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RISK CIRCUITS IN ISRAEL'S YOUTH AT-RISK EDUCATION SYSTEM

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Abstract

This article presents the results of the small-scale research on the pedagogical challenges and emotional issues of teachers who have trained in mainstream education, with at-risk and socially excluded youth in Israel. The purpose of the study is to gather information about these challenges in order to prepare them for work with at-risk and socially excluded youth with the help of professional s Support and mentoring that will improve their work and even provide a better and more effective response to youth. The study adopted a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews. The findings show that teachers who have trained in mainstream education, people at risk and adolescents experience pedagogical challenges that are reflected in working with the learner and their experiences, with the educational staff and in the face of demand from the education system. Also, these teachers experience many emotional issues that are reflected by physical and psychological factors.

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1. Introduction

In Israel, more than 2 million children live, of whom 330,000 children and adolescents are at risk and in distress, with some of the risk situations being manifested in detachment from normative frameworks (Children and Youth at Risk - Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services in Israel, 2018). In the last decade, reforms have been introduced in the vocational education systems of developed countries according to the outlines of the World Labor Organization (n.d.), with one of its goals being to prevent dropouts from schools. In light of this, alternative educational frameworks have been established with the aim of providing a solution to the population at risk who have dropped out of the system. Technology education centers are one of the alternative education frameworks, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, which provide a solution to the population at risk who have dropped out of the regular framework. Cohen-Navot et al. (2001), stated that the professional training of teachers who teach in these settings is normal and not adapted to work with a population at risk that needs a different therapeutic and pedagogical response and as a result encounter many challenges in their work. In this article, we will try to understand what pedagogical and emotional issues these teachers face, through their personal stories and experiences. It opens with a theoretical background that deals with at-risk youth in Israel, their characteristics and directions for action to reduce the phenomenon, as well as their integration in technological education centers the importance of professional development among teachers.

1.1. Youth at risk in Israel - Definition, Characteristics and Action directions

In 2008, the Israeli government adopted a uniform definition of children and youth at risk. The definition was formulated by the Schmid Committee (2006), the public committee for examining the situation of children and adolescents at risk and distress, headed by Professor Hillel Schmid, which was based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and accepted definitions in the professional literature and policy makers in Israel. By definition, children and youth are at risk of life in situations that endanger them in their family and environment, and as a result of these situations their ability to exercise their rights in seven areas of life is impaired - in each area several situations are defined that indicate risk in this area:

1. Physical existence, health and development. Risk situations are manifested due to concern of inappropriate physical treatment or due to their physical or cognitive development being abnormal, for no known organic reason. **2. Belonging to a family.** This area includes seven situations: a. Inadequate supervision. b. Severe problems in the relationship between them and their parents. c. Lack of enrichment and assistance in coping with academic assignments. d. Parental difficulty in dealing with behavior and setting boundaries. e. Parental difficulty in worrying about getting the services they need. f. Children whose at least one parent suffers from a mental or intellectual disability. g. Children whose at least one parent suffers from addictions, is involved in crime or is characterized by a lack of normativeness. **3. Learning and acquiring skills.** This area includes four situations: a. Children whose functioning in educational settings is extremely poor and who do not show involvement in learning. b. Children with conduct disorders and lack of authority. third. c. Children with low academic achievement compared to their peers. d. Children and adolescents who are not in any kind of school or work setting. **4. Well-being and emotional health.** Children with behaviors that indicate emotional difficulties. **5. Belonging and social integration.** Children

who have difficulty adjusting and making contact with others or those who exhibit aggressive behaviors. **6. Protection from others.** This area includes four situations: a. Exposure to dangerous behaviors in the family. b. Sexual abuse or abuse within the family. c. Abuse or sexual abuse outside the family. d. Physical abuse within the family or in their immediate environment. **7. Protection against risky behaviors.** This area includes four situations: a. Risk and self-harm. b. Illegal or non-normative behaviors. c. Alcohol or drug use. d. Demonstration of abnormal sexual behavior or inappropriate for their age. According to this definition, a child / adolescent was defined as "at risk" if he was found to suffer from at least one risk situation, in at least one of the seven areas of life.

This report was submitted to the Government of Israel as a strategic action plan for the years 2006-2010 for the improvement of the well-being of children and youth at risk and in distress. Its aim was to reduce the extent of risk and distress as much as possible, and in the ways proposed in it to return children and adolescents to the normal and normative cycle of life.

