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Interference between the teachers' private life and school work

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

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Tartalomjegyzék

1. THE PURPOSE AND THE BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

During the school years students gain experiences that have lifelong effects. Besides teaching and facilitating cognitive processes the explicit task of education is to foster the process of gaining practical, behavioural and social knowledge in order to help students become successful individually and useful members of society. The school provides adequate conditions for successful self-development and also develops communities. This forms the character of the student shapes the potentials in adult life and among others orients career choices. The actual effect of the school years considering the above aspect can be detected only after a long time. In the process of developing a socially and mentally capable adults with well-balanced personality the impact of the teacher and the peers is determinative (Telkes, 2002, Evers et al., 2004, N. Kollár, Szabó, 2004).

Present research puts the focus on the most influential subjective factor of the school environment: the teacher. The teacher is involved in the teaching process with his whole personality leads by his own human example. In the highly hierarchical classroom environment the interpersonal relations, the sentiment and the evaluation of the teacher is of high importance for the students might it be positive or negative. It has long-term consequences on motivation and in the process of the cognitive and social development of the students. The primary aim of this research to examine the impact of the teacher's current motivational level and mood, formed by private life events, on the teaching work and the interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the students. Although some researchers claim that personal crisis, change of job or moving may temporarily affect the teachers' work (Steffy, Wolfe, 2002) the impact of the teachers' personal life events and current motivation on the teaching process is only peripheral in current scholar research.

In professions that are based on interpersonal relationships the actual emotional state and persistent mood of the participants have an effect on the activity performed, so the teachers' current emotional state or mood influence teachers' behaviour and classroom interaction (Zajonc, 1991; Smith and Mackie, 2001, In N. Kollár, Szabó, 2004). This influence can be positive or negative and may affect any segment of the educational process from disciplining to evaluation. The permanently negative emotional state of the teacher has an impact on the student's development as school provides the environment for growing up, developing cognitive skills and preparing the students for adulthood and becoming a contributing member of society (Fodor, 2001). The moral, emotional and cultural characteristics are present in all teaching activities and affect the learners cognitive, moral, social, emotional advancement. (Peabody, Goldberg, 1989, Digman, Takemoto-Choek, 1981, McCrae, Costa, 1989, Walker, 2013, Suplicz and Fűzi, Paksi, Veroszta, Schmidt, Magi, Red, Endrődi-Kovács, Felvinczi, 2005a,).

In accordance with the above facts it can be stated that the teacher's personality and psychological attributes are indispensable elements of the educational process. It is highly expected that those people choose the teaching profession who have the required qualities. Studies outline good teachers as dedicated people with a sense of humour who respect their students, admit their mistakes and also forgive the mistakes made by others (Peabody, Goldberg, 1989, Digman, Takemoto-Choek 1981, McCrae, Costa, 1989, Falus, 2011, Kotschy, 2011, Antalné et al. , 2013, Suplicz and Fűzi, 2015 Nikitscher, 2016 and others). The desirable qualities of the listed criteria presuppose teacher attributes at the two opposing ends of the same characteristic feature (e.g.: precise and generous) (Suplicz, 2013). It is a complex task to meet these expectations, besides the actual behaviour patterns, the specific attitude towards others and the cognitive and emotional attributes are dynamic phenomenon changing through lifetime (Allport, 1955).

A good teacher's construct is difficult to define. It can be described with cognitive and non-cognitive attributes, which include various intelligence idiosyncrasies. In addition to the high level of professional expertise, methodological and pedagogical knowledge, it is important to have the personality that suits the profession (Farber, 1991). In addition to the appropriate personality traits, the emotional intelligence of the teachers', which basically determines the quality of the intra- and interpersonal relationships, stress management, the level of empathy, motivating ability and proactive attitude, is also a key element. The teacher's work is a lonely occupation, with many uncertainty factors and high expectations, so the work environment also largely transforms the teachers' mood and mental health conditions (Farber, 1991, Telkes, 2002).

The miscellaneous teacher profession is essentially important for the society and requires whole dedication. Nevertheless it is not a popular field, as teachers do not enjoy high social esteem and excellent remuneration. Researchers found that the quality of the education is formed by the motivating factors of profession choice and the job retention likelihood of the outstanding teachers'. Although teachers' personality and aptitude are popular research topics, pedagogical, educational, methodological issues are considered more important.

2. THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The focal point of present dissertation is mapping the different external and internal effects that form the professional self, resulting in changed working style, attitude and motivation considering both pedagogical and psychological characteristics. Teachers have to meet diverse social and professional expectations (Falus, 2006b). The vocational expectations are described in terms of pedagogical competence descriptors, statutory regulations, job descriptions, and job satisfaction is also influenced by the work environment. As far as teachers are concerned, pedagogical work-related internal expectations (self-satisfaction, attitudes and internal motivating factors) usually result in teachers' satisfaction with their own work, while the source of discontent usually comes from external factors such as school management, work load and social status (Telkes, 2002).

Teachers must meet the general social and specific professional requirements of the various groups and individuals in the educational procedure. In addition people believe they are able to judge the teachers' practice based on the experience gained during the years spent in school. Scientists claim that expressing general opinion on teachers' behavioural patterns built upon one's own school experiences (15000 lessons, *Berliner*, 2005) creates distorted picture (Biddle, Good and Goodson, 1997). The number of teachers one meets during their school years do not represent the varied community of the teachers' worldwide. In addition, teachers are not just professional personalities, they have their out-of-school private life with problems and individual coping strategies. In today's world teachers have to deal with many negative stereotypes and it would be desirable to be changed (Biddle, Good, and Goodson, 1997).

The following defining factors are represented in present dissertation:

• career choice, job retention
• good teacher attributes
• the dangers of the profession
• work – private life interference

The research problem is centred on the constant or variable characteristics of the interpersonal relationships of teachers' and aims to find answers for the following research questions:

Q1. What emotional and psychological characteristics can define stress factors at the workplace?

Q2. What emotional and psychological characteristics can define private life stress factors?

Q3. To what extent does the persistent positive / negative emotional state or current bad / good mood determine the affective style and private life attributes of the individual?

Q4. To what extent does the persistent positive / negative emotional state or current bad / good mood determine the affective and work style attributes of the individual?

Q5. To what extent are the teachers aware of the effect of their altered affective and work style on the interpersonal educational process?

Q6. How successfully can teachers take advantage of the positive effects and eliminate the negative consequences?

3. METHOD OF RESEARCH

After defining the research problem, I studied the international and Hungarian literature regarding the investigated phenomenon. To meet the requirements of triangulation I examined the research problem with different methods on heterogeneous population at different times (Sántha 2007) to gain a thorough understanding of the issue and provide validity. I developed my own research strategy in which I aimed to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data. In the course of the research data were collected by questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data analysing tool was content analysis supported by the MAXQDA12 software.

The methodological framework of the research was based on the grounded theory research tool developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Background knowledge was collected and revised and research started by defining and during the process modifying the research questions (Fischer, Otnes, 2006, Strauss, Corbin, 1998, In Mitev, 2012). The literature research provided a solid base for theory development during the data processing period (Glaser, Strauss, 1967, Suddaby, 2006 , Kucsera, 2008, Sántha, 2009, Mitev, 2012). After this, based on the answers found for the research questions the theses of the research could be defined.

4. THE THESES OF THE DISSERTATION

Analysing the qualitative text data gained from questionnaires and interviews discovered that all respondents experienced hard times both at home and at the workplace. Most of the respondents believe it is not right to let your current mood or the effects of the experienced hard times show while teaching so they are certain that in the classroom they have never displayed any negative emotions originating from home or work stress. In the meantime answers to control questions revealed that the respondents are aware of the fact that hardships in life or at the workplace affect their work and also influence students' cognitive, psychological and social improvement. Based on the above facts in the following I will summarize the answers for the research questions.

Q1. *What emotional and psychological characteristics can define stress factors at the workplace?*

The research involved two life spheres. It examined the interference between the respondents' work environment and their private life circumstances.

In the workplace, teachers have to face multiple difficulties. In most cases negative feelings and failure originate from too much workload, the overregulated school environment, excessive paper work, incompetent school management and lack of reward and these appear to have negative effect on the teaching work.

Nearly the whole of the examined sample experienced long term difficulties related to working, conditions which resulted in permanent negative emotional state and changed the person's affective style and caused affective disorders. These affected the respondents' performance and work style and deteriorated their professional self-esteem. The research also revealed that less negative stress is desired and job satisfaction is reached by professional development and excellent work performance. Intentions were claimed to further one's career in accordance with the formal pedagogical career model.

Q2. *What emotional and psychological characteristics can define private life stress factors?*

The questionnaire and interview research reveal that more than 75% of the sample studied experienced persistently difficult life stages. These influenced the individual's mood and affective style. The aforementioned difficulties are typically the following: illness, death, divorce, financial difficulties, being overloaded, children, ageing parents, family crisis. The volume and characteristics of private life crises change with age.

The main factors of a happy personal life are harmony and a happy family life. Since the majority of the employees in the teaching profession are women, in line with traditional gender roles, family and private life goals are either as or more important than career advancement.

