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ITALIAN STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS OF "POSITIVE SCHOOL BEHAVIOUR" A STUDY IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ASSESSMENT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Recent Italian school legislation has turned the attention of the educational community to the importance of student scholastic behaviour, and asks for a precise evaluation of this behaviour. In this light, schools have begun to seek appropriate evaluative tools. During the preliminary phases of creating a behaviour evaluation rubric for use in a North-Italy high schools, a research was carried out with the aim of exploring the meanings given by teachers and students to the idea of "positive school behaviour". The participants were 898 students, subdivided in 41 classes from 1st to 5th class, and 101 teachers. Using a mixed method design, researchers individuated some dimensions of the construct of "positive school behaviour" in teachers and students. The analysis highlights how, in the school context, the idea of "positive school behaviour" refers to a wide range of dimensions, which are not entirely shared by teachers and students. The factor analysis on quantitative data outlined three "macro-dimensions" describing "positive school behaviour": "Respect for others and the environment", "participation in school activities" and "school organisation". Among these, the first two are elements of a shared model of "positive school behaviour". As well as these common aspects, the qualitative analyses highlighted, in particular, some heterogeneity between the teachers' model of "positive school behaviour" and that of students. In this light, there is an emerging need for schools to activate processes of sharing, as a preliminary moment in the behaviour assessment process, and to work towards a "sustainable evaluation".

Keywords: assessment, school behaviour, democratic school practices, mixed method design.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the latest reform process of the Italian school system, the government has given particular attention to the issue of scholastic behaviour by circulating a set of standards to control and evaluate students' behaviour at school. This attention alternates between "enlightened" moments aimed at encouraging students' responsibility towards their own conduct, and other less felicitous ideas aimed at establishing rules for the use of "control by sanction" on student behaviour, instead of guiding their education (Grion, Giolo, 2010). It is a widely held view that this issue be recognized for the attention given to "behaviour" as a dimension linked reciprocally to academic performance. In effect, «there is little doubt that problematic behaviours, such as absenteeism, truancy, and unruliness, are implicated in poor academic performance» (Petrides, Chamorro-Premuzic, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2005, p. 250). In this sense, even Salerni (2005) has identified that class behaviour of both students and teachers is closely linked to contextual and process factors which shape scholastic success and failure.

2. TRAINING AND EVALUATION OF SCHOLASTIC BEHAVIOUR

Compared with other European contexts, the attention drawn to scholastic conduct in Italy comes rather late, after concern which has matured for some years. Moreover, this concern comes to scholastic communities, which tend to have weak theoretical foundations and poor specific didactic guidance. These vague ministerial guidelines do not provide sufficient references outlining possible educational directions leading to the concept of "positive school behaviour". This leaves ample room for the common belief that classroom behaviour is strongly influenced, if not primarily determined, by the family environment (Salerni, 2005) rather than an ongoing process that builds on, and borrows from, the community. Other countries such as the United Kingdom and France have broader ministerial guidelines which suggest a range of programs (see, for example, English documentation available at http://nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/behaviourattendanceandseal/behaviour, or French at http://eduscol.education.fr/cid47749/apprendre-vivre-ensemble.html) designed to encourage reflection and preparation in teachers and principals, partnerships between schools and families, and school activities designed to share and increase awareness of the significance of "school behaviour". They also reflect the idea that positive "behaviour is not innate in the child, it is essentially learned and therefore its management is essentially an educational rather than a moral problem" (Weare & Gray 2003, p. 23). It is a product of a progressive move in schools towards a culture of common responsibility, and of mutual respect among its members (Fielding, 2012; Steer, 2009). Salerni (2005), in research about scholastic discipline, states that what we call "positive school behaviour" cannot be intended as mere compliance and respect of determined rules; instead it should be considered as a sharing of common rules of behaviour. According to the author, considering scholastic behaviour as the product of rules strictly imposed by the teacher or school authorities will eventually lead to the student becoming dependent on the teacher's corrections and directions, without developing autonomy and the consequent self-discipline. Educational intervention should instead be directed towards students willingly adopting the rules of conduct through reflection on the group experience and self-education. Orienting one's own teaching methods towards obtaining a positive behaviour means devising forms of joint responsibility in observing, accepting and respecting acceptable behaviour and interactions which facilitate classroom wellbeing. However, it also means ensuring that students effectively become responsible and aware of their own behaviour (Salerni 2005). We should note that, according to some authors, even in the research world, and especially in the field of educational psychology, not much attention has been given to the issue of evaluation of behaviour from a "scholastic" point of view (Shapiro & Kratochwill, 2000). Also, the topic of behaviour is usually investigated within distressed and problematic contexts. We believe instead that exploring the significance of "scholastic behaviour" is of great importance to the "normal" scholastic education and evaluation processes.