Emphasizing one of the risk situations that appear in Schmid's (2006) definition, learning and acquiring skills, a direct link was found between dropping out of school and its far-reaching negative consequences for the lives and futures of boys and girls (Richman & Bowen, 1997). The youth, who fail to get the most out of the education system, have led to the development of many programs in the education systems. Donmoyer and Kos (1993), distinguished between two approaches to these programs: "complementary" approaches, aimed only at needy students versus approaches aimed at improving the education of the general population, so that the weak students benefit along with the rest of their classmates.

In the next chapter, we will discuss one of the frameworks according to the "complementary" approach, as an alternative educational framework - which will refer to a technological educational center.

1.2. Alternative educational framework - Technological Educational Center

Education centers are another important national service in the alternative education system. These frameworks, which are operated by local authorities and various education networks, under the supervision of the "Shahar" Division of the Ministry of Education, are intended to serve youth who have dropped out of the regular system. These are relatively small schools with a combination of academic and vocational education, Students with normal abilities and intelligence will be accepted, characterized as students with multiple needs and at risk, who need a multidisciplinary holistic therapeutic educational system and were referred on the recommendation of a local community center / perseverance committee for this framework. The main objectives of the education centers are: a. Preventing students from dropping out of the education system and ending 12 years of schooling. b. Giving a significant certificate as part of a social and occupational concept. c. Completion of educational gaps (for ninth graders). d. Strengthening self-image and raising personal sense of competence. e. Social mobility: preparation for military service / national service or civil service and integration into the world of employment and academia. f. Involvement and contribution to a community known to have a positive impact on students' social and academic achievement, strengthening their confidence, reducing risky behaviors, and increasing the degree of happiness in their lives (Ministry of Education, State of Israel, 2020)

1.3. Issues in the professional development of teachers in Israel

The professional development of teachers in Israel raises many issues due to different perceptions of staff and policy makers, school principals and teachers. These create unregulated and unsupervised competition for the time and resources of the lucrative teacher. The Ministry of Education and school principals have their own demands for internships and advanced training, and as a result the teacher's professional development lacks a clear guideline that guides him step by step and gradually builds his expertise (Abdor, 2008).

Many teachers have reported changes in their careers (beyond teaching at a different level of education; entering the role of a classroom educator; a change in the teaching profession, changes that undoubtedly require learning, training, and development. Instead, they learn their new roles within the school, in its frameworks and through more experienced faculty members or with the help of outside instruction that comes into the school. Sometimes, most likely, they simply learn on their own, from their own experience (Kfir et al., 2008).

2. Problem Statement

There are issues and dilemmas that occupy the alternative frameworks due to the special needs of the students, vis-à-vis the education system, vis-à-vis industry but also vis-à-vis the teachers who teach in the system. In these settings, many teachers have difficulty knowing how to teach students so that they can achieve significant academic achievement - that is, break the patterns of covert dropout, which often formed the background for overt dropout. Technology school teachers, most of them, have received their pedagogical training in colleges of education and university programs, and do not have enough tools to work with the weak population studying in these schools. In addition, all alternative schools employ professional teachers, or professional counselors whose training in the field of education and care for adolescents with adjustment problems is usually even more limited. This group of educators also needs help and tools in dealing with the needs of the population. In general, most staff members need training and counseling in dealing with the difficulties of adolescents emotionally and socially and with the difficulties they experience in relationships with their parents and family members (Cohen-Navot et al., 2001)

3. Research Questions

What are the pedagogical and emotional issues of teachers trained for mainstream education working with at-risk and socially excluded youths in high school in Israel?

4. Purpose of the Study

This study will identify the pedagogical challenges and emotional issues of teachers trained for mainstream education working with at-risk and socially excluded youths in high schools in Israel.

5. Research Methods

This research will include the qualitative research method, with its research approach being interpretively naturalistic. This approach allows the researcher to examine people's experiences from their personal stories and thus to understand or interpret a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). This study will deal with the production of information from the population of teachers who have been trained in mainstream education who work with at-risk and socially excluded boys in the Israel High School of Technology, in order to understand their pedagogical challenges and emotional issues. This information will be based on semi-structured interviews.

5.1. Research population and sampling

This study was conducted in the winter of 2019-2020, which included a population of teachers working with at-risk youth at a technological high school in northern Israel. The data in this case pertained to 17 teachers, aged 31-60, 12 female teachers and 5 male teachers. Their professional experience in teaching ranges from 4 to 23 years, in various fields of specialization. 15 teachers were trained for mainstream education and only two teachers were trained to work with at-risk youth.

