STRESS AND TEACHING: A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENQUIRY ON THE COPING STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS IN ITALY

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Introduction

In the last decade, school in Italy has been involved in a series of radical changes and, consequently, teachers have been obliged to deeply modify their methods and conception of work in the direction that literature on the subject has pointed out for a while (Ben-Ari, Krole, & Har-Even, 2003; Rascle, Cosnefroy, & Quintard, 2009; Van Horn, Schaufeli, Greenglass, & Burke, 1997). This has caused them to continually adapt and ri-adapt and thus to become more vulnerable to stress (Long, Kahn, & Shutz, 1992; Terry, Tonge, & Callan, 1995). Nevertheless, some of them seem to be more capable of facing problematic events than others (Miller, Brownell, & Smith, 1999; Maslach & Leiter, 2000; Ben-Ari, Krole, & Har-Even, 2003).

Aims of research

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The poster reports the results of a survey carried out with Italian teachers in order to analyze which coping strategies teachers adopt when they find themselves dealing with difficult situations or stressful events.

Participants

254 Italian teachers took part in the survey, 121 (48%) from the North, 68 from the Centre and 65 (25%) from the South. Males are 27 (mean age 50.2, SD 9.3). Females are 227 (mean age 45.0, SD 8.6). If the 254 participants are divided into five age clusters, distribution is normal s shown in table 1.

Males have been working as teachers for 24.9 years in average (SD 11.3), while females have been working as teachers for 17.4 years in average (SD 10.6). Table 2 reports the distribution for seniority clusters.

Instrument

In order to measure the coping strategies of Italian teachers, the Brief Cope (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced) by Carver, Scheier and Weintrab (1989) was used.

It is a questionnaire composed by 28 items. Other than this, the Italian version (Caprara, 2001) of the Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (Bandura, 1977) and the Questionnaire on Motivations (Galati, Fassio & Viarengo, 2006) were used. The first one measures two factors: the personal self-efficacy and the organizational self-efficacy. The second instrument is irrelevant for this poster.

Age clusters	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
27-30	15	15	5.90%	5.90%
31-40	68	83	26.8%	32.7%
41-50	97	180	38.2%	70.9%
51-60	67	247	26.4%	97.3%
61-65	7	254	2.70%	100%

Table 1: distribution for age clusters.

Seniority clusters	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
1-9	77	77	30.4%	30.4%
10-19	59	136	23.2%	53.6%
20-29	59	195	23.2%	76.8%
30-39	59	254	23.2%	100%

Table 2: distribution for seniority clusters.

Item	Wording	Mean	SD
14	I try to find a strategy for what must be done	3.23	0.7
7	I do something in order to improve the situation	3.21	0.8
2	I focus on doing something for the situation I find myself in	3.15	0.8
25	I seriously think about moves to do	3.10	0.8
20	I accept that the fact has happened	2.87	1.0
13	I self-criticize	2.77	0.9
17	I try to find something good in what happened	2.40	1.0
12	I try to look in the bright side	2.37	0.9
21	I express my negative feelings	2.36	1.0
10	I search for help and advice from others	2.29	0.9
24	I learn to live with that	2.22	0.9
23	I try to obtain help and advice from others about what I should do	2.20	0.9
5	I try to get emotional support from others	2.02	1.0
15	I search for comfort and understanding from others	2.01	1.0

Table 3 : the most chose items from the *Brief Cope*.

Item	Wording	Mean	SD	r	p
11	I joke	1.8	1.0	− .43	.002
23	I try to obtain help and advice from others about what I should do	2.2	0.9	− .34	.014
10	I search for help and advice from others	2.3	0.9	− .31	.019
3	I say to myself "this is not true"	0.7	1.0	+ .29	.031

Table 4: correlation (r) between coping strategies and age/seniority.

Item	Wording	Mean		p
		M	F	
19	I do something to think less abouth this, such as going to the cinema, watching TV, reading, daydreaming, sleeping, doing shopping or else	0.9	2.1	.001
9	I say things that allow my unpleasing feelings to come out	0.9	1.9	.019
7	I do something in order to improve the situation	2.9	3.8	.018
14	I try to find a strategy for what must be done	3.0	3.7	.030
27	I pray or do meditation	1.0	1.9	.033

Table 5: comparisons between males (M) and females (F) for the *Brief Cope* items.

Item	Wording	Mean		p
		M	F	
7	I know how to involve in my activities even the most difficult pupils	2.1	3.5	.019

Table 6: comparisons between males (M) and females (F) for one of the items of the *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire*.

Item	Wording	Personal efficacy	Organizational efficacy
2	I focus on doing something for the situation I find myself in	.46	.20
3	I say to myself "this is not true"	-	.19
4	I refuse to believe that it has happened	-	.25
6	I give up dealing with it	−.39	-
7	I do something in order to improve the situation	.41	-
10	I search for help and advice from others	−.29	−.28
12	I try to look in the bright side	.38	.25
14	I try to find a strategy for what must be done	.46	-
16	I give up even trying to deal with it	−.46	-
17	I try to find something good in what happened	.49	-
20	I accept that the fact has happened	.37	-
22	I try to find confort in religion or spiritual convictions	-	.19
23	I try to obtain help and advice from others about what I should do	−.24	-
24	I learn to live with that	.34	-
25	I seriously think about moves to do	.69	-
27	I pray or do meditation	-	.27

Table 7: statistically significant correlations between coping strategies and the two factors from the *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire* (personal efficacy, organizational efficacy).

Results

Table 3 shows the most chosen items from the Brief Cope.

Some differences linked to age and seniority (related with r = .89) emerge: older teachers, with a higher seniority, are less inclined to joke and search for help and advice, while they tend to deny more than young teachers (table 4).

Even gender influences the choice of coping strategies. The five reported in table 5 are preferred by females

It is possible to find gender differences even in one of the 21 items of the *Self-Efficacy Questionnaire* (table 6).

As for the relations between the concepts of self-efficacy and coping strategies, table 7 reports the statistically significant results (p < .05).

Main References

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