Q3. *To what extent does the persistent positive / negative emotional state or current bad / good mood determine the affective style and private life attributes of the individual?*

Questionnaire and interview answers revealed that workplace conditions mostly have a negative impact on family life, the sphere that is the most significant for employees as above indicated. The respondents feel that the difficulties are brought home and the harmony of family life is distorted. Data collected by various methods demonstrate that the sample feels that work related negative effects such as excessive psychological strain, too much workload distress and frustration are much more pronounced in personal life causing, impatience and changed behaviour in private interpersonal relationships. This results in unwanted compromises, unpopular problem solving strategies and continuous remorse. In the meantime respondents consider the impact of their private life troubles on their work performance less emphasized.

Q4. *To what extent does the persistent positive / negative emotional state or current bad / good mood determine the affective and work style attributes of the individual?*

Man strives for happiness in life and the key to a balanced life is the more or less constant harmony of the different life spheres. In occupations where the key element is the interaction with people the current mental state of the worker determines the quality of the performance. Difficulties and accomplishments play an important role in shaping the current psychological characteristics of the person so interplay can be detected between private and work successes and failures. Less frequently mentioned successes than difficulties could be observed in the answers. Contradictory responses to control questions reveal that in particular cases respondents recognize that their actual mood and personal characteristics, work satisfaction, and motivation level have an impact on their work, but on the other hand they generally believe that they can eliminate negative impacts and leave their problems out of the classroom. Student responses reveal that this is not the case as during their school years every respondent experienced altered teacher behaviour mainly due to the changed circumstances of the teacher. Students recalled more negative experiences though they do not recognize that the bad emotional state of the teachers' can have impact on their own intellectual and emotional development.

Q5. *To what extent are the teachers aware of the effect of their altered affective and work style on the interpersonal educational process?*

It is revealed that work and private life conditions that form the actual mood and alter the professional self of the teacher affect the quality of the interpersonal relationships. Teachers are only partly aware of the aforementioned mostly negative effects and they believe they can successfully develop appropriate coping strategies. When the negative state of mind is so overbearing that it hinders work and harmony in private life teachers consider changing profession. Due to the above mentioned factors teachers are more prone to burnout.

There is a strong interference between the persistently negative working environment (work overload, unequal work distribution and lack of professional acknowledgement) and it creates a mental state that negatively affects both work and family life. In the responses work related stress factors outnumbered private life stressors. The negative processes reinforce each other and, if they last for a long time, they have a negative impact on students 'current mental state, which affects the efficiency of the learning process, subject preference thus future career orientation and have long-term effects on students' mental development.

Q6. *How successful are teachers to take advantage of the positive effects and eliminate the negative consequences?*

As most educators believe private life traumas do not have a major influence on their work, they do not recognize that their persistent negative emotional state can affect pupils' psychological development and mood creating either motivating or traumatic school experiences. The positive impact of professional successes and private happy periods was not denied neither emphasized by respondents.

As teachers only partly realise that their state of mind can affect managing problematic educational situations and the quality of a lesson, this effect can be eliminated only in certain cases. Often they recognise that their work has changed only after the crisis period. That part of the sample who thinks they are mostly aware of the fact that their current state of mind, their living and working conditions have an impact on their work at school, considers the phenomenon normal in some cases as teachers are just human beings like others.

Contradictions can be found in the responses of students and teachers surveyed. Teachers feel the existence of these effects, but believe that negative effects can be alleviated or completely excluded by self-reflection, self-discipline and self-reflection. With regard to the same issue, most of the students surveyed considered that the teacher's state of mind influenced the course of the lesson. They named professional, pedagogical and evaluation problems in cases where the teacher was in a negative emotional mood during the lesson. Positive examples of the above mentioned issues were also mentioned in cases when the teacher was in a good mood.

5. CONCLUSION

The research revealed that a change of attitude is needed in the field of teacher training and further education, which can contribute to independent teacher personality and attitude development. Organizing non-professional supportive trainings should be fostered to develop self-reflection, and problem management. Research has shown that emotional exhaustion leads to mood swings and

depressive symptoms. At present, school working conditions do not provide opportunities for organizing educational programs and sensitizing trainings on the topics concerned.

The relevance of the research topic is indicated by the enthusiasm that characterised the questionnaire and interview research on the respondents' side. The first step should be establishing the institutional mental health care system that provides assistance for teachers. The goal is to preserve teachers' enthusiasm and motivation and have as many excellent teachers as possible on the track who enjoy and love their work and are capable of mental and professional renewal. It is a task of high priority, since the teacher is the one who has a deep influence on the intellectual, emotional and mental development of the future generation from the preschool age.