The sampling method in this study was a homogeneous purposive sampling, with the participants selected at the discretion of the researcher and having a common set of dimensions. This sample best represents the study population, which can provide in-depth information and knowledge about the phenomenon under study, based on good expression, willingness to answer questions and share experiences and experiences (Shkedi, 2012).

5.2. Research Tools

The study conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview, in order to identify the pedagogical challenges and emotional issues of teachers trained for mainstream education working with at-risk youth in high schools in Israel. A semi-structured in-depth interview contributes to the researcher in understanding and interpreting the phenomenon being studied through in-depth discourse and generalization from individual states to general.

The semi-structured in-depth interview included 19 pre-formulated neutral questions, with the sequence of presentation not a priori and during the interview the researcher added questions based on the context and need of the interviewee's answers. The questions contributed to a relationship based on basic trust with the interviewee, for honest answers, while maintaining the validity and credibility of the study. The interview questions addressed a variety of topics presented in the questionnaire such as teacher perception and teacher education, vocational training, emotional issues and coping, pedagogical challenges and coping with them, making contact with the learner and contributing, student support and system professional.

The referral to the participants was done in their workplace, a personal conversation was held with them in which the purpose of the interview was explained, the confidentiality was maintained and their desire to participate in the study was expressed. A personal meeting was scheduled with each participant, with each interview lasting 40-60 minutes in Hebrew. To ensure reliability and accuracy of the study,

immediately after conducting the interviews, they were fully documented and even included citation of interruptions and non-verbal responses (Creswell, 1998) to maintain confidentiality, all recordings were numbered without identifying details and participants were given a fake name to disguise their identities.

5.3. Data Analysis method

The process of analyzing the data in a qualitative study is done by arranging and constructing the information collected by sorting the data into sections and regrouping them in a meaningful order that allows for interpretation (Shkedi, 2003; 2012).

Interview analysis began only after proficiency in materials read several times by the researcher, adding notes to help identify codes that emerged from the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and encoding data and reaching valid and reliable conclusions (Patton, 1990; Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

Next, an analysis of all the interviews was performed in order to identify topics that could be generalized, using quotes from interviews to anchor the conclusions. Interview analysis was done in two stages. In the first stage the text was coded deductively through a conceptual analysis, which included the collection of words and sentences expressing teachers' pedagogical challenges and emotional issues, and in the second stage an inductive analysis was conducted that focused on constructing categories that emerged from the interviews.

6. Findings

This study examined the pedagogical challenges and emotional issues of teachers trained for mainstream education working with at-risk and socially excluded youth in high school in Israel. The personal story of the teachers, came up in the analysis of the interviews and described their personal challenges in teaching work with this population, with the educational staff and the education system. The analysis of the content made from the data, raised 2 main themes: 1. Pedagogical challenges. 2. The emotional issues they face.

6.1. Pedagogical challenges

Teachers trained in mainstream education working with at-risk and socially excluded youth in high school in Israel have pointed to many pedagogical challenges on a variety of topics.

- **Adjusting Teaching Ways for the Learner.** E.S. declared: "I have to adapt different study material for each child." This population is heterogeneous due to the diversity and needs of each of them as well as having educational gaps. G.S. described it in his own words: "I have a hard time adapting the study material to a population with educational gaps." These gaps were due to their dropout from the educational framework or due to their dysfunction. SH.A. Claims this by saying: "Most of them came to this school, did not attend middle school at all. As a result, I had to close the gap in high school and teach them high school material for the matriculation exam."

- **Coping with Learning Difficulties between Learners.** I.B.G. raised: "I work with a very complex population of teens, special education students, students with behavioural disorders, ADHD, complex problems at home and more." as. Expressed a similar difficulty: "My difficulties are in dealing with students

with learning disabilities that I do not know how to answer in class during class." The phrase "I do not know how to answer" is a great difficulty facing the teacher due to lack of tools, knowledge and tailored professional training.

- **Difficulties in moving the student to learning.** Due to difficult family background, learning difficulties of the population, experiences of failure, failure in previous frameworks and learning inequality, the learner becomes unmotivated. These came up in the words of A.S. in the statement: "The children are not available for learning because there are a lot of difficulties that they bring with them from home, there are children who avoid and are unmotivated." A.D. another interviewee also reinforces this difficulty and claims: "Learning difficulties among the learner cause him to avoid."

- **Discipline and behaviour problems among the learner.** I.I. described: "My main difficulty is dealing with students who are very interfering with the course of the lesson." Another G.S. participant also noted the same difficulty and claimed, "My difficulty is dealing with inappropriate behaviors." Classroom discipline and behavioural issues pose an additional challenge due to minimal progress in the curriculum and non-compliance with it as a result. SH.A. refers to this by saying: "I feel that many times I 'put out fires' and do not always progress in the study material."