2. SHARING MEANINGS AS A PRIMARY CONDITION FOR THE EVALUATION PROCESS

According to the English Department for Education and Skills, «if a school wishes to ascertain how well it addresses the emotional health and well-being of its whole community, it is important to reach a consensus on terminology and its meaning. Some staff will be more familiar with terms such as 'emotional literacy', 'emotional intelligence' and 'social and emotional competence' than others» (Department for education and skills, 2005, p. 5). They have to explore «popular beliefs and misconceptions that may be held» (ibid.); both are elements that can prevent common comprehension and distort the effectiveness of activated processes.

With this aim, we carried out a research around the idea of "positive school behaviour" during the process of developing an evaluation rubric (Andrade, 2000) for a high school in Italy, in the context of the recent law regarding evaluation of scholastic behaviour. The first need expressed by a group of teachers to us, as researchers, was help in producing a tool to evaluate scholastic behaviour, which is a particular complex competence (Shapiro & Kratochwill, 2000) and, as such, not easily evaluated. We decided to propose constructing a rating scale tool since it is a measurement system that can be easily managed by untrained personnel and it enables reliable and valid data to be achieved even through practices set up in "natural" settings (Merrel, 2000).

In constructing the rubric, it was necessary to operationalize the performance being evaluated, which was performed using indicators and descriptors that portray it in detail. It was also necessary to define levels which could be achieved by student performances (in terms of quality and/or frequency) and insert them in a rating scale. The final task was to clarify and explicitly declare the criteria used to assign points relative to each level. The basic condition for process effectiveness is that performance, indicators and descriptors must refer to common meanings. In other words, the performance and its description must be based on terminology generally understood and shared by all members of the school community (Glickman-Bond & Rose, 2006). In the light of these considerations, some research questions emerged during the construction process of the above-mentioned evaluation rubric. In this regard we identified the following research issues:

- What is the idea of "positive school behaviour" held by teachers and students, or rather, which dimensions characterize it?
- Is the "school behaviour" idea genuinely shared by teachers and students, that is, does it refer to common dimensions that should be considered during the evaluation phase?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Sample

The high school where the research was conducted specializes in three courses of study: modern languages, social science and human science. The entire school population, mainly female, comprises 898 students grouped in 41 classes, and 101 teachers. The actual research participants (students and teachers present at the time of the survey taking place) were 32 teachers (n = 21 female and n= 10 male) and 825 students (455 girls and 380 boys, average age = 17.23 y.o.). The teachers, divided according to their teaching area, were from the fields of (n= 10) Italian literature, natural science (n = 3), foreign languages (n = 3), social sciences (n = 7), maths (n = 4), philosophy (n = 1), and science (n = 2). The students were divided according to class, which included: first grade (n = 188), second grade (n = 152), third grade (n = 150), fourth grade (n = 186) and fifth grade (n = 149). Of the total number, 802 students were Italian and 23 were foreign. In detail, the parents of 712 students were both of Italian nationality, 83 had one parent Italian and one foreign, and the parents of 30 students were both foreign.

4.2 Instruments

The research design was based on the Mixed Method Design of Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010). The complexity of the subject investigated led us to believe that it would be necessary to perform a triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Silverman, 2010) of multiple sources and their consequent data interpretation, to represent different points of view better and to obtain reliable and valid data regarding different perceptions of "positive school behaviour" in teachers and students.

To answer the two research questions, we compared the data obtained from:

- A written open question where participants were asked to describe the characteristics of a student who had "positive school behaviour";
- A questionnaire composed of a set of items scored on a 4-point scale (from "agree" to "disagree"). With this tool, the researchers wanted to analyze the rank of agreement/disagreement in the sample, regarding the dimensions of school behaviour considered useful for scholastic evaluation (the descriptors of the behaviour evaluation rubric).

