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Review of Ph.D. Dissertation entitled Teacher Burnout in Youth Villages in Israel

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The review has been prepared on the commission from the council of the Sociology Sciences Department of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań . The assessment of the following study has made according to general guidelines and rules specified within The Act on academic degrees and academic titles and degrees and titles in art. It has been assessed in terms of originality of resolving scientific problems, independence in performance of the project and theoretical preparation based on the review of up-to-date research. The following review presents the general assessment of content and structure the theoretical assumptions in terms of definitions accuracy, and correctness of the research report. Possible new directions of future explorations and limitations of the presented study have been also indicated.

General assessment

The dissertation consists of three parts : the first is the review of literature concerning teacher burnout, risk of maladjustment among youth, and boarding school in Israel. The second part concerns research methodology and the third includes research outcomes and analysis of them. The last chapter contains the discussion of results , conclusions, and recommendations for teaching practice. The appropriate proportion has been kept between the theoretical consideration and the report of research.

The assessed dissertation refers to the significant issues such as burnout among teachers, especially teachers in youth villages in Israel. The study was conducted in a few schools with mixed methodology (quatitative and qualitative) on the group of 277 participants. It is worth highlighting that the subject of the study is connected with the personal experience of the doctoral student. The

presentation of the project is realized in the coherent, logical and consistent way. The basis are sufficiently described in the field of :

- definitions of important concepts,
- review of the theoretical assumptions,
- justification of the methodological project,
- selection of accurate procedures ,
- evidence for solving research questions.

The study has several notable strenghts as well weaknessess but on the whole the study is a valuable for the knowledge about teacher burnout.

Theoretical assumption

The theoretical assumptions cover over one hundred pages and concern the following subjects : a burnout syndrom, youth at risk, and boarding school. The first part of the presented study focuses on the general theory of a burnout in terms of definitions, causes, indirect and direct consequences, and methods of coping with it.

Burnout is a very popular phenomenon among supportive professions like : medical staff, clinical psychologists, social workers and teachers. The last group seems to be especially vulnerable for the burnout because of overwork, conflicts with superiors, co-workers and parents, low wages, low social prestige and problematic behavior of students. This problem is very closely connected with stress and has a lot severe consequences in physical, psychological and social life. Additionally, results of the burnout are visible in economic domain because of absenteeism in work, health problems , and dropping out of workplaces (job rotation) . Personal consequences concern low self-esteem and the feeling of inaccuracy, obstacles in social relationships, damage of mariage and friendship. Evidence based research confirm the high level of the burnout among teachers and their difficulty in coping with stress caused by institutional, individual and transactional factors. Research in various countries show similarity and differences in causes and intesify of symptoms. The author has made good selection of professional literature paying special attention for the local research which provide evidences for discrepancy between Arabian and Jewish teachers.

The next problem is the classification of causes for burnout. Several propositions are presented in this field and they contain very similar risk factors in following spheres: organisational,

personal , interpersonal, work-life balance. I expect that the Author could have compared among these classifications of burnout and stress reasons, and make an attempt of synthesis. Additionally, citing the one more division of causes of the teacher burnout is not necessary . It would be better to gather all classifications in one place and add a comment to them similiarly in the case of the reference to methods of coping with burnout, which are described in a very syntetic way. It should have been to mention that all these ways are strictly methods of coping with stress. They are divided into four kind of methods according to crossing criteria; direct-indirect, active –passive, which are presented in table number 1 (p.45). This is interesting point of view to the classification of these methods. The author should have given the source of information in tables. Presented ways of coping with a burnout are not specific for various proffesion, so the need of creation of methods dedicated to teachers should have emphasized.

The author disusses specific reason of teacher burnout such as the system of education for teachers. During the university courses they have training in methods of teaching, but not in stimulating social competences and skills necessary in school practice. At first, novice teachers have a sense of mission and a strong desire to be good at work, but in the situation of lack any support from supervisors/ mentors, colleagues, and system of education they are quickly worn out. A very interesting part is the one describing reasons for teacher burnout in the interpersonal spheres: relations with colleagues, community, society, parents and students. The main condition for positive collaboration is effective communication and balanced involment of both sides, teachers and parents, but there are a lot obstacles and difficulties caused by personal and organisational factors. Studies concerning differences between Arabian and Jewish teachers in Israel show that the situation of Arabian teachers is worse and more complicated than Jewish, specially when they work together with Jewish colleagues. These reports provide the well- grounded evidence that the problem of teachers burnout in Izrael needs investigation.

Another very important aspect of the reasons of burnout is a social climate in schools and other educational institution. The author accept the Moose's meaning of this term as a multidimensional concept which includes interpresonal relationships, norms, degree of supervisors control, sense of belonging and satisfaction, order and procedure, sharing and competitiveness. She has located this factor in the wide environmental context indicating the direct and indirect influence of social climate on the development of values and norms among students and teachers.

