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Relational Assessment between Teacher's Implicit Theories, Rating Judgments and Implied Expectations of Student Performance Assessment

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ABSTRACT: In the context of the complementary roles (teacher-student), the teacher's implicit theories interfere and form the educational relationship, direct the categorization, the resulting expectations and the behaviors of the interacting persons, thus obstructing or facilitating the learning process. The aim of the present study is to outline aspects of the teachers' implicit theories and discuss whether they can be altered, emphasizing on the emergence of the imaginary element relying on student assessment. In order to achieve the aim above, a meta-analysis of a series of four researches is carried out examining the ways that the implicit theories of teachers are linked to the assessment judgments and the consequent expectations for student assessment.

KEYWORDS: assessment, meta-analysis, student appearance and performance, teachers' implicit theories

I.   INTRODUCTION

Implied theories are defined as the systems of beliefs according to which a person organizes their experiences, judges themselves or classifies other people. They refer to the process of social construction and comprise the learning outcome of each culture. People construct reality in relation to the context in which they are integrated (Lawrence & Oliver, 2001: 526). Any human action or thought is motivated by a purpose and takes its meaning in relation to the wider context. According to Tsakiris (2018), the attitudes of the individual, as derived from their perceptions, expectations, choices and actions, are derivatives of the social habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), that is, the habits that are incorporated by the individual unconsciously. These affected by the socioeconomic and educational environment in which the person is born and lives (p. 156). Theories of Personality attempt to theorize aspects of implicit theories by constructing concepts such as "self", "personality", "attitude" to interpret behavior (Potamianos et al., 2002: 33; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993: 2).

The implicit theories are used to explain and define ways of individual action and thought. They predict behavior and are difficult to modify. Bruner (1997: 49) argues that the basic perceptions each one has created for life and for themselves are neither true nor false. All that can be claimed is that they bear some meaning to us, so we are attached to them, often overcoming logic. Our assumptions regarding others and us endure due to our ability to obtain assertions. When we have explained a phenomenon, we tend to support it and resist the attempts to change our minds. In the search for the meaning of behavior, our bias, because of our beliefs, lead us to observe what we expect and not to consider events that do not confirm our beliefs. Often, in our attempt to interpret a behavior, we attribute it to the personality of the person involved (Leyens, 1996: 141; Lawrence & Oliver, 2001: 604).

In the context of the interdependence of the complementary roles of teacher-student, unreliable theories interfere and shape the educational relationship (Katerelos, 1999: 38), direct the categorization, implied expectations and behaviors of the interacting persons (Postic, 1998: 103), obstructing or facilitating the learning process (Beard & Wilson, 2006: 241). The teacher, as well as the student, express explicit or implicit expectations regarding one another, sometimes unfavorable and sometimes positive, with the corresponding consequences. During the interactions between teacher and students, a mechanism for confirming the initial crisis and repeating expectations is subconsciously generated. From this mechanism originates the differentiated attitude of the teacher towards their students, the preferred attitudes and school performance, depending on their perception of each of them. Initially, students are categorized according to their physical traits, their gender, linguistic competence, origin, profession of their parents, their level of education, past performance of older siblings at school, etc. and all these characteristics determine the students' expected school performance from the part of the teacher.

The "label" is reinforced by the categorization derived from their school performance, according to the expectations of the educational role by classifying students as "good", "moderate" and "low", as shown at Gilly's research (1994). In the Nilson and Nias experimental study (e.g. Merle, 1998: 20), a series of progress reports were given to a group of examiners, in which photographs were attached, depicting more or less appealing student faces. The team of examiners, based on these bulletins and the stapled photographs, was asked to make some school prognosis. The resulting conclusions highlighted that the progress report that lead to favorable prognosis, thus school success, correlated to pleasant and attractive people, whereas the same school progress reports when associated with less attractive photos of people, had on average less favorable school prognosis. Initial classifications have intervened to vary the differences between students who achieve good or bad performance or to classify those who are ranked in the middle ranks. Therefore, it is assumed that in the representations of the assessors there were some models of success or failure that influenced their judgment and prognosis in terms of student performance, in this case, physical attraction.

