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Linking teacher's care and motivation to students' engagement and achievement

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is that of investigating how teachers' care and motivation contribute to enhance students' motivation and academic achievement. In order to do so, high school students 14 to 19 years of age and their teachers were asked to take part in the study. Through a questionnaire we observed how students perceive their teachers' support and how important this is to them. At the same time, we asked teachers how they see themselves in order to understand whether care is perceived differently from different perspectives. We touched on different teaching methods, showing how they put diverse emphasis on students and their motivation, later examining which types lead to effective and long-lasting learning outcomes. Moreover, the psychological sphere of education was investigated, as studies on developmental psychology played a pivotal role in understanding adolescence. Teachers in particular, by gaining a more adequate knowledge on psychological matters, can help their students in the process of growth and personality formation. We finally concentrated on how the teacher's teaching styles can influence both the learning process and engagement. We considered how the development of positive relationships, both among the students and between students and teachers in particular, can contribute to create a positive classroom atmosphere thus enhancing the well-being of the students, ultimately leading to an increase in motivation and potential academic achievement.

“No significant learning can occur
without a significant relationship.”

James Comer

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at investigating whether the care and support students receive from their teachers is considered a fundamental element for students' wellbeing in the classroom environment and whether those elements influence, to some extent, their motivation to studying, their school engagement and ultimately their academic achievement. We would like to demonstrate that when students perceive attitudes of care, when they feel supported and valued by their teachers and when the classroom environment is positive, those elements positively influence their attitude towards school and learning. In order to do so, a questionnaire has been administered to a total of 90 High School students 14 to 19 years of age, 43 coming from an Art School address and 47 coming from a Technical School address, and their respective teachers, 26 in total, 14 coming from the Art School address and 12 coming from the Technical School address. As we will see in the thesis, the age-range of our participants plays a fundamental role in understanding the perceptions students have of their teachers and the importance they play in their academic life and in their personal growth. Moreover, in order to have a wider overview of both perspectives, we decided to include their teachers in the research in order to investigate whether perceptions differ depending on the different roles teachers and students play in the class and whether their different perspectives influenced their points of view.

As far as the structure of the thesis is concerned, the work has been divided into three main theoretical chapters whereas the forth, and last, chapter has been dedicated to displaying the case study and the work of research which has been carried out. As far as the first chapter is concerned, the different teaching approaches have been presented in order to show how they have changed during the years and how recent approaches are concentrating on the centrality of the student in the learning environment. Moreover, the role of motivation will be presented in order to show how the different types of motivation have different levels of efficacy in making learning more meaningful and long lasting.

Secondly, the second chapter will concentrate on a pivotal life phase: adolescence. Developmental Psychology will be introduced as well as the definition of development. Furthermore, the main approaches towards human development will

be presented and explored in order to delve more into adolescence itself, its wellbeing and its essential developmental tasks, thus exploring adolescents' physical, sexual and affective maturation, their cognitive and self-concept development and their autonomy achievement. Moreover, the importance of teachers' training on psychological matters will be emphasised in order to raise teachers' awareness on the role they play both in the academical, but more importantly in the personal growth of the students.

Thirdly, the third chapter aims at introducing the core part of the thesis which will subsequently be the case study. Chapter three will deal with the importance of relationships in education, both among peers and between teacher and student and it will present how teacher's teaching styles influence learning as well as the whole classroom atmosphere. Ultimately, it will focus on the teacher-student relationship and it will explore the evidence existing concerning the fundamental role this special type of relationship plays both in the motivation and in the students' engagement and academic achievement.

Finally, the fourth chapter, which represents the core of this thesis, will be aimed at presenting the case study which has been carried out. In particular, we will present the research question and the purpose of the study, the research methodology which has been followed and the kind of data which were required in order to carry out the research. Additionally, participants will be further presented and justified and the procedure followed will be explained. We will later present the instruments which have been used and give a detailed explanation of the choices that we made. Ultimately, data will be analysed and discussed in order to draw meaningful conclusions on the work which has been done and we will conclude the thesis by answering our research question.

CHAPTER ONE

Changing methods in foreign language teaching and understanding of the importance of motivation

Methods in language teaching and learning have always been changing over the course of the years. At first, based on the conviction that grammar rules were at the core of foreign language acquisition, the focus was being put on grammar and written translation. However, in recent years, there has been the recognition that if the student is put first, learning can be more meaningful. Therefore, the field of motivation in language teaching and learning has been explored in order to make foreign language learning more effective and long lasting.

1.1. Deductive and inductive approach

As far as reasoning is concerned two main approaches exist that can be applied to the classroom: *deductive* and *inductive approach*.

When applied to the language classroom, a deductive approach means that the teacher who uses the aforementioned approach, when presenting a new grammatical structure, will tend to offer rules first and then examples (Shaffer, 1989: 395); whereas an inductive approach conceives learning as a process of passing by abstraction from particular to universal where skills are implanted by practice and use (Kelly, 1976: 34-35).

Starting in the 15th century, scholars began to gain awareness of the fact that when using the second kind of approach knowledge would stick with the student at greater length. But it was already as early as in 389 AD, that philosopher St. Augustine, first saw the utility of this principle when applied to the classroom. He was convinced that effective learning occurs when we actually understand and find practical outcomes of linguistic skills rather than when we memorise a rule by heart. (Kelly, 1976: 35).

Surprisingly enough though, in this day and age, in spite of the effectiveness of the inductive approach having been largely tried and tested, the deductive approach is still widely present in Italian language classrooms. Whether being due to a lack of effort on behalf of the teacher or to his or her scarce knowledge concerning new advanced teaching methods of foreign language learning, most Italian students still

have to deal with the "learn the rule – apply it to the exercise" paradigm, which ultimately consists in some sort of new version of the grammar method which should have been abandoned a long time ago. That is why new reflections on the language are being done in the field of education and foreign language teaching.

1.2. From grammar to reflection on the language

As we previously said in the paragraph above, the teaching of grammar rules at the beginning of the lesson in foreign language classrooms is still largely present in Italy. This may be due to a lack of effort in researching new methods on behalf of the teacher and on the long-settled assumption that knowledge is a gift in the hands of the latter. Indeed, in the deductive method the grammar is the starting point of the lesson and the teacher gives full schemes on how the language works and on how the student should approach the language. This does not mean that grammar should be avoided or cancelled from foreign language study programmes, but that it should be taught from a different perspective. The student should be the protagonist of learning and should be able to discover the rules him or herself by trial and error in order to find a general rule that lies beneath a certain pattern. In 1981 famous linguist, Stephen Krashen, discovered the distinction between *conscious learning* and *unconscious acquisition* of language: unconscious language acquisition refers to the process in which a child learns, or to say it best, acquires his or her L1, which is the first language or mother tongue. L1 acquisition is made possible by contact with people and the language that is being spoken by that certain community without conscious effort; whereas conscious language learning is the one which takes place in foreign language classrooms where it is thought that error correction and explicit rules presentation are helpful tools for effective language learning (Krashen, 1981: 1-2). In his discovery Krashen understood that if foreign languages are taught trying to copy the pattern that occurs during L1 acquisition, which is mainly through natural exposure, maybe we would stand a better chance of making foreign language learning more effective. Yunie (1974) supports this idea stating that students tend to remember when learning occurs inductively. However, as Doughty (2001) and Ellis (2002) suggest, we should not forget that grammar still plays a fundamental role in foreign language learning as it is necessary in order to develop high levels of accuracy in the language as well as of its

structures and of its forms. Therefore, we can ultimately state that a combination of both methods would be the best possible scenario we can have in the class.

The inductive approach demands us to bear in mind that even though grammar is indeed a core foundation of every language, language teachers should face it from a different perspective. In such manner, what does the inductive approach imply that differs from the mere teaching of grammar (deductive approach)?

There are some main differences concerning these two kinds of methods which involve three major aspects of language learning:

- the role of the teacher;
- the role of the language;
- the role of the student.

In the *deductive approach* the *teacher* has the most important role. He is thought to be the possessor of the truth and knowledge and gives his or her *lectio magistralis* in front of the whole class which is meant to be listening passively to the lesson. Indeed, in this kind of approach even the shape of the class and the disposition of its desks and chairs is meaningful: these types of classroom are normally in the shape of an auditorium where the teacher sits at his or her teaching position meanwhile all the students are sitting in front of the teacher, either in isolated desks or in pairs, but all of them looking at and listening to the professor. Given his role, the teacher opens the conversation, decides the directionality of the interventions, establishes speaking times, topics and durations as well as which interventions are thought as more or less relevant to the lesson, and ultimately closes the conversation.

Consequently, the *language* and its teaching assume a transmissive approach, where learning is in the form of acquisition of rules and vocabulary that are then applicable to texts translations and written exercises completion. Grammar is formed by unmodifiable morphosyntactic rules explained by the teacher in the form of full schemes where what is important is the correctness and validity of language use (linguistic competence).

Unsurprisingly, in this kind of approach, the *student* assumes a passive role. The sole role of the learner is that of applying the rules to the exercises in a mnemonic way. This type of approach promotes an individual and isolated kind of learning where

neither communication nor collaboration among students are enhanced. Thus, learning is mainly carried out in isolation.

As far as the *inductive approach* is concerned, the *teacher* assumes the role of a guide. No more the bearer of all knowledge, the teacher puts himself aside in order to observe the learner from a background point of view. This kind of teacher tries to see through the intellect of the student in order to catch his abilities and help him out in order to find the best strategies that work for him.

Regarding the *language*, the aim of this approach is that of communicative competence, which means knowing how to communicate. Starting from the use of the language, hypotheses are formed by looking at its structures in order to communicate and 'do language'. In this kind of approach, a reflection on language takes place; the student analyses what has been learnt and, just in the end, schematises what has been done in order to acquire the grammar and reflect on the language to generalise what has been discussed and discover the rules behind a certain pattern. A fundamental factor in the reflection on language is *metacognition*. Neil Anderson (2002) in his study on metacognition in second language teaching and learning stated that:

> "Metacognition can be defined simply as thinking about thinking. Learners who are metacognitively aware know what to do when they don't know what to do; that is, they have strategies for finding out or figuring out what they need to do. The use of metacognitive strategies ignites one's thinking and can lead to more profound learning and improved performance, especially among learners who are struggling. Understanding and controlling cognitive processes may be one of the most essential skills that classroom teachers can help second language learners develop".

The same principle can be applied to foreign language classrooms: learning a foreign language does not only mean to apply a given rule; when learning a foreign language, teachers should help their students learn to think about what happens during the language learning process. This important role of metacognition will lead them to develop stronger learning skills (Anderson, 2002: 2).

Ultimately, but more importantly, the inductive approach implies putting the *language learner* first. The student becomes the protagonist of learning, the most important person in the classroom. It is his job to discover, to do and to complete the tasks given during the lesson (it goes without saying that this is done guided by the teacher). A side note should be added here with a reference to the *age* of the students,

which is a fundamental factor that differentiates the students in the way they learn: this thesis refers to the importance of using an inductive approach in the language classroom and by classroom it is meant mainstream school with teenage students approximately 11 to 19 years old. As a matter of fact, scholars seem to refer to age as a controversial issue. Rivers (1975) contends that adults and already well-motivated students do actually prefer a deductive approach when it comes to language learning, probably because it is more direct and straight to the point and allows them to immediately fixate the rules of grammar that are needed for formal correctness; on the other hand, Rivers (1975) states that the inductive approach would be more appropriate for young foreign language learners, where cognitive effort on their behalf could help them retain the newly acquired grammatical and language structures. Therefore, when teaching a foreign language, we need to bear in mind what kind of audience we have in order to choose the right approaches and strategies. Moreover, as Younie (1974) states, *time* needs to be taken into consideration when choosing between the two approaches; indeed, as is goes straight to the point, the deductive approach is considered to be faster than the inductive one and could be an appropriate solution when teaching takes place with a large number of students as there might not be the time to wait for all the students to be able to infer the rules and wait for them to discover generalisations about them on their own.

As mentioned shortly above, despite the relevant question of time which may be an issue when talking about teaching a foreign language at school, a fundamental factor needs to be taken into consideration when teaching a foreign language with the inductive approach: metacognition. Metacognition refers to "higher order thinking that involves active control over the cognitive process engaged in learning. Activities such as planning how to approach a given learning task, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating progress toward the completion of a task are metacognitive in nature" (Livingston, 2003: 3). Metacognition is maybe one of the most interesting parts of learning especially when using the inductive approach because it obliges students to think and to make a cognitive effort when learning. Anderson (2002) contends that "metacognition combines various attended thinking and reflective processes". According to him, metacognition can be divided into five primary components:

- preparing and planning for learning;

- selecting and using learning strategies;
- monitoring strategy use;
- orchestrating various strategies;
- evaluating strategies use and learning.

The first component consists in *preparation and planning for learning* which are important metacognitive skills that can improve student's learning. When students engage in this kind of process in relation to a learning goal, students might be thinking about what they need or want to accomplish and how they intend to accomplish it. The teacher has a fundamental role in this process, as he or she can promote reflection by explicitly clarifying the learning goals they have set for the class and by helping the students in setting their own learning goals (Anderson, 2002: 2). This important phase of metacognition can be closely related to the role that the teacher has in the inductive approach where he is seen as a guide for the class and for the individual student.

As far as the second component is concerned, *selecting and using learning strategies* is important in order to make learning effective. It is widely known that every person has different cognitive skills and developing a metacognitive ability to select and use particular strategies in a given context for a specific purpose means that the learner can think and make conscious decisions about the learning process (Anderson, 2002: 3). Undoubtedly, this ability does not develop on its own. The teacher can be crucial in helping the student discover the existence of different strategies in order to find the one that suits him and his way of learning the most.

Thirdly, *monitoring strategy use* is taken into consideration. Anderson (2002) contends that by monitoring their use of learning strategies, students are better able to keep themselves on track to meet their learning goals. Once they have selected and begun to implement specific strategies, students need to ask themselves periodically whether they are still using those strategies as intended (Anderson, 2002: 3). Research has shown that young children are quite limited in their knowledge and cognition about cognitive phenomena, or in their metacognition, and do relatively little monitoring of their own memory, comprehension, and other cognitive enterprises. Investigators have recently concluded that metacognition plays an important role in language acquisition and many other fields. Thus, the nature and development of metacognition and of

cognitive monitoring/regulation is currently emerging as an interesting and promising new area of investigation (Flavell, 1979: 906).

The forth component of metacognition consists in *orchestrating various strategies*. This means that knowing how to orchestrate the use of more than one strategy is an important metacognitive skill. The ability to coordinate, organize, and make associations among the various strategies available is a major distinction between strong and weak language learners. As usual, teachers can assist students by making them aware of multiple strategies available to them and the teacher also needs to show students how to recognise when one strategy is not working and how to move to another (Anderson, 2002: 4).

Finally, the fifth component consists in *evaluating strategy use and learning*. This action takes place when students attempt to evaluate whether what they are doing is effective. Teachers can help students evaluate their strategy use by asking them to respond thoughtfully to the following questions: (1) What am I trying to accomplish? (2) What strategies am I using? (3) How well am I using them? (4) What else could I do? Responding to these four questions integrates all of the aspects of metacognition, allowing the language learner to reflect through the cycle of learning. Therefore, the whole cycle is evaluated during this stage of metacognition (Anderson, 2002: 4).

As it might well be deduced, each of these five metacognitive skills described above interact with each other. Metacognition is not a linear process that moves from preparing and planning to evaluating. More than one metacognitive process may be occurring at a time during a foreign language learning task. This highlights how the orchestration of various strategies is a vital component of foreign language learning. Allowing learners opportunities to think about how they combine various strategies facilitates the improvement of strategy use (Anderson, 2002: 5).

Anderson concludes that the teaching of metacognitive skills is a valuable use of instructional time for a language teacher. When learners reflect upon their learning strategies, they become better prepared to make conscious decisions about what they can do to promote their learning thus empowering the learners.

Everything that has been said up until now allows us to understand how the student is at the core of the learning process. Education, through different perspectives, such as the inductive approach and metacognition, has tried to find ways to make

learning more effective. However, in addition to this, another factor is fundamental when talking about learning. Therefore, what is a crucial factor in foreign language teaching in order to make learning effective?

1.3. Motivation in foreign language learning

Motivation is a fundamental factor in foreign language learning. Motivation can be defined as "the extent to which you will make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursue" (Brown, 1990: 384). Motivation is the driving force that guides everything we do. Referring to Deci's work (1975) on *Intrinsic Motivation*, it is definitely interesting to note how the most frequently asked questions about human behaviour are "why" questions. The main reason behind this is that people are interested in knowing the cause of certain behaviours. According to Deci (1975), the reasons why "why" questions fall within the field of motivation are multifold and they differ based on different psychology-based theories and perspectives: *psychoanalytic theorists*, for instance, concentrated on unconscious processes, claiming that people's behaviour is determined by a complex interaction between their unconscious drives and the environment. On the other hand, *cognitive psychologists* believe that people *decide* what to do therefore they have concentrated on thought processes, thus considering the way people process information and make choices about what to do. At the same time, *humanist psychologists*, like cognitive theorists, believe that humans are active organisms making continual choices about what to do. Unlike cognitive theorists, however, humanists have been less concerned with thought processes and more concerned with the "wholeness of a person", that is, the inner force and phenomenological experience of people. Still other psychologists have concentrated on the affective component of behaviour, postulating that people develop patterns of behaviour and hierarchies of responses as a result of the effect associated with their behaviours. Finally, *behaviourists* are concerned with the mechanistic associative links which develop between stimuli and responses through reinforcement of a response in the presence of a stimulus. (Deci, 1975: 3-4)

From all of these theories, we can infer that even though different psychologists have given different answers to what the force that drives motivation actually is, it is still important to note that all of them have tried to find a reasonable answer to it.

Particularly in the field of education and language teaching, this topic is highly interesting to teachers whose aim is that of motivating their students towards the learning of their subject. Indeed, Dörnyei (1994) contends that motivation is one of the main determinants of second and foreign language learning achievement (Dörnyei, 1994: 273). Motivational psychologists have been looking for the *motors* of human behaviour in the *individual*, focusing on concepts such as instinct, drive, arousal, need, and on personality traits like anxiety and need for achievement, and more recently on cognitive appraisals of success and failure, ability, self-esteem, etc. (Dörnyei, 1994: 274).

When foreign language learning is taken into consideration, various types of motivation exist. These types of motivation are: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and integrative and instrumental motivation. In the following paragraphs of this thesis, these four types of motivation will be further explored in order to understand how motivation can vary depending on different factors.

1.4. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

As previously mentioned, one of the most general and well-known distinction in motivation theories is that between *intrinsic motivation* and *extrinsic motivation*. According to Dörnyei (1994) extrinsically motivated behaviours are the ones that the individual performs in anticipation of some extrinsic reward from outside and beyond the self (such as getting a good mark in an exam, receiving money, prizes, 'gold stars', etc.), as well as those initiated solely to avoid adverse stimuli (i.e. punishments); on the other hand intrinsic motivation takes place from within: with intrinsically motivated behaviours the rewards are internal, for instance the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity. According to Deci (1975: 23) intrinsically motivated activities:

> "are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. […] Intrinsically motivated behaviours are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of *competence* and *self-determination*."

Apparently, and quite logically, intrinsic motivation seems to be more powerful than extrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985: 245) argue that intrinsic motivation is a

central motivator in the educational process. It is in evidence whenever students' natural curiosity and interest energise their learning. Moreover, when the educational environment provides optimal challenges, rich sources of stimulation, and a context of autonomy, this motivational wellspring in learning is likely to flourish. Another important factor when talking about intrinsic motivation is that of the risk of mixing the two types of motivation. Dörnyei (1994: 275-276) adds that extrinsic motivation is something that can undermine intrinsic motivation; several studies have confirmed that students will lose their natural intrinsic interest in an activity if they have to do it to meet some extrinsic requirements, such as compulsory reading at school. Provided how the school system is set, little can be done to completely avoid this risk. Italian schools are mostly organised to enhance extrinsic motivation: teacher domination, grades and tests all exclude the possibility for motivation to come from within as students continually have to meet external duties. What can be done, however, is trying to combine the two kinds of motivation in order to lead to intrinsic motivation, which is made possible under certain circumstances if they are sufficiently self-determined and internalised. *Self-determination* (also referred to as autonomy) is considered a prerequisite in order to deem a certain behaviour as intrinsically rewarding. Since the mid-1970s in educational psychology a *cognitive approach* determined the direction of motivation research. As we stated shortly above, when taking into account the different theories that drive motivation, the cognitive theory prevailed, claiming that motivation is a function of a person's thought where people *decide* what to do rather than a function driven by some instinct, need, drive, or state. Therefore, cognitive psychologists believe that the source of action is determined by the way people process and encode information and make choices about what to do transforming information into a belief (Dörnyei (1994: 276).

Ultimately, following the aforementioned cognitive theory, Weiner (1992) conceived three major cognitive conceptual systems:

- attribution theory;
- learned helplessness;
- self-efficacy theory.

These three key concepts are fundamental when considering the individual and his or her belief in what can or cannot be done, which is a factor that profoundly influences the individual's strive and need for achievement in the present as well as in the future.

Firstly, the *attribution theory* is the perception an individual has on the causes of the events that happen to him or her. It postulates that past failures and successes experienced by an individual will eventually influence the relationship of the person to that specific event thus affecting future goal expectancy. The so-called *Locus of control* is the degree of control perceived by the individual regarding his destiny and the events that happen to him. It can be *internal* or *external*, which means that when a person perceives the locus of control as internal, he or she tends to attribute the cause of what happens to them as determined by themselves. When the locus of control is internal, they believe in their abilities, in their intelligence and their commitment; whereas, when the locus of control is perceived as external these people believe that they have very few possibilities of influencing what happens to them and tend to attribute the events to fate, case or to other people's behaviours and to the features of a certain task. (Rotter, 1966: 1) Every person has a dominance of one of the two attribution styles and what may be interesting to note is that attribution may vary to protect *self-esteem*. For instance, individuals would tend to attribute success and achievements to themselves, meanwhile they would attribute that of the others to fate or fortune. At the same time, as far as failure is concerned, individuals would tend to assign it to bad luck and external causes when it happens to them, meanwhile they attribute other's failure to their incapacity or lack of commitment towards a certain task.

The second conceptual system is that of *learned helplessness* which is a state of mind where the individual feels helpless, resigned and pessimistic and while wanting to succeed he feels that success is impossible or beyond him or her for some reason. Moreover, this kind of state of mind is very difficult to reverse once it has established (Dörnyei, 1994: 276-277). Therefore, teachers should work really hard to avoid the emergence of this kind of feeling in their students.

The third and last conceptual system of this cognitive theory is that of *self-efficacy*, which refers to an individual's judgement of his or he ability to perform a specific action. An important role in self-efficacy is played by one's past

accomplishments but also by persuasion, reinforcement and evaluation by others, especially teachers and parents (Dörnyei, 1994: 277). Self-efficacy is a fundamental system to develop because it allows the individual to face and overcome failure when it inevitably comes when facing life and its tasks. As far as education and language learning are concerned, teachers should help their students develop a sense of self-efficacy by providing meaningful, achievable, and success-engendering language tasks (Dörnyei, 1994: 277).

Teachers need to take into account these three fundamental cognitive conceptual systems when teaching, in order not only to be aware of and raise their students' self-esteem but also to enhance internal motivation in learning through the achievement of competence and self-determination.

In addition to this, the field of education sees other two important types of motivation that need to be taken into account when dealing with language teaching and learning, which are *integrative* and *instrumental motivation*.

1.5. Integrative and instrumental motivation

Two other important motivation types in language learning are *integrative* and *instrumental motivation*. Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggested that integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language thanks to the positive attitudes and feelings toward the target language group (a community of speakers); whereas, instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to attain certain career, educational or financial goals, such as getting a better job or a higher salary i.e. the potential utilitarian gains of foreign language proficiency. According to Gardner (1988) and other research studies on the field, an integrative orientation seems to be more linked to language proficiency than an instrumental orientation.

As this can certainly be true for certain contexts, we should not forget that different life conditions in different parts of the world might change the results coming from research on motivational factors towards the learning of a foreign language. It can be noted that foreign language integrative motivation, considering the fleeting contact with the target community of speakers, is determined by general attitudes and beliefs, such as interest in foreign languages and people, the cultural and intellectual values that the target language has, and new stimuli through learning and using the

target language (Matsuzaki Carreira, 2005: 41). Normally, this kind of motivation is driven by intellectual factors deriving from pleasure in learning which can only be achieved when primary needs of psychological and financial stability are met. In other realities, such as India and other third world countries, where life conditions are different from those of the wealthy states of Europe or the US, the instrumental motivation can be seen as a driving force towards the achievement of learning a foreign language. Indeed, to prove this theory, Lukmani (1972) in his study showed that an instrumental motivation was positively correlated with proficiency in English among Marathi-speakers in India. The results of his study showed that they were instrumentally motivated to learn English and that instrumental motivation scores correlated significantly with English proficiency scores.

From this, we can infer that, both integrative and instrumental motivation can be driving factors for foreign language learning and that they can vary depending on individuals' social and cultural needs.

Clearly, what can be stated is that instrumental motivation could lower when a certain instrumental objective is met, such as obtaining a good job position and/or economic stability as it is mostly extrinsically driven; whereas integrative motivation has more possibilities of remaining active throughout a person's life as more internally driven, therefore this is why teachers should be manly interested in promoting integrative motivation.

1.6. Duty, need and pleasure in learning

The first chapter of this thesis, up until now, was aimed at showing how different foreign language teaching methods have changed over the years and how a brand new consciousness on the role of the student has raised from the recognition that, if the individual is put first, learning can be more effective. Moreover, it has been noted how reflecting on language acquisition is a fundamental process for effective learning (metacognition). More importantly, however, it has been observed that motivation is crucial in foreign language learning as well as in education more in general. Nonetheless, not all motivation is the same and has the same efficacy in promoting proficiency in foreign language learning.

Indeed, according to Balboni in Serragiotto (2006: 19-20) extrinsic motivation is mainly driven by *duty*. Unfortunately, mainstream school systems are mostly obliged to promote this kind of motivation as they need to meet national standards of grading and evaluation and, for as much as a teacher can try to avoid sterile marking, still they need to come to terms with what the system imposes. Sadly, duty is not a very effective way of creating motivation in students as they mostly feel oppressed by continuous evaluation while little interest is put into what really matters to them and motivation in language learning is mainly driven by the need of avoiding bad marks and school failure.

Secondly, a second kind of motivation in learning is driven by *need*. This is the case of instrumental motivation, where students learn a foreign language because they need to. We should remember the case of Marathi-speakers in India who felt the need to learn the English language in order to find better job opportunities. However, this is only one of the many cases in which people feel the need to learn a foreign language. As far as immigrants are concerned, for instance, they feel the need to learn the L2 (i.e. the language of the country where they are settling which is not their mother tongue) because they need to communicate with the target community and it is necessary for them in order to find a job. What can easily be deduced is that, at a certain point, instrumental motivation will eventually fail them: as soon as they will have obtained a job and enough financial security, they will no longer feel the need to make progresses in learning the foreign language.

This is why, foreign language learning should focus on *pleasure*. Pleasure is mainly intrinsically and integratively driven. As Taylor (1963) said in his work on *Pleasure*, this philosophically important topic has been taken so much for granted until pretty recently. Pleasure is a complicated concept and it may lead to overgeneralisations that would ultimately tell us little about what it actually is. That is why Taylor (1963) tried to narrow down generalisations, which in any case were not meant to exhaust the riches of the concept; he proposed some idioms in order to make some considerations on them. The idioms were sentences like: (1) I fish purely for pleasure; (2) I take great pleasure in humiliating him; (3) I enjoy fishing; (4) I am very pleased at the result; (5) Reading is his only pleasure; (6) He was much given to the pleasures of the table (the flesh).

Given the following sentences as few examples, it immediately seems clear that trying to isolate the "crucial something" which is the pleasure in each and every case would undoubtedly be a hopeless task. However, if one tries to discover what kind of feelings are involved in the examples above one answer that might be suggested is that all the examples involve feelings of *satisfaction*. According to Taylor (1963) satisfaction seems to mean awareness of having got what one wanted, which we can all agree to say that will always involve feeling pleased (Taylor, 1963: 3).

But, what is the most important feature of pleasure when it comes to foreign language learning? The main trait of pleasure is that it focuses on the *person*. When learning becomes a part of us and something we are passionate about, it becomes a pleasure. Motivation based on pleasure is the keystone for deep learning processes that involve the whole student's personality, because what we learn with pleasure we never forget. Laughter and having fun is one way to do that. A vast amount of research and articles show how *humour* seems to play an essential role in learning. Cornett (1986: 7) claims that humour is a significant part of our lives, but that even so it often goes unacknowledged. According to her, laughing is something humans really like to do and she claims that humour has something to offer to everyone who works with children of all ages and abilities. She contends that humour can be used for various reasons, such as correcting reading problems, control behavioural disorders, and among other things: teach foreign languages (Cornett: 1986: 8). She says that humour can be one of the most powerful instructional resources as we do really seem to learn through laughter. There is evidence that humour can function in ways that help us achieve our educational goals and, while it is none of our concern to expain them in deep detail, a brief clarification will follow the points that Cornett displayed no less than with 13 reasons why teachers should "get serious" about incorporating humour into their lessons, which is because it:

- attracts attention and provokes thoughts – this can be easily explained by the fact that whatever rating on your laugh meter you give to a certain joke, still humour attracts attention an provokes thought;
- liberates creative capacities – apparently, humour offers novelty, which is a quality that all individuals seek;

- helps gain friends – humour serves the social function of promoting group membership and helps us deal with awkward moments which also help to create bonds among people;
- improves communication – to explain this, consider the language skills involved in joke telling. To deliver a joke effectively requires speaking skills such as volume, rate, tone and especially pause;
- helps deal with difficult moments – self-deprecation helps overcome tough and/or embarrassing situations and enables others to laugh with us;
- can be an entrée into the study of other cultures – the study of various forms of humour in different cultures is fascinating, and it is deeply related with foreign language learning and proficiency: indeed, we can affirm we do know a language when we understand its people's sense of humour;
- for the health of it – as simple as we can put it: psychologically, a good laugh makes you feel better;
- develops a positive attitude and self-image – this is important because it can be used by teachers to maintain a positive classroom atmosphere by knowing how to reverse the direction of negative energy: in the end, one cannot be angry and laugh at the same time;
- motivates and energises – physiologically, there is evidence that starting a lesson with a humorous story, joke or riddle can gain students' attention and actually put them in a more active mental state. This can also be done every now and then during the lesson to maintain concentration;
- solves problems – joking with students about problems is a means of releasing tension and it also helps – at least momentarily – separate themselves from the problem;
- increases quality and quantity of students' reading – quite simply: students will read more if they are enjoying what they read;
- reinforces desired behaviours – reinforcing effects of a smile or a wink is a feature that should not be forgotten and good teachers do this frequently as it is a useful technique;
- it is cheap entertainment. (Cornett, 1986: 9-17)

Just by looking at this long list, what can be noted is that humour does play a fundamental role in learning and in creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom; that is why it should be enhanced as much as possible due to, at least, all of these reasons.

As far as teachers are concerned, when giving a lesson they should not only competently convey knowledge, understanding, and appreciation about a specific subject but should also do so in a way that is engaging and interesting if they wish to be effective (Torok, McMorris, Lin, 2004: 14). This is undoubtedly a difficult task education is asking teachers to do, nevertheless its effectiveness should encourage them to try their best to accomplish this mission as in today's pedagogical standards, humour has a substantial place in classroom lectures and testing and incorporation of humour is encouraged across all academic levels (Torok, McMorris, Lin, 2004: 14). Ultimately, when students are asked to identify characteristics that describe exemplary teachers, one of the first descriptors offered is, invariably, a sense of humour. Students point to their favourite instructors as teachers who made them laugh in a variety of ways and made class fun (Pollak, Freda, 1997:176). These results are no surprise as humour helps learning be driven by *pleasure* which ultimately leads to internal and integrative motivation in learning, which is a main source to promote foreign language proficiency.

CHAPTER TWO

Adolescence, its developmental tasks and the well-being of the student: what the teacher needs to know

As far as the second chapter of this thesis is concerned, we are going to explore concepts related to a particular phase of life: *adolescence*. Given the importance of teachers' training on psychological matters in the field of higher education, we are going to introduce concepts related to the field of *Developmental Psychology* such as those of *development* and its *approaches* as well as what it means to talk about *well-being* in adolescence and we will ultimately focus on its crucial *developmental tasks*. This important premise will help us frame the following 3rd chapter of the thesis in order to explain and give a coherent context to the subsequent case study.

2.1. Developmental psychology and the definition of development

Developmental psychology is that branch of psychology which studies human evolution and the development of human behaviour throughout the whole person's life time, from conception to death (Baltes, 1987: 611). In other words, developmental psychology observes the continuous and endless modifications that take place in every person in the different seasons of life, at a physical, emotional, relational, cognitive and behavioural level, in order to define the internal processes that produce and regulate them. The first scientific research on developmental psychology took place no earlier than the end of the 18th century. This is due to the fact that, before this date, adults (especially parents and teachers) believed that having a direct experience of those periods of life, such as infanthood and adolescence, would have been enough in order to understand its workings. The recognition of the falsehood and the groundlessness of those hypothesis led to a gradual conscience that a new research methodology needed to be introduced. This ultimately led to the introduction of the so-called *Developmental Psychology* (Fonzi, 2001: 13) thanks to psychologist and pedagogist Stanley Hall who first understood that the child's mental world is very different from that of the adult. Between 1890 and 1920 he dedicated numerous researches to children's beliefs and behaviour concerning the various aspects of the animate and inanimate world, children's behaviours, their cognitive life, their

emotions and their personality formation, collecting a great amount of data that he later published in the first Developmental Psychology Journal, that he himself founded in 1891 (Fonzi, 2001: 14). Despite this important discovery, the method of indirect observation that he used to study the children was later considered untrustworthy: indeed, there has been an understanding that relying on self-childhood memories can be highly risky as our memory tends to reconstruct and distort our memories. The understanding of the methodological limits of indirect observation led future research to be conducted by direct observations. Once again, however, research founded on simple observation – be it *direct* or *indirect* – only allowed scholars to *describe* behaviours and their development but little chance did they have to *explain* the reasons behind those behaviours, their possible causes and the possible developmental processes behind them (Fonzi, 2001: 16). The need to explain, and not only describe, the various manifestations of the infant psychic life ultimately led to the introduction of *experimentation* in the Developmental Psychology field. Indeed, an experimental situation enables the researcher to go beyond the simple description of a phenomenon and allows for explanations to be formulated as it makes it possible to discover the relationships existing between certain conditions (independent variables – which can be controlled or manipulated by the experimenter) and the production of certain effects (dependent variables) (Fonzi, 2001: 17).

