

## CHANGING ROLES AND NEW DANGERS IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN CHANGING TIMES

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*To be able to adapt the changes in the last few decades, teachers should take on new roles in their profession. Since all information is available via the Internet, teachers should redefine their old role as a director and rather become a facilitator. Today their task is to teach students how to handle information: how to find the suitable one and how to eliminate wrong data with healthy scepticism. Due to family problems and the loss of old values, children, mainly, adolescents stay without their parents' support. Finding help only in peer groups, teenagers may turn to deviant habits. Teachers should be prepared to deal with students' personal problems, to give advice on them as well as to mediate the values of adult society. Performing this new role together with other low social status, a salary may cause stress and burnout in the teaching profession. The symptoms of burnout - general, psychosomatic and psychosocial - make teachers unable to deal with their students. In order to cope with the difficulties of the teaching profession, teachers should learn coping strategies: both reactive ones to be able to fight successfully against burnout and proactive ones to be able to avoid it.*

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The world has changed a lot in the last 20-30 years, in Hungary mainly in the last 15-20 years. By the technological revolution, the appearance and widespread use of microchips and PCs, the world has opened for everybody. One can obtain plenty of information in some seconds only by a click of the mouse. Any information seems to be easily accessible. Via the Internet, kids may have more precise and up-to-date information than the teacher. However, the data and the information on the net are not controlled: there might be wrong or even dangerous information or pages for children. With the technical development around us, the speed of life has become faster. Growing demands at workplaces, overworking overtime?, the rat race of life cause a lot of stress not only for people in executive positions but in all families - and, of course, among teachers as well. Family troubles influence children's behaviour, their psychological development and socialisation. All these problems can be felt at schools too, which makes teachers experience problems which they did not have to face 20

years ago. As a consequence, teachers of the new age must learn how to cope with stress and even burnout.

In the changing world, a teacher's job has become more complex: beyond the classical roles, teachers nowadays have to adopt a lot of new roles. Each person in society has several roles according to their social positions. *Somlai* defines roles as "all the cultural patterns connecting to a particular position". (Somlai, 1997. 94 - trans. by the author) In the sentence above, the term 'role' is used in a different meaning which can be a synonym of the concepts as such 'approach' or 'attitude'. However, in this article according to Anglo-Saxon literature, the term 'role' is used referring to the concept 'approach'.

Focusing partly on the professional and partly on the human side of the teaching profession, two new roles are listed which teachers have to face and take. These new roles might cause role conflicts in teachers' minds and adding other problems caused by poor working conditions and low salaries, this may result in stress and burnout.

### From director to facilitator

With the unbelievable development of technical equipment, teachers must not be stuck to the 'board and chalk' method if they want to catch their students' attention. A number of surveys show that children's leisure time activities have significantly changed in the last decades. *Ábrahám* (2006) claims that according to her survey done in Komárom - Esztergom county in Hungary that while in the 60s - when most Hungarian families did not have a television set - Hungarian 14-year old adolescents' favourite past time activity was reading fiction, by the end of the 70s this was superseded by watching TV, and in 2004 the second most favourite activity was playing on the computer. These changes must be taken into consideration when planning work at school.

Fortunately, there is a lot of new equipment (such as a language laboratory, computers or interactive boards) at schools, but it needs new techniques as well as new methods to be applied in the lessons. "Knowing methods is the significant complement of professional knowledge, since they are applied every day in education." (Falus, 2001. 232 - trans. by the author) To reach different goals, teachers have to apply different methods and to be able to choose the most effective one they should know both the advantages and disadvantages of each method. In schools, teachers meet a generation which has better computer skills and know the Internet more than their teachers; several kinds of media are present in students' everyday life. Unfortunately, research shows that the pace at which the use of IT is spreading at schools is slower than required: the appearance and use of this equipment is rather linked to IT subjects (Hunya & Dancsó & Tartsayné, 2006).

The spread of IT in schools and the interest of the new generation require teachers to learn a, so called, new literacy. The World Wide Web has changed our concept of being literate. Classical literacy nowadays is only the lowest layer of the richer and more complex forms of new, Internet literacy (Leu, 2000). The literate person of the Internet age is not the one who possesses more information than the others, but the one who, from the piled knowledge accessible via the Internet, is able to pickup and choose, in the most effective way, the pieces of information one just needs. For this, one has to acquire new and more and more

sophisticated navigation strategies (Leu, 2000). The metaphors linked to knowledge today are 'surfing' and 'navigation' (Cohen, 2006). According to Lévy, "the universe has got beyond unreachable forever; everybody has to build up one's own partial totality" (quoted by Cohen, 2006. 85 - trans. by the author). Lévy goes on that today the function of education in schools is not spreading as much information as the teacher can. The classical teacher's role of directing the whole teaching-learning process is disappearing. The teacher should become an animator or facilitator, who follows and handles the learning process. (quoted by Cohen, 2006). In the changing world, the school itself has to adapt to changes. One of its new tasks is to prepare students to be able to expand their knowledge after leaving school regardless the fact what age they leave school (Vári et al., 2001).

