

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Teacher Personality Background of Competence
Based Education**

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**University of Debrecen
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Introduction

Important changes in Hungarian society, involving a radical restructuring of the country's economy, began to take shape at the beginning of the 1990s. Those changes had a significant impact on education as well. For a better understanding of some dramatic changes in the educational system, we need to understand the personality traits and the mental states of teachers, who are the actors in those changes.

The present work is an attempt to analyze the personality profile of practicing teachers and to reveal possible interconnections between competence based education and burnout risk factors.

The dissertation offers a survey of research and the literature in Hungary and abroad on interconnections between a teacher's personality and their profession, between roles and the profession, and between the profession and burnout phenomena (Bagdy, 1997; Gáspár-Holecz, 2005; Szilágyi, 1991; Telkes, 1997; Túri, 1999; Cropley, 2000; Hoffman, 1984; Rushton-Morgan-Richard, 2007).

Among the principles of career choice, the principle of development has been considered central. Career qualifications, as well as the conditions people work in, are constantly changing, which causes the individual to continuously seek for a compromise between professional roles and requirements they are expected to fulfill on the one hand and personal aspirations on the other. In our empirical research, we have focused on an analysis of one aspect of these processes.

The research conducted

Aims of the study

The general aim of the study has been to reveal any interconnections and expose contradictions between the personality coverage apparently required by competence based education and elements of a teacher's personality profile which may contribute to burnout and to explore the possibilities for constructing a teacher education model which not only points more effectively in the direction of expected personality traits but offers some protection against burnout.

A more immediate goal of the research has been to survey the personality status of practicing teachers and compare the results so gained by standardized questionnaires with the personality traits specified as teacher requirements in the teacher education and qualification decree.

An equally important immediate goal of the research has been to determine the mental hygienic stability of the teacher personality profile apparently required by competence based education and identify factors that involve risks of, rather than protection from, early burnout.

The hypotheses of the study

1. We hypothesize that the Teacher Education and Qualification Requirements (Decree no. 15/2006/IV.3, issued by the Ministry of Education) contains a richer and more specific inventory of personality expectations than the previous decree on teacher education (Government Decree no. 111/1997.).

2. We hypothesize that one can identify a group within the sample of teachers involved in the study, whose personality profiles are not consistent with the personality requirements laid down in the more recent decree.

3. We hypothesize that educators that meet the personality requirements in question present a less favorable picture from a mental hygienic perspective, and are, therefore, more threatened with burnout than teachers whose personality profiles are farther away from what is apparently required by the decree.

4. We hypothesize that the personality states of teachers who work in competence based educational contexts are more consistent with personality requirements laid down in the decree, and thus they represent the more endangered population of teachers from a mental hygienic perspective.

The study sample

A total of N=560 educators participated in the study. The composition of the sample: practicing teachers participating in special in-service programs and students in MA programs in education at Eszterházy Károly College. Subjects came from all parts of the country, which does not entail that the sample can be considered representative.

Table 1. Summary table of the sample

	Division of respondents	Number of respondents
Working on CBE programmes	264	N=560
Working on (conventional) non-CBE programmes	296	
Men	128	N=560
Women	432	
Recently-trained educators	94	N=559
Experienced educators	465	
Sciences	253	N=542
Arts	289	
Working in primary education	306	N=560
Working in secondary education	245	

Study methods

When decisions were made about the type of questionnaires to be used, two conditions were especially considered: 1. their yield potentials must cover the personality traits contained in the Teacher Education and Qualification decree (no. 15/2006/IV.3, Ministry of Education); 2. they must be potentially relevant for the interconnections the research aimed to reveal. Thus, the following questionnaires have been selected:

- Big Five personality study questionnaire
- Atlas.ti content analysis software
- Maslach: Burnout Inventory, a device for measuring burnout
- Davis: Interpersonal Reactivity Index, a device for measuring empathy
- Rotter's Locus of Control Scale, which serves to identify loci of control