But what is the aim of Developmental Psychology? The aim of Developmental Psychology is that of studying age-related changes in behaviour, examining the psychological processes of development, which means it describes the sequence of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes that humans undergo as they grow older (Blake, Pope, 2008: 59). Therefore, its ultimate aim is that of understanding how the human development takes place. *Development* is a fairly broad term which encloses multiple meanings in itself, so much so that terms such as growth, maturation, evolution and learning can be seen as synonyms of it. However, while *growth* takes into account the quantitative dimension of change (e.g. increase of the body mass or of the dimensions of the organism as a whole); while *maturation* refers to the changes that follow an orderly sequence and exclusively includes changes influenced by a person's genetic heritage; while *evolution* refers to species-specific changes; and while *learning* can be defined as the process by means of which knowledge and abilities are

acquired and improved through the individual's experience, which produce relatively permanent changes in our feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 3); in psychology, *development* corresponds to none of these aspects but to all of them put together. Indeed, development can be defined as the set of changes that take place during time inside one or more areas of behaviour and of mental functioning and in the relationships among these different areas, thanks to the interactions between biological factors and experience. What seems interesting to note is that although there are typical pathways of development that virtually all people follow, no two persons are exactly alike. Therefore, to adequately describe development, it is necessary to focus both on typical patterns of change (also called normative development) and on individual variations in patterns of change (also referred to as ideographic development). Thus, developmentalists seek to understand the important ways in which developing humans resemble each other and how they are likely to differ as they proceed through life (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 3).

The latter part appears particularly interesting as it underlines how, despite the fact that the biological development of the person seems to follow quite regular steps in the life of an individual, individual experiences strongly differ from that of one another. Therefore, this is the reason why, for a very long time, psychologists have been asking themselves this question: is human development primarily the result of *nature* (biological forces) or *nurture* (environmental forces)?

2.2. The main approaches towards human development: nature, nurture and dynamic interactionism

In order to seek a reasonable answer to this question, different developmental theorists have tried to investigate this theoretical controversy.

The two main opposing views on this topic are those of:

- nativism;
- empiricism.

Nativists believed that, since birth, the human brain is organised in a way that imposes a given order to the sensory stimulation and that transforms those sensations in perceptions endowed of meaning. In support of such theory, in 1923 Wiggam wrote:

> Heredity and not environment is the chief maker of man. […] Nearly all of the misery and nearly all of the happiness in the world are due not to environment. [...] The differences among men are due to differences in germ cells with which they were born. (Wiggam, 1923: 42)

On the other hand, empirists believed that the mind of the new born is a 'tabula rasa' and that all the knowledge derives from experience, claiming that experience itself is necessary to create order and knowledge in humans. In favour of this theory, Watson said:

> Give me a dozen healthy infants, well formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant, chief, and yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors. There is no such thing as an inheritance of capacity, talent, temperament, mental constitution, and behavioural characteristics. (Watson, 1925: 82)

Nonetheless, neither the nativist theory nor the empirist theory seemed to be exhaustive. This is why new researches have been conducted in the field of developmental psychology and the theory which seems to have gained more supporters in recent years is the so-called *dynamic interactional theory*. Around the 1970s research on the generic code and genetic research on human behaviour were slowly but gradually building a case for the importance of genetics as well as environment as fundamental factors of human development: genetic research has consistently shown heritable influence in many traditional areas of psychological research such as mental illness, personality, cognitive disabilities and abilities, and drug use and abuse. Moreover, what may seem even more surprising is that some areas such as self-esteem, interests, attitudes, and school achievement were as well showing strong genetic influence. Therefore, this research has led to growing acceptance of roles for both genes and environment in the etiology of individual differences in behaviour (Plomin, Asbury, 2005: 87-88). This middle ground theory suggested by interactionist psychologists who believe that the relative contributions of nature (nativists) and

nurture (empirists) depend on the aspect of development in question, emphasises that all complex human attributes such as intelligence, temperament, and personality are the end products of a long and involved interplay between biological predispositions and environmental forces. As this theory seems to be proved, the most appropriate conjunction between the words *nature* and *nurture* cannot possibly see nature *versus* nurture anymore; instead, thanks to the increasing acceptance of the evidence for substantial generic influence on many behavioural traits as well as for the evidence provided by research on the importance of environmental influence on genetics and developmental actions, the most appropriate word to conjugate them inevitably is *and*. Indeed, the fundamental question for the interactionists is not *if* and *how much* these two components influence human development, but rather how these two sets of influences combine or *interact* with each other to produce these developmental changes (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 69).

Therefore, after having devised the different approaches towards human development, we are going to explore now *that* phase of human life where those changes seem to be more evident: *adolescence*.

2.3. Adolescence

Adolescence is a fundamental phase of life, a phase where significant changes and evolutions take place. As we previously said in the above paragraphs, despite its obvious and evident importance, adolescence has started to be part of scientific research relatively recently due to the fact that, in the past, adults believed that having experienced it directly would have been sufficient in order to understand how adolescence works. However, being our memory of a reconstructive type rather than of a reproductive one, and being every human profoundly influenced by cultural and personal filters, led to the understanding that personal memories were not sufficient in order to understand how adolescence functions.

The term adolescence derives from the Latin word *adolescere*, meaning ‘to grow into maturity’ and it is indeed the transitional period in a person’s life where starting from the phase of childhood a human being prepares to go into adulthood. The starting point of adolescence is defined by the onset of puberty (around 10 years of age), while

its end is defined socially (i.e. it goes from 18 to 22 years of age), as it is considered the time when an individual takes an independent role in society. This is one of the reasons why the timing and length of adolescence has varied historically and varies between cultures (Dumontheil, 2016: 39). There is no doubt, however, that overall, adolescence is characterised by a rather lengthy transition phase in which the individual is neither a child nor an adult and, although the adolescent struggles to move towards acquiring independence and the achievement of the perceived rewards of adulthood, adolescence shows a relative lack of preparedness to face all adult responsibilities, thus increasing conflicts with the adult figures that surround them (Chiccetti, Rogosch, 2002: 6). Indeed, adolescence is an important developmental phase, which is marked by a multitude of significant psychological and social changes. Though formerly described as a period of 'storm and stress' (Hall, 1904) characterised by extreme mood-changes and difficult behaviour; today, it is known that, apart from the challenging *developmental tasks* and cognitive maturation that can affect adolescents' emotional *well-being* that may lead to a considerable amount of stress, most of the young people progress relatively unaffected through the years of adolescence (Goldbeck, et al., 2007: 969) as this 'storm and stress' are neither universal nor inevitable variables.

So, what is it meant by *well-being in adolescence* and what are these *developmental tasks* that adolescents need to face?

2.4. Well-being in adolescence and its developmental tasks

As one can easily deduce, the way in which adolescents face and overcome the different developmental tasks of this delicate phase of life are closely interwoven with the level of well-being perceived by the youngster and successively by the young adult. Indeed, *well-being* needs to be seen in a multidimensional way as it corresponds to the positive interaction among the different components of the person: physical, functional, psychological and social, that influence the present and future quality of life. A state of well-being leads to a positive approach towards life which ultimately results in being able to cope with difficult situations and effective problem-solving. On the other hand, discomfort takes place when the person has a negative approach towards life which can lead to an inability to cope with difficult situations in the most

appropriate way. This is why it is difficult to understand where this circular relationship between well-being and developmental tasks start. Therefore, it is fundamental to protect this delicate circular mechanism and be ready to intervene in the most adequate way when negative mechanisms get triggered as this can lead to distress and hardships in coping with the different developmental tasks. The well-being of an adolescent definitely goes beyond the school walls, but school plays a fundamental part in every person's life and therefore the emotional side of the person needs to be taken into account by the teachers and the adult figures who surround them.

As a matter of fact, the adolescent's transition involves complex developmental changes in neural and hormonal stress processing systems. The period is also marked by significant increases in stress due to increased academic, social and family demands. Most adolescents are able to cope with these stress factors and 'survive' this transition without developing any major mental health disorders, which means that changes in stress regulation systems during this developmental period are likely adaptive to facilitate stress coping. However, there is also an acceleration of the incidence of stress-related psychopathology during adolescence, which suggests that many adolescents are at elevated risk (Roberts, Lopez-Duran, 2019: 9).

Due to what has just been said up until now, the delicacy of this phase of life is the reason why *developmental tasks* in adolescence play such a fundamental role in the life of every person and have to be taken into account by the adult figures surrounding the adolescent.

A famous expert on human development named James Havighurst (1952) considered life as formed by a series of tasks which have to be tackled at a pre-established and appropriate moment. Indeed, during the lifespan, the individual is asked to perform some tasks which are typical to a certain developmental phase of life. Some of these tasks are determined on a *biological basis*, such as learning to walk or talk during infanthood, as they require biologically-determined timing. On the other hand, some others are determined by *cultural factors*: different societies put different kinds of pressure on different specific communicative competences, such as the acquisition of reading and writing, as well as specific social competences such as becoming a responsible citizen, for instance. Havighurst (1952) considered some developmental tasks to be universal throughout every culture and considered other

developmental tasks to be present only in some societies and defined only by certain communities. He took into consideration both intercultural variables and intracultural variables: indeed, while tasks derived from social demands show a great variability from one another; he regarded other tasks to be 'recurring' as he considered them to occur for a long period of time or for the whole lifespan of the person. These tasks involve general aspects of the main areas of human development, which are:

- tasks related to physical and sexual maturation;
- tasks related to cognitive development;
- tasks related to affective maturation;
- tasks related to the self-concept development;
- tasks related to autonomy achievement (Havighurst: 1952).

Since early childhood, there is an interplay between biological (i.e. walking, talking, playing, etc.) and social (i.e. hygiene, drawing, communicating, etc.) tasks; some other tasks are considered sub-categories of the previously mentioned ones, which are related to the specific phase of development. For instance, throughout our whole life we face changes in our body related to the passing of time and maturation or during adolescence we face changes determined by our going through puberty. Recurring tasks always concern adaptation to body changes, but age-specific tasks are very different from each other. What is important is that every task needs to be faced at the appropriate time and solved into pre-established timing, otherwise individual development cannot be achieved.

In the following sub-chapters, I am going to unravel Havighurst's 'recurring' tasks as they are of core importance in understanding some of the main traits of adolescence and human development from childhood to adulthood.

2.4.1. Physical and sexual maturation

Adolescence marks the beginning of puberty, which is a period of rapid growth and sexual maturation. These changes start taking place between 8 and 14 years of age and age changes from boys to girls: girls normally hit puberty around ten years of age, whereas boys begin this process approximately two years later, i.e. around twelve years of age. Pubertal changes take around three to four years to complete therefore

adolescents experience an overall physical growth spurt where both height and weight increase, leading the youngster to the gates of adulthood and complete body development. Due to this, puberty makes gender differences manifest: during childhood, boys and girls are quite similar in height and weight. However, gender differences become apparent during adolescence leading boys to become, on average, taller and heavier than their female counterparts (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 202-203). The changes which take place during this phase of life do not go unnoticed by adolescents: boys and girls are definitely sensitive towards what is happening to their bodies and start being influenced by social constructs and experience pressure on how they should look like versus what they really look like, thus intensifying the perception of *gender roles* in their specific society. For instance, as we previously said, boys and girls are nearly equal in physical abilities until puberty; however, while adolescent boys continue to improve on tests of large-muscle activities, girls' skills level off or decline. While this is partly attributed to biology (adolescent boys have more muscle and less fat than adolescent girls), there is evidence that physical decline of adolescent girls is a product of gender-role socialisation: with their widening hips and developing breasts, girls are often encouraged to become less tomboyish and more interested in traditionally feminine (and less athletic) activities (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 216-217).

The need to fit into social norms and to not disappoint society's expectations is an issue which needs to be overviewed by the adult figures surrounding adolescents in order to put a filter between them and society, essentially explaining to them that nobody and no-body is perfect and by making it clear that the difficult path towards acceptance is the key for a happy and fulfilling life.

Another pivotal moment of this phase is the development of sexual maturity. Sexual changes are divided into two categories: primary sexual characteristics and secondary sexual characteristics. *Primary sexual characteristics* are changes in the reproductive organs. For males, this mean growth of the testes, penis, scrotum and spermarche or first ejaculation of semen, which occurs between 11 and 15 years of age. On the other hand, female's gametes stored in the ovaries are present at birth but are immature. Therefore, during puberty females experience growth of the uterus and menarche or the first menstrual period (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 203).

Secondary sexual characteristics are visible physical changes which are not directly linked to reproduction but which signal sexual maturity. For instance, males grow broader shoulders and lower voice due to larynx growth, hair grows in pubic areas, under the arms and on the face. For females, around the age of 10, their breast starts developing and it will take several years to complete, hips broaden and, as males, body air starts developing as well (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 205). Without going into further anatomic and medical details, as this is not the aim of our thesis, this paragraph was aimed at explaining that this important physical changes affecting both boys and girls are crucial developmental moments which also affect the psychological side of adolescents who have to carry out the difficult task of understanding their bodies and dealing with the visible and invisible differences and changes that are taking place in them. Indeed, as far as the psychological side of this phase is concerned, adolescence is a critical phase in the development of mental health disorders. There is evidence that mental health problems are more likely to occur when the child is among the first in his or her peer group to develop. Because the preadolescent time is one of 'not wanting to appear different', early developing children stand out among their peer group and gravitate toward those who are older. For girls, this results in them interacting with older peers who engage in risky behaviours such as substance abuse and early sexual behaviour. Boys also see changes in their emotional functioning at puberty. What is interesting to notice is that, while most boys experience a decrease in depressive symptoms during puberty, boys who begin puberty earlier and exhibited a rapid tempo, or a fast rate of change, actually increase in depressive symptoms suggesting that this would be a risk factor in boys' development. Researchers found out that, for boys whose pattern of pubertal maturation differs significantly from those of others of their age, peer relationships may be especially challenging. Thus, leading to negative consequences for boys attaining early puberty who registered higher likelihood of heading towards cigarette, alcohol, or other drug use (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 206).

Therefore, to conclude this first part, adults and teachers in particular need to bear in mind that adolescence carries these pivotal changes with it and that the psychological sphere of adolescents' brain is deeply influenced by these apparently just-external changes and they therefore need to help their students understand what

these natural changes are in order to make them understand and accept what is happening to them both from a physical and psychological points of view. Moreover, what is fundamental is that teachers themselves need to be aware of these changes and grow a sense of sensitivity towards their students' needs.

2.4.2. Cognitive development

As far as the second developmental task is concerned, we need to remember that Developmental Psychology is the study of age-related changes in behaviour. This means that it examines the psychological processes of development: it describes the sequence of biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes that humans undergo as they grow older. In particular, *Cognitive Psychology* is a branch of psychology that focuses on studying the mental processes which include how people think, perceive, remember, and learn. Indeed, its core focus is on how people acquire, process, and store information. This is the reason why it is highly advantageous for teachers to understand cognitive psychology: because it can help them plan more effective lessons and create positive learning environments for their students. Among other things, by using appropriate developmental instructional techniques, teachers who are aware of these cognitive processes have proved to be able to increase their students' achievement (Blake, Pope, 2008: 59).

One of the main and most influencing figures in the field of cognitive psychology was undoubtedly Jean Piaget. He believed that there are two main mechanisms at the basis of learning:

- assimilation;
- accommodation.

As far as the first concept is concerned, Piaget believed that the child incorporates in his own schemes, data acquired through experience: this means that when a scheme is established in the child's mind, there will be a tendency to use that same scheme again in future situations that look similar to previous ones where that particular scheme had properly worked in order to cope with a specific problem or difficulty. Those future situations will be indeed 'assimilated' to the pre-existent scheme, which can be seen as a sort of generalisation of those schemes. This is a useful mental process as it helps us cope both with positive and with negative situations: if we think about it, this way

of processing information helps us behave in a proper way in case of a dangerous situation. Thus, we can deduce that trying to apply pre-established behavioural, organisational, interpretational, prevision patterns is a functional strategy to our way of living (Petter, 1998: 103-104).

The second fundamental concept at the basis of learning is accommodation; this means that our mental schemes are also modifiable on the basis of experience. Whenever we try to insert reality in a pre-established scheme, reality itself appears different from what we had expected, thus making that pre-established scheme inadequate for that specific situation. This is the reason why we need to accommodate our schemes to reality and, if necessary, create new ones. Indeed, schemes are flexible structures, which can be modified and/or duplicated by new elements of experience. What is fascinating is that our human way of learning lies in a 'dynamic equilibrium' which sometimes breaks to rebuild itself anew at a more elevated level where the organism's adaptation to reality is improved and founded on a larger quantity of schemes to fit the vast amount of different situations that can occur in life (Petter, 1998: 104).

During his studies on human development Jean Piaget also deduced that intellectual development evolved in stages. He believed that every stage has its own organisational form which cannot be skipped; in addition to this, he believed that previous stages are integrated in the following ones. He also believed that the age in which a child passes from a stage to the one which follows can vary significantly from child to child and that this passage happens when the child needs to create new structures. Therefore, he identified *four stages in cognitive development*, which are:

- sensori-motor stage;
- pre-operational stage;
- concrete-operational stage;
- formal-operational stage (Blake, Pope, 2008: 60).

We will briefly discuss the first three stages, since they take place since birth till the twelve years of age (thus, before puberty and adolescence), while we will discuss more

in depth the forth and last cognitive developmental stage since it is relevant to the phase of adolescence we have been discussing so far.

The *sensi-motor stage*, which is also called infancy, takes place between 0 and 2 years of age and it is a stage in which children are likely to learn by using their five senses and it is a stage in which the child 'understands' the world on the basis of what he can do with the objects that he has and the actions he performs are goal-directed (Blake, Pope, 2008: 60). Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that infants and young children fail to understand other people's point of view as they still have not developed the so-called 'theory of mind' (Flavell, et al., 1992: 100).

As far as the second stage is concerned, the *pre-operational stage* takes place between 2 and 6 years of age. During this period, children are able to cope with one-step logic problems, they also develop their language abilities as well as those of using symbols and images. Through the so-called 'deferred imitation' they are able to observe and reproduce – after a certain time – what they had observed, thus proving to have retained the whole representation of a given model. During this phase, however, thought processes are still quite rigid and this is shown by irreversibility traits: a lack of competence in adapting shape changes in concrete objects (Blake, Pope, 2008: 60).

The third stage consists in the *concrete-operational stage* in which, between 6 through 12 years of age, action become reversible and children are capable of creating sequences as well as multiplicative and additive classifications and, among other things, they overcome the so-called infant egocentrism developing the theory of mind thus becoming capable to understand other people's thoughts and behaviour even when they are not manifested directly (Blake, Pope, 2008: 60).

The forth and most important stage is the *formal-operational stage*, which takes place from 12 years of age (age in which puberty starts as well) and allows children to think logically and develop the so-called 'formal thought'. Indeed, the most important feature of this stage is the emergence of the *hypothetical-deductive* thought. The term 'hypothetical' indicates that this type of thought aims at representing hypothetical situations. This means that children become capable of making logically correct reasoning starting from hypothetical situations without necessarily starting from a direct experience; on the other hand, the term 'deductive' indicates the ability to draw

from those hypothetical premises, logical conclusions without verifying the conclusions of the hypothetical reasoning through practise (Petter, 1998: 131).

The development of the hypothetical-deductive thought is pivotal in the educational field. Despite making the adolescent, and student, capable of accessing complex contents, it determines the emergence of new epistemic interests in the student. Students start developing interest in, not only knowledge in itself, but on how men have tried to get hold of it and on the processes behind it. Teachers need to take into account this new stage in order to adapt their cultural training to these new needs. With the growing ability to develop complex reasonings, a new enjoyment for reasoning grows as well. Adolescents increasingly feel the need to, not only being presented things, but also to having them demonstrated through practice. Subsequently, a new desire for *discussion* comes together: they demand equal discussions, where adults take into consideration and respect their different opinions and where statements do not have higher or lower value depending on who is making that statement – teacher or student – but on how coherent is the value expressed in itself. Ultimately, g*roup discussion* increasingly becomes an essential tool in the educational relationship and the ability to guide the discussion but putting yourself, as a teacher, at the same level of the students is proved to be, as we will later discuss in the following chapter, an essential personality trait in teachers (Petter, 1998: 135-136).

2.4.3. Affective maturation

Another important developmental task is affective maturation, which allows the adolescent to become more aware of his own feelings and to start being able to do some kind of introspection. This way, the adolescent does not feel the same need to be protected by the family as he did just a few years before the beginning of these developments. From childhood to adolescence, affective maturation can be defined as an individual's progressive development of more numerous relationships. At first the child has relationships with the mother and the father and at most with some relatives, but as he grows, he starts building relationships with people who are also external to the family; these people can be teachers, friends, peers of the same or of the opposite sex, animals, objects and places. As time goes on, the child can develop closer and more intense relationships, as well as weaker ones. In addition to this, during this

phase, the group of peers, in particular, acquires greater importance and becomes an invaluable source of support which satisfies some fundamental needs of the youngster, such as the need for socialisation, fun and the need to get to know the world in a more autonomous way than it happened before. As it can be deduced, during this phase, relationships with adults (i.e. both members of the family and external adult figures) change. So, what is the main factor which helps the child develop a positive affective relationship with an adult? Does it depend on him? Or on the adult? Or is it determined by other elements? During adolescence, a mechanism starts developing in the youngster that allows adolescents to establish positive affective relationships and it is the fact that they start growing positive affective relationships with those people who contribute, in a consistent and meaningful way, to satisfy their 'developmental needs'. Although parents are given many years to accomplish this task during their children's childhood, teachers can be seen as those fundamental figures as well. To do so, teachers, as well as the parents, need to gain their students' esteem and affection (Petter, 1998: 141-142). This can be done only if the adult is seen as a positive and stable figure (i.e. showing knowledge, having prestige, possessing fascinating abilities, and so on) that the youngsters are willing to look for and therefore they themselves will try to spend time with them. This type of teacher is seen by adolescents as a sort of *extension* and *completion* of their personality, hence as a founding part of their psychological self. While it is easier for parents and peers to be seen as these fundamental figures, teachers can be seen as such as well. This kind of feeling of attachment can be noted, for instance, when a teacher we like goes away and is replaced by a new one: the feelings we experience show that something important that we 'owned' in a way, is not there anymore, and we feel sorry for that loss, so much so that we might experience emotions of nostalgia and regret. This can only occur if the conditions of attachment previously exposed are met (Petter, 1998: 140).

What is important to notice is that a positive affective relationship represents a form of *socialisation*, which is a fundamental need during adolescence. During adolescence, the most important types of rewards and threats normally reside in the social domain, such as being admired, being accepted or rejected by peers and so on. Indeed, it is important to recognise an overlap between affective and social processing in adolescence (Crone, Dahl, 2012: 640). Socialisation gives place to interpersonal and

communicative behaviours which can undoubtedly take place in the family or among peers, for instance with a 'best friend': friendships already start growing during childhood; however, adolescence represents a pivotal moment in the development of peer relationships. The type of friendship that takes place with the 'best friend' is marked by the need for full trust and confidence, by a desire for reciprocity and by a demand for exclusiveness (this means that the youngster does not easily accepts his or her 'favourite friend' to have other friendships of the same type with someone else). The 'best friend' plays an important role in the psychological development of the adolescent: first of all, it allows him or her to have an equal relationship with a peer in a phase of his or her life where they experience feelings of impatience due to their dependency on and inequality with adults. Moreover, that friend is there in order to listen to their problems and outbursts, and by sharing certain experiences, a 'best friend' represents for adolescents an important support in their first independent-life attempts. Also, what frequently happens is that the 'best friend', despite some background similarities (such as sharing the same interests), represents a complementary personality of him or herself (i.e. the 'best friend' is more optimist, more extrovert, more thoughtful, has more capacity for initiative, and so on), and therefore, the multiple imitation trials which occur, represent a personality enrichment for both of them. Ultimately, a 'best friend', through the continual comparisons that occur in their relationship and the daily conversations which take place between them, hugely helps the adolescent's elaboration of the 'idea of him or herself' (Petter, 1998: 147-148), of which we will talk about in the following paragraph.

2.4.4. Self-concept development

As we mentioned above, the development of the 'self-concept' is a fundamental task in adolescence. The term 'self-scheme' contains in itself terms such as *self-concept*, *self-understanding*, *self-efficacy* and *self-esteem*. This umbrella term comprises all these terms in itself as the development of all these areas contribute to the image a child has about himself and his possible and future selves (Bode, 2015: 26). In order to understand what these four terms mean we are going to give a brief definition of them so as to clarify their different meanings: first of all, the term *self-concept* refers to the evaluation that a child has of him or herself in certain domains, such as their

academic performance, or their athletic competence, or their physical appearance, etc. This knowledge is created by the child's experience and by evaluations done by himself and by the people who surround him. All this information is then stored and placed in the long-term memory where memory structures are collected. As Santrock (2014) in Bode (2015) said, self-evaluation is more than self-understanding as the child does not only define and describe attributes about him or herself but he also evaluates these attributes (Bode, 2015: 27).

Secondly, *self-understanding* is considered the ability to describe features of oneself. This means that the child is able to depict his or her self-image, not only on the basis of what the parents or the society have constructed for him but also on his own personal definition. Unsurprisingly, during the phase of adolescence, the understanding of the self is chameleonic (Bode, 2015: 27) as it is still not clearly defined.

Thirdly, *self-efficacy* is the belief that one has of his or her ability to master a certain situation and to derive a positive outcome from that. The self-efficacy concept is fundamental in the development of the child's personality because a child with high self-efficacy beliefs will know and believe that he is *able to* accomplish a given task, such as doing well in school or in a sport, for instance; on the other hand, a child with low self-efficacy will be more likely to think that he *is not able* to carry out a certain task, especially in case of a challenging one, thus seeking excuses or directly trying to avoid it. This means that children with high self-efficacy belief will be more prone to invest time and effort in accomplishing tasks which are assigned to them than those children with low self-efficacy belief. This is why teachers and educators in general should work on the creation of positive environments in order to enhance their students' self-efficacy beliefs and challenge them in ways that will prove them able to accomplish ever increasing tasks (Bode, 2015: 27).

The forth point concerns *self-esteem* which can be defined as a global evaluation of the child's self and how he accepts himself, his self-worth and his self-image. We should note that self-esteem and self-efficacy are not synonyms; indeed, only because a child might feel a sense of low self-efficacy in one domain this does not mean that, in general, he has a low self-esteem. Moreover, self-esteem is formed by two main domains: the first one concerns the discrepancy between what the child would like to

be (also referred to as ‘ideal self’) and what the child believes to be (which can also be defined as the ‘actual self). The lower the gap between these two selves, the higher the child’s self-esteem and vice versa. The second domain concerns the fact that the child’s self-esteem is significantly influenced by his or her own general feeling of the quantity of support that he or she receives from the people who surround him or her. Caregivers’ and peers’ attitudes and values manipulate the child’s scale of values he or she attaches to skills and achievements. This is the reason why it is important that adult figures know the role that they play in the child’s life as supporters of this delicate process, especially as far as caregivers are concerned (Bode, 2015: 28-29).

Ultimately, all of these different aspects of the self, contribute to create the personality of the child and, whereas the teen’s understanding of him or herself is often full of contradictions, as they tend to change personality and behaviour depending on who they are with or where they are, leading them to ask themselves questions such as ‘which one is really me?’ (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 218) it is important for them to be guaranteed an adequate support. With the passing of time, the adolescent becomes more autonomous and, with a new intellectual autonomy, adolescents are called to express their own ideas on important matters, which will inevitably lead them to making choices, thus shaping their life philosophy. This is a step by step accomplishment that will take place smoothly if adolescents are gradually led to independent thinking and acting. Gradually, by refusing to accept adults’ beliefs uncritically, they will start reflecting on their personal values thus shaping what will ultimately be their personal hierarchy of values. The inevitable reflection on one’s self will allow adolescents to select those aspects of their personality which they would like to maintain and those others which they would like to get rid of or modify. Of course, this is a long and complex process that sometime takes more than adolescence, but adolescence is the phase of life in which these changes start taking place. With time, the awareness of their own limits and of their own talents, as well, will make it possible to create a solid and realistic ‘idea of themselves’, which by shortening the gap between ideal and actual self (as we said above) will contribute to enhance their self-determination and self-esteem. This process of search of one’s identity is long and needs to be walked by trial, error and experimentation. Indeed, the path towards the discovery of one’s own identity is neither easy nor brief and it may take even more

than adolescence to finally get to full accomplishment. Erikson's 1968 idea of identity was that of a dynamic organisation of drives, abilities, beliefs and personal history which all contribute to creating a coherent and autonomous self (Montgomery, 2005: 347). Developing from Erikson's belief that the primary psychosocial task of adolescence was establishing an identity, James Marcia (2010) in Lally, Valentine-French (2017), identified four identity statuses which can occur during life:

- identity diffusion – this means that the person still has not explored his or her possible selves and still has not committed to a specific identity;
- identity foreclosure – in this status the person has made a commitment to an identity but he or she still has not explored the various options that exist;
- identity moratorium – during this phase, the person is actively exploring and looking for his or her ideal identity in an attempt to establish it, but still has not made any commitment to a particular one;
- identity achievement – this last status refers to those people who after exploring the various identities have made a commitment to a specific one. (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 219)

Having made these observations, what is important to bear in mind, in general, is that *there is* a continuity inside change and we need to allow these changes to take place in order to build an adult's solid and consistent self. As we said before, the path through the discovery of one's identity might be long and tumultuous but with sufficient help on behalf of those who surround children and adolescents we can all accomplish the task of identity development which is core in creating adults capable of introspection and ones aware of what they are doing with their life and in the world.

2.4.5. Autonomy achievement

The last, but not least, developmental task we are going to explore is that of *autonomy achievement*. Autonomy achievement is, quite the contrary, one of the main developmental tasks of this phase. Psychological autonomy involves different dimensions, such as emotional autonomy from childhood dependency on parents, behavioural autonomy which is considered in terms of independent functioning and on

the so-called self-reliance, and cognitive autonomy which involves self-confidence in decision making (Cicchetti, Rogosch, 2002: 9-10). Although the process of detachment from the parents already starts during the first years of life of the child, starting from the beginning of a child's life, we can think about the moment when a child learns to walk and becomes freer and, indeed, autonomous in his movements; or later in life, when the child starts going to school and with that comes a second kind of detachment where the child starts interacting in a world of brand new strangers; adolescence sees a new and more evident search for autonomy. A more general and profound detachment from the parents happens during adolescence which is aimed at creating a more equal relationship with them – and the adult figures more in general – based on trust and respect. In their search for autonomy, adolescents crave for more freedom and independence and with that comes a decrease in the time spent with the family and the subsequent outbreak of new conflicts. Especially in families that get along well, this can be seen quite negatively and parents might feel shaken and find it difficult to understand their child's change and their new desire for autonomy and besides they might be forced to re-examine their own relationship due to the child's growing independence (McArthur, 1962: 191). However, this phase *does* require the parents to 'suffer' for and accept this detachment as it is the core phase for the adolescent in order to become an independent and fully developed adult. Of course, both parents and teenagers need to find a balance between autonomy, while still maintaining close and supportive familial relationships (Lally, Valentine-French, 2017: 222) also because there is evidence that achievement of psychological autonomy is best achieved through the maintenance of a positive relatedness with parents rather than through parents' rejection (Cicchetti, Rogosch, 2002: 10). Moreover, contexts such as home or schools, should optimise adolescents' strivings for psychological autonomy and this should occur in a graded fashion in accord with changing needs as the adolescent matures. At school, for instance, teenagers' environments should be structured so as to optimise their success in negotiating developmental tasks: rather than being provided exclusively with restrictions, adolescents would benefit from contexts that provide alternative tracks for achieving autonomy in ways that both have personal meaning and promote self-esteem and personal accomplishment (Cicchetti, Rogosch, 2002: 15). This allows us to notice how human developmental tasks are

closely interconnected with each other and that all contribute to the development and evolution of the adolescent in order to create a functional adult.

To conclude, in order to relate everything that has been said up to this point to the school environment and to the teacher's role in particular, the following and last paragraph is aimed at briefly summarising the reasons behind the core importance of mixing education with the fascinating and fundamental field of developmental psychology.

2.5. Awareness on the importance of teachers' psychological training

Around the 1990s the awareness on the importance of teachers' training on psychological matters became widespread in the field of higher education. This realisation derived from the increasing recognition that the school's task was not only that of creating *cultural literacy* but also that of promoting *personality formation* of their students, considered in all its dimensions. Therefore, in this perspective, the necessity of gaining a more adequate knowledge on the psychological processes of growth, of its phases and of its critical moments seemed evident (Petter, 1998: 1).

Thanks to this recognition, its usefulness became more evident in the interests of creating more effective teaching activities, as well. It has been noticed that a more adequate knowledge on how the mind works can allow teachers to gain higher and more long-lasting academical performances. Eventually, psychological matters became a relevant topic also to the mass-media (such as the tv, the radio, journals, etc.) thus showing and pointing out the limits and the dangers that can occur when basing our knowledge on distorted or incomplete interpretations on youth and on how 'their world' works (Petter, 1998, 2) by relying on our own memory – which, as we said is reconstructive and unreliable.

The 1890s were the starting point of a long and complex journey through the understanding of adolescence which continues until the day of today and which still has doubts and unanswered questions, but what is important is that adults are committing themselves to find more complete and adequate answers to these questions.

What has been said so far is of core importance because the knowledge of adolescents' developmental phases and the psychological issues that characterise this

period are key for a better understanding and a more positive relationship between teachers and students, as well as for all the adult figures who surround them. In every human relationship there is a need for sympathy and compassion and it is for this reason that everything that has been said so far is relevant.

In the following chapter, picking up from here, we will see how the teacher's teaching styles influence learning as well as in which ways the relationship that the teacher establishes with the students in general, the relationship among peers in the class and among teacher and single student, can contribute to a more positive and peaceful classroom atmosphere. Ultimately, we will focus on the role teachers have in the class and how their caring and motivation can contribute to students' engagement and even result in better academic performances.

CHAPTER THREE

The importance of relationships in education: peers and teacher relationships for a positive classroom atmosphere, school engagement and academic achievement

In chapter two, we concluded by saying that bringing psychological awareness to teachers' training programmes is a fundamental feature for the benefits both of the student and the school teacher himself. In this following chapter, we are going to explore the role of school educational relationships. In particular, we will see how teachers' teaching styles influence learning as well as the whole classroom atmosphere. In order to do so, we will present the role of relationships in the class in general so as to later investigate the one between teacher and student and how the teacher's care seems to play a fundamental role both in the motivation and the student's engagement and academic achievement.

3.1. The educational relationship

Teachers play a fundamental role in the school classroom. They are the ones in charge of creating a positive classroom atmosphere in order to make learning meaningful and enjoyable. In order to do so, a fundamental role is played by *human interpersonal relationships*. Interpersonal relationships can be defined as those relationships occurring among individuals (generally two) and they are about the thoughts and feelings that we experience towards another person; they are about the way we perceive and take action towards others and what we think and wait for the other person to do for us and, ultimately, about how we deal with other people's actions (Heider, 1972: 7). Generally, a person reacts to what he or she thinks the other person is perceiving, feeling or thinking, as well as what the other person is doing. In other words, what a subject *presumes* is taking place in the other person's mind normally is an essential feature of an interpersonal and interactional relationship (Heider, 1972: 7).