As facilitators, teachers should draw their students' attention to both the advantages and disadvantages of Internet. On the one hand, for the first time in human history man is able to communicate with anyone in the world through the Internet. One becomes not only the object but also the subject of the communication process. "We should be prepared to see the world through the eyes of another person" (Cohen, 2006:83 - trans. by the author) A child who is linked to WWW obtains several different kinds of data, information, pictures, music. Watching the world from this new point of view forms and changes the child's comprehension, intelligence and creativity. In schools of modern age, teachers have to teach competencies which enable students to acquire new information and to discover new knowledge. While using the Internet, students should learn how to work in teams, how to share information with others via WWW. This provides a good opportunity for students to get acquainted with other cultures (Cohen, 2006).

On the other hand, Internet literacy needs a new kind of critical thinking. As anyone can publish anything on the Internet, as the border between the author and the recipient is disappearing, the control over and the guarantee for the accuracy of the information done earlier by classical institutions and authorities do not exist any longer. Till the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, writing and reading were the tools of both informing and forming the mass. In addition, authority controlled not only reading through published, spread and preserved books, but also writing via censorship. By today the book has lost its culture-forming role (Petrucci, 2000). On the Internet anyone may not only read but write anything one wants. According to Tószegi (2000), when two-way communication was available on the information superhighway a kind of epidemics broke out among people, and "logorrhoea, abnormal verbosity got millions of people into its power". (Tószegi, 2000:16 - trans. by author) She notes that although it is an opportunity for everybody to become an author, there have been hundreds of pieces of writing of questionable value. Unfortunately, the limitless opportunities of publishing "have not multiplied significantly the number of Shakespeares, Jókais, Hrabals, not even Einsteins". (ibid) This requires teachers to teach their students how to handle information with the so called 'healthy scepticism' (Leu, 2000). Since the skill of orientation in the ocean of information is essential a prerequisite of being successful in both career and private life.

## Age of value relativity

Besides a facilitator, the (teacher's?) role as a consultant, an adviser or a mediator is being emphasized today as well; as families are not able to provide their classical functions in children's lives. "On the one hand, a growing number of parents are hardly able to provide particular functions for the kids due to either objective or subjective reasons, or both. On the other hand, a growing proportion of young people are starting to refuse, at earlier and earlier age, the patterns of way of living offered to them by their families" (Szapu, 2002:52 - trans. by author). Perhaps the most difficult age is adolescence and youth, which is, according to Szapu (2002), the transitional period of life between childhood and adulthood, the time of one finding oneself, that of forming one's consciousness of identity" (Szapu, 2002. 22 - trans. by author). According to several researchers, youth has become an autonomous social group having particular consciousness. The place of youth is always the real reflection of survival and continuation of the given society (Szapu, 2002).

In welfare states, the status and the role of the youth have changed in the last few decades. First, comparing with the length of adolescence, by today youth has become much longer: on the one hand, present youngsters get mature both biologically and mentally at a much earlier age, on the other hand, youth finishes later with the lengthening period of learning and having a stable partnership later. (Somlai, 2004) Second, the less affectivity the welfare state has, the more widespread are consumer and aggressive youth subcultures (Szapu, 2002). Youth peer groups are coming into being as "their members, based on the dominant culture, cannot reach the values accepted by the society as significant". (Szapu, 2002:24 - trans. by the author) So they are in opposition with the authorised culture on the basis of separating? generations. The post-modern society is characterised by the features of consuming and virtuality?. The old values have lost their roles in people's lives, one experiences value-relativity.

In our changing world, parents have become uncertain; they cannot adapt to changes as quickly as it would be needed. Experiencing the unbelievable changes in their kids' behaviour, parents either panic or behave in a too strict way with the intention to break the teenager's ambitions to have independence. However, the other extreme situation sometimes happens when parents leave the kids with the problems on their own compensating them with money (Koncz, 2005). Parents are often either too ill-informed or indifferent, or too anxious and over-scrupulous. On the basis of their superficial knowledge about their children's lives, their values and their problems, parents quite often make either too strict or too permissive decisions (Szapu, 2002). According to Szapu's (2004) survey in Kaposvár, 29% of parents is totally satisfied with their children, 32% is dissatisfied with the kids' school results, and only 9% criticises the child's bad habits (Szapu, 2004). This refers to parents' attitude towards their kids: they focus mainly on formal, visible things instead of dealing with the kids' real problems. Therefore today the young have confidence in their partners, friends and peers rather than in their parents. Only 8 % of youngsters, by Szapu's survey, turn to their parents in case of problems; 25% seek support at their peers while 20% withdraws into oneself. What is warning or even frightening is that 10% of youth finds ease and 'flees' into smoking, drinking alcohol or even taking drugs (Szapu, 2004).