Seventeen items were identified by a group of expert participants (15 teachers of different disciplines) who selected the items to be included in the questionnaire by analyzing, with the researchers, some behaviour evaluation rubrics which are published on the Internet by national and international schools. The construction of this tool is based on a "naturalistic" methodological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), in which the research develops as a collaborative activity between researchers and participants, involving, in this case, teachers' situational knowledge and the construction of instruments that incorporate their semantic universes. The purpose of the questionnaire was to reveal the "meaning" of the investigated idea, as well as what participants believed it to mean. Its validity is linked to the

"credibility" concept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of qualitative research and, as Seale (1999) stated, quoting Lincoln and Guba, «the most crucial technique for establishing credibility is through "member checks", showing materials such as interview transcripts and research reports to the people on whom the research has been done, so that they can indicate their agreement or disagreement with the way in which the researcher has represented them» (Seale, 1999, p. 45).

4.3 Procedure

The research tools were distributed in each class at a designated time, as part of normal classroom activity. The protocols of 825 students and 31 teachers were collected, one for each of the two questionnaires distributed. As mentioned, these numbers refer to the school population present for the distribution of the survey, which defines the limits of non-randomized sampling, given the "already existing" school environment. The research attempted in this way to provide significant findings from a theoretical-conceptual, rather than a statistical, point of view. In order to avoid the potential influence of suggested items, regarding the participants' "initial" preconceptions of positive school behaviour, the open-ended question survey was carried out first, followed by the survey consisting of predefined items.

Statistical analyses were undertaken of the data gathered from this latter agree/disagree questionnaire. A qualitative analysis was instead conducted on answers of a small number of open-ended questions. Many authors (Curtis, Geslerb, Smith, & Washbur, 2000; Sorzio, 2005) report that for a detailed study such as a qualitative one, it is sufficient and appropriate to conduct the analysis on a limited number of cases, according to time constraints and available resources (Patton, 2001). The *purposive* sample was selected through a reasoned choice considering the specific characteristics of the investigated population and context (Silvermann, 2010), and based on the findings of the first steps of the research (*opportunistic emergent* sample) (Patton, 2001). To determine how many documents should be analyzed, it was calculated that about one third of the total number of school teachers responded to the open-ended questions (obtained by distributing the survey during normal classroom activity). We therefore proceeded to acquire, through random selection, the same proportion of student questionnaires considering the total number of students in each class (in this way, the contribution of any student from the same class was considered equally significant). The selection of the sample in a qualitative approach, aimed at studying real people in their natural real-life environments, was also determined by the need to consider the influence of space-time and situational variables on people, in the specific research context, rather than the personal characteristics of the subjects. A randomized sample of the entire student population would not have allowed an analysis of the class unit, which we consider to be the most significant element of a school.

Considering the *naturalistic* approach adopted (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), and the declared goal of bringing out the meanings assigned by participants to the construct under investigation, the documentation available was considered to be representative.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Quantitative data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data obtained by the default item questionnaire. The items originally submitted were in the following order:

1. Attends lessons regularly
2. Punctual for lessons and extracurricular activities
3. Promptly justifies absence and late arrival
4. Respects other people and their opinions
5. Respects other people's belongings
6. Uses appropriate language during interactions
7. Speaks politely to teachers and non-teachers
8. Follows indications and directions
9. Makes appropriate use of school and extracurricular areas and equipment
10. Orderly in areas frequented by other people
11. Pays attention to lessons

12. Does the assigned homework diligently
13. Brings the necessary materials to class
14. Participates actively in lessons
15. Works to improve his or her own learning
16. Collaborates with classmates
17. Participates responsibly in lessons and extracurricular activities

Some initial and interesting findings, linked to the research questions, were highlighted by the descriptive statistical analysis (see Tables 1 and 2). First, concerning the relevance assigned to each item, student responses were more homogenous than those of teachers. Another difference found between students and teachers is the different priority order given to items.

Table 1. Mean and standard deviations of the answers given by students

Item	M	SD
Respects other people and their opinions	3,61	,64
Speaks politely to teachers and non-teachers	3,60	,63
Respects the belongings of others	3,49	,70
Attends lessons regularly	3,46	,70
Makes appropriate use of school and extrac. areas and equipment	3,40	,68
Punctual for lessons and extracurricular activities	3,35	,74
Works to improve his own learning	3,34	,72
Collaborates with classmates	3,29	,74
Follows indications and directions	3,28	,70
Promptly justifies absence and late arrival	3,26	,90
Uses appropriate language during interactions	3,25	,73
Orderly in public	3,21	,76
Brings the necessary materials to class	3,14	,79
Does the assigned homework diligently	3,11	,73
Participates actively in lessons	3,08	,75
Participates responsibly in lessons and extr. activities	3,00	,82
Pays attention to lessons	3,06	,75

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the answers given by teachers

Item	M	SD
Makes appropriate use of school and extrac. areas and equipment	4,00	,00

Respects other people and their opinions	3,97	,18
Attends lessons regularly	3,94	,25
Speaks politely to teachers and non-teachers	3,94	,25
Pays attention to lessons	3,90	,53
Does the assigned homework diligently	3,87	,56
Respects the belongings of others	3,87	,34
Works to improve his or her own learning	3,86	,44
Punctual for lessons and extracurricular activities	3,81	,47
Orderly in public	3,80	,40
Uses appropriate language during interactions	3,76	,43
Brings the necessary materials to class	3,71	,46
Participates responsibly in lessons and extr.. activities	3,69	,47
Participates actively in lessons	3,68	,47
Follows indications and directions	3,64	,48
Collaborates with classmates	3,57	,56
Promptly justifies absence and late arrival	3,59	,69

At a later stage, it was necessary to evaluate the capacity of the scale to perform according to the goals intended, that is, to identify the shared attitudes that characterize “positive school behaviour”. The selection of Likert scale items is based on the assumption that they are linked to the same underlined latent concept, but this choice does not prove to be correct, even if made by experts. It therefore became necessary to establish whether each single item moved in the same direction as the total score, using the correlation coefficient between the total score and each single item. The Cronbach’s alpha index allows this overall internal coherence to be assessed, and permits the elimination of any unsatisfactory items characterized by too small an index of correlation. The high alpha (α = .906), obtained from the collected data, reveals a high average correlation between the scale elements, ensuring that they are good indicators of the same “positive school behaviour”.

However, this result is not sufficient to ensure the one-dimensionality of the scale because the elements that comprise it could also subtend two or even more properties. An effective way to control the one-dimensionality of the scale is by a factorial analysis (Corbetta, 2003). Detecting the presence of possible underlying properties of “positive school behaviour” would allow a very clear reading and interpretation of the scale results. For this reason, we performed a factorial analysis of the items, which were previously subject to a bivariate correlation analysis that showed a strong correlation between all of them (significance of each correlation < of 0,05). Some results of the factorial analysis are found below. Table 3 reports the levels of commonality which show how each variable is generally well-represented by the factor solution chosen, together with the weighted components of the rotated solution (matrix). The lowest values are linked to variables 16 (,33) and 17 (,42). The tree factorial solution components identified explain a total variance of 56.06% which is a considerable part of the overall (total) variance. The first component (self-value 6.91) explains 40.69% of the variance, the second (self-value 1.46) explains 8.59% and the third (self-value 1.15) explains 40.69% of the variance. The *Varimax* rotated method identified unrelated factors and distributed the saturation over three factors: the first included 7 statement-items called *“Scholastic participation*”, the second included 4 statement-items called *“Scholastic organization*” while the third included 6 items about the “*Respect for others and the surrounding environment*”.

Table 3. Factorial analysis*: Rotated Component Matrix. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

	Components			*Commonality*
Factor 1: Scholastic participation				
11. pays attention to lessons	**,81**	,09	,19	,70
12. does the assigned homework diligently	**,75**	,27	,07	,64
14. actively participates in lessons	**,72**	,07	,15	,56
15. works to improve his or her own learning	**,68**	,09	,25	,54
13. brings the necessary materials to class	**,51**	,49	,18	,54
8. follows indications and directions	**,48**	,44	,34	,55
16. collaborates with peers and classmates	**,41**	,36	,18	,33
Factor 2: Scholastic organization				
3. promptly justifies absence and late arrival	,08	**,78**	,13	,64
2. respects timetables of lessons and extracurricular activities	,16	**,72**	,26	,62
1. attends lessons regularly	,14	**,70**	,16	,54
17. participates responsibly in lessons and extracurricular activities	,41	**,44**	,22	,42
Factor 3: Respect for others and for the surrounding environment				
5. respects other people's belongings	,09	,23	**,79**	,69
4. respects other people and their opinions	,15	,04	**,77**	,63
6. uses appropriate language during interactions	,34	,19	**,60**	,52
9. makes appropriate use of school and extracurricular areas and equipment	,15	,43	**,60**	,58
7. speaks politely to teachers and non-teachers	,34	,30	**,51**	,48
10. orderly in areas frequented by others	,32	,40	**,47**	,49

