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Social Intelligence and well-being at school: preliminary results of an exploratory study

Social Intelligence e benessere a scuola: risultati preliminari di uno studio esplorativo¹

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ABSTRACT

The relational dimension within the school organisation is crucial for the well-being of those involved. Collaborative work and mutual trust between colleagues are essential for improving teachers' professional effectiveness and have positive effects on student learning (Wullschleger et al, 2023). For this reason, social intelligence is a key construct for the development of teaching professionalism, as outlined by Albrecht's (2006) model. The exploratory survey conducted with 180 primary and pre-school teachers at the University of Palermo adopted a qualitative/quantitative framework through the implementation of a structured questionnaire (171 responses) constructed

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from the perspective of Cantor and Kihlstrom (2000) and Albrecht (2006a; 2006b) and a semi-structured focus group (9 participants) and examines teachers' perceptions of the construct of Social Intelligence. The initial results of the exploratory study suggest the need to develop training sessions on Social Intelligence in initial teacher training in order to cultivate the relational dimension appropriate for building and maintaining adequate well-being within the school organisation.

Keywords: Social Intelligence, teachers' training, organisational well-being.

RIASSUNTO

La dimensione relazionale all'interno dell'organizzazione scolastica è fondamentale per il benessere degli attori coinvolti. Il lavoro collaborativo e la fiducia reciproca tra colleghi sono essenziali per migliorare l'efficacia professionale dei docenti, e mostra ricadute positive anche sull'apprendimento degli studenti (Wullschleger et al, 2023). Per tale ragione, si ritiene che la Social Intelligence possa rivelarsi un costrutto chiave per lo sviluppo della professionalità docente, così come delineato dal modello di Albrecht (2006). Il contributo presenta gli esiti dell'indagine esplorativa condotta con 180 docenti di scuola primaria e dell'infanzia nelle scuole della Sicilia Occidentale, volta a rilevare la percezione dei docenti rispetto al costrutto di Social Intelligence. Gli strumenti costruiti e utilizzati sono: un questionario strutturato (171 risposte) costruito a partire dalla prospettiva di Cantor e Kihlstrom (2000) e di Albrecht (2006a; 2006b) e un focus group semi-strutturato (9 partecipanti). L'impianto adottato è quali/quantitativo. I primi risultati dello studio esplorativo suggeriscono la necessità di sviluppare momenti formativi sulla Social Intelligence nella formazione iniziale dei docenti, al fine di coltivare la dimensione relazionale opportuna per costruire e mantenere un adeguato benessere all'interno dell'organizzazione scolastica.

Parole chiave: Intelligenza sociale, formazione degli insegnanti, benessere organizzativo.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relational dimension represents a central element in school organizations, conceived not only as a structured system but as a community of individuals interconnected by interpersonal ties.

In light of this premise, Social Intelligence (SI) and relatedness in school dynamics emerge as objects of study of relevant interest. This paper aims to explore this construct through a survey conducted by the University of Palermo in A.A. 2023/2024 with in-service primary and kindergarten teachers in Western Sicily, using quantitative/qualitative instruments: through a survey based on the administration of a structured questionnaire investigating five dimensions of Social Intelligence (Manipulation, Empathy, Social Irritability, Communication and Authenticity) and a semi-structured Focus Group that delves into their views on the importance of Social Intelligence and collaborative work within the school context.

This investigation hypothesizes the integration of the construct of Social Intelligence into undergraduate education for future teachers, as well as into initial teacher training programs.

The development of interpersonal skills is thought to correlate positively with the building of a solid, collaboration-oriented professional identity. Teachers endowed with social intelligence could show a significant relationship with strengthening the sense of belonging in the school community. This, in turn, could be associated with improved relational climate and professional well-being, factors that are found to be related to the overall effectiveness of the educational system.

2. THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN BEINGS AND SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE (SI)

Understanding the nature of a living organism is impossible without considering its relational context (Simoncini & De Simone; 2017). Boi (2009) highlights how relationship represents a primary need, rooted in human DNA and neuronal system, constituting an essential key to the interpretation of individual development. Moreover, relationship acts as a fundamental category of social being and acting, influencing and transforming individuals through external dynamics and internal stimuli. In this relational process, others play the function of a “critical gaze,” facilitating the construction of our identity in a continuous cycle of interaction (Boi; 2009). Belton, Ebbert and Infurna (2016) identify social intelligence as a crucial element in navigating the fabric and evolution of social relationships throughout life, a factor that is particularly relevant in today's context of continuous changes in relational dynamics due to technological advances and transformations in social, educational and work structures.

In 1920, in an article in Harper's Monthly Magazine, researcher Edward L. Thorndike first presented the concept of Social Intelligence, viewing it as a significant component of a person's intelligence. Thorndike (1920) defines social intelligence as “the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls, and to act wisely in human relationships”; it also represents the human ability to understand what is going on in the world and to respond to that understanding, effectively, from a personal and social point of view. In agreement with Thorndike's (1920) statement, Moss and Hunt (1927) add that SI, understood as “the ability to get along with others,” constitutes one of the natural abilities to be considered in determining a person's success in the world. Building on past conceptualizations, Vernon (1933) combines new ideas, providing a broader explanation of SI, which includes “the ability to get along with people in general, knowledge of social matters, social technique or ease in society, susceptibility to stimuli from other members of a group, as well as insight into the temporary moods or underlying personality traits of strangers.” Thorndike's (1920), Moss and Hunt's (1927) and Vernon's (1933) reflections represent early attempts to conceptualize a very complex construct such as SI.

Subsequently, researchers' attention shifts from describing and assessing social intelligence to understanding the purpose of interpersonal behavior and the role it plays in effective adaptability (Bar-On, 2006). This line of research helps to define human effectiveness from a social perspective and reinforces a very important aspect of Wechsler's (1958) definition of general intelligence, understood as “the individual's ability to act purposefully.” In the 1980s, SI became the field of interest of Gardner's (1983) studies in his Theory of Multiple Intelligence. The American psychologist identifies it as a form of interpersonal intelligence, which underlies the group interaction and behavior of individuals. In the same years, the study conducted by researchers Ford and Tisak (1983) shows that SI is not a purely cognitive phenomenon; rather, it is considered in terms of effective social behavior, resulting from the interaction of a variety of psychological and sociocultural processes.

Today the construct continues to attract interest. Cantor and Kihlstrom (2000) study social intelligence as an individual's "fund of knowledge about the social world." The two scholars posit SI as the cognitive basis of personality, which individuals bring to bear in solving personal life tasks and which enables them to know in advance the events that occur in their lives, using them productively. Other scholars refer to SI as meaning a person's ability to understand and manage other people to engage in adaptive social interactions; to establish positive relationships to meet the demands of social situations (Kaur, Roy, & Kumar; 2021); and to understand one's environment and react appropriately to achieve socially effective behavior (Sadiku, Alam, & Musa; 2019). Emmerling and Boyatzis (2012) define Social Intelligence in terms of a competence or a set of skills (Boyatzis; 2020), which enable the individual to build and maintain healthy relationships, whether in dyads, teams, or large groups. SI includes awareness of situations and the social dynamics that govern them, but it also includes knowledge of interaction styles and strategies that can help a person achieve their social relationships (Militaru; 2016).

Karl Albrecht (2006) in his book "Social Intelligence: The New Science of Success," proposes the following definition: "the ability to get along with others, to gain their cooperation, and to navigate complex social relationships and environments."

Social intelligence is a true individual trait; it is especially positively specified in ethical and pro-social environments (Frankovský & Birknerová; 2014); it enables one to understand one's environment and have a positive influence on social interactions; and it is an adaptation for dealing with highly complex social situations, such as politics, romantic relationships, family relationships, quarrels, and collaboration (Sadiku, Alam & Musa; 2019).