A very specific type of relationship occurs in the class: the educational relationship. An educational relationship is that relationship which takes place between teacher and students and, according to Carl Rogers (1951), an educational relationship takes places as a *relationship of counselling*. This means that the teacher takes action

in order to facilitate their students' growth and maturation. The student, in this view, is not a subject who needs to be manipulated but a person who is capable of self-realisation and personal fulfilment, a concept which lies at the basis of the person-centred approach (Rogers: 1951) which has been explained throughout Chapter one. Rogers believed that we cannot 'directly teach' people, but we can only help them make their learning easier. This concept is particularly interesting and it can be easily explained through an ancient saying which goes "you can take a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink". You cannot grow motivation where there is none, but you can work on the contexts in order to *try* making learning easier. For as simple as it may seem, still many teachers ignore this basic concept thus making their work more difficult, starting from the wrong assumption that everything teachers teach will eventually be what students learn (Rogers, 2007: 253). What is important to notice is that it is fundamental to respect the student's timing while creating the basis for a positive teacher-student relationship as well as a safe classroom atmosphere. In addition to Carl Rogers' theory, Guido Petter (1998) affirms that "an educational relationship essentially is a communicative relationship" (Petter, 1998: 219). According to his view teacher's behaviours in the class play a fundamental role in making their students' learning experience effective. He understood that the two characteristics that students least like in their teachers are 'the teacher doesn't talk much' and 'he's too strict', the latter meaning scarcely prone to accept their students' points of view which may differ from the teacher's one. We can easily notice how these two aspects are *deeply* interwoven with difficulties in communication, thus showing how students actually *do* want to be able to communicate effectively with their teachers.

Clearly, we need to bear in mind that the educational relationship is closely linked to learning. One does not go to school just to build 'relationships', because we could otherwise opt for more comfortable environments. People go to school mainly because they have to learn contents and increase their knowledge. However, what teachers should do is creating an environment in which students can have a *point person*, a person with whom they can share their knowledge and their ideas and rework the acquired information in order to 'understand' school contents and the world other than just 'know stuff' about them. Thus, what students need is a person who can, not

only inform them on contents, but also one who has a 'formative' as well as an 'educational' role. The teacher is there in order to help them organise the information that they need to acquire and help them understand the relationships which take place beneath the contents, ultimately allowing them to create meaningful connections between themselves and the world around them.

As we said in Chapter two, during adolescence, starting from the 12 years of age, there is an important intellectual development which concerns the way of reasoning: the emergence of the so-called hypothetical-deductive thought. The appearance of this complex way of reasoning has repercussions both in the cognitive area, in the self-concept development as well as in the relationships adolescents establish with adults (Petter, 1998: 131). The acquisition of the hypothetical-deductive thought has multiple effects at the educational level. Despite allowing students access to more complex contents, it determines the appearance of new interests and desire to establish an 'equal confrontation' with adults. With the increasing ability of developing complex reasoning, they start *enjoying* reasoning as well. Adolescents start growing the need and desire to *discuss*, but what they want are 'equal discussions' where their ideas are taken into serious consideration and respected as much as those of the adults surrounding them. In this sense, *group discussions* become, even more, an essential instrument in the *educational relationship*. The ability to guide group discussions in the class and share ideas with the students, giving their opinions the same dignity as the one of the teacher, is a fundamental skill that every educator should possess. Moreover, what is also important is being able to patiently support the students, never showing impatience and intolerance, never allowing them to see that you have way more experience than them and never being ironical towards them. Just like it is supposed to be, adolescents still do not totally possess a full variety of human behaviours and still cannot handle the complexity of social reality; however, adolescents highly appreciate those teachers who are willing to listen and respect their opinions and who help them in the difficult talk of intellectual autonomy achievement (Petter, 1998: 136).

This third chapter is deeply interlinked with what has been said so far both in the first and in the second chapter of this thesis in particular. We should remember how significant the developmental skills are in adolescence and, with regard to that, we

emphasised how important it is for the teacher to gain an adequate knowledge on psychological matters as well as putting their students at the centre of the educational scene.

Teachers' training on psychological matters seems particularly relevant when speaking about cognitive development in adolescence because it allows the teacher to propose the right things at the right time. This means being able to know *when* the students are able to understand and deal with certain topics as well as with certain problems. Being able to understand the difficulties and challenges of every single student is not an easy task, as they are all different from one another, but being able to do so is fundamental in order to be a good teacher: it means being there for them for a word of advice when they need one, it means reassuring them when they are worried and ultimately helping them to gradually gain their autonomy (Petter, 1998: 143).

As we will see in the following paragraphs, not all teachers allow for these conditions to take place as some of them do not create the adequate contexts to have a positive classroom atmosphere. We will see which behaviours are considered more appropriate in order to allow learning to be successful and which ones are less adequate for the wellbeing of the students. The role of the teacher is quite complex as it obliges them to be highly versatile. Teachers need to possess not only an excellent knowledge of their subject, but they also have to possess certain personality traits and abilities which do not have much to do with what they actually teach. Going back to what we previously said, that "an educational relationship essentially is a communicative relationship" (Petter, 1998: 219), communicative and social abilities are at the core of the teaching profession. Therefore, what is the type of relationship that a teacher can establish with the class? What kind of educational atmosphere should he create in it? And in which way should he exercise his leadership?

In order to answer these questions, first of all, we need to understand which *relationships* more in general take place in the class in order to have a broader vision of the whole classroom environment to later concentrate on the key role of the teacher.

3.2. Relationships in the classroom environment

The relationships which take place in the class are mainly two: those between teacher and students and those among students themselves (also referred to as peers). Given

the great amount of time that the adolescent spends in the classroom, both play an important role for the student's personal development as they both contribute to enhance or undermine his self-confidence and wellbeing in the classroom environment and may also lead to external ripple effects.

It is highly fundamental to remember that the classroom environment creates *involuntary-formed groups*. This means that the single individual can neither decide with whom he is going to spend his time with, nor can he choose to leave the group if he does not like its components. On the contrary, students are 'forced' to spend a great amount of their time with people who will be, most probably, highly different from each other on so many different levels. This specific feature makes the classroom environment both highly formative but at the same time quite dangerous, as some experiences may acquire negative connotations. Indeed, the classroom environment is a very complex dynamic system that resembles a small-scale society and, like every society, the differences existing among the different people may generate conflicts, thus making it difficult to create a cohesive and collaborative group whose aim should be that of learning together.

3.3. Peer relationships

One of the main relationships which take place in the class is that among peers. As developmentalists would say, peers can be defined as "social equals" or as individuals who are operating at similar levels of behavioural complexity. Peers do not necessarily share the exact same age but they all are considered so as long as they can adjust their behaviours to suit one another's capabilities as they pursue common interests and goals (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 614). This is particularly true when talking about the educational field as the group of peers has the common goal of learning together and, despite their different personal interests, they share the same objective of succeeding in learning. Therefore, peers play an important role in the adolescent's development as peers normally have equal status and power and must learn to appreciate each other's perspectives, negotiate, compromise, and cooperate with each other if they are willing to get along or achieve joint goals. The *equal status* that they share, unlike the one that they establish with adults, is likely to contribute to the development of social competences that are otherwise difficult to acquire in the unequal interactions with

parents, teachers and adults in general (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 614). The interaction among peers allows them to develop a fundamental skill, which is that of *sociability*. Sociability, as described by Shaffer and Kipp (2010), is a term that describes a person's willingness to engage others in social interaction and to seek their attention and approval (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 614). Humans are born as sociable creatures but to be fully functional we need years of practice and the best possible way to be fully functional is seeking opportunities to socialise with others. This is why there is no better place than school in order to acquire and develop peer sociability, not only to be able to socialise with others but also to compare ourselves to them, thus developing those important processes which are essential for our self-concept construction.

As it may easily be noticed, the first opportunities children have to develop social abilities already occur at a very young age when the child starts going to kindergarten, which is when he first starts spending some time with children of his same age. However, it is only throughout the grade-school years that peer interactions become increasingly sophisticated. By early adolescence, youngsters start spending more time with peers than with parents, siblings or any other agent of socialisation, initially preferring same-sex companionship and later forming heterosexual groups by mid-adolescence. Groups are either in the form of *cliques*, which are small groups of friends who interact frequently, or *crowds*, which are larger, reputationally based peer groups made up of individuals and cliques who share similar norms, interests and values (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 617). During high school the differences existing among individuals increase thus starting to form, little by little, the different groups which grow inside the classroom. Crowds normally come into play mainly as a mechanism for defining an adolescent's niche within the larger social structure of high school; and though they may differ slightly from place to place still most schools have crowds of 'suck-ups', 'stoners', 'emo kids', 'preps', 'rednecks', and so on (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 617). Crowds and cliques play a fundamental role for adolescents as they allow them to express their values and experiment different roles as they begin to forge their own identity, which is no more the one 'established' by their families (Shaffer, Kipp, 2010: 618).

Peer socialisation becomes hugely important when relations take place in the classroom environment. Indeed, according to Furrer and Skinner (2003), peers seems

to play a pivotal role in the children's school participation and completion. Evidence shows that there seems to be a correlation between peers rejections and children's disaffection from academic activities and school. When children and adolescents experience loneliness and social isolation this seems to lead to academic failure and may eventually result in school drop-out (Furrer, Skinner, 2003: 150). Furrer and Skinner (2003) further claim that children highly value the support they receive from peers. Studies demonstrated that there appears to be a link between children's perception of peer social and emotional support and their academic goals, engagement and self-concept (Furrer, Skinner, 2003: 150). Indeed, in this perspective, Steinberg, Dornbusch and Brown (1992) claim that peers are the most powerful influence on student's everyday behaviour in school (Steinberg, Dornbusch, Brown, 1992: 727).

Therefore, great importance should be given to creating a positive atmosphere among the members of the class in order to create the conditions to have an effective learning environment. Teachers in this context play an important referee role in the creation and maintenance of these relationships. Moreover, as Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer (2014) claim, *warmth* is a key feature of high-quality peer relationships and highly functional classroom climates. Therefore, this means that when students have opportunities to talk and listen to each other, provide emotional support, share learning experiences, and develop respect, they are more likely to feel that they belong and are understood and cared for by their peers. Indeed, warm interactions with classroom peers create a climate of comfort and help meet students' need for relatedness (Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer, 2014: 106). For all the reasons outlined above, peer positive relationships seem to be a protective factor against school anxiety and failure and must therefore be taken into serious consideration and must be paid close attention to by teachers when dealing with the class.

3.4. Teachers' role in the classroom environment and the teacher-student relationship

As we have seen in the previous paragraph, peers play a fundamental role in the classroom environment as with their different behaviours and expectations they can hugely influence the classroom's climate and the interactions that take place in it. The classroom environment is based on a delicate balance, which at any moment may be

compromised by any internal or external interventions. Every single 'actor' in the class provides his contribution to the 'scene' and the different approaches they display may make a difference in the classroom formative context. However, we should not forget that the 'scene' is coordinated by a specific 'director' which is the teacher. Teachers play a fundamental role in the classroom environment and are probably the most powerful and influential figures in it. More than anyone else, teachers can affect the direction of the formative process and influence it through their ideas and their actions.

At the beginning of paragraph 3.1 we asked ourselves a series of questions concerning teachers and their role in the class, which were: what is the type of relationship that a teacher can establish with the class? What kind of educational atmosphere should he create in it? And in which way should he exercise his leadership? In this third chapter we will try to answer these questions in order to understand what the key factors of successful teaching and learning are.

3.5. Teachers' teaching styles: authoritarian, laissez-faire and democratic teachers

One of the most important aspects of teaching which has a direct effect on the classroom's climate is the teacher's *teaching style*. The teaching style (Vegetti Finzi, Battistin, 2000) concerns the attitude the teacher has in the classroom which depends on how he perceives his role in it. Therefore, different teaching styles exist, which may slightly vary in terminology, but which can be summed up in three main categories:

- authoritarian teachers;
- laissez-faire or tolerant teachers;
- democratic or authoritative teachers (Lewin, Lippitt, White, 1939: 273).

Traditionally, there was a tendency to merely oppose authoritative teaching style to non-authoritative teaching style, leaving all sorts of blending out of the running. Indeed, this opposition was particularly evident in the years which immediately followed the 1968's student revolution. While before the revolution the standard way of teaching was of an authoritarian kind, the revolution saw a generalised revolt against a fundamentally authoritarian school, thus paving the way towards new methods and attitudes for a more non-authoritative type of teaching (Petter, 1998: 203). Lewin

however underlines that the authoritative/non-authoritative dichotomy appears to be an oversimplification of reality thus suggesting that a further distinction should be introduced between authoritative and non-authoritative teaching style which is that of democratic teaching (Petter, 1998: 203-204). As Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) found out in their research, the different approaches teachers display, have a great impact in the classroom atmosphere and students' attitudes towards learning. Therefore, teachers should be conscious of the different impacts their style has on students' engagement and on the classroom atmosphere more in general.

Thereby, the first type of teacher is the *authoritarian* teacher. Authoritarian teachers are convinced that the most important thing which should be done in the classroom is the transmission of knowledge. They are not interested in the student as a person and are therefore not concerned about their individual characteristics and personal differences. Moreover, all determination of policy is in the hands of the leader, thus refusing any sort of common ground in the decision making. Indeed, every technique and activity steps are dictated by the authority and displayed one at a time, so that future steps are always uncertain to a large degree. The authoritarian teacher also decides the roles of the individuals and the composition of working groups. Furthermore, the leader does not actively participate in the activities, except when he has to demonstrate a certain activity to the class. Finally, work evaluation, both when it is positive and also when it is negative, is addressed *ad personam*, which means that the praise or the critique are done directly to the person who has succeeded or failed and, in his praise or criticism, the professor is 'personal' thus tending to lack fairness and objectivity (Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939: 273). In this respect, it is not particularly relevant to observe whether stressing on positive evaluation is good or bad, as in most cases this is overall a positive strategy; however, negatively evaluating the student in front of the whole class needs to be done in certain ways which do not put the student in a condition of threat and self-consciousness. Demoralising students publicly can strongly undermine their self-confidence, their self-esteem and even lead to episodes of anxiety, thus threatening the delicate adolescent equilibrium by threatening their self-image in front of the whole class. Certainly, students are all different from each other and some are stronger than others thus being better at accepting criticisms, but there are also more sensitive students who are not that good

at dealing with personal mortifications and particular attention should be paid towards their wellbeing in order to make their learning experience enriching and fulfilling.

The second type of teacher is the *laissez-faire* or *tolerant* teacher. This kind of teacher is the opposite of the authoritarian one. Laissez-faire teachers are permissive and tend to not impose rules. Indeed, both the group and the individuals are allowed to complete freedom in the decision making without any leader participation. Chaos is the natural result of this type of teaching style and, while this type of leader may be initially loved by students as he allows them complete freedom, he is not considered an actual adult role model. Moreover, during classroom activities laissez-faire teachers only hand out materials making it clear that they would supply information only when asked, thus taking no other part in the work discussion and group activities. As far as evaluation is concerned, they make very infrequent comments on member activities unless questioned and they make no attempt to participate or interfere with the course of events (Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939: 273). As mentioned above, this teacher may be loved at first; however, students know that they are at school in order to learn and to have an adult figure who should lead them through the difficult path of education. Therefore, despite an initial understandable joy and satisfaction towards their freedom and the almost non-existence of an adult figure in the class, students will later recognise the delusion, thus regretting the absence of an actual adult figure willing to take responsibility for their journey through education and, more importantly, through their personal development and academic achievement. Teachers as well as parents, are the closest adult figures surrounding children and adolescents for a good portion of their life, therefore they should take their role seriously as they are the adult models adolescents get to see on a daily basis and should be role models for them in order to guide them amidst an often-misleading society.

The third type of teacher is the *democratic* or *authoritarian* teacher. Democratic teachers look for an equilibrium between authoritative and laissez-fair teaching style by establishing, together with the students through group discussions, a limited number of fundamental rules which should not be transgressed. Democratic teachers allow students to take part in the decision-making process of activities and, thanks to group discussions, the overall view of future activities is displayed to the class. General steps to group goals are sketched and students are also given alternatives from which they

can choose (Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939: 273). Ultimately, g*roup discussion* increasingly becomes an essential tool in the educational relationship and the ability to guide the discussion while putting yourself, as a teacher, at the same level of the students is proved to be an essential personality trait in teachers (Petter, 1998: 135-136).

In a democratic teaching style, roles distribution is jointly discussed and decided and everyone is free to choose with whom they want to work with. (Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939: 273). Therefore, a fundamental function of the democratic leadership is that of the distribution of responsibility as well (John Gastil, 1994: 958). Also, democratic teachers try to be regular group members in spirit without doing too much of the work, thus trying to find an in-between balance in their role of teacher but also in their membership in the class. Ultimately, during the evaluation process, democratic teachers are 'objective' and 'fact-minded' in their praise and criticism (Lewin, Lippitt and White, 1939: 273). It is important to notice that, with regards to authoritarian teachers, direct evaluation is not bad in itself. When criticising authoritarian evaluation, we were not meaning that evaluation should not be done in the classroom environment. Students know that, sooner or later, they will be given an assessment and assigned a mark, what is important is *the way* in which teachers evaluate their students. Fairness is an essential component of the teaching profession and teachers should be able to fairly evaluate their students, paying close attention to the different students' sensitivities.

On top of that, the most important aspect of this teaching style is that democratic teachers are aware of the need to understand the relational dynamics and the affective aspects of the class group. They are aware of the fact that the core aspect of effective teaching is about *establishing positive relationships* and that the educational relationship is, as we already said, a communicative relationship. Indeed, while in the authoritarian teaching style, communication is mainly unidirectional, from teacher to student, with small episodes of students to teacher communication, which takes place mainly through oral tests; while with laissez-faire teachers communication is mostly casual and unorganised, and though it may be bidirectional at times, it has no clear structure; the democratic teaching style allows for an effective bidirectional, or better circular, type of communication. This type of communication is more flexible and

more varied than in the authoritarian teaching style, and it is more articulated and organised than in the laissez-faire teaching style. It is in this third form that the educational communication better reveals its complexity, which is due to the variety of contents that are communicated, but also to the forms given to messages and to the way in which they are presented. Lastly, the communicative relationship established in the classroom ultimately reflects the type of atmosphere that reigns in it (Petter, 1998: 219-220).

3.6. A focus on democratic teachers

Therefore, given all that has been said so far, what are the characteristics of a democratic educational relationship? The experiment carried out by Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) offers quite a number of points of reflection. Above all, it seems to demonstrate that the democratic leadership appears to have a superior impact on learning compared to the laissez-faire and to the authoritarian teaching styles. It seems important, at this point, to further investigate the discourse on the democratic teaching style both because it is the most difficult one to adopt (this may also be the reason why it is the most difficult to find in professors) and also because this teaching style does not only regard the relationship between a leader and a group, but also the personal relationship between an adult, in our case the teacher, and a single child, in our case the student. The reason why it is difficult to establish a personal democratic relationship towards a student or a group is because it is necessary to develop and blend two apparently conflicting background attitudes:

- an *attitude of listening*, which means adjusting and adapting to the group needs;
- a *proactive attitude,* which means guiding towards action, thus putting yourself at a higher position with respect to the group (Petter, 1998: 206-207).

Therefore, what do these two fundamental characteristics more specifically mean?
As far as the *attitude of listening* is concerned, in the educational field this means that the teacher try to decentralise from himself towards their students. It means that teachers try to grasp, through different possible verbal and behavioural indexes, their

students' innermost developmental needs, as well as their moods, their interests, their disposition towards certain proposals and towards engaging in school activities with a good amount of effort. Teachers with this kind of attitude think that their students can always tell them something they still do not know, that they can reveal aspects of the teachers' personality and life that they themselves still do not know. This kind of attitude is that of who is not unshakably sure of their actions, inaccessible to reasoning and arguments, but who is open towards their students' attempts to take into consideration certain data and present points of view different from his own. An attitude of this kind is indispensable at school and it is certainly useful in everyday life as well, especially for people working in social contexts. (Petter, 1998: 207).

Though it might seem an easy attitude to adopt, on the contrary, it is actually quite difficult. Possessing an attitude towards listening is a quite rare quality. The vast majority of people are convinced to 'already know how things work', they are quite sure of their interpretations of events, and they are certain of what others' needs are. These kind of people do not even start listening, which is a quality that does not only require to wait for others to tell us how they feel in order to reveal themselves to us, it also means actively collecting indications; it means encouraging answers by asking the right questions; and it means making assumptions on others' needs and moods and trying to verify them. What should be noted is that there are many people who may display attitudes of this kind, but they would still filter everything they collect by adapting information to their own schemes, by interpreting things their own way, leaving no space for the possibility of new events to change their way of seeing things. The good news is that the attitude of listening is something we can acquire through practice, by reflecting, by exercising and by trying to more deeply get to know the characteristics and the problems of the different ages, by acquiring certain techniques such as group discussion or individual talks (Petter, 1998: 207-208).

The second fundamental attitude is the *proactive attitude*. On the basis of the data and the impressions collected through listening, teachers can assume a proactive attitude, aimed at guiding their students both in their path of learning and their path towards personal growth. Therefore, this means teachers can propose to their students certain activities which, on the one hand (for the contents and form in which they are presented) are in harmony with their students' needs and expectations and, for this

very reason, destined to attract their attention and interest, and on the other hand they are also considered educationally and culturally important for the teacher (Petter, 1998: 208). This is a very interesting way to propose didactic contents to students, as students will feel the liberty and spontaneity of having been able to choose part of the material thus feeling more interested and engaged in the contents and at the same time teachers, having already checked the relevance of the different contents, can be sure that those topics will be relevant for class purposes. However, giving students the possibility to decide themselves which one, among various options, is the one which interests them the most, shows that the teacher is interested in what *they* like rather than only on what the teacher wants and needs to do in class. This could also be and interesting way to get to know the students and their interests thus allowing for a future plethora of ideas to be shared in class for potential future contents. What should be remembered is the fact that not all teachers are willing to have or *can* have such an attitude. Being a democratic teacher is not an easy task and those teachers need to possess a great ability to present contents clearly, by making them interesting for the students thorough the use of links with interests and real-world issues that students might feel close to (Petter, 1998: 209).

Teachers are a very peculiar kind of leader as they not only have to guide a group towards certain objectives, but they also have to help their members in their growth, by putting themselves, as teachers, alternatively at the same level of their students and also at a higher one, depending on the situation. Moreover, teachers are also asked to possess specific personal qualities: a good teacher cannot lack joy, optimism, enthusiasm, curiosity, towards things and news, openness towards teenage issues and towards the big problems of today's world, flexibility, a sense of humour, and last but not least the ability to admit errors and deficiencies (Petter, 1998: 209).

Ultimately, we can say that a democratic classroom atmosphere is the one which better guarantees the realisation of what should be every teacher's objective which is the need for everyone to be *equal* and *different* at the same time. This concept expresses the need to guarantee equity towards students' needs, but to also encourage and allow for the existence of differences among the class group (Petter, 1998: 210). In this respect, we need to bear in mind that, for teachers, concepts such as different and diverse are not synonyms.

The word *difference* etymologically comes from *dis-ferre*, which means 'carrying from one side to the other', 'taking beyond, towards various directions'. In other words, if two subjects are different from one another in intellectual, physical and psychical abilities, this means that both possess and manifest those given abilities but in different ways: one may possess them more or may possess them less with respect to the other person, but both possess those abilities. The value of difference lays in continuity, in the graduality of quantitative progression and in the width of the range of the qualitative capacities, of the competences and of the mastery that the subject manifests in his life actions. The risk of difference lays in wanting to 'normalise' students, by standardising their abilities in closed and restrictive forms, by subjecting them to continuous assessments and controls, thus not allowing them to appreciate the value of their differences. All the formative work of schools, in class, with the groups of students interacting with each other, is founded on the principle of interpersonal differences, with a didactic centred on customised learning, which should refer to everyone's potential development (Tessaro, 2015: 7).

On the other hand, *diversity* etymologically comes from *dis*-vertere, which means 'to proceed towards opposite directions', which refers to the concept of divergence, to the impossibility to converge. If a subject has diverse abilities from another, this means that one of the two subjects possesses the given ability, whereas the other is lacking it *or* possesses an antithetical one. Diversity implies immutability and irreversibility. Therefore, the concept of diversity mostly refers to the biological and genetic field of existence. By giving a simple example: the eye shape of a Chinese is diverse from that of an Italian, we cannot change the shape of our eyes; however, this does not mean or implies that we see diverse things, or that one sees better than the other. We will have different points of view, but the difference of our points of view does not depend on the diversity of our eyes. The value of diversity lays in complementarity, in the exchange and in reciprocity which may become an opportunity for mutual enrichment. The risk of diversity is that of considering the other alien, averse, thus *alius* and not *alter*, a sort of outsider or freak to show and see rather than a person to get to know, to listen to and comprehend (Tessaro, 2015: 7-8). In this perspective we need to bear in mind the difficult situation that students with intellectual and/or physical disabilities need to face every day, who strongly desire to

be included, to feel equal; without denying that they may be different from the other kinds, but always remembering they are not at all diverse from anybody else.

In the context of teaching and learning, these concepts need to be remembered as they play a fundamental role in the wellbeing of the classroom individuals. Allowing for an atmosphere of openness and acceptance towards differences and diversity makes it possible to create an *inclusive* environment where all individuals feel welcome to be part of and take part in. In this perspective, we can say that the atmosphere and educational style that most encourages and promotes the development and acceptance of those difference is the democratic teaching style. In such sort of environment, students breath an air of more freedom, are more encouraged to take action, to bring personal contributions to the class and to even take responsibility for their actions therefore carrying out tasks that facilitate the emergence of differences both on an academical and social level. In addition to that, given the democratic teacher listening attitude, this allows democratic teachers to notice the special individual characteristics of their students, thus learning to respect them and identifying the right stimuli in order to make them manifest. In a *democratic relationship* a great amount of space is given to personal enhancement which creates opportunities for the search and formation of the student's personal identity (Petter, 1998: 213).

3.6.1. Verbal and non-verbal communication: the indirect influence of democratic teachers

Therefore, so far, we have seen that educational teaching styles are evidently expressed through the use of communication. In particular, verbal and non-verbal communication, are two main tools through which the teacher can talk to and interact with his students thus shaping the atmosphere of the class. As we extensively said so far and as confirmed by studies conducted by Flanders (1970), teachers play a pivotal role in the classroom environment. Through an instrument developed by himself, called the Flanders Interaction Analysis (FIA), he was able to categorise types and quantity of verbal interaction and direct and indirect influences of the teachers in the classroom, thus making it possible to improve teacher-student interaction patterns.

Through his study, he observed how teachers can use forms of direct influence, which leave little space and esteem to students (such as in the authoritarian and to some

extent the laissez-faire teachers), or forms of indirect influence which require a more active participation on behalf of the students (which is the care of democratic teachers). While teachers with direct influence give lectures about content or procedures, expressing their own ideas and asking rhetorical questions, giving directions and orders that students are expected to comply with as those teachers are the symbol of authority; teachers with indirect influence accept and clarify the tone of feelings of the students in an unthreatening manner, praise or encourage their students' actions or behaviours, accept and use ideas of students and develop ideas suggested by them, and ask questions about content or procedures with the intent of obtaining answers from their students (Inamullah, Hussain, Ud Din, 2008: 30; 32). The latter approach, as corresponding to a more democratic teaching type, seems to be more effective in order to boost students' engagement towards learning. Indeed, while the direct influence sees students' interventions as a response to external stimuli, the latter approach of indirect influence seems to encourage spontaneous interventions on behalf of the students thus enhancing their internal motivation and engagement.

3.6.2. Pedagogical care as a promoter for engagement and achievement

In addition to what has been explained so far regarding the importance of the democratic teaching style and of verbal and non-verbal communication, a third and last fundamental element which needs to be taken into account is the concept of *pedagogical care*. According to Noddings (2005) in Tosolt (2009) a caring relationship is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings: a carer and a recipient of care, or cared-for (Tosolt, 2009: 405). By linking this concept to the field of education, caring about students means that teachers should embrace all their learners, regardless of their personal characteristics thus, only by doing so, becoming *real educators*. In this perspective, pedagogical love becomes the precondition for pedagogical relations to grow. Through showing their support, teachers prove their students that they believe and trust in their students' personal possibilities and abilities (Määttä, Uusiautti, 2013: 30) thus allowing for a positive relationship to grow between them.

As the basis for student-teacher relationship is interpersonal linking and trust, when teachers express their involvement and warmth and when they treat their students

with care and affection showing them that they enjoy having them in class, students feel a sense of belonging in school that is very important in order to enhance their *engagement*. Therefore, in order to make students feel connected to their teachers and to feel safe at school, teachers should behave as dependable sources of emotional and instrumental *support* in difficult times (Furrer, Skinner, Pitzer, 2014: 105).

Indeed, emotion-based attachments are bridges between people; this means that making students feel loved and cared for is a key aspect of good teacherhood. In fact, empathy and a genuine concern for students seem to be key aspects of the educational field in which students need to be understood, protected and supported in their path towards learning and personal growth (Määttä, Uusiautti, 2013: 31). What is particularly interesting to notice is that, human beings are fundamentally emotional creatures. When students feel interested in the environment which surrounds them, its phenomena, the object world, and so on, this is primarily an emotional experience by nature and only secondarily intellectual or willed, meaning that people first and foremost concentrate on what pleases them and what they value (Määttä, Uusiautti, 2013: 32).

Consequently, it should be evident that education cannot only be confined to the teaching of contents without an emotional experience and the existence of a relationship behind it. On the contrary, research has shown that students benefit, both academically and emotionally, when they perceive that their teachers care about them (Tosolt, 2009: 406). Indeed, an extensive body of research suggests that the *quality* of students' *relationships* with teachers and with peers as well, as we have seen in paragraph 3.3., play a pivotal role in the development of school engagement and the accomplishment of effective learning which eventually leads to *academic achievement* (Faircloth, 2009; Furrer et al., 2014; Furrer, Skinner, 2003; Gehlbach et al., 2012; Klem, Connell, 2004; Libbey, 2004; Montalvo et al., 2007; Tosolt, 2009; Van Uden et al., 2014; Wentzel, 1997; Yu et al., 2018;). According to Buskirk-Cohen and Plants (2019) students' sense of belonging, which is only possible in contexts in which individuals feel welcomed, included and cared for, seems to play a fundamental role in learning as it has been associated with higher levels of academic engagement and achievement (Buskirk-Cohen, Plants, 2019: 108). According to Furrer, Skinner and Pitzer (2014), close and *caring* teacher-student relationships as well as high-quality

peer relationships seem to influence students' self-perception, school engagement, motivation, learning and performance. Indeed, with respect to this, children who experience lower quality relationships with their peers, who are rejected or socially isolated, are more likely to become disaffected from school and this may eventually even lead to school drop-out (Furrer, Skinner, Pitzer, 2014: 102).

Therefore, engagement and belonging are two fundamental elements in the educational field as they seem to serve as protective factors against early school leaving. When students have a more enjoyable school experience, they are provided with a better source for coping with everyday school challenges, resulting in a better chance to being more engaged in classroom activities (Furrer, Skinner, Pitzer, 2014: 102). This seems to lead to the conclusion that students learn from people they love and teacher-student relationships are among the most fundamental factors in successful schooling, motivational outcomes and academic achievement (Gehlbach et al., 2012: 690).

In the chapter which follows, we will investigate the validity of this theory, by inquiring high school students' and their teachers' perspectives on teachers' care and motivation as fundamental factors for students' motivation, school engagement and academic achievement. In an age in which students are facing the emergence of adolescence and are dealing with its developmental tasks, we would like to observe the importance students give to teachers as well as how much do they feel the need to have a guiding figure in class, a person they can trust and value in their learning and educational path.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Study

The fourth chapter of this thesis is aimed at displaying the case study which is the core part of this work. As we concluded in chapter three, research in the field of education seems to show that there is a correlation between a positive teacher-student relationship and students' engagement and academic achievement. Throughout the case study of this thesis, we would like to investigate whether this theory is proved as valid in our research context. Indeed, this fourth chapter aims at explaining the study which has been conducted, by presenting the research question, the subjects who have been involved, which instruments have been used in order to conduct the research, the kind of data which were required as well as the methods of data analysis adopted. Additionally, we will explain the procedure that has been followed in order to carry out the research and we will eventually report the data which have been analysed, we will discuss them and draw the conclusions in order to answer the research question.

4.1. Research question and purpose of the study

To begin with, we need to bear in mind the most fundamental aspect of the research which is the *research question*. The research question states as follows:

Is teachers' care and motivation linked to students' engagement and achievement?

In other words, do teachers' care and motivation contribute to creating and enhancing students' motivation and subsequently promote academic achievement among students? As we have seen in the previous chapters, adolescence is a delicate phase in a student's life and adolescents need to be helped in successfully overcome the challenges that the adolescence developmental phases oblige them to tackle. In this thesis, we hypothesise that the support students receive from their teachers is important in order to enhance their engagement and achievement. We would like to demonstrate that when students perceive attitudes of care and support on behalf of their teachers, when the educational learning environment is well structured and when the teachers' expectations are high, clear and fair, students should be more likely to report

engagement in school. Moreover, it would seem logical to think that when students' are engaged in learning, they should report higher academic performances, thus providing further support for an indirect link between students' experience of support and academic performance through students' engagement. Moreover, we would like to investigate whether teachers' motivation is perceived as important by their students, as well as their need for dialogue, trust and empathy. The leading themes of our thesis are that of examining the teacher-student relationship, the role of empathy, care, trust and the role teachers play in their students' life. Moreover, motivation will be investigated as well as the level of wellbeing perceived by the students in the classroom environment. Ultimately, the following subchapters will be aimed at thoroughly presenting the work that has been conducted in the *field* of higher education and the conclusions we can draw by the work that has been done.

4.2. Research methodology and kind of data required

In order to carry out the research a quan-qual approach (mixed paradigm) has been used. Indeed, our study involves a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. *Quantitative research* involves data collection procedures which mainly results in numerical quantifiable data; whereas, *qualitative research* primarily involves data collection procedures which result in open-ended, non-numerical data which is to be analysed through content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007: 24). Therefore, in the current study, both quantitative as well as qualitative data were involved: quantitative data were mostly expressed through numbers, whereas qualitative data mainly involved written open-ended questions which were aimed at resembling the structure of an interview. The quantitative side of the study aimed at creating hard quantifiable data which could be statistically analysed in order to draw results which could be standardised and, to some extent, generalised. However, what should be remembered is that hard data were explained through soft data as the numbers resulting from statistical analysis needed to be interpreted. On the other hand, by looking at the qualitative answers, we could be able to further deepen our research by looking at the more personal side of the participants' perceptions. Indeed, soft qualitative data concentrated on looking for an in-depth understanding of the 'meaning in particular', thus searching for the typical.

As we considered fundamental to have both quantitative but also qualitative data, a mixed paradigm quan-qual approach was used which aimed at putting together both hard data and soft data both at the data collection and at the analysis levels.

4.3. Subjects involved in the study: participants

In order to carry out the research, the subjects to whom we asked to participate in the study were a specific kind of subjects: in particular, they were High School students 14 to 19 years of age and their teachers. As throughout our thesis we considered the delicate developmental phases which take place during adolescence, we wanted to investigate the point of view of those students which were going through the important phase of adolescent developmental growth. In this sense, we wanted to investigate the importance teachers have as far as motivation is concerned as well as what importance do students give to the teacher-student relationship with particular emphasis on themes such as caring, trust, empathy and such. Adolescence processes of growth carry with themselves a process of adult devaluation which is typical of the adolescent period; however, research has reasons to believe that this does not totally happen with the teacher. Therefore, open-ended questions will aim at particularly investigating those aspects. Furthermore, the importance of the wellbeing of the individual in the class is taken into account as well as whether our subjects perceive as important to have a positive classroom atmosphere and whether they feel free to express their own ideas in the class.

