



School climate as Predictor of Teachers' Capacity to Meet the Educational Needs of Adopted Children in Italy

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The current study examines the association between different components of school climate (teacher-principal and teacher-parent relationships, parents' involvement in school activities, connection between school and the local services) and teachers' competences and knowledge regarding the adoption experience. Participants were 573 teachers (95.7% women; mean age= 47.06, SD= 8.66, ranging between 25 and 65) residing in three Italian regions characterized by rates of international adoptions that are higher than the national average. The association between school climate and teachers' knowledge and competences on adoption was evaluated via independent multiple logistic regression analyses. Findings show that three of the components of school climate under examination are associated to teachers' knowledge and competences regarding the adoption experience. Thus, interventions aimed at improving school climate hold promise for promoting teachers' capacity to handle the challenges of the adoption process.

Keywords: school climate; teachers' competences; internationally adopted children, adoption, teaching approach.

Introduction

According to the *Commission for Intercountry Adoptions* (CIA 2014-2015), while rates in other countries seem to be falling, Italy continues to rank first in Europe and second in the world after the United States for the number of foreign-born children its citizens adopt. Every year between 3,000 to 4,000 new adoptions are approved by Italian courts. Of these, approximately three out of four can be defined as international adoptions. During the 2014-2015 period, 4,422 children were adopted: the percentage of girls was 41.7%; that of boys was 58.3%. The age breakdown was as follows: 41.2% between 1 and 4, 44% between 5 and 9, 11.9% older than 10, 2.9% younger than 1. The highest percentage of adoptees clearly refers to school age children.

Foreign children adopted by Italian parents come from 56 countries, but the first country of origin is Russia (24%) followed by Poland (8.3%), China (8.1%) Columbia (6.7%), Vietnam (5.1%), Bulgaria (5%), Brazil (4.6%), Ethiopia (4.5%), India (4.2%) and Congo (3.5%) (CIA 2015).

In Italy, the path to international adoption is a long and complicated process (4-5 years) entailing an evaluation of the would-be adoptive parents by the juvenile court. The complicated bureaucratic practices, unexpected setbacks, and inadequate assistance that often characterize the undertaking may lead to long delays and provoke anxiety and stress (Hogbacka 2008; CIA 2013, 2014-2015).

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3 The ease in settling in (for both children and parents) and the success of the entire adoption
4 process also depend on the reception capacity of the host country, of the local community and
5 school (Author 2015).
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7 Indeed, adopted children are particularly vulnerable to academic and relational problems due to
8 neglect or past traumatic experiences (Davies and Bledsoe 2005; Gindis 2009; Palacios, Román,
9 and Camacho 2010), and the school environment is a fundamental setting where these problems
10 can be addressed or prevented. Recent studies (Masten et al. 2008; Artoni Sclesinger and Gatti
11 2009; Vos et al. 2012) on children and adolescent behavioural problems are giving more and
12 more relevance to the role of the school environment in influencing students' behaviour, since
13 children and adolescents spend much of their time at school. Existing researches have indicated
14 that several factors of school climate are positively associated with students' achievement and
15 well-being of school staff (e.g. Klein et al. 2012; Thapa et al. 2013). Therefore, schools can
16 contribute to the prevention and reduction of children problematic behaviours by optimising
17 different components of school climate. A promising strategy consists in promoting those
18 characteristics of the school climate that can foster the teachers' competence to satisfy the
19 educational and emotional needs of adopted children.
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23 In view of these considerations, promoting the creation of a school climate improving teachers'
24 understanding of the adoption process and the emotional complexities families face would seem
25 to be a particularly important measure to facilitate the children's adjustment (Dalen 2005; Gioia
26 2003; Jacobs, Miller, and Tirella 2010; Miller et al. 2009). In addition, teachers themselves
27 should be aware of the importance of their role in this context and be provided with classroom
28 management competencies preparing them for the dynamics of a class with adopted children.
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30 Teachers should be prepared to handle behavioural problems, learning difficulties and
31 emotional reactions resulting from a past often marked by the neglect or absence of adult
32 caregivers. As above anticipated, all adopted children have experienced some trauma linked to
33 loss, to the broken attachment bond, and to feeling themselves in danger or not safe (Sempowicz
34 2017). The implications of these experiences are revealed in the social, emotional, cognitive and
35 behavioural development of these children (Becker-Weidman 2009) and they could represent a
36 challenge for teachers (Webber and Plotts 2008). Even if this paper will not deal with the
37 complex issue of trauma management, it is important to know the problems that might derive
38 from it and require particular educational and psychological programs in the school context
39 (Downey 2007; Perry 2006; Costa 2017). These teachers' specific competences will not enter
40 into our dissertation but it is a well established fact (Bryk and Schneider 2003; Cohen 2006;
41 Cohen et al. 2009) that teachers who have been provided with background information about
42 their students can better meet their particular educational needs, leading to a positive effect in
43 academic performance. Little, however, is known about the factors that can promote teachers'
44 competencies in meeting students' additional support needs. Teachers' knowledge about the
45 adoption process/experience and their ability to provide sensitive responses to the adopted
46 children in their class may be affected by some features of the school climate such as the level of
47 connectedness between teachers, principals, parents and the community at large (Jordan,
48 Orozco, and Averett 2002; Baker 2013).
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53 The current study set out to investigate the association between school climate (relationships
54 between teachers and the principal, between the teachers and the parents, as well as parents'
55 involvement in school activities, the connection between the school and the local institutions
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and social services) and teachers' competences/knowledge regarding the legal and emotional journey that foreign-born students and their adoptive families are traveling.