3. THE QUANTI-QUALITATIVE STUDY

The present investigation is concerned with the construct of SI, a construct that is not widely used in the pedagogical field and is more related to the field of work organizations. Nevertheless, as made explicit in the previous paragraphs, SI is a full candidate to become one of the competencies that actors in the educational context must possess with a view to building and maintaining a productive and effective school climate.

The following contribution aims to investigate the perception of the social dimensions, related to SI, within the school, through an exploratory survey, whose reference sample (convenience sampling) consists of 171 teachers conducted by the University of Palermo during the first semester of the a.y. 2023/2024.

The instrument chosen for the survey is a structured questionnaire that was constructed through the collaboration between the University of Palermo and the University of Sarajevo². Having completed the construction phase of the instrument, it was administered in 8 countries: Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Greece, Germany, Serbia, Turkey, and Croatia. Results related to the data collection carried out in Italy by the University of Palermo are discussed here.

With the aim of expanding the data with qualitative elements, the results of a Focus Group, conducted

² Under the coordination of Prof. Dino Mujkic. He is interested in researching managers with a background in sports to investigate the connection between their level of social intelligence (SI) and success in management performance. Specifically, he aims to examine the hypothesis that a higher level of social intelligence is positively correlated with enhanced management activity and performance.

with 9 elementary school teachers to investigate their degree of awareness with respect to the construct under consideration, are also reported.

Following the explanatory sequential design approach outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), it was planned to conduct an initial quantitative phase and, on the results of the latter, a follow-up was developed through a second qualitative phase in order to give a clearer and more in-depth explanation of the first results.

3.1. Tools used

The objective of the structured questionnaire is to go out and investigate how important social intelligence actually is for successful management in organizations, how people use their social intelligence in team environments, and what specific skills are needed for successful management of processes and organizations. The instrument considers five dimensions related to Social Intelligence: Manipulation, Empathy, Social Irritability, Communication, and Authenticity (Albrecht, 2006a; 2006b; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 2000). Each dimension consists of a series of closed-ended attitudes/behaviors based on a 5-level Likert scale.

The focus group discussion was based on a group discussion in order to investigate the views, opinions, and attitudes of individuals and the group regarding the construct of Social Intelligence. It began by constructing a set list of stimulus questions, the structure of which is outlined by Frisina (2010) and is set out below.

1. Moderator and observer introduction 1.1 Can you briefly introduce yourself, how long have you been working as a teacher? 1.2. What is your experience as a teacher?	OPENING QUESTION
2. What comes to your mind when you hear about Social Intelligence? 2.1. What is the role and importance of a good relationship with each other in the work team?	INTRODUCTORY QUESTION
3. Within the work context, how do you stand in your relationship with each other? 3.1 What are the main relational dimensions/characteristics that set you apart in your team both individually and as a group?	TRANSITION QUESTION
4. In your opinion, what are the main characteristics that an educational leader must possess in relating to each other? 4.1. What can be the consequences and benefits of a positive relational climate within the work context? 4.2. What are the consequences of a disorganized and uncommunicative work environment? 4.3. What would you do as teachers to improve the relationship within the team?	KEY QUESTIONS.
5. Are there any additional insights/reflections you would like to share?	CLOSING QUESTION

Tab. 1 Focus group question schedule

3.2. Survey recipients

The reference sample with respect to the administration of the structured questionnaire consists of 171 participants. Of them, 11 are school leaders, 156 are teachers and 14 are educational personnel (pedagogical coordinators, educators). 87.9 percent of the participants are women and 12.1 percent are men. 34.1 percent of respondents fluctuate in the age range of 51 to 60 years; 27.3 percent, are between 41 and 50 years of age; 16.7 percent are between 31 and 40 years of age; 11.4 percent are between 21 and 30 years of age; and finally, only 0.8 percent of respondents are over 71 years of age. Regarding the level of education, most of the respondents, 55.3 percent, hold a master's degree; this is followed by 13.6 percent who hold a high school diploma; 9.8 percent hold a bachelor's degree; and the rest of the respondents hold a bachelor's degree followed by a postgraduate degree. Through the responses, it is also possible to stabilize that 78.7 percent say they are not in charge of a team of people, while 21.3 percent are in charge of a work team.

