



**Karolinska
Institutet**

Klinisk Neurovetenskap

**LOST IN TRANSITION?
A STUDY OF NEWLY GRADUATED
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES DURING THE
INITIAL PERIOD OF EMPLOYMENT**

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av

Daniel Hultell

M.S.

Huvudhandledare:

Professor Petter Gustavsson
Karolinska Institutet
Institutionen för Klinisk Neurovetenskap

Bihandledare:

Professor Bo Melin
Karolinska Institutet
Institutionen för Klinisk Neurovetenskap
Enheten för Psykologi

Fakultetsopponent:

Professor Jan Johansson-Hanse
Göteborgs Universitet
Psykologiska Institutionen

Betygsnämnd:

Docent Johnny Hellgren
Stockholms Universitet
Psykologiska Institutionen

Docent Malin Josephson
Uppsala Universitet
Institutionen för Medicinska vetenskaper
Enheten för Arbets- och Miljömedicin

Professor Hugo Westerlund
Stockholms Universitet
Stressforskningsinstitutet

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ABSTRACT

The most crucial factors affecting burnout and work engagement when entering employment were feelings of competence to satisfactorily perform one's work, the discrepancy between previous expectations and the actual conditions of employment, and the balance between work and private life. Beginning teachers who felt competent, had their expectations met, and had a sound balance between their work and private life experienced less burnout and were more engaged in their work. Overall, most teachers coped well with the transition from education to employment and had low levels of burnout and high levels of work engagement. However, there were those who experienced strain and rather quickly decided to leave the teaching profession and there were those who suffered from burnout.

The background to the study was the steep increase in levels of long-term sick leave due to mental illness that occurred in Sweden in the late 1990s. Teachers were one of the occupations that consistently had the highest levels of long-term sick leave, and teachers in Sweden have also been found to have the highest levels of work-related stress. Moreover, the transition from higher education to employment has been found to be quite a challenge for newcomers, and it has been found that the initial period of employment is critical when it came to the development of work-related attitudes and especially for the development of burnout.

The overall aim of the thesis was to study teachers' transition from education to employment, focusing on their experiences of burnout and work engagement.

The data used in the studies originated from the Prospective Analysis of Teachers Health (PATH) study. The PATH study has a longitudinal study design and data were collected annually on five occasions using questionnaires. Two data collections were performed during the final two years of education and three during the initial three years of employment. A total of 4,067 student teachers from the whole of the country with approximately two years left of their education were contacted for participation, of whom 2,853 responded and constituted the cohort of the study. Data were analyzed using quantitative analyses.

The results showed that experiences during education to some extent affected initial levels of burnout and work engagement. It was, however, evident that both burnout and work engagement were mainly affected by the conditions of employment. Beginning teachers who experienced high levels of demands and low levels of resources were more likely to experience burnout, whereas inverse relationships were found for work engagement. Moreover, it was also found that first-year experiences of employment had a significant impact on the development of burnout and work engagement, indicating that there were spiral-like developmental patterns of both constructs, a positive spiral resulting in work engagement and a negative spiral resulting in burnout.

In sum, the majority of the teachers managed the transition well and remained engaged in their work. The major impact of unmet expectations and feelings of competence on burnout and work engagement highlights that it is crucial to prepare the student teachers well for their future work. It thus seems as if there is important work to be done in the teacher education programs in Sweden in providing future teachers with the appropriate skills and knowledge needed to be a successful teacher as well as presenting a realistic picture of the reality of what it will be like working as a teacher.

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