

Training of educators in transition: what competencies for tomorrow's society?

Formazione per educatori in transizione: quali competenze per la società di domani?

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Abstract

Through this paper, the authors, involved with initial and on-going teacher training, share their thoughts on the competencies teachers need in order to facilitate teaching and learning for tomorrow's needs. This paper attempts to answer the following questions: Who is a teacher and what do we mean by competencies? What actually makes a difference in children's learning and what is the role of the teacher in this learning process? Teaching is described as being a very stressful job with many teachers experiencing burnout. Positive psychology has changed the focus of our attention from one of psychopathologising to the study of "what makes a person cope and flourish even in such a stressful job environment?": the focus is therefore shifted to a "resilience perspective". The authors strongly believe in an education for all, i.e., Inclusive Education, and decided to focus their attention on those teachers who have difficulty in coping and, for this reason, could tend to undermine the effectiveness of inclusive education (Soresi et alii, 2013).

Keywords:
**teacher training, professional development, competencies,
education for all, inclusive education**

Con questo contributo, gli autori, coinvolti nella formazione iniziale e continua per gli insegnanti, condividono le loro riflessioni su quali siano le competenze che gli insegnanti necessitano per attuare strategie di insegnamento-apprendimento efficaci per rispondere ai bisogni di domani. Questo contributo si propone di rispondere alle seguenti domande: chi è l'insegnante e cosa si intende per competenze? Quali elementi influiscono sull'apprendimento dell'alunno e qual è il ruolo dell'insegnante in questo processo? Il lavoro dell'insegnante può essere descritto come molto stressante visti i casi di burnout. La psicologia positiva ha cambiato il focus dell'attenzione da un approccio psicopatologico allo studio di "che cosa permette ad una persona di reagire e progredire professionalmente nonostante l'ambiente di lavoro sia così stressante?": il focus è dunque traslato su una "prospettiva della resilienza". Gli autori credono fortemente in un'educazione per tutti, un'educazione inclusiva, e hanno quindi deciso di focalizzare la loro attenzione sugli insegnanti che riscontrano difficoltà nel reagire alle situazioni problematiche e che, per questa ragione, potrebbero tendere a compromettere l'efficacia dell'educazione inclusiva.

Parole chiave:
**formazione per insegnanti, sviluppo professionale, competenze,
educazione per tutti, educazione inclusiva**

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1. Introduction

This paper presents findings that help us better understand what competencies teachers would need to acquire in order to respond to the demands of the 21st century. Through this paper we try to give some answers to the following questions:

1. Who is the teacher?
2. What influence does a teacher play in the life of a young learner?
3. What makes the difference to children's learning?
4. What needs to be fostered in teachers to be effective?
5. What do teachers say about their profession?
6. What does positive psychology teach us?

Our first question is asking "Who is the teacher? What does this professional do?". The TALIS report (2013) adopts OECD (2004) definition of a teacher as "a person whose professional activity involves the planning, organizing and conducting of group activities whereby students' knowledge skills and attitudes develop as stipulated by educational programmes. In short, it is one whose main activity is teaching" (p.28). Researches have repeatedly emphasised the crucial influence of the role of the teacher in the learning journey.

Research by Hanushek (2004) and Hershberg (2005) shows that the relationship between aptitude, intelligence and school achievement is dependent upon instructional conditions. Guskey (2011) concludes "when instructional quality is high and well matched to students' learning needs, the magnitude of the relationship between aptitude/intelligence and school achievement diminishes drastically and approaches zero" (p. 18). Hattie (2014) in his synthesis of meta-analyses relating to achievement claims that about 20-30% of the variance in student achievement stems from the teachers' effects (p. 103).

It is therefore inevitably clear that the formation of teachers is paramount to the success of education for tomorrow's learner. The European Commission (2013) upholds the need of "making sure that teachers have the essential competencies they require in order to be effective in the classroom" (p.5). The European Commission emphasises the need for European countries to continue "encouraging teachers to continue developing and extending their competencies" (p. 5) so as to raise levels of student attainment and meet the needs of a fast changing world.

Before we proceed we need to define what we understand by competencies. We need to be able to answer the questions related to what teachers are "expected to know, and be able to do". Such a "framework of teacher competencies may then be a basis for:

- *Defining the learning outcomes of initial teacher education programmes*
- *Defining criteria for recruitment and selection to teaching posts*
- *Assessing teachers' needs for in-service training, and*
- *Arranging provision of professional learning opportunities so that teachers continue to develop their competencies throughout their whole careers*" (European Commission, 2013, p. 5, paragraph 5).

While we value the clarity and directionality that competencies give to the work on teacher formation, we cannot not see the limitations that such an approach has on this endeavour. Sultana (2009) upholds that *the critiques* made towards the different versions of competence-based approaches need to be addressed. Sultana outlines the following three critiques:

- (a) to be *reductionist and fragmentary* in relation to tasks that are complex and integrative of many dimensions of the self;
- (b) to *define good practice solely in relation to institutional norms* rather than in consultation with practitioners and service users;
- (c) to forget that there are *aspects of human behaviour which are more likely to be caught than taught*, and that therefore, excellence is sometimes the results not of targeted training as much as of socialization into (and by) a community of established practitioners" (Sultana, 2009, p. 29)

These critiques have to be taken seriously if we want to ensure a formation programme that acknowledges the complexity of the profession – a profession that deals with human subjects that are complex in nature and create complex situations that go beyond institutional norms. Notwithstanding these limitations we do need to identify knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to ensure that teacher training and formation has the right ingredients for moulding the profile of a successful teacher. The European Community (2013) states "making sure that teachers have the essential competencies they require in order to be effective in the classroom is one of the keys to raising levels of student attainment; encouraging teachers to continue developing and extending their competencies is vital in a fast changing world" (p. 5).

There is, however, no unanimously accepted standard and definition of "competence" (Bourgonje, Tromp, 2011). Bourgonje and Tromp (2011) continue to argue that "in general, the understanding of "competence" is shifting however from a narrow focus on what a person can do towards a more holistic focus on the possession and development of a complex combination of integrated skills, knowledge, attitudes and values displayed in the context of job performance" (p. 9).

John Hattie in his seminal work *Visible Learning* (2009) presented a collection of researches about what actually works in improving children's learning in schools. This collection of researches shows that by making teaching and learning visible we can know the impact of our teaching practices on student achievement. Hattie's meta-analysis of the extensive research already out in the public domain indicates that teacher's need to have high expectations from students, intervene and give prompt feedback, be able to build on

prior achievement, be able to articulate success criteria and achievements, foster effort and engage students in their own learning.

2. Research findings

Having highlighted the prominent effect teachers have on students' learning we will now turn to listen to what teachers themselves think they need to become more effective teachers. We will present the teachers' voices both those presented by the OECD's international survey – published as the 2013 TALIS report – and those findings revealed with data conducted by one of the authors of this paper together with two other researchers in 2009. Tanti Burlò, Camilleri and Zucca presented these data at the EFPA European Federation of Psychologists Associations conference.

On the international scene, teachers, working in lower secondary schools, thought they needed training or further training in ICT, “special needs” teaching, and teaching in multicultural and multilingual settings as well as responding to students' behaviour and classroom management, approaches to individualized learning, career guidance and counselling (TALIS, 2014, p. 6). These teachers, however, tended to attend training mainly in subject specific areas (TALIS, 2014, p. 6) and when they did attend training on learners with “special needs” they felt that these courses did not answer to their teaching needs.

In many EU countries school leaders also report significant shortages of teachers with competencies in teaching students with special needs (FR, NL, HR, ES, EE) (TALIS, 2014, p. 4). Teachers should, therefore, be offered opportunities to develop their skills in these areas in a way that would attract them to attend the course, in the first place, and making the course meaningful for them to become more effective educators.

Teachers who are involved in collaborative learning report that they are using innovative pedagogies more and state that they are more satisfied with their jobs (TALIS, 2014, p. 7). Consequently, more training in collaborative learning is a must.

The TALIS report also highlights the fact that “(W)hile a vast majority of teachers and school leaders state that, all in all, they are satisfied with their jobs, only 19% of EU teachers and 30% of EU school leaders think that teaching is valued in society. Less than 10% of teachers in Croatia, Spain, Sweden, France and Slovakia view teaching as a profession valued in society” (TALIS, 2014, p. 5).

