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Helga Andl

Undergraduate research at Wlislöcki Henrik Student College

Translated by Márton Sajben

In May 2015, the “Horizons and Dialogues” Conference was held at the University of Pécs at the Faculty of Humanities. At the Conference, students of Wlislöcki Henrik Student College (which belongs to the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs) were present with their own symposium, the abstract of which reads as follows:

The symposium aims to provide a platform for the students of Wlislöcki Henrik Student College (WHSC) to present their findings.

Among many other pursuits, the WHSC deems it extremely important to help students integrate into academic life and to support their research. Thus, for the third time, a call for proposal was announced in the Student College. The research topics of the students applying for the symposium are diverse, which also aptly represents our Student College. These topics include, but are not limited to, local history research, analysis of the effects of university advertisements, the success of slum rehabilitation, and testing the basic health knowledge of high school students. Also – just like previous lines of research – Romology as a scientific field of research is again in focus: one research group aims to assess the knowledge of primary and secondary school students about Gypsies, while another critically analyzes the text corpus of Romology through interpretation of examples.

In the following study, we aim to present how the symposium came to be, the background of the students’ research projects, and how they were supported by the Wlislöcki Henrik Student College. At the same time, we also make an attempt to define the *learning community* of the Student College, based on the study conducted by Bordás and Ceglédi, regarding the Student colleges of Debrecen (Bordás – Ceglédi, 2012).

The Student College and scientific research

The Organizational and Operational Regulations, the appendix of the pedagogical principles of the Wlilocki Henrik Student College (WHSC) – in accordance with the principles of the Student College Charta (2011) and the TÁMOP-project³ regulations, which has lately supported the WHSC – determine the aims and tasks of the Student College. It defines the Student College as a self-regulating organizational unit, which supports the students of PTE (University of Pécs), so they can successfully finish their studies. Its students are mainly Roma or Gypsy students, but the document emphasizes that this is not necessarily so: the student college intends to provide an opportunity for all those “who show interest in Roma/Gypsy issues, and wish to pursue scientific and professional work” (Pedagogical Principle, 2013: 214-215). The WHSC in its manifold pursuits strives to provide a supporting framework, which helps the students in their *scientific research* directly with: (1) financial and professional support for individual research programs, (2) helping students to present the findings of their individual research at conferences, (3) providing opportunities for publication, (4) encouraging participation in scientific and other kinds of tenders, (5) organizing conferences at the Student College (Pedagogical Principles, 2013: 215).

In the recent years many studies were written addressing the formation and working mechanisms of student colleges, such as the Romaversitas and the WHSC, as well as the Christian Roma student colleges that emerged later, all of which aim to support Roma or Gypsy students in higher education (see, for example, Forray, 2012; 2013; Forray and Boros, 2009; Jenei, 2013; Orsós, 2013; Varga, 2013; 2014). The existence of these student colleges is a priority even on a legislative level, since §54² in the Act CCIV of 2011 on national higher education specifically names the Roma student colleges. Simultaneously, the activity of identifying and supporting underprivileged and multiply disadvantaged students with the help of student colleges appeared in law. This means the introduction of a new form of student college, the remedial student college, and these institutions view themselves mainly as a channel for improving social mobility (Demeter, 2012: 60-61).³ The WHSC also focuses on disadvantage compensation, but rather than

- 1 The title of the tender: Supporting Roma Student colleges (KONV) / TÁMOP 4.1.1.D-12/2/ KONV. The tender of WHSC: The supporter of research: TÁMOP-4.1.1. D – 12/2/ KONV-2012-0009 “The improvement of complex student services for underprivileged students, organized by Wlilocki Henrik Student College.”
- 2 According to the §54, the task of the institutions of higher education is identifying and providing professional help for underprivileged and multiply disadvantaged students with great potential and motivation, capable of extra-curricular achievements, and encouraging them to partake in professional, scientific, artistic, and physical activities. The institution of higher education provides talent-nurturing and catching-up programs by itself, or in cooperation with another higher educational institution. These programs might include scientific student associations, student colleges, or Roma student colleges. Student colleges, or Roma student colleges may also be created in collaboration with higher educational institutions, by those who are entitled to establish or maintain higher educational institutions by this law. The institution of higher education provides help for underprivileged students in the form of a mentoring program (Act CCIV of 2011 law on national higher education).
- 3 Besides compensating for disadvantages, these student colleges also aim to increase the number of graduates who take responsibility for their communities, so programs that focus on identity are also organized (Demeter, 2012: 61). The same also applies to Roma student



