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Teacher's subjective well-being as an influential factor in feeling responsible for student's achievement at school

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Abstract

Many people regard work as an attribute of adult life that also represents an important part of their personal and civil identity: an adult attribute that forms an integral part of a personal and civil identity. Good citizenship means being competent in life, contributing to life satisfaction and well-being. Can we link teacher's subjective well-being to responsibility for their students' achievements? We use the Berne Questionnaire of Subjective Well-being (Adult Form) and the Responsibility for Student Achievement Questionnaire. We found teachers thought that students' achievements often result from the good teacher's work, while underachievement is caused by students' lower abilities. The longer they have practiced as a teacher, the more likely they are to hold this opinion.

Introduction

One of the many important tasks awaiting schools and individual teachers in the confused world of the beginning of the 21st century is to assist the young generation in finding its own identity so that it will be able to take up responsibility not only for itself, but also for the whole society. This, we believe, is a crucial issue. It is our belief that only those teachers who are satisfied within their profession and identified with their professional role are able to care for the responsible citizens of the future.

The working adult role is one of the most important ones we encounter in our adult life and it is connected with social identity, well-being, social contacts, physical and mental activity, standard of living, personal fulfilment and the feelings of usefulness and ability to perform effectively. Work in particular is the essential attribute of adult life for many people. The feeling of competency we have been growing gradually from our childhood, reaches its highest point here, and we feel the satisfaction from a well-done job.

People strive to increase the quality of their lives continuously regardless of their age, background and education. They explore their feeling of subjective well-being and harmony while looking for the ways to maintain it and, at the same time, increase it. The positive state of the body and the mind, which means subjective well-being (it will be referred to as SWB further in the text) seems to be a common and widely sought-after goal for most individuals. SWB is subject to several conditions – both individually varied and set by the society, such as one's cultural or sociological background, economical situation and standard of living.

According to Grob (1998), SWB is 'a complex term spanning various stages from low self-esteem, little satisfaction and the negative aspects of life to happiness, fulfilling

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satisfaction and the positive aspects of life' (p.21). Also, Grob distinguishes between the habitual SWB, which can be gained by pursuing individual inner motivations and needs, and the existent SWB. Personal failures to accomplish them result in the feeling of discomfort.

The existent SWB depends on active factors and can be reached either directly, i.e. through positive experiences, or indirectly, i.e. by eliminating or reducing negative experiences.

The SWB structure consists of two main components:

1. SWB as cognitive experience (people compare the real situation with their expectations): The difference between the real and the sought-after situation yields SWB index. If it is zero or positive, the person feels fulfilment and satisfaction.

Satisfaction emerges from many series' of conscious reflections concerning self-perception in contrary to perceiving others, self-perception in contrary to the ideal self and, finally, the generalised self-perceptions versus the actual state.

1. SWB as an emotional component (all the everyday experience evaluated in terms of positive or negative outcome): hence, satisfaction is the arithmetical difference obtained by subtracting the negative experiences from the positive experiences.

Blatný (2001) believes that the cognitive component in SWB is represented by one's own evaluation of life satisfaction, whereas the emotional component is formed by all the positive and negative emotions, moods and affects creating a certain level of satisfaction without any conscious awareness.

Diener and other authors (1999) assume that SWB is rather a long-term setting of personal mood than the current emotional state. Gulotta and other authors (2000) claim that the psychological aspects of well-being include self-confidence, ability to recognise and use personal potentials, assertion, and the feeling of psychological comfort and harmony. Self-development aspects correlate with self-esteem, maturity, stability, locus of control, sensitivity, self-confidence and planning coordination (p 99).

Minimum changes in the corresponding current psychical setting throughout various life situations signify a stable personality. People feeling personally satisfied while working are satisfied in their free time, too. Diener and other authors (1984) reflected that the level of pleasant experience at work correlates .70 with a well-spent holiday and negative experience at work correlates .74 with a negative holiday experience.

The facts stated above clearly show the deep impact that SWB has on every single individual and his or her profession. In other words, a person's job satisfaction serves as one the main indicators of a positively perceived SWB.

Research

We tried to estimate whether there is a correlation between a teacher's perception of his or her work and their subjective well-being while using two already tested methods. The first one was the Berne Questionnaire of Subjective Well-Being – Adult Form, which explores the six basic elements that comprise satisfaction – positive attitudes towards life (POS, 7 items), problems (PRO, 7 items), somatic complaints (SCR, 8 items), self-esteem (SEL, 3 items), depressive mood (DEP, 4 items), joy in life (JOY, 5 items).

The questionnaire was issued in the written form and the respondents were asked to use a Likert scale for every item, ranging from strong disagreement (1) to strong agreement (4 to 6). The Cronbach α for the questionnaire as a whole was 0.66 in case of our sample.

The other method applied was RSA – Responsibility for Student Achievement Questionnaire by Guskey (1981), which is usually used by teachers in primary and secondary schools and deals with a teacher's responsibility for student's performance at school.