Training Teachers to Cope with the Difficulties of the Adopted Child

According to studies published in the literature, adopted children are particularly vulnerable to academic difficulties (Miller et al. 2009; Jacobs, Miller, and Tirella 2010). There is, in fact, a higher incidence in adopted children of specific learning disorders such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthography, dyscalculia, and general learning difficulties due to psychological and functional immaturity or, in the case of foreign children, the obstacle of needing to learn a new language, with respect to that in non-adopted peers (Gindis 2004, 2005; Glennen 2007). Numerous studies have reported finding more Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) in adopted children with respect to their non-adopted peers (van Ijzendoorn, Juffer, and Klein Poelhuis 2005; Miller et al. 2000; Rosnati, Montiroso, and Barni 2008), although these data may be biased as many studies have been conducted with clinical samples. Miller et al. (2000) explain that the data supporting elevate rates of psychopathology or behavioral problems in adoptees have serious methodological shortcomings, mainly due to the fact that in clinical databases the adopted children can be over-represented, because adoptive parents are likely used to seeking professional help also to cope with the children's normal development problems.

These findings need in any case to be evaluated in the light of the awareness that emotional, behavioural and social difficulties can be caused by early neglect or traumatic experiences (Gindis 2009; Palacios, Román, and Camacho 2010). The repercussions of those experiences can lead to difficulty in concentrating and controlling impulses as well as in following directions and completing tasks/assignments autonomously (Gunnar and van Dulmen 2007; van Londen, Juffer, and van Ijzendoorn 2007; Weitzman and Albers 2005). Not infrequently, teachers have described adopted children who have difficulty in complying with rules and who are emotionally unpredictable and overly reactive to environmental stress (Brodzinsky and Palacios 2005; Author 2017). These behaviour problems may result from defensive reactions that generally take the form of relational abnormalities (such as excitation, hyperactive or aggressive responses), reflecting the child's insecurity, fear of yet another rejection experience, lack of self-confidence and/or linguistic immaturity (Cummins 1991; Bomber 2007, 2011; Scott, Roberts, and Glennen 2011).

Teachers are often the first people to recognize and to be responsive to these manifestations. As educators, they play a crucial role in helping students modify their self-awareness and to manage their emotions and behaviour appropriately. Given their awareness of the causes underlying inappropriate behaviour, teachers who have received opportune training are able to recognize the problems of an adopted child and to be sensitive to his/her distress by giving constructive feedback (Gindis 2009; Botta 2017).

It should also be remembered that the Italian family has undergone significant changes over recent years in view also of the increasing numbers of families with adopted children that has inevitably affected the social climate. These transformations have also had inevitable consequences for the school system because, for example, foreign-born adopted children bring new educational needs to the classroom. In Italy, nevertheless, we often find that teachers still consider adoption a 'private/ family event' or a 'school event' (Cesaro and Pecoraro 2009) rather

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3 than an educational pact between teachers, parents and students.

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5 Appropriate training for teachers aiming to provide basic information on adoption practices and
6 to provide opportune teaching skills necessary to manage the cognitive challenges and relational
7 difficulties emerging in the classroom could [has](#) positive repercussions at various levels: for
8 example, by reducing teachers' stress and increasing their job satisfaction (Ingersoll 2006) and
9 by facilitating the integration of the adopted child into the classroom (Oullette, Belleau, and
10 Patenaude 2001; Hosford and O'Sullivan 2016), promoting their educational outcomes and
11 supporting families during a delicate and oftentimes stressful period (Tan et al. 2012; Baker
12 2013).

