

The 6th International Conference Edu World 2014 “Education Facing Contemporary World Issues”, 7th - 9th November 2014

The Existence of Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations Among Student-Teachers

Einat Bracha^{1a}, Dganit Hoffenbartal^{1a*}

¹ *PhD. Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Psychology and Science of Education, Sindicatelor Street, nr. 7, Cluj 400029, Romania*

Abstract

Student-teachers differ in their feelings about their ability to cope with complex teaching situations.

The concept SOCITS - Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations, can offer an explanation for these differences.

SOCITS describes a coping resource that reflects the student-teachers' feelings and has three components: Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness in teaching situations.

The researchers examined the existence of SOCITS among 47 student-teachers from a college in Israel, using a qualitative research approach and tools. The results yielded evidence for the existence of SOCITS and its components among student-teachers. Further research will help anchor the research findings and constitute the concept.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

Keywords: Student-teachers; Stress and coping; SOC; SOCITS; Teacher education

1. Rational

Student-teachers are young people that have to navigate between being “students” and “teachers”, between academic tasks and their teaching requirements. Their teacher education includes the education and teaching studies

* Corresponding author.

EinatBracha;E-mail address: einatb8@walla.co.il

DganitHoffenbartal;E-mail address: dganith3@walla.co.il

a) Two authors contributed equally to this work

component and the teaching practice component. In each of the teacher education years, the student-teachers take a mentoring course, which accompanies their practice teaching and guided by a pedagogical instructor and a mentor teacher. This process enables them to understand the requirements of the world of teaching, the pupils and their needs.

However, they report high levels of academic stress, which considers the relationship between individual and environment, the qualities of the individual and the nature of the environmental event all together (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). In addition, international research studies have confirmed that teaching has become one of the more stressful occupations in recent years (Billingsley, 2004; Borg 1990; Eloff, Engelbrecht, Swart & Oswald, 2002; Pithers&Soden, 1998 in Jacobs, 2010).

Teaching situations, which are complex and requires academic, emotional and behavioral coping, combined with the academic stress, causes pressures that makes it hard for some of the student-teachers to withstand the stress and cope. The fact that student-teachers may feel either stress or enthusiasm in their teaching situations (Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon& Kaplan, 2007) raises the question how these differences can be accounted for.

2. SOCITS - Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations as a coping resource

One of the explanations to the differences between student-teachers' feelings is Antonovsky's Salutogenic Model, where the main concept is *Sense of Coherence (SOC)*. SOC as a global orientation was found to be a coping resource that helps the individual withstand stressful situations. It includes three components: Comprehensibility – cognitive component: Manageability – behavioral component: Meaningfulness – emotional component. The uniqueness lies in the combination of the three components (Antonovsky, 1998). Therefore, a person with a strong Sense of Coherence facing stressful situations will be motivated to cope (Meaningfulness), believe the challenge is understood (Comprehensibility), and believe he or she has resources to help cope with that challenge (Manageability) (Antonovsky, 1998). Sense of Coherence (SOC) formed the basis to the concept "Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations" – SOCITS, that enables to understand a Sense of Coherence in specific teaching situations.

This research focused on the concept SOCITS – (Bracha&Hoffenbartal, 2011) which is based on previous research of the authors (Bracha&Hoffenbartal, 2011), that validated the existence of a Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations as a concept, by using a questionnaire. SOCITS much like SOC is an inner coping resource. It is not a global orientation but a specific one. It defines the extent to which the student-teacher has a sense of confidence in the predictable, familiar teaching situations, and the belief that one can cope so that teaching situations will be managed in the best way. SOCITS has three components: Comprehensibility: (cognitive component) the extent to which the student-teacher perceives teaching situations as cognitively meaningful and predictable. Manageability: (behavioral component) the extent to which the student-teacher perceives the available resources as satisfactory in the attempt to meet the demands placed by both external and internal stimuli in teaching situations' problems. Meaningfulness: (motivational-emotional components): the extent to which the student-teacher feels teaching situations are emotionally meaningful and that at least some of the daily requirements pose more of a challenge than a heavy burden. Since the former study was the first and only research, this research will reinforce the existence of the concept SOCITS among student-teachers by qualitative approach and tools.

3. Research Methodology

The research goal and question: The research goal was to examine the existence of Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations among student-teachers and thus the research question was: What are the manifestations of SOCITS including all its components, among student-teachers?

The research participants: The research participants were collected from three groups: (1) first year pre-service teachers (2) third year pre-service teachers (3) interns from different programs (N=47).