Middle school students were not taken into account in this study as 11 to 13 years of age is now considered pre-adolescence; therefore, they were not the age range we wanted to investigate. The main concerns for our study were particularly two: the first one concerns age span, which we wanted it to be 14 to 19 years of age, which represents the period of an individual's life when students through adolescence. The second focus was put on the type of school specialisms the subjects go to, which in our case were two: we interviewed students and their teachers coming from an Art School address and from a Technical School address. A distinction has been made between the two types of schools in other to see whether there were different trends depending on the different school addresses. No further distinctions were made in terms of gender, nationality or any other sorts as they did not represent the focus of our study.

However, we decided to leave out a specific type of participant: new teachers or teachers coming from other schools were not included in the study as they could not show us a correlation with the students as we administered the questionnaire right at the beginning of the school year.

Ultimately, 90 students (43 coming from the Art School address and 47 coming from the Technical School address) and 26 teachers (14 coming from the Art School address and 12 coming from the Technical School address) took part in the study.

4.4. Procedures

In order to carry out the research, we primarily contacted the schools which had the type of sample that we needed, therefore higher educational institutions to which we sent our Research Project, which contained the research question, our study hypothesis, our objectives, the participants that we needed to carry out the research and the methods and materials which we intended to use. Moreover, a consent form containing our objectives and the data protection rules was also attached to our written request. Upon receiving approval from the Head of the School, and the approval of teachers and students themselves, participants were recruited from a High School in Padua (Italy) in order to participate in the quan-qual research study. High School students coming from the Art School and the Technical School addresses and their respective teachers were given a printed copy of the questionnaire during the school hours which was to be completed within around 30 minutes. Due to logistical reasons, teachers' questionnaires were delivered at a later stage and were asked to complete it at home and later return it to the researcher. During the completion of the students' questionnaires, the researcher was present in the class in order to present the current study and its purposes as well as to answer to potential questions and doubts. The time needed in order to carry out the whole process since we first contacted the High School till the time in which we were returned the questionnaires lasted around three weeks. There was no compensation for participation in the study.

4.5. Instruments

In order to carry out the research, the instrument that has been used to conduct the survey was the questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of 29 attitudinal questions, meaning that they were aimed at discovering what participants thought, with respect to their opinions, beliefs, and values (Dörnyei, 2007: 101) concerning the relationship between teacher and students, motivation, their wellbeing in the classroom environment, etc. The questions chosen to create both the students' questionnaire and the teachers' questionnaire were mainly of three types:

- Likert scales;
- multiple-choice items;
- open-ended questions: in particular, clarification questions, sentence completion and short-answer questions.

The questionnaires were primarily made up of 'closed-ended' items (quantitative data), which means that they did not require participants to produce writing; instead, participants were asked to choose one or, in some cases, more options of given alternatives in order to express their preference in an unambiguous manner. This way, the selected response option/s could be more easily coded numerically and entered into a computer database in order to analyse the acquired data. However, we considered important to also have a few open-ended questions (qualitative data) in order to support closed-ended questions as well as to try having more personal responses from teachers and students, which could be analysed through content analysis.

In both students' and teachers' questionnaires, the main type of questions were of the Likert scale type. In particular, as far as the Likert scale type of questions is concerned, participants were asked to express their opinion on a given topic choosing among the following options: not at all, not much, quite a lot, and a lot. In the students' questionnaire 16 questions out of 29 were of the Likert scale type, thus forming the major type of questions. This decision was made on purpose in order to both have the majority of questions resulting in quantitative quantifiable data, but also so as to render the questionnaire easy to deal with and faster than if we were to use other types of questions and data collection methodologies.

The second type of questions were multiple-choice ones. In the students' questionnaire, 7 questions out of 29 were of the multiple-choice type. Multiple choices were considered a fundamental way to understand students' preferences on a given topic among more choices. For some of the questions that we wanted to ask, binary responses would not have given the participants the opportunity to express their different opinions, thus making it more difficult for us to understand their preferences. Also, multiple-choice questions allowed the researcher to create quantitative quantifiable data while proposing questions which appeared somehow different from the Likert scale ones, thus giving the respondents the idea of being able to express their opinion more freely than in the Likert scale type of question, especially when the last option would result in the heading 'Other', thus allowing them to write an answer which would seem more appropriate to their personal point of view than the given ones.

Finally, the third type of questions were open-ended questions. In the students' questionnaire, 6 questions out of 29 were open-ended ones. In particular, we decided to create different types of open-ended questions: out of those 6 questions, 2 were *clarification questions* (plus 1 which was attached to a Likert scale question). We considered important to attach clarification question to those answers which were of special importance to us, which will be explained later. Moreover, some questions in the multiple-choice items had the 'Other' option which could also be considered a clarification question. Secondly, 2 questions were of the *sentence completion* type, in which an unfinished sentence beginning was presented for the participants to complete. Finally, 2 questions were of the *short-answer* type, where participants were asked to shortly respond to the given questions in three lines. We deliberately chose those 2 questions in order to allow participants greater freedom, however as it can easily be seen they represent a small amount (2 out of 29) because they are not easily quantifiable and may not always lead to meaningful results (Dörnyei, 2007: 107).

Either way, all questions were thoroughly thought and balanced in order to create a questionnaire which could be as easy and understandable as possible. Besides, in order to try making it enjoyable we decided to mix the different typologies of questions so as to make it more pleasant for the interviewees to respond to the questions.

As far as the teachers' questionnaire is concerned, it was intentionally created in order to follow the same path of the students' one. In particular, 17 out of 29 questions were of the Likert scale type, 5 out of 29 questions were multiple choices and, finally, 7 questions out of 29 were open-ended questions. In teachers' questionnaires open-ended questions resembled those asked to students. In particular, 6 questions were of the *short-answer* type and 1 was a clarification question. However, as we will see later, both in the students' but more clearly in the teachers' questionnaire, clarification questions were present inside Likert scale questions in order to try finding more adequate and deeper responses to those questions which played a core importance for us in the study.

In the following pages, I will explain every question in detail, thus justifying the reasons behind the questions that were chosen to be asked and its purposes. The students' questionnaire was considered the most fundamental one as students were the main characters of this study. However, a mirror type of questionnaire was also created for teachers in order to investigate whether answers changed depending on the perspectives and the different roles individuals play in the class.

4.5.1. Students' questionnaire

Question 1: Do you think that being valued by your teachers influences your motivation towards the subject they teach?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

This first question was asked through a Likert scale type of question and it was aimed at investigating the degree of importance students give to their teachers and how much they are influenced by teachers' behaviour. In particular, we wanted to see how much being *value* mattered to students and how teachers' care influenced students' motivation towards the subject they teach.

Question 2: Are you satisfied of the relationship that you have with your teachers?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

In this second question, we wanted to discover the degree of satisfaction students feel concerning their relationship with their teachers. As we said in the theoretical chapters,

relationships play a pivotal role in the educational environment. Therefore, discovering the degree of satisfaction students perceive can help us understand what type of situation is taking place in the classroom environment.

Question 3: If in the previous question you answered 'not at all' or 'a little', what are the causes of your dissatisfaction? Briefly explain them. (If you answered 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' go ahead with the next question).

This third question is in the form of a clarification type of question. Two lines were given to the respondents in order to briefly answer this question. We created this question in the form of an open-ended one because we considered it important to understand the reasons behind students' dissatisfaction concerning their relationship with their teachers. When relationships are negative ones, there may be many different reasons for it. Therefore, discovering the reasons behind it could be of great importance in order to understand students' feeling and helping teachers deal with their dissatisfaction. Sometimes, students do not open up with teachers for fear of negative retaliations. Therefore, creating this anonymous questionnaire could help teachers and students to try finding common grounds from where to start working as a team. In the analysis section, thanks to content analysis we will see what the main causes for students' dissatisfaction are, so that teachers could start working from there.

Question 4: Would you like to have more lesson hours dedicated to classroom discussions among students and teacher in order to talk together about classroom issues?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

The forth question is aimed at unveiling whether students would or would not like to have more opportunities to talk about common issues in class together with their teachers. Issues may be due to many different reasons, such as misunderstandings among peers, but also misunderstandings or issues with the teacher. The idea for this question started from the assumption that communication is always key to solving problems and sometimes, due to time issues or lack of will on behalf of one or both parts there is little chance to actually talk and discuss problems. In the end, teaching occurs through communication and relationships; therefore, though it may be true that

you can learn and study without the need to appreciate the people around you, positive relationships help a great deal when it comes to spending a great amount of time with the same people, six hours a day, six days a week. By looking at the students' responses, we will see whether they would like to have more opportunities for dialoguing or not and we could start acting from there.

Question 5: Do you think that your teachers are motivated in teaching their subject?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

This fifth question is aimed at looking at students' *perception* of their teachers' motivation. The idea behind this question started from the assumption that only motivated guides can generate motivation. This does not mean that students will study *only* if their teachers are motivated; however, research has shown that being motivated can help others become motivated as well. If teachers are not motivated in teaching, how can we expect students to be motivated in learning?

Question 6: Do you feel free to express your opinion in the class?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

The sixth question of this questionnaire is related to students' *wellbeing* in the classroom environment. As we discussed in the previous chapters, the type of atmosphere which reigns in the class can both have a positive and a negative impact in learning. Freedom of speech and freedom of self-expression are two very important elements in personality formation and school should help students' build strongly opinionated individuals, not intended in the pejorative meaning; on the contrary, meaning individuals able to support their ideas, creating valid reasoning and who are able to listen to others' opinions while being able to disagree with others when necessary. This sixth questions introduces us to the related seventh multiple-choice question.

Question 7: When you are asked to express your opinion in the class, how do you feel? You can choose one or more options from those listed below or you can choose 'Other' in case none of the given options express how you feel.

- I fear that my opinion won't be appreciated

- I am very confident and I happily express my opinion
- I fear that the teacher has a different opinion from mine and this may penalise me
- I feel insecure to express myself in front of the whole class
- I tend not to participate. I don't think my opinion is important
- Other

This seventh question, which is related to the sixth, is aimed at discovering *how* students feel when they have to speak in the class. In this case, as we explained in the theoretical part of this thesis, both peers and teachers play a pivotal role in the class. Therefore, an emphasis was given to students' fear to talk in front of the group as well. Issues with speaking anxiety are very common in general, let alone in the classroom environment where you play a role in the class, where you are asked to share your contribution with people you know, and by whom you want to be appreciated and respected. In other words, you want to safeguard your self-concept and speaking is one of those social aspects which can undermine your self-esteem and self-confidence. Ultimately, the 'Other' option was given in order to allow the respondent to express the exact feeling that they feel in case none of the options given by the researcher were right for them.

Question 8: Would you like to have opportunities for individual discussions with the teacher?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Referring to question 8, given the answer that you chose: why would/wouldn't you like to have chances for individual discussion with the teacher? Answer briefly.

Question eight is related to the teacher-student relationship. In particular, we wanted to investigate whether students would or would not like to have opportunities for face to face dialogues with their teachers. It is generally accepted that teachers 'are there for the class' and not for the individual; however, individual discussions could also be useful in order to create a closer relationship between teacher and student. Therefore, we would like to see whether students perceive it as important to find opportunities for talking. Given the importance of the question, we thought it would have been relevant to not only ask students whether they would or would not like to have opportunities

for speaking with their teachers individually, but also to investigate *why* do they think it is either a positive or a negative idea to do so. Understanding their point of view through their argumentations would help us understand the reasons behind their choices and their different points of view.

Question 9: Does the teacher try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

As far as question 9 is concerned, the importance of creating a positive classroom atmosphere should be remembered. Through this Likert scale type of question, we wanted to investigate whether students perceive their teachers as being able to create a positive learning environment or not. Moreover, this notion is directly linked to the concept of *wellbeing* that we previously mentioned in question 6. When the classroom atmosphere is positive, when the teacher is able to adopt an attitude of listening and when peers are educated towards the creation of a team who is able to listen and be empathetic towards others, then learning can more easily occur.

Question 10: How important do you think is the motivation teachers have towards the subject they teach?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

This tenth question is closely linked to question number 5, where we asked students' to tell us if their teachers were motivated in teaching. This question wants to further investigate not only whether their teachers are motivated or not but, more importantly, we wanted to understand the importance students give to teachers' motivation. The results that will appear from their answers will have a great importance in understanding which characteristics define good teaching and whether motivation is considered one of them.

Question 11: How important is it the support you receive from your teacher?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

The eleventh question wants to investigate how much students value the support they receive from their teachers. As we have seen in the literature, studies show that giving

students the support they need is highly important in the educational field in general. Therefore, we wanted to investigate whether this theory finds proof in our sample.

Question 12: Rita Pierson once said: "You know, kids don't learn from people they don't like". How much do you agree with this quote?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 12 was inspired after Rita Pierson's 2013 speech on TEDTalks named *Every Kid Needs a Champion*[1]. Rita was an incredible educator who made it clear in her speech that human connections are of core importance and value and therefore creating a bond between teacher and student is a fundamental factor in creating engagement and fostering achievement at school. Motivation, passion, empathy, charisma and humour are just a few of the characteristics she shows through her inspirational speech. Schools do need educators like her and her legacy should continue to resonate for a long time after her. By asking this question, though taken out of context, we wanted to see how much adolescent students value this connection in learning and how much do they feel 'liking' the person, their teacher in our case, influences their success in learning. Both question 12 and question 20, which we will see later, are inspired by quotations: this was a stylistic choice in order to interrupt continuity and render the questionnaire more original.

Question 13: Do you think you are better at the school subjects in which you also like the teacher?

- The two things are not related at all
- The two things are not necessarily related
- The two things are quite related
- The two things are definitely related

As it can be noted, question 13 is a multiple-choice type of question. By asking this question we wanted to investigate whether students feel that liking the teacher

[1] *Every Kid Needs a Champion* – Rita Pierson. TEDTalks, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFnMTHhKdkw

influences learning. This question is closely related to question 12. Therefore, we would like to see if there is a correlation between these two questions.

Question 14: If you do badly at school, do you think it is the professor's fault?

- I don't do badly at school
- No, I don't think it's the teacher's fault
- It is both my fault and the teacher's fault
- It's the teacher's fault
- Other

As far as question 14 is concerned, it is a multiple-choice type of question. Here we wanted to investigate the level of *locus of control* that students feel regarding their school success. Being able to take responsibilities for failure and success are two highly important elements in becoming a well-formed adult. We should not forget that contexts may differ greatly and not all students receive the best education and the quality of teachers is not a variable we could control. However, by looking at the tendencies of the participants' answers we can be able to discover what are the reasons behind students' failure.

Question 15: If you answered 'It's the teacher's fault' to the previous question (14), briefly explain in which way you think the teacher is responsible for your poor school performance. Maintain the anonymity.

Question 15 refers to question 14 and it is an open-ended clarification question. Three lines were given in order to briefly explain the reasons why those who answered 'It's the teacher's fault' considered teachers responsible for their failures. We thought, just like all the other times in which we asked an open-ended question, that it would have been important to understand *why* students think the responsibility depends on teachers. We need to bear in mind that teachers, before being educators, are people and this means they have their own personality and their own ways of dealing with students. Some teachers may have attitudes which are difficult to deal with, such as little will to talk and to have a fair confrontation with their students, thus making them feel devalued. Distances between teachers and students should be shortened in order to allow students to understand why they failed and what they can do to improve. When

this kind of communication lacks, normally students think teachers do not care, thus considering them responsible for their poor performances.

Question 16: What do you think is important in a teacher? Choose maximum 3 answers.

- Good knowledge of the subject they teach
- Good didactic style (good materials' and lessons' organisation, good time organisation, etc.)
- Good capacity to value individual differences
- Fairness
- Respect
- Patience
- Other

Question 16 is a multiple-choice type of question in which participants were asked to choose from 1 up to 3 choices. By doing so, we wanted to investigate, among all these important characteristics, which ones they thought were the *most* important ones. Good teachers should possess all these features; however, we wanted to see which ones students think are the most important.

Question 17: Below you will find a list of activities. Read them and choose those you would like your teachers to dedicate more time in class to. Choose maximum 3 answers. Moreover, you yourself can add another option under the heading 'Other' in case none of the aforementioned options suit your tastes.

- Group work (cooperative learning) in order to further explore topics discussed in class
- Explanation of the topics of the 'programme'
- Classroom discussion and free interventions on topics which are of your interest, chosen together with the teacher
- Usage of interactive tools in order to explain the programme topics
- Sharing opinions on topics covered in the class either orally or in writing with the principle that there are no right or wrong ideas, but just *different* ideas
- Other

Question 17 was chosen in order to discover whether students are interested in *sharing* their knowledge and their ideas in class. Options 3 and 5 in particular, are aimed at discovering whether students would like, either orally or in writing, to discuss about important topics and issues and whether they are willing to share their point of view with the teacher and the class. Moreover, option 1 as well, wants to see if students are willing to work in cooperative learning in order to learn. This question does not intend to say that 'classical teaching' is intrinsically bad: teachers undoubtedly are the most prepared people in the class in their subject and their role is of core importance both on an academical point of view and a personal point of view as they are the only adults in the class. This question asks participants to think about the *ways* in which they would like to share their knowledge and to ask themselves *if* there might be more interesting ways to explain the same things in order to catch the students' attention and possibly raising their interest and motivation towards the subject teachers teach. All knowledge, even the one we learn at school, is related to the world around us and too many times school seems to be referred to as a theoretical world which has 'nothing to do with' what is really going on outside. Therefore, shortening the gap between school and outside world through different methodologies of learning could help students understand that what they need to learn is actually interesting *and* useful at the same time.

Question 18: Briefly narrate the best memory that you have of a teacher.

Question 19: Briefly narrate the worst memory that you have of a teacher.

Questions 18 and question 19 are evidently related to each other. Thanks to these open-ended short-answer questions we would like to discover what made a memory of a teacher the *best* memory and what made it the *worst*. As they are not easy to interpret, we decided to give space to solely 2 short-answer questions of this type out of 29. However, we thought it would have been highly interesting to collect the different students' answers in order to understand which memories had the biggest impact in their school life. Our school experience, before being about learning, is about human connections and relationships and we all inevitably have quite a number of *memories* of our school experiences, some of which will never leave us. The more human and emotional side of learning plays a fundamental role and being able to first-hand read

their experiences was considered of great importance in order to understand how they feel.

Question 20: Alessandro D'Avenia in his book *L'Arte di Essere Fragili*[2] (*The art of being fragile*) said:

"Solo chi vive il suo rapimento genera rapimenti e provoca destini: solo se io so che cosa ci sto a fare al mondo metto in crisi positiva un adolescente, che non vuole gli si spieghi la vita, ma che la vita si spieghi in lui, e vuole avere al suo fianco persone affidabili per la propria navigazione".

English translation:

"Only the ones who live their dreams generate dreams and trigger destinies: only if I know what I am doing in this world I can put an adolescent in a 'positive crisis'. Adolescents do not what life to be explained to them, they want life to hoist the sails in them, and they want reliable people by their sides for their navigation".

How much do you agree with this quote?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

This enlightening quote by professor Alessandro D'Avenia is a wonderful metaphor for life. In the Italian version, the original meaning is better kept as 'spiegare' in Italian both refers to 'explain' and 'hoist the sails'. Life is expressed as a navigation and teachers and adults more in general implicitly are the captains and guides for adolescents' navigation. However, adolescents, in his point of view, do not wish for authoritarian figures to guide their 'boat'. On the contrary, they look for silent guides who can be able to help and inspire them through their difficult path that is growth. Figures who they can always find by their sides, but who leave them free to be and follow their own and personal journey through adulthood and life.

By asking how much do they agree with the quote we would like to investigate how important do they think it is to both have motivated guides, referring to the first sentence of the quote, and how much do their motivation influence students'

[2] D'Avenia, Alessandro. 2016. L'Arte di Essere Fragili. Come Leopardi può salvarti la vita. Pp.34.

motivation; and also, how much do they value the fact of having a guide they can always look up to and trust in their educational path.

Question 21: Do you feel influenced by what teachers think of you as a student?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

This twenty-first question aims at unveiling how much students value what teachers think of them. Through this Likert scale type of question, we would like to see how much students are influenced by what teachers think of them as students. The following question (22) is deeply interlinked with this one.

Question 22: Do you think it is important that the teacher has good expectations of success towards you?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

As far as question 22 is concerned, we wanted to investigate not only whether students feel influenced by what teachers think of them as students, but also whether they feel it as an important factor the fact of having them by their side and having good expectations of success towards their students. In Psychological Studies, the Pygmalion effect says that if a teacher believes a student to be less gifted than another one, he will unconsciously treat him differently from the other. Subsequently, the student will internalise the teacher's judgment and will behave accordingly (Rosenthal; Jacobson: 1968). Starting from this assumption, we wanted to explore whether students themselves thought as important that the teachers believe in them as students, thus having positive expectations towards them and their school success.

Question 23: How important is it for you to establish a trustful relationship with your teachers?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 23 started from the assumption that every functional relationship can only work if there is trust at its basis. Therefore, we wanted to investigate how important it is for students to build a relationship of trust with their teachers. Maybe not all students care about building a close relationship with their teachers; however, we thought that

teacher-student relationship should not necessarily be close but should definitely be based on trust.

Question 24: I don't like a teacher when…

Give 3 motivations. You can answer in the form of a small text or create a bulleted list.

Question 25: I like a teacher when…

Give 3 motivations. You can answer in the form of a small text or create a bulleted list.

Questions 24 and 25 are in the form of open-ended sentence-completion type of questions. We thought it would have been interesting to directly see the students' point of view rather that influencing their answers by giving them multiple-choice options. By looking at their answers, we will be able to categorise what aspects of the teachers' personalities are valued as positive and which ones are valued negatively. In spite of their different answers, we expect some answers to resemble one another. This way, we will be able to create some specific categories, which will be put in the Appendix section, which can also be useful to teachers in order to understand what behaviours are liked by their students and which ones are least liked.

Question 26: Are your teachers interested in your difficulties?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Through this twenty-sixth question we wanted to investigate how much teachers are interested in their students difficulties or, better, what is students' *perception* of their teachers' interest. Empathy is a fundamental factor in human connections and relationships and teachers should show their care towards their students.

Question 27: Have you ever experienced stress due to a teacher?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 27 wants to discover whether students have ever experienced situations of stress due to a teacher. All those who have gone through schooling well know that stress and anxiety are constants of the educational path for a plethora of reasons.

However, a kind of anxiety which can be avoided is the one created by the teacher-student relationship. Without lowering expectations and their demands, teachers should work on creating a positive environment in the class through the construction of a positive relationship with their students thus lowering the level of helplessness and anxiety students perceive in the class.

Question 28: Do you feel more motivated in studying if you know that the teacher is demanding?

- No, I don't care
- Not much
- Yes, quite a lot
- Yes, I definitely study more

Through question 28, which is a multiple-choice type of question, we wanted to investigate whether the academic achievements of the students are linked to the ability of teachers to be warm demanders. Question 28, when referring to a demanding teacher, was not meaning a too strict type of figure, one with which you feel anxious and afraid and with which you therefore feel obliged to study for fear of negative backlashes. On the contrary, we intended a type of authoritative teacher who fairly demands their students to study and tries to motivate them through their learning by displaying fair, clear and well-structured lessons.

Question 29: What do you think mostly influences your learning and academic achievement? You can choose 1 or more options from the ones given. If none of the suggested options describes you, you can write yourself what you think influences your learning the most.

- Teachers
- Causes external to school
- It depends on the subject
- The relationship that I have with my classmates
- Other

This last twenty-ninth multiple-choice question is key in order to answer our research question. We will see to what degree teachers influence students' learning and which

of the given variables are considered as the most important to students. In the 'Other' section, they will be able to tell us whether there are additional aspects to be taken into account. By discovering students' perspective on what they think influences their academic achievement the most, educators can better understand what role the different variables play in the student's life, thus making it possible to actively take action in order to improve the situation whenever it is possible.

4.5.2. Teachers' questionnaire

As far as teachers' questionnaire is concerned, as it was designed as a mirror study, the great majority of questions was designed to be the same of those asked to students. Obviously, they needed to be adapted and flipped in order to be asked to a different kind of participant: the teacher. The reasons behind this *mirror questionnaire* are that we wanted to see if there was a correlation between teachers' and students' answers and whether answers changed depending on the different points of view and on the role the different characters play in the class.

In displaying the teachers' questionnaire, the questions which are the same as those asked to students will only be listed below, with little or no further explanation as we think they are clear enough to be understood by the reader. On the other hand, those questions which are different or slightly different from the students' questionnaire will be further explained and motivated. Those questions which totally differ from the students' questionnaire, which are 6 out of 29, will be signalled with the indication 'Different' at the beginning of the question in order to make it clear to the reader that they are different. The questions marked as different will be thoroughly explained in order to give a detailed motivation to the choices that were made by the researcher.

Question 1: Do you think that valuing your students influences their motivation towards the subject that you teach?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 2: Are you satisfied of the relationship that you have with your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 3: If in the previous question you answered ‘not at all’ or ‘a little’, what are the causes of your dissatisfaction? Briefly explain them. (If you answered ‘quite a lot’ or ‘a lot’ go ahead with the next question).

As in the students’ questionnaire, this open-ended clarification type of question this time we wanted to investigate the teachers’ point of view and the reasons behind their dissatisfaction.

Question 4: Do you think it would be useful to dedicate some hours to classroom discussions between you and your students in order to talk together about classroom issues?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Motivate your answer.

This fourth question is basically identical to the one asked to students. The only two different aspects are the fact that we asked about the *usefulness* of dedicating hours to classroom discussions to teachers, whereas in students’ questionnaires we asked if they *would like* to have those ‘discussion hours’. Secondly, since it is the teacher the one who ultimately decides what to do in class, we thought it would have been interesting to understand the reasons behind their choice.

Question 5: Do you feel motivated towards teaching?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 6: How important is it for you that your students feel free to express their opinions in class?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Different:
Question 7: What is the reason that motivated you towards becoming a teacher?

This seventh question is different from the one in the students’ questionnaire. It is in the form of an open-ended short-answer question. Three lines were given to teachers in order to answer this question. By asking teachers the reasons behind their motivation for becoming a teacher we wanted to see whether their motivation was an internal, an

external or an instrumental one. As supported by the literature, intrinsic motivation is the one which lasts the longer and it is also the best one which drives us into doing things and maybe even doing them better. Therefore, we wish to read answers which mostly display an internal type of motivation.

Question 8: Would you like to have opportunities for individual discussions with your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Motivate your answer.

As in question 4, in this eighth question we also wanted to ask teachers the reason for their choice. As teachers are the guides of the class, they also greatly influence the direction relationships take. Therefore, they should be the first ones to seek to establish a good relationship with their students and we would like to investigate what they think about having opportunities to individually talk with their students.

Question 9: How important do you think it is to try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 10: Do you think it is important to show motivation in teaching?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 11: How much do you think you support your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 12: Rita Pierson once said: “You know, kids don’t learn from people they don’t like”. How much do you agree with this quote?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Different:

Question 13: How impartial do you think you are towards your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

We asked this question because fairness is a core element of the teaching profession and we would like to investigate the teachers' point of view on this topic. We wish to obtain a majority of 'a lot' as this would show that teachers try to be as fair as possible. Students frequently complain about unfairness and we will see if there is a correlation between students' open answers in questions 24 and 25 and the teachers' point of view.

Question 14: When a student does badly at a school subject:

- It's the teacher's fault
- It's both the student's fault and the teacher's fault
- It's the student's fault
- It's no one's fault

Justify your answer.

Unlike students, teachers are more frequently asked to explain or justify their answers. This is no exception as we wanted to investigate *why* they chose a certain option.

Different:
Question 15: When is a student considered 'good'?

Question 15 is an open-ended short-answer type of question. Here we wanted to investigate *how* teachers value their students and what do they look for in order to see if they care more about the subject in itself or about the person behind it.

Question 16: What do you think is important in a teacher? Choose maximum 3 answers.

- Good knowledge of the subject they teach
- Good didactic style (good materials' and lessons' organisation, good time organisation, etc.)
- Good capacity to value individual differences
- Fairness
- Respect
- Patience
- Other

Question 17: Below you will find a list of activities. Read them and choose those you would like to dedicate more time in class to. Choose maximum 3 answers. Moreover, you yourself can add another option under the heading 'Other' in case none of the aforementioned options suit your tastes.

- Group work (cooperative learning) in order to further explore topics discussed in class
- Explanation of the topics of the 'programme'
- Classroom discussion and free interventions on topics which are of your interest, chosen together with the teacher
- Usage of interactive tools in order to explain the programme topics
- Sharing opinions on topics covered in the class either orally or in writing with the principle that there are no right or wrong ideas, but just *different* ideas
- Other

Question 18: Briefly narrate the best memory that you have of a student.

Question 19: Briefly narrate the worst memory that you have of a student.

Question 20: Alessandro D'Avenia in his book *L'Arte di Essere Fragili*[3] (*The art of being fragile*) said:

"Solo chi vive il suo rapimento genera rapimenti e provoca destini: solo se io so che cosa ci sto a fare al mondo metto in crisi positiva un adolescente, che non vuole gli si spieghi la vita, ma che la vita si spieghi in lui, e vuole avere al suo fianco persone affidabili per la propria navigazione".

English translation:

"Only the ones who live their dreams generate dreams and trigger destinies: only if I know what I am doing in this world I can put an adolescent in a 'positive crisis'. Adolescents do not what life to be explained to them, they want life to hoist the sails in them, and they want reliable people by their sides for their navigation".

How much do you agree with this quote?

[3] D'Avenia, Alessandro. 2016. L'Arte di Essere Fragili. Come Leopardi può salvarti la vita. Pp.34.

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Different:

Question 21: How important do you think it is to possess a psychological training in order to pursue a career in the teaching profession?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Different:

Question 22: How did you receive a psychological training in order to become a teacher?

- I followed specific courses during my studies
- I acquired it on my own
- I never acquired it, experience is the most useful and important thing
- Other

Questions 21 and 22, which differ from those in the students' questionnaire, were asked because in chapter 2 of the thesis we talked at length about the importance of acquiring a psychological training in order to pursue the career of teacher. Question 21 aims at looking at how much teachers themselves understand its importance and question 22 aims at discovering how and *if* they acquired it.

Question 23: How important is it for you to establish a trustful relationship with your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 24: In your opinion, when is a teacher 'liked? Give 3 motivations.

Question 25: In your opinion, when is a teacher 'disliked'? Give 3 motivations.

These two questions were considered important as it is quite interesting to notice *if* teachers are *conscious* of what are the best and what are the worst characteristics to possess. By looking at both teachers' and students' answers we will be able to understand if there is a correlation between what students perceive as positive and negative characteristics and what teachers perceive as such.

Question 26: Do you care about your students difficulties?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Different:

Question 27: In your opinion, can significant learning occur without a significant relationship?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

As far as question 27 is concerned, we wanted to understand how much teachers consider *relationships* as a significant element for their students' learning.

Question 28: Do you try to be demanding towards your students?

1 not at all 2 a little 3 quite a lot 4 a lot

Question 29: What do you think mostly influences your students' learning and academic achievement? You can choose 1 or more options from the ones given. If none of the suggested options describe you, you can write yourself what you think influences your learning the most.

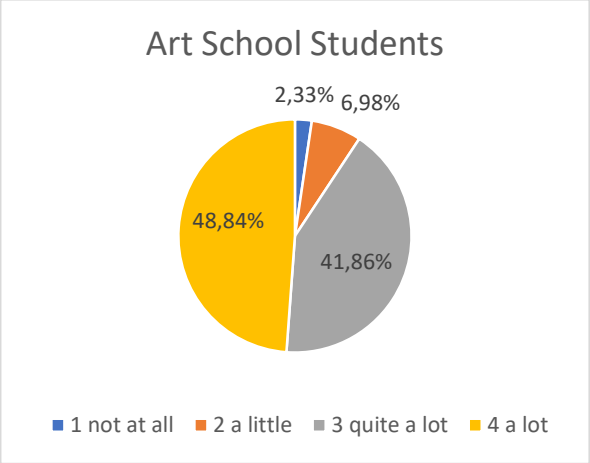
- Teachers
- Causes external to school
- It depends on the subject
- The relationship that I have with my classmates
- Other

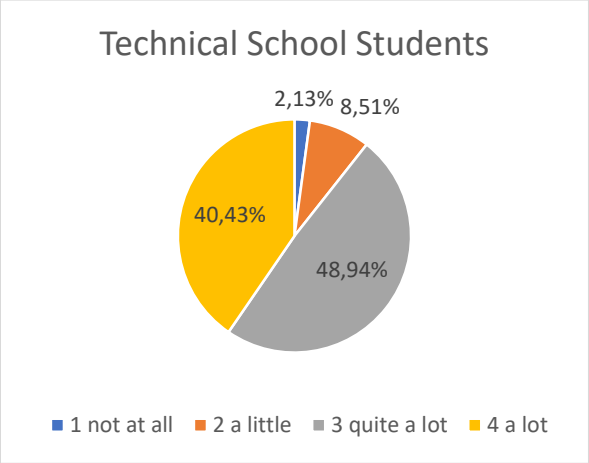
By asking question 29, we would like to investigate whether teachers perceive as *most influencing* the same or different things from the students. It will be interesting to notice the different perceptions students and teachers have of what is important and what mostly influences learning and students' academic achievement. Ultimately, by acknowledging the students' answers, important guidelines can be drawn in order to direct teachers' attention.

4.6. Data analysis and discussion

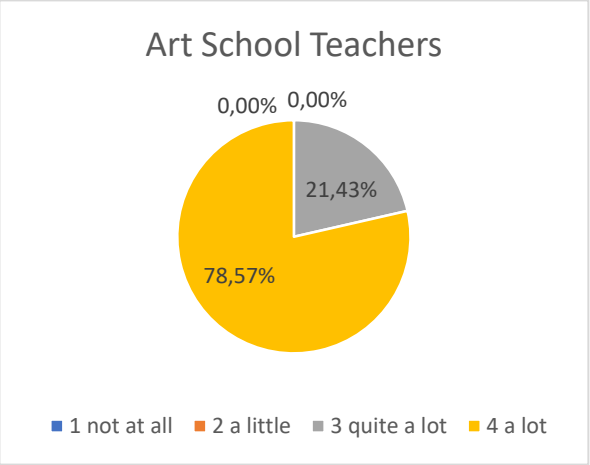
This subchapter aims at showing the research findings of the study which has been conducted. Every question of the questionnaire will be explained through the use of a graph in order to report the statistical findings of quantitative data. In order to compare students' and teachers' answers of this mirror study, students' and teachers' results will be put on the same page in order to make it easy for the reader to compare the data. As for those questions which are different, they will appear separately and will be commented in sequence: first the students' answers with the discussion and later the teachers' answers with the discussion or vice versa. On the other hand, qualitative data will be analysed through content analysis and the summary of the findings will be directly put in the data analysis and discussion section. Only frequency tables of questions 24 and 25 (both concerning students' and teachers' questionnaires) will appear in the Appendix. Qualitative data will be further discussed in the conclusions section in order to support quantitative data. Analysis and discussions start in the following page.

