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Assessment of Vered Azulay's doctoral dissertation entitled: "Teacher Burnout in Youth Villages in Israel".

Occupational burnout poses a significant problem for modern-day man. It affects mainly those whose professional work demands a direct relationship with others. Although it is not strictly regarded as a medical condition, occupational burnout has a negative impact on the quality of life; it triggers depressive moods in individuals, creates a feeling of dissatisfaction with oneself, and generally it makes people feel unwelcome in their chosen profession. The problem of occupational burnout was first described in the 1970s by the psychologist H. Freudenberger; since then, it has remained present in the scientific discourse and is also the subject of many aid programs and social activities.

The subject matter of the reviewed doctoral dissertation is, therefore, of topical interest. Its topicality is fully justified in times of the ubiquitous apotheosis of market efficiency and digitalisation. These two nowadays, seem to invade almost all areas of human life, not sparing the most personal ones, which due to their deeply human specificity elude market measures and numerical conversions. Teachers nowadays are faced with the difficult task of saving this uniquely human component in their profession which on the one hand contributes to the formation of an integrated character of young people and on the other it is to give teachers both a sense of life satisfaction and professional fulfillment. Thus, this highly unique, immeasurably human component must defend itself in today's world that is dominated by the market mentality and digital technology. Teachers are currently faced with the problematic task of finding a professional modus operandi that will help them rediscover, in the currently

depersonalised standards of professional success, the effort they put into the diligent performance of their profession.

Complementarity and correctness in formulating hypotheses and research goals

The main questions formulated in Vered Azulay's doctoral thesis seems correct and justified. The findings show, that approximately half of all teachers performing their job in the youth villages in Israel have experienced a sort of professional burnout and this experience caused many of them to leave the education system. It has been established as well, that teaching albeit in their own perception, doesn't hold much prestige in society, teachers mostly understand the unique character and responsibility of their profession. Insufficient appreciation of their work from a societal viewpoint however, may be a vital trigger for many of them to depart from the teaching profession. Burnout is not associated with age, gender or educational level – the thesis confirms the findings contained in the literature. There is a variety of data that influence teacher burnout, therefore, it cannot be ascribed to any particular single factor. Complementarity and overall structure of the thesis is correct. The hypotheses and research goals were formulated correctly.

Structural order of chapters, completeness of the thesis, research methods and techniques

Vered Azulay's doctoral thesis consists of two parts that comprise five chapters. The first part contains theoretical systematics of occupational burnout; the second one deals with methodology, including specific issues of the research procedure. The thesis commences with the lists of tables, figures and illustrations. It ends with conclusions, list of literature and the data survey template used in the thesis. In the first part the author presents the current state of research concerning teacher burnout; she lists reasons and circumstances that result in leaving the teaching profession as a consequence of burnout, and generally she describes burnout as a phenomenon that affects school system in Israel.

The cited data concerning the number of drop-outs give in total a complete picture of the problem in question. It's been found out, that the highest drop-out rates educators are in kindergartens and universities; those leaving are predominantly beginner-teachers. The author refers to comparative studies from Israel, the USA, Greece and the Netherlands.

The causes of burnout resulting in leaving the teaching profession vary in nature. The author mentions, among other things: mental exhaustion; lack of support of the role-holders; lack of an accompanying mentor for the novice teachers; health and wellbeing, gaps between the expectation of the role and those job reality; poor student achievements; family reasons; the hierarchical structure of the school organisation; outdated infrastructure at school; sense of massive responsibility; routine work; stressful interpersonal relationships; pressure being put on teachers; inferior working conditions; insufficient mental resources and attitudes toward the organisation; multitasking of teachers' work; unsatisfactory and low wages; difficult communication with the "Z generation" of students; the school atmosphere that is a compound of many factors (interpersonal relationships, norms, the degree of supervision or freedom, cohesion, sense of belonging and satisfaction, order and procedure, sharing and competitiveness). In addition to that, the findings show that age, gender, level of education, teacher-student relations and efficacy in teaching are not significant to having impact on burnout and abandonment of teaching profession. The findings obtained in the conducted research coincide with the author's experience who – as the text shows – has been active working as a teacher in the context of a youth village in Israel.

The above-mentioned factors that lead to burnout give a specific dynamic to that systematic part of the dissertation. The author qualifies the factors in question as personal reasons – those regarding mental and physical strength, gender, age, seniority at work, physical symptoms and interpersonal reasons – those which cover relationships with students, colleagues, supervisors and parents. Parents are deemed to be partners in the education process but do not interfere in it. The author signals the significance of ethnic factors – Arab teachers, for example, suffer from additional burden that bring about more stress when they teach in Jewish schools. What may help reduce teacher burnout is the increase of their sense of autonomy; their personal rather than institutional interactions with students; and their positive feedback from well-conducted classes at school – concludes the author. When it comes to coping with stress, the author points to two approaches: eliminating stress and alleviation of distress.

