

# MENTAL HEALTH OF EDUCATORS

## A Key Element of Education Quality *Panel Discussion*

**"Mental health in education is an indispensable part of the discussion about possible innovations in education more than ever before, we should pay more attention to it",** agreed the speakers at the international panel discussion entitled **"Mental Health of Educators"**, moderated by the Managing Director of organization Genesis, Aneta Bednářová. The discussion took place on October 26, 2023 in Prague at the Hybernská Campus and was part of the international project Solve it!. In the consortium of the countries Czech Republic, Spain, Ukraine, Romania, Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the project dealt with crisis management in education. What are the challenges facing educators in the 21st century? How can we face these challenges? What does it contend with in the normal daily agenda? How are individual education systems set up, how to function in them and what is the relationship between formal and informal education? What can we do to solve the challenges at a strategic level, but what can we do as individuals? One of the areas of the project is the topic of the mental health of educators, and that is exactly what the panel discussion was devoted to. The output of the entire program will also be a publication on the crisis management of educators, which will respond to the challenges of the 21st century and establish possible solutions, tools, tips, approaches and other resources in individual areas. One of the chapters will be dedicated to the mental health of educators.

Speakers with diverse backgrounds, from various sectors dealing with mental health and education, answered questions from visitors from Europe and the Caucasus.

**Bob Kartous**, from his position as an advisor to the Minister of Education and a long-time instigator of innovations in education, introduced the audience to the Czech education system and presented ideas from his new book *Future ON!*. **Kristýna Cetkovská** brought the point of view of a psychologist working in the field of psychology and the issue of well-being in the workplace. **Jan Gondek**, a member of the Czech Secondary School Union and a university student, enriched the discussion by sharing his own experience with mental illness and the perspective of those most affected by the topic. The fourth speaker of the discussion was **Tomáš Konrád**, a team coach in the innovative education program at the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, who contributed his experience from working with university students.

During the opening of the discussion, all the speakers agreed that effective care for the mental health of pupils and students begins with their educators. According to them, especially in today's digital age, the topic of mental health is an indispensable part of public discussion. In this regard, the very destigmatization of the topic of mental health in society, which young people themselves deserve, is essential in this respect. According to Bob Kartous, today pupils and students are no longer afraid to talk about their emotions and possible mental health problems. Jan Gondek added that especially partnerships, i.e. balanced relationships in institutions, are the key to change. *"Young people need to know that their problems will be heard. Only in that case will they discuss their mental health with their educators,"* the speakers agreed.

In the field of prevention of mental health problems, Kristýna Cetkovská introduced the term mindfulness, i.e. a certain awareness and reflection of what is happening in ourselves, whether it is positive or negative emotions. Tomáš Konrád confirmed that it is mindfulness, not only to oneself but also to others, that can be essential for detecting incipient problems and bring the opportunity to react to them in time. Establishing a relationship with your body is also an important factor. This was also confirmed by Jan Gondek, who perceives the great focus of today's young people on the mind and the neglect of its connection to our physical part.

Another term we discussed was the "burnout" of workers, which, according to Kristýna Cetkovská, is above all important to see as a gradual process that can be prevented. The prevention of burnout is sufficient mental hygiene and the just-mentioned mindfulness, which can help detect incipient problems, for example, among colleagues at the workplace. We can help the people around us by sensitively asking them about a change in behavior and any problem and letting them know that they can turn to us.

Bob Kartous sees the future of preventing teacher burnout primarily in the possibility of short-time work in education, and the involvement of educators in another sector would bring in a greater perspective, can bring the efficiency of their activities in education. The possibility to work in education part-time only could also attract experts from various fields to educational institutions. He mentioned the so-called sabbatical as another important tool, i.e. the possibility for pedagogues to take a break from educational activities for a longer period of time.

Možnost se na vzdělávání podílet pouze částí pracovního úvazku by také mohla přilákat do vzdělávacích institucí experty z rozličných oborů. Jako další významný nástroj uvedl tzv. sabbatical, tedy možnost pro pedagogy si po delší časový úsek od činnosti ve vzdělávání odpočinout.

According to Bob Kartous, the Czech education system is currently not ready to face the growing pressure on mental health care, which will only be made possible by its systemic change. "Such a systemic change mainly needs enough time," explained Bob Kartous. In this respect, there is great hope in the activities of various non-governmental organizations that fulfill the role of so-called bypasses, i.e. a certain bridging of the needs of young people and educational institutions. Their projects can be a tool for the creation of specific solution models, which will subsequently be taken over by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

In his closing part to the participants from the ranks of education workers, Jan Gondek highlighted the importance of the cooperation of all those involved in the education process. In addition to school principals and teachers, parents and especially pupils and students themselves should be included in the public discussion about mental health. Tomáš Konrád emphasized the important role of educators as role models, who should devote enough time to self-development in order to be a true inspiration to those around them. Bob Kartous emphasized that the important role of education, rather than imparting the taught material itself, is to support young people on their journey to find their own identity.

### Our panelists:

- **Bob Kartous** - Advisor to the Minister of Education of the Czech Republic (MŠMT)
- **Kristýna Cetková** - psychologist (Deloitte & Soulmio)
- **Jan Gondek** - member of the Czech Secondary School Union (ČSU)
- **Tomáš Konrád** - team coach (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague)

We thank all the panelists, visitors, partners and the Hybernská Campus for providing space for discussion.

### The team of the international consortium of the project Solve it!