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14 While it is well established that harmony at home is critical for adopted children's school
15 achievement (Bomber 2007, 2011; Buranelli, Gatti, and Quagliata 2010; Author 2015; Botta
16 2017) the multifaceted role played by teachers within the dynamics of a classroom in which a
17 foreign born child has been [included](#) is no less crucial. The gap between the performance of
18 adopted children with respect to their non-adopted classmates may reflect the gulf between
19 teachers who are prepared to [support](#) adopted children's educational needs and those who lack
20 these [strategies and teaching approach](#) (Baker 2013).

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22 It is for this reason that the Italian Minister of Education developed guidelines to promote the
23 inclusion, integration and well-being of adopted pupils and their families recommending
24 training programmes for teachers and recognizing the co-responsibility of the family, school and
25 educational services (see [Legislative references](#) 'Guidelines of the Ministry of Education to
26 Promote the Right to Education of Adopted Pupils', December 2014).

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28 Before those guidelines were adopted, the Commission of International Adoptions published a
29 series of good practices booklets (CIA 2008, 2010) based on statistics and research projects
30 providing information and recommendations on the placement of adopted children, their special
31 needs, the roles of schools and of public and private social services. The booklets have helped to
32 raise public awareness and to encourage the political debate on this subject.

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34 The ministerial guidelines [above mentioned](#) likewise focus on the importance of promoting
35 teachers' knowledge about adoption practices and the skills needed in the classroom in the
36 context of a school climate characterized by effective communication between the teachers,
37 between the teachers and the principal, between the parents and the school authorities, and
38 between the school and the local social services and the community at large.

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40 Indeed, besides specialized training courses that can be organized for small groups of teachers, a
41 good school climate implies a kind of 'spontaneous training' involving all of the protagonists of
42 the school system. Consistent with this theory, the ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979;
43 Lave and Wenger 1991; Stokols 2000) aims to reach far beyond the classroom to address the
44 entire educational system within which children can best develop their potential.

45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 ***A School Climate Favourable to Adoption***

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54 School climate refers to the quality and character of school life and it reflects norms, goals,
55 values, interpersonal relationship, teaching and learning practices, as well as organizational
56 aspects including the physical environment. 'Student, families, and educators work together to
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3 develop, live, and contribute to a shared school vision' (Cohen et al. 2009, 181).

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5 It seems only logical that adoptee's academic success depends on his/her early life conditions
6 and the experience of carving his/her place in a new family. But teachers efforts are another
7 crucial variable that have an important impact, directly or indirectly, on the learning experiences
8 and well-being of this population of students (Baker 2013; Lucato and Zambianchi 2011).

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10 The first empirical studies on the importance of the social dimension on school life date back to
11 Halpin and Croft (1963), who examined its effects on student learning and development. Some
12 studies on school climate (Anderson 1982; Fraser 1994) have examined the relationship
13 between school climate and school effectiveness, others have evaluated the interaction between
14 individuals and organizational features (Author 2002; D'Amato and Majer 2005) which together
15 are highly correlated with school effectiveness (Lazaridou and Tsolakidis 2011). According to
16 Cohen (2006) there are four dimensions characterizing school climate: safety (physical and
17 socio-emotional), teaching and learning, the environment, and organizational patterns.

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20 According to the ecological perspective, a good school climate has a profound effect on the
21 student (van Eck et al. 2017) and teacher's wellbeing (e.g., Author et al. 2015). As far as the
22 adoptee is concerned, a trusting climate in which cooperative relationships can be experienced
23 will help him/her to take any leaps into the unknown that is implied for all learning experiences.
24 Indeed research has shown that in a cooperative school atmosphere, an adoptee is able to
25 reconstruct his/her past history and this will reduce stress (Lucato and Zambianchi 2011) and
26 help the individual to reacquire trust in adult guidance, a condition necessary for exploration
27 (Bowlby 1988). The child thus unlearns mistrust and gradually transitions to trust.
28 Furthermore, studies in the literature have demonstrated that there is a correlation between
29 school climate and problem solving skills (Author 2011) and that interventions in the
30 educational system can prevent adolescent distress and typical adolescent misbehaviour, which
31 seems to be heightened in adopted individuals who may be searching for their roots (Watson,
32 Stern, and Foster 2012).