The research tools: The researchers used Quantitative approach and tools: Reflective diaries and Semi-structured interviews. The tools were chosen in accordance to the three groups of the research participants. While the reflective diaries are a part of the academic duties of the pre-service teachers, interns do not have to write such dairies, so semi-structured interviews were conducted. Approaching the phenomenon from two observation points, using different tools and techniques, allowed the researchers to identify aspects of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009) and understand SOCITS as a coping resource. The qualitative research would initially help to identify the manifestations of SOCITS, including all its components.

- **Semi-structured interview:** This interview involved pre-determined, open-ended questions but with freedom for either the researcher or the interns to raise issues and to explore them during the interview process. In this research, the questions included one major open-ended question and focus question that were derived from the definition of the concept SOCITS and its components.
- **Reflective diaries:** The writing of reflective diaries, before and after teaching episodes, is an ongoing developmental process in teacher education (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012). In this research, the pre-service teachers were instructed to write reflections on their teaching practice, as a part of their academic duties in the end of the course.

Data Analysis: The data analysis in this research was via content analysis: The semi-structured interview analysis was guided by a driven thematic analysis that is particularly useful when the researcher have a set of theoretical concept (Sullivan et al. 2012). The categories of the analysis were determined in advance and did not arise from the interviewees' experience. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the manifestations of SOCITS including its components. The Reflective diaries analysis was guided by a data driven approach. In this approach, no pre-determined categories were defined. The categories that were identified emerged from the data itself. The purpose of the analysis was to identify the three SOC components - Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness as indicators of SOCITS (Weber, 1990 in Creswell, 2009).

4. Results

The findings will be presented on two levels: (1) Analysis of the participants' statements regarding SOCITS as a global concept; (2) Analysis of the data from the perspective of each of SOCITS' components: Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness.

4.1. *Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations as a Global Concept*

The interviews yielded expressions which represent the student-teachers' SOCITS. The student-teachers reported a component, which allowed them to remain optimistic, and continue teaching even though they experienced difficulties:

- "The last year has been a challenging, intensive and sometimes difficult year for me. I'm willing to invest time, thought and much effort..."
- "I knew it would be hard, that it is the first year... I believe that these things will change next year... So I am optimistic..."
- "Coherence strengthens me, without the Sense of Coherence I wouldn't have been able to continue doing my job, because you are lost..."
- "It is both a challenge and sometimes a breaking point. There were several times when I simply went home and burst out crying... I believe that over the years, I'll cry less and stop taking things to heart..."

4.2. *The Components of Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations among student-teacher*

The concept of SOCITS is comprised of three components: Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness. This study is a pioneer research, which examines these three components among student-teachers. The qualitative analysis sought to identify expressions and ideas, which illustrate the existence of each of these components. The student-teachers expressions were organized by several characteristics.

4.2.1. Manifestation of Comprehensibility in teaching situations

Comprehensibility is a cognitive component - the extent to which the student-teacher perceives teaching situations as cognitively meaningful and predictable (Bracha&Hoffenbartal, 2011). In this study, we found expressions that illustrate the existence of the sense of Comprehensibility, which are represented by words that stand for understanding. The student-teachers expressed a feeling of Comprehensibility in regard to several characteristics:

- Different teaching situations- "Earlier this year, I was in shock and now I learned to manipulate between the demands... and I really understand the process and see my progress in class".
- Teaching methods - "Only in the second semester I felt that I have totally internalized the principles of teaching disabled pupils. I managed to grasp their typical characteristics and teaching methods, and more".
- The pupils' characteristics and their needs - "At the first lesson there was a gap between the goals I had set and the student's ability. From this I concluded that students have difficulty understanding with multiple elements".
- Understanding the special education populations' needs - "I realized that curriculum planning is an outline that can be change during the year. This allowed me to be more flexible, a necessary behavioral for survival in the population of behavioral disorders".
- Professional identity – "In the beginning I was stubborn... but I quickly understood that I need to become flexible and be there to listen and contain the pupils. After that, it will come... I think I understand the role of the teacher".