The TALIS 2013 study showed that “experienced teachers feel on average more confident about their abilities (‘self-efficacy’), but their job-satisfaction is lower than for teachers in their early years”. Teachers’

1 “Special needs” is in inverted commas since we believe that every learner is unique and we do not need to identify any children as having “special needs”.

self-efficacy and job satisfaction are positively linked with: 1. good student-teacher relations; 2. opportunities to participate in school decisions and 3. collaborative learning (TALIS, 2014). A whole school approach needs to be developed to create the environment for the above to develop. Challenging behaviour in the classroom is one of the factors typically linked to lower job satisfaction (TALIS, 2014, p. 5).

Howard and Johnson (2004) note that the incidence of job stress and burnout, particularly among professionals employed in human service organizations, has been well documented over the last 20 years. In their study they insist that instead of looking at what causes stress and burnout one should look at the factors which facilitate teacher resilience and coping strategies. Many teachers leave the profession early due to ill health or ask for early retirement (Howard, Johnson, 2004).

The purpose of Howard and Johnson's study, was to see whether one could apply the same concept of resilience (used in children's studies), to those teachers who coped extremely well, notwithstanding the highly stressful conditions they taught in. The authors developed the following screening device which helped school principals identify those teachers who were " 'at risk' of stress and burnout, due to the nature of their work, but who nevertheless were 'resilient' (i.e. they persistently and successfully coped with stress)" (Howard, Johnson, 2004). This screening device is being reproduced below.

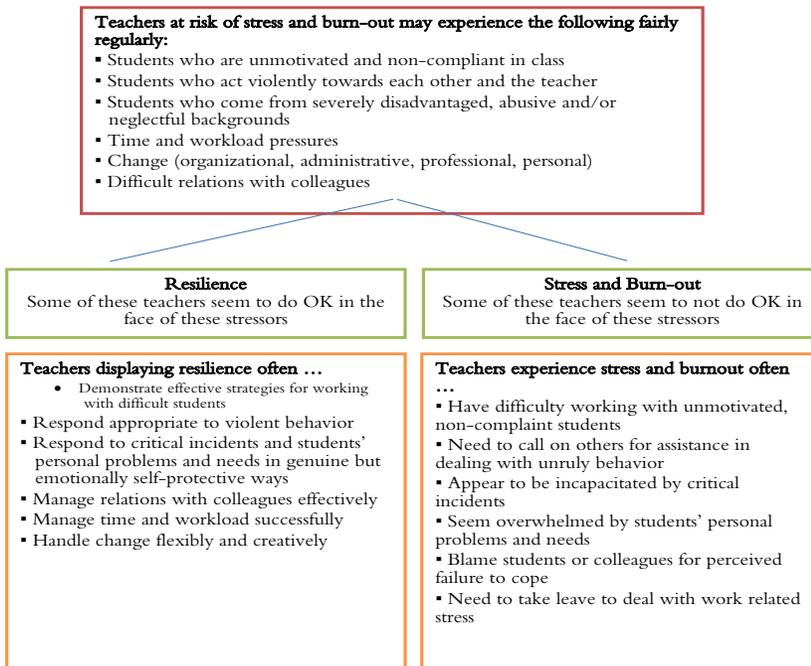


Fig. 1 Howard and Johnson Screening Device to help in the identification of teachers at-risk of stress and burn-out who are displaying resilient and non-resilient behaviour

The results from Howard and Johnson (2004) study clearly show that resilient teachers tend to describe incidents of violence both within and out of the classrooms in a calm manner. The researchers showed that while the incidents teachers experienced were serious (children physically attacked other children or teachers by throwing furniture, punching, kicking and biting and verbal abuse) and were obviously a source of stress, teachers claimed that the most stressful source came when dealing with aggressive, abusive parents (Howard, Johnson, 2004, p. 408).

A consistent feature brought up by all the participants in the Howard Johnson study was a “sense of agency – a strong belief in their ability to control what happens to them (the opposite of which is fatalism or helplessness)” (Howard and Johnson, 2004, p. 409). This became evident from their narratives on how they responded to the aggression and violence that they experienced on an almost daily basis. The “key strategy mentioned by all 10 teachers in the three different schools was the need to depersonalise the unpleasant or difficult events (Howard, Johnson, 2004, p. 409).

They did this in various ways by: seeing whether they acted appropriately; whether they could have responded better and whether they learnt from their experience. This was done through explaining the events to themselves and trying to understand the parents’ and children’s motivations and circumstances and what Howard and Johnson termed as the “moral purpose”. All participants in this study were teachers who chose to work in underprivileged schools convinced that they could make a difference.

