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Development of Preventive Measures to Prevent School Absenteeism in Twente

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Abstract

This research studies the relationship between school policy regarding school-absenteeism of pre-vocational education schools and pupil's self-experiences regarding school and school-absenteeism. School-absenteeism is a big problem for pupils, as well as for the school and the environment. School-absenteeism is an indicator for early school leaving and is also related to risky behavior. Initially schools took measures by addressing school management and tackling disciplinary problems. Yet, often personal factors like physical/psychological/cognitive problems and negative self-experiences are important factors related to school-absenteeism that are left unaddressed.

This research consists of two questionnaires. One questionnaire measures the school policy of 10 pre-vocational education schools. The other questionnaire measures self-experiences of 700 pupils of 3 selected pre-vocational education schools. Both questionnaires will be conducted in the region of Twente in the Netherlands. The results of this research are translated to preventive measures which the schools in the region can use to further improve their policies and practices to prevent school-absenteeism (Convenant, 2008; Van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart, 2010).

Introduction and hypotheses

School-absenteeism is a very obstinate problem for youngsters, schools, and society. Currently, school-absenteeism is regarded an important indicator for early school leaving and risky behavior (Teasley, 2004). Twelve pre-vocational education schools, two secondary vocational education schools and four local municipalities in the Netherlands (Almelo, Enschede, Hengelo and Oldenzaal) have committed themselves to investigate these problems and subsequently take measures that aim at a fitting, personalised en just-in-time approach of school-absenteeism. Often schools take measures to tackle problems through school policies and disciplinary actions. Only when a pupil's school-absenteeism becomes frequent or chronic, schools will look at the underlying problems (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009). The chance of absenteeism increases when pupils are experiencing background problems, negative self-experiences regarding school of when they feel disengaged to school (Kearney, 2008; Reid, 2005; Vuijk, Heyne, & Noll, 2008). Little is known of the effectiveness of certain measures (Baat, 2010). Moreover research results are inconsistent (Reid, 2005).

This research aims at developing more knowledge on the way schools execute their policies regarding school-absenteeism and how pupils respond to these policies.

The following hypotheses will be studied by two questionnaires:

1. Pre-vocational education pupils with positive self-experiences toward school do attend school, where as pupils with negative self-experiences do not.
2. Schools that attribute school-absenteeism to pupil's behavior contribute to the negative self-experiences to school and absenteeism of pupils, schools that attribute school-absenteeism to the curriculum contribute positive to the self-experiences to school and absenteeism of pupils.

Theoretical framework

Each year the amount of youngsters not attending school becomes larger and larger (in 2008-2009 68.934 youngsters of school age did not attend school) (Van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart, 2010). Factors related to school-absenteeism can be categorized in the pupil themself, school and the social environment (Teasley, 2004; Kearney, 2008). School absence can be caused by underlying problems like learning-, behavioral of phisical/psychological problems (Reid, 2003). School factors like school-size and location, academic- and social-climat, school policies and disciplinary measures, the quality and effectiveness of the staff, relationship between school and parents, teacher and pupil, influence absenteeism (Rumberger, 1995). Beside these factors, a

pupil's social environment like his/her socioeconomic status (SES), the family structure, parent-child relationship and parental involvement with school, play an important role concerning absenteeism (Teasley, 2004). Self-experience is also an important factor to school-absenteeism. Pupils who attend school have more fun and like school more than pupils who don't attend school (Vuijk, Heyne, & Noll, 2008). With regard to pupils with negative self-experiences, school-absenteeism will increase, whereas motivation, efforts to do homework and school engagement becomes less, until in the end the pupil leaves school to early (Batenburg, Korpershoek, & Werf, 2007; Dynarski, Clarke, Cobb, Finn, Rumberger, Smink, et al., 2008).

Research design

In this empirical research two questionnaires will be used, one to measure school policy of 10 pre-vocational education schools and a questionnaire to measure self-experiences of 700 pupils of 3 selected pre-vocational education schools in the region Twente (Netherlands).

The questionnaires relate to the following research-questions:

1. How do pre-vocational education pupils experience school?
2. How do pre-vocational education schools handle their policies regarding school-absenteeism?
3. How do pre-vocational education pupils experience school policies regarding school-absenteeism?
4. Is there a relation between pupil's self-experience regarding school and the way school handle policies regarding school-absenteeism?
5. Is there a relation between pupil's self-experience regarding school-absenteeism and the actual school-absenteeism?
6. Is there a relation between pupil's self-experience regarding school-absenteeism and the way school handles policies regarding school-absenteeism?
7. Which school- and pupil bound factors are related to pupil's self-experiences regarding school and school-absenteeism and which of these factors are related to school policies regarding school-absenteeism?

In March 2010 the questionnaire "School policies" has been conducted on 10 pre-vocational education schools, in the region Twente (which is located in the east of the Netherlands)(Ritzen

& Liere, 2010). In December 2010 the questionnaire "Self-experiences" will be conducted to 700 pupils of 3 of the former ten pre-vocational education schools. For the questionnaire "School policies", a theoretical study has been performed, leading to common questions and questions grouped in 5 subscales:

1. measures related to school-absenteeism (16 items, alpha .87);
2. realized measures (7 items, alpha .74);
3. preventive measures (23 items, alpha .81);
4. no problem (8 items, alpha .88);
5. bottleneck (10 items, alpha .88).

The questionnaire "Self-experiences" is composed by the Dutch version (Vuijk et al., 2008) of Kearney's Refusal Assessment Scale - Revised (SRAS-R), called SRAS-R-NL; and Ritzen's (2004) version of the Self-experience questionnaire initially developed by Stoel (1982).

The results of the research will be translated to preventive measures which can be used by pre-vocational education schools to reduce school-absenteeism.

During the Earli conference in Exeter in 2011 these results will be presented.

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