The Aspiration to Success in School and the Need for Performance of the Pupils

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Abstract

This study is treating, from psychic-social-pedagogical point of view, the two types of attitudes and abilities of pupils: the level of aspiration for progress and need of performance of the pupils. The purpose of the study is the emphasizing of the importance of the aspirations and need of performance of the pupils for ensuring the school progress. One needs not ignore the major role school plays in promoting the motivation and influencing of efficient school results.

The psycho-pedagogical approach of the aspiration to learning of the pupils assumes its unmediated research in terms of common learning, and in close relationship with the demands and expectations of teacher and other social factors – (colleagues, parents) – influencing the level, intensity or its realization. The psycho-pedagogical studying and treating of the pupils’ aspiration is still poorly represented. This is explained - perhaps by the absence of a well defined methodological line – the aspirations and the associated variables are difficult to identify in the current learning activity of pupils. No wonder, then, that most researchers have resorted to creating some experimental activities, often using tasks not directly related to student learning activity. It would have been desirable that the results obtained in experimental conditions, be integrated naturally in the life and work of pupils and professors, which actually never happened. Actually, this condition would have never be achieved if the laboratory itself wouldn’t be the class of pupils (2).

The level of aspirations or the need for self-controlling involves from cognitive point of view the representation of an ideal or the possibility for achieving the higher level, meaning the school success or the lowest level – weak

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performances. This is an effect of the need for performance and it is tightly related with the self-esteem (high esteem – high aspiration level or vice versa) (12).

The school success is appreciated in general by the marks expressing the results in learning and by the results at the exams, contexts, Olympics, it represents in fact, the maximum level of school adapting, which draw once more the attention on the fact that the concept of success or school achievement, relates to the school activity as a whole, rather than to the learning activity in school, such as it has been the subject of our analysis. The school success or failure in the school activity expresses in fact the concordance between the qualities and interests of the pupil and the exigencies and standards of the school.

The attitude of the pupils towards success or failure is one of the most important factors of school success. It is also an important factor at the aspirations level: it has been demonstrated that the pupils with inadequacy, self rejection and sense of inferiority focus on too high or too low scopes.

From pedagogical perspective two categories of school success factors differentiate, one related to the interiority of the pupil, and the other related to the external environment. The internal factors of success are:

- Psycho-social maturity
- Intellectual capacity
- Skills
- Motivation for learning
- Motivation for success

The external factors of school success are:

- The social cultural environment
- Family ambiance
- Group of friends
- School policy
- Pedagogical organization
- Pedagogical structure
- Pedagogical content
- Professor’s competence
- School management competence

If the success expresses the concordance between the possibilities of the school child and the school exigencies, the school failure expresses the “situation of a school child whose results do not satisfy the norms of the school”, situation created by the fact that the school imposes basic programs and identical rhythms for all children (13).

Indeed, the initial studies on the aspirations of school success are indebted to experimental method. Typical on this meaning is the success of the experimental research conducted by P.S. Sears (7) on school success, as the author herself calls it.

For the studying of school success aspiration, P.S. Sears used as subjects three groups of pupils in small classes: the group of pupils with successful school education in all subjects (reading and arithmetic inclusive), the group of pupils with school failure in reading and arithmetic and the group of pupils, called differential group, with successful reading and failure in arithmetic. The experimental tasks (similar to school ones) consisted of 120 items of multiple choices of the significance of the word and the addition operations, taken from Courtis test and adapted to the aimed purpose. Their grouping was thus made so as to allow a larger number of tests. Each group of tasks (three reading items and three addition operations, each with four digits) was equal in degree of difficulty, they being presented as speed tests. The number of words and operations alleged by subject as possible to be solved in a unit of time was taken as an index of his level of aspiration. According to the experimental procedure, the first tests (neutral session) were intended to experimentally produce the success (successful group), the unsuccessful (group of failure) and the success in reading and failure in arithmetic (differential group). In other words, to the school success and failure overlapped the experimental success and failure.

From the comparative analysis of the results of the three groups of pupils, the author draws the conclusion according to which - within experimental conditions, where the social norms extensively exercised have been internalized (the requirements towards the performance of pupils in school) – the confidence in social adequate achieving influences the course to establish the level of aspirations. It was not clear whether the greater variability in
the level of aspirations of group of failure was due to their prior experience specific with the learning object (prolonged failure), recent failure, to the both forms of failure or a third factor.