After discussing some of the international literature, in the next section we would like to present some of the data generated from Maltese secondary State schools (forms 3 to 5) teaching students from the age of 13/14 to 15/16 as part of the research project called “When educating becomes difficult” (Tanti Burlò, Camilleri, Zucca, 2011).

The following table describes the participants in this project. The great majority of them were teachers but, since there are a few LSA’s (Learning Support Assistants) plus other educators, the participants are being referred to as educators.

Position at school		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Teacher	Count	52	153	205
	Percentage	92.9%	83.6%	85.8%
LSA Facilitator	Count	0	11	11
	Percentage	.0%	6.0%	4.6%
Supply facilitator	Count	1	15	16
	Percentage	1.8%	8.2%	6.7%
Other	Count	3	4	7
	Percentage	5.4%	2.2%	2.9%
Total	Count	56	183	239
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 1: The Participants (Tanti Burlò, Camilleri, Zucca, 2011)

This study, which involved 239 educators, focused on what difficulties educators encountered in teaching and what they perceived were the causes of such difficulties.

Through this study the researchers also wanted to identify those areas of competencies educators wish to develop to be able to deal more effectively with such challenging situations.

The educators were first asked to describe the incidence they felt they had most trouble coping with (Figure 3) and then to state the reasons why they thought they couldn't cope (Figure 4).

Figure 3 summarises the incidences teacher identified as most challenging for them.

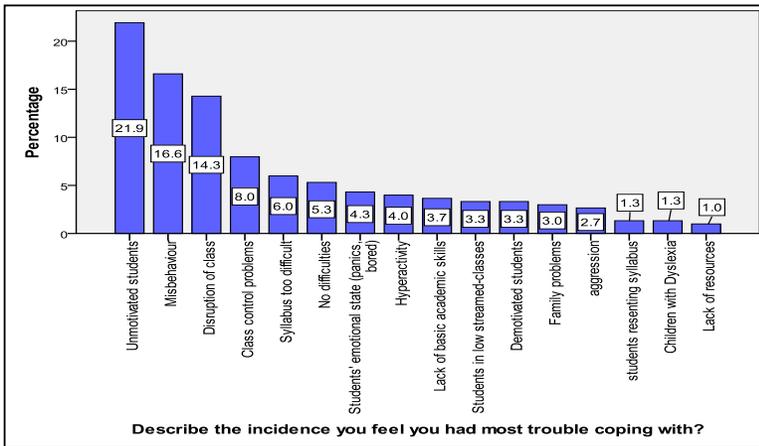


Fig. 3. Perceived situations educators found challenging

The data has been further grouped under different headings according to the focus of the incidence given by teachers: description of incidence focused on the students; on institutional policies and resources, and family.

Description of incidence focused on the students:	73.6%
Description of incidence focused on institutional policies and resources:	8.3%
Description of incidence focused on the student's family:	3.0%
5% of educators stated that they did not experience such incidents.	

Fig. 4. Focus given by teachers of the incident described.

Therefore, one can see that the great majority of teachers attributed the basis of their difficulties in teaching to their students' behavioural issues.

Here are some representative samples of what the educators wrote in answering this open ended question "Could you kindly describe the incidence you feel you had most trouble coping with?"

Educators' Voices:

“When a whole class (low stream) made it clear to me that they don’t want to learn anything” (Teacher)

“Students who are reluctant to work no matter how hard you try to motivate them. This is often the case with mixed ability classes (secondary school in my case) where hyperactivity is used to mark their inability to follow/understand/work out tasks assigned. Moreover, their unruly behaviour often reflects their social background: discourteous communication amongst themselves, use of bad language (at times) etc” (Teacher)

“When I had an argument with a kid. He was sent to the headmaster’s (office) and while he waited outside his office he escaped from school and threw a stone at my car and kicked the mudguard” (Teacher)

“The kind of students we have, have never been described by university tutors. Challenging behaviour has become normal” (Teacher).