Regarding school assessment, the questions raised and investigated by scholars of sociology revealed that the pupil's grading judgment is not formed in abstract terms, that is, it is not a sterile judgment of the value of pupils' knowledge and skills. It is referred to a social judgment that affects mental shapes, categories, values and social norms that are (re)produced in school (Tsakiris, 2018: 159). The teacher's expectations are passed on to the student who is not always limited to altering his reactions to respond positively or negatively to the imposed expectations. It also happens to be convinced that he is the expected person to be judged (Leyens, 1996: 281; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Social Psychologists have shown that the first impression affects the succeeding interaction (Dailey, 1952; Newcomb, 1947; Clifford & Walster, 1973) and that expectations for each other significantly affect the behavior of the other (Zajonc & Brickman, 1969; Brock & Edelman, 1965; Arsonson & Carlsmith, 1962). School psychologists have also shown that there is a relationship between the teacher's attitude toward pupils and student performance (Kranz, 1970; Palardy, 1969; Rist, 1970).

Within the school context, the action of critical function through examination and rating system is established through a socially ratified regulatory framework, but also by a symbolic system. It also holds a dominant position in education as a project and as an evolutionary process. The starting point of the search for the teachers' implicit theories of the professional educators' performance is both the diverse behavior of each teacher at school as well as the dissimilar treatment of pupils in the classroom concerning their personal characteristics and the evaluation of their performance. The purpose of the study was triggered by the observation of the interpersonal relations that are developed based on the categorization made by the teachers and the relationship between them and the assessment of the student.

II.   METHOD

2.1. Aim of the study

The present study attempts to outline aspects of the teachers' implicit theories and control whether these theories can be changed, emphasizing on the emergence of the imaginary element in which student assessment is based on. Through school assessment teachers express and display their social imaginary meanings such as hierarchy, distinction and choice (Tsakiris, 1994; Tsakiris, 2007). Focus and analysis of the imaginary element are important for the study of social institutions. Therefore, through and due to this imaginary category, we can consider the existence and functioning of the institutions, the resulting social phenomena and situations as an eternal source of production and drawing of meanings that determine the relationship of the social subject with the institution in which it occurs. The existence of these social imaginary meanings of school assessment are essential and they exist because they are based on psychic processes of the teacher as a subject (Tsakiris, 2018).

2.2. Methodology

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal, a meta-analysis of a series of four researches will be carried out concerning the teachers' implicit theories. The data are used to critically review their findings and emphasize the role of the imaginary element in student assessment. The results will stem by research with references to the methodology and its main findings. Furthermore, the results are followed by commentary.

The first two studies to be analyzed are related to the evaluation of teacher's implicit theories concerning the students and whether these can be altered. In the first study, two groups of teachers participated in an experimental field research in the Cyclades complex of islands during the school year 2007-2008. Throughout the school year, one group participated in a communication development intervention program whereas the other group did not, in order to investigate whether the communication development and the possible modification of the teacher's implicit theories is linked to a change in the student's assessment.

The two other studies to be analyzed relate to variables that initially influence the formation of teachers' attitudes towards their students through the most common sources of information from which the teacher can shape his/her attitude; the appearance and the performance of the student. These studies were conducted in the years 2012-2014 in the 1st Primary Education Region of Boeotia. The first, aimed to detect the

relationship of first impression and performance and the second to the relationship of late impression and performance.