This questionnaire form lists 30 items offering two available options. According to Guskey, fifteen items measure the R+ factor of responsibility for student's success and the remaining fifteen items represent the R-factor of responsibility for student's failure. Both sets of questions describe a particular situation and ask about its cause. Teachers are supposed to choose the option that, in their opinion, most often prevails in lessons. They award both options with a percentage figure which sums up 100% in total.

Example:

When your students quickly understand some learning material, is it most likely because:
a) you helped them overcome the biggest problems with learning (for example 35%)
b) these students' performance is usually very good and they perform well in other subjects too. (100 – 35 = 65%)

The Cronbach α in this questionnaire was 0.66 for R+, 0.84 for R- and 0.76 in sum.

Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 140 teachers.

Men N=41 (29.29%), Women N=99 (70.71%)

Average Age: men 44.33 years, women 40.59 years (there is a statistically significant difference with men being significantly older than women)

Marital Status: single N=15 (10.71%), married N=114 (81.43%), divorced N=11 (7.86%)

Table 1 Length of Age Teaching Practice

M	13.47	41.69
SD	10.60	9.80
max	45	63
min	1	24

Results**Table 2 – RSA Results**

	$\Sigma R+$	$\Sigma R+/15$	$\Sigma R-$	$\Sigma R-/15$
M	883.21	58.88	728.09	48.54
SD	116.76	7.78	174.40	11.63
Max	1157	77.13	1244	82.93
Min	491	32.73	293	19.53

As seen in the table above, most of our respondents' sample opinions show that student's achievement is caused by teacher's abilities. However, the same opinions showed that students are most often to be blamed for teacher's failure.

R+ and R- relations: the appearance of R+ and R- is not correlated, they are independent phenomena. Teacher's achievement and failure perception and their subjective share of it is purely individual and is not influenced by the length of their teaching practice.

The respondents' age compared with the RSA questionnaire results did not correlate with the R+ and R- sets (the statement correlation is shown in the table below). In other words, the age of the respondent does not influence individual perception of one's own responsibility for student's achievement or failure.

Nevertheless, the length of teaching practice is in negative correlation with R-: the longer the teaching practice, the less responsibility is felt for student's failure. The statements were listed according to the arithmetical average.

Statements with maximum R+:

1. M = 85.36%

Let's suppose that that you add an extra lesson into the curriculum. It is because:

a) you try to ensure that all your students master the material

2. M = 76.90%

When you overhear a student saying: 'He/she is a great teacher and able to teach you something', it is probably because:

a) you try to make lessons attractive for your students

3. M = 71.57%

We assume that your superior will highly speak about your work. It is because:

(The age and item correlation here is $r = -0.21$. The younger the teacher, the more he or she thinks of their abilities to teach students efficiently. This feeling decreases with the growing age.)

Minimum R+ Statements:

1. M = 41.11%

Let's suppose that your work in a class is going well. It is probably because:

2. M = 44.57%

When your student works well in a lesson, it is most likely because:

3. M = 46.62%

Let's suppose that some classes try to make sure that you teach their class. It is probably because:

You can make pupils interested and involved in learning.

The correlation between the statement and the age or the statement and the length of practice shows us that the older the teacher and the longer the teaching practice, the more confident they feel about their ability to make their students interested and involved.

Statements with maximum R-:

1. M = 67.99%

When you feel hopeless and desperate, lacking faith in what you do, it is usually because:

b) you cannot always teach in such a way that would make all your students successful in learning

The correlation between the statement and the length of practice is $r = -0.24$.

The correlation between the age and the statement is $r = -0.22^*$.

2. M = 59.58%

When your superior suggests you change your teaching methods, it is probably because:

a) they have their own ideas about the shape of the lessons

3. M = 53.68%

When your students perform poorly in a written test, it is because:

b) you did not make them prepare sufficiently for it

Statements with minimum R-:

1. M = 28.7%

When your student cannot remember something that you have just said during your lesson, it is usually because:

b) you probably failed to stress the piece of information out as important

The older the teacher, the less worried they are about stressing the important information.

2. M = 30.47%

Let's suppose that one of your classes does not perform as well as your other classes. It is probably because:

a) you neglected your preparation for the lesson on that day

The older the teacher, the more careful the preparation.

3. M = 39.57%

When you have problems keeping your students focused and concentrated, it is because:

a) you did not have enough time to get ready for the lesson

R- Correlation: the Length of Practice:

If your class does not understand the learning material you went through, it is probably because:

1. you probably did not explain it clearly enough $r = -0.16^*$. The longer the teacher in practice, the fewer statements support this view.

2. When your students works poorly in your lesson, it is probably because:

a) you have not found the right way how to motivate him or her $r = -0.22^*$.

The longer the teaching practice, the more skilful teachers are in looking for the right ways to motivate students, and vice versa.