While 9 teachers participated in the focus group including 4 working at preschool and 5 at elementary school. The target sample varied in years of teaching at both primary and preschool. They include only one support teacher. Currently, almost all of the teachers work in and around the Palermo area. Only one teacher serves in a comprehensive school, in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, in Pordenone.

3.3. Quantitative data analysis

The collection of quantitative data enabled both a descriptive analysis, in order to calculate the frequency, mean, mode and standard deviation of the responses, and a reliability analysis, through the calculation of Cronbach's α coefficient, in order to measure the reliability of the instrument. To make the reading of the data intuitive, it is evident that the Likert scale used was converted to a numerical scale from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Descriptive analysis was performed for each area, referring to all the items that it comprises.

Social influence

Descrittive

	ITEM A-1	ITEM A-2	ITEM A-3	ITEM A-4	ITEM A-5	ITEM A-6
N	132	132	132	132	132	132
Mancanti	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	2.52	1.49	3.96	1.20	2.14	2.20
Mediana	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	2.00	2.00
Moda	3.00	1.00	4.00	1.00	3.00	1.00
Deviazione standard	1.000	0.660	0.920	0.458	0.934	1.01

Fig. 1 Descriptive analysis social influence area.

Area A consists of the following items: 1. I persuade others to do what I want; 2. I use others to my advantage; 3. I act in accordance with the feelings of others; 4. I belittle others to appear better; 5. I tend to influence the decisions of others; 6. I persuade others to take my side.

Teachers are aware that through their behavior and ideas, they can exert social influence on others, testifying to interconnectedness as a defining element of human nature. We are able to influence and manipulate others through our presence: the intentionality of our actions is a crucial element in determining positive and/or negative outcomes on others. It emerges that teachers tend to act according to a positive intentionality, in accordance with the feelings of others, as confirmed by the mean of item A3 (3.96 ± 0.920) keeping away the idea of using others to one's own advantage (1.49 ± 0.660), belittling them to appear better (1.29 ± 0.458), persuading them to do what one wants (2.52 ± 1.000), influencing, their decisions, for personal purposes (2.14 ± 0.934).

Empathy

Descrittive

	ITEM B-1	ITEM B-2	ITEM B-3	ITEM B-4	ITEM B-5	ITEM B-6	ITEM B-7	ITEM B-8
N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
Mancanti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	4.12	2.02	4.02	3.83	3.74	3.73	4.36	1.43
Mediana	4.00	2.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	1.00
Moda	4.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	1.00
Deviazione standard	0.630	0.928	0.624	0.682	0.716	0.730	0.732	0.632

Fig. 2 Descriptive analysis Empathy area.

Area B contemplates the following items: 1. I understand the desires of others; 2. Perceiving the feelings of others confuses me; 3. I recognize the desires of others; 4. I understand the feelings of others even when they do not show them; 5. I recognize the intentions that guide the actions of others; 6. I understand the weaknesses of others; 7. I catch my own moods and emotions; 8. I ignore the emotions of others.