Besides problem-solving methods, youngsters' values have also changed a lot in the last two-three decades. According to *Sas's* (2004) research called '*Imagined Families*', which was done nowadays and 20 years ago among 14-18-year-old youngsters, one can state that the youth today has different values than their parents had at their age. When imagining their future, young people 20 years ago emphasised the importance of family, while today the youth focuses on career. This means that family, family links have lost their significance and value in young people's mind. Even parents themselves cannot teach their kids how important family is due to the growing number of divorces. Many children live in one-parent families without learning both the male and female patterns, or with their step father or mother and half-siblings. According to a huge survey called '*Youth 2000*' done by several researchers with 8000 Hungarian youngsters, *Susánszky* and *Szántó* (2002) claim that if children in two-parent families are regarded somatisationally endangered at average degree, children in one-parent families and in families with a step-parent are even more endangered.

In addition to the generation gap which seems to be wider than decades ago, the influence of mass media on youth peer groups and youth subculture is considered to be significant by most researchers. The patterns of behaviour, the values of life advertised by the media quite often widen this gap between youngsters and adult society and make the young more self-centred and individualistic. Not having confidence in their parent, not finding real help at their peers, some youngsters turn to the behaviour patterns which are considered to be deviant - such as smoking, alcohol or even drugs - to be able to cope with or at least to ease their troubles.

Experts say that education should be more child-and youth-centred and teachers should take on some particular family roles. It is often the teachers' task to link young people with adults, to mediate the values of adult society towards the youth. To be able to become a mediator or even a consultant or an advisor from a once authorised person, teachers should have more tolerance with and confidence in children. The work done together, mutual thinking - and not giving orders in an authorised position - may result in confidence, which may lead to mutual problem-solving (*Vincze*, 2005).

### Teacher's burnout

Due to the appearance of new roles and fast role changes in the teaching profession, teachers may experience role conflicts - since strategies used in classical roles are not effective and useful any longer - which causes stress. If the resources seem to be equal to the demand, one views them as challenges. If, however, the demands are felt to exceed the resources, they are experienced as stressors. According to several researchers, teachers who experience stress for a long time may get into the state of burnout (*Wood & McCarthy*, 2002). Regardless of age and pre-service and in-service training, according to *Salvato* (2004), most teachers are struck by burnout at some point of their career. By *Thompson*, this is due to the fact that teachers by nature focus on their students' needs instead of their own ones (quoted by *Salvato*, 2004).

There are several definitions of what burnout means. According to many researchers, burnout is closely related to work. By *Greenglass* (2001), "burnout [is] ... a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding". *Benjamin* (1987) defines burnout similarly but she goes on describing the state itself: "Burnout is a distinctive kind of job-related stress that inhibits the person's capacity to function effectively... Burnout is not just a temporary disposition but an unhealthy condition that makes once idealistic, productive, enthusiastic workers detriments to their profession, their colleagues, and themselves." Other scholars focus directly on teacher's burnout. Burnout "as a condition caused by depersonalization, emotional exhaustion and a diminished sense of accomplishment". *Wood* and *McCarthy* (2000) give a more concrete definition: "An extreme type of role-specific alienation with a focus on feelings of meaninglessness, especially as this applies to one's ability to successfully reach students."

Burnout can be assessed by a widely-used research instrument developed by *Maslach*, *Jackson* and *Leiter*, the so called Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). Although the first version was designed to measure the burnout in occupations of human service, as it was recognised in the US, the teaching profession was also 'endangered' by burnout as well. Teachers experience increased pressure by society e.g. to educate students, to meet individual needs of the students, to provide various activities, to correct social problems (alcohol, drug, etc.). That is why a lot of teachers leave the profession and fewer students choose this career, unfortunately, quite often not the brightest ones. In 1997 *Maslach*, *Jackson* and *Leiter* developed MBI-Educators Survey (MBI-ES). This survey measures the same three dimensions as the original MBI: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment. Emotional exhaustion is the tired and fatigued feeling resulting in the situation that teachers do not have positive feelings about their students. Experiencing depersonalisation means displaying indifferent or even negative attitude towards students using derogatory labels ("They are all animals") and keeping physical distance from students (barricading themselves behind the teacher's desk). The feeling of low personal accomplishment is the most crucial in teaching position as most teachers start this job with the aim to help others. When teachers feel that they are no longer able to accomplish this, they turn to other fields to be rewarded (e.g. spend more time money making) (*Maslach & Jackson & Leiter*, 1997).