III. RESULTS

3.1. First and second study

In the first survey that was evaluated followed the methodology of the experimental field research, with an experimental group of 23 primary and secondary education teachers and a control group of 23 primary and secondary education teachers. The main research questions of this study were the exploration of the implicit theories held by teachers and the effect that a long-term communication development intervention may have on these beliefs and the impact of any change in the way their students are graded. The experimental group of teachers attended 4-month experiential communication sessions, while no interventions were conducted for the second group. The Communication Development Seminars focused on the developing of certain areas, namely: a) self-knowledge, b) effective communication, c) problem-solving skills, and d) the implicit theories of teachers in practice to their professional role. For the two groups of teachers, a 136-item questionnaire was required to be evaluated in the above areas at the beginning and at the end of the intervention in order to investigate possible differences between the initial and the final completion. In addition, grade data of all three school trimesters were gathered for the 1.235 students of the participant teachers (575 for the experimental group and 660 for the control group) in order to ascertain the potential impact of the intervention on the way teachers grade their pupils (Moon, 2004: 51).

Figure 1. Average performance for primary and secondary school students per school trimester and group
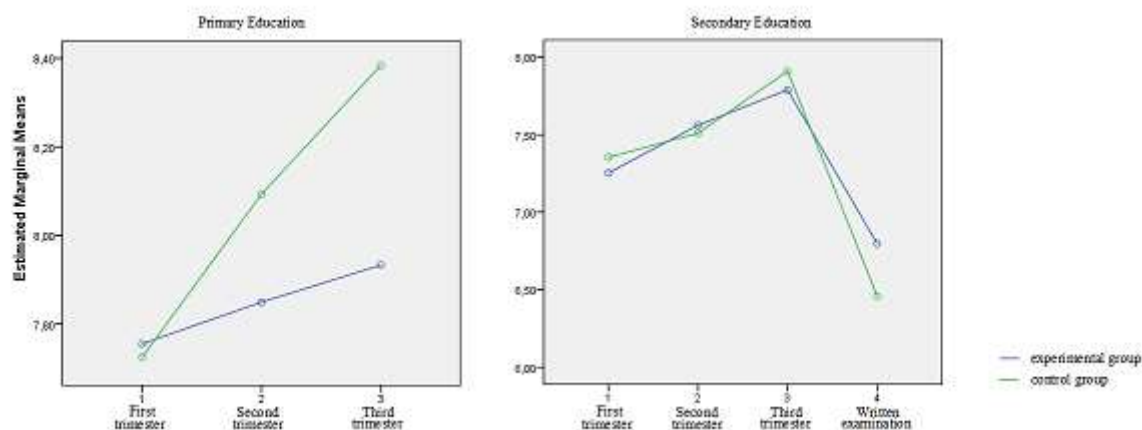
From the quantitative analysis that followed, the authors conclude that the teachers of the experimental group improved their non-verbal communication, counseling, conflict management and categorization based on the student's perceptual characteristics at good, medium and low level. While the teachers, according to their questionnaire statements, accepted that they are influenced by the classifications they make, therefore, adjusting their behavior accordingly, they do not consent that these behaviors are "translated" into expectations from the students and that they "motivate" students to behave differently through non-verbal communication. The statistical analysis made to identify the correlation between the grades and teachers' attitudes unveiled that the Secondary Education Teachers of the experimental group were not affected in the way they graded their students. Primary Education teachers rated significantly higher grades than Secondary Education Teachers. Primary Education teachers of the experimental team graded their students more strictly in the third school trimester. Figure 1 shows the course from the first trimester (before the intervention) to the third trimester (after intervention) of the average performance of the pupils by level of education for the experimental group (blue line) in comparison to the control group (green line).