In order to build a good relationship with each other, teachers need to adopt an empathetic attitude, through which they can create an attunement with others, paying attention to their feelings, without identifying their own selves with each other, but maintaining each one's uniqueness, as confirmed by the mean of item 1: 4.12 ± 0.630 . It also emerges that teachers possess good emotional awareness, are able to maintain a distance between themselves and the other, demonstrating decentralization skills: they are able to shift their attention away from their "self" and look to the other from themselves, recognizing their intentions (item 5 - 3.74 ± 0.716) and understanding their desires (item 3 - 4.02 ± 0.624) and their own (item 7 - 4.36 ± 0.732) and others' moods (mean item 8 1.43 ± 0.632). Building an effective connection with others, understanding what they need, and observing the other while maintaining their own uniqueness represent key principles for empathy in the context of Social Intelligence.

Social Irritability

Descrittive

	ITEM C-1	ITEM C-2	ITEM C-3	ITEM C-4	ITEM C-5	ITEM C-6	ITEM C-7
N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
Mancanti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	2.56	3.95	2.38	1.83	3.28	1.75	1.86
Mediana	3.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
Moda	3.00	4.00	2.00	1.00	5.00	1.00	1.00
Deviazione standard	0.998	0.713	1.00	0.830	1.44	0.775	0.866

Fig. 3 Descriptive analysis Social Irritability area.

Area C is based on the following items: 1. I avoid physical contact with others; 2. I understand how to adapt to new people; 3. I feel discomfort when I have to deal with new people; 4. I consider the weaknesses of others a limitation for myself; 5. I consider the superiority of others to be unappeasable; 6. I believe that the desires of others are confusing to me; 7. I find opinions different from my own frustrating.

The social nature of the individual implies awareness of the presence of the other, an aspect that distinguishes the teaching profession, which, by its very nature, is relational. As a result, teachers must come to terms with the attitudes and behaviors of others: in particular, teachers do not feel discomfort with the presence of others (mean item 3 - 2.38 ± 1.00), do not avoid physical contact (mean item 1 - 2.56 ± 0.998), and exhibit good adaptive skills (mean item 2 - 3.95 ± 0.713). However, there emerges a discordant opinion about considering the superiority of others as an unapproachable attitude (item 5 - 3.28 ± 1.44), but in most cases, the other is not a limitation to one's self. There is good self-perception and self-confidence of teachers, who are not disoriented by the desires of others (mean item 6 - 1.75 ± 0.775) and do not find opinions other than their own frustrating (mean item 7 - 1.86 ± 0.866).

Communication

Descrittive

	ITEM D-1	ITEM D-2	ITEM D-3	ITEM D-4	ITEM D-5	ITEM D-6	ITEM D-7	ITEM D-8	ITEM D-9	ITEM D-10
N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
Mancanti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	4.17	3.90	4.11	4.12	4.33	3.63	1.72	3.93	3.72	2.42
Mediana	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	2.00
Moda	4.00	4.00	4.00	4.00	5.00	4.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	2.00
Deviazione standard	0.726	0.686	0.713	0.677	0.757	0.735	0.894	0.701	0.804	1.13

Fig. 4 Descriptive analysis Communication area.

This area contemplates the items: 1. I respect the timing of a conversation (communicative

circularity): communication-feedback-communication; 2. I respond quickly and pertinently during a conversation; 3. I listen to my interlocutor by grasping his or her wants and needs; 4. I use active listening techniques towards my interlocutor; 5. I calibrate language in relation to the interlocutor; 6. I interact only with people of my same sociocultural level; 7. I believe that my ideas should prevail over those of others; 8. I accommodate the opinions of others regarding the issue being addressed by asserting the most suitable idea; 9. I can have mastery in any conversation by observing the interaction of others; 10. I mainly pay attention to my own way of interacting by ignoring what is said to me.

Connecting with others requires the ability to express one's thoughts and opinions, using communication skills and recognizing the other as an active member of a communicative relationship. Good communicative competence requires adherence to communication time (mean item 1 - 4.17 ± 0.726) and relevant use of language and active listening (mean item 4- 4.12 ± 0.677). Within the school context, teachers report interacting with people from different sociocultural levels and, consequently, calibrating their language in relation to the presence of the interlocutor (mean item 5- 4.33 ± 0.757). Teachers perceive the presence of the other, within a communicative relationship, grasping their desires and needs (mean item 3- 4.11 ± 0.713), valuing the opinions of others (mean item 88 - 3.93 ± 0.701) although the value related to item 10 for which there is a tendency to ignore what others say (mean item 10 - 2.42 ± 1.13) is discordant.