In the next chapter the risk among youth is discussed. Adolescence has been defined as a period of time, which is linked with the second decade of life. It is called the critical period of development because young people undergo numerous changes such as: psychological, physiological and social. Youth built their independence, temporary rejection of accepted norms, and they are susceptible to maladjustment like anti-social behavior, delinquency, use of psychoactive substances, and many more. The main factors of risk are: poverty, broken families, bad domestic atmosphere, generation gap, dropping out of school. Of course there are many other not mentioned problems as delinquency in a family, contact with deviation groups, a low socioeconomic situation. These cause specific consequences in personality, mental health, and social adjustment of youth. All these influences on children's development should have discussed on bases of the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner, which was mentioned in the introduction. A very specific factor of risk in Israel society is immigration, and situation of immigrants in a school, and in a family. Immigrants have difficulties in adjustment to new social and culture demands and suffer of various forms of loneliness and alienation. Therefore the rate of youth dropout is still rising in the new immigrant community. The government tries to cope with that problem, especially with the phenomenon of covert dropout, which is very difficult to estimate.

Special advantages of residential system in the educational, social and academic aspects are worth noting. The teachers play essential role because they are significant models of adult, they compensate deficits of family environment and mediate between students and the world through making it more understandable and meaningful. The conclusion of this part is not optimistic, because in spite of increasing needs the budget of the Ministry of Education has been significantly cut. One of the most common solutions for education youth at risk is the boarding school system. The term „boarding school” refers to institutions in which people live most of the year under one authority, and the interpersonal relationships between them are not family ties (p.74). The history of establishment them is connected with the history of Israel, Zionis ideology, and religion. Today, Israel has a reach net of boarding school which belong to four categories: educational, rehabilitative, therapeutic, and post-hospital. They focus on various goals according to social expectations of different populations in Israeli society in following forms: traditional and high school yeshivas, agricultural schools and youth movement in kibbutzim, youth villages for immigrant children, and technical., military or naval schools. In comparison with other countries Israel has the highest rates of children who were educated in boarding schools.

Special attention were given to the Youth Aliyah , the leading organization of youth villages and educational boarding schools in Israel. It is a unique residential model for the integration of immigrant youth from different cultural backgrounds with social, economic and educational difficulties, which is derived from the kibbutz movement. This system does not exist in any other countries because only the Israeli society has so multicultural structure. Among the school staff instructors play special role of educators, who have a lot of tasks in individual care (close contact with students, protecting them from risk factors, promoting individual development of students, stimulating their autonomy, transferring social norms, and boundaries) and work with a group (creating positive social relationships, caring of discipline, building independence and responsibility among groups, supporting learning climate). All these aims are very complicated and difficult specially for young people without professional preparation for work. In Israel, contrary to other countries, the instructor does not require educational or/and therapeutic education, which appears to be the main weakness of youth villages system.

All presented above problems constitute a well-grounded basis for the project of the study. The author has made good selection and critical review of the scientific literature. She has pointed out the need of research in the field of teachers burnout in youth villages in Israel. Another remark regards sources of tabels content , because only a few of them have indicated a source.

The methodological assumption of the study

The research questions and hypotheses are formulated correctly. There are two questions about settlement, and three are diagnostic questions. It is suggested to change order of questions and number them. One of them should have been the main question. There are five research hypotheses, but they are not exactly connected with questions. Three of them are hypothetical answers for questions about factors causing burnout (questions number 4 and 5), one regards to the question about relations between burnout and dropping out of the education system (questions number 1) , and one regards to the relations between the perception of efficacy in teaching and the perception of teacher-studet connection (maybe question number 2 or 3). There are not any answers for question about preventive factors (number 5). Additionally, it would be necessary to indicate the origin of hyphotesis, for example by previous presented results of research.

The research methodology is described on over forty pages and is very precise. At the beginning of the methodological consideration, arguments for using quantitative and qualitative

research method, and mixing them are provided. Both methods are a valuable source of information which is integrated in the interpretation of the overall results. The qualitative methods are located in the positivist approach based on deduction about empirical data. The main assumption in the positivist paradigm is that there is an objective truth in the world that can be measured and scientifically explained. The main advantages and disadvantages of the quantitative and qualitative method and comparison between them are presented. The method of recruitment of participants are characterized taking into consideration probabilistic and non-probabilistic methods. This part of analysis is very valuable and precise. The quantitative research methods used in the study are questionnaires with self-reporting items ranging on the Likert scale. They measure the following variables: support factors, factors leading to leaving the teaching profession, teacher-student relations, ability to teach students with special needs, teacher burnout. All questionnaires have high internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha. They have been constructed for the need of the presented study and they are the experimental version of questionnaires that do not have any more validation. It is a pity that one of the standardized test measuring burnout (for example the Maslach Burnout Inventory) was not used at the presented research.