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For me, conducting research was memorable. We participated in both research competitions with my team and we also won in both. For me, it mattered a lot. I got a lot of experience and, of course, a good team is also important.

simply helping students catch up, the initiative should be defined on a new level: creation of an inclusive environment, the elements of which (both human and material) encourage the development of a supportive and cooperative community, adjusted for the needs of each individual (Varga, 2014a). In a related study Varga examines how the WHSC can be interpreted as an *inclusive scientific society*, and lists “activities that encourage scientific inclusion” in the students’ college lives. In the research, the scholar presents how numerous elements of support programs (for individuals or communities) intentionally aim to involve students in research in order to maintain or boost their motivation. At the same time, Varga also points out that this complex facility provided by student colleges functions as a means of equality, as it opens up “a wide array of opportunities for scientific achievements” (Varga, 2014b).

Henceforth, we hope to present how one rather complex feature of the support program, namely the tender system assisting student research, helps students integrate into academic life.

The tender system supporting student research

The Wlislócki Henrik Student College, using the opportunities provided by the TÁMOP-tender mentioned above and embedded in the tasks regarding scientific research, specified in the pedagogical principles, proposes to support student research; in order to do so, an *internal tender system* has been devised. Research tenders were announced three times. Their goals can be described along these lines:

- Gaining experience in planning and conducting (micro-)research (writing a research plan, scheduling, budget planning);
- Conducting research based on research methodology training provided by the TÁMOP tender that fits with the topics examined by the Romology Research

colleges: compensating for disadvantages and developing Gypsy, Roma identity are both viewed as elementary objectives (Varga, 2013: 69).

Center workshops (Linguistic workshop, Social studies workshop, Educational Sociology workshop) operating alongside the Department of Romology and Sociology of Education, which provides the professional and infrastructural background of WHSC;

- Providing an opportunity to research both independently and as part of a larger research group;
- Apart from scholars, providing an opportunity for other PTE students to join research groups (WHSC members, and members of other student colleges of PTE), also, encouraging cooperation;
- Concluding, and publishing research findings, after finishing the research (research report, participation in a conference, publication, writing course paper, writing a thesis);
- Gaining experience in application writing, performing, and concluding.

Prior to administrating the applications, all scholars had to attend a research methodology training program. Among the objectives of this training was to provide the essential theoretical background knowledge for planning and conducting empirical research, the introduction of the research methodology applied by social sciences, as well as publishing, and speaking at conferences. This training was necessary for several reasons: (1) to begin with, the students study at various departments/faculties, therefore not all of them were familiar with the characteristics of social studies, (2) also, the entry questionnaire filled out by the students proved the same point. As shown by their answers, most scholars had no courses on research methodology, nor had they taken part in research projects during their studies. Nevertheless, the assumption that students would gladly participate in research projects seems to be correct. Judged by their answers, they were more than willing to work as a part of a research group. Furthermore, their interests and the proposed topics – in one way or another – are all connected to the field of Romology.

The following table contains basic information about the successful applications of the three tenders (Table 1), and further analysis will rely on this data.

In the first two tenders, research projects had to be planned for four months each, but it soon became apparent – even though these were micro-research projects – that this time is not sufficient, especially for those working in a group, as matching all their findings required a different kind of concentration, and thus, more time.

Altogether, twenty research projects had been completed during the three rounds, with varying depth and intensity. Most of the winning applications were created in the first round. In the second round – maybe due to difficulties arising throughout a research project – fewer applications were submitted, even though the number of applicants remained the same. This shows how group work can enhance motivation. Lastly, seven applications were submitted for the third round, involving individual, and group work as well. Altogether 20 research projects have been conducted during the 14 months period, which equals a total of 49 students: 18, 16, and lastly, 15 took part in the research. Among them, there are students who worked in several research projects: in the second round, there were three, then 10 students who participated in the first or the second rounds as well. It is probable that the positive experience of successfully taking part in a research project had a constructive influence on students' motivation, which encouraged them to become more committed to scientific research.