Authenticity

Descrittive

	ITEM E-1	ITEM E-2	ITEM E-3	ITEM E-4	ITEM E-5	ITEM E-6	ITEM E-7	ITEM E-8	ITEM E-9
N	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132	132
Mancanti	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Media	4.42	4.13	4.05	2.15	3.49	1.63	4.58	3.01	2.95
Mediana	5.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.00	3.00
Moda	5.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.00	3.00
Deviazione standard	0.677	0.735	0.734	0.912	1.01	0.746	0.753	1.15	1.31

Fig. 5 Descriptive analysis Authenticity area.

The items in this area are: 1. I listen to those who have opinions different from mine; 2. I grasp the point of view different from my own to take on new perspectives; 3. I enter into authentic and deep relationships with others; 4. I enter into fictitious and short-lived relationships with others; 5. I communicate sincerely even something unpleasant; 6. I lie if I am asked my opinion; 7. I consider honesty indispensable; 8. I engage in different behaviors in relation to the contexts or people around me; 9. I engage in the same behaviors regardless of the context or people around me.

This dimension allows us to detect how honest individuals are with themselves and others. Authenticity demands that teachers engage in meaningful, deep relationships (mean item 3- 4.05 ± 0.734), grasp the other person's point of view (mean item 2- 4.13 ± 0.735), listen to opinions different from their own (mean item 1- 4.42 ± 0.677) to take on new perspectives and express their views critically and constructively. An almost unanimous value is reached with respect to item 7 for which honesty is considered essential (mean item 7- $4.58, \pm 0.753$). All this is confirmed by the

negative cases, whereby teachers state that they do not engage in fictitious relationships (mean item 4- 2.15 ± 0.912), do not lie (mean item 6: 1.63), and communicate sincerely even unpleasant things (mean item 5 - 3.49 ± 1.01). a certain non-net value is seen with respect to the possibility of assuming (mean item 8 - 3.01 ± 1.15) or not assuming (mean item 9- 2.95 ± 1.31) the same behavior in different environments all the time. This sphere allows teachers to build authentic, trusting and deep relationships with others: it is a fundamental aspect within the school organization, formed by a network of relationships.

3.4. Reliability analysis

	Media	SD	α di Cronbach
scala	2.25	0.532	0.684

Tab. 6: Scale reliability statistics - Cronbach's α area A.

Cronbach's α coefficient is 0.684, so good item reliability is present within dimension A.

	Media	SD	α di Cronbach
scala	3.41	0.375	0.624

Tab. 7 Scale reliability statistics - Cronbach's α area B.

Cronbach's α coefficient of area B is 0.624: a margin of error is present. ITEMS B-2 and B-3 pertain to the sphere of feelings and are similar to each other.

	Media	SD	α di Cronbach
scala	2.52	0.452	0.393

Tab. 8 Scale reliability statistics - Cronbach's α area C.

Cronbach's α coefficient of area C is 0.393: a margin of error is present. ITEMS C-2 is not relevant with respect to the entire SOCIAL IRRITABILITY scale.

	Media	SD	α di Cronbach
scala	3.60	0.394	0.661

Tab. 9 Scale reliability statistics - Cronbach's α area D.

Cronbach's α coefficient of area D is 0.661: a margin of error is present. ITEMS D-10 is not reliable with respect to the whole scale.

	Media	SD	α di Cronbach
scala	3.38	0.349	0.266

Tab. 10 Scale reliability statistics - Cronbach's α area E.