The above findings made the researchers more skeptical. For a deeper elaboration of the score, there were searched the average performance rates of the first trimester by student level (low, medium, high) and teachers' group per education grade and two-factor variance analysis, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Average performance of Primary and Secondary Education students in the first school trimester per teachers' group
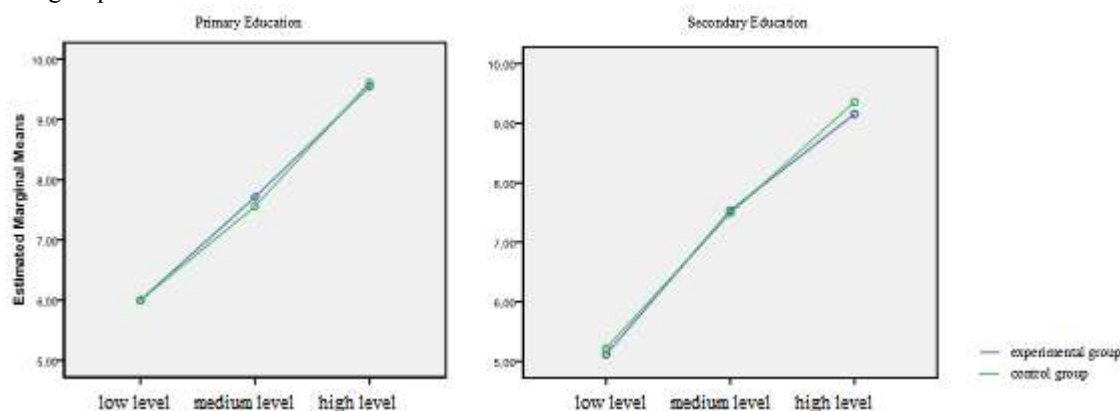

The performance of students for the first trimester, as rated by the teachers, who enrolled the control group does not differ from the grades of the students who were taught and rated by the teachers of the experimental group. In addition, the interaction between the variables of student-level and teachers' group was not found to be statistically significant at either of the two levels of education. These findings suggest the existence of an initial equivalence of the experimental and the control group. Subsequently, the average performance rates of the third school trimester were analyzed by student level and teachers' group per education grade and a two-factor variance analysis was also performed, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3. Average performance of Primary and Secondary Education students in the third school trimester per teachers' group
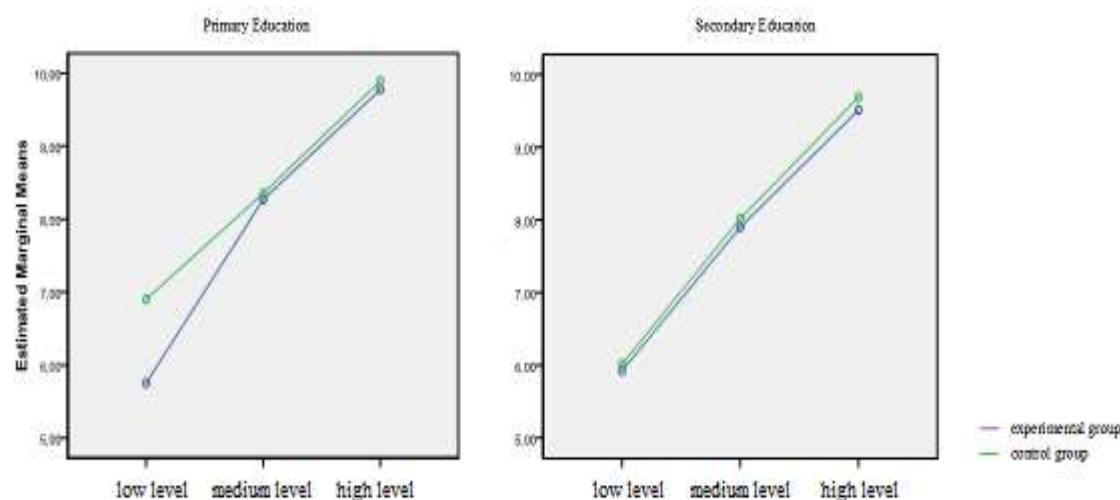
The two variation analyses presented above, demonstrate that the impact of the experiment is significantly important solely for the primary school teachers. Therefore, the difference observed at the beginning (Fig. 1) is due to the scores of low-level students. Then, the average performance levels of regarding the third trimester per Education level were identified and a two-factor analysis was performed (Fig. 4).

The difference between the experimental groups is statistically significant. The control group had a significantly higher value after the intervention at each level of education. Also, what is noteworthy is the difference between education levels. Teachers of Primary Education rated significantly higher grades than the Secondary Education teachers. No significant interaction was found between the experimental groups and education levels.

Figure 4. Third trimester average performance of students per education level
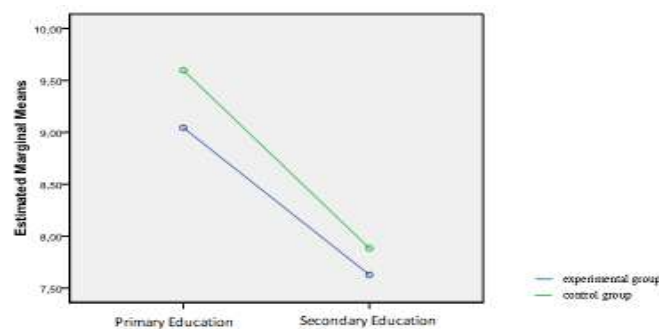
The evaluation of the above results led the researchers to carry out a second study, as a continuation of the first presented above, in order to further explore their results. Given the strict design of the study they decided to conduct a qualitative research analyzing interviews with 18 Primary Education teachers (7 non-further-qualified teachers, 7 high further-qualified teachers/school counselors and 4 unionists) who commented on the results of the first survey. In their interviews, teachers agreed that they needed pedagogical and communication seminars. They considered the way and the content of the intervention of the first experiment to be complete and necessary for the teachers. However, they are divided on the use of the rate as a criterion for intervention. Half of them claimed that improving interpersonal relationships would result in improved behavior and performance, and the other half asserted that the benefit of the seminar could not be obvious in teachers' rating. They showed cognitive discrepancy in listening to the results and tried to rationalize their reaction, where extreme positions were heard to decipher the information they had heard. They acknowledged that Primary Education teachers categorize and adapt their behavior on the basis of the pupil's characteristics. On the contrary, they refused that they categorize based on their professional role. They seem to believe that Secondary Education teachers categorize students to good, moderate and low-level students because of their ignorance of their pedagogical role, inadequate training and impersonal relationships (because they teach each teaching time in a different class, so they do not have sufficient time to develop effective relationships with their pupils). Furthermore, the interviews showed that there is a lack of clarity as to the content of the role of primary school teachers, which confuses them in the performance of their duties. They do not have an established view whether a meritocratic teacher is eventually a good or a bad professional. In addition, the role of the teacher (and his/her behavior) seem to have two poles, according to their answers. Some support the parenting role of the teacher and others claim it to be more of an evaluator. The role of the Secondary Education teacher is, according to them, rather clear; he/she rates the student's knowledge strictly and is, essentially, an evaluator. In primary school, there is an ignorance of how the rate is handled, so others believe it should be abolished, others are objective in the rating on the basis of strict criteria, and others suggest a descriptive assessment system of pupils' achievements and abilities.

The ambiguity of political discourse and educational policies is passed on to educators who are called upon to act within the school institution in a variety of roles, including the role of the assessor. This situation causes educators "value-based schizophrenia" (Ball, 2006) which disrupts the coherence of the assessment, and more so, their recognition as a "social act" (Tsakiris, 2015: 206). What is more, the attempted rationalization as conveyed by the educational contributors is essentially a defense mechanism, which does not allow the subjects to reflect either on the content of the data through which they perform the critical function nor on the effects that the students have on their sanction's operation (Tsakiris, 2018).

3.3. Third and fourth study

The third research was based on the assumption that students' appearance affects the teacher's judgment. The better looking a student is, the more favorable will be his teacher. This research was conducted on a sample of 107 subjects, 18 of which were men educators and 89 were women teachers of primary education.

Four photos of school pupils were used as a tool for this research. The photos were taken from the Pupils' Album, made by the parents' association for the end of the school year and depicted four girl-students. The photos were taken from the commemorative album because they had the same background and distance from the camera as well as a slight smiley and were chosen by 6 teachers based on pupils' beauty out of a total of 10 photos with the characterization "Very Beautiful", "Beautiful", "Pretty Beautiful", "Not Beautiful". Instead of a name, the students had numbers that corresponded to their actual performance as follows: 1 (Very good student), 2 (Good student), 3 (less good), 4 (Not good). From a beauty point of view, the judges/adults had indicated the student with number 3 as Very Beautiful, 1 as Beautiful, 2 as Pretty Beautiful and 4 Not Beautiful.