Table 1: Participants of the research tender of Wlislócki Henrik Student College⁴

		1 st research tender	2 nd research tender	3 rd research tender	total
number of successful applications		8	5 (6)*	7	20 (21)*
timespan of tenders		10.01.2013 – 01.31.2014 (4 months)	02.01.2014 – 05.31.2014 (4 months)	11.05.2014 – 05.15.2015 (6 months)	14 months
number of students involved in research (persons)		18	16 (18)*	15	49 (51)*
of which	number of students with scholarship (persons)	13	9	11	33
	WHSC-member student mentors not in scholarship (persons)	5	4	0	9
	WHSC students not in scholarship (persons)	0	0	1	1
	other students of PTE student colleges (persons)	0	3	3	6
number of persons involved in previous research grants		-	3	10	13
distribution of students according to their faculties¹ (persons)					
ÁJK		2	0	0	2
ÁOK		0	1	0	1
BTK		11	9	7	27
ETK		2	1	2	5
FEEK		1	0	0	1
MIK		0	1	1	2
TTK		2	4	5	11

* Six successful applications were submitted for the second tender, two applicants however have withdrawn their applications.

Upon further analysis it becomes apparent that some participants were not receiving scholarships: fifth of the students supported were not the original target audience of the TÁMOP-tender, or students with scholarship, but still active members of the WHSC, working as mentors, ensuring the success of the research applications. In addition to them, in the second and the third round there were participants who were students of

4 Faculties of the University of Pécs: Faculty of Law (ÁJK), Medical School (ÁOK), Faculty of Humanities (BTK), Faculty of Health Sciences (ETK), Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resources Development (FEEK), Ilyés Gyula Faculty (IGYK), Faculty of Business and Economy (KTK), Faculty of Music and Visual Arts (MK), Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology (MIK), Faculty of Sciences (TTK).

other student colleges of the PTE – which opened a whole new level of cooperation and horizontal learning for the students, and at the same time, showed how openly the WHSC community operates as an organization.

The distribution of the partaking students by their faculties more or less represents the composition of the WHSC members – most of the members study at the Faculty of Humanities (BTK) – which is absolutely normal in the light of the above mentioned fact, that the Student college is backed by (financially and professionally) the Department of Romology and Educational Sociology, which belongs to the Faculty of Humanities. Also, correspondingly to the profile of the student college, most of the tenders involved research in the areas of sociology and humanities; furthermore, the research methodology training also prepared the students for a certain type of research, which yet again might have influenced the composition of the students. Although humanities students were present in a higher ratio (55%), students of other faculties were also present in the research groups. These were mainly students of the Faculty of Sciences, but not exclusively, as other faculties were represented as well (1-2 persons from the Faculty of Law, the Medical School, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Adult Education and Human Resources Development, and the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology), because interest in a given research question is partly independent from one's the faculty affiliation.

The research topics are diverse – as emphasized in the description of the symposium in the introduction – and they represent the diversity of the special school well. At the same time, with a few exceptions, these research projects are mostly somehow connected to Romology. For instance, students undertook projects on collecting the Beás (Boyash) folk tales, collecting data on the attitude of Gypsy women towards medical screening, assessing the knowledge of primary and secondary school students about Gypsies, or the critical analysis of the text corpus of Romology.

The WHSC helped the researchers in multiple ways, apart from the research methodology training mentioned before: (1) The students were supported by teachers of their choice (tutors) during the TÁMOP-project, so some of them provided help in the actual research; (2) Regular monitoring also contributed to the successful completion of these research projects, in which students reported their progress and received feedback at the same time. All this was completed by the arrangement enabling students to present and publish their findings during the student college conferences. As the closing of the first two rounds, the students presented their findings at a "micro" conference at the student college, and some of them decided to publish their findings in one of the WHSC brochures. The students participating in the third round received greater publicity: they were present at the "Horizons and Dialogues" conference (mentioned in the introduction), with their own symposium, they wrote a short summary for the Romology journal,⁵ and currently, many of them are working on a more extensive concluding study.