- **Regular presence and admission of new students.** Causing a lack of continuity in the teaching process and consequent non-compliance with the curriculum. This challenge is found in the words of R.M.: "Their irregular presence sometimes makes it difficult for me to progress with a particular class when not all students come in a row." S.N. Another teacher raised the pedagogical difficulty of absorbing students who dropped out of other settings during the school year and shared: "Joining new students during the year causes me to repeat the material and there is no learning sequence, it is difficult to catch gaps." Other teachers even claim that in order not to lose continuity, they invest their free time to complete the learning gaps. This can be seen in the words of I.I.: "The difficulty is in dealing with students who have an irregular attendance, so I am required to take them to individual lessons to compare the material they have lost."

Teachers in education settings for at-risk youth are dedicated educators who make every effort to help these students, most of whom lack training and systematic professional support (Cohen-Navot et al., 2001). Students in exclusion and at-risk experience persistent failure, severe behavioral problems, feel alienated from school, often absent, involved in violence or delinquency and as a result, their teachers find it difficult to help them, accumulate failures and low ability due to lack of professional coordination between population needs and goals (Razer, 2009)

6.2. Emotional issues

Many emotions are involved in teacher work. A content analysis of the data that emerged in the study showed that general education teachers working with at-risk youth indicated many emotional issues in their work.

- **Helplessness.** Expressed during classroom instruction, in the words of I.I. Teaching work is accompanied by feelings of helplessness, which a student strongly refuses to cooperate, after I try in every possible way to understand and help him, and yet it does not occur to me." More teachers claimed to feel helpless due to the lack of cooperation in the team they work with. Evidence of this emerges from the SH.A.

claim: "There is sometimes a sense of helplessness because each of the teachers is busy with his own (which is fine, of course), and there is basically no ability to help each other."

- **Frustration.** Teachers feel frustrated when students do not show interest in the learning process. Evidence of this can be found in SH.N. In saying: "I feel frustrated when students disparage the learning process." Others experience frustration when the matriculation curriculum is not tailored to the student's level because of their academic gaps, with N.S. explaining it in his remarks: The feeling that sometimes the matriculation exam is sometimes frustrating is very difficult and can lead to a lack of success". Classroom discipline issues also cause frustration among teachers, S.A. Declared it: "Frustration is one of the many problems of discipline." Pines et al. (1981), noted the feelings of depression and frustration among teachers because of the exposure to the suffering and pain of their students.

- **Loneliness, detachment and lack of belonging.** S.M. shared that these feelings were expressed in her early years as a newcomer to the system: "Within the system, especially when you are new, I was ignored, they would not be treated almost at school." From these words it can even be concluded that the process of absorbing teachers within the system that combines support and guidance, as is customary in other frameworks is not possible in this framework. The feeling of loneliness also arises in veteran teachers in the system, when these indicate workload and as a result, the educational staff is not available to help its staff members, SH.A reports: "From the personal, pedagogical and emotional burden each teacher has then he is not available to another teacher. Everyone survives on their own within the system in order to bring success in their own good faith." Teachers who work with at-risk and excluded youth experience, as their students, ongoing failure, loneliness and alienation (Razer, 2009).

- **Anxiety.** Teens share their difficult life stories with their teachers. These stories cause anxiety among them beyond working hours as S.A. claimed. In his words: "If a student tells me about something he is experiencing, I can take it home with me and think about it." I.D. also points this out in his speech: "I take the work home, unable to disconnect."

- **Anger.** Teachers expressed towards themselves and towards the education system as SH.A. claimed: "I am filled with anger toward myself, the system and the way we work, and it is not always true but stems from such budgetary constraints and others." A sense of anger was also directed towards the students when their behaviours was disrespectful According to A.S. reports: "I am angry because of their disrespect to me as a teacher and to their friends." In cases of negative feedback and inappropriate student behavior, teachers experience unpleasant feelings of shame, anger, embarrassment, vulnerability, and sadness (Hargreaves, 2000; Kelchtermans, 2011; Nias, 1999;).

- **Insult.** Teachers have argued that exposure to verbal violence against them or their students causes them to feel this way. S.A. notes: "There are instances of students directly hurting me, personally very naturally, I feel a great insult..." Another claim was found in R.M.'s testimony: "A personal injury and verbal abuse of a student towards his friend, or to me, cause me a great insult."

