

# THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE-LONG LEARNING - SUCCESS AND EFFORT FROM THE PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW

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*The essay shares the conclusions of an experimental survey. The research was made with physically handicapped students in secondary education. It had two aims. On one hand it examined the disabled students' opinions about scholastic success and effort. On the other hand it tried to find out whether these students have the same point of view about these questions as the majority of the students in secondary education.*

**Keywords:** Scholastic success, effort, physically handicapped students' point of view, empirical research

As life-long learning becomes more and more important in the modern world economies, learning does not finish at the end of formal school education. The technical development requires continuous learning, and the adaptation to the ever changing labour-market requirements.

On the other hand the conclusions of representative researches show rather depressing results. It becomes clear that the majority of students are not so highly motivated and they only learn those subjects which are definitely necessary to learn. In accordance with this fact students think that scholastic success attributable especially to congenital capacities.

However these results refer generally to the students in secondary education. We do not know the disabled students' point of view. As disabled young people are quite underprivileged on the labour market and they have to make an extra effort to get on in life I think these questions have special importance in their case. This fact made me to start wondering whether this phenomenon would appear in the groups of disabled young students as well. Do they have the same opinion? What do they think about these questions anyway.

In order to find answers to my questions I made interviews with some physically handicapped students. In the next chapters of my essay I am going to share the experiences of my survey. Before this I represent the results of the researches mentioned earlier.

## Review

The researches about students' views of success and effort are hallmarked by the name of Erzsébet Golnhoffer and Éva Szabolcs. The results of Golnhoffer and Szabolcs (2005) showed that during the years of elementary education the opinion of adults –both parents and teachers as well- and school marks have primary importance for children.

In primary school children are "theorists of growth" because they attribute the scholastic success to diligence and hard working. At senior age the "theory of growth" gives its place to the "theory of reality" In the "theory of reality" students do not believe in the force of will anymore. They share the opinion that congenital capacities are unchangeable.

With the expansion of the scholastic experiences the "theory of little work" appears among secondary school students. The majority of students avoids those learning strategies which require too much effort or those that are too simple. They begin to differentiate the subjects which are worth of learning from those that are not. As they make decisions about learning strategies and efforts they especially take into consideration the requirements of the subjects, the strictness of control, the role of the subjects in their future career, the teacher's authority and the parents' expectations. Besides this majority there exist a minority, who is hard-working, has high level achievement motivation, and positive self- concept about schoolwork.

## Presentation of the research

### The sample of the research

I made my research in the autumn of the 2006/2007 school year. I involved nine physically handicapped students in my survey. The majority of these students with the exception of two lived in the State Institute of Physically Handicapped People. All of them attended the Technical and Grammar School of Addetur Foundation that can be found in the neighborhood of the Institute. At the time of the survey two of them were vocational school students, four of them were grammar school students and three of them were technical school students.

As the number shows I did not manage to involve too many vocational school students. The reason behind this was that vocational students preferred not to be involved. There were so many people who had wanted to make interviews with them before that they became tired of it.

### Research method

I made structured interviews with the students. To be undisturbed we tried to find tranquil places. The majority of the interviews took place in the State Institute of Physically Handicapped People. On two occasions we talked in the Technical and Grammar School of Addetur Foundation. With the permission of my interviewees I taped the conversations.

### The questions of the research

The main points of my interviews were based on the concepts of the previous researches. According to the terminology of earlier surveys I examined whether

these students were "theorists of little work" or they belonged to the minority motivated hard-workers. I analyzed whether they were "theorists of growth" or "theorists of reality".

I was very curious to know if there was any difference between the summarized results of the vocational school students, grammar school students and technical school students. I wanted to find out if there was any difference between the summarized results of the three examined groups and the results of earlier researches.

### Hypothesis

In connection with the questions I had the following assumptions:

1. Comparing the results of the three groups vocational school students are "theorist of growth" and they belong to the minority motivated hard-workers students. In contrast to them the students of the other two groups are "theorists of little work" and "theorists of reality".
2. Comparing the results of the involved students with the results of the earlier researches the involved students are the "theorists of growth" and they have higher level of achievement motivation than the other students had in the earlier researches.

### Presentation of the research results

In order to find the answers to my questions and to make sure of my hypothesis I typed the conversations and began to analyze the results. In this part I'm going to present the conclusions. I proceed systematically. I start with the results of the vocational students than I continue with the results of grammar school students and technical school students. In order to protect the anonymity of my interviews I do not use their names in the presentations.

#### Vocational school students' views about success and effort

From the conversations it becomes clear that vocational school students do not make long-term study plans. They learn regularly every day. On the average they spend one or two hours with learning per day.

In their learning strategies they pay attention to the length of the curriculum. Their attitude towards the subject is also very important. They spend more time with those subjects which they enjoy learning. In their opinion the success is particularly attributable to hard work and diligence. Building up good connection with teachers can help a lot as well.

#### Grammar school students' views about success and effort

Analyzing the results I came to the conclusion that all of the students except the only male student from this group studies every day. This boy confesses to learning only when it is inevitable. Sometimes just before the class starts.

The students who learn regularly from this group spend on average more time with their studies than the vocational school students. In their case the one/two hour term rises to two or three hours per day.

As they make their learning strategies they take into consideration the following factors: personal interest in the subject, the difficulty of the subject, the type of the exam, the type of homework, the available time and the extent of tiredness.