Cronbach's α coefficient of area E is 0.266 provides poor reliability compared to the whole scale. Some of these indices suggest a revision of the instrument with a view to future improvement.

The analysis of the quantitative data allows us to conduct a reflection on the level and degree of teachers' awareness of the possession of interpersonal skills and their effectiveness within work organizations: the social dimensions considered, which are fundamental to interacting with others, are reflected across the S.P.A.C.E. model on Social Intelligence by Karl Albrecht (2006).

Being aware of the presence of others (Social Irritability) and from one's own social influence (Social Influence) and building empathic (Empathy) and authentic (Authenticity) relationships based on effective communication (Communication) are the foundational dimensions of Social Intelligence, and they are fundamental to teaching professionalism.

3.5. Analysis of qualitative data

In order to collect qualitative data with respect to the lecturers' views on the construct of Social Intelligence, a Focus Group session, lasting approximately 60 minutes, was conducted remotely via the Google Meet platform on 25 January 2024. The Focus Group involves the presence of a moderator and an observer. The programme of stimulus questions is divided into 5 areas, with 9 stimulus questions, which were proposed to all participants/teachers, who were able to share their opinions on the proposed topic.

With respect to the opening questions (questions 1, 1.1, 1.2), a heterogeneity emerges regarding the years of service as teachers: most of the teachers have between 10 and 30 years of teaching experience, except for one teacher with only 4 years of experience and one support teacher with 1 year of teaching experience. The participants are all of the female gender.

Right from the introductory questions (questions 2, 2.1), the teachers state that they had never heard of the construct of social intelligence, however, they find the topic interesting and express enthusiasm for the proposed thematic focus. All of the teachers agree that a good relationship with the other has positive repercussions in the working environment, fostering "the relationship between teachers-teachers and teachers-pupils". In particular, two teachers maintain that, among the peculiar aspects to build a good relationship with the other in a constructive way, "patience, empathy and flexibility" addressed to all the actors of the school community (school staff, teachers, students), considered unique and original, are fundamental. One teacher, in this regard, reports: "empathy and flexibility are also key in the inclusive perspective towards both students and colleagues. Through empathy one can share, put oneself in one's shoes and understand oneself. We are all a resource for each other. Everyone is unique, original and unrepeatable."

From the teachers' experience solicited through the transition questions (questions 3, 3.1), however, it can be seen that it is not easy and obvious to build up a 'feeling' with colleagues. However, when it is present, strong understanding between colleagues has a positive impact on successful outcomes and teaching performance by encouraging the sharing of ideas, discussion and the creation of open classes. One teacher confirms that "the cohesion of the teaching team, its degree of compactness, the common line favours interdisciplinarity, at a didactic level, which is also perceived at home, especially by the children.

The creation of a good climate between the teachers influences the management of the class, making it possible to alleviate moments of confusion and disorientation in the teaching setting. In this regard, among the skills mentioned, one teacher confirms "being able to communicate with children and

colleagues. The strong understanding between colleagues favours respect and successful outcomes". Getting to the heart of the matter, the teachers agree that, within the work context, it becomes necessary to see the other as a source of mutual enrichment. For the construction of a good working group, the importance of questioning oneself, without isolating oneself, is noted. In particular, one teacher confirms how unconstructive it is to seclude oneself, to work alone, without putting 'one's hands to work'. Actively listening to the other, welcoming the thoughts of others and respecting them, without prejudice, are the main aspects that emerge, from the teachers' experiences, in relating to the other. Questioning oneself in a work team, clearly, also implies the risk of exposing oneself to personal and work-related criticism from colleagues: however, criticism could become a source of growth. In confirmation of this, one teacher states that "a serene climate is formed by the relationship between colleagues and the school is a social place". If the teachers take on these relational characteristics within the work team, then the construction of a positive relational climate within the working context is fostered.