Therefore results, that the analyzed study is somehow a compromise between the two directions of research. By grouping the subjects by the criterion of school success and failure and the use of some school-like tasks, the study approaches the psycho-pedagogical research of the phenomenon, and throughout the way of arranging and administering of the tasks, the tests conducting and applied technique are similar to any experimental research.

In other studies, occurring simultaneously or shortly after the analyzed one, it was shown that under school class conditions, when the school grade was used as an index of the level of aspirations, neither the success nor the failure would lead invariably to the raising or lowering of the levels aspirations. The conclusion is that in this case some other factors intervene (6). In these conditions, the levels of aspiration would belong more to the "willing thinking" while the self-esteesmes are much more grounded in the realistic thinking and strongly influenced by the objective performance, the appreciation of the abilities and self-critical attitude of the pupil (8). The estimation and appreciation of the results is not done only in its terms, in an objective way, but it is simultaneously reported the aspiration level of the individual. In the school grades language the pupils tend to overestimate the results obtained, the mental knowledge self-assessment is greatly determined by the level of aspiration, and only in small percentage by objective knowledge of performances (11). This aspect of the problem is required to be looked at more differentiated. As proof, there are pupils with adequate and consistent self-appreciation who show confidence in their capabilities, pupils with inadequate self-appreciation, exaggerated self-esteem (self-sufficient) and pupils with consistently low self-esteem, lacking confidence in their capabilities (3). Therefore, the formation of an appropriate self-appreciation adequate to the school results, important precondition of learning, must be an ongoing and explicit concern of the professor.

Ignoring the influence of the professor on pupil aspirations is characteristic of many of the researches which we have referred to. However, it has been demonstrated that the approval by the professor of the results influence in general positively the pupils’ aspirations, while the disapproval - depends on how this is perceived by pupils - exerts an ambiguous influence. In case the professor’s expectations are consistent with the aspirations of pupils and are backed up on their real capabilities, they exert a positive influence and stimulate the aspirations (10). It is generally accepted, that pupils assimilate the professors’ expectations and behave in accordance with them. In particular, the pupil learns and approximates the school results that the professor expects and, therefore, he strives to obtain them. Furthermore, it is believed that the professor creates in the class - consciously or not – the conditions to confirm his expectations (5). This is an important aspect of the problem and - so - it must be more closely examined.

The identification at the children of a competition for an excelling standard has naturally led to the assumption of the existence of a need for performance at the pupils (need-Achievement), expressed as the competition for better school grades. The concept of the need of performance was transposed in the psychology of learning under the name of high performance (the classification was done on the school grades average criterion) later obtained better school grades than their counter partners (the pupils characterized by fear of failure). This fact was considered as a proof of a high correlation between the need of performance, level of aspiration and school success (1).

The performance represents an action whose effect is superior to the common level and may even constitute a record. In terms of learning theories, the performance is the response reaction to the repetitive action of the stimuli. It is about the results of learning, they representing the performances of the pupils, on which numerous reasons are based. It is known that a higher motivated pupil reaches higher performances than others less motivated, which means that the performance is directly determined by the reasons. The performance in turn, exercises an action upon the self perception of the pupil. Through its high performance he perceives himself as competitive. If the performance had is weak, he will perceive himself as lacking skills, as an individual losing his value.

Such as results from the researches of a large number of psychologists, the relationship between school achievements and the aspiration for school grades does not seem to be so clear, nor does one find a significant relationship between the self-concept (related to school achievement), and the actual grades and those aspired to. It
was noticed that the pupils with low capacity wish higher grades compared to previous ones, while the pupils with high capacities expect lower grades. These data are interpreted in the meaning that the weak pupils want to show that they want to achieve more, and for the pupils with higher capacities, the school grades have little strengthening value. On the other hand, the subjects that are rejected (self rejection) had the smallest discrepancies between the earlier grades and the actual aspiration level. On the contrary, the under accomplished ones (pupils whose school results are below the level expected by the professor) satisfied with themselves have shown the highest overvaluation. However, dissatisfied with themselves they have reached or exceeded the level of the expected results.