Schoolyears – including teachers' personalities and affective styles – have a profound impact during the time when the child becomes a young adult. Accordingly, the mood and emotional state of the teacher is reflected in the educational process and can cause problematic situations, which are not easy to handle for many reasons. On the one hand, successful problem management assumes that outsiders, school leaders and colleagues should take action in cases needing intervention in the intimate private sphere of the person concerned. The mediator needs adequate psychological knowledge to recognize when and where he may and must cross the narrow boundary separating private and work life. There is no approved protocol for the outlined problems in the Hungarian education system. Due to the diverse interpersonal and hierarchical relationships in the school environment the solution requires the involvement of experts, psychologists or psychiatrists who can provide professional help if necessary and decide on the application of any therapy.

6. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research results and the problems discovered the following are the proposed changes in the different areas of the education system:

Education policy

Education policy can improve the circumstances by means of well thought-out steps, which in the long run will lead to positive changes both for teachers and students. Improving the social and financial esteem of the profession helps to create a competent and heterogeneous teacher society. At social level, it also raises the prestige of the profession if the unique qualities of the occupation are acknowledged by the educational policy and the working conditions are shaped accordingly.

It is essential to involve in-service teachers in the preparation and implementation of educational policy decisions thus consulting and motivating opinions of practising teachers and also assessing impacts. As far as educational policy decisions are concerned, it is recommended to study and adopt well-functioning foreign samples and apply them in the Hungarian schooling environment and to rethink and re-introduce methods that proved to be useful in the past but which are no longer used.

Supporting measures will improve long-term results. It is also important to emphasize the priority of the teaching work, rationalize school tasks and drastically reduce administrative burdens. For this purpose, the employment of assistants to support the teacher's work is essential. As the profession is highly practice oriented it can be concluded that by decreasing centralization, providing more local autonomy both on professional and maintenance issues, establishing a quality school environment, and delegating responsible decision making from the governmental to school level working conditions and results would be on the upgrade. Finally, besides encouraging the professional renewal of the teacher it is important to develop programs to help their mental health improvement as well as to create a career tracking and assistant system that offers solutions for teachers in crisis situation.

For professional renewal, it is important not to overload the employees but to provide high quality working time for development. From the professional and the mental point of view, it is important that educational policy decisions include foreign scholarship and further training opportunities for teachers. Getting to know foreign systems can generate innovative solutions and inspiration. Staying out of the usual work environment broadens the mind and lifts the mood.

From the national policy perspective the quality of the education is of strategic importance. Local and national school policies determine the future, shape the cognitive, logical, problem-solving ability of the next generations with setting moral and ethical standards, helping social integration, and providing the potential of a successful and happy life. The money spent on education is an effective long-term investment in the country's future as the success of the nation depends on the success and satisfaction of the citizens.

Teacher training

To be a good teacher, several criteria must be met. The basically academic approach of the teacher training prioritizing material knowledge of high importance. Though it is acknowledged that the personality of the teacher is an integral part of the tutoring process it is not fully emphasized in teacher education and teachers with acceptable subject material knowledge can work in schools and in the job interviewing process screening mental aptitude is not possible.

According to the student respondents human features of teachers were considered much more important than the professional characteristics, the subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. Positive and negative teacher behaviour and characteristics were given as examples. It shows that there are many, professionally and mentally capable teachers on the field, but some responses depict teacher's personality models and describe behaviour patterns that are unacceptable.

In teacher education besides excellent professional training the student's self-knowledge and personality development must also play an equally important role, thus self-recognition courses and mental hygiene training should be included in the curricula and the students should also be informed about the occupational hazards. In addition to high professional standards, students' problem sensitivity, problem-solving skills, and the ability to retain mental health should be developed at the same high level as their subject knowledge. Additionally, a sufficient degree should be provided to students who recognize during the training period that they are not fit for the career and do not want to become practising teachers.

School management

When employing a teaching staff, equal attention should be paid to the professional and personal features. In order to establish proper work conditions the school principal needs to be familiar with the theoretical and technical background of group formation, group roles and supportive group co-operation (Belbin, 2010a, 2010b). The management of the school should be provided with further training in this field. With attentive management, equal distribution of additional tasks within the teaching staff, and its periodic redistribution, would create a positive, motivating work environment. It is also important to monitor the work done continuously with regular work assessment and the public recognition of the created values. Through continuous monitoring of the mental health of human resources it is possible to help the colleagues in need and, if necessary, provide life and psychological counselling.

In addition, it is essential to have a continuous and open dialogue with teachers, students, parents to find common grounds. Developing an acceptable leadership style and a motivating work environment will reduce conflict situations and increase efficiency.

7. FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The results of the research can be used as the basis for a follow-up research. I propose to explore on representative sample the factors and measures that would improve the job satisfaction among teachers. Feasibility studies could prove the viability and the likely impacts of the proposed solutions. In this way, a competent, satisfied and mentally healthy teacher group can be created, which is the key to quality education of the future generations.

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