Summary of study methods and tools by hypothesis:

Table 2. Study hypotheses, methods and devices employed

Hypothesis	Method	Device	Sample
1. hypothesis	content analysis	Atlas.ti	– Competence based Teacher Education and Qualifications decree (no. 15/2006/IV.3) – Gov. decree no. 111/1997.
2. hypothesis	questionnaire	Big Five Rotter	560 persons 546 persons
3. hypothesis	questionnaire	Big Five Burnout Rotter	560 persons 556 persons 558 persons
4. hypothesis	questionnaire	Big Five Burnout Empathy	560 persons 556 persons 558 persons

Research results and verification of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

We have hypothesized that the Teacher Education and Qualification Requirements (Decree no. 15/2006/IV.3, issued by the Ministry of Education) contains a richer and more specific structure of personality expectations than the previous decree on teacher education (Government Decree no. 111/1997.).

The texts of both decrees have been analyzed with the help of Atlas.ti content analysis software. The first step was to code the texts. This was carried out first by setting up an appropriate system of categories and subsequently assigning text elements to those categories. Thus, the texts were converted to analyzable and interpretable data. The second step was to derive quantitative inferences.

Categories of analysis were set up in two steps. First, both decree texts were subjected to a tripartite category analysis. Three different types of expressions were identified in terms of their content: expressions on subject knowledge, methodological knowledge, and personality traits. Once expressions on personality traits were identified, the category was subjected to further analysis, with the exclusion of both remaining categories. The first hypothesis appears to have been corroborated: the Min. decree no. 15/2006/IV.3. indeed contains verifiably more expressions on personality traits than its predecessor decree no. 111/1997.

Hypothesis 2

We have hypothesized that one can identify a group within the sample of teachers involved in the study, whose personality profiles are not consistent with the personality requirements laid down in the decree.

We have found the Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ) to be most reliable and most relevant for this hypothesis. Nevertheless, data obtained with other devices have also been considered, supplementing the BFQ data and corroborating the findings.

High and very high scores obtained in the five main factors and ten sub-scales of BFQ were regarded as representing a personality profile that meets the personality trait requirements of the decree. Thus, teachers with scores in the low and very low domains do not meet the decree requirements (cf. Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of teachers who do not meet the personality trait requirements broken down to main BFQ categories

BFQ main factors and their sub-scales	Percentage of teachers who do not meet personality trait requirements
Energy	20.0%
Dynamism	15.9%
Dominance	20.2%
Affability	18.0%
Cooperation/ empathy	17.0%
Politeness	23.2%
Conscientiousness	13.4%
Exactness	12.3%
Perseverance	20.0%
Emotional stability	10.9%
Emotional control	11.4%
Impulsiveness control	12.2%
Openness	34.3%
Openness to culture	26.2%
Openness to experience	36.1%

As the data in the table above shows, the expected requirements are not met by a fifth of the subjects in four main factors of expected personality traits, and over thirty percent of the sample fails to meet them in one main factor. Thus, hypothesis 2 has been corroborated.

Hypothesis 3

We have hypothesized that educators that meet the personality requirements in question present a less favorable picture from a mental hygienic perspective, and are, therefore, more threatened with burnout than teachers whose personality profiles are farther away from what is apparently required by the decree.

Educators who most closely approximate the decree requirements are those with high and very high scores on BFQ and those with high scores on the empathy scale. Teachers in the low and very low domains of BFQ and in the low domain on the empathy scale do not meet the decree requirements on personality traits. For the comparison of the results obtained in the two groups, analysis of variance and cross tabulation have been employed. Interrelationships are represented by Pearson's Chi-square values.

