



Teachers' sense of responsibility and its correlates on a sample of Italian teachers.
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Abstract: Over the past twenty years, new responsibilities have been assigned to teachers across Western countries, but little is known about teachers' perceived personal responsibility. The present study was designed to examine professional personal responsibility perceived by a sample of Italian primary and middle school teachers, and the relations between teacher responsibility, self-efficacy, motives behind the teacher career-choice and implicit theories of intelligence. Drawing on a sample of 220 teachers, multivariate analysis of variance revealed that the teacher responsibility is affected principally by the teachers' school level (primary vs. middle), and by self-efficacy beliefs. The study increases our understanding of how teachers conceptualize their professional responsibility and the factors that shape their sense of responsibility. Practical implications will be discussed.

Keywords: Teachers, responsibility, implicit theories, self-efficacy

1. Objective

The study addresses the question of whether teachers' perceived personal responsibility is influenced by socio-contextual factors, i.e. the school level (primary versus middle school), and by teachers personal variables such as self-efficacy beliefs, implicit theory of intelligence, motives behind the teacher career-choice.

2. Theoretical Framework:

Over the past twenty years, increasing attention has been placed on teachers' changing professional role, including their formal level of accountability (Eurydice, 2008). However, little is known about teachers' perceived personal responsibility in the context of their broadened responsibilities and duties. In recent times, the research on the notion of teachers' responsibility has been spotlighted (Matteucci, 2007; Matteucci & Gosling, 2004) and Lauermann and Karabenick (2011) have proposed a specific definition of personal responsibility. Following this work, research on the notion of teachers' sense of personal responsibility has increased, revealing that the teachers' responsibility - as outlined by the authors - has important implications with some constructs previously confirmed as affecting the teaching/learning process (Lauermann, 2014; Matteucci & Gugliemi, 2013). However, there is still much to investigate about psychological determinants and correlates of teachers' perceived personal responsibility in the context of their broadened professional roles. Among the theoretically antecedents of teachers'

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responsibility, Lauermaann and Karabenick (2011) has included both contextual and personal influences with a potential to foster an internal sense of responsibility.

A following qualitative study on teachers' reports (Lauermaann, 2014) revealed that responsibility has also important motivational implications in terms of effort investment, persistence and commitment to students, as well as potential consequences for students (i.e., student success, positive classroom atmosphere).

In the present study, we include personal (i.e. self-efficacy beliefs) and contextual characteristics (i.e., school level) previously explored , as well as complementary and relatively unexplored notions such as the implicit beliefs about intelligence and motives behind the teaching career-choice.

3. Methodology:

a. Participants and procedure

The sample included 220 primary and middle schools teachers (females = 89.5%; average age= 49; DS=8.74) and had a tenure position (86.4%). Teachers had on average 17 years' experience (SD=11.3). All participants were invited to participate in an online survey.

b. Measures

Participants completed an online questionnaire which included the following sections and scales:

- Demographics. Respondents were asked to provide information about their gender as well as age, school level, enrolment status, educational degrees, years of teaching experience, subject taught, and whether the teacher has a position of responsibility within the school (e.g., principal, assistant principal, coordinator of projects).
- Factors Influencing Teaching Choice Scale (FIT-Choice Scale, Watt & Richardson, 2007).
- Teacher Responsibility Scale (Lauermaann & Karabenick, 2013). The scale included 12 items designed to represent the following four areas of responsibility (three items each): responsibility for student motivation (e.g., "... if a student of mine was not interested in the subject I teach"); student achievement (e.g., "... if a student of mine had very low achievement"); relationships with students (e.g., "... if a lesson I taught was not as effective for student learning as I could have possibly made it"); and teaching (e.g., "... if a lesson I taught failed to reflect my highest ability as a teacher"). The following statement preceded the items: "Imagine that the following situations would occur in your classroom. To what extent would you feel PERSONALLY responsible that you should have prevented each of

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- the following?” The items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 6 (Completely). Data from validation studies support the use of this scale as it has high internal reliability and the high interrelation among the four dimensions, allows the use of a global score of responsibility (for a detailed discussion of the psychometrics of these measures, see Lauermann & Karabenick, 2013a).
- Theories of Intelligence Scale. A three-item scale originally developed by Dweck and Henderson (1989) to assess whether an individual believes that intelligence is a fixed (i.e., entity theory) or malleable human attribute (i.e., incremental theory). Respondents indicate their agreement with the three statements (e.g., “People have a certain amount of intelligence, and they can’t really do much to change it”) on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Scores on the three items form an overall indicator of individuals’ thoughts about intelligence. A higher score on these items reflects an incremental view of intelligence. Data from validation studies support the use of this scale as it has high internal reliability as well as high test-retest reliability over a two-week period (for a detailed discussion of the psychometrics of these measures, see Hong et al., 1999).
 - Italian version of the Norwegian Teacher’s Self-Efficacy Scale (NTSES, Avanzi et al., 2013). The scale consists of 6 dimensions, for a total of 24 items (four items each), with a response scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Completely). The scale is designed to represent the following six areas of self-efficacy: self-efficacy for instruction (e.g., “...answer students’ questions so that they understand difficult problems); adapt instruction to individual need (e.g., “...organize schoolwork to adapt instruction and assignments to individual needs); cooperate with colleagues and parents (e.g., ... find adequate solutions to conflict of interests with other teachers); cope with change (e.g., “...successfully use any instructional method the school decides to use); motivate students (e.g., “...get all students in class to work hard with their schoolwork); maintain discipline (e.g., “...control even the most aggressive student). The following statement preceded the items: “To what extent do you feel you can...”

c. Data analysis

The data were analysed using a multivariate ANOVA (Manova–G.L.M.) design. The dependent variables were the four variables assessing the four subscales of the TRS: responsibility for student motivation (RSM), student achievement (RSA), relationships with students (RRS), and teaching (RTE). The independent variable (factor) was the school level (primary versus middle); as covariates were assessed the dimensions of the NTSES and of the FIT-choice scale, the total score of incremental theory of intelligence scale and the age of the participants.