4.2.2. Manifestation of Manageability in Teaching Situations

Manageability is an instrumental-behavioral component - the extent to which the student-teacher perceives the available resources as satisfactory in the attempt to meet the demands placed by both external and internal stimuli in teaching situations' problems (Bracha&Hoffenbartal, 2011). Analysis of the student-teachers' answers and reflections revealed expressions, which represent the feeling of Manageability, such as: coping, managing, I think I can succeed. They expressed a sense of Manageability with regard to several characteristics:

- The feeling of controlling a classroom in different teaching situations- "I know how to cope better with different situations in every class situation ... I really see my progress in the last four months.
- Planning in advance- "Organization of the environment during the activity and the order of the lesson so that it is clear and known in advance have made the learning process easier... they were significant tools for achieving the goal".
- Expressing flexibility in the teaching process- "There is no doubt in my mind that I can manage a class... I am proud of myself. I teach whole classes which differ from each other, and I am flexible with the curriculum".
- The ability to construct personal and class-wide teaching programs- "In real time, in the special education class... In managing a schedule I feel great... I construct the personal programs, the educational programs and teaching units".
- The ability to modify teaching method to fit the characteristics of the pupils and the class- "I believe there was a need to expose my pupil to sensory stimuli, and in order to do that, there was a need to plan lessons which are active and experiential".
- Professional identity - "I feel that I have the personal ability to do it (manage a classroom). I understand how it is done. I do not even need too much support".

4.2.3. Manifestation of Meaningfulness in teaching situations

Meaningfulness is a motivational-emotional component - the extent to which the student-teacher/teacher feels that teaching situations are emotionally meaningful, and that at least some of the daily requirements pose more of a challenge than a heavy burden (Bracha&Hoffenbartal, 2011).

Sense of Meaningfulness in this research was expressed in the student-teachers' perceptions of different teaching situations as a way of life, a personal choice that satisfies them. The applied expressions indicating that they regard teaching to be a significant challenge, both in terms of advancing the pupils and their own professional progress:

- Feeling of personal motivation - "I think that Meaning is the source of my work... I do not see myself ever giving up on teaching in one way or the other."
- Feeling of personal challenge - "I feel like every day is a new challenge for me. I really try, each time, after every class, to reflect upon it...it is a huge challenge".
- Feeling of personal satisfaction-"I get up every morning and know it is going to be a complex day of coping, because I teach an extremely difficult population...it is significant for me...so that is what keeps me going".
- Feeling of personal satisfaction from teaching the pupils-"There is no better feeling than the feeling of knowing a child managed to learn something from you".
- Feeling of personal satisfaction from teaching the subject matter - "since there is study material that is not in the regular program, it is a challenge for me because there are new things I am learning...teaching them is a lot of fun for me".
- Setting and accomplishing goals - "Now, when school is over, I feel I have accomplished the goals I had met during the year and the pupil has reached the level I expected."
- Personal relationships with Pupils - "In the morning, the children hug you and love you, or they give you hell, but I like coping with these different situations. It is very challenging".
- Professional identity - "Teaching is a way of life to me. Something that I really love and am happy to do... I think that I am in the right place...I feel at home there".

5. Discussion

The findings will first be discussed as they relate to the existence of SOCITS as a global concept in teaching situations among student-teachers and afterwards, as it relates to each and every component of the concept.

5.1. Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations as a Specific Orientation

The qualitative findings testify to the existence of SOCITS among student-teachers. The student-teachers' SOCITS can be explained by personal-psychological sources which constitute the system of a person's responses such as action or regression in the face of stressful situations (Antonovsky, 1998; Bental and Sagi, 2012). The psychological factor in the context of this study can be a source, which helps and enables the student-teachers to respond to stressful situations and crisis when dealing with different teaching situations. Rots, et al., (2012) examined the feelings of students in training. They found a connection between the feelings of pre-service teachers and their decision to enter the world of teaching. It was found that already in the process of their experiences as pre-service teachers, they are characterized by a personal ability to actively interpret their experience so that it has an influence on their process of decision making regarding whether or not to become a teacher or leave the teaching profession. Another explanation which may account for the existence of SOCITS among student-teachers' include the perception of the teacher's role, love of ongoing learning, teaching the pupils and the subject matter. These are the elements influencing teachers to engage in the teaching profession, persevere in it and feel satisfied with their role (Loui, 2006; Culross, 2007; Anhoern, 2008; Sunddip, 2010).

In light of the statements made by the student-teachers, we can learn that SOCITS was found to be an important internal personal source that promotes coping resources in the student-teachers' professional life as shown by Eriksson & Lindström (2006) with regard to Sense of Coherence. In other words, this is an internal personal feeling

typical of the student-teachers and serves as an important resource that affects his or her motivation to cope with teaching.

5.2. Three SOCITS Components – Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness in teaching situations

The characteristics that were found shed light on the theoretical meaning of each SOCITS component, in accordance with the range of meaning of this sense as perceived by the student-teachers.

The characteristics that were described by the student-teachers can be classified with respect to three teaching domains: Pedagogical content; Pupils' characteristics and Personal and professional identities that were mentioned in a theoretical survey by Schatz-Oppenheimer (2011) as four domains of difficulties typical of intern's teaching process as shown in table No.1.