5 The summaries can be found in the current edition.

The WHSC as a community of students, in light of research projects

Even though this paper is not meant to uncover the organizational structure or the working dynamics of the student college in a scientific manner, it is worthwhile to introduce a complex model in order to organize the manifold, at times parallel, at other times simultaneous processes, which provide the essence of this student community.

Bordás and Ceglédi in their related study examined the student colleges operating at the University of Debrecen, as platforms for sharing and generating knowledge. They defined student colleges as “fertile grounds for building, and maintaining *student communities*, physically, structurally, and socially stimulating environment” (Bordás and Ceglédi, 2012: 9-10). The study of Bordás and Ceglédi analyzes the nature of the operational mechanisms of the student colleges in many aspects. In this paper, we only focus on one of these in relation to the WHSC: the presence of the various forms of learning, connected to student research. The examined learning forms are all parts of the model used by Paavola and Hakkarainen, which distinguishes between monologic, dialogic, and trialogic learning.

Monologic learning focuses on the individual, whose goal is to “acquire knowledge.” Dialogical learning is an interactive process, which helps the members acquire the communities’ values, norms, and internal language, used formally or informally, at professional or community events. Trialogic learning aims to create an artefact, related to the desired knowledge (Bordás and Ceglédi, 2012: 17-18). All three forms of learning are typical for student college students, and can be found in the WHSC as well, in varieties of examples. Activities connected to the research projects – partly mentioned above – can be interpreted along these learning forms. The various language courses of the WHSC can be categorized as monologic learning, the usefulness of which is revealed in the research projects as well: for instance, an English language course might encourage students to use English literature, or to write an English abstract for a conference; similarly, the correct usage of Lovári or the Beás language became important during some thematically related projects (collecting Beás folk tales, for instance). Other courses contributed to the completion of the research projects as well: the research methodology training provided basic knowledge on methodology, and the ICT training helped the students to record the results of their research (word processing, creating presentations). Professional and community events can both be categorized as forms of dialogic learning. Those forums and professional conversations, which were connected to Romology, also supported the students in their research projects, as well as the “academic writing” course, or the programs aimed to develop communicative competences that enabled the students to sufficiently present their findings. Apart from these, the constant monitoring of the research projects, which provided an opportunity for professional conversation, can be viewed as a unique form of dialogic learning. All these activities listed above contributed to the successful fulfillment of the research projects and advanced the position of the WHSC in the professional circles.

In trialogic learning, “the immediate goal is not learning itself, not acquiring knowledge, and not only the participation in a communal learning process, but rather the focus is on an object beyond the individual, or the group of learners, and learning merely occurs as a beneficial ‘side effect’ during this process” (Bordás and Ceglédi, 2012: 37). At the WHSC, there are instances for the creation of both material and intellectual arte-

facts, in connection with the student research projects. Tutor–student collaboration is an intellectual product, as well as the research projects conducted by students coming from various faculties, or their findings, while studies published by WHSC, the micro-conferences held at the student college, the symposia for conferences (mentioned before), or individual issues of the Romology journal – for which this writing was intended as well – can be all viewed as dialogic learning forms, producing material artefacts.

It is clear from the above examples that all forms of learning are present (in multiple ways) in the complex system, which strives to support students working on their research projects. In turn, this leads to an increasingly significant presence of these students in academic life.

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Mercédesz Fenyvesi

Ápolás és Betegellátás- Ápoló Bsc, WHSZ tag, PTE ETK

I think it is really good that I have a tutor. My tutor teaches me the most serious subjects, and, in my opinion, discriminates me positively. My tutor always encourages me to participate in TDK [Scientific Students Group—ed.] with my thesis. My tutor is a positive person and a good person to talk to; the lectures of my tutor are also almost conversations. I am much more informal with my tutor now and it is really positive.

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