RESILIENCE AND THE EFFECT OF BACKGROUND VARIABLES

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METHODOLOGICAL POSSIBILITIES TO IDENTIFY RESILIENT STUDENTS

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One of the most compelling priorities of the international educational agenda is to close the achievement gap between those students who are successful and those who are at risk of failure. One area of research that has important implications for this topic is focused on resilience and resilient students. Resilient students (OECD, 2011) are those who come from a disadvantaged socio-economic background and exhibit high levels of achievement. There has been a growing interest towards studying factors which contribute to resilience. However, more interpretations of resilience are known, which establish different approaches and assessment methods. Significant differences can be discovered in the measurement of the two necessary criteria of this phenomenon: (a) exposure to significant adversity or risk and (b) success or good developmental outcome. This complicates the planning of research and the unification of results. The main purposes of this study are (1) to present different solutions which we can use to measure the two necessary conditions and identify the group of resilient students, and (2) to test these solutions and explore the prevalence of resilience in two primary school samples. In order to reach these goals we analyse data from two separate data collections, which are not suitable for comparison, because of their different methodologies. Altogether 722 4th graders participated in the first data collection, which was carried out via the online eDia platform. In this, we identified 74 disadvantaged students based on official Hungarian classification. Based on the students' professed opinion about their satisfaction with their school performance, more than half of disadvantaged students were resilient (52,7%). We applied the WHO–WBI5 index (Bech, 1996) to evaluate students' psychological well-being, and based on this categorisation, 40.5% of at-risk students qualified as resilient. If we take into account the overlap between these two approaches, we find that 27% of disadvantaged students can be considered resilient. In the second data collection a total of 98 4th graders responded to a paper-based questionnaire, and we used teachers' opinion about their students' family background to identify 43 at-risk students. Less than half of them were resilient based on their reading (46,5%) mathematics (41,8%) and science (41,8%) grades, and 37,2% performed well in every subject. There are just few empirical researches that examine resilience in Hungary, and we have only general information about the ratio of resilient students. In order to initiate investigations which contribute to the improvement of educational efficiency and equity, we need to adapt methodological procedures. In this study we applied two different routes to identify the criteria of risk and three routes to identify the group of disadvantaged students who succeed from different points of view. Theoretical implications of the findings are also discussed, and suggestions for future research are given.