

BOOK REVIEW⁹

Authors:

Adrienn Oravