

Book Review

Large Blossom of Small Flowers, i.e. Resilient Promises in Higher Education

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1. Introduction: on the Springboard

I write my review of the book *Resilience and Social Inequalities in Higher Education*, written by Tímea Ceglédi, lecturer and researcher at the University of Debrecen. In her research, she examines students with disadvantaged backgrounds, who have been successful despite their disadvantages and gained access to higher education through their good record. These students are the so-called resilient promises. In the beginning, I would like to refer to the title of this review, which is also related to the cover of the book: The name "Little Flowers" is a complex of students who come from disadvantaged social backgrounds, but, thanks to their perseverance, diligence and their need for development, they have paved their way to higher education. However, the question arises in all of us, what will happen to these talented young people after successful entry? How can they thrive after university enrollment? Reading the book will give us answers to our questions.

2. Review

Hereinafter, I am going to briefly summarize the content and the merit of the book under review, chapter by chapter.

Beginning with the first chapter (*Resilience and Inequalities*), the author presents a theoretical approach to the problem, i.e., we encounter literature definitions of resilience while reading. The book focuses on higher education and students who have come this far with outstanding performance. The author presents explanations of exceptional life paths, pointing out the interconnection between social status and effectiveness. Examining these exceptional life paths, she tries to assess how the hitherto resilient life path develops during the student years. The students in the book are called resilient promises by the author. This means that successful entry to the university is only a promise and not a guarantee that we will talk about resilient life paths during the student years as well.

In the following Chapter 2 (*Inequalities in Access*), the author summarizes here her theoretical approach to the relationship between higher education and social inequalities. It emerges as a structural question, what changes will the expansion of higher education bring for the students with a disadvantaged background, and whether is the impact of origin (a person's social and family background) diminishing in higher education on account of this process? The author is interested not only in observing social changes but also individual-level effects. She also measures the phenomenon in theoretical sections such as the modernization hypothesis, vertical exclusion, the life cycle hypothesis, the selection effect, and the accumulated inequality and differentiated selection.

In Chapter 3 (*Inequalities in the Student Years*), the author examines what theories serve to capture higher education inequalities. She reviews theories highlighting the effects of family

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background as the primary influencing factor. She points out that the impact of family background also extends to the following questions: who will “utilize” the possibilities higher education offers, how and what those persons will spend their student years with. (Bourdieu 2003) Hereafter the author introduces us to the factors that create inequality, we can read about factors such as study involvement and lecturer relationships. Overall, the chapter looks at the main gaps in higher education. One such gap is the blind acceptance of the authority of higher education institutions and the aimless pursuit of its manifest goal system, which leads to the reproduction of inequalities if it is not accompanied by meaningful exploitation of student years.

Going to Chapter 4 (Inequalities in Exit) the author concluded, that overall, even though education is related to the place in the employment structure, we can talk about impenetrable walls for graduates from the lower strata of society. The success of a fresh graduate is determined by many factors in the labor market. We can find different social glass ceilings in different regions, counties and organizations. The author also discusses the social differences in the choice of different majors and institutions, the success of admission and graduation, in terms of the higher education career of resilient promises. Such is the difference in prestige. According to that, students are left out of certain institutions not on merit but the social background, thus giving undue advantage to students in higher prestige education.

In the next Chapter 5 (Resilience of Entry) the author’s main question is, what has driven the promises of resilience to higher education? The results of her research show that the resilient students start on unequal terms compared to those, who have obtained admission with similarly successful results to higher education with a more favorable background (she calls them, “winners”). Here I would like to describe the concept of the names of the control groups used in the research. One such name is, “drifters”. Drifters are those students, who are in the worst social situation and have not had outstanding results in accessing higher education, i.e., in terms of their effectiveness, they drift with the constraints of their background. The other such group was named “the winners”, which means that good performance can be predicted based on the student’s favorable background. The third group is made up of indifferent prodigal students. They are the ones who are mostly from good backgrounds but don’t turn their social benefits into results. Rather, they participate in higher education because of the prestige-maintaining role of the degree.

The data show that in a group of elite faculties (UofD MS, UofD GYTK, UofD GTK) the resilient students are most likely to make their way to the detriment of the drifters, while the winners are overrepresented. Legal training is neutral in this respect, as neither group is over- or under-represented. The choice between college and university faculties also shows the internal stratification of higher education, so that the promises of resilience are congested towards a college education.

Their social disadvantages determine the development curve of student years. Overall, the results of the research confirm resilience as the ability to seize the opportunities inherent in external conditions, as they have access to higher education with fewer resources than groups from better backgrounds. The author’s finding that there are atypical family traits also fits the theory of cultural mobility: resilient promises and their mothers have recognized the importance of reading and can make better use of the less supply from their family.

The 6th Chapter (Inequalities in the Student Years) focuses on the student years, examining the inequalities present there. The author compared study involvement within the four groups, i.e., how often students attend classes, whether they strive for good grades, and how much time they spend studying. As a result of the comparison, it can be said that the resilient promises can be characterized by above-average study involvement, but they make modest use of opportunities outside credit collection. The number of those, who participating in research or attending conferences, drops. Comparing all this, the comparison with the winners reveals that they do not have the knowledge and motivations necessary to exploit the advantages of higher education that are typical of the winners. Resilient promises are also outstanding compared to winners in tutoring fellow students, and they are most receptive if the instructor encourages them to perform. According to the author, the effectiveness of resilient promises is twofold. Besides, to study involvement and nurturing lecturer-student relationships, they are less receptive to intellectual activities than to opportunities for socialization.

As the research was still conducted among students in higher education, this final 7th Chapter (Towards Labor Market) is predictive, so it presents the perspectives of students on resilient promises regarding the world of work. The writer drew two conclusions about post-exit ideas. One seems to emerge along with the actual possibilities, the other along with attitudes. While we could predict success for them based on their attitudes, their opportunities are indicating the overcoming of inequalities. The work undertaken during the academic year is far from the work associated with their major, proving their limited opportunities, however, it is not certain that one of the elements of the road to success could be the work experience gained during the student years.

3. Conclusion

The author concludes the book by describing that the research serves as a lesson for education policy, for actors in higher education institutions, and also for students. The author suggests a specific proposal, according to that, a so-called “talent outpatient clinic” should be operated, tailored to the career stages of high school students, college and university students and fresh graduates, instead of project (call for proposals, tenders) periods. The essence of the concept is to provide individual and continuous assistance to students and students starting with disadvantages, just in the field where there is a need for it.

Towards the end of the review, I would like to recommend the book primarily to educators, as it provides knowledge that is essential for recognizing and helping resilient promises. I would recommend it to parents, as it can add to their child's higher education career and help them choose between faculties and majors. I recommend it to students as I realized while reading the book that it is more than likely that I also belong to the group of resilient promises, so I already look differently at the challenges around me in the mazes of higher education. I could also say that I would rather define them as a possibility.



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