The factor of personal interest in the subject is familiar. Vocational school students mentioned it as well. The type of homework - whether it is oral or written- however is a new interesting point. Some students who have serious problem with hand writing concentrate first of all to the oral homework. In the written tasks they should ask for other people's help.

The available time and the extent of tiredness are also new factors. According to the reports it come home to me that these students are quite busy. After the classes they take part in different kinds of rehabilitation programs or they have to participate in compulsory psychology advice. As a result little time remains to learn and they are exhausted.

The majority of the students attribute scholastic success especially to diligence. Besides diligence they mention other factors too such as the interest in the subject, the good intellectual skills, the high level of learning achievements and the activity during the lessons.

In connection with the interest in the subject and intellectual skills in their opinion it is very important that learning means joyful experience for the student. The student understands the curriculum, learns easily and be quick of understanding. In reference to high level learning achievement and the activity in the classes, the interviews emphasizes that the student must perform well during the class and write good papers.

#### Technical school students' views about success and effort

According to the results it becomes clear that two students learn at least one-three hours every day. In contrast to them, there is one girl in the group who learns only when it becomes inevitable, just like the male student in the group of grammar school students.

In the decisions about learning strategies we can find various practices. One hand there are two students who differentiate the subjects that are worth of learning from those that are not. On the other hand there is a male student who is a hard worker and intents to do his best in every subject.

Those students who are "theorists of little work" take into consideration especially the difficulty of the subject and the measure of spontaneous learning. According to these factors one of the boys spends more time with those parts of the curriculum that are easier to understand and the female student deals with only those parts of the curriculum that she did not manage to memorize during the class.

In connection with the factors of success the importance of good intellectual skills is mentioned in this group as well. As the students describe the main parameters of a successful student they mention the following: "a successful student is clever, quick of understanding". "He or she can memorize and understand the curriculum easily". "A successful student is a genius. Only one preview is enough to him and he knows the curriculum by heart."

Besides the above mentioned intellectual skills from these students' point of view the role of highly motivated attitude, the interest in learning the subject are also very important.. As a new factor students talk about the importance of student's efficiency as well. In their opinion dud who learn everything by heart

could be successful as well. As a new interesting opportunity they even consider possibility that a student buys the certificate of qualification or fawns on the teacher.

### Summary, examination of the hypothesis

In this part of my essay I'm going to summarize the results of my survey and I examine whether my assumptions were true or false. In order to the better transparency I tabulated the results of the different student groups and the results of the previous researches.

*Table 1 Summarized table of the views about success and effort*

	<b>Vocational school students</b>	<b>Grammar school students</b>	<b>Technical school students</b>	<b>Previous researches</b>
<b>Decisions about effort</b>	Theorist of little work	Theorists of little work	Theorist of little work	The majority of the students is theorists of little work the minority is highly motivated, hard workers
<b>The judgment of success</b>	Theorists of growth	The majority of students is theorist of growth the minority is theorist of little work	Theorists of reality	Theorists of reality

As the table 1 shows all of the groups of the involved students are "the theorists of little work". Although they generally learn every day they differentiate the subjects which are worth of learning from those which are not. As they are making decisions about learning strategies and efforts they take into consideration several relevant factors such as the difficulty of the subject, the length of the curriculum, the curiosity of the curriculum, the type of the exam, the available time and the extent of tiredness. Due to the fact that these students are disabled they face problems of hand writing as well.

Regarding to the judgment of success the three groups have various opinions. As "the theorists of growth" vocational school students emphasize the importance of diligence and hard working. In contrast to them grammar school students are only partly "the theorist of growth" and besides the diligence they begin to emphasize the importance of intellectual skills as well. Finally technical school students are unambiguously the "theorist of reality". In their opinions diligence and hard working have no role in the scholastic success. They believe only in the power of intellectual skills.

These results verify the results of earlier surveys. At the higher grade of education students become more and more the "theorists of reality". The success they attribute to the factors which they can not really influence. Unfortunately this attitude might have a serious effect. Using the technical term of Réthy (2003) this can lead to a defensive behavior. The student begins to hesitate and

does not trust himself. This phenomenon is like a never ending spiral that sets back the achievement and reduces the motivation.

In connection with school success the involved students make another very noticeable establishment. They recognize the importance of hidden curriculum in the school career. It is evidence for them that building up good relationship or even weaseling in with the teachers can be beneficial for school career.

### Examination of the hypothesis

Comparing the results of the students groups my first hypothesis was partly verified. Although vocational school students are "the theorists of growth" and they attribute scholastic success especially to diligence, similar to the other groups, they are the "theorists of little work" at the same time.

The majority of grammar school students is "theorist of growth" and there is only one person from this group who thinks that the success attributable to the intellectual skills. Technical school students come to a common conclusion. In their case my assumption seems to be true. They are "theorists of little work" and "theorists of reality".

Comparing the summarized result of the involved groups with the results of earlier surveys my hypothesis was partly verified as well. The majority of the involved students is the "theorist of growth" Vocational school students and the majority of grammar school students believe that hard working is a relevant success factor.

On the other hand the majority of the involved students is the "theorist of little work" who differentiate the subjects that are worth of learning from those that are not as well.

### Epilogue

It was very exciting and interesting to make this survey. It gave me the possibility to prove myself as a researcher. During the interviews I took a fancy to these disabled young people. I wish that all of their dreams come true and that they will have enough courage to achieve their goals.

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