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36 As far as teachers are concerned, some studies have associated the benefits of a good school
37 climate with their job performance (Selamat, Samsu, and Kamalu 2014) and satisfaction (R. Rani
38 and P. Rani 2014; Vos et al. 2012). In fact, teachers working in a good school climate have less
39 stress, heightened satisfaction, and a sense of personal effectiveness (Collie, Shapka, and Perry
40 2012). Indeed, student behaviour problems and lack of support from their principal are often
41 linked to teacher attrition (Ingersoll 2001), while collaboration with colleagues to meet
42 students' needs and having a voice in decision-making are pull factors in teacher retention
43 (Cochran 2004). In addition, teachers are more in tune with the subject they are teaching when
44 the school climate is positive (Ingersoll 2006).

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47 Although the benefits of a positive school climate on teachers' performance and well-being are
48 well-known, no studies have investigated if it has any effect on promoting the acquisition of
49 skills in a specific domain such as the adoption experience. The current study set out to evaluate
50 if school climate can be considered a variable that can promote teachers' knowledge and
51 perceived competences about the adoption process.

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54 Most components of school climate have shown their beneficial effect on a wide range of
55 students' outcomes and in schools with different characteristics (e.g., socioeconomic status of
56 the neighborhood, demographic composition of the school), but might be particularly relevant in

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3 schools characterized by specific needs, such as schools with students with special life
4 experiences and needs (e.g., adopted children) or school with a very diverse ethnic composition
5 (Gray, Wilcox, and Nordstokke 2017).
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7 For example, a good relationship between principal and teachers and among teachers allows an
8 optimization of the school resources and the organization of activities responding to the
9 students' needs. In other words, every school might benefit from a good leadership and the
10 ability of the principal to coordinate the school resources and teachers' activities (Castro Silva,
11 Amante, and Morgado 2017). Good relationships among teachers are also critical to exchange
12 information about the students and coordinate potential requests to the principal, thus
13 responding effectively to students' educational needs. At the same time, in a school with adopted
14 children, specific adaptations might be necessary, such as dedicating time to teaching activities
15 that go beyond the curricular activities (e.g. narrative workshops, inclusive projects, etc.) and
16 implementing activities promoting an understanding of the adoption process in adoptees'
17 classmates. In a school where principal and teachers have cooperative relationships, for
18 example, teachers might easily ask for a training on the adoptive process or the cultural
19 background of the adoptees' country of origin.
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23 In a similar vein, a good teacher-parent relationship and the involvement of parents in the
24 school activities have shown to promote students' achievement and well-being (Hughes and Oi-
25 man Kwok 2007) in schools with different characteristics (Klein et al. 2012; Lv et al. 2016).
26 However, when dealing with adopted children and their stories, parents become a very
27 important resource for teachers; for example, by being involved in school activities and having
28 regular contacts with teachers, they can let teachers know about their children, their
29 characteristics, cultural background, resources, needs and past experiences, thus promoting
30 their competence and knowledge regarding the adoption experience (Lucato and Zambianchi
31 2011).
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34 Finally, a strong connection between the school and community services is very important for
35 the good functioning of a school (Vos et al. 2012). For instance, a link between the school and the
36 community might provide students with occasions for civic participation or structured activities,
37 and would allow parents and teacher to be aware of the services available in the local
38 community (Epstein and Sanders 2009). Although this is important in every kind of school and
39 neighborhood, in schools with adopted children it might be particularly critical as a resource for
40 teachers, who would have the opportunity to turn to specific services or community resources in
41 order to improve their educational strategies (Winn Tutwiler 2010).
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44 The dynamics described above, along with the high rates of learning, behavioral and emotional
45 difficulties generally experienced by adoptive children, make school climate a critical factor to
46 take into account for promoting the adopted children's well-being within the school
47 environment. More specifically, the aim of the current work is to evaluate whether some specific
48 components of the school climate, particularly relevant when teaching in classrooms with
49 adopted children, can promote teachers' knowledge and perceived competences about the
50 adoption process.
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Methods

Participants

Five hundred seventy-three teachers (95.7% women; mean age= 47.06, SD= 8.66, ranging between 25 and 65) with mean years of teaching experience = 20.1 years (SD= 9.41) and mean years of education = 14.7 years (SD= 2.89) participated in the study.

The teachers could be classified into three groups as far as the number of years they had been teaching was concerned: 0 to 10 years (10.1%), 11-20 years (43.3%), more than 20 years (46.6%).

As far their contractual status was concerned, 85.7% of the teachers had a permanent contract, the remaining (14.3%) had short-term ones.

Of the 573 teachers involved in the survey, 42.2% said that they have currently an adopted child in their classroom.