Table 4. Significant interrelationships between the Big Five Questionnaire and the Burnout questionnaire (using variance analysis and cross tabulation)

BFQ factors	Burnout questionnaire – emotional burnout		Burnout questionnaire - depersonalization		Burnout questionnaire – decrease in individual performance	
	Variance-analysis	Pearson’s Chi-square	Variance-analysis	Pearson’s Chi-square	Variance-analysis	Pearson’s Chi-square
Big Five - energy	0.000 p<0.01	(0.014) p<0.05	0.003 p<0.01	(0.011) p<0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.000) p<0.01
Big Five – affability	0.132 p>0.05	(0.841) p>0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.000) p<0.01	0.000 p<0.01	(0.00) p<0.01
Big Five – conscientiousness	0.419 p>0.05	(0.380) p>0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.013) p<0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.000) p<0.01
Big Five – emotional stability	0.000 p<0.01	(0.000) p<0.01	0.001 p<0.01	(0.148) p>0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.001) p<0.01
Big Five - openness	0.105 p>0.05	(0.371) p>0.05	0.027 p<0.05	(0.376) p>0.05	0.000 p<0.01	(0.000) p<0.01

Significant interrelations hold between particular factors of BFQ and certain dimensions of the burnout questionnaire. In the case of educators who meet the personality requirements of the Teacher Education and Qualification decree, high scores in the five main factors of BFQ are in each case significantly related to the decrease in the individual performance dimension of the burnout questionnaire (see Table 4.).

As they scored demonstrably low in the individual performance dimension of the burnout questionnaire, the conclusion is justified that educators who appear to possess the personality traits specified as decree requirements are in a less favorable condition from a mental hygienic perspective.

Hypothesis 4

We have hypothesized that the personality states of teachers who work in competence based educational context are more consistent with personality requirements laid down in the decree, and thus they are the more endangered population of teachers from a mental hygienic perspective.

The analysis of data obtained in the BFQ factors shows that personality states of teachers who work in a competence based educational environment are “better,” i.e., more in accordance with the requirements, in all five main factors, as well as the sub-scales. Out of the five main factors, significant differences have been found in the factors of energy, conscientiousness, and openness, while on the sub-scales, the dimensions of dynamism, dominance, perseverance, and openness to experiences showed statistically meaningful differences. In calculating the levels of significance, average values of the T-values in particular factors were subjected to two-sample t-tests (see Table 4).

The second part of the hypothesis addresses the issue that teachers whose personality traits better approximate the decree requirements are the more endangered of the two groups of teachers from a mental hygienic perspective. In order to decide that issue, we used data

obtained in the MBI questionnaire. When investigating any possible interrelationships between a decrease in individual performance and the type of activity, we found that there were significant differences between the two groups of teachers involved in the study. Decrease in individual performance was represented by significantly higher scores in the group of teachers who worked in a competence based educational context than in teachers working in conventional education (cf. Table 5).

Table 5. Interrelations between decrease in performance and type of educational program in the Burnout questionnaire

Burnout questionnaire – decrease in individual performance	Working in a competence based educational program?	
	yes	no
N	262	294
average	34.30	32.72
standard deviation	7.799	7.910
t	2.367	
df	554	
p<	0.018	

Both parts of the hypothesis appear to have been empirically justified: the personality states of teachers working in competence based educational environments are more in accordance with the required personality profile, and, at the same time, they are more endangered by burnout from the perspective of the decrease in performance.

Summary

As an overall description, teachers in study sample appear to be characterized by an outstandingly high desire to meet expectations, as compared to the national standard. Further research could reveal aspects of how it affects performance on the job as well as any explanatory factors in the teacher education program itself.

A decidedly identifiable subset of the sample, active and currently employed as teachers, appears to fail to meet the requirements laid down in the Teacher Education and Qualification Decree.

Teachers who work in competence based educational contexts better approximate the required personality state in all categories. On three major scales and five subscales, they differ significantly from teachers working in conventional education.

With an increase in the teachers' age, a marked increase is noticed in three main factors (openness, affability, and emotional stability), indicating a superior state of mental hygiene in more experienced teachers. In contrast, representatives of the younger generation excel in the main factors of energy and conscientiousness.