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4. Discussion of Data, Evidence and Objects or Materials

The Manova revealed a highly significant influence of the factor on the dependent variables, $F(4, 159) = 3.59$, $p = .008$, Wilk's $\lambda = .92$, partial $\eta^2 = .86$. The univariate analyses (Anova) performed for each of the dependent variables revealed a significant effect of this factor on the responsibility for student achievement (RSA), $F(1, 171) = 3.99$, $p = .047$, and on the degree of responsibility for relationships with students (RRS), $F(1, 171) = 6.23$, $p = .014$. Compared to primary school teachers, middle school teachers show significantly lower level of perceived responsibility concerning both student achievement (respectively $M = 4.44$ $SD = .85$; $M = 4.77$ $SD = .89$) and relationships with students (respectively $M = 4.97$ $SD = 1.34$; $M = 5.51$ $SD = .98$).

As for the covariates of the MANOVA analysis, the personal utility dimension of the FIT-choice scale revealed a significant effect on the dependent variables about teacher responsibility, $F(4, 159) = 2.62$, $p = .037$, Wilk's $\lambda = .94$, partial $\eta^2 = .72$, showing that high level of personal utility value for the teaching career-choice predict significantly higher level of teacher responsibility for teaching, $F(1, 171) = 6.95$, $p = .009$.

Personal beliefs about self-efficacy influence the dependent variables as well, specifically the beliefs about self-efficacy for instruction, $F(4, 159) = 2.70$, $p = .033$, Wilk's $\lambda = .94$, partial $\eta^2 = .74$, and for adapting instruction to individual needs, $F(4, 159) = 3.34$, $p = .012$, Wilk's $\lambda = .92$, partial $\eta^2 = .84$.

The teachers' age did not contribute significantly to the multivariate model. However, the univariate analyses revealed that the teachers' age influences the teacher responsibility for teaching, (RTE), $F(1, 176) = 7.78$, $p = .006$, which decreases with teachers' age. The incremental theory of intelligence did not contribute significantly to the multivariate model, however univariate analyses revealed its influence on teacher responsibility for student achievement, (RSA), $F(1, 176) = 6.66$, $p = .011$, showing that "incrementalist" teachers perceive a greater sense of personal responsibility for students' achievement.

5. Results and/or conclusions

In conclusion, the study confirm that the work responsibility perceived by teachers depends from the school level in which they work: primary versus

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middleprimary teachers feel to be more responsible for their pupils' achievement and for establishing positive relationships with them.

This result is in line with the professional duties assigned to teachers in different school levels. In fact, one of the most important difference between primary school and secondary school teaching is the relationship between teachers and children. The relationship between children and their teachers tends to be closer in the primary school where children have one prevalent teacher and, in total, no more than 2 or 3 teachers. In primary school teachers act as tutor, specialist teacher and substitute parents during the course of the day.

Starting from the middle school, teachers have a less close relationship with children, each teacher is a subject specialist and students may have ten or more different teachers.

Findings reveal also that the motives behind the choice of the teaching career may influence the feeling of work responsibility. In fact teachers who affirm to have chosen to become teacher because of the personal advantages of this profession (e.g. time for family) are also those who feel more responsible for the positive accomplishment of their work duties (e.g. give their best in classroom).

According to previous results, self-efficacy beliefs influence the teachers perceived responsibility, and specifically, teachers' self-efficacy beliefs for instruction and for adapting instruction to individual needs predict higher level of responsibility.

The teachers' age did not contribute significantly to the multivariate model, but the univariate analyses revealed that perceived responsibility for teaching decreases with teachers' age.

Finally, even if the incremental theory of intelligence did not contribute significantly to the multivariate model, univariate analyses revealed that "incrementalist" teachers perceive a greater sense of personal responsibility for students' achievement. This finding is in line with previous results (Diamond, Randolph, Spillane, 2004), and support a theoretical connection between these two notions, since it is reasonable to suppose that teachers' implicit beliefs about intelligence as a malleable characteristic of students' may imply a sense of responsibility to produce an educational environment (e.g. through instructional practices) that can improve their abilities.

6. /Contributions and Scientific importance of this work

From a theoretical perspective, the study expands upon prior research (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011, 2013; Matteucci & Gugliemi, 2013, submitted), as it examines primary and middle school teachers, a target population never before used in an investigation concerning this topic on Italian teachers. Importantly, the

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study confirm the importance to study this emergent notion and to exploit it during teacher education and training, since teacher responsibility has been confirmed previously to have practical implications for teachers' well-being, motivation and approaches to instruction, and also for student outcomes and, in this study, we found proofs about direct links among teacher relevant issues (e.g. self-efficacy, beliefs, teaching context) and perceived responsibility.

7. References

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