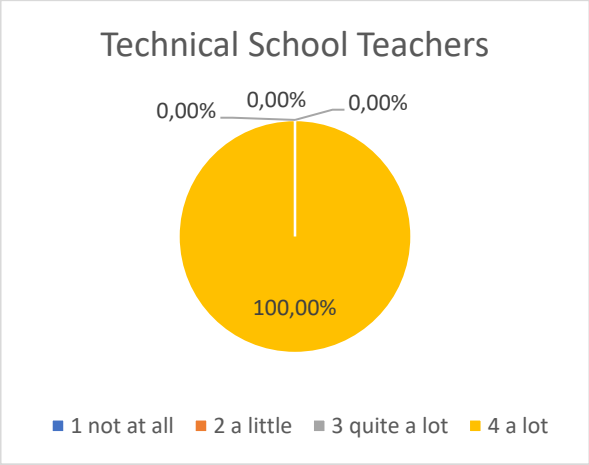
Question 1: Do you think that being valued by your teachers influences your motivation towards the subject they teach?





Question 1: Do you think that valuing your students influences their motivation towards the subject that you teach?

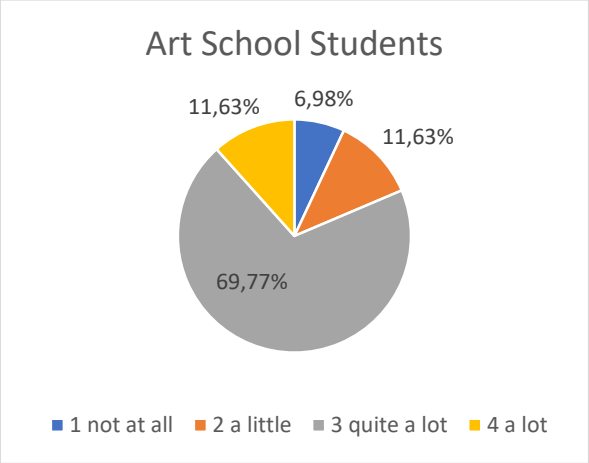


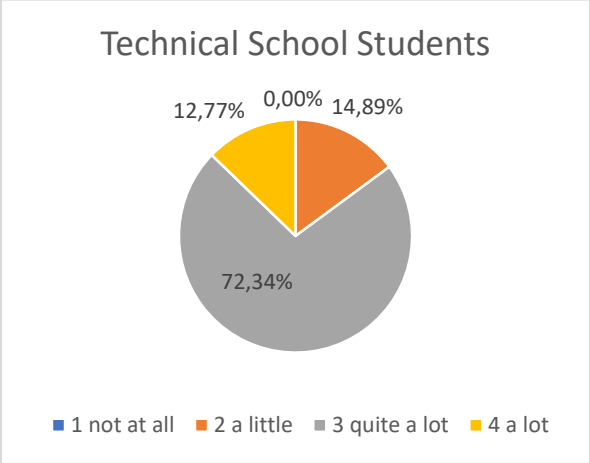


As it can be inferred from the graphs above, students give great relevance to their teachers. Indeed, 48,84% Art School students and 40,43% Technical School students think that it is really important to be valued by their teachers to the point that it even influences their motivation towards the subject teachers teach. Even the ones who did not think it was really important still think that it matters quite a lot, so much so that 41,86% Art School students and 48,94% Technical School students state that being valued by their teachers influences their motivation towards the subject 'quite a lot'. Indeed, the percentage of students who are scarcely or not at all affected by teachers as motivators towards their subject is quite low both in the Art and in the Technical School. For their part, as far as this question is concerned, teachers seem to be quite

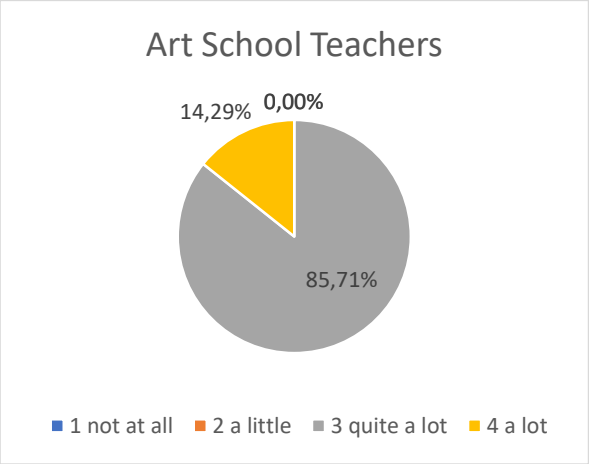
aware of their role to the point that 78,57% Art School teachers and the totality (100%) of Technical School teachers answered ‘a lot’.

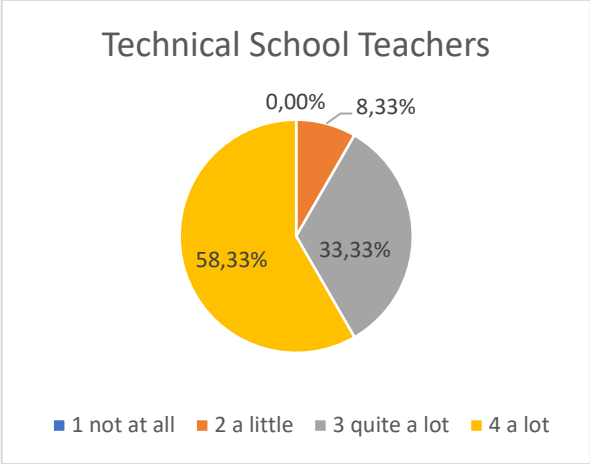
Question 2: Are you satisfied of the relationship that you have with your teachers?





Question 2: Are you satisfied of the relationship that you have with your students?





As it appears from the graphs, the majority of both students and teachers answered that they are quite satisfied of the relationship that they have with each other. Indeed, despite not being highly satisfied of their relationship, 69,77% Art School students, 72,34% Technical School students, 85,71% Art School teachers and 33.33% Technical School teachers stated they are quite satisfied of it. Only Technical School teachers appear to be highly satisfied of their relationship with their students as 58,33% answered ‘a lot’. In general, however, we can notice how higher levels of dissatisfaction are present on behalf of the students. Indeed, despite not being a high percentage compared to the whole sample, 11,63% Art School students and 14,89% Technical School students report little satisfaction towards their relationship with their

teachers and 6,98% Art School students even responded they are not satisfied at all. Moreover, it appears interesting to notice how, whereas Art School teachers report no level of dissatisfaction, 8,33% Technical School teachers answered they are little satisfied of their relationship with their students. Indeed, as the reasons for both students and teachers' dissatisfaction are relevant, we considered it appropriate to further investigate the motivation behind the discontent of both of them by asking the third open-ended clarification question:

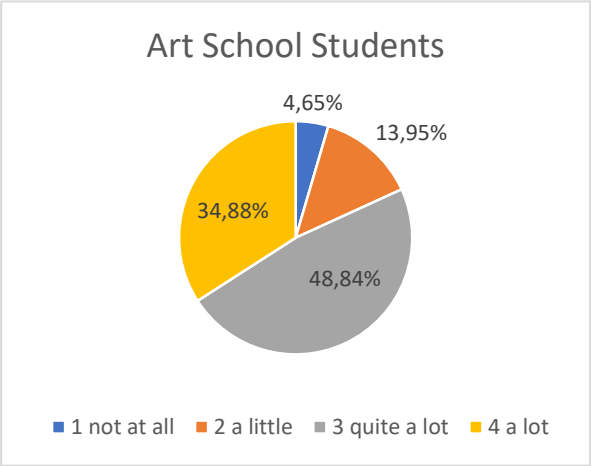
Question 3: If in the previous question you answered 'not at all' or 'a little', what are the causes of your dissatisfaction? Briefly explain them. (If you answered 'quite a lot' or 'a lot' go ahead with the next question).

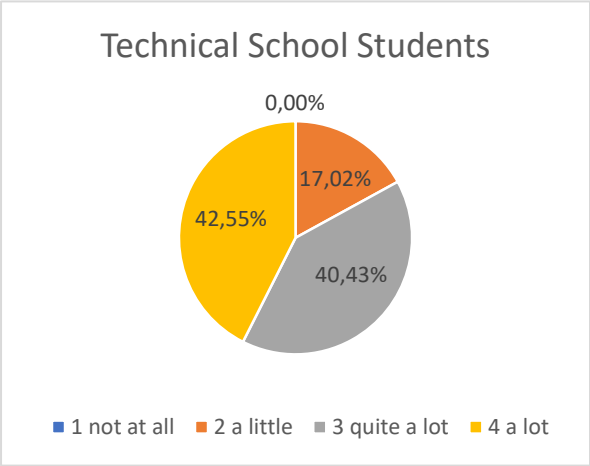
As it could be summarised from their answers, both Art School and Technical School students which reported little to no satisfaction towards their relationship with their teachers, said it is mostly due to teachers' lack of interest in students' ideas and the impossibility to establish a fair dialogue with them. Others reported that some teachers are unable to create engagement and motivate their students towards the subject they teach and lack passion in what they do. Finally, many of them claimed that some teachers are unfair and that there are discriminations, further claiming that teachers are sometimes rude when talking to them and that there are frequent conflicts which undermine the classroom atmosphere.

For their part, teachers who reported little to no satisfaction towards their relationship with their students said so for different reasons. Art School teachers claimed the dissatisfaction mostly comes from the fact of having a superficial relationship with their students while wishing for a closer one. Technical School teachers instead, showed dissatisfaction because of the difficulties they have in getting their students' attention in class and have them study, claiming that their students are nice but they are not quite aware of the importance of studying.

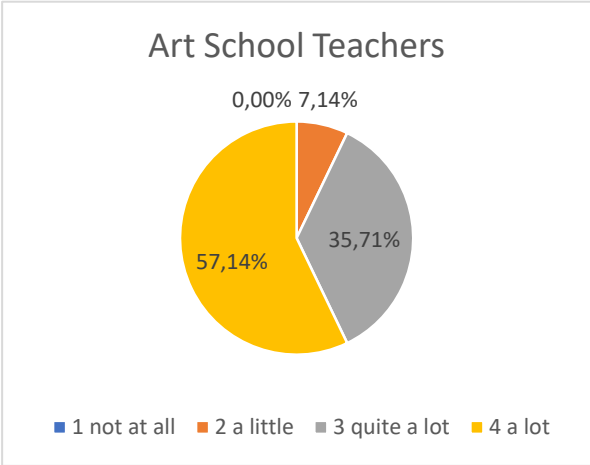
Overall anyway, the low percentage of both students and teachers' dissatisfaction shows us that both teacher and students are generally 'quite' to very satisfied of the relationship that they have with each other which is a positive factor in order to establish a positive classroom atmosphere in class and motivate students.

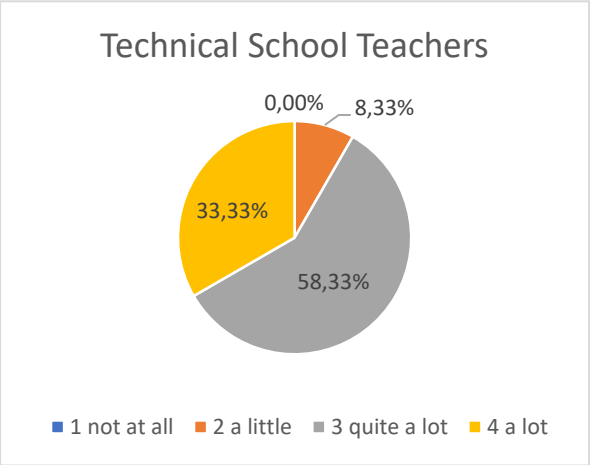
Question 4: Would you like to have more lesson hours dedicated to classroom discussions among students and teacher in order to talk together about classroom issues?





Question 4: Do you think it would be useful to dedicate some hours to classroom discussions between you and your students in order to talk together about classroom issues?





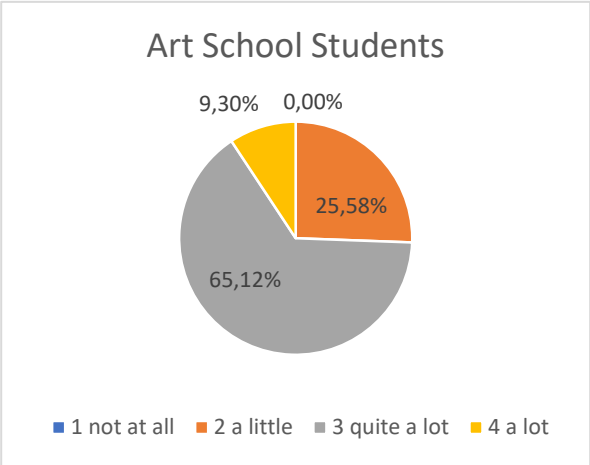
As is emerges from the graphs, both students and teachers from both school addresses think it would be useful to dedicate hours to classroom discussion. Indeed, 34,88% Art School students and 42,55% Technical School students would highly like to have more lesson hours dedicated to classroom discussion in order to talk together about classroom issues. On the other hand, also 57,14% Art School teacher and 33,33% Technical School teachers think it would be useful to face classroom issues by talking

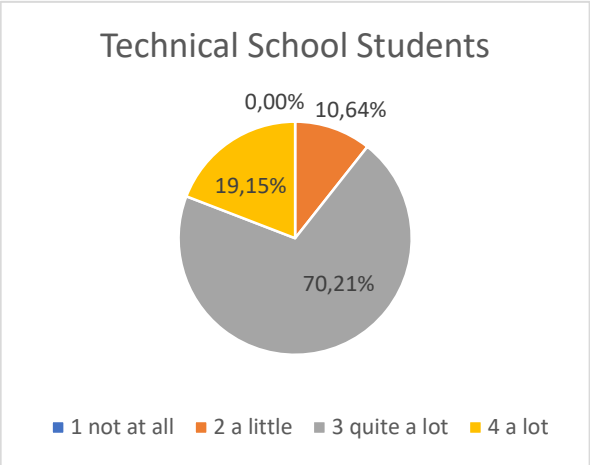
with their students; whereas, only few students and teachers think it would not be a good idea.

In addition to this, teachers were asked to motivate their answers through an open-ended clarification question. It appeared that, those who answered ‘a lot’ think it is very important because dialogue helps having a better understanding of classroom issues. Moreover, they further claim that dialogue helps, not only understanding, but also actually solving problems and it prevents them from becoming insurmountable. Some teachers also think it is important to talk in class because the teacher can serve as a mediator between the students. Moreover, teachers think that students need to reflect and share their ideas in order to face their life difficulties and talking can help them find positive coping strategies to solve their issues. Furthermore, they claim that talking in class can be useful in order to understand what works and what does not work in class in order to try creating a collaborative and cohesive group. Ultimately, they state it can be highly useful in order to create closer relationships with the teachers: indeed, many of them complain about superficial relationships with their students and hope to build stronger bonds with their students. Finally, a limited number of teachers reported that dialogue is important but up to a certain point and that teachers need to know when it is the ‘time to stop’ otherwise it would end up being just a ‘loss of time’; moreover, some of them claim that too much dialogue has students take advantage of teachers’ and their ‘openness’ and they take advantage in order to ask for ‘excessive requests’ which are convenient to them. One teacher finally stated that he has too few lesson hours therefore it would be impossible for him to also spend some of them to talk about classroom issues.

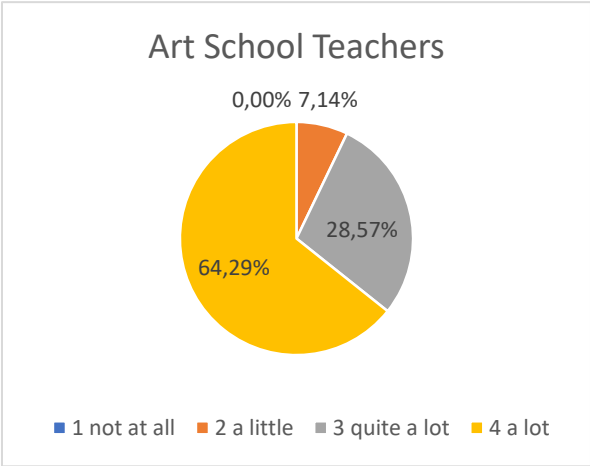
What was interesting to notice is the fact that teachers themselves are willing to have deeper and stronger relationships with their students, which also seemed to appear in question two and three when some of them answered they were little satisfied of their relationship with their students *because of* the superficial relationship that they have with them and wished for a stronger bond. We believe this shows teachers highly care about establishing positive and strong relationships with their students which is a core element in the teacher-student relationship and the creation of positive atmospheres in the classroom environment and the wellbeing of the students.

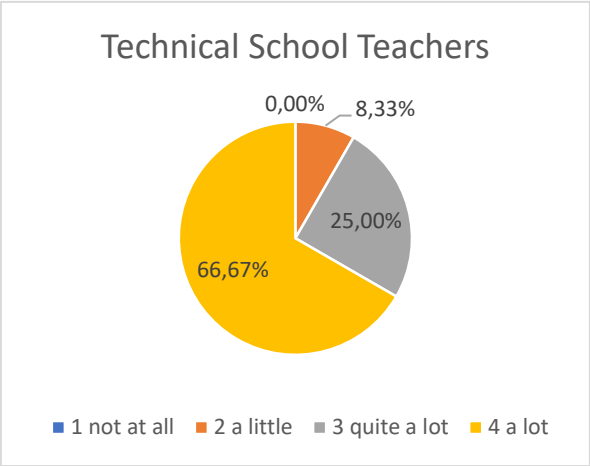
Question 5: Do you think that your teachers are motivated in teaching their subject?





Question 5: Do you feel motivated towards teaching?

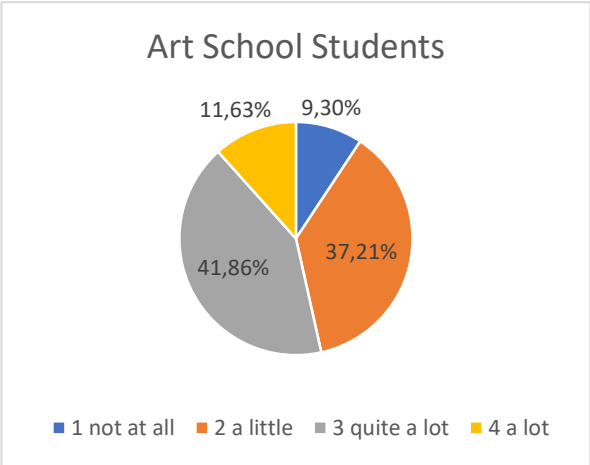


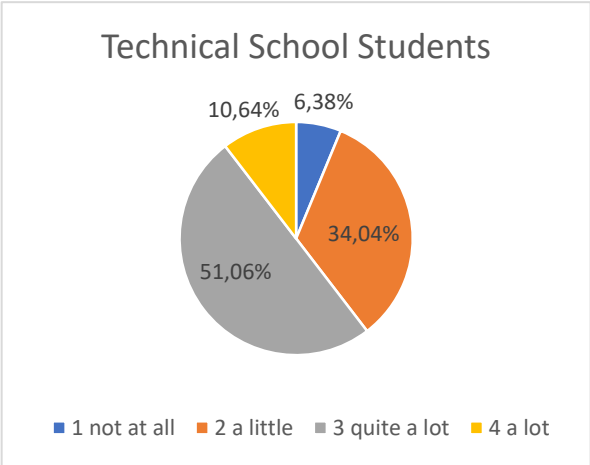


As it appears from the graphs, it is immediately clear how teachers' motivation is perceived differently from different perspectives. Indeed, only 9,30% Art School students and 19,15% Technical School students think their teachers are very motivated in teaching. However, 65,12% Art School students and 70,21% Technical School students think their teachers are quite motivated in teaching.

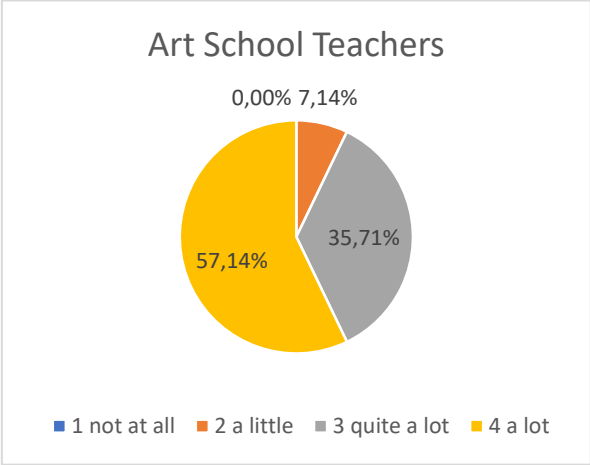
What is interesting to notice is that what appears as 'quite motivated' to students does not correspond to how much motivation teachers actually feel towards teaching. Indeed, the great majority of them feels very motivated towards teaching, specifically 64,29% Art School teachers and 66,67% Technical School teachers feel very motivated towards their job, which is a core aspect of the teaching profession.

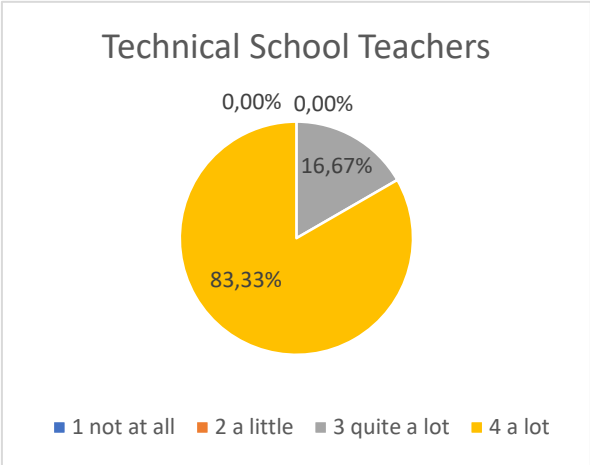
Question 6: Do you feel free to express your opinion in the class?





Question 6: How important is it for you that your students feel free to express their opinions in class?





As it appears from the graphs above, freedom of speech is perceived differently from teachers to students. Indeed, it seems relevant to notice how a large number of students feels slightly free to express their opinion in class: 37,21% Art School students and 34,04% Technical School students answered ‘a little’ which seems to be a quite high percentage. Even though it is true that 41,86% Art School students and 51,06% Technical School students feel quite free to express their ideas, very few answered ‘a lot’ and some of the students even answered they do not free to talk ‘at all’.

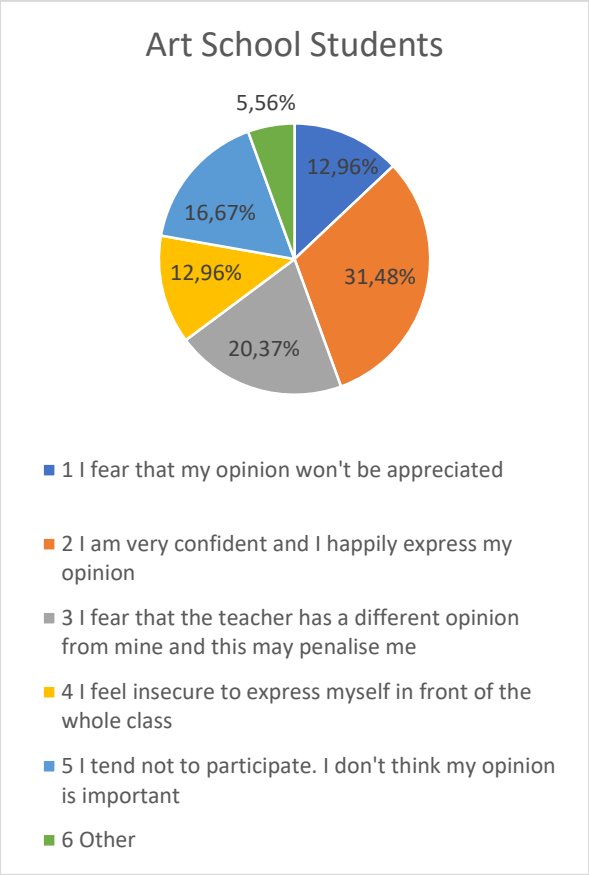
This is a quite interesting outcome as, for their part, the majority of teachers believe it is highly important that students feel free to express their ideas in class. Indeed,

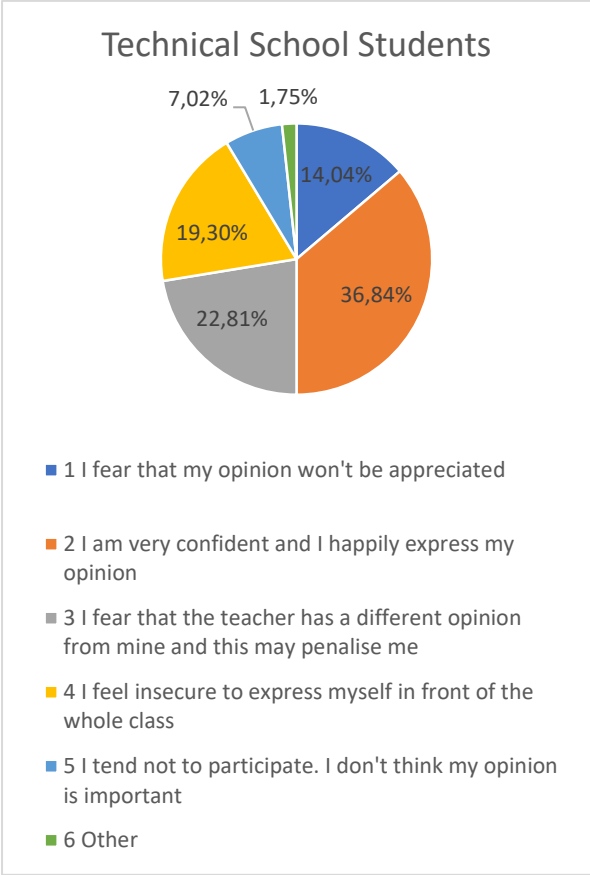
57,14% Art School teachers and 83,33% Technical School teachers answered it is very important; moreover, 35,71% Art School Teachers and 16,67% Technical School teachers answered it is quite important that their students feel free to express their opinion in class. Almost none of them answered 'a little' and none of them answered 'not at all'. Therefore, we have reasons to believe that students' answers might be motivated by variables which are not exclusively related to teachers' responsibilities and which could not be controlled through the question we asked, which could influence the outcome of their answers: for instance, communication anxiety, shyness, peer relationships which may influence the freedom students feel to talk in the class could all be variables that may have indirectly directed their choice in selecting the answer.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental element of classroom wellbeing because it influences the classroom atmosphere which reigns in the class, thus having an impact on learning. Moreover, freedom of speech is also important in order for students to be able to express themselves and functionally go through the process of personality formation which takes place during adolescence. Teachers' answers showed openness on their part, which is a fundamentally positive outcome. The reasons for students' high percentage of feeling a lack of freedom, though not exhaustively, may be further explored through the answers we received from the following students' question (question 7):

Question 7: When you are asked to express your opinion in the class, how do you feel? You can choose one or more options from those listed below or you can choose 'Other' in case none of the given options expresses how you feel.

- I fear that my opinion won't be appreciated
- I am very confident and I happily express my opinion
- I fear that the teacher has a different opinion from mine and this may penalise me
- I feel insecure to express myself in front of the whole class
- I tend not to participate. I don't think my opinion is important
- Other





The answers which appear from question seven seem to confirm the findings in question six: indeed, 31,48% Art School students and 36,84% Technical school students feel very confident and happily express their opinion (which supports the percentages of people in Q.6 who felt very or quite free to talk). As for those who answered differently, we can notice they have quite a multifaceted range of reasons for not feeling free to express their opinions in class: in particular, 20,37% Art School students and 22,81% Technical School students fear that their teachers have a different opinion from theirs and that this will penalise them, which may as well be related to the role and position of power teachers have in the class. Moreover, the third highest percentage as far as Art School students are concerned is their feeling that their opinion is unimportant (16,67%); whereas the third highest option as far as Technical School students are concerned comes from feeling insecure to talk in front of the whole class (19,30%). A large number of people also fear their opinion will not be appreciated (12,96% ASs; 14,04% TSs). As for those who answered 'Other' (5,56%) some Art School students answered they don't feel free to express themselves in class, but they

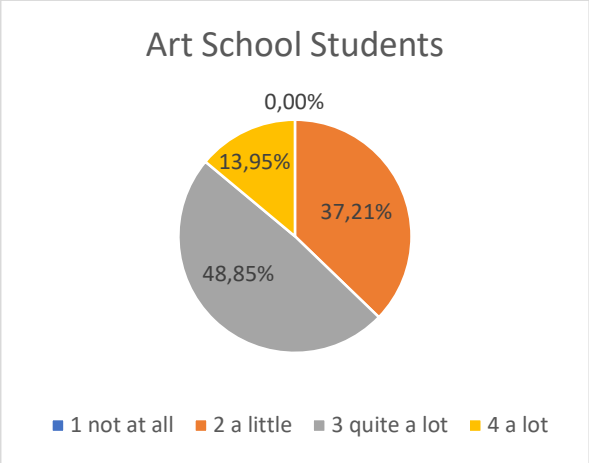
do it anyway, others said that they do it ‘only when necessary’ and, finally, it was reported that they do not feel free to speak because teachers ‘90% of the times think they are right’. Ultimately, as far as Technical School students are concerned 1,75% (which was one person) responded that he may be wrong but he tries anyway.

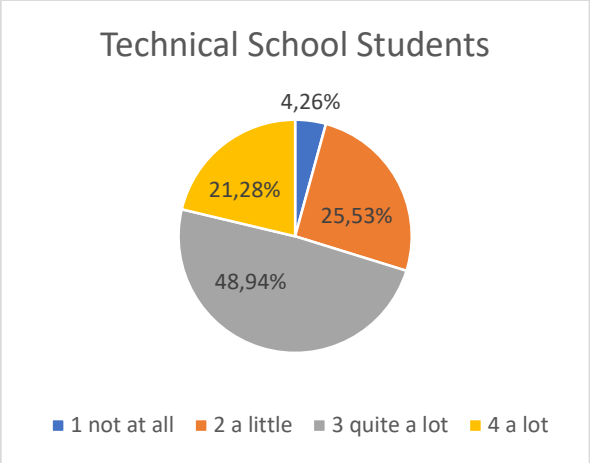
Teachers’ seventh question was a *different* one and it was meant to be linked to question 5, which wanted to investigate through a Likert scale the degree of teachers’ motivation. This time we would like to investigate, through an open-ended short answer question *why* did they choose to become teachers, therefore:

Question 7: What is the reason that motivated you towards becoming a teacher?

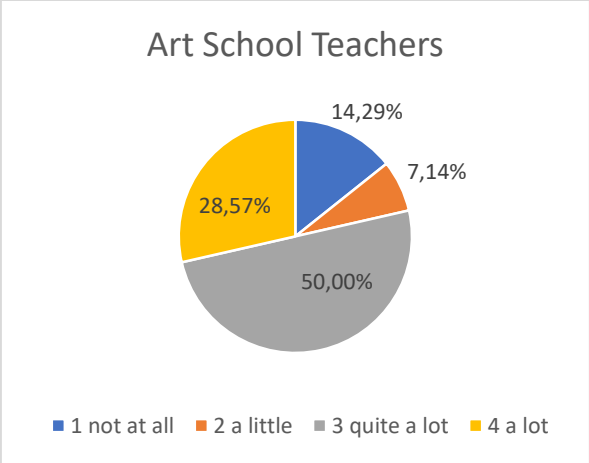
The majority of Art School teachers answered they chose to become teachers in order to be in contact with and build relationships with teenagers and young people. In particular, they claimed they really care about contributing to youth education, transmitting knowledge, promoting emotional and critical-conscience education and guiding their students through their ‘self’ discovery. Furthermore, almost all of them reported they love teaching and are passionate about it. Ultimately, some also highlighted that teaching allows them to organise their time and have a certain economic stability. Technical School teachers answered similarly, indeed, the majority of them also like spending time with young people and having a role in the youth education. Like Art School teachers, some Technical School teachers also appreciate the freedom this profession allows them to have in order to express their creativity. However, some said around 30 years ago there was greater freedom and less ‘duties’ related to school meetings and such. Overall, *passion, love, care for youth relationships and growth, feelings of freedom and creativity expression,* and *transmission of knowledge* were the main reasons for becoming a teacher, which all appear to represent those characteristics teachers should possess in their profession and which seem to show an internal type of motivation for becoming a teacher. Ultimately, only a very limited number of teachers chose to teach only because they won the government exam which allowed them to teach or because it allows to have free time from work (external or instrumental motivation).

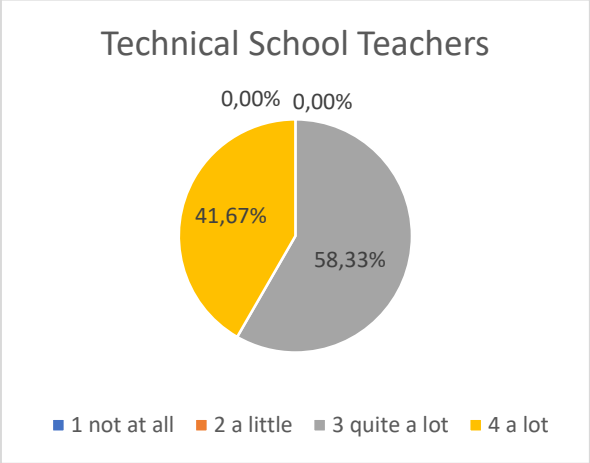
Question 8: Would you like to have opportunities for individual discussions with the teacher?





Question 8: Would you like to have opportunities for individual discussions with your students?





As the graphs above show, on average students are less prone to talk individually to teachers than vice versa. Though 48,85% Art School students and 48,94% Technical School students are quite willing to have opportunities for individual discussions with their teachers; there is a consistent amount of students which are not quite willing to talk individually with their teachers, namely 37,21% Art School students and 25,53% Technical School students. Teachers are those who seem more open to individual discussions: 50% of Art School teachers and 58,33% Technical School teachers think they would quite like to have opportunities for individual talks and a quite high percentage of teachers (28,57% ASt; 41,67% TSt) are highly inclined to talk

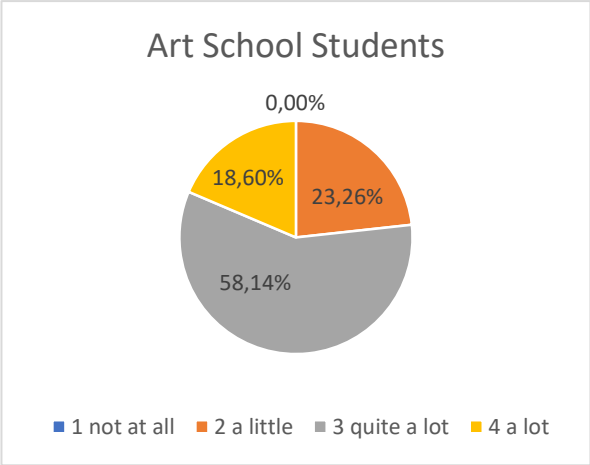
individually. What seems relevant to notice, however, it the fact that those students whose willingness to talk individually was lower are the same which have a high percentage of teachers who are not quite or not at all willing to individually talk with them. Indeed, 14,29% Art School teachers reported they do not wish for individual talks at all; whereas Technical School teachers, on average, seem to be more prone to seek opportunities for individual discussions with their students.