The next part refers to the qualitative research method which is located in the constructivist paradigm and offers less precise knowledge than the quantitative method but in-depth and interpretative. The theoretical background of the qualitative method is very broad because it includes following methods: phenomenological, narrative, anthropological, action research, anchored in the field and a case study. The main method used in the study are interview and elements of observation, which are described in terms of the structure and aims. The consideration of validity, reliability and generalization are not necessary because these procedures have not been used in the presented study. The one of the most valuable parts was the comparison between the quantitative and the qualitative method. The author has paid attention for ethical problems of research which proves her methodological reflectiveness.

There is a one misunderstanding in this chapter and it is connected with description of research instruments. They were discussed on pages 113-115 and ones again on pages 141-143. I have some doubts about it, because I have found a few differences between these two texts specially regarding to indicators of internal consistency.

The analysis of results

Research participants have been recruited with the use of the method called „snow ball”. It needs more information why this method for recruitment participants has been chosen. A total 277 of teachers working with youth at-risk in the youth villages in Israel took part in the study. They are described in following aspects: gender, age, marriage, number of children, experience in teaching, academic degree, type of supervision, structure of school where teachers worked. Results of research were presented on graphs which illustrate number of hours dedicated to the preparation of lessons, teaching, inputting student information, evaluation student papers and tests, occasional professional conversations and to professional meetings. The analysis was based on the statistical description mainly percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

The next analysis was processed using the SPSS software version 23. The following procedure were used: Pearson correlation , Spearman correlation, t-Student test for independent variables, t-Student test for a single sample , chi -squared test for ordinal variables and hierachical regression.

At first reasons of the departure from the teaching proffesion were ranked. On the top of the ranking were found : mental exhaustion, salary level, lack of support, health situation. The correlations among main research indices were presented in the figures and the table. The differences in the main research indices were observed acorrding to: gender , community type, demographics characteristic, and other. Examination of the hypotheses was performed by T-test for a single sample and hierarchical regression for the prediction teacher burnout using main research indices. Several additional hypotheses on the base on hierarchical regression were examined. The majority of models turned out to be insignificant, in the first stage no significant factors were found. In my opinion these results need the more comments and interpretation. Only prediction of teacher –students realtionships through the presence of factors of support and efficacy in teaching revealed that it was the significant model.

Summary of the findings indicates that results have provided answers for research questions. The statistical procedures were accurate to examined issues , the presentation of results and comments of findings were proper.

Qualitative analysis covers information from questionnaires with open-ended questions and from elements of observations during an interview. The discussed issues concerned : daily routine

of the respondents, teachers status in Israel, satisfaction with the job, causes of burnout, tips for work in a youth village, importance as a teacher, level of burnout, recommendation for teacher working in a youth village, causing of leaving the profession. Answers of 31 respondents were used in analysis, some of them were exactly cited. The author quote of personal observations during interviews. This part of analysis was rather subjective in the respect of the choice of respondents' answers.

Discussion and limitation

In the discussion and conclusion chapter the author once again mentions about the value of the study. The education system in Israel is unique because there are about sixty youth villages, a specific creation which does not exist in other places in the world. The staff, especially teachers, in youth villages have a lot of various tasks causing job stress. Rising level of burnout leads to often drop out from teaching profession. This hypothesis was confirmed in the following study similarly as in previous research. A discrepancy between estimation the level of burnout in quantitative and qualitative analysis needs further explanation. The relationship between the most commonly chosen factors and burnout turned out to be insignificant. The results of the study could indicate factors that responsible for dropout of work among teachers in youth villages. All conclusions were supported by the broad review of previous studies. Some of the conclusions were in line with previous reports, some were different and demanded more comments. Finally, some general recommendations for practice were given. They concerned especially the educational system in Israel which should provide more support for teacher.

Unfortunately there were no remarks about limitation of the study and proposition for the future research. It is one of the weaknesses of the study. It should be said about the method of recruitment of participants and number of them. The next limitation is lack of any standardized instrument among used questionnaires. I suppose that results of the presented study suggest at least a few ideas for future exploration.

Conclusion

In spite of a few critical remarks, the presented study has provided valuable evidences for understanding the core of the burnout among teachers. The problem of teacher burnout is very important in the respect of psychological, social, medical and economical costs.

The candidate has proved to be competent enough in critical review of professional literature, methodological basis of research and in interpretation results. She has conducted the original and difficult project which contributed significantly in the field of perceived reasons of job stress and burnout. The research was carried out in the very special education environment as boarding school in youth villages. The results allowed to formulate recommendation for educational practices especially for coping with teacher dropout from profession, and indicate teachers' expectancies of support from the educational system. Personal experience in teaching profession of the author was the confirmation for conclusion of obtained results.

The language of the study is clear, precise and understandable. The level of editorial side of the work is good. References are very rich and covers papers from many countries. In my point of view all elements of the study are satisfying and constitute a good foundation for recommending the study as a doctoral dissertation. My general assessment of the study is positive.

In my opinion the presented study meets expectations for the Ph.D. dissertation according to the The Act on academic degrees and academic titles and degrees and titles in art . The candidate may be approved to further stages of the doctoral procedure.