Photo 1. The four photos that were used as a research tool

The researchers, after showing the 4 photographs to the teachers, they said to them the same story: "The students took the same test that was rated by their teacher as follows: A excellent, B good, C less good and D bad". Then they were asked "which student do you think wrote the test A, B, C and D?" without giving them any further information.

After the answers were coded with 1 = excellent to 4 = bad and A = the most beautiful as D = the ugly, the statistical analysis followed that yielded the following data.

Teachers generally chose the Very Beautiful pupil to have written the Excellent Writing, the Beautiful to have taken the good grade, the Pretty Beautiful to have written the Less Good and the Not Beautiful to have written the Not Good writing. There is noted a difference in men's and women's preferences. Women had the above preferences, while men matched the Beautiful pupil with the excellent writing and the Very Beautiful with the Good writing. This may indicate that men have a different perception of beauty, compared to women.

Figure 5. Diagram of results from the analysis of the answers as a whole and by gender of teacher
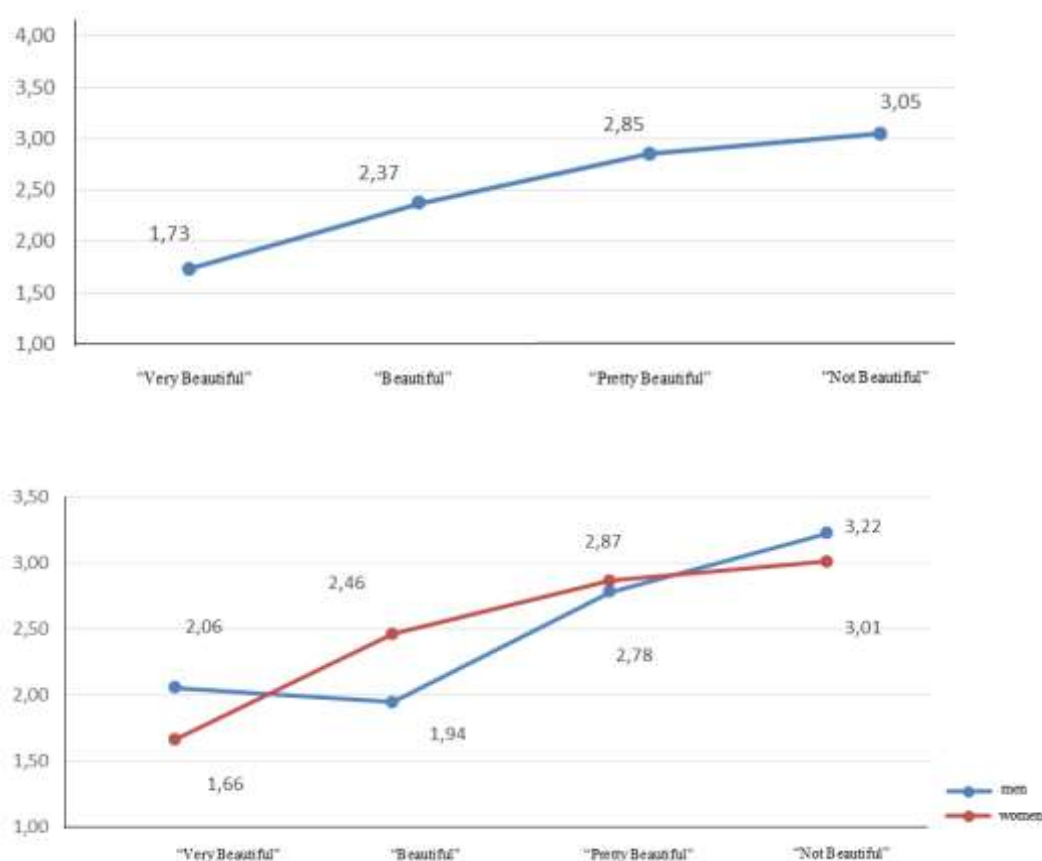
The fourth study investigated the relationship between late impression and performance and was carried out with a sample of 32 fifth and sixth grade teachers (11 men and 21 women). The questionnaire that was used concerned the appearance of the best and weakest student in the class. In other words, the teachers