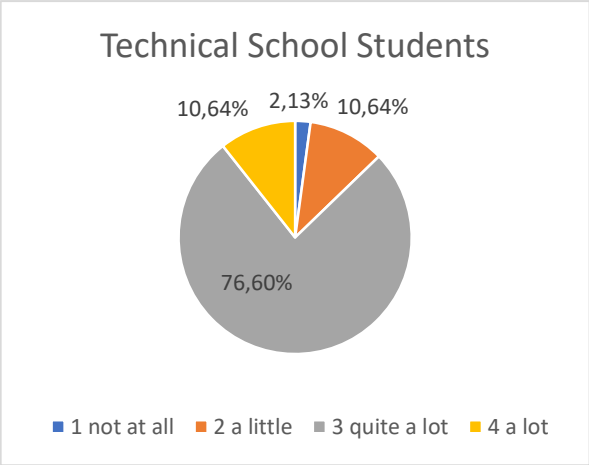
In order to further investigate the reasons behind their choices, question 8 asked them to motivate their answers: it appears that both Art School students and Technical School students who answered positively, think it is important to talk individually with the teacher in order to solve possible misunderstandings and to better understand each other as dialogue is the fastest way to solve all problems. Moreover, they stated it is useful in order to solve classroom issued without being influenced by peer presence and it can be useful in order to understand how to study and what to expect from teachers. Moreover, many students from both addresses thought it important in order to create closer relationships with their teachers, considered by some as 'life coaches', which interestingly enough seems to even *influence* their attitude towards studying. Ultimately, they said it can also be useful in order to better understand what they have to do in class and to discuss difficulties about the subject and to create a more positive classroom atmosphere. On the other hand, those who answered negatively, stated that they do not think it would be either necessary or useful to have individual teacher-student discussions. They claimed they would feel uneasy to talk individually with the professor and would rather prefer to have the whole class present. Some others said they tried to talk many times but teachers did not understand their point of view and that teachers would stick to their opinions anyway so it would not be useful to talk. Finally, some of them fear for teachers ending up having preferences thus finishing for ruining the pre-established relationship.

As far as teachers are concerned, they greatly believe it is important and helpful in order to solve problems and individual issues as well as to receive a feedback of the work they are doing, to exchange different points of view and to build closer relationships with the students. Interestingly, some even claimed it can help teachers 'be better people'. Those who answered negatively, on the other hand, mainly thought

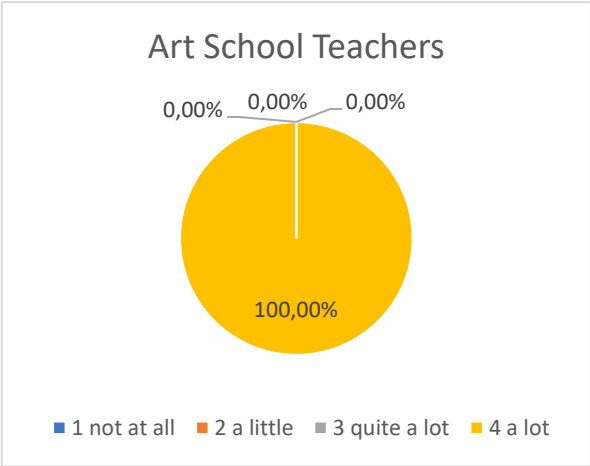
talking with the whole class is enough and it is not necessary or needed to have individual discussions with their students.

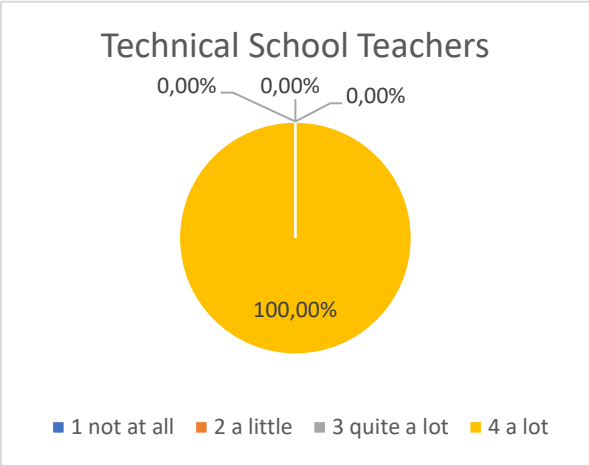
Question 9: Does the teacher try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere?





Question 9: How important do you think it is to try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere?

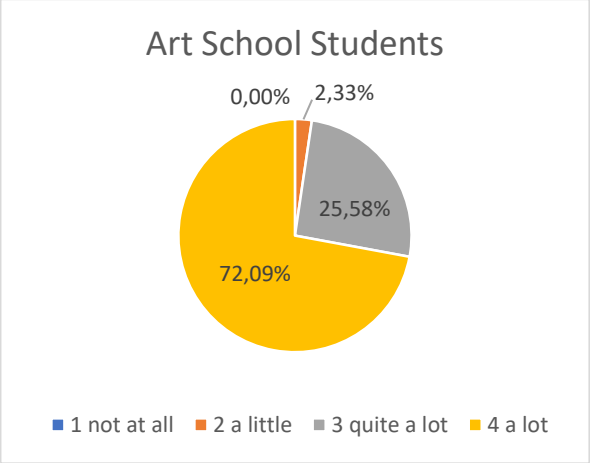


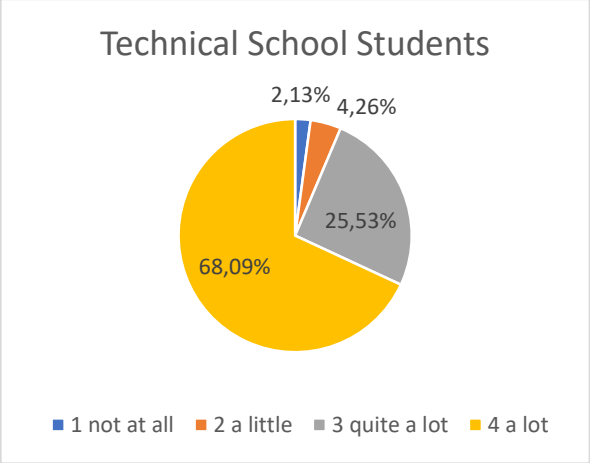


The outcomes of this question are quite interesting to discuss. As it appears from the graphs, the totality of both Art School teachers and Technical School teachers (100%) said it is *really* important to establish a positive classroom atmosphere. What is surprising about the results from the research conducted is that, despite is, not a lot of students think teachers try to stablish a positive atmosphere in the class. Indeed, only 18,60% Art School students and 10,64% Technical School students think their professors try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere 'a lot'. It has to be said that 58,14% Art School students and 76,60% Technical School students stated that teachers

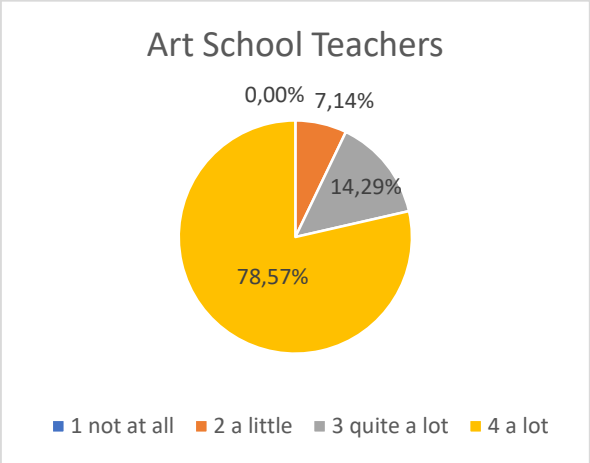
try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere ‘quite a lot’, which still is a positive outcome. What surprises is the high percentage of students from the Art School address (23,26%) who report teachers do not really try to establish a positive classroom atmosphere. With the tools that we have, we cannot further interpret the reasons behind it, but it is still interesting to notice the gap between what teachers think and students’ perception of the degree of positivity which reigns in the class. We can conclude by saying that there may be other variables which, in the current research, could not be controlled, such as whether students were able to answer objectively or if their perceptions were influenced by aspects such as bad academic performances, etc.

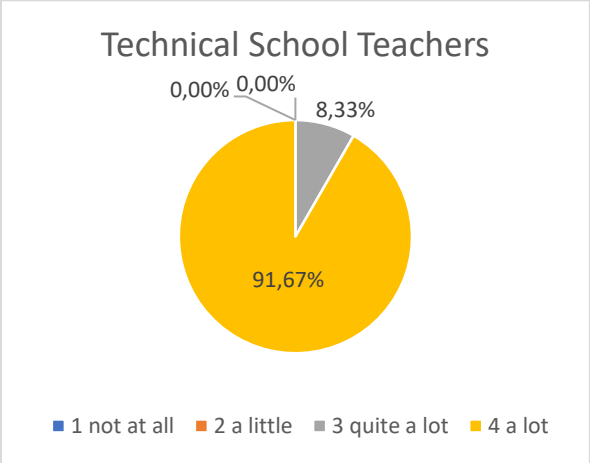
Question 10: How important do you think is the motivation teachers have towards the subject they learn?





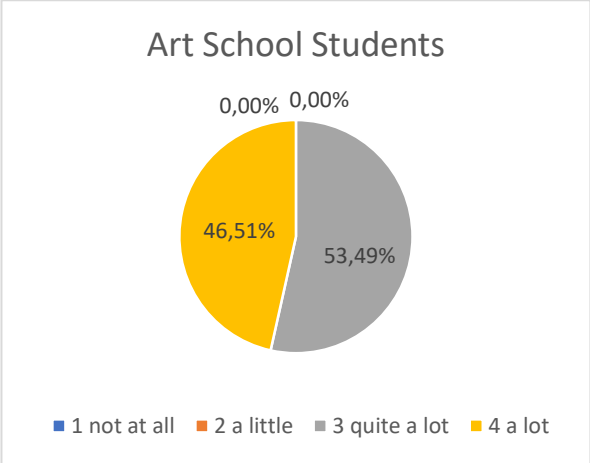
Question 10: Do you think it is important to show motivation in teaching?

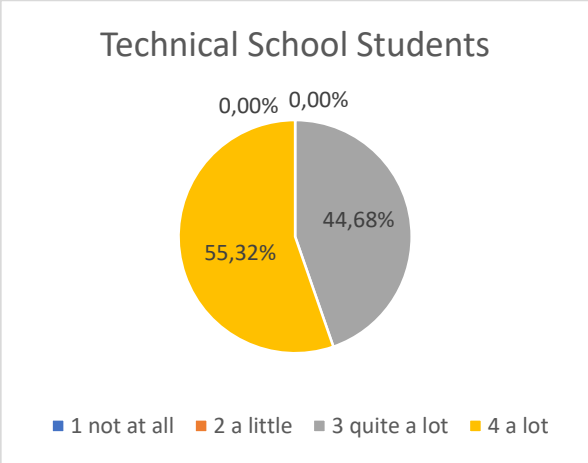




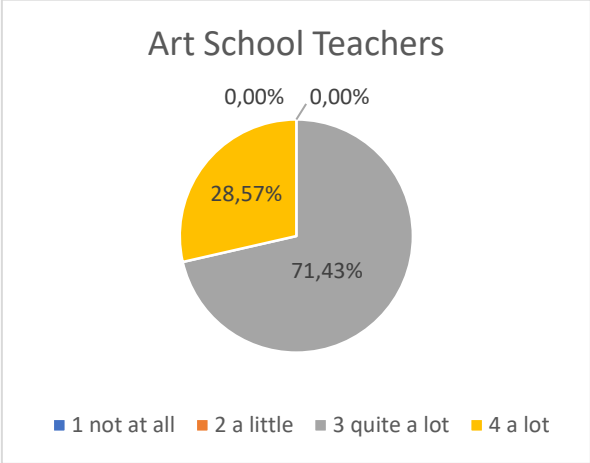
As it emerges from the graphs above, both teachers and students from both addresses think motivation is fundamental in teaching and, more importantly, it is important to show it. If you remember question 5, we asked students if they perceived their teachers as motivated and we asked teachers whether they are actually motivated in teaching. From those findings, it appeared that teachers feel more motivated in teaching than what students actually perceive. However, it is important to notice the outcomes of this tenth question: indeed, despite not perceiving their teachers as really motivated but, at most, quite motivated, the majority of students think the motivation teachers have towards the subject they teach is really important: 72,09% Art School students and 68,09% Technical School students reported it is very important whereas very few to none of them considered it of little or none importance. Interestingly, teachers agree with them as 78% Art School teachers and even 91,67% Technical School teachers claimed it is really important to show motivation. It is not easy to understand the huge gap between teachers motivation and desire to show it to students and students' actual perception of it. Could it may be due to the approach they have towards the subject they teach? Or to their behaviour in class? Or even to the way they present or talk about the subject they teach? Or, more simply, could it may be due to the fact that they rarely make it clear that they love what they do? All those questions are meant to be provocative ones, and it is no intention of this study to answer them; however, they may serve as avenues for reflection and potential further investigations.

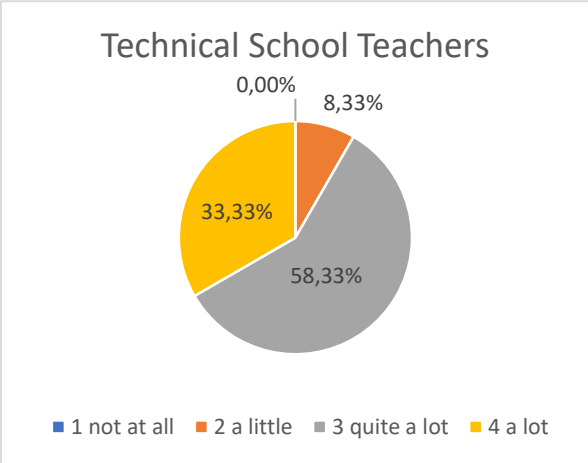
Question 11: How important is it the support you receive from your teacher?





Question 11: How much do you think you support your students?

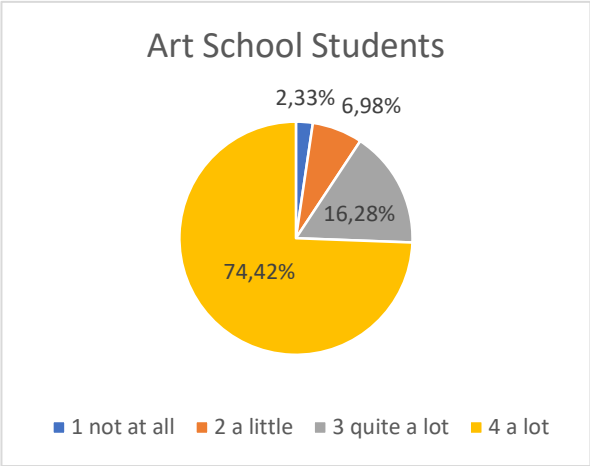


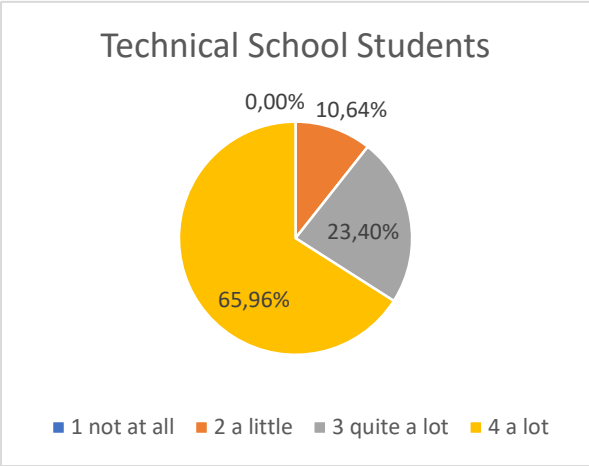


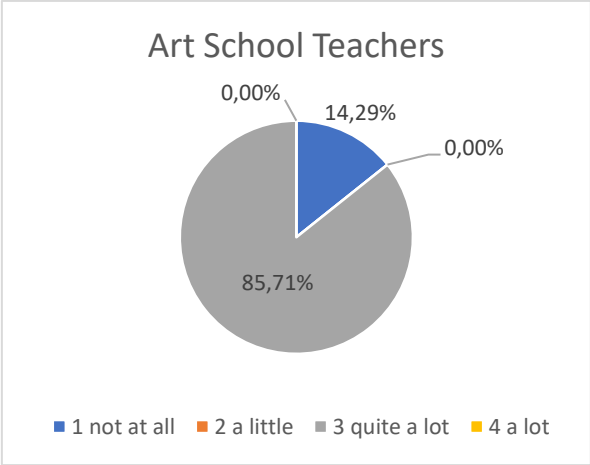
As it emerges from the graphs, on average, receiving support from their teachers is very important 53,49% and quite important for 46,51% Art School students and it is very important 55,32% and quite important for 44,68% Technical School students. For both addresses, no student answered it is little or not important to them. This seems to prove the findings of previous researches in the field of education which consider teachers' support as a fundamental factor in order to promote students' wellbeing and achievement. For their part, it emerges that teachers do not seem to support their students quite as much as students need them to do. Indeed, by comparing their answers to those of the students, despite undoubtedly supporting them, the majority of them answered they support them quite a lot (71,43% ASt; 58,33% TSt) but a smaller

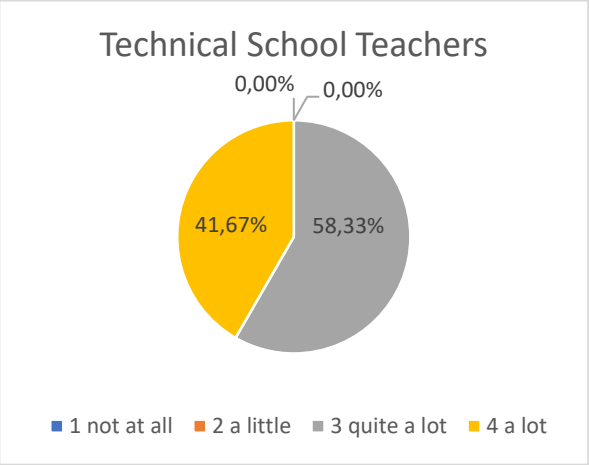
amount of them claimed to support them a lot (28,57% ASt; 33,33% TSt). Moreover, 8,33% Technical School teachers state they give little support to their students.

Question 12: Rita Pierson once said: "You know, kids don't learn from people they don't like". How much do you agree with this quote?







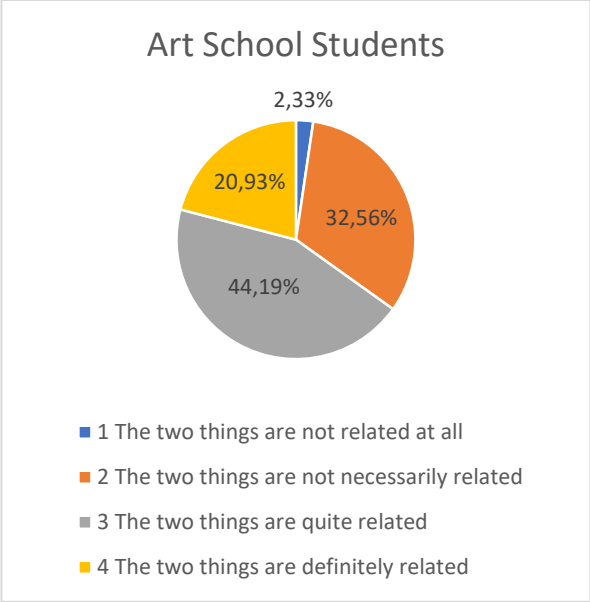


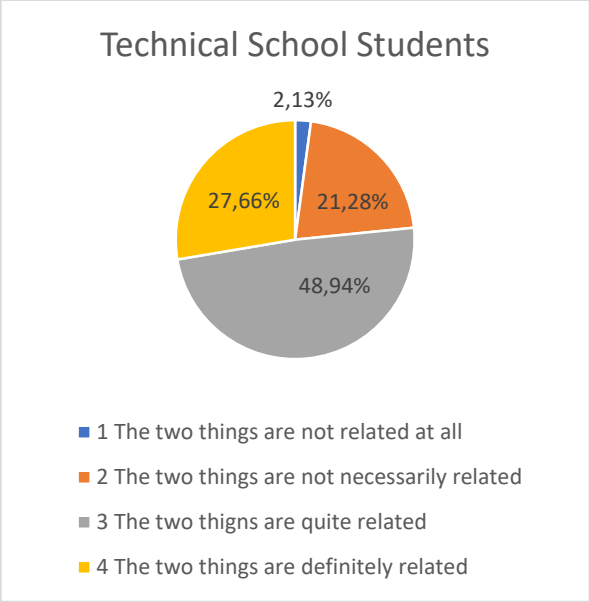
The statistical data emerging from this question are quite interesting. As it can be noted from the graphs, the great majority of students strongly agreed with this quote, namely 74,42% Art School students and 65,96% Technical School students; whereas, as far as teachers are concerned, 41,67% Technical School teachers strongly agreed and 58,33% quite agreed with it. At the same time, none of the Art School Teachers strongly agreed, but 85,71% of them quite agreed with what Rita Pierson said. Interestingly, 14,29% Art School teachers did not agree at all with it. By asking this question, though taken out of context, we wanted to see how much adolescent students value human connection in learning and how much do they feel 'liking' the person,

their teacher, in our case, influences their success in learning. It seems evident that the two things are closely linked and whether teachers believe it or not, students *do* care about liking the person they have in front of them.

As far as question 13 is concerned, we asked different questions to students and teachers. We will start by discussing the students' question:

Question 13: Do you think you are better at the school subjects in which you also like the teacher?

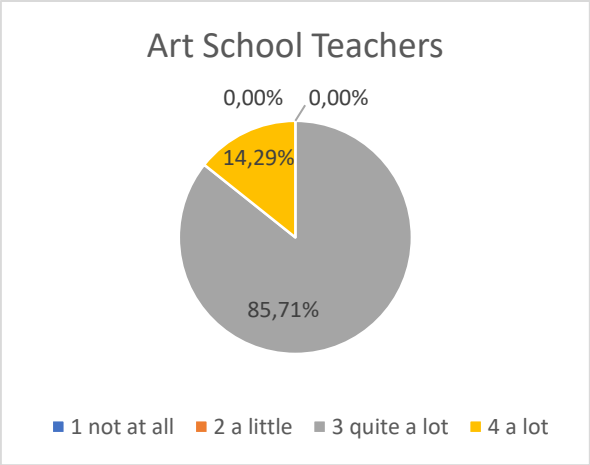


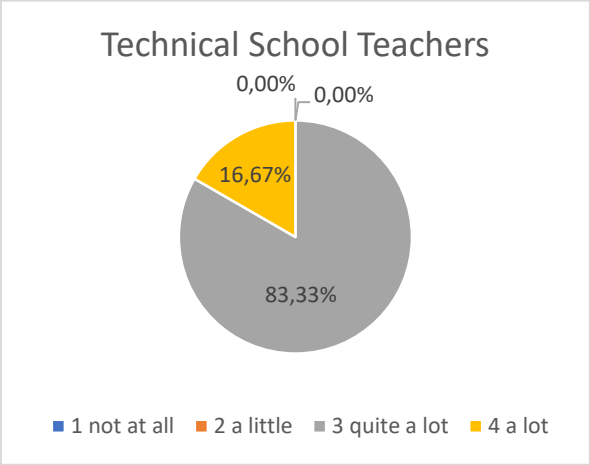


Question 13, which we only asked to students, seems to show interesting results. Connected to question 12 where we asked students to tell us how much liking the teacher influences their will to learn, question 13 seems to prove that there is a correlation between having a positive relationship with the teacher and doing good at school. Indeed, as is appears from the graph of both Art and Technical Schools students, a very few percentage (2,33% ASs and 2,13% TSs) think the two things are not related at all. A good amount of people answered that the two things are not necessarily correlated: 32,56% Art School students and 21,28% Technical School students. This is a reasonable outcome as there inevitably are cases in which you may like the teacher but not being built for some subjects as well as you may also dislike the teacher who teaches your favourite subject, thus continue liking it despite all odds. What is interesting to notice however, is that the majority of people seem to prove the

theory that liking the teacher influences learning. Indeed, the majority of people, 44,19% Art School students and 48,94% Technical School students, think the two things are quite related. Ultimately, despite not being the majority, quite a relevant number of students, 20,93% Art School students and 27,66% Technical School students think the two things are definitely related.

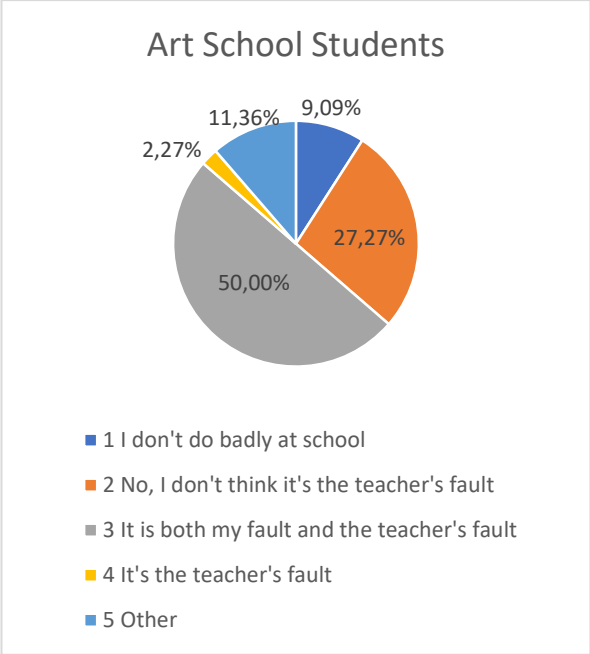
Question 13: How impartial do you think you are towards your students?

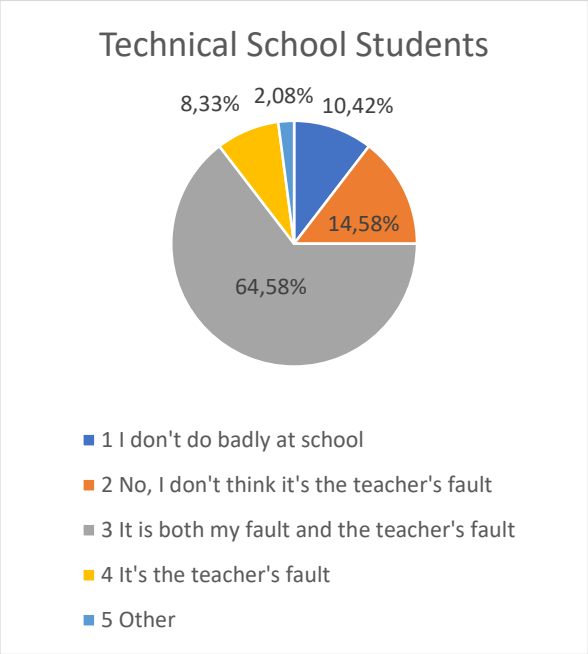




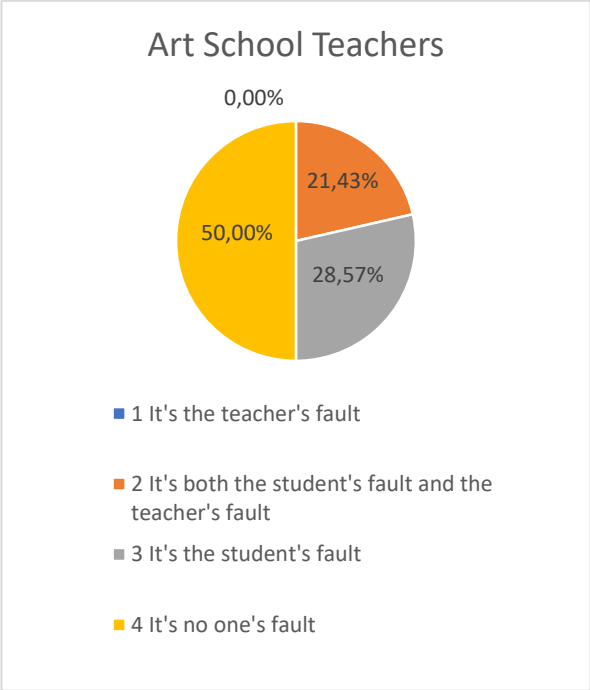
As it appears from the graphs, teachers from both addresses seem to report similar answers as far as impartiality is concerned. Fairness is a fundamental feature in the teaching profession and teachers should try being as impartial as possible. Although, though reporting no negative results, still the great majority of teachers, 85,71% Art School teachers and 83,33% Technical School teachers, claim they are quite fair with their students, but only 14,29% Art School teachers and 16,67% Technical School teachers state they are highly fair with their students. These results suggest that those unfair behaviours students perceive on behalf of their teachers may sometimes be true and justified by the evidences. As it appeared from the above open answers, students sometimes perceive teachers as one-sided and sometimes lacking the important attitude of listening of which we talked about in the theoretical chapters. Despite the results being reassuring, teachers should become aware of the following results and make an effort in trying being as fair as possible with their students as fairness represents a core element in the creation of positive and close relationships between teacher and students.

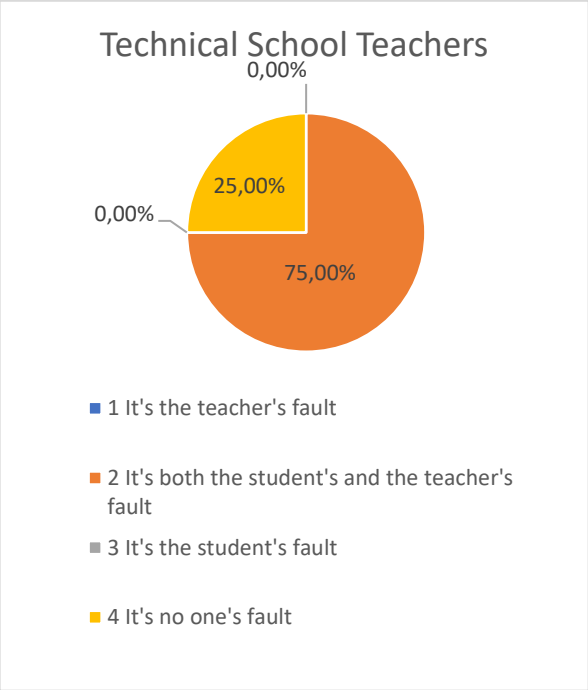
Question 14: If you do badly at school, do you think it is the professor's fault?





Question 14: When a student does badly at a school subject:





As far as questions 14 are concerned, we wanted to investigate both the teacher and, in particular, the students' *locus of control* when it comes to school failure. In short, the attribution theory states that you can have either an internal locus of control, which means you are willing to take responsibility for your actions, or an external locus of control, which means you tend to attribute to external causes your success or failure.

As it emerges from the graphs, it is noteworthy to notice how the majority of both teachers and students are willing to take mutual responsibility for students' failure. Indeed, 50% Art School students and 68,58% Technical School students think it is both their fault and the teachers fault when students do badly at school. The second highest percentage represents those students which have a totally internal locus of control, indeed 27,27% Art School students and 15,58% Technical School students are willing to take full responsibility for their school failure. Those students who responded 'Other' claimed it depends on the situation, on the subject, on the way a topic was taught and on how they themselves and the teachers approached the subject. Others admit they may have studied the wrong way but that maybe also the teachers could have taught the lesson wrong. Finally, some reported that it is principally the student's fault; however, if the whole class does badly it means it is the teacher's fault.

As far as teachers' answers are concerned, we asked them to justify their answers. It emerges that teachers who are willing to take mutual responsibility for students' failure think that maybe the teacher did not succeed in creating empathy and therefore the student did not feel free to ask for further explanations. Quite a number of teachers admit they might have taught the lesson wrong, but that at the same time some students might not be willing to make an effort stating that some of them are used to 'having everything without doing nothing'; therefore, they claim both sides should do some self-examination in order to understand the reasons behind it. Interestingly, some teachers said it is mainly the teacher's fault as students fail when the teacher-student relationship, which is at the basis of learning, fails. Those who answered it's only the student's fault claimed that 'students need to study period'. The majority of those who said it is no one's fault said that there are no univocal answers and that every situation is different. Moreover, they said 'it can happen' to do badly and that 'next time it will be better'. Others pointed out that sometimes it is the system's fault as parents and students do not follow the 'school orientations' they are given (which supposedly are those indications students and parents receive at the end of Middle School where Middle School teachers suggest which is the type of school students should better go to depending on their abilities). Ultimately, some teachers did not like the concept of 'fault', which is a fair consideration: 'fault' might sound harsh; therefore, a better word could be 'responsibility'.

Student's question 15 is still related with question 14, whereas teachers were asked to answer to a different question. Therefore, we will first continue with the students:

Question 15: If you answered 'It's the teacher's fault' to the previous question (14), briefly explain in which way you think the teacher is responsible for your poor school performance.

Question 15 is an open-ended question; therefore, no graph will be needed in order to report the student's responses. We should remember how students who answered 'It's the teacher's fault' were 2,27% Art School students and 8,33% Technical School students. They therefore represent a minority group. By all means, we considered important to further explore their point of view. Generally, many of those who said it is the teacher's fault, reported that some teachers 'do not teach' and then ask the content in the exam and that it is difficult to study on your own. Others say it is the teacher's fault when they do not create motivation and do not make an effort to create interesting lessons, which affects their will to study. Moreover, some students said they have difficulties in getting good marks if they do not like the teacher as they are not willingly to follow their lessons and are not very motivated towards studying their subjects. Ultimately, some students said some teachers are unfair and always help 'suck-ups', thus penalising the others.

Is appears interesting to notice how many students reported low levels of commitment in those subject whose teacher they do not have a good relationship with.

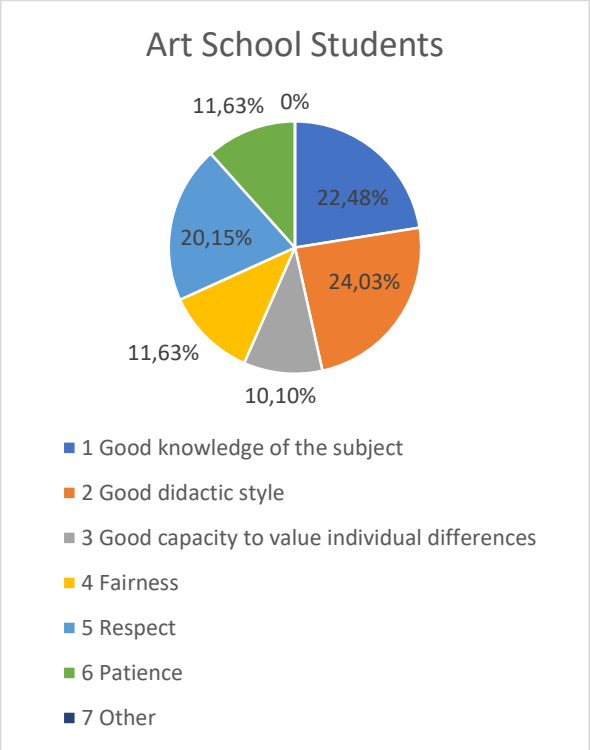
As far as teachers' open-ended question (15) is concerned:

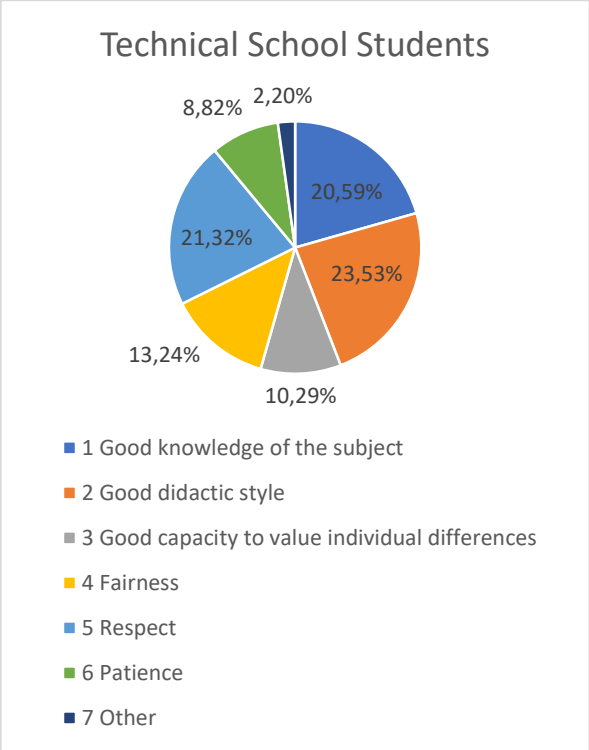
Question 15: When is a student considered 'good'?