With respect to the key questions (questions 4, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3), all the teachers agree that a good educational leader must not improvise, but must be authoritative, know how to listen, give rules, enforce them, be persevering, give trust. These characteristics are fundamental because the child must have a reference point to feel welcomed and listened to. Therefore, creating the necessary conditions to give continuity and a well-organised and cohesive line of work, both in pre-school and primary school, allows teachers to be more efficient and productive. The lack of social intelligence skills, especially in the figure of the leader, creates anxiety, frustration, a sense of dissatisfaction and uselessness. In particular, one teacher reports her own professional experience stating that a sense of confusion is generated in a disorganised and uncommunicative working environment and this has an impact on pupils' performance. In particular, one teacher confirmed that "the presence of a disorganised and fluctuating line of work creates agitation and a sense of frustration in the children. The lack of a calm working climate leads children to a state of burn out due to the lack of a sense of gratification and appreciation from the teaching team".

At this point, after asking the teachers for their personal input to improve the relationship with the other, it emerged that it is necessary to overcome a form of egocentric attitude in order to give space and listening to the other. The teachers agree that collaboration and dialogue are fundamental to building a good relationship with the other. The need for each teacher to "learn to smooth out the corners and edges of one's character", as confirmed by one teacher, in order to build good relationships and get along well with others, is considered interesting. The school context is characterised by the presence of many different personalities, which should not be crystallised: teachers, in their relationship with each other, must learn to take differences with "a little lightness", which is not synonymous with superficiality, as one teacher pointed out. In order to live serenely in the classroom, it is necessary "to learn to question ourselves, knowing that we can make mistakes: we must be humble, recognise our mistakes and learn from others, including children". In times of difficulty, emphasises one teacher, "having better colleagues must be a source of growth and not competition", reiterating once again the importance of how each can be a resource for the other.

The concluding moment, which concerns the teachers' advice, suggestions and reflections on the topics discussed (question 5), brings awareness of how the relationship was very limited during the pandemic and in recent times, and consequently, of how much the children suffered from the lack of a serene climate, of meaningful relationships, of empathy. Therefore, even the analysis of the negative cases should make us reflect on how important it is to work on relationality and the development of

social skills.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that teachers express interest in the topic of social intelligence, although they are not familiar with it. They agree that interpersonal skills are key to improving the school climate, facilitating positive relationships between colleagues and with pupils. Cohesion between teachers is considered essential for the quality of teaching, improving classroom management and fostering an inclusive environment. The need to collaborate and communicate openly emerged, avoiding solitary or egocentric attitudes, and valuing personal diversity.

Teachers recognise their ability to influence others and create a positive or negative impact through their actions. They consider it important to build empathic relationships without losing their uniqueness, demonstrating emotional awareness and the ability to understand their own and others' desires and states of mind. The teaching profession, being social and relational in nature, requires adaptability, openness to contact and self-confidence, without allowing oneself to be swayed by differing opinions or perceiving the other as an obstacle.

In the area of communication, teachers show respect for the timing of communication, active listening and adaptation of language to different socio-cultural contexts. The relationship with the other is seen as an opportunity to grasp different points of view and to be enriched, valuing the opinions of others. Authenticity emerges as a central element in interactions: teachers state that they do not engage in superficial relationships, avoid lies and communicate even uncomfortable content with sincerity, placing honesty and trust at the centre of professional relationships. This authenticity is essential to build a network of deep and trusting relationships within the school environment.

In conclusion, we see the importance of social skills in teacher education and in building inclusive communities. Teaching is a relational profession, which cannot disregard interaction with others: finding a collaborative working environment is not taken for granted and requires reflection on one's own way of relating to others.

Building positive relationships with others fosters the quality of relational well-being in the work context, a fundamental element in improving the effectiveness and job satisfaction of the teacher and the entire school organisation; it enables teachers to 'be community' and to work in a serene, welcoming, reciprocal and enriching context; it has positive repercussions on student performance, especially in building a productive and collaborative learning environment.

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