were asked to choose whether the best student and the weakest one, in terms of rating, was very beautiful, beautiful, pretty beautiful, ugly. The participants' responses were as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1. Table of frequencies and relevant frequencies of teachers' responses

	Very Beautiful		Beautiful		Pretty Beautiful		Ugly	
	N	N%	N	N%	N	N%	N	N%
Good student	6	18,75	18	56,25	8	25	0	0
Weak student	1	3,13	11	34,38	16	50,00	4	12,50

According to the results, the teachers indicated the beautiful students as good students and the weak students as ugly (χ^2=11,93, df=3, $p<0,01$).

IV.   DISCUSSION

As emerged from the first two studies, the ambiguity of teachers' role, social identity, and the implicit theories of teachers in the practice of their professional role, led them to confusion, pressure, and psychological responsiveness. The more important the subjective social identity is the stake of the proposed or threatened behavior, the more intense will be the socio-psychological responsiveness generated and the tendency to recover the lost freedom. The greater the confidence of subjects in their ability to respond to the demands of their role, the greater will be the psychological reactivity they feel by the restriction of their freedom and, of course, the greater will be their refusal to succumb to the pressures (Papastamou, 2006: 379). Research has shown that teachers have a self-esteem in defense when they feel confronted with issues such as their pedagogical and professional competence (Zachos, 2007). Research on teachers' attitudes in relation to their social role (Papas, 2004: 286) reveals that "teachers see teachers with pedagogical and not scientific criteria at 88.9% or 96.8%". Teachers believe that their role is different, and while they were told that they are "biased," they "proved" that others were to blame.

The rating is the quantitative expression of the student's learning outcomes and is subjective (Trillian, 2004). But removing rating would mean eliminating the categorization of students into "good", "poor" and "bad"? It is utopian to believe this, because the Greek examination system is based on categorization and the element of competitiveness is predominantly in the Greek education system. Also applies the motivation to confirm the implicit theories, that the knowledge of conclusions contrary to the original ideas does not lead to more moderation (Postic, 1998: 227).

The results of the last two surveys confirm our case. The appearance of students has a great impact on the teacher's judgment. The research data revealed that the teacher's rating is not related to the performance on the test, but it is related to certain school stereotypes of the pupil's schooling ability.

According to Tsakiris (2018), the clarification of the above elements does not constitute a "judgment" of educational practices, much less of the teachers themselves. It does not seek for moralistic advocacy and suggestions advocating for a figure of an educator who is free from the social imaginary meanings of their examination and grading, sterilized by unconscious desires, feelings and anxieties that make up their personal imagination. The proposed clarification attempts to highlight some milestones in the way the teacher thinks about interpreting his assessment practice. It focuses on the way educators as psychic entities see themselves through the mirror of evaluating their students and how they rationalize their psychic economy by engaging them in a course of school assessment (p. 21-22).

Our conclusions are in no way intended to attribute responsibility to the teacher, but, rather, to trigger reflection on and emphasize the dynamic role of the teacher in the educational process. Maintaining high expectations for all students is a motivating factor. However, the prerequisite of all these is the teacher's ability to detect and to doubt the classification that spontaneously and necessarily determines their thinking. Their categorization and expectations, which are part of their implicit theories, resist and change very slowly, and this is the reason we make it known. Besides, the intake of social action, as a social measure and the emergence of the imaginary element that it contains, is the foundation stone of a process of clarifying the social action and the new challenges that the subject is to be confronted with in the current socio-historical context (Tsakiris, 2018: 180). The implicit theories on professional performance may change, but a different educational policy is required.

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