*Numbers before items reflect the order of the first presentation of the questionnaire to participants

From the factorial analysis we derived a representation of "positive school behaviour" formed by three-dimensions

A further analysis was undertaken to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the attitude of the two groups (teachers and students) towards the "positive school behaviour" construct. The factors identified through the factorial analysis and used as variables were analyzed using a parametric test for independent samples *t. of Student Test*. The test results show that the student sample acts differently from teachers in all three macro-areas. In particular see the following results:

1. "*Scholastic participation" p* < 0,05 and t=5,09

2. "*Scholastic organization" p* <0,05 and t=2,81
3. "*Respect for others and for the surrounding environment" p* <0,05 and t=6,62

A careful inspection of the values assumed by these means (see Table 4) shows that although there is a significant difference between the averages of teachers and students, between these two groups there is a lesser distance concerning the "scholastic organization" variable. The biggest difference, instead, concerns the "scholastic participation", a sign of the importance given to that macro-area.

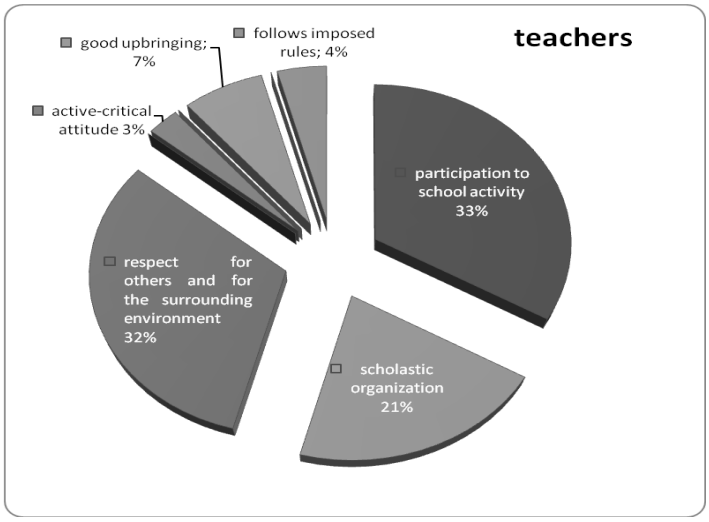
Table 4. *t of Student Test*

	Teacher/Student	*N*	*M*	*M Difference*
Scholastic participation	Student	825	21,83	3,68
	Teacher	31	25,52	
Scholastic organization	Student	825	13,02	1,29
	Teacher	31	14,32	
Respect for others and for the surrounding environment	Student	825	20,02	2,68
	Teacher	31	22,70	

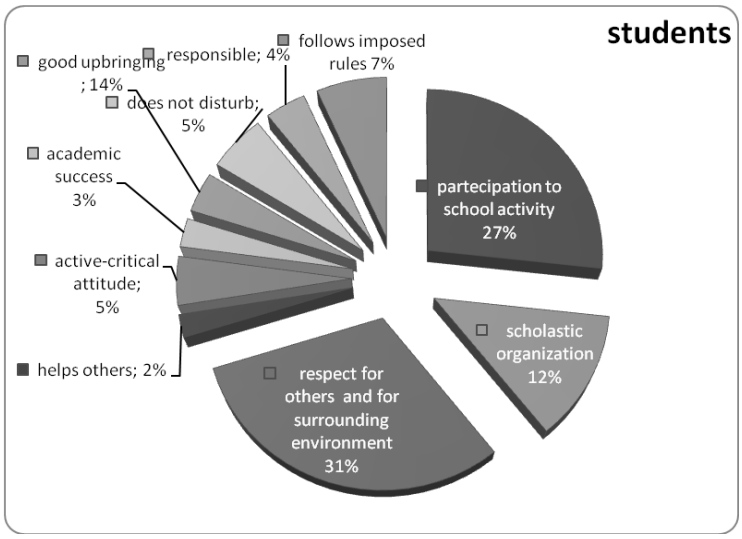
5.2 Qualitative data analysis

Through a two-phase process, first top-down and then bottom-up, 31 answer texts from teachers and 275 from students were analyzed. These texts were divided in two *corpora* of analysis, "Teachers" and "Students", and were encoded using the AtlasTi textual analysis software. During the first phase of analysis, the previous three factors, which emerged from the factorial analysis, (see Table 3) were used as interpretative codes of the "portions of text", one of which may define the set of meaningful words attributable to a single interpretative code. This was carried out to verify whether the three macro-dimensions could also explain the "initial" idea (free of the possible influences of the predefined descriptors used in the agreement/disagreement questionnaire) of "positive school behaviour".

Two independent coders analyzed the texts and a first agreement on 72% of the codes was achieved. The following discussion and negotiation allowed a unanimous encoding of those portions of text initially subject to disagreement. It was found that the three codes allowed the encoding of 86% and 70% respectively of the portions in the two *corpora,* (Graphics 1 and 2). In other words, the idea of positive school behaviour is amply explained by the three codes identified in the factorial analysis, with a fairly similar trend in the two *corpora*. On the other hand, they represent "macro-dimensions" of scholastic behaviour, which break down into a set of more specific descriptors (Table 3). It should be pointed out that among these codes, representing the three macro-area dimensions, the "scholastic organization" code appears in both *corpora* less often than the other two, and with much lower percentages in the "students" *corpus* (12%) compared with the "teachers" (21%). This shows that the participants, especially students, assign a much lower importance to these school life issues than to the other two macro-dimensions.



Graphic 1. *Occurrences of the most frequent codes in the "teachers" corpus*



Graphic 2. *Occurrences of the most frequent codes in the "students" corpus*

In the second analysis phase, we proceeded to identify text segments which were not encoded by the previous analysis, with the aim of identifying further components that characterize the "positive school behaviour" of teachers and students. Using a bottom-up process, codes were defined which permit a further declination of the three macro-dimensions previously decoded, or the identification of some new and more specific dimensions of positive school behaviour. Among the codes that may represent declinations of the three macro-areas (Graphics 1 and 2), the most recurrent in both *corpora*, but with different percentages, are "good upbringing" (7% and 4% respectively) and "follows imposed rules" (4% and 7% respectively). Both (although they do not represent precise and defined behaviour descriptors, especially the first) can be interpreted as elements that give additional strength to the dimension linked to the "respect for others and the environment" macro-dimensional code which recurs more than

others in the two *corpora.* Of particular interest is another emergent code called “active-critical attitude”, more present in the “students” *corpus* than in the “teachers”. It is connected to the “participation in school activity” macro-dimension, and shows the emergence of a need, expressed by participants, for more attention to be given to student’s participation during the behaviour evaluation. A participation characterized by «great critical spirit and curiosity for confrontation and discussion» (teacher), because «a good student is not the amorphous one in the classroom, who does not have a critical consciousness…», he/she should instead show «critical and evaluation skills for potential problematic situations and common sense dealings with such situations» (student). Other codes were identified only in the “students” *corpus*, allowing recognition of different representations of “positive school behaviour” shaped by students and teachers. Unlike teachers, students believe that “academic success” should be added to active classroom participation. “Academic success” is intended as «constant study in order to achieve good grades», thus emphasizing the *cognitive dimension* of participation. This participation should also be characterized by personal “responsibility” towards school activities and one’s own duties, highlighting an *ethical dimension* of school behaviour. In other words, the student should «have the will to commit him/herself to all that he/she does» because «it is the responsibility of each student to give their best without teacher insistence». Another dimension which emerged from the “student” *corpus* only is that which we can call *social-affective.* It regards the “take care” dimension, according to which school behaviour should also be evaluated by considering the attitude and degree of attention to classmate’s needs and willingness to help others, «keeping friendship and solidarity relationships».

6. DISCUSSION

What does a teacher mean when, during periodic evaluation, he/she must assign a conduct rating to the student? And based on which factors will students recognize that they are behaving adequately or not?

The research findings show the difficulties, as also noted by Salerni (2005), in identifying a single view regarding “positive school behaviour” that is widely accepted by teachers, and shared by the members of the school community. The absence of a shared position even between teachers in the same school is demonstrated by the descriptions of “positive school behaviour” given by two teachers involved in the research:

> Sits composed, doesn’t chatter during the lessons, always raises his or her hand, stands when a teacher enters, healthy, pays attention during questioning, keeps the desk in order, never comes late, always brings the right materials and is punctual with assignments, shows respect to the school staff, … (teacher A).