Table No.1 SOCITS' components and teaching domains

SOCITS' components	Pedagogical content	Pupils' characteristics	Personal and professional identities
Comprehensibility	Different teaching situations	Pupils' characteristics and their needs	Professional identity
	Teaching methods	Understanding the special education populations' needs	
Manageability	The feeling of controlling a classroom in different teaching situations-		Professional identity
	Planning in advance- Expressing flexibility in the teaching process The ability to construct personal and class-wide teaching programs The ability to modify teaching method to fit the characteristics of the pupils and the class		
Meaningfulness			Feeling of personal motivation
			Feeling of personal challenge
			Feeling of personal satisfaction
			Feeling of personal satisfaction from teaching the pupils
			Feeling of personal satisfaction from teaching the subject matter
		Setting and accomplishing goals	
		Personal relationships with Pupils	
		Professional identity	

The characteristics of Comprehensibility in teaching situations can be attributed to the domain of Pedagogical content, Pupils' characteristics and Personal and Professional Identity; the characteristics of Manageability in teaching situations can be attributed to the domain of Pedagogical contents and Personal and Professional Identity, whereas the characteristics of meaningfulness in teaching situations can be attributed to the domain of Personal and Professional Identities.

Sense of Comprehensibility in teaching situations:

Student-teachers testified that the feeling of understanding the pupils and his/her needs, understanding the population and its needs and understanding teaching methods and their implementation allows them to understand events concerning the pupil's or the population's needs, understanding situations in teaching concerning teaching

methods and their implementation and reasonably predict what will happen in these events and situations. The arose of the student-teachers' comprehensibility can be explained by their theoretical knowledge. This knowledge includes basic theoretical studies and applications required as grounds for the work of teaching and the shaping of the teacher's image as an educating personality for all age groups and all areas of teaching. The various topics include aspects of teaching and learning in a multi-dimensional context, including training the student-teachers in the understanding and treatment of pupils in different teaching situations. These allow them to feel that they have an understanding of teaching situations with which they have to cope.

Sense of Manageability in teaching situations:

The existence of sense of manageability in teaching situations can be explained by the teaching practice component in teacher education. Teaching practice constitutes the practical aspect of teacher education, seeking to expose student-teachers to the main aspects of the teacher's work in practice, to the complexity of their role, and to all aspects of the school. The program assures the connection between the practicum and the academic study program. The practical training is part of each of the disciplinary routes and in all relevant age groups.

In addition the combination between the basic theoretical studies and the teaching practice expand the student-teachers' feelings regarding their ability to manage teaching situations.

Sense of Meaningfulness in teaching situations:

In order to understand the sense of meaningfulness in teaching situations there is a need to understand the concept of meaningfulness. Antonovsky (1998) explained meaningfulness as the emotional identification with events in the environment and the feeling that the individual plays a primary role in determining his/ her own daily experiences. This component is also known as the motivational component. The individual responds to problems and challenges by seeking meaning and believes the events should be overcome with dignity (Skarsater et al., 2008, at Jacobs, 2010). Furthermore, Aloni (2014) explains that significant things are the first those we experience as relevant and important to us beyond our selfhood. On the one hand, to be meaningful they must touch us, excite us, conquer our spirit, and connect in one way or another to our personal identity and self-determination - to fit into the story of our lives. On the other hand, for us to experience them as meaningful, things should be present before us as important, serious, valuable and of quality or considerable weight. Our significant experiences contribute to our meaningful living. This is a whole fabric, an existential continuum, a personal profile and leaving a mark in the world. According to the researchers mentioned above, the feelings of the student-teachers that were described as characteristics testified to the existence of the sense of meaningfulness in teaching situations. Although their goals may be somewhat hard to reach, the student-teachers will find meaning in their attainment and will be motivated to do so.

Another explanation for the existence of sense of meaningfulness can be found in the relationship with the environment. In other words, the student-teachers in this research are in an emotionally supportive environment that includes the pedagogical instructor and the mentor-teacher. They support them emotionally, allow them certain degree of autonomy in their work and involve them in the decision making process.

From the classification of the characteristics, we can learn about the connection between the SOCITS' components and the three domains. They point to the existence of a Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations.

In summary, in the SOCITS' range of meaning, the student-teachers described different characteristics of each component in SOCITS – Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness in teaching situations. These characteristics are of great significance in their feelings in situations with which they have to cope in their teaching experiences. The characteristics are perceived as resources, which help the student-teachers feel that they perceive teaching situations as cognitively meaningful and predictable, perceive these resources as available and satisfactory in the attempt to meet the demands placed by both external and internal stimuli. Moreover, the characteristics enable to perceive teaching situations as emotionally meaningful and challenging - meaning when the student-teachers encounter stressful situations, they will be highly motivated to cope, and it will be clear to them that they possess the resources with which to cope with those challenges (Antonovsky, 1998).