In the situation when the level of the motives is not controlled, there is a much more obvious relationship between the motivation of performance, success or failure and the preparing of the purposes; the failure separately taken is not an element of variation. On the contrary, this improves the performance of the subjects with need of success which, in all cases, when the level of performance does not depend on them, have higher performance score. In fact, the studies have shown that the subjects with need of high performance, which are more numerous, present in all experimental conditions (relaxing, neutral and stimulating the motivation) a significant gap between the ideal pupil's results and does so to increase school contribution among the factors that stimulate the aspiration and in this way influence the real self and the level of aspiration in relation to the remaining subjects.

The fact that, based on the need of performance developed in childhood, the school performances could not be adequately predicted, has been interpreted as a proof that it is about a more general behavioral feature which does not necessarily manifest in responses during school, the school motivation probably representing a more specific aspect. Although the need of performance can influence the efficacy of the teaching, the good school results can be motivated by the impulse for power, resentments, dependence, social acceptance and aggression, while poor results can be motivated by impulses for seek of pleasure, extroversion, denial of shortfalls and power. A more cautious opinion in which I concur, is that the need of performance cannot be considered in any case as the only factor of these accomplishments, that the reciprocal relationship between motivation and the level of achievement has not a linear character, that the motivation of accomplishments differs from pupil to pupil and in its appreciation and scholastic achievements of each pupil, one must take into account, his personality.

Thus, the emphasizing of the importance of parental attitudes and practices in shaping children’s need of performance and aspirations should not lead us to ignoring the role that school plays in promoting the motivation and influencing of school results. The professor has many means to reduce the effects of various parenting practices and does so to increase school contribution among the factors that stimulate the aspiration and in this way influence pupil’s results. He can do so either directly, through contacts with parents or indirectly, through the efficiency of instruction and control of knowledge.

The affectivity of the professors, correlates with the school performance in order to satisfy the need for affective security of the pupils (A. Freud – Theory of affective learning); the absence of affective involvement generates counter-performances within the academic: acquisitions plan and of the communication conduct centred exclusively on the topic of the lesson; the capitalization of the cognitive dimension, abandoning the affective-motivational and social one; the lack of positive expectancies with regard to the evolution of the pupils.

**Conclusions**

Indeed, the professor has numerous opportunities to inspire to the shy and undecided pupils (with low level of aspiration and need of performance) more confidence in themselves. This imposes mainly in case of those for whom waiting for failure has become "a natural state", a steady one. In case of these pupils, the periodical achievement of several successes - possibly by consecutive proposal of some achievable objectives - is a way of overcoming the mistrust and, with this, the gaining of the appetite for better school performance. It is important however that they "see" and be convinced that such accomplishments are due to the personal efforts and not to professor’s benevolence. Briefly, it is necessary that to pupils in this category be occasionally provoked, from time to time, the emotions of success. By contrast, pupils in the opposite category (those who usually, overestimate) should be caused, from time to time, the emotion of failure, which is good, because it will contribute to a much more realistic self-appreciation. In other words, the professor must counterbalance thus the success and failure so that the pupil does not lose perspective, and if he has lost it, to help him regain.

In order to support the pupils and for their positive evolution in school situations, it is important to consider that in such situations not only the intelligence is involved, but also the need for development, his ambition, his intrinsic motivation. Knowing his involvement capabilities can provide an indicator according to which the teaching staff
orientates in order to stimulate the pupils. An important role has the family but also the class to which he belongs to. These create the environment within which a child can be encouraged and stimulated, and his teaching efficiency will be very high or very frustrating through the lack of motivation.

Between the school success and the level of aspiration there is an interacting relationship. Thus the lack of success determines a low level of aspiration, which at its turn can reduce school performance. The pupils most affected by the school failure present a lower degree of tolerance towards frustration, and this appears when, due to external or internal causes (deficiencies, lack of self confidence, fear of failure etc) it no longer can satisfy certain needs.

Also, besides the personal aspiration level, are the aspirations of the social group, to which the pupils belong. Generally the aspirations of the pupil evolve on a social interactions background to get nearer the aspirations of the group he belongs to, without having erased the individual differences. The aspiration level and the performance one can be ascending, the performance surpassing the aspiration, achieving thus the sell surpassing. The self-regulating nature of pupil’s activity is emphasized by the changes at the aspiration level pending on school performance modification (15).

References