3. Let's suppose that you are trying to help a student solve a certain problem and it is very difficult. It is because: you are not able to explain it in correspondence with his or her learning ability $= -0.17^*$.

Here, the longer in practice, the fewer arising problems. There is a correlation between the statement and the respondent's age, too.

4. When some of the parents criticize you, it is probably because:

you have not succeeded in changing the situation for better for some of the students;

$r = -0.29^*$. The teachers who have been teaching for a longer time are more successful here. The age of the teacher also correlates with the statement $r = -0.42^{**}$.

R-Correlation: the Age of the Respondent

When most of your students work poorly, it is usually because:

You did not have enough time to spend with them and help adequately $r = -0.32^{**}$. The older teachers always have enough time to work with them, but students find this fact difficult to understand.

When a students works poorly in a lesson, it is most likely because:

you have not found the right way to motivate them to learn $r = -0.31^{**}$.

The older the teacher is, the more confident he feels about looking for the right ways to motivate, and vice versa.

Table 3 – The SWB Results

	POS	PRO	SCR	SEL	DEP	JOY
M	32,57	19,46	13,95	14,93	8,05	14,26
SD	4,77	6,90	3,98	2,48	4,41	2,16
<i>Ideal. Median</i>	<i>21,5</i>	<i>21,5</i>	<i>16,5</i>	<i>9,5</i>	<i>12,5</i>	<i>10,5</i>

None of the items shows results close to the ideal median. Thus, our respondents are positive above average (more than the median) about their life attitudes, but they have more problems than average. They have fewer somatic complaints or depressions and feel more joy of life.

Table 4 – Correlations – R+/R- and SWB

	POS	PRO	SCR	SEL	DEP	JOY
Věk	-0,06	0,10	0,03	-0,05	0,09	-0,06
Σ R+/15	0,08	0,03	0,03	0,15*	-0,23*	0,13
Σ R1-/15	0,08	-0,06	0,08	0,03	0,04	-0,07
Length of practice	-0,23*	0,24*	0,17*	-0,08	0,12	0,00

The higher the individual self-esteem and less depression, the more likely they are to attribute student's achievement to themselves.

Depressed teachers with low self-esteem tend to see the situation from the opposite point of view.

The research also shows that the longer the teacher's practice, the less positive attitude towards life, more problems and more somatic complaints.

Analysis of Variance: Using MANOVA; NCSS Method

The changeable factors were as follows:

respondents' sex, age, length of teaching practice, subjects taught, grade, type of school and its location, respondents' marital status, number of children.

Results

The only data shown are statistically significant on the 5% significance level.

($p < 0,05$)*

1. The men in our sample are significantly older than women. The men have a more positive attitude towards life.
2. The highest self-esteem is shown by the physics teachers and the lowest self-esteem by the chemistry teachers.
3. The university teachers show the fewest somatic complaints, whereas the primary teachers show most somatic complaints.

4. The highest R+ score occurs in the big city teachers, the lowest in the village teachers.
5. The most positive attitude towards life is shown by the small town teachers.
6. Most depressed are the village teachers, least depressed the big city teachers.
7. The highest joy in life is shown by the big city teachers, the lowest by the village teachers.
8. The highest R- score is shown by the single teachers, the lowest by the divorced teachers.
9. The most positive attitude towards life is expressed by the married teachers, the least positive attitude by the divorced teachers.
10. The highest self-esteem is shown by the married teachers, the lowest by the single teachers.
11. The highest rate of depressions occurs among the divorced teachers, the lowest among the married teachers.
12. Approximately one half of the respondents has three children. The highest self-esteem is shown by the parents of four children and the lowest by the parents of five children or of an only child.

Conclusion

The measure of responsibility for students' successes and failures belongs among the subjective feedback mechanisms used by the teacher, though probably very intuitively, and it can vary with particular events or be different for the individual teacher and student, too. Teachers with high self-esteem and low levels of depression are more likely to view student's success as their own product than their colleagues with a lower self-esteem and a high level of depression. This research tries to show the relation between these responsibility measures and the subjective well-being factors.

The R+ teachers evaluate their abilities to teach students and make the learning material attractive very highly. This is also what they perceive to be their most important share of the student's success. They do not attempt to help nor encourage students too excessively, because that is what the students are supposed to do in reaction to their teaching, or respectively, what lies within their student roles. If students do fail from time to time, it is because the teacher sometimes feels lack of hope due to his or her inability to teach all the students equally efficiently and make them prepare for the lessons sufficiently or there is a different vision of teaching work imposed on them by their superiors. The R+ teachers are always thoroughly prepared for their lessons and seldom fail to stress the most important information.

Our findings suggest that a successful education in civil attitudes and wholesome identity is also influenced, among other factors, by the fact that teachers with high self-esteem show a higher degree of responsibility towards looking after their students' development. Consequently, we believe that improving conditions for teachers' subjective well-being should be treated with more attention and become more focused both locally and in the social scale and that teachers themselves should be encouraged to realise how subjective well-being influences their working performance.

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