Procedures

Primary school teachers residing in three Italian regions characterized by rates of international adoptions that are higher than the national average, participated in this study (CIA 2013, 10-11).

Concerning the procedure used, school principals were contacted in order to explain them the research purpose and to agree with them on the methods for a collective completion of the questionnaire form by teachers. Therefore, teachers were invited to participate via the principal's circular letter in which were indicated: the general purpose of the research, the right to anonymity, to decline the invitation or to withdraw at any time and finally the date in which the teachers were requested to fill up the questionnaire. Through an arrangement with the teachers' principals, in each school it was agreed a date already scheduled in the school calendar for didactic-educational programming. This choice has ensured the widest possible participation of teachers and a significant recruitment in all of the three involved regions, although the compilation did not happen simultaneously in each region, for understandable organizational reasons.

During the session the teachers were asked to fill up also the demographic questions (e.g., gender, age, qualifications, the subjects they taught) and it took them approximately 20 minutes to answer the entire questionnaire. All were asked to sign informed consent letter.

Measures

Dependent variables

Teachers' knowledge about the adoption process. The teachers' knowledge about the adoption process was evaluated via five items regarding Italian adoption legislation and the emotional

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3 experience of the adoptive parents. More specifically, the participants were asked to quantify
4 their level of perceived knowledge regarding laws 184/83, 476/98, and 149/2001. Law 476/98
5 ratifies the Hague Convention (concluded on May 29, 1993) and Law 149/2001 regulates
6 adoption and foster care. Together they amend law 184/1983 and recognize international
7 adoption as a form of collaboration and cooperation among peoples providing a family to
8 children without parental care. Responses to these 5 questions could range from (1) 'none' to (5)
9 'excellent'. Since the distribution of the variables was skewed and the content of the laws is
10 overlapping, responses were dichotomized ('none' vs 'sufficient' to 'excellent') and a single
11 dichotomous variable was created (with 0 indicating a lack of knowledge of the three laws on
12 adoption, and 1 corresponding to knowing at least something about one of the three).
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15 **Teachers' knowledge about the experience of the adoptive parents.** It was measured by
16 asking the teachers to identify the most stressful aspect of the pre-adoption national and
17 international practices (a specific item was dedicated to each type of adoption). Teachers could
18 choose between six options (including an 'other' option), and their responses were considered
19 correct if they selected 'The phase during which the couple was evaluated by institutional and
20 adoption services'. According to the literature, in fact, evaluation by the social services or
21 adoption agencies is the most stressful stage of the adoption process (Hogbacka 2008; CIA 2013,
22 2014-2015). It is normally expected to last four months although it can frequently take over six,
23 and the assessment process by which the Juvenile Court or social services evaluate a couple's
24 suitability is a nerve wracking experience and long delays and waiting times often cause
25 psychological and emotional stress.
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28 **Teachers' perceived competence.** It was measured via a single item asking participants how
29 competent they felt regarding the adoption process. Participants' responses were given on a 4-
30 point scale (ranging from 'not at all' to 'a lot'). Answers were dichotomized as follows: 'not at all'
31 vs 'a little/sufficiently/a lot'.
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36 *Independent variables*

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38 **School climate.** School climate was measured via 4 subscales of the teachers' version of the
39 Questionnaire of the School Situation (QSS-I; Author 2002). The instrument examines different
40 components of school climate and was developed along the lines of the School Situation Survey
41 (Helms and Gable 1989), which seeks to identify the causes of stress in school. For each subscale,
42 responses were given on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from (1) 'not at all' to (4) 'a lot'. The
43 responses were averaged to obtain a single measure for each subscale.
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46 The components of school climate were selected depending on their theoretical relevance and
47 their possible influence on teachers' competence about adoption. Those chosen are described
48 below.
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50 **Relationships between teachers and the principal.** The quality of the relationships between
51 the teachers and the principal was measured via 5 items describing their levels of collaboration
52 and how decisions were made within the school and the quality of communication. Sample items
53 were: 'The principal takes teachers' opinions into consideration during the decision-making
54 process' and 'Teachers talk about their work with the principal' (Cronbach's alpha = .82).
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3 **Relationships between teachers.** Five items dedicated to the level of collaboration and the
4 respect between teachers were utilized to measure the quality of the relationships between
5 teachers. Sample items were: 'Teachers agree on the students' school achievement' and 'I feel
6 appreciated by my colleagues' (Cronbach's alpha = .67).
7