We wanted to ask this question in order to understand what teachers believed as positive student behaviours and attitudes. Unsurprisingly, many teachers were more of a traditional mindset: they consider students good when they are polite and respectful to teachers, when they take notes, ask questions, study at home, work consistently, follow teacher's indications, re-elaborate the content and reach good academical achievements. Other teachers however gave 'deeper explanations' to what makes a student 'good': they stated students are good when they show their personality and individuality, when they are self-critical and think with their own head rather than

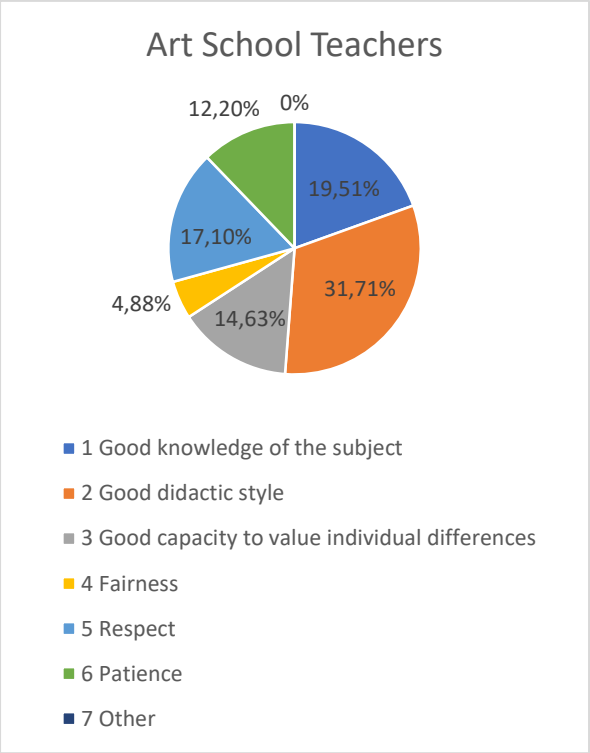
learning things by heart. Furthermore, they considered them 'good' when they were able to challenge the teacher by asking specific an in-depth questions and when they were able to deal with their everyday busy life peacefully. What was interesting to notice was that every teacher had a different way of considering a student 'good'; therefore, what can be inferred is that students might end up feeling confused about what they have to do and how they have to do it in order to be considered 'good' by their teachers. It is not an easy task, but we think clarifying the different conceptions would be useful for both teachers and students in order to 'understand' what they need to do in class. As you may remember from question 8, indeed, those who looked for opportunities for individual talks with their teachers were willing to do so in order to understand what they have to do and what to expect from teachers. The fact that they reported it in their answers it may indicate they are not quite sure.

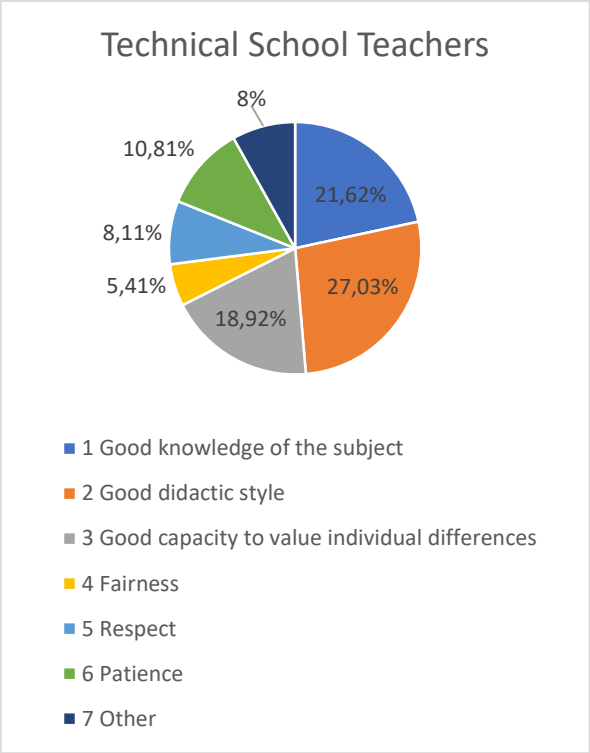
Question 16: What do you think is important in a teacher?





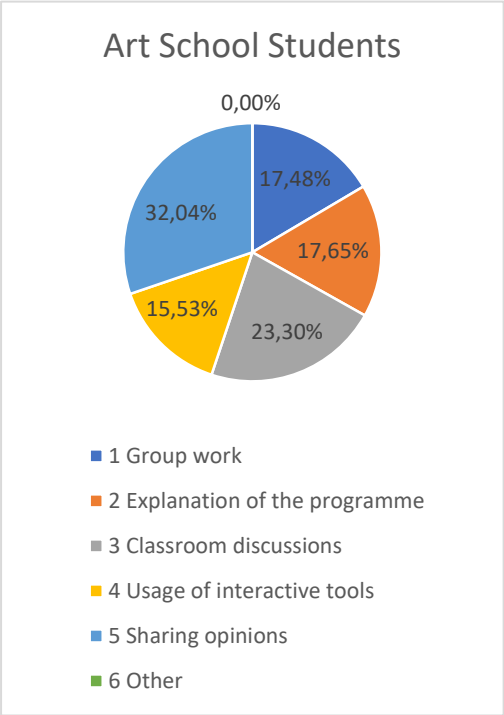
(Teachers' graphs are on the next page)

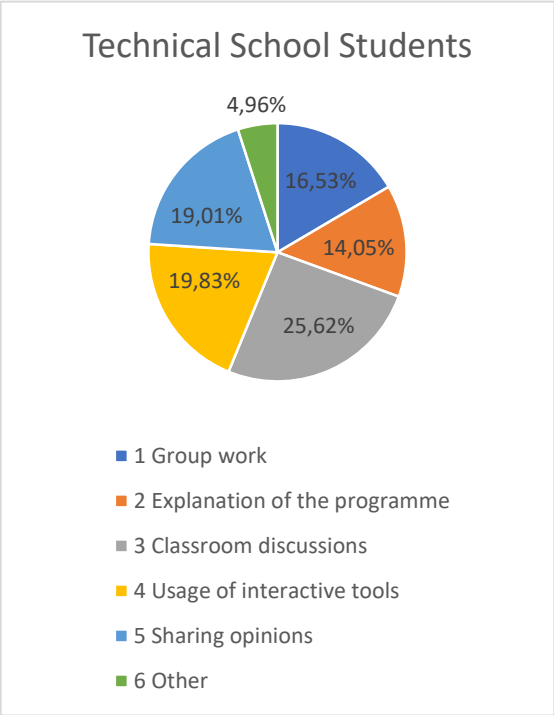




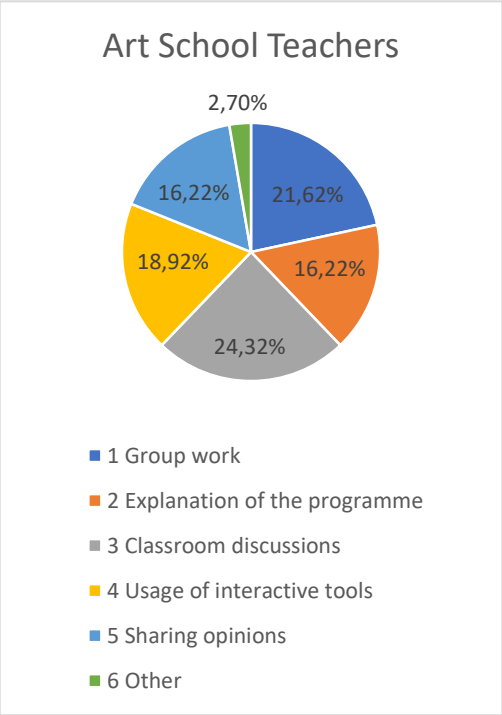
As it appears from the graphs, teachers and students seem to generally agree in what they consider the three most important elements in a teacher. Indeed, for all of them, a good didactic style is the most important element as 24,03% Art School students, 23,53% Technical School students, 31,71% Art School teachers and 27,03% Technical School teachers claimed so. Moreover, as far as the second element is concerned 22,48% Art School students, 20,59% Technical School students, 19,51% Art School teachers and 21,62% Technical School teachers think a good knowledge of the subject is a highly important feature of a good teacher. Thirdly, the most important element seems to be respect; indeed, 20,15% Art School students, 21,32% Technical School students and 17,10% Art School teachers think respect is a core element. Differently from all others, as it can be noted from the graphs, Technical School teachers believe that a good capacity to value individual differences is more important than respect (18,92% vs 8,11%). In general, however, all those characteristics seem to be considered important as results appear to be quite balanced. Ultimately, as for those who answered 'Other' Technical School students added as important: helping students who are in trouble, listening to them and creating engagement. Whereas, technical School teachers added: empathy, awareness of students' needs and coherence.

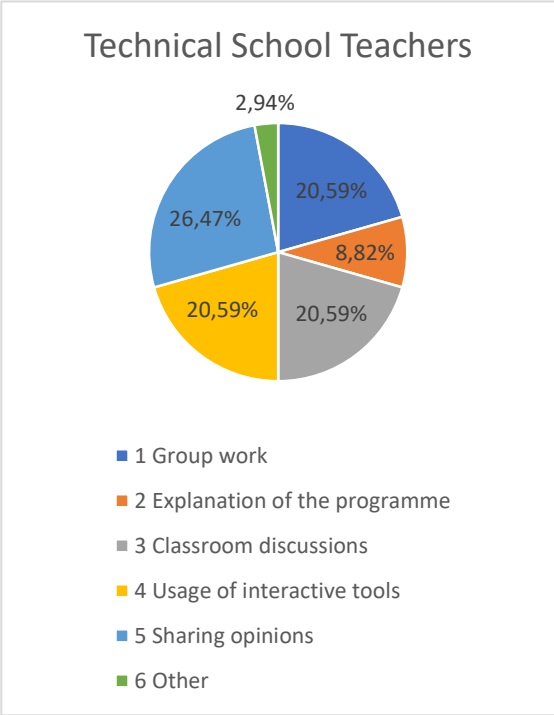
Question 17: Below you will find a list of activities. Read them and choose those you would like your teachers to dedicate more time in class to.





Question 17: Below you will find a list of activities. Read them and choose those you would like to dedicate more time in class to.





As shown in the graphs above, both teachers and students agreed in which are the classroom activities they would like to dedicate more time to. Indeed, 32,04% Art School students claimed that they would like to dedicate more time to sharing opinions on topics covered in the class either orally or in writing with the principle that there are no right or wrong ideas, but only *different* ones. The second highest percentage (23,30%) concerns classroom discussions and free interventions on topics of interest chosen together with the teacher. Similarly, 24,32% Art School teachers report they would like to dedicate more time to classroom discussions and secondly to group work (21,62%). As far as Technical School students are concerned, 25,62% would like to have more opportunities for classroom discussions and secondly to use interactive tools (19,83%). Similarly, 26,47% Technical School teachers would like to dedicate more time to sharing opinions and would equally (20,59% for all three categories) like to dedicate more time to using interactive tools, discussing in class and doing group work. As for those who answered 'Other', students reported they would like to have more opportunities to use graphic programmes, do extra-curricular activities, do field trips and practical activities; whereas, teachers would like to spend more time reading books or scientific articles or attending meetings and conferences. However, we can notice how all answers appear to be balanced among all participants as there are no too high and too low percentages.

The following two questions, both those to students and to teachers, asked to shortly report respectively their best and worst memory of a High School teacher and the best and worst memory of a student.

By trying to categorise all the answers that they gave, we will report the summary which was created and with which we could draw some interesting conclusions that will also help us answer our research question: key words will be put in *Italics*.

Question 18: Briefly narrate the best memory that you have of a teacher.

When talking about their best memories most Art School students talked about receiving *support* and *encouragement* by their teachers either in situations when they were feeling down or having a bad period or when they needed help in studying, thus showing that students appreciated when teachers *cared* about them; moreover, many of the students' best memories come from being able to *build a relationship* with their

teachers either inside or outside of school: most of them happily remember those moments in which they could have a coffee with the teacher, talk about life with them and keeping their relationship close despite past misunderstandings. Thirdly, a good number of students reported their best memory concerns being *praised* for their hard work and being *valued* by their teachers. Moreover, some were moved by their teachers' giving them *meaningful gifts*: such as receiving a mineral during science class or being given a book about 'self-confidence' when feeling insecure. Ultimately, some students' best memories were about being *motivated* and *engaged* by the teacher in a subject, later ending up loving it thanks to the teacher.

As far as Technical School students are concerned, they reported similar answers. Indeed, a large amount of students commented upon *building a relationship* with the teacher either inside or outside of school by being able to talk 'about everything' with them through objective discussions and by feeling free to express themselves. Secondly, many students appreciated *receiving compliments* by their teachers, being *valued* by them and seeing teachers' *satisfaction* for their improvements. Thirdly, the majority of the students reported that their best memory was when the teacher was *available* for them, both during the school hours and in the afternoons when they stayed after school to study together, thus spending their free time with the students. Moreover, like many Art School students, many Technical School students appreciated when teachers *asked them 'How are you?'* showing that they *cared* about them and their feelings. Ultimately, it was interesting to notice that some students reported their best memories come from past school trips because they got the chance to get to know the teacher better.

Question 19: Briefly narrate the worst memory that you have of a teacher.

As far as the worst memories are concerned, they appear to be quite similar for both Art and Technical School students. Indeed, their worst memories mostly concerned being treated *unfairly*: this seems to mainly concern school marks and school failure (could it may be due to a lack of communication between teacher and students concerning the causes of students' failure?) and when they were *accused unjustly* for something they did not do. Secondly, their worst memories come from being treated with *indifference* either when they were asking for help concerning a school subject

(*non-availability*) or when they were feeling emotionally bad and their teachers did not notice or did not care. Thirdly, many students reported they felt *targeted* by some teachers and this made them feel really bad and anxious. Sadly, some students reported they were *humiliated* and *insulted* by some teachers *in front of the whole class*, either for their mistakes and sometimes by being told 'You'll no nothing with your life' or 'You're worthless' and they remind it as their worst memories. Ultimately, some students' worst memories concerned their favourite teachers leaving the school.

Question 18: Briefly narrate the best memory that you have of a student.

As far as teachers are concerned, their best memories mostly come from *being remembered after years* by their students, making them feel like they were able to leave a trace in their students' life and create a *legacy* (e.g. a teacher said he was invited to a student's wedding and by talking about the school period with him, he understood that the 'negative moments' helped the student grow and mature; another one remembered about receiving a 'Merry Christmas' wish and being thanked for his 'warm heart and generosity'). Secondly, more than one teacher's best memory concerned being *hugged*: e.g. 'a student who was admitted to the final exam 'by majority vote' shook hands with all professors at the end of it except me, then he turned back and hugged me'. This shows teachers *care* about building a *relationship* with their students and deeply appreciate being valued and cared for by them in return. Ultimately, some teachers reported their best memories come from students succeeding (*students' success*) in their academic and personal life as well as when students improved at school thanks to them.

Question 19: Briefly narrate the worst memory that you have of a student.

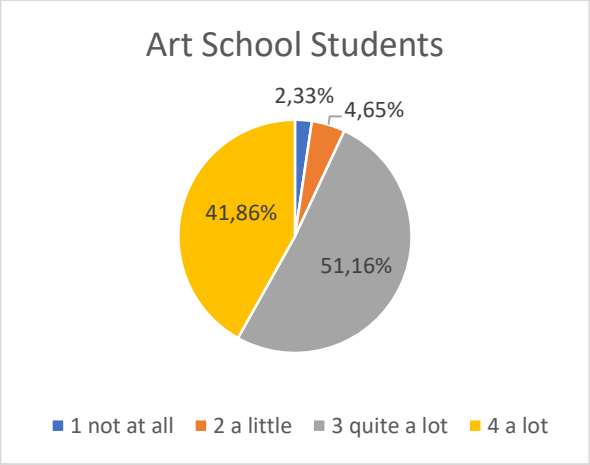
Teachers' worst memories, which they rather report as *sad*, are mostly about *students dropping out of school* as they mostly perceived it as partly due to their failure as educators. Secondly, interestingly enough, their worst memories come from *being targeted* by their students: they remember with regret those students who claimed to hate them, who targeted them for their failures, who considered them liars, who told them 'You are nothing' in front of the whole class and when their work is put into question – such as when parents ask access to documents, etc. Lastly, some of their worst memories come from having *fights* with the students, mostly verbal ones and

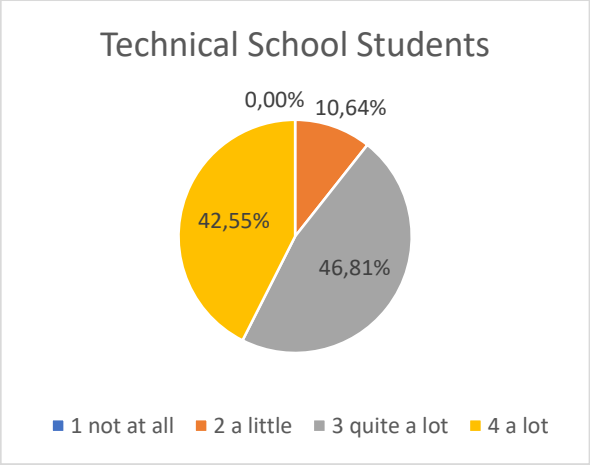
one teacher reported as his worst memory being almost punched in the face by a drug-addict student.

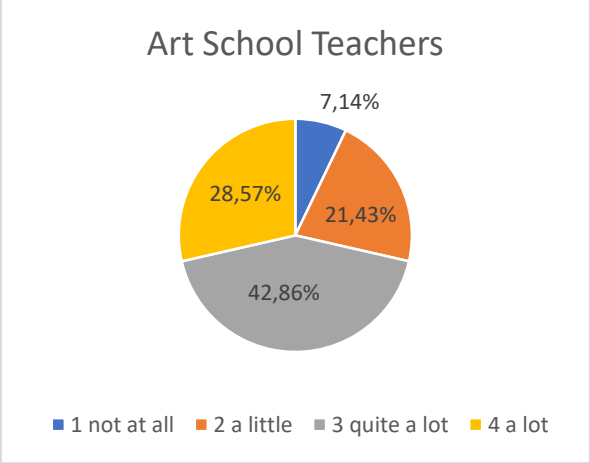
Question 20: Alessandro D'Avenia in his book *L'Arte di Essere Fragili*[4] (*The art of being fragile*) said:

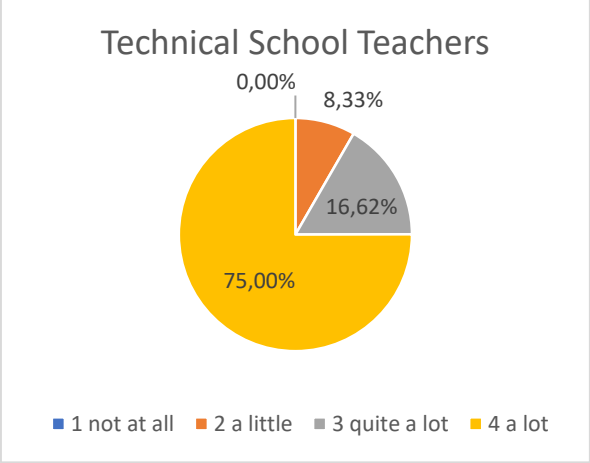
"Only the ones who live their dreams generate dreams and trigger destinies: only if I know what I am doing in this world I can put an adolescent in a 'positive crisis'. Adolescents do not what life to be explained to them, they want life to hoist the sails in them, and they want reliable people by their sides for their navigation".

How much do you agree with this quote?









As is appears from the graphs, the majority of both teachers and students seem to quite agree with the quote. Indeed, 51,16% Art School students and 46,81% Technical

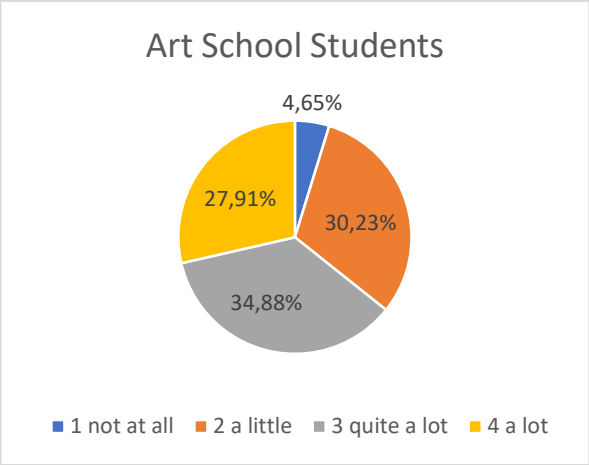
[4] D'Avenia, Alessandro. 2016. L'Arte di Essere Fragili. Come Leopardi può salvarti la vita. Pp.34.

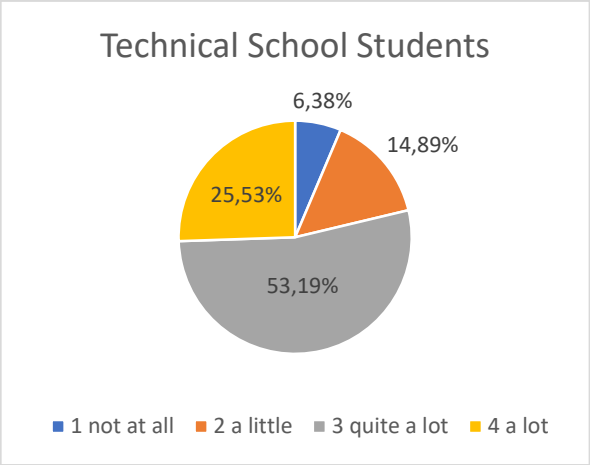
School students quite agree with it. Secondly, quite a number of student seem to strongly agree with it (41,86% ASs and 42,55% TSs). Different outcomes seem to appear from the teachers' answers. Indeed, 28,57% Art School teachers strongly agree, 42,85% quite agree, but 21,43% little agree with the quote, which seems to be a relevant percentage of people. On the other hand, 75% Technical School students strongly agree with the quote and only 16,62% quite agree, meaning the great majority of teachers agree with it.

As far as question 21 and 22 are concerned, we decided to ask teachers different questions from those of the students. Moreover, since they are both linked, we will present in succession the two students' questions first and the two teachers' questions later. The questions we asked students are the following:

Question 21: Do you feel influenced by what teachers think of you as a student?

How much do you agree with this quote?

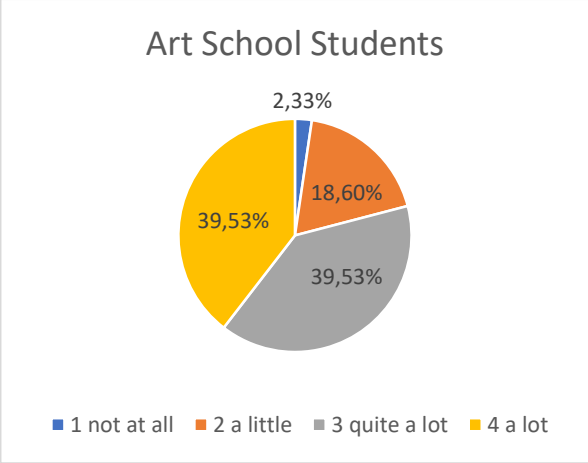


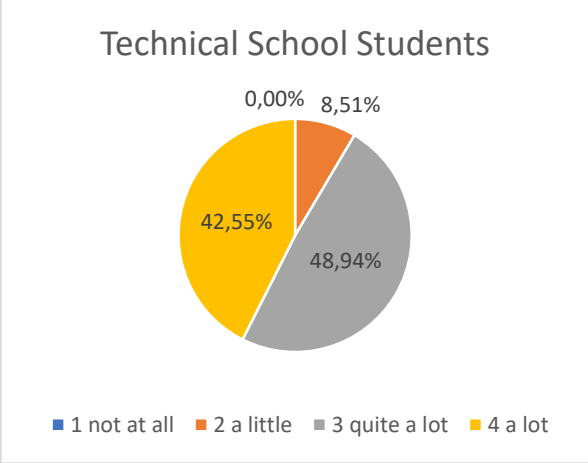


By asking this question we wanted to investigate the degree by which felt influenced by what teachers thought of their students. The results seem to suggest that, though to varying degrees, students *do* feel influenced by that their teachers think of them as students. Indeed, 29,91% Art School students and 25,53% Technical School students state they feel highly influenced by it. Moreover, 34,88% Art School students and 53,19% Technical School students they are quite influenced by what their teachers think. Although the percentage of those who answered 'a little' is 30,23% for Art School students and 14,89% for Technical School students is quite high, still this

percentage allows for perceiving some degree of influence. Indeed, we can conclude that generally, most students feel influenced by what their teachers think of them as students.

Question 22: Do you think it is important that the teacher has good expectations of success towards you?

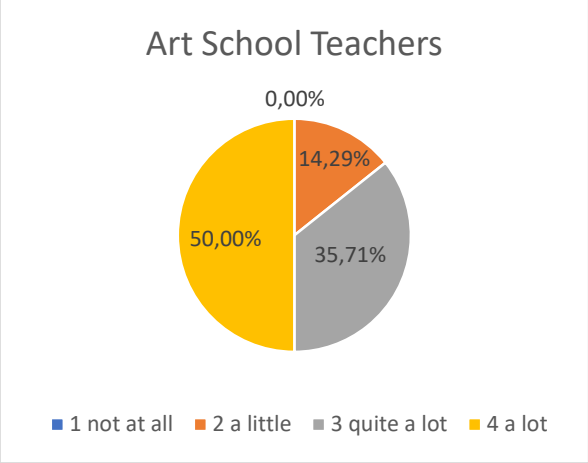


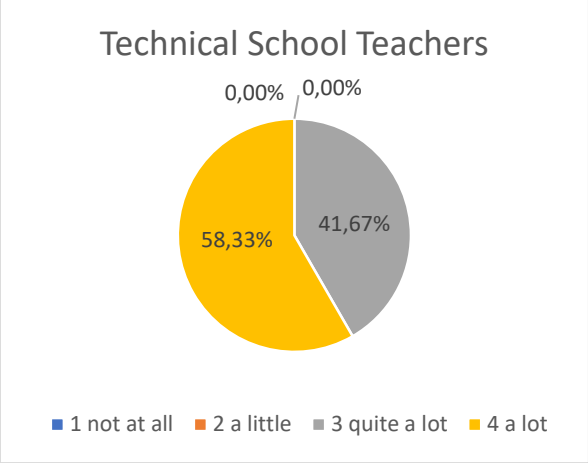


As it appears from the graphs, the majority of students think it is quite or highly important that the teachers have good expectations of success towards them. Indeed, as supported by statistical data, 39,53% Art School students and 42,55% Technical School students claimed it is highly important for them. Furthermore, 39,53% Art School students and 48,94% Technical School students reported it is quite important for them. Only a smaller amount of students reported is of little importance or not important at all. This means, students care about teachers having positive expectations towards them and their school and personal success.

As reported above, teachers were given two different question which state as follows:

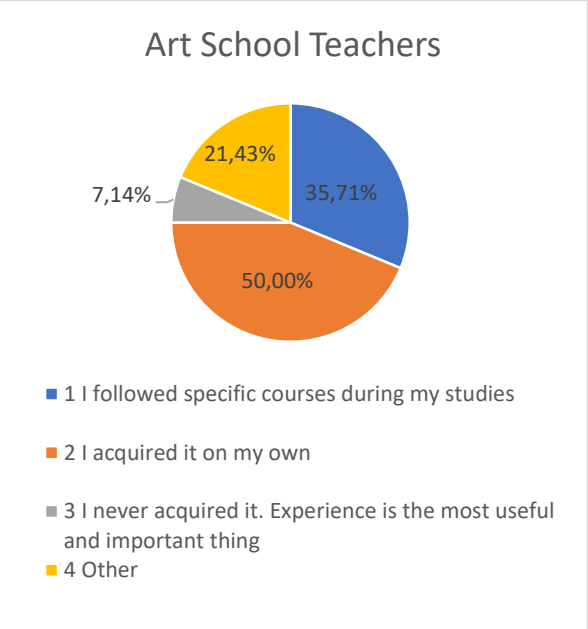
Question 21: How important do you think it is to possess a psychological training in order to pursue a career in the teaching profession?

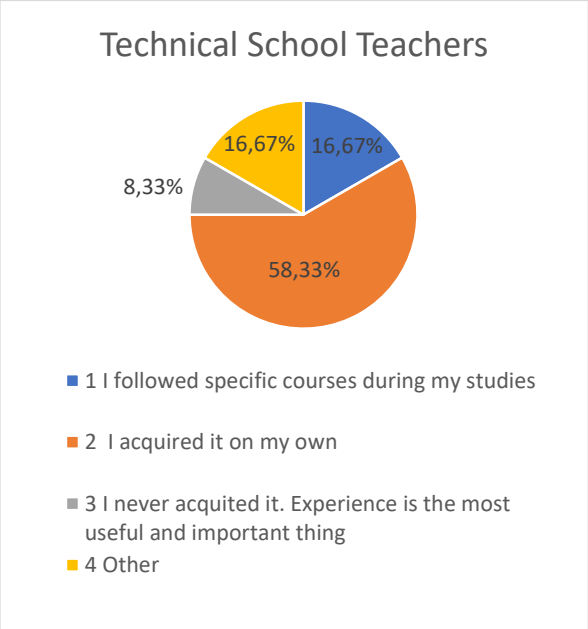




According to teachers answers, the majority of them think it is highly important to possess a psychological training in order to pursue a career in the teaching profession: indeed, 50% Art School teachers and 58,33% Technical School teachers answered 'a lot'. Those who answered different still for the most part claimed it is quite important: 35,71% Art School teachers and 41,67% Technical School teachers. Only 14,29% Art School teachers claimed it is of little importance and none of the teachers said it is not important at all.

Question 22: How did you receive a psychological training in order to become a teacher?

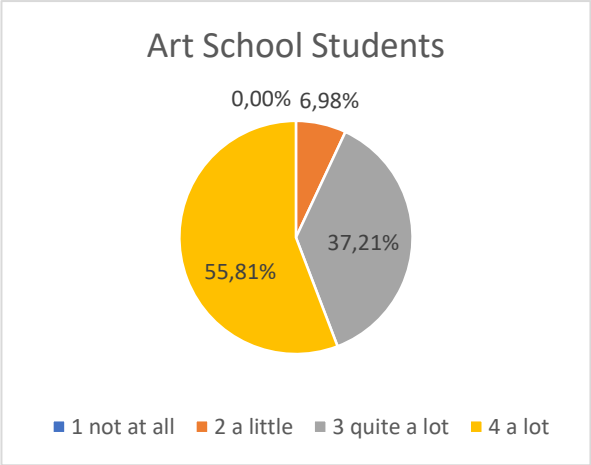


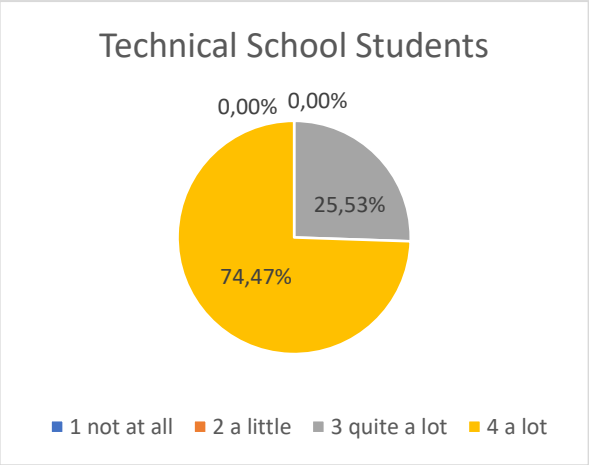


In relation to question 21, in which the majority of teachers claimed it is mostly highly or quite important to possess a psychological training in order to teach, it appears quite interesting to notice how the great majority of teachers had to acquire it on their own. Indeed, 50% Art School teachers and 58,33% Technical School teachers reported so. The second highest percentage of teachers reported they acquired it through their studies (35,71% ASt and 16,67% TSt). It would be interesting to understand whether those teachers who acquired it on their own had to do so because of a lack of courses during the time in which they were studying or for other reasons. Moreover, it seems relevant to note how they decided to acquire it despite it not being imposed by the institution or their study plan. Only a limited number of teachers never acquired it and think experience is the only think that matters. As for those who answered 'Other', they said they acquired it through refresher training, TFA (Active Formative Apprenticeship) and government employment examinations.

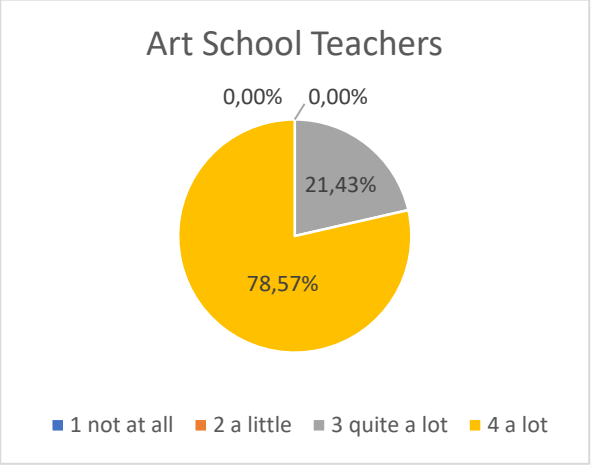
Due to logistical reasons, questions 23 appear on the following page.

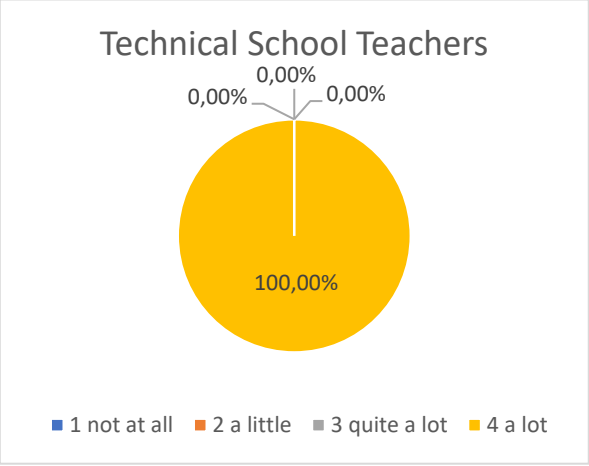
Question 23: How important is it for you to establish a trustful relationship with your teachers?