> “Interested in the various subjects, motivated to study and in all the different scholastic and extra-curricular activities, self-esteem, social skills, collaboration, willingness to help others, deep respect of people and things, great critical spirit and curiosity for confrontation and debate… (Teacher B)

The diversities identified, made visible by the quantitative analysis and understood better with the qualitative, seem to highlight the unquestionable need for schools to adopt processes of explication and negotiation to build a shared idea of “positive school behaviour” to refer to when preparing the educational agreement, as well as evaluation of conduct. It is necessary to make some particular considerations regarding some specific observations which became evident during the qualitative analysis. The reference to “good upbringing”, made frequently by teachers and students, seems to reflect a culture that conceives “positive school behaviour” as a consequence of generic “good upbringing” by the family, instead of the result of learning processes that should take place at school. A “good upbringing” seems to refer to different behavioural characteristics which is a *pot-pourri* of ambiguously subjective and individually designed meanings - a definition which is certainly not usable as a descriptor in an evaluation rubric! Among the other emerging dimensions, of particular interest is the one that characterizes scholastic participation as “critical” in relation to the behaviour evaluation; an evaluation that should detect whether the student demonstrates *critical spirit* and *evaluation skills*. This is a need expressed in the student *corpus* in particular. It is a phenomenon that leads us to think that maybe, in the passivity process of students (about which teachers complain), teachers themselves contribute to this process by not placing enough importance on this behaviour dimension and may be guided in their actions by an idea of school as a place for “transmission of information” or, as defined by Bereiter and Scardamalia

(2003), the belief mode, rather than the place for collaborative construction of ideas or design mode. Finally, the components of “positive school behaviour” which emerge only from students’ answers deserve special attention.

The results seems to outline a distinct idea of “positive school behaviour” characterized by a strong *personal sense of responsibility* of students, which accentuates the dimensions: a) *effort* aimed at *good results* , b) *moral duty* of the student, and c) *care* towards peers.

In reference to these two first dimensions (points a and b), which are highlighted by the students’ spontaneous answers to the open question, it should be noted that they could be interpreted as confirmation of the idea of "effort" (commitment, dedication, diligence related to school activities) as defined by a branch of educational research that investigates the relationship between attributional processes and school dynamics (Weiner, 2003). Within this area of study, Matteucci & Gosling (2004) interpreted “effort” as an innate element in classroom settings. Specifying its function, the researchers detected that “putting maximum effort into study” seems to be «a norm of conduct, an ethical moral principle of school context, which guides teachers' everyday decisions and influences the judgments, evaluations and sanctions they are called upon to take every day (*'What grade should I give to this student's essay? ": "What or which type of intervention should I take with this student?"*)» (ivi. p. 156). Referring to Weiner attributional theory (1995), Matteucci, Tomasetto, Selleri and Carugati (2008) show how the effort cannot be considered simply as “one” of the various causal attributions, but the “key-factor” that determines the assignment of responsibility for school success and failure. This latter process, in turn, influences the opinions of teachers towards the students. From this perspective, effort becomes the core role of “scholastic ethics”, which comprises all that is considered correct and fair by teachers, and therefore encouraged by them. Interest, effort, perseverance, and participation are constitutive elements of this ethic and as such are the basic requirements of the “the student’s job”. In assuming this kind of perspective, it is necessary to consider how the “positive school behaviour” idea, notable here in the student *corpus,* reflects what has been highlighted by previous research (Matteucci *et al*., 2008), according to which, school evaluation is a form of social judgment. A judgment of irresponsibility, given to a student who is seen as not being committed to an assignment, is a “moral” judgment that determines, together with the grade of the assignment, the teacher’s rating (Weiner, 2003).

In our context, students seem to have given voice to their teachers’ thoughts, and are committed, more or less consciously, to building an “ethic of effort” as a form of raising the awareness and responsibility of the student (and perhaps their own irresponsibility) towards scholastic successes and failures.