High and average results in the empathy factor indicate that teachers are able to suppress egocentric behaviors and are ready to actively respond to the needs of others, which is desirable from the perspective of successful professional functioning. Equally desirable is the finding that teachers appear to have the ability to put themselves in other people's positions in a variety of different situations.

They appear to feel uncomfortable about the idea of openly refusing to offer help and their empathic responses are not self-oriented. All this is accompanied by an externally controlled attitude.

It is remarkable that over a third of the participants are markedly conservative traditionalists, with little understanding of new developments or people from cultures at variance with their own. Their personalities and behaviors are characterized by a fear of whatever is new and intolerance towards otherness. Less than a third of the sample possess traits like openness to cultures and to values different from their own, components of a flexible personality, apparently required by the decree, which looks upon an unexpected situation as a challenge.

Teachers working in competence based educational environments are more extroverted, feel better in the company of others, have more interest in establishing interpersonal relationships, are more communicative, more enthusiastic, prefer situations rich in stimuli, they are more trustworthy, more exact in their work, work with more perseverance, are more open to other people, values and cultures than their counterparts in conventional educational contexts. They are less likely to stick to routine and more likely to seek for progressive solutions. Overall, their personality profile is compatible with the decree requirements. As teachers working in competence based educational programs are more highly exposed to burnout, competence based teacher education may, and perhaps must, respond to this.

Conclusions and suggestions

The results of the research appear to suggest two major educational tasks in two different areas. One of these is to reduce the desire to meet external expectations, the externally controlled attitude, and facilitate a shift toward internal control. Emphasis in the second area to be developed falls on developing personality traits that relate to interpersonal relations. As data obtained in the openness, energy, and affability scales of BFQ, designed to measure this dimension, shows, this is the domain where teachers are farthest away from meeting personality requirements. Scores in the openness scale are particularly disquieting, since both the decree and general considerations of important aspects of the profession dictate that teachers' relations to their students ought to be characterized by acceptance, tolerance, and openness to others and to differences in culture and values.

One must recognize that issues of professional skills and personality development are not, as yet, satisfactorily resolved in teacher education. It is inappropriate and professionally unwise, for instance, to include the relevant courses as regular required courses, awarded by credit points, as usual, since that would entail jeopardizing the very aims of such development, naturally hostile to the notion of being 'obligatory'.

Experience of teacher in-service training has shown that there is a great demand among teachers for mental hygienic support and, regardless of the content and goal of a particular in-service course they participate in, they tend to put a lot of work into regaining their own equilibrium. Results of the research reported here suggest that the considerable amount of emotional burden, stress filter, decrease in performance, and the statistically obvious high degree of the desire in teachers to meet external expectations all indicate a need for personality development based on rational emotional therapy to be included in the methodological-developmental repertoire of teacher education. That certainly involves the task of working out its educational adaptation in future.

Further research opportunities

The sample may, in future, be made representative, keeping the same test and measurement repertoire constant. The sample may also be amended by teachers not currently participating in teacher education, whose motivations are likely to be different.

It would also be interesting to study a layered sample of teachers from selected regions where they face child protection issues more intensely than others elsewhere.

A career aptitude survey, not as an entrance requirement but conducted with participants in the teacher education program, could also promise interesting results.

The research has yielded additional indirect evidence that the current educational system does not offer a sufficient amount of assistance in areas of self-knowledge and understanding professions in order to help young people in making career choices. As a matter of fact, young people do not appear to know very much about the most elementary aspects of the process of making such decisions.

Research results may contribute to the planning and implementation of in-service teacher education programs, in addition to their potential usefulness in redesigning full-time teacher education. More emphasis may be put on improving students' self-power and empowering them with protective devices. In addition, teachers currently working in the profession need to be taught about ways for them to critically revise, analyze, and evaluate their own views and conceptual constructs, so they can regularly restructure their professional selves. A higher degree of self-awareness and self-definition might promise better patterns of student-teacher relations.

Keywords

teacher education, personality traits, competence-based education

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