8 **Parents' involvement in school activities.** Parents' involvement in school activities was
9 measured via 3 items describing the level of family involvement in school activities and the level
10 of collaboration when special school projects were organized. A sample item was: 'Parents take
11 active part in school activities' (Cronbach's alpha = .63).
12

13 **Connection between school and local institutions and social services.** A five-item subscale
14 was utilized to measure the level of collaboration between the school and the local institutions
15 (e.g. university, local health care providers), and social services (e.g.: educational, recreational
16 services, counseling and general services rendered by the city administration or civic
17 organizations) of the territorial community formed by the civic relations existing among the
18 people residing in it (Orford 1992; Francescato and Zani 2013). Sample items were: 'The school
19 organizes projects in collaboration with local institutions' and 'School structures and equipment
20 are available for extra-curricular activities' (Cronbach's alpha = .67).
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23 **Demographics and confounding variables.** The participants were asked to specify their
24 gender, date of birth, and the length of their career as teachers (years and months). The teachers
25 were also asked to specify if they had ever taught in a class with an adopted child.
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28 **Results**

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30 After controlling the effect of other variables (gender, age, length of career, adoption
31 experience), the association between the components of school climate and teachers' knowledge
32 about the adoption process and their perceived competence was evaluated via independent
33 multiple logistic regression analyses (one for each dependent variable). All statistical analyses
34 were conducted using IBM SPSS software (22.0).
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36 Descriptive statistics for dependent and independent variables are outlined in Table 1 and 2.
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40 [Table 1 and Table 2 near here]
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44 A relatively small percentage of the teachers surveyed claimed knowing the legislation on
45 adoption (15.9 %). A slightly lower percentage of teachers identified parents' most stressful
46 experience during the national adoption process (12.4%); the percentage of teachers who
47 identified the most stressful experience during the international adoption process was even
48 smaller (8.2%).
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51 Four logistic regression models (one for each outcome) were run to test the association between
52 different components of school climate and teachers' knowledge and competence about the
53 adoption process (Table 3).
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[Table 3 near here]

A positive association was found between the school-local institutions/social services connection and the likelihood of knowing the legislation about adoption. Data analysis showed that teachers reporting higher levels of connection between the school and the local community were more likely to feel knowledgeable about the legislation on adoption. More specifically, teachers were almost twice more likely to report feeling competent on the legislation about adoption for each one-unit increase in the degree of connectedness between the school and local services. This was the only component of the school climate examined showing a significant association to the teachers' knowledge about the legislation on adoption.

Regarding the teachers' knowledge about adoptive parents' stressful experiences, two components of the school climate resulted to be positive predictors: the connection between the school and local services and parental involvement in school activities. Findings showed that teachers were more than twice more likely to correctly identify the most stressful aspect of the pre-adoption national and international practices for each one-unit increase in school-local services connectedness. An association was also found between the parents' involvement in school activities and the teachers' knowledge about the adoptive parents' stressful experience during the evaluation of parental suitability (for national and international adoption). Results showed that teachers reporting parents' active participation in school activities were more likely to correctly recognize the most stressful aspects of the adoption process. In other words, for each one-unit increase in parents' involvement in school activities, teachers were more than twice more likely to correctly identify the stressors that parents have to face during the evaluation of parental suitability, both for national (OR=2.14) and international (OR=2.32) adoption.

Finally, the perceived competences about the adoption process were significantly predicted by two of the components of the school climate examined in the study. Higher levels of connection between the school and the community were positively associated with the teachers' perception of competence regarding the adoption process (1.71), i.e., when teachers reported that their school had a strong connection with local services, they were more likely to feel competent on the adoption process. More specifically, for each one-unit increase in the perceived connection between the school and the local services, teachers were twice as likely to report feeling competent in relation to the adoption experience. Good relationships among teachers were, instead, negatively associated to the teachers' perceived competence about the adoption process (OR=.45). Indeed, findings show that when reporting good relationships among teachers in the school, teachers were less likely to feel competent on the adoption process (every one-unit increase in perceived cohesion among teachers corresponded to a 55% decrease in the likelihood of reporting to feel competent in the adoption domain).

The only component of the school climate examined that was not significantly associated to teachers' knowledge and competences about adoption was the quality of the relationships between teachers and principal.

Overall, according to our results, the degree of connectedness between the school and local services was the most relevant component of the school climate in predicting the teachers' knowledge and competences about adoption; indeed, teachers reporting high levels of

connectedness were more knowledgeable about the laws on adoption, more likely to correctly identify the stressors for parents in the process of international adoption and felt more competent on the overall adoption experience. Parental involvement in school activities was also very important for the teachers' knowledge about adoption, especially in relation to parents' emotional experience, i.e., by knowing the stressors that parents have to face during the evaluation of parental suitability in national and international adoption.