6. Conclusions

The reflective diaries and interviews showed expressions, which illustrated the student-teachers feelings.

In light of the research results, it can be conclude that:

1. Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situation does exist as a global orientation among student-teachers.
 2. SOCITS is a personal internal component in student-teachers and becomes a resource for them in coping with stressful situations and crisis in teaching.
 3. Each of the components of the SOCITS: Comprehensibility, Manageability, and Meaningfulness exist while dealing with teaching situations.
 4. The characteristics found for each component in teaching situations are indicators of the existence of SOCITS among student-teachers.
 5. The characteristics found for each component in teaching situations are connected to three domains in teaching: Pedagogical content, Pupils' characteristics and Personal and Professional Identity and point to the existence of a Sense of Coherence in Teaching Situations.
- The originality of the research stems from it being innovative and primary in:
- The research topic: the topic is innovative and preliminary in the examination of the existence of the concept SOCITS and its components.
 - The research population: no specific research has been conducted regarding this topic among the population of student-teachers.

References

- Anhorn, R. (2008). The profession that eats its young. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin* [online] vol.73, no.3 pp.15-26. Available from: <http://dothan.troy.edu/ed/rdavis/PDF%20files/The%20Profession%20that%20Eats%20Its%20Young.pdf>.
- Antonovsky, A. (1998). The salutogenic model as a significant theory in health promotion. *Megamot*: 39 No. 1-2, pp. 170 – 181 (Hebrew).
- Aloni, N. (2014). Meaning in Life: in education. In teaching and in learning. *The Mofet Institute Journal*.9, 52 (5) (In Hebrew).
- Bental, A. and Sagi, S. (2012). Life experiences that contribute to the development of a Sense of Coherence, between consistency and "Erupting Experience". *Readings in Education*, 1-2, pp. 215 – 241 (In Hebrew).
- Bracha, E. and Hoffenbartel, D. (2011). *How Students Feel – Developing a Sense of Coherence in Teaching Questionnaire*. Research report submitted in the framework of a research and assessment course, the Mofet Institute (In Hebrew).
- Culross, J. (2007). *Why I Teach*. *College Teaching* 5(2), pp.63
- Cohen-Sayag, E., Fischl, D. (2012). Reflective writing in pre-service teachers' teaching: What does it promote? *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(10). Retrieved from: [http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss10/2\(25.12.2013\)](http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol37/iss10/2(25.12.2013))
- Creswell, J.W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mix methods approaches (3rd Ed)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Eriksson M., Lindström B. (2006). Antonovsky's Sense of Coherence scale and the relation with health: a systematic review. *Journal of Epidemiology Community Health*. Vol. 60, 5, pp.376-381.
- Jacobs, M. (2010). *Teaching Learners with Learning Difficulties in mainstream Primary Schools: the Educators' Sense of Coherence*. Dissertation Submitted in Accordance with the Requirements for the Degree Magister Societatis Scientiae. Retrieved from: <http://etd.uovs.ac.za/ETD-db/theses/available/etd-10172011-110958/unrestricted/JacobsM.pdf> (12.4.2013).
- Lazarus, R.S. and Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, Appraisal, and Coping*. New York: Springer.
- Loui, M.C. (2006). Love, passion, and the amateur teacher. *College Teaching*, 54 (3), p.285.
- Roth, G., Assor, A., Kanat-Maymon, Y., & Kaplan, H. (2007). Autonomous motivation for teaching: How self-determined teaching may lead to self-determined learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 99, 761–774.
- Schatz-Oppenheimer, O. (2011). Internship for pre-service teachers and interns. *Ma'agalei Chicuch*, 1, pp. 161 – 170. (In Hebrew) <http://www.dyellin.ac.il>. Accessed 2.1.2013
- Sullivan, C., Gibson, S. & Rily, S. (2012). *Doing Your Qualitative Psychology Project*. U.S.A, California: Sage Publication.
- Sunddip-Panesar, N. (2010). Voices from the field: perspectives of first-year teachers on the detachment between teacher preparation programs and the realities of the classroom. *Research in Higher Education Journal* 9 <http://www.aabri.com/manuscripts/10446.pdf> Accessed 29.1.2013
- www.mofet.macam.ac.il/ktiva/dapim/Documents/dapim39.pdf