In this perspective, it is necessary to consider the “follows imposed rules” descriptor which defines positive behaviour as a peculiarity of the student who agrees to abide by (school) rules even when not participating in any way in their definition. This indicator is attributed higher percentages by students (7%) than by teachers (4%) and could be interpreted as a statement, by some students, of not wanting to assume those responsibilities that teachers assign them (as if saying “I prefer to passively accept the role instead of making the *effort* to discuss and elaborate it”). The last of the three dimensions listed above is interesting – that is, “care towards peers” (point c). It would seem to confirm the relational-affective weaknesses of current adolescents. Students participating in this survey seem to show, on the one hand, the need to seek and create in school those "real relationships", which are becoming weaker and rarer in current life scenarios, characterized by an increased incidence of virtual meetings and relations. On the other hand, is their need to expend themselves emotionally in school, as compensation for a family environment which has become less significant as a reference for the development of socio-emotional skills (Sandomenico, 2007). A further reading of the data analysis permits further reflections.

First of all, it seems that the different meanings assigned by teachers and students to the “positive school behaviour” concept, although regarding appropriate democratic and civil coexistence within the school, does not capture the broader concept of “citizenship”, as proposed instead by many European school legislations (Eurydice, 2012; Gearon, 2009). In Italy this latter connotation assigned to school behaviour was introduced by the Ministry, simultaneously with the specific discipline “Citizenship and constitution”, proposed as curricular teaching for schools of all levels, in 2008. In this sense it is evident that at the time the research was conducted (2009), this connotation had not yet become part of the scholastic cultural heritage of teachers and students.

The research data seems to us, however, interesting because it opens further, wider areas of investigation regarding the presence, or absence, of the “citizenship” idea, as the cultural heritage of young Italian students, also related to those of other countries. This phenomenon could be explored in future research, also of a comparative nature.

A second point, which is worth thinking about, concerns the fact that among the positive school behaviour dimensions which emerged from this analysis of research protocols, “awareness” appears only partially. This skill is cited several times in the Italian ministry guidelines concerning the assessment of school behaviour. In our research context, that "awareness" should be an element of “positive school behaviour” seems to emerge only through the “active-critical attitude” dimension (identified in minimal percentages of 3% and 5% respectively in the *corpora* of teachers and students) which describes the behaviour of students who do not passively accept the rules, or the values and practices of their relevant contexts, but activate processes of discussion and reflection to achieve personal elaboration and awareness. This result seems particularly significant especially because it has been identified in the school context, that is, the environment that should be aimed predominantly, among all the other learning contexts, at the pursuit of metacognitive skills. The suggestion has already been made that the increasingly passive attitude of students, perhaps even caused in some way by the school, makes this even more necessary.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In one of his articles, Weiner (2003) uses a particularly significant metaphor in defining as “courtrooms”, those school contexts where the processes of attribution and, as a consequence the educational phenomena occurring in them, are subject to dynamics which can be equalled to those of judgment and punishment contexts. «A student who considers the classroom a courtroom is apt to be motivated by the avoidance of punishment. Hence, acceptable classroom strategies include deceit and excuse giving (hoping one won’t ‘get caught’), while the construal of the teacher is not as an ally or helper, but rather one who administers ‘just deserts’. A school, just like the courtroom, is therefore a place to be avoided – an aversive setting with in-group and out-group divisions» (ivi, p13). Weiner’s “pedagogical” invitation is to abandon this logic, by employing metaphors like a “temple of learning’ or a ‘marketplace of ideas”, i.e. democratic teaching/learning practices (vs. authoritarian ones), within horizontal school organizations (vs. hierarchical ones), in which evaluation activities are oriented by formative rather than summative approaches. We believe that in these latter practices, current research may acquire meaning since it is oriented towards finding concrete applications in school contexts and proposing realistic means of co-building and sharing the meanings within evaluation processes that are in fact workable in schools. From a theoretical point of view, it proves validity as an “authentic research” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research can be said to be authentic when it supports the actors in developing a more sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon investigated (ontological authenticity), in recognizing points of view which are different from theirs (educative authenticity) and in stimulating participants to act (catalytic authenticity) and acquire empowerment by means of the actions that are taken (tactical authenticity). By actively involving participants at every stage of the research and by sharing the results - also in practical terms by building and using the rubric for the evaluation of school behaviour - we believe we have achieved our target. From a practical point of view, the research seems to highlight the need to plan behaviour evaluation in parallel with processes of making explicit and, most importantly, sharing the idea of “good school behaviour”, so that the evaluation may also acquire a formative value which is necessary to reach the target. This target is currently highly desired by evaluation research, assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2009) and self-evaluation capacity.

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