School-Related Burnout among Hungarian High School Students and Responsibility of Teachers in Prevention – a New Aspect of Teachers’ Competences

Author(s): Nora Kunos (presenting), Katalin Hejja-Nagy

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Contribution

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The aim of this presentation is to introduce a field of educational researches yet unknown in Hungary: school-related burnout, identified in the last ten years by a Finnish research group led by Katariina Salmela-Aro. A wide circle of scientists are involved in the study of this new aspect of burnout syndrome - studying not only undergraduates but high school students and comprehensive schools’ pupils as well. Explored earlier by Christina Maslach and her research team, symptoms of work-related burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, cynicism or depersonalization and reduced professional efficacy (Maslach, et al., 2001) were transferred into the world of education as exhaustion caused by school’s demands, cynicism toward the meaning of one’s schoolwork and feeling of in-efficacy as a student (Salmela-Aro, 2008). All these problems are well known in Hungarian schools as well but nobody called it burnout before. We are talking about laziness, lack of motivation, disinterest, school stress and mental diseases and nobody has delt with these symptoms as a whole unit and nobody has connected them with the syndrome of burnout. The interest for the topic comes from the first author’s practice as a high school teacher for 25 years, and her permanent stress to help her students in managing themselves across the adolescence and schools’ demands.

There are many researchers from several regions studying background factors of school-related burnout: gender, school
achievement, family background, grade and transition from comprehensive to upper schools are identified, as well as teachers’ burnout. We examine similar aspects of school-related burnout, so we have the possibility of cross national comparison. What is new in our studies is the mapping of teachers’ competences needed to avoid their own burnout symptoms and for the prevention, identification and therapy of the one of the students.

In the current research we verify our hypothesis about the existence of this phenomena among Hungarian adolescents and the connection of the burnout syndrome not only with the above listed background variables but with school and classroom motivation, too. We were right to suppose that more students feel the school and classroom climate supporting and motivating, the less they suffer from burnout symptoms.

Our second hypothesis was a belief that the intensity of students’ burnout as well as the school climate depends on the attitude of teachers: teachers with high emotional intelligence and good conflict-solving and coping strategies can prevent school-related burnout. We studied the extent to which teachers are prepared for possible bournout effect of the schoolwork, what are their and their students’ believes and expectations towards teachers and their opinion about responsibility of the teachers. We supposed there was a connection between the students’ burnout and the engagement of the teachers to help the students coping with their own school-related problems and to motivate them thinking positively about their school demands. According to the results, there is a negative correlation between these two phenomena.

The third aim of our researches was to identify the teachers’ competences needed to develop a positive and motivating classroom climate and supporting psychological environment. We realized the students could name all of these competences and most of these competences are listed among the teacher’s competence inventory used for measuring and evaluating them at their schoolwork. So nothing more is needed for developing good coping strategies what we have already known – but this is a big challenge for teacher training and educational policy to manage with.

Method
Along with a questionnaire measuring external variables (such as social status, GPA etc.), and motivational questionnaires, we administered the School Burnout Inventory by Salmela-Aro and al. (Salmela-Aro, 2009) to nearly 500 high school students in one Hungarian town. Tenth of them took part in five focus group interviews and were suggested to share their own thoughts and believes about the possible reasons of burnout and teachers’ role in coping with them. We will give an overview about the symptoms and intensity of school-related burnout among Hungarian adolescents. Our data is currently under statistical analysis, we will report about the exact results in the presentation. But some tendencies can already be seen. Comparing our results to the international references we have realized the similarities and differences between the background factors of the Hungarian and foreign high school students' burnout symptoms. In the first part of the presentation we will summarize and compare the bibliographical and researched experiences and try to uncover what factors these differences are due.

This pilot measurement doesn’t represent satisfactorily the Hungarian high school students’ society so a representative research is needed. Though, qualitative interviewing has explored interesting and thought-provoking ideas that it is worth sharing with the audience. The students were asked to list the skills and abilities of teachers they feel important in motivating and supporting them in the schoolwork and to introduce their own expectations about the motivating and supporting teacher. Students were also asked about their school career as well, supposing the positive relation between the existence of “good teachers” – supporting, motivating ones with great empathy in their environment and their lack of feeling of burnout symptoms.

Expected Outcomes
After the first pilot researches we have identified the existence of the burnout syndromes among the Hungarian high school students and we can strengthen that this is a difficult and complex problem because many variables influence it. Since it is the first in Hungary research focusing on the adolescents’ mental health from the aspect of burnout in the future we must continue the mapping of this problem by a representative research and we must decide the main districts of the examinations. The referred variables as gender, grade, school achievement, family background must be examined in the context of the burnout syndrome of the Hungarian students as well and we want to turn the attention on the responsibility of teachers in prevention, identification and introduction students coping strategies too. We spotlight the main competences, skills and abilities needed ourselves, the teachers and teacher trainers to make it possible.

We hope we can join the international volume of the students’ burnout researches and give additional information about the reasons of and the coping with the symptoms. We suppose there are a plenty of countries with similar to us educational difficulties as the lack of helping workers at schools or students’ feelings of unachievable demands, big classrooms and so on – so we would like to share our conclusions and discuss the others’ in the interest of finding, learning and disseminating new methods.
References


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Author Information

Nora Kunos (presenting)
Eszterházy Károly College, Eger, Hungary
Doctoral School of Education
Miskolc

Katalin Hejja-Nagy
Eszterházy Károly College
Department of Psychology
Eger