Discussion

An analysis of study results disclosed that three of the components of school climate that were examined seemed to play a role in promoting teachers' knowledge and skills regarding the adoption process implying that training activities for teachers would be an opportune measure to improve adopted children's adjustment and their school life (Gray, Wilcox, and Nordstokke 2017).

The study showed, first of all, that when parents participate and are fully engaged in school activities, teachers are more likely to correctly recognize the aspect of the adoption process causing the most stress and anxiety. As reported in literature (Hogbacka 2008; Winn Tutwiler 2010), parents' involvement in school activities increases the opportunities for contact between teachers and parents, creating occasions to socialize and to share relational and emotional experiences (difficult moments and feelings) regarding the adoption process. There are evidences that parent-school communication plays a moderator role on the emotional well-being of elementary school children (Lv et al. 2016; Hughes and Oi-man Kwok 2007), favouring a school-family relationship based on mutual trust. As referred by others (Botta, 2017; Burani Procaccini and Zimpo 2011), this trust pact could help teachers to adequately handle the reticence of some parents to disclose information about the child's past, in order to safeguard their children's privacy. Indeed, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that adopted children are carriers of a unique history and a singular living experience that need to be acknowledged and respected by the child's new life context, both familiar and scholastic. This is why it would be important for teachers to understand the pre-, peri- and post-adoption emotional states of those involved on adoption and to know the related legislation (Levy and Orléans 2000; Buranelli, Gatti, and Quagliata 2010).

Collaboration between the school and the local community was also found to increase the teachers' knowledge and competences about the adoption experience. It can be hypothesized that when the school and local community have frequent contacts, there are more opportunities for the authorities (e.g. university, minister, local health care providers), informal services (e.g. organizations no profit to support adoptive families, social workers, family counsellors) and school staff to exchange information not only with regard to the legislation regulating adoption but also about the adoption process as a whole, included the stress experienced by parents during the adoption process (Tan et al. 2012) and the teachers' own perceived competence. Furthermore, this school-community connection could respond indirectly to a special need of the adoptees, that is, to feel themselves embedded in a relational network that citizenship can represent, reinforcing the identity-community link (Kalb 2013).

Contact with the local social services and adoption agencies could also provide information about the best practices that have already been outlined by institutional authorities (Vos et al.

2012). Since the community should represent an informal support system, it is within this context that the integration between educational, legal, and social resources should take place in the effort to accompany the family throughout the adoption process and the child throughout his/her academic progression. According to the literature (Epstein and Sanders 2009) there are different proposals to build this partnership and to prepare the teachers to maximize the use of resources available in their communities. Collaboration with local social services could reinforce the teachers' skills in addressing the educational needs that the children manifest in the classroom and, at the same time, would permit the social services to monitor the evolution of the post-adoption family (Cyrulnik and Malaguti 2005; Schofield and Beek 2006), intervening with support actions whenever necessary.

Finally, a counter-intuitive result also emerged: cohesive relationships among teachers were negatively associated to teachers' perceived competence about the adoption process. It is possible that when relationships between teachers are cohesive and thus characterized by effective communication, they have more opportunity to compare the level of their knowledge about various aspects of effective teaching (including the adoption process) and the different skills that are necessary, thus enhancing their awareness about how much they still need to know about the adoption experience. This reflection is confirmed by the fact that not all types of professional relationships interact positively in collaborative practices (Tschanner-Moran 2001). As indicated by Bryk and Schneider (2003), teachers interact in a collaborative way when they have a relationship of trust that has been built day to day. The principal can play a key role in this regard (Castro Silva, Amante, and Morgado 2017). Unfortunately, the relationship between teachers and principals has not shown statistically significant results in predicting teachers' knowledge on adoption, therefore it is not possible to support this reflection with our research results.

Study findings lead us to conclude that in addition to specific training for teachers on the procedural-legal aspects of the adoption, every effort should be made and intervention designed to foster a positive climate at school. As shown above (Cohen 2006; Anderson 1982; Fraser 1994; D'Amato and Majer 2005; Lazaridou and Tsolakidis 2011; Selamat, Samsu, and Kamalu 2014; R. Rani and P. Rani 2014; Vos et al. 2012), the school climate produces positive effects on multiple variables and acts, even in this case, as a protective factor (T. M. McGuiness, J. P. McGuiness, and Dyer 2000).