Listing the factors contributing to burnout in the teaching profession, different scholars name similar stressors. *Jarvis* (2002) classifies these factors into three groups: 1. factors intrinsic to teaching, 2. cognitive vulnerability to stress and 3. systematic factors. Factors intrinsic to teaching include workload, long working hours, low social status and salary.

Since the number of researchers had found a link between the bureaucratic structure and the big size of schools, as well as the autocratic leadership style, *Dworkin*, *Saha* and *Hill* (2003) focused on democratic school and investigated whether the phenomenon of burnout may also appear in schools like that. Contradicting to authoritarian and bureaucratic system, centralised decision-

making processes, lacking of professional autonomy in classical state schools, which may result in teachers' depersonalisation, democratic schools are considered to have non-authoritarian and non-bureaucratic system, open communication, shared decision-making processes, student-centred approach to the teaching-learning process. In addition, parents are regarded as partners in the process of education. The consequence of all of these factors should be that teachers in democratic schools do not experience burnout. However, democratic schools cannot minimize teacher burnout; they may even contribute to this. First, teacher's role may be considered to be more ambiguous. In the classical school hierarchy, teachers stand above students; in democratic schools, however, hierarchy is minimized, which may result in negotiable behaviour patterns. Second, democratic schools require extra effort from teachers in the teaching-learning process, which is one of the typical causes of burnout. Finally, the content of the curriculum is in the sphere of government authority.

As far as the symptoms of burnout are concerned, the Beginning Teacher Mentor Program in Indiana University East describes them in three big categories: 1. general symptoms, 2. psychosomatic/physical symptoms, 3. psychosocial/behavioural symptoms. General signs include declining efficiency; decreased interest in and quality of work; questioning the values of oneself, peers and life; feeling of exhaustion; emotional withdrawal from the family, friends and colleagues; and denying the problems themselves. Psychosomatic symptoms consist of depression, headaches, weight loss, insomnia, high blood pressure, and loss of sexual drive. Psychosocial symptoms include increased rigidity and negativity; increased irritability; suspiciousness; increased illness and absence from work; disorganised behaviour, and inability to enjoy the pleasures of life.

In the teaching profession, many teachers suffer from burnout and try to cope - sometimes on their own - with the syndrome. However, "it is far better if the roots of teacher burnout are identified and eliminated before the syndrome develops, rather than treating it when it has already occurred. (Wood & McCarthy, 2002) To be able to fight successfully against burnout, teachers have to acquire coping strategies. Several researchers have categorised coping in very different ways. One of them is *Greenglass*, who categorises coping strategies as reactive and proactive ones. While the former category refers to strategies reacting burnout, the latter indicates strategies preceding it. Reactive or traditional coping deals with the stressful events after their appearance, therefore its goal is to compensate the loss or harm. Proactive coping is more future-oriented facilitating the promotion of challenging aims. While reactive coping is regarded to be risk-management seeing demands as risks and harms; proactive coping is considered to be goal-management seeing demands and opportunities as challenges. Reactive coping derives from risk appraisal evaluating environmental demands as threats; proactive coping, on the other hand, perceives situations as challenging and stimulating (Greenglass, 2001). She created the Proactive Coping Inventory (PCI), which "consists of 18 subscales describing various dimensions of behaviour and cognition" (Greenglass, 1998).

## Conclusion

Being able to cope successfully with burnout is essential not only for teachers. If teachers are burnt out, they cannot teach children effectively, moreover they cannot acquire new methods and attitudes, they cannot 'learn' new roles. Thus they are unable to help kids either in the learning process or in their personal problems. They do not recognise children's problems, but consider children as problems. Teachers' responsibility seems bigger than it used to be. As far as their professional responsibility is concerned, they have to teach their students that computer is not only a tool for silly and sometimes dangerous games, but via the Internet they can get useful or even essential information. Being well-informed is a key concept in our modern age. Having studied important techniques how to find the suitable information on the Internet will provide students thousands of good opportunities in their later lives from finding a bargain to finding a job.

If the teachers are burnt out, they cannot respond to students' personal life problems either. Children, mainly teenagers who do not have good relationship with their parents might turn to their teachers. Although adolescents seek independence, they do need their parents' or at least an adult's help and confidence. Relying on their peers' advice only, teenagers may make wrong decisions which might influence their lives seriously: they might get into dangerous gangs, play truant from school, and be addicted to alcohol or even drugs. Teachers may stop students from committing bad things. But it can be done only by teachers who are healthy both in mind and body. Society needs healthy people in the future as well; and the education of a new generation is (in today's parents and teachers hands) (partly in today's parents' hand, partly in teachers'). Therefore teachers should have the ability, the intention and the effort? strength? to cope with stress and burnout, to regenerate and to renew.

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