- **Ungratefulness.** SH.A. claimed that students are ungrateful: "The students are ungrateful." S.N.'s claimed that the ungrateful comes not only from the students but also from their parents: "They are ungrateful, do not believe in teachers and do not always appreciate the teacher's work. I feel that among my parents as well."

- **Fatigue and burnout.** SH.A. pointed out these feelings due to the difficulties involved in teaching this special population, saying: "I feel fatigue and burnout from this place that I can sit with a student for hours and then the next day he tells me he can't remember anything." Other teachers pointed out these feelings due to the professional load to the loss of professional motivation. This can be seen in S.M.'s statement S.M.: "Another point is burnout, there are veteran teachers here, although they are few, but it is very important to note that most are busy and worn and lack motivation. Emotional involvement that lasts for a long time can lead to burnout (Etzion, 1983, Maslach et al., 2001). These emotions cause teachers to even drop out of the system (Maagan, 2017).

- **Stress.** This feeling is due to the great burden on the teachers. Evidence of this can be found in S.N. in the saying: "I feel stress from the demands, from the overflow of information and tasks." The same evidence was found in S.A.'s remarks it says: "It's hard to keep going in a pressure cooker all the time and there are ones that are even harder for them." According to Friedman and Lotan (1993), teachers who work with a population of students who need to adapt them, based on the therapeutic aspect, express stress at work.

- **Despair.** A sense of lack of hope, failure and disappointment as described by S.N. In saying: "Despair, decline in morale motivation when the student forgets everything you learned in the one-week / two-week lesson." S.A. also described a feeling of despair following an ongoing feeling that has no solutions: "I feel despair when I reach helplessness and extreme frustration I feel that I want to get up and go."

- **Emotional overload.** This phenomenon has arisen in the words of many teachers in various aspects. S.M. described an emotional overload following dealing with their personal stories and difficult experiences for her students, dealing with their parents and dealing with system demands: "Emotional load from students from their stories, from their parents the system demands." The emotional load that is also expressed following the home visits is described in S.M.'s words: "Home visits are very difficult for me. Seeing the homes that the same students come to, it breaks my heart." Other teachers testified to emotional overload because of their inability to accommodate multiple events. A.S. identified with this claim, adding: "The emotional burden is too great that I cannot always contain, it is very tiring." Teachers working with this population, share their personal stories out of a desire to meet the needs of their students in crisis. As a result, their difficult stories evoke feelings of sadness, despair, melancholy, compassion, and emotional upheaval among teachers (Ginat, 2011; Oplatka, 2011; Tzur, 2001).

- **Self-blame and low self-esteem.** Failure to meet the expectations they set for themselves or failure to do their job, makes teachers feel guilty to the point of lack of self-esteem. S.N. reported: "Sometimes I feel I am not a good teacher and maybe not in the right profession. I judge myself and blame myself for being wrong." Further evidence of this was found in the statement of G.S.: "I feel unjustifiably guilty when my education students drop out of school." These teachers, as their students, experience and accumulate failures and a low sense of self-efficacy (Razer, 2009) and were described by "failing patterns" manifested as patterns of helplessness, guilt and language of self and systemic guilt due to failure or inability to cope with the population and "virtual identity" patterns, due to working with an inferior population and their importance as failing in the system (Maagan, 2017).

7. Conclusion

The essence of the teaching profession is characterized by constant confrontation with a sequence of value and educational challenges, and with an emphasis on working with special populations. The meaning of choosing teaching as a profession is to express a willingness to invest a lot, to persevere and to fight tirelessly - even if the road to success is, at times, long and includes failures. Accompaniment of teachers for at-risk youth through a support system and in addition to the support system at the Colt School, contributes significantly to the process of their coping and integration into a system designed for at-risk populations. The support of experienced teachers and especially the professional changes during their careers, contributes to their professional development and their positive professional image. At each stage of his professional development, beyond the professional assistance, it is extremely important to listen to the teacher's troubles as well as his successes, and to give him the emotional support he needs. It is important that this emotional response be given within the system by a professional team. It is also important to oblige every teacher, throughout their professional career, to develop professionally through courses or advanced training relevant to his or her professional advancement. These studies will contribute to their development and professional status: to raising the quality of their professional functioning, their satisfaction and professional image - as well as to raising their status in the public, and at the same time will contribute to preventing or postponing their erosion. There is no doubt that systemic guidance and support in school and professional development, contribute to all the circles involved in education, the system, the staff, the individual teacher and especially the student's success.

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