Question 23: How important is it for you to establish a trustful relationship with your students?





As it can easily be inferred from the graphs above, both students and teachers think it is highly important to build a relationship based on mutual *trust*. As it emerges from the graphs, teachers seem to value a high level of trust slightly more than students as 78,57% Art School teachers and the totality of Technical School teachers (100%) think it is very important to establish a trustful relationship with their students. On the other hand, students as well perceive it as really important as 55,81% Art School students and 74,47% Technical School students answered 'a lot'. It seems interesting to notice how students who reported more percentages of 'quite a lot' or 'a little' are the same whose teachers also responded a higher percentage of 'quite a lot'. We could infer that

there might be a correlation between the actual relationship which goes on with Art School teachers and their students and its impact on their perception of the importance trust has in their mutual relationships. However, the results in general seem to be very positive and seem to confirm the relevant level trust plays between teacher and student.

As far as both students' and teachers' question 24 and question 25 are concerned, these open-ended questions wanted to investigate which are the students' preferred features about a teacher and which are those they least like. At the same time, by asking their teachers the same question we wanted to investigate whether teachers have the same or different perceptions of what students like and what they do not like. In order to do so, a grid was created in order to code and categorise all the students' and the teachers' answers, which the reader can find in the Appendix section at the end of this thesis. We put all the responses in a frequency order so that the reader could immediately perceive the frequency with which those answers appeared. In this section we will focus on commenting upon the most fashionable answers in order to understand what characteristics the majority of both students and teachers value the most as well as some of the least fashionable but still interesting ones. By doing so we would like to see if there is a correlation between what students think are positive and negative teacher's traits and what teachers think and whether their responses differ from each other. Key words will be put in *Italics*. If you want to have an overview of all the responses from the most fashionable to the least fashionable responses, you can find the complete list in the Appendix section.

Question 24: I don't like a teacher when…

As far as question 24 is concerned, the majority of students (36 students) answered that their least favourite characteristics is being treated *unfairly* and when the teacher has *preferences*. Moreover, the do not like a teacher when he is *disrespectful* towards them (22 students) and when he is *not available* either when they need school and/or emotional support. It appeared interesting to notice how many students also focussed on the teacher *not caring* about them (10 students) and *not creating a positive classroom atmosphere* or *good teacher-student relationship* (10 students). Students from both addresses gave a plethora of different reasons for disliking a teacher; however, what seemed interesting to notice is that the majority of their comments

concerned the emotional and relational side of teaching rather than the subject itself. Indeed, only few people concentrated on it: only 4 students complained about teachers giving *heavy lessons* and on being *boring* (4 students). Apart from those two categories, all other answers seem to concentrate more on the emotional side of the person.

Question 25: I like a teacher when…

As far as question 25 is concerned, the majority of students (22 students) like a teacher when he is able to *make his subject interesting*, when he is *patient* (18 students), *fair* (18 students) and when he is *available* (17 students) when the student is in need. Moreover, a good amount of participants responded they like a teacher when he is *empathetic* and tries to *understand the student* (16 students) and when he is *passionate in what he does* (15 students). Many students (14 students) also said they like a teacher when he *creates a positive teacher-student/classroom relationship* and when he is *not too detached*. Students gave many different reasons for liking a teacher; however, the frequency of their responses seemed relevant to us and seem to confirm that students like being cared for and having a reliable figure they can count on and by whom they want to be inspired and learn from.

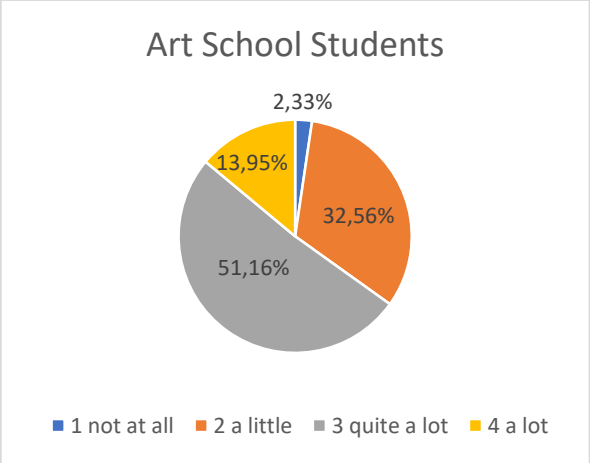
Question 24: In your opinion, when is a teacher 'liked?

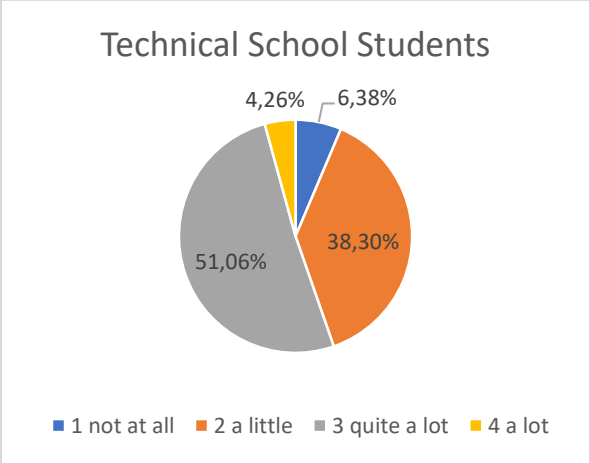
As far as teachers' answers are concerned, the majority of teachers think students like them when they *explain the subject clearly* (8 teachers), when they *create motivation* (7 teachers), when they are *fair* (6 teachers) and when they are *passionate* in what they do (6 teachers). Many of the teachers' and students' responses were similar to each other. Indeed, teachers seem to be aware of which are the characteristics students like to find in a teacher. However, it was interesting to notice how some teachers, although being the absolute minority, responded that students like teachers when they are *laissez-fair*, when they *give few homework* and *'easy marks' to everyone*. We thought it important to report those answers as they seemed quite superficial and slightly disrespectful to the students. Though it may be true that some of them to like those characteristics, students' most fashionable answers prove they do not like this kind of attitude. On the contrary, students are willing to learn and to find teachers willing to educate them.

Question 25: In your opinion, when is a teacher 'disliked'?

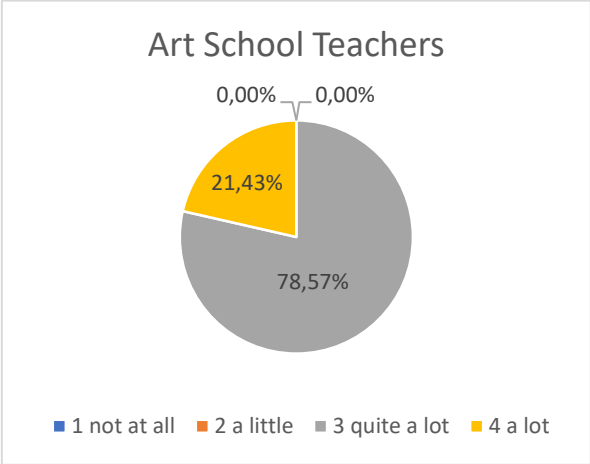
As far as teachers' question 25 is concerned, teachers reported students do not like them when they are *not clear* when they explain (8 teachers), when they *do not care* or *do not create a good teacher-student relationship* (7 teachers) and when they are *unfair* (6 teachers) and *disrespectful* (6 teachers). Teachers seem to be quite aware of what students do not like in a teacher. Indeed, once again, their responses were quite similar especially concerning unfairness and disrespect. Similarly, to the previous section, a minority group of teachers responded students don't like teachers who *give low marks* (3 teachers), *give homework* (1 teacher) and *bad notes* (1 teacher). Overall however, they seem to be conscious of the role they play in the class and of what characteristics are mostly disliked by students.

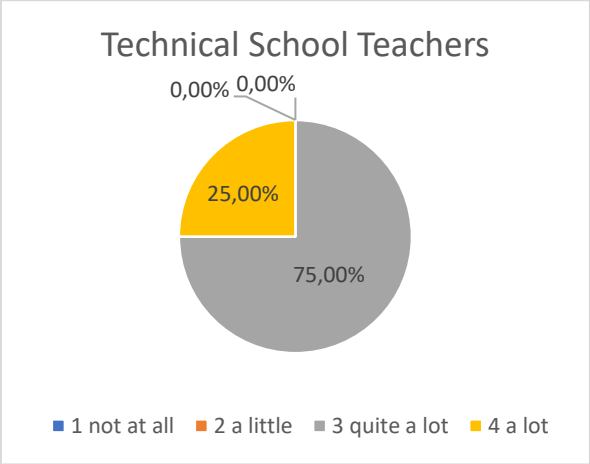
Question 26: Are your teachers interested in your difficulties?





Question 26: Do you care about your students' difficulties?

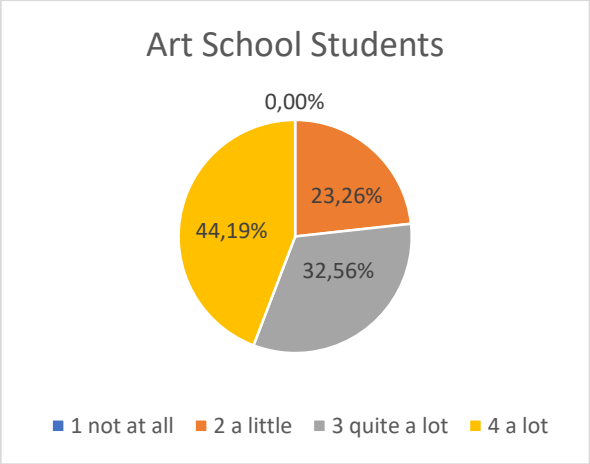


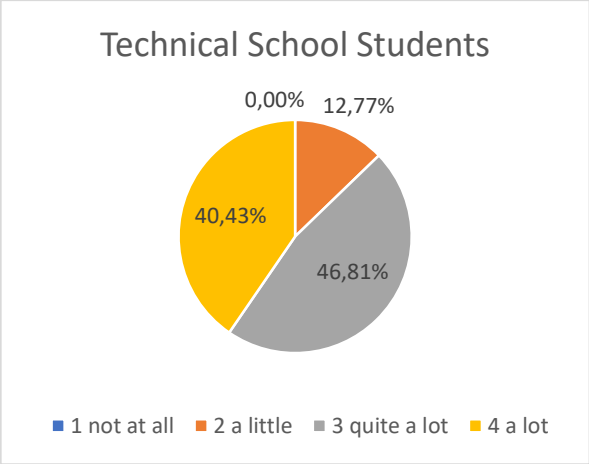


As it emerges from the graph, as far as teachers' care about students' difficulties are concerned, the results seem not to be too encouraging. Indeed, although more than half of the students report their teachers quite care about their difficulties (51,16% Art School students and 51,06% Technical School students), a large portion of students think their teachers care little about their difficulties: i.e. 32,56% Art School students and 38,30% Technical School students. Students results seem to be confirmed by those of teachers themselves. Indeed, though it is still 'good enough' the great majority of teachers affirm there are only quite interested in students' difficulties (78,57% Art School teachers and 75% Technical School teachers). Despite the still considerable amount of teachers who claim to care 'a lot' (21,43% Art School teachers and 25% Technical School teachers), students' results seem to suggest they do not actually perceive care as much as teachers think they are giving them and that teachers' most fashionable answer should have been 'a lot' rather than 'quite a lot'.

Going on with question 27, we created a different one for students and teachers. The first one is the students' question:

Question 27: Have you ever experienced stress due to a teacher?



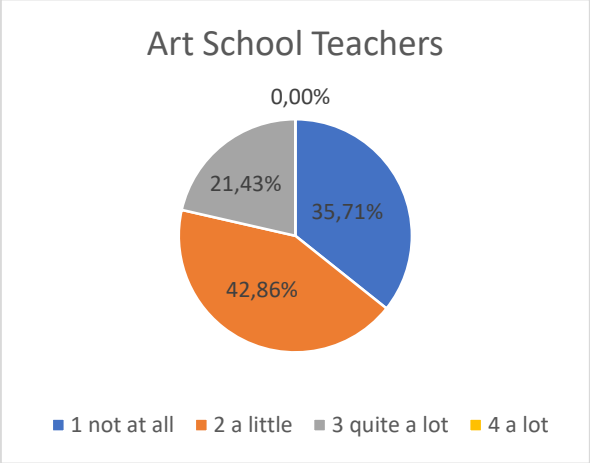


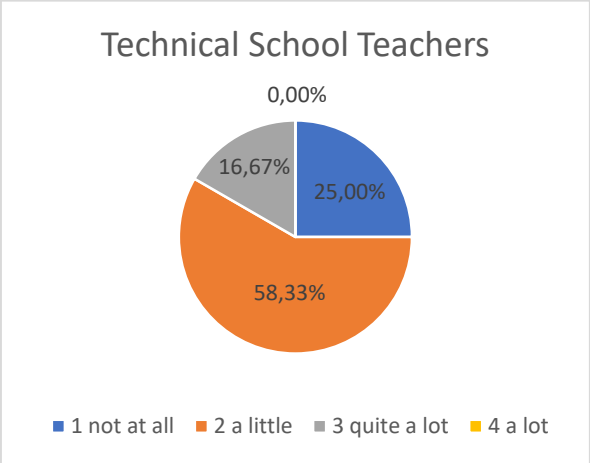
Teachers play an important role in students' wellbeing. This seems to be confirmed by the students' responses which appear from the graph. Indeed, the majority of students experienced either 'quite a lot' (32,56% Art School students and 46,81% Technical School students) or 'a lot' (44,19% Art School students and 40,43% Technical School students) of stress due to a teacher. Though school stress is inevitable due to a plethora of motivations, teachers should try to create a positive classroom atmosphere as much

a possible. Indeed, as it also appeared from the graphs that we have commented up until now, teachers play an important role in the students' life and they should be seen as positive, guiding figures rather than bearers of stress and discomfort.

Teachers' question 27:

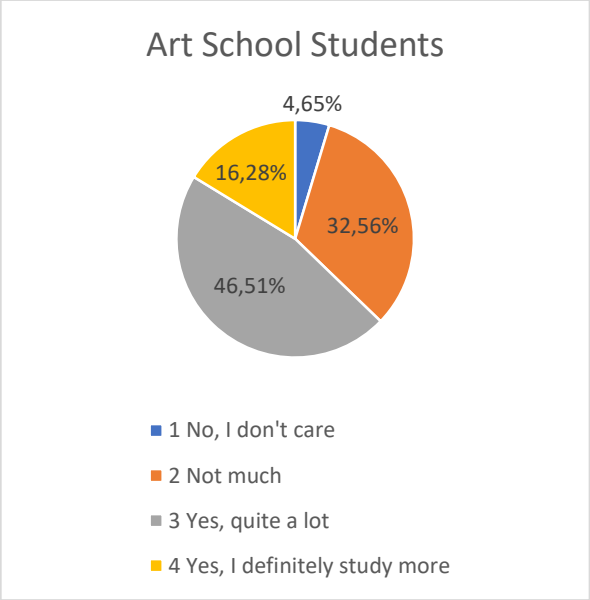
Question 27: In your opinion, can significant learning occur without a significant relationship?

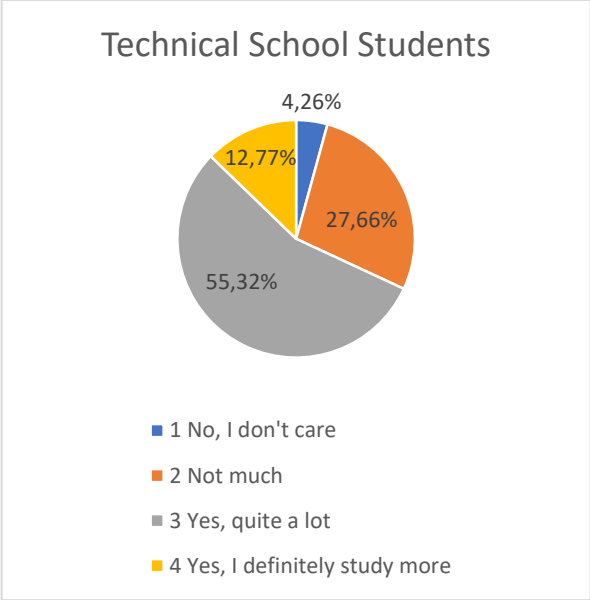




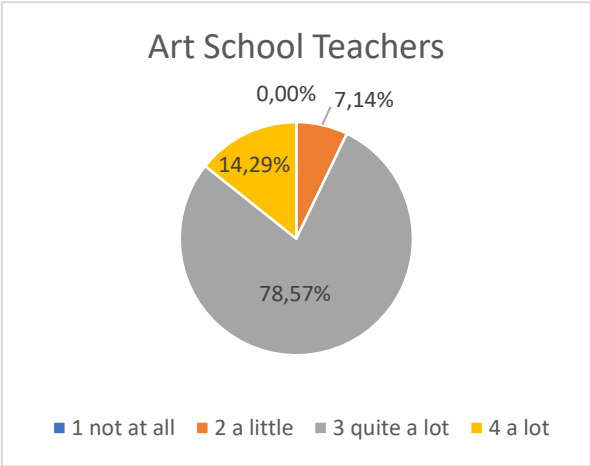
As it appears from the graphs, according to the majority of teachers little chance do we have to create opportunities for significant learning without a significant relationship. Indeed, 42,86% Art School teachers and 58,33% Technical School teachers think so. Moreover, 35,71% Art School teachers and 25% Technical School teachers state that without a significant relationship we cannot hope to have significant learning at all. This shows teachers are mostly quite aware of the role relationships play as far as learning is concerned. Only 21,43% ASt and 16,67% TSt think significant leaning can quite easily occur without a significant relationship. These results seems a little inconsistent when compared to the degree of care they showed towards students' difficulties and, more importantly, to the care students perceived on behalf of their teachers. Though, we do not have enough data to affirm that an actual incoherence is going on, we thought it could be an important reflection to make.

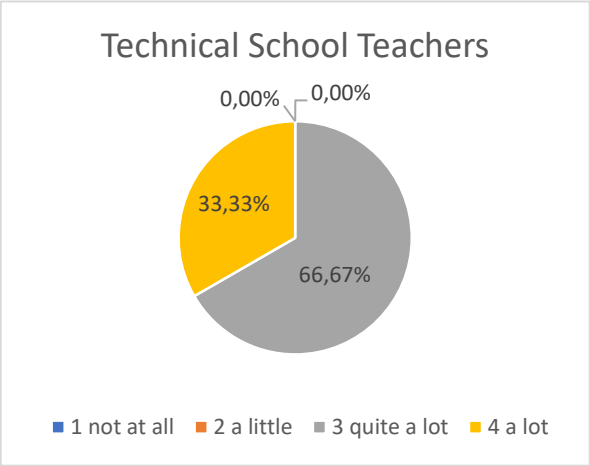
Question 28: Do you feel more motivated in studying if you know that the teacher is demanding?





Question 28: Do you try to be demanding towards your students?

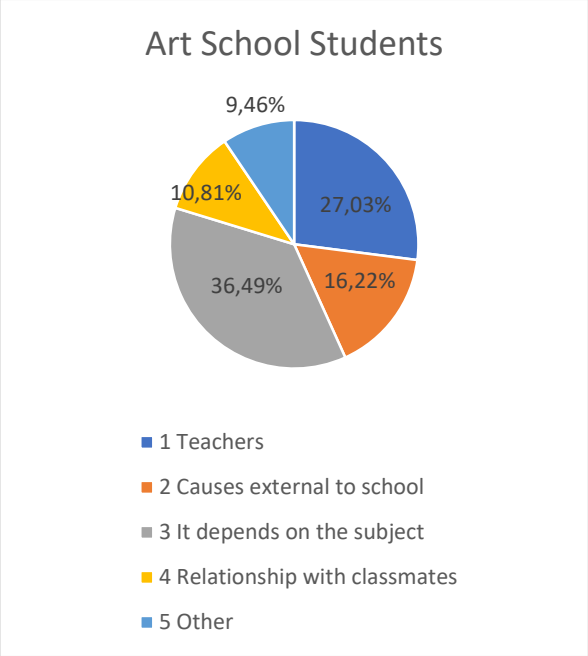


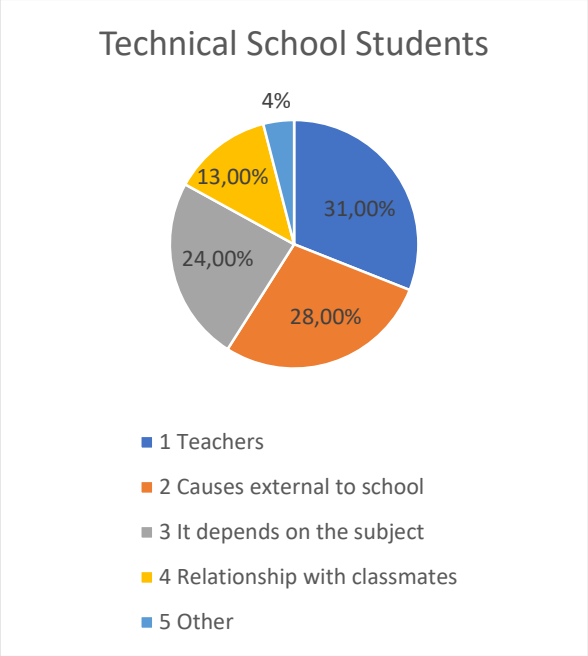


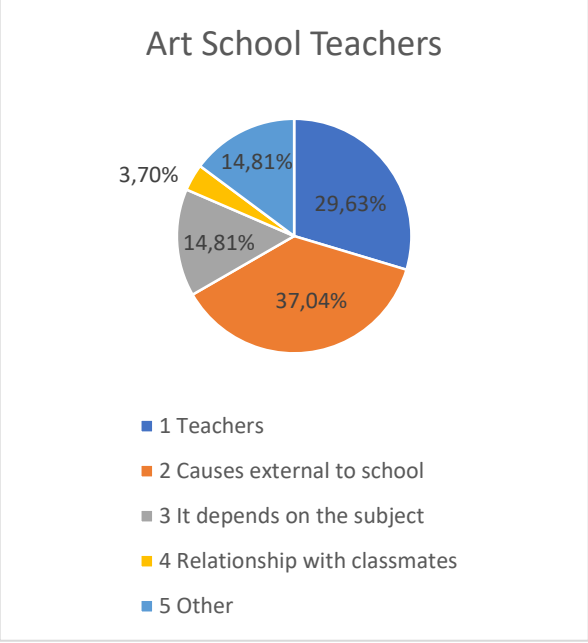
According to both teachers and students' answers, demanding teachers seem, to a certain extent, to influence students' motivation towards studying. Indeed, while a relatively small percentage of students seems to definitely study more if the teacher is demanding (16,28% ASs and 12,77% TSs); at the same time, the majority of students think that demanding teachers quite influence their motivation to studying: 46,51% ASs and 55,32& TSs. It is also true to remember that one cannot create motivation when there is none and that being demanding does not solve all problems. Indeed,

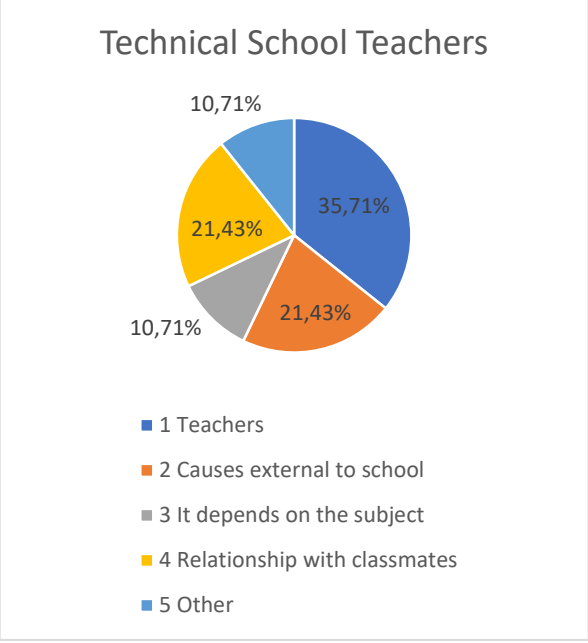
32,56% ASs and 27,66% TSs still claim they are not much influenced by the teacher being demanding. As far as teachers are concerned, the majority of them tries to be demanding (78,57% ASt and 66,67% TSt) whereas a minor percentage tries to be very demanding (14,29% ASt and 33,33% TSt). Indeed, the most suitable solution for the majority of teachers seems to be that of trying to be quite strict but not too strict.

Question 29: What do you think mostly influences your/your students' learning and academic achievement?









As it appears from the graphs, as far as Art School students are concerned, on average their learning and academic achievement seems to be mostly influenced by the subject (27,03%) they need to study; whereas the second most important thing that influences their learning seem to be their teachers (29,63%), showing they play an important role in students' engagement and academic achievement. Indeed, Technical School students' achievement seems to be mostly influenced by teachers (35,71%) and secondly by external causes (21,43%) and relationships with classmates (21,43%). As shown in the graphs, all variables anyway seem to play a role in their learning. As for those students who answered 'Other', they claim their academic achievement to be mostly influenced by their efforts, their parents (which are anyway external to school), their level of stress and anxiety, their wellbeing and their need to have good marks to have a better future. On the other hand, as far as teachers are concerned, they do not appear to be mostly aware of the importance subject play when it comes to academic achievement, but seem to be quite aware of the importance they themselves have and the role they play in students' learning and academic achievement. Indeed, 29,63% Art School teachers and 35,71% Technical School teachers claimed teachers influence students' learning. Furthermore, 37,04% Art School teachers and 21,43% Technical School teachers think students' achievement is mostly related to external causes to school. At the same time, 21,43% Technical School teachers think classmates influence learning as much as external causes to school and teachers from both addresses consider all others as minor causes. As for those who responded 'Other', teachers mainly claim students' learning and academic achievement is mostly influenced by didactic and relational gaps from previous years, motivation to learn and to study, studying methodology and teachers and parents' support.

4.7. Research Limitations

The findings of this study have to be seen in light of some limitations. Indeed, given our research question, which aimed at investigating whether teachers' care and motivation may influence students' engagement and achievement, some limitations concerning our methodology need to be pointed out. Firstly, the main element which could not be controlled through the administration of our questionnaires, was the direct correlation between the single students' answers and those of the teacher. To use other words, we could not be completely sure that, when answering the questions, the totality of students where considering those teachers which were interviewed only because they pertained to their same school address. Indeed, many times Italian schools do not guarantee continuity during the five years of High School; therefore, this means different students could have had different teachers the previous years, who may have influenced their responses, but who were not present in their academical path anymore and did not participate in the study. The same limitation can be directed from teachers to students for the same reasons. Indeed, so as to obviate to this limitation, new teachers, as reported in the 'Participants section', were not included in the study. For future studies, an alternative methodology could be that of addressing a single teacher at a time so that students would exactly know to what teachers they are referring to and, by analysing students' responses, teachers could have a direct feedback of the work they are doing, of what are the elements students like and what other elements are least liked, of which elements of his personality or working method could be improved or even changed in order to make learning more effective and of what is the best direction to take in order to improve students' motivation and their academic achievement.

Secondly, the quantity of our sample, though large enough, cannot be considered large enough to draw universal conclusions about what all teachers and all students think. Economic, cultural and social variables, which were not the focus of our study, could slightly or greatly impact the research findings we obtained. However, it needs to be said that the majority of High Schools in Italy are of the same type of those which were considered in our research study; therefore, results may not be too dissimilar. Ultimately, for future studies, it may be interesting to notice whether results would

differ depending on a greater variety of school addresses with a greater economic, cultural and social variety.

4.8. Conclusions

After having analysed and discussed all the data, both quantitative and qualitative responses seem to confirm that teacher's care and motivation do influence students' engagement and their academic achievement. Indeed, throughout the study, the majority of students claimed that motivation plays an important role for them as they look for passionate teachers during their educational path in order to encourage them to do better and motivating them towards studying the subject when making it interesting and by finding different way in which to explain it. Moreover, great emphasis was put on care. Indeed, the majority of students claimed that receiving support by their teachers both from an academical as well as from an emotional point of view is highly important for their wellbeing and their engagement. Additionally, they claimed that receiving teachers' support is a fundamental element in order to succeed in the school subjects and that they greatly value those teachers who are available for them both during and after school in order to help them improve and greatly appreciate those teachers who are willing to listen to them and understand them. What was interesting to notice is that they seem to affirm that being valued by their teachers influences their motivation towards the subject that teachers teach and that they are more likely to succeed in those subjects in which they also have a good relationship with the teacher. Overall, students think that teachers are among the most important elements that influence their learning and that they wish for having a close and trustful relationship with them. As supported by the answers that they gave, they deeply appreciate those teachers with whom they are able to establish a positive relationship, with whom they are able to have equal confrontations and discussions and who are there for them in order to support them throughout the school path. Furthermore, they put great emphasis on teachers having good expectations of success towards them and appreciate those teachers who notice their commitment and compliment them for their efforts and improvements.

At the same time, teachers seem to be mostly aware of their students' needs and try being positive guides for them. Indeed, the majority of teachers report being highly

motivated in teaching and willing to guide and support their students through their educational and personal path of growth. The majority of teachers is aware of the fundamental role relationships play at school and in the classroom environment and consider it fundamental to be able to build a close and trustful relationship with their students. Indeed, those who reported little satisfaction for their relationship with their students said so because they wished for less superficial and closer relationships with them. Additionally, teachers from both addresses seemed to be aware of what students like and least like in a teacher and are aware of their role and their influence in their students' lives. Related to this, teachers reported the wish of leaving a legacy and a positive trace in their students' lives. Ultimately, the great majority of teachers seemed to be aware of the great importance psychological training plays in learning and therefore either acquired it through their different training and study paths or acquired it on their own which seemed to show their openness and inclination towards updating themselves in order to facilitate their students' academical and personal growth. Overall, we can conclude that the statistical data we obtained through our research seemed to confirm that both for students and teachers themselves, care and motivation play a fundamental role in education and seem to influence students' school engagement and their consequent academic achievement.

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APPENDIX

Students' questionnaires:

Question 24: I don't like a teacher when…

He is unfair. / He has preferences. (36)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is disrespectful. (22)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is not available (in every way). (16)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He screams and gets angry. (14)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He feels superior. (13)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He doesn't care about the students. (10)	X X X X X X X X X X
He doesn't create a positive classroom atmosphere. / Doesn't build a good relationships with the class/student. (10)	X X X X X X X X X X
He is not clear when he teaches. (10)	X X X X X X X X X X
He thinks he's always right. / He doesn't admit he was wrong. / He's not open to confrontations. (9)	X X X X X X X X X
He doesn't do his job. (9)	X X X X X X X X X
He devalues / humiliates me (+in front of the class). (9)	X X X X X X X X X
He doesn't listen. (8)	X X X X X X X X
He's not passionate in what he does. (8)	X X X X X X X X
He doesn't motivate marks. (6)	X X X X X X
He judges. (6)	X X X X X X
He loses time. (6)	X X X X X X
He is too strict. (5)	X X X X X
No freedom of expression. (4)	X X X X
He gives too heavy lessons. (4)	X X X X
He is boring. (4)	X X X X
He explains in a hurry. (4)	X X X X
He is not organised. (4)	X X X X
He is incoherent. (3)	X X X
He is not in control of the class. (3)	X X X
He is not patient. (3)	X X X
He blames everyone instead of the real guilty ones. (3)	X X X

He looks at the marks and not at the student. (3)	X X X
He is arrogant. (3)	X X X
He is superficial.	X X
He talks to himself. (1)	X
He doesn't take his responsibilities. (1)	X
He has no trust in me. (1)	X
He doesn't take me seriously. (1)	X
He doesn't understand me. (1)	X
He is touchy. (1)	X
He is tardy. (1)	X
He doesn't value individual differences. (1)	X
He makes empty promises. (1)	X

Question 25: I like a teacher when…

He makes his subject interesting. (22)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is patient. (18)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is fair. (18)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is available (in all ways) + finds common grounds. (17)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is empathetic/understands the student. (16).	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is clear when he explains. / He explains well. (16)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is passionate in what he does. (15)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He creates a positive teacher-student/classroom relationship. / He is not too detached. (14)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He helps me when I am struggling. (13)	X X X X X X X X X X X X X
He engages me. / He motivates me to do more. (12)	X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is nice/fun/friendly. (12)	X X X X X X X X X X X X
He is open to confrontations. / Allows for freedom of expression. (10)	X X X X X X X X X X
When he listens to the student. (9)	X X X X X X X X X
He cares about me. (8)	X X X X X X X X
He has trust in me. (6)	X X X X X X
He is organised. (6)	X X X X X X

He cares about student's success. (5)	X X X X X
He values your abilities. (4)	X X X X
He is willing to come to school trips. (4)	X X X X
He fosters serenity. (3)	X X X
When he supports me. (3)	X X X
He is good in his subject. (3)	X X X
He doesn't judge. (3)	X X X
He accounts for commitment. (2)	X X
He gives study materials. (1)	X
He uses interactive tools. (1)	X
He discusses objectively. (1)	X
He explains in an easy and intuitive way. (1)	X
He doesn't scream. (1)	X
He admits he was wrong. (1)	X
He imposes fair rules for the common good. (1)	X
He is a person you can count on if you need a word of advice. (1)	X
He doesn't give 'easy marks'. (1)	X

Teachers' questionnaire:

Question 24: Students like a teacher when…

He explains his subject clearly. (8)	X X X X X X X X
He creates engagement/ motivation. (7)	X X X X X X X
He is fair. (6)	X X X X X X
He is passionate in what he does. (6)	X X X X X X
He listens. (5)	X X X X X
He is available. (5)	X X X X X
He is authoritative. (5)	X X X X X
He is respectful. (5)	X X X X X
He is empathetic. (4)	X X X X
He is good in his subject. (4)	X X X X
He is coherent. (3)	X X X
He creates a good teacher-student relationship. (3)	X X X
He motivates marks/choices. (2)	X X
He has trust in his students. (2)	X X
He allows for freedom of speech. (1)	X

He is not too full of himself. (1)	X
He is committed. (1)	X
He is responsible. (1)	X
He helps his students. (1)	X
He treats his students as mature people. (1)	X
He gives easy marks to everyone. (1)	X
He is laissez-faire. (1)	X
He gives few homework. (1)	X

Question 25: Students don't like a teacher when…

He is not clear when he explains. (8)	X X X X X X X X
He doesn't care/ doesn't create a good teacher-student relationship. (7)	X X X X X X X
He has preferences/ is unfair. (6)	X X X X X X
He is disrespectful. (6)	X X X X X X
He is authoritarian. (5)	X X X X X
He consider his students marks and not people. (5)	X X X X X
He is incoherent. (4)	X X X X
He doesn't listen. (4)	X X X X
He doesn't motivate marks/ behaviours. (3)	X X X
He is not open to dialogue/ confrontations. (3)	X X X
He is unfair. (3)	X X X
He is demotivated. (3)	X X X
He is grumpy. (3)	X X X
He doesn't do his job. (3)	X X X
He is boring. (3)	X X X
He gives low marks. (3)	X X X
He is high-handed. (1)	X
He doesn't create motivation. (1)	X
He gives homework. (1)	X
He is laissez-faire. (1)	X
He continues teaching after the bell rings. (1)	X
He gives bad notes. (1)	X
He is presumptuous. (1)	X
He gives 'easy marks' to everyone. (1)	X
He screams. (1)	X