STEPS HIERARCHICAL MODELING OF BURNOUT ON THE COMMUNICATIVE-RELATIONAL FACTOR

Variables	R	Ad. R	SE	β	T	p
Experience Age	.35	.12	.01	.13	1.80	.07
Disabled Students			.14	.26	3.66	.00
Immigrant Students			.14	.09	1.20	.23
Experience Age	.47	.22	.01	.16	2.24	.03
Disabled Students			.13	.24	3.44	.00
Immigrant Students			.13	.08	1.10	.27
Classical Prejudice			.11	.10	1.04	.30
Modern Prejudice			.15	.17	1.89	.06
Manifest Prejudice			.08	-.26	-3.43	.00
Latent Prejudice			.08	.14	2.07	.04

Note: Dependent variable: Factor B
Abbreviation: β, beta standardized coefficients; SE, standard error.

TABLE III
MULTIVARIATE TWO-STEPS HIERARCHICAL MODELING OF BURNOUT ON THE DIDACTIC FACTOR

Variables	R	Ad. R	SE	β	T	p
Experience Age	.37	.14	.02	.13	1.77	.08
Disabled Students			.14	.29	4.06	.00
Immigrant Students			.14	.09	1.27	.21
Experience Age	.49	.24	.01	.15	2.14	.03
Disabled Students			.14	.27	3.96	.00
Immigrant Students			.14	.09	1.24	.22
Classical Prejudice			.11	.04	0.49	.62
Modern Prejudice			.15	.19	2.04	.04
Manifest Prejudice			.08	-.31	-4.14	.00
Latent Prejudice			.08	.10	1.53	.13

Note: Dependent variable: Factor C
Abbreviation: β, beta standardized coefficients; SE, standard error.

IV. CONCLUSION

Today more than ever, school and education focus above all on issues such as meeting, relationships and managing differences. School is the place where we not only learn to discover who we are, but also who we could be and where we build our own if possible.

It is a cultural and symbolic-relational context within which clashes are generated between belief systems and cultural models of diversity, of which teachers are the bearers.

Teachers condition the cultural models of students, within an educational relationship which is configured as asymmetrical [17] and, as such, capable of creating/facilitating meaningful encounters and dialectical processes, or, on the contrary, conflictual dynamics that consolidate intergenerational distances.

The present research investigates the relationship between latent and manifest prejudices of teachers towards disabled and/or immigrant students as predictive variables of teaching-learning strategies.

In accordance with research hypothesis, data show that the presence of foreign students in the classroom influences and improves empathic skills and the communicative adaptation of teachings, which is expressed through greater use of non-verbal and paraverbal communication, showing assertiveness and sensitivity to the difficulties of the foreign student; although in some contexts, the use of planning and instructional control by

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teachers appears necessary.

These data confirm the literature which underlines how contact between people belonging to different ethnic groups significantly intervenes on prejudices and stereotypes, because it reduces intergroup anxiety and increases affective and cognitive empathy towards members of the external group [18].

Furthermore, data underline that in a classroom context in which there is one or more student with disabilities, the teacher seems to improve communicative adaptation, making greater use of non-verbal and paraverbal communication; teachers seem to carry out group activities which can increase coexistence and emotional bonds. These educational contexts also seem to intensify teachers' ability to adapt to new situations and plan activities and knowledge. Therefore, school in itself represents a favorable context for the promotion of intercultural sensitivity and the creation of inclusive processes.

Confirming the second research hypothesis, teachers' experience, the presence of disabled and non-native students, but above all a high level of manifest and latent prejudice toward immigrant seem to predict the socio-emotional competence of teachers. Similarly, teachers' communicative-relational ability seems to be predicted of their experience, the presence of disabled students, but above all the presence of latent and manifest prejudice towards students with difficulties, related to their immigration condition.

It seems interesting how the didactic dimension seems to be predicted by the presence of disabled but not immigrant students, teacher's experience, and manifest prejudice towards immigrants but modern prejudice towards ID students. These data confirm the importance of a quality school inclusion process, which cannot ignore the creation of an educational context attentive to the valorization of differences and the management of the classroom in its systemic complexity.

Furthermore, the welcoming and competent accompaniment of the non-native or disabled students involves the formation of a basic inclusive professional habits, aimed at strengthening the development of special knowledge, skills and competences, not necessarily specialized and/or hyper-specialized [18].

The usefulness of the training appears evident, especially for those who have been directly involved in experiences of emigration and disability; while specific training for teachers appears necessary especially for those who have achieved a high level of education.

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