Among other issues related to teacher burnout are listed two: youth at risk and the specificity of boarding schools in Israel.

A group of those particularly vulnerable to being at risk are immigrant youth. Otherwise, the author points implicitly to an interesting problem of the biographical coherence – this pertains to the immigrant children. The life of an immigrant child is lived embedded in a sense, into two different worlds: family and school. The life in family draws on and is basically

anchored in parents' system of value. – These are values assimilated and interiorized through primary socialisation; expressed in the ethnic language of origin. Meanwhile, at school immigrant children are confronted with values that are often different from those instilled in the family and are transmitted in their native language. The problem arises when parents, for not being the bearers of the school's values, are unable to engage their own intellectual capabilities to help their child integrate these two worlds of home and of the school, into one inseparable continuity. This continuity deems to be the *sine qua non* for one to achieve a axiologically consistent identity.

The author writes a lot about the youth at risk and its specific subculture. Because of this one may arrive at the conclusion that the report of youth at risk is somewhat and unnecessarily elongated. However, it is justified if we consider familiarity with the specific conditions of youth at risk with its insight into the specificity of youth villages, which makes up the subject of Vered Azulay's doctoral thesis.

The author describes in detail the specificity of boarding schools in Israel. They stem from the kibbutz model. The main concepts underlying this residential model of schooling are three dimensional creating:

- (1) a social framework capable of accommodating and educating youth from different cultural backgrounds;
- (2) a balance between education, the realisation of social goals, and the personal fulfillment of the individual; and
- (3) an educating community that presents the participants with normative educational challenges. One of the goals of youth villages is to help newcomers integrate into the Israeli community.

The first part of the dissertation is based first and foremost on the literature and the documents containing regulation regarding functions and competences in the youth villages and boarding schools. This part is concise in form and saturated with information; it resembles a "summary" spread over a one hundred pages.

The second part of the assessed dissertation contains a description of the research methodology. The adopted methodology in its own right is a mixed one. It has been applied for collecting and analysing data, both quantitative and qualitative, and is deemed an alternative and complementary to traditional, one-sided ways of processing data. The style in which methodology has been portrayed – somewhat in a textbook style – is informative. In form of an elucidation it serves as a guide through consecutive sections of the research conducted. As a

matter of fact, both quantitative and qualitative ways of collecting and elaborating data are used in the thesis.

In describing the quantitative part of the applied research methodology, the author points to three groups of factors: those identified to be accountable for leaving the teaching profession; those supporting teachers in staying in their profession; and those that pertain generally to teacher-students relationships. The questionnaire applied to assess teachers' burnout, contains fourteen self-report items that indicate variety of conditions leading to burnout. For each item, respondents were asked to rate the degree of agreement reflected by the Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4; the final index was calculated as the average rating of the items that make up the questionnaire, with a high value indicating a high degree of attrition.

The author lists in detail all sorts of variants of qualitative research. To my mind, this explanation is informative, somewhat in a textbook style and it may be deemed justified if applying her mixed methodology. No doubt, the author would have made use of all those instruments with which she meticulously gives account of in her thesis.

The respondents surveyed make up a group of 277 teachers; more than 80% of those are women. The clear majority of respondents has been identified as being married and having children; obtained a baccalaureate and/or master's degree; as well as being employed in schools in the Jewish sector under state and state religious supervision. The respondents also declared working both in urban and rural areas with a slight majority of the former ones.

The following issues are possible factors in causing burnout and drop-off rates in teacher numbers: teachers' preparation for classes; the use of tests; time dedicated to occasional conversations with fellow teachers, and to evaluation of papers; and varied responsibilities throughout the week. Table number 6 contains a set of information regarding the respondents, as well as the schools they work in. These include: age, education, family situation and so on. Based on this information, one is able to obtain a relatively full picture of teacher burnout rates of those employed in the Israeli youth villages and boarding schools located there.

Research findings have been presented in a form of clear-cut, descriptive statistics. In this section which contains the findings acquired during qualitative analysis, we find virtually the same conclusions already partially formulated in the previous subsections of the dissertation. There is among other things, information on the specificity of youth villages in Israel and boarding schools. The author also includes discussion on: the structure of the day in schools; the status of teachers in Israel being rather low with unequivocal negative overtones; causes of burnout and those resulting in teacher resignations; and tips and recommendations for teachers looking to work in the youth villages.

The level of advancement of theoretical knowledge in the field of sociology and related disciplines

Vered Azulay had extensively and correctly described the methodology of social research which she applies in her dissertation, especially the elements of the research process she conducted. She proved to have acquired satisfactory knowledge of the specialist literature that canvasses issues concerning occupational burnout in general and teacher's burnout in particular. The author efficiently uses the literature, correctly carries out and compiles analysis and draws the correct conclusions. As mentioned above, the systematics of the problem of burnout based of the literature in the first part of the work gives a complete picture of this problem issue. In the second part of the dissertation, the author proved to have acquired skills in making use of questionnaires on the basis of which she determines among other things, the number of those suffering from teacher burnout, as well as the number of those departing the teaching profession. The questionnaires contain seven, fourteen, sixteen and twenty-eight items for self-reporting. For processing data and to measure consistency of the questionnaire items the author uses SPSS software program, and then calculates Cronbach's alpha. To examine the formulated hypotheses, variables and independent samples the author uses Pearson correlations, Spearman correlations and t-test. The author combines the methodology of sociology with the methodology of pedagogy and does this efficiently enough to obtain the assumed results.

Formal side of the dissertation

The author uses a clear-cut and understandable narrative form dominated by the active voice. The text is free from unnecessary stylistic frills and embellishments. The narrative form is accessible to a non-native English speaker, and this makes the reading pleasurable. Since English is not my native tongue, I do not feel entirely competent to assess the stylistic correctness of the dissertation language. In my perception of a non-native speaker, however, the narrative form is concise, saturated with information, and as mentioned above, it is pleasant to read. The inter-text footnotes are made correctly; tables and charts are also satisfactorily presented.



Selection of sources, analysis and interpretation

The author uses a specialist literature that deals with the issue of professional burnout. She also refers both to "the classics" as aforementioned Freudenberger, as well as the newest titles of which some are published in Hebrew. The author of the dissertation used about two hundred source items. The literature cited is strictly scientific. It consists of articles in scientific journals, chapters in scientific volumes and documents. In general, the level of conducted analyses and formulated conclusions, as well as the advancement of quantitative and qualitative analyses – in short, all elements of the methodology combined, orchestrated and used for research purposes in Vered Azulay's doctoral dissertation meet the scientific level provided for doctoral dissertations. The author in a rather clear-cut and concise manner puts together the findings established in a course of the research; she also convincingly formulates her final conclusions.

Undoubtedly, a good opportunity for the author to gain a thorough familiarity with such a multi-faceted subject matter as teacher burnout in Israeli youth villages must have been drawn upon her personal experience of being involved in the educational system of those institutions. The hypotheses aims and objectives of the dissertation are formulated correctly, and so they were verified and achieved.

The main shortcomings

Now let's move on to the main drawbacks of the reviewed doctoral thesis. It contains perhaps too numerous repetitions. The findings e.g. portrayed at the beginning of the thesis come up in a rewritten and reformulated form in the remaining chapters. Of course, repetitions that occur in a thesis are justified to some degree – they help us to navigate our way through the maze of disquisitions of the main plot -- the problem of teacher burnout, its causes and preventive measures must necessarily be present in all parts of the thesis. To my mind, however, a more diligent editorial scrutiny of the dissertation prior to its final submitting might have helped eliminate some most glaring repetitions.

The work has some editing shortcomings, the most serious of which is the list of literature at the end. The author obviously has a problem with the consistent application of a

unified system for listing sources correctly. In some cases, pages of articles are missing; periods and commas put after the initial of the author's first name are used inconsistently. I get the impression that the author was producing the last sectors of her dissertation under immense time pressure, hence these shortcomings. Certainly, mistakes of that kind do not affect the value of the conducted research, nevertheless, they cast a shadow over the work as a whole. Of course, in the doctoral assessment procedure we are dealing with a dissertation manuscript, and I understand that dissertation in the present form will be properly corrected and supplemented before being submitted to publication, as we wish it to be.

Conclusion

My assessment of Vered Azulay's dissertation is unambiguously positive. She demonstrated several academic qualities that should characterise a researcher at the doctoral level. She mastered techniques essential for conducting empirical and interdisciplinary research in social sciences – in her dissertation sociology inextricably intertwines with a pedagogical approach. These methodological competences made her able to bring the dissertation to a satisfactory conclusion. She managed to do it in giving an original solution to the research problem which she took as a subject matter of her thesis. Vered Azulay has been exploring an area that touches upon private and extremely delicate sphere of life. The reviewed dissertation proves that the author is able to design and organise research, conduct analyses and efficiently present their results. It is not free from drawbacks, but its advantages far exceed the former.

The dissertation contributes to the aspect-based diagnosis of occupational burnout of teachers in Israeli youth villages. In its own right, it formulates an original solution to a research problem and it proves the acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and satisfactory research competences in social sciences. I hereby certify that the Vered Azulay's dissertation meets the statutory requirements for doctoral dissertations, and thereby I petition the Sociology Department of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań for her admission to the successive stages of the registration and conferment procedure for a doctoral degree.

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