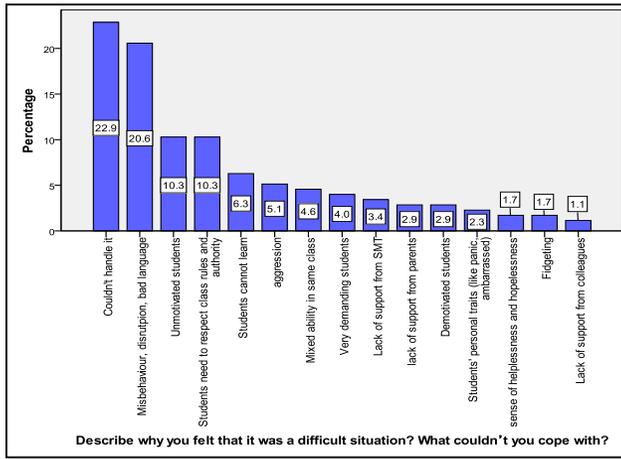


Fig. 5. Educators’ reasons for not coping with their perceived challenging situation.

When asked to describe why a certain situation was difficult and why they felt they could not cope the educators highlighted the following reasons: they couldn’t handle the situation (22.9%); that this was due to misbehaviour, disruption, bad language (20.6%); unmotivated students (10.3%); lack of respect for rules and authority (10.3%); that students cannot learn (6.3%) and due to aggression (5.1%). These were given as the main reasons for their not being able to cope with “difficult teaching situations” while 1.7% specified that they felt “a sense of helplessness and hopelessness” which might be the feeling many other educators felt. The answers given were grouped in the following categories starting from reasons directly linked to the educators themselves, the students, the working relationships between the educators and colleagues, the school administration (SMT: Senior Management Team) and also those decisions taken centrally by the Ministry and Educational Directorate.

Reasons focusing on the educators themselves 24%

- I couldn't handle it (22.9%)
- Sense of helplessness and hopelessness (1.7%)

Reasons focusing on the students 63.5%

- Misbehaviour, disruption, bad language (20.6%)
- Unmotivated students (10.3%)
- Disrespect for rules/authority (10.3%)
- Students cannot learn (6.3%)
- Aggressive behaviour (5.1%)
- Very demanding students (4.0%)
- Demotivated students (2.9%)
- Students' personal traits (2.3%)
- Fidgety (1.7%)

Relationships between the educators and colleagues and school administration (SMT: Senior Management Team) 4.8%

- Lack of support from the SMT (3.7%)
- Lack of support from colleagues (1.1%)

Centralised decisions 4.6%

- Mixed ability classes (4.6 %)

Fig. 6. Reasons given by educators for not coping according to categories

Figure 6 demonstrates that the majority of educators think that the reasons why they find it difficult to teach lays outside their control – and caused by the students.

Educators'Voices:

“Language is a barrier. So admonitions should be in Maltese to be effective (English teacher). The school authorities do not provide enough support. With all due respect, they know how to bounce the problem on to you. It is easier to control the teachers then the students!” (Teacher)

“I don't say I couldn't cope but it is certainly difficult. Obviously, it is easier to have a homogeneous group of students” (Teacher)

“That I was wasting my time with them and that our education is really failing with these kids who have no support at home” (Teacher).

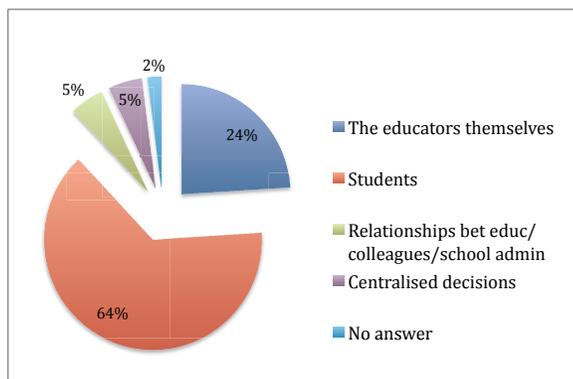


Fig. 7. Reasons for Difficult situations according to educators

Teachers were then asked whether these difficulties could be prevented and what kind of support they needed. Their answers were grouped in the following categories according to the locus of responsibility: Centralised Ministry/Directorate decisions, School Administration, Teacher, Teacher Relationships, linked with teachers' teaching and Home/ after school support.