Implications

The study identified an association between some components of school climate and teachers' knowledge and perceived competences about the national/international adoption process. The results emphasize that it is important that teachers recognize the school climate as a protective factor with regard to the efforts to meet the educational needs of these students. These findings confirm that such school climate dynamically interacts with educational effectiveness, in a particular way in supporting inclusive practice (Hosford and O'Sullivan 2016; Collie, Shapka, and Perry 2012). Training programs that are able to provide adoption-related information and to outline measures to improve the general school climate could help educators to meet the challenges that these students bring to their classrooms. There is a new awareness about the need to support the school programs linked in some way with adoption, but in Italy only a few

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3 efforts have been made until now to address the two aspects outlined here and thus to further
4 enhance the beneficial effects of training programs.
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6 Private and personal networks are presently working at a grassroots level in Italy to improve the
7 school experience of adopted children, and we are hopeful that the Ministry of Education will
8 make its own tangible contribution in the years to come by investing in opportunely organized
9 training programs. As stated in the Introduction, according to an ecological view, the
10 beneficiaries of a positive school climate are not only the teachers but the school and local
11 community as well as (Jordan, Orozco, and Averett 2002). Indeed, although the school has a
12 central role in this process, an effective strategy to improve the overall adoption process must
13 incorporate actions at a wider societal level and include interventions in multiple ecological
14 settings. The teachers' training on the adoption process should not be considered as a direct
15 consequence deriving from governmental choices but rather the outcome of a "consultative
16 process" (Sempowicz 2017, 320) having children at the center of this ecological perspective. In
17 so doing, the flow of the interactions among parties is radically changed: we should start from a
18 micro-centered level, where we find the children and their educational needs, followed by other
19 "consultative partners" (e.g.: parents, non-school professionals and others social recourse of the
20 local community), which in turn should guide and implement the government policy, then the
21 school policy and finally the teachers preparation programs ((Sempowicz 2017; Bryk and
22 Shneider 2003). Even if the interaction between the school climate components and larger
23 societal pressures is not considered in our study, this topic could be further deepened in a future
24 research because an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner 1979) is very important to promote
25 resilience (Cyrulnik 2009), especially in presence of risk factors (Whipple et al. 2010) as argued
26 above about adopted children (Juffer nad van Ijzendoorn, 2005, 2007).
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Table 1. Descriptive statistics on teachers' knowledge and competences on the adoption process (n= 573).

Knowledge and competences about adoption	Frequency (%)
Knowledge adoption laws	83 (15.9%)
Knowledge of stressors (national)	71 (12.4%)
Knowledge of stressors (international)	47 (8.2%)
Perceived competences (yes)	463 (80.8%)

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviations of school climate components (n= 573).

School climate components	M (SD)
Relationships between teachers and principal	2.88 (.56)
Relationships between teachers	3.17 (.38)
Parents' involvement in school activities	2.86 (.50)
Connection between school and local institutions and services	2.63 (.55)

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Table 3. Association between school climate components and teachers' knowledge and competence adjusted for gender, age, career length, adoption experience (n= 573).

Predictors	Knowledge of adoption laws	Knowledge of stressors (national)	Knowledge of stressors (international)	Perceived competences (yes)
	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)	OR (95% CI)
<i>Demographics and covariates</i>				
Gender (woman)	.87 (.24-3.12)	.77 (.21-2.76)	.68 (.15-3.20)	1.47 (.51-4.19)
Age	.96 (.91-1.01)	.96 (.91-1.01)	.93 (.87-.99)*	1.00 (.96-1.04)
Career length	1.04 (1.00-1.09)	1.02 (.97-1.07)	1.07 (1.01-1.14)*	1.02 (.98-1.06)
Adoption experience	1.07 (.61-1.87)	.79 (.43-1.48)	.89 (.42-1.87)	.61 (.37-1.03)+
<i>School Climate components</i>				
Relationships between teachers and principal	1.60 (.91-2.82)	.95 (.55-1.65)	.84 (.44-1.59)	1.37 (.87-2.17)
Relationships between teachers	.82 (.35-1.92)	.59 (.24-1.47)	.45 (.14-1.45)	.45 (.21-.94)*
Parents' involvement in school activities	.79 (.45-1.40)	2.14 (1.13-4.06)*	2.32 (1.06-5.09)*	1.05 (.62-1.78)
Connection between school and local institutions and services	1.90 (1.06-3.40)*	1.20 (.66-2.18)	2.38 (1.11-5.07)*	1.71 (1.02-2.88)*

* $p < .05$