

THE CONNECTION OF ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC COPING

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In the last two decades, interest in studying the school engagement of students has increased significantly, which is closely related to the issue of academic coping (Thien, 2013). Engagement is a continuous, active and constructive participation of students in learning activities as well as a protective factor against low school achievement and school dropout (Fredricks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004; Pitzer & Skinner, 2016). Also, the way how children and adolescents cope with academic demands influences their academic success (Vierhaus, Lohaus & Wild, 2016). According to international results, engaged students use adaptive coping strategies, while disaffection (the opposite of engagement) leads to maladaptive coping methods and low achievement (Pitzer & Skinner, 2016; Shih, 2015; Skinner, 2015). Despite this, no empirical study has been carried out to the author's knowledge in Hungary that focuses on the relationship of students' engagement and academic coping. The goal of this pilot study was to investigate the connection of engagement and academic coping among 4th, 6th and 8th grade students (N=122). We used two self-report instruments: the Hungarian version of the Academic Coping Scale (Skinner, Pitzer & Steele, 2013) and the Engagement and Disaffection questionnaire by Skinner, Kindermann & Furrer (2009), which was also adapted into Hungarian. The Cronbach's alpha value was .89 for both instruments. The results show that students' engagement and the use of adaptive coping decrease with age: there is a significant difference between students' engagement in all grades ($F=24.14$, $p<.001$), and 4th graders use significantly more adaptive strategies than 6th and 8th graders ($F=10.35$, $p<.001$). In gender comparison, there was no significant difference either in engagement or in the way of coping. We found significant correlations between engagement and adaptive coping in 4th ($r=.46$, $p=.006$), 6th ($r=.68$, $p<.001$) and 8th graders ($r=.38$, $p=.01$) as well. The connection of disaffection and maladaptive coping is also significant in 4th ($r=.53$, $p=.001$), 6th ($r=.61$, $p<.001$) and 8th graders ($r=.58$, $p<.001$). The regression analysis shows that emotional and behavioural components of engagement explain 28% of adaptive coping in 4th graders, 50% in 6th and 20% in 8th graders. The effect of emotional and behavioural components toward maladaptive coping is 29% in 4th graders, 38% in 6th and 45% in 8th graders. As a result, engagement may have a stronger effect on coping in the 6th grade, while disaffection influences maladaptive coping in the 8th grade. Thus we need to focus on helping students' engagement and academic coping especially in the upper grades of the primary school.