Centralised Ministry/Directorate decisions 55.3%	
The need of more resources	8.8
Support for teachers	7.5
Reduction of syllabus	7.5
Teaching responsibility/duties	7.5
Support to all who need it	5.0
Financial support	3.8
Smaller classes	2.5
Other professionals	2.5
More literacy lessons	2.5
Inclusive education	2.5
Streaming	2.5
After school support	1.3
Support in learning zones	1.3
School administration 17.5%	
Strong disciplinary action by administration (17.5%)	
Relationships 8.8%	
Team-work between SMT and teachers (6.3%)	
Good teacher student relationship (2.5%)	
Linked with teachers' teaching 6.3%	
Teaching real life situations (5.0%)	
Motivating lessons (1.3%)	
Home/ after school support 11.3%	
Educating parents/support at home (10.0%)	
After school support (1.3%)	

Fig. 8. Preventive measures according to the locus of responsibility

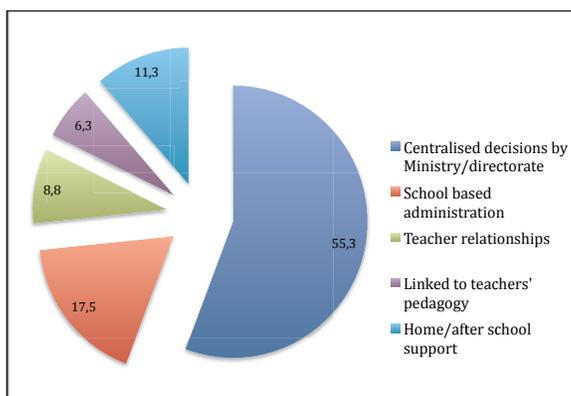


Fig. 9. Preventive measures according to the locus of responsibility

Once again the data above shows that educators don't see themselves as the main source for solutions. The data points to external agents for solutions, mainly from centralised support and other sources that can offer support to students and their parents after school hours.

The answers, given for the question which asked what type of support educators think they would need in order to address the above mentioned challenges, were grouped in the same categories used above:

<p>Centralised Ministry/Directorate 36.3% More resources in school (9.5%) Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) for whole class/more LSAs (8.3%) Smaller classes (5.1%) More SW in schools (5.1%) Less mixed abilities (4.5%) More time (1.9%) More support from Directorate (1.9%)</p>
<p>School administration 26.1% Back up re discipline (26.1%)</p> <p>Educators' Relationships 2.5% Co-operation with parents (2.5%)*</p> <p>Educator based 31.8% Training (22.9%) Personalized support (8.9%)</p> <p>Home/after school 2.5% Co-operation with parents (2.5%)*</p> <p>Others 3.2%</p>

Fig. 10. Types of support educators state they need

Predictors of effective inclusive educators

Level of Inclusion	Search for predictors	Significance
19.00		
	Gender students	
	School size	
	Age	
	Educators' gender	
	Level of education	
	Years as educators	
	Type of secondary school	
	Coping with particular situation mentioned	
	How well prepared	
	Coping generally	
	Need of support	
4	Prevented	
	Relations with parents	
1	Need to develop skills	p.value = 0.019
	Universal design for learning	
	Frontal classical lesson	
3	Differentiated teaching	
	Cooperative learning	
2	Group work mixed ability	p.value = 0.038
	Peer tutoring	
	Individual educational programme	
	Collaboration with LSA (for teachers only)	
	Collaboration with teachers (for LSA)	
	Judging of own skills	
	Level of stress	
	School considered to be less stressful for teachers	
	School considered to be less stressful for children	
	Choice of school to work in	
	LSA university course	
	Teachers: University course	

Fig. 11. Search for predictors

This study also highlighted some characteristics of highly effective educators. Those educators who are most aware of the need to continue developing their skills, to become more effective educators, have stated that they organise students in mixed ability groups, practice ‘differentiated teaching’ and think that they can prevent certain difficult situations through addressing the diverse needs of their students. These also showed to have a stronger belief in inclusive education. However, these predictors only account for 12% of the total variation in the dependent variable (responses).

It was also evident from the data that those educators who seem to be more positive and want to improve their skills had a higher level of belief in the value of inclusion. Others with a less positive outlook towards inclusive education seem to think that they do not need to further develop their skills to become more effective teachers.

The major limitation of the One-way ANOVA test, Pearson correlation and Chi Square test is that they investigate solely the relationship between a dependent variable and an independent predictor. However, the goal of many research studies is to estimate collectively the quantitative effect of the predictors upon the dependent variable that they influence. It is well known that a lone predictor could be rendered a very important contributor in explaining variations in the dependent variable, but would be rendered unimportant in the presence of other predictors. In other words, the suitability of a predictor in a regression model fit often depends on what other predictors are included with it.

The regression model reveals two significant predictors of the dependent variable ‘How inclusive would you like to see State school in 5 years time?’. ‘Do you think you need to further your skills to make you a more effective educator?’ is the best predictor of the dependent variable. This is followed by ‘Teachers’ use of group work according to mixed abilities during the scholastic year’. There were two other predictors ‘Teachers’ use of differentiated teaching’ and ‘Teachers’ perception on the preventability of difficult situations’ that had a p-value slightly greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Analysis for these two predictors was also carried out.

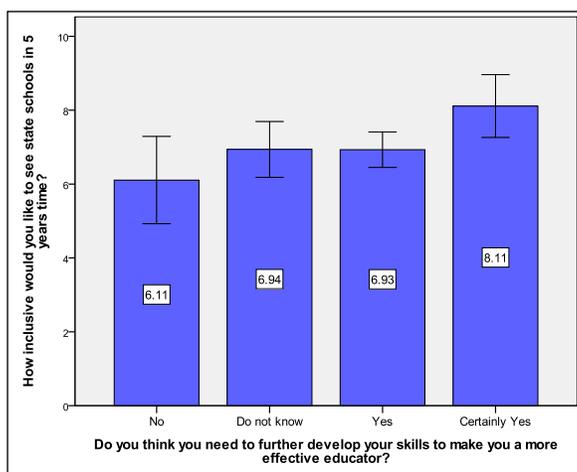


Fig. 12. Inclusive education in 5 years time with developing skills

The study also showed that teachers with a B.Ed (Hons) (a 4 year Initial Teacher Training course offered at the university) seem to have encountered fewer difficulties than graduates following a one year initial teacher preparation course after completing a 3 or 4 year Bachelor degree in a specific subject (PGCE).

Also overall, it seems that the younger Maltese teachers encountered more difficulties. These difficulties seem to lessen after a couple of years of teaching to increase once again, rather sharply, in the 31+ years group showing signs of early burn out.

The above observation is also supported by the data on the perceived self-efficacy of new and more experienced teachers (OECD, TALIS Database, 2012). The data shows that Maltese new teachers perceive statistically significantly much lower levels of self-efficacy than their more experienced peers. Malta ranks 16th place out of 23 countries on level of self-efficacy with levels being way below average for the 23 countries. New teachers also spend more time on classroom management than experienced ones and express a much higher need for professional development in student discipline and behavioural difficulties (OECD, TALIS Database, 2008, in TALIS 2012 p.2).

Moreover, further analyses of the data gathered in the Maltese study, indicated that educators encountered more difficulties with:

1. *Teaching content* to part of the class when these classes were described as being “mixed ability”, “middle and lower streams/sets” (p.= 0.049) and
2. *Behavioural difficulties* with part of the class when these classes were described as mixed ability, middle and lower streams/sets (p.= 0.00).

Therefore, educators seem to encounter the greatest difficulties in the lower streams and sets. This state of affairs could easily have repercussions on the educators most of whom are not pleased to be working in lower streams/sets and would not have willingly have chosen to teach students at the lower end of academic achievement. Educators are also experiencing difficulties in mixed ability classes.

This study and the evidence discussed above continue to strengthen the belief that teachers need to develop skills to be able to work within inclusive settings. However, having skills is only one side of the coin. Inclusive education requires certain attitudes and values apart from skills. Inclusive education also depends on the collaboration of all the stakeholders, namely educators, parents, children, school administration, policy makers and other professionals (Tanti Burlò, 2010; Soresi et alii, 2013).

It is also important to highlight the need for teachers to take responsibility for their teaching even when “educating becomes difficult” and not abdicate this responsibility onto others (the school senior management team, the Ministry responsible for education, the educational directorate, the students and their families). The study showed that most teachers seem to look for solutions outside of their institution or at least outside of their classrooms, pathologising learners’ behaviour and looking for “special intervention” with more “special” resources being put into the schools turning them into places of control by the SMT. The proposed “Education Act”, published in 2014 for consultation by the Ministry for Education and Employment (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a) is removing the parents’ rights to decide what is the best education for their child and transferring this power to the Head of School. The Head of School would be the person who decides whether a child should go to a resource centre, learning zone, nurture groups or attend any other specialised service or not. The disempowerment of parents and the abdication of the teachers’ responsibility to teach all students becomes a threat to school inclusion itself and a threat to the educational process (Tanti Burlò, 2010; Soresi et alii, 2013). A far cry from the declared aim of the proposed Education Act, also known as Bringing education into the 21st century, is “to ensure an excellent standard of education for a better quality of life for all learners and which will equip learners to live in an inclusive and multicultural society able to celebrate diversity and the employment of human rights to all” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b).

Skills are not enough. Ferrari, Sgaramella & Soresi (2015) state that fostering inclusion requires positive action, “such as *hope, optimism and resilience*,

and the ability to instil these values” in the learners (Ferrari, Sgaramella, & Soresi p194, 2015) and to move away from the teachers’ “sense of helplessness and hopelessness” (quoting a Maltese teacher).

In their study of 500 teachers Soresi et al. (2013) have identified four different groups of teachers according to different attitudes toward teaching and inclusion. These are:

1. Pessimists and disappointed (35%)
 2. Definitely unsatisfied and pessimists (17%)
 3. Moderately supportive, optimistic and realist (27%)
 4. Very positive, optimist and resilient (21%)
- (Soresi et al. 2013)

“Pessimists and disappointed” which formed 32% of those studied in Soresi et al. are teachers who “consider themselves as unable to instil confidence and hope in other persons” or even respond appropriately to difficult situations they may encounter. “These practitioners are inclined to show passive emotions, feelings of high resignation and try to delegate to others the responsibility of searching for adequate intervention and strategies capable of overcoming obstacles and barriers” (p. 194).

Teachers who fell under the category “definitely unsatisfied and pessimists” formed 17% of the cohort. These teachers are “limited in self-efficacy beliefs, they feel unable to help persons facing real difficulties nor able to instil feelings of hope and optimism which they need in order to face difficulties and obstacles they encounter everyday in their lives”. “They are also inclined to recognize a low value and social prestige in the activities they perform” (p. 195).

Teachers that fell under the category of “moderately supportive, optimistic and realist” formed 27% of the cohort. Soresi and his team describe these teachers as being characterized by having sufficient self-efficacy belief about their work; have positive feelings with respect to the work they do, which they consider as socially helpful and believe they are able to effectively conduct their work and are helpful to others.

Finally, those with “very positive, optimist and resilient attitude” form 21% of the cohort. These teachers: “believe that more positive events than negative ones can happen also on the “disability planet”; “consider themselves as capable of establishing positive relationship with colleagues”, and “recognize in themselves the ability to instil confidence and hope also in those persons who are worried about their personal discomforts and difficulties” (p. 195).

Positive, optimistic and resilient educators are crucial for the success of the inclusion project. “(I)n times characterized by crisis and uncertainty” such characteristics are crucial for our educators. Soresi and colleagues highlight the need to continue to “*address public recognition and esteem* because it is thanks to their enthusiasm and to their positive feelings that inclusive processes are still fostered in several different local contexts” (p. 195).

It is clear for Soresi et al “that students, either with or without impair-

ments or so called “special needs”, ‘educated’ by teachers such as those in the first and second group, will easily exhibit:

- learning difficulties;
- low levels of motivation to academic achievement;
- low self-efficacy beliefs and
- low level of self-regulation abilities (Soresi et al., p. 195).

The above descriptions given by Soresi et al (2013) also correspond to Howard and Johnson’s (2004) descriptions of resilient and non-resilient teachers.

3. Conclusion

This research has demonstrated a number of crucial characteristics that should form an integral part of the curriculum for both initial teacher education and continuing professional development offered for in-service teachers. Teacher education programmes should ensure that the attitudes, values and skills – that are required for teachers to be more inclusive – form an integral part of any professional formation. Educators need to be equipped with self-regulating abilities to ensure that the challenges that they identify are resolved through a strong professional community that acts in favour of all learners. The State should also provide the necessary environment to facilitate inclusive practices by first and foremost training its educators to implement a whole school positive behaviour approach, Universal Design for Learning and cooperative learning. Once teachers are equipped with the right tools and a set of attitudes and values that embrace a positive approach to teaching, the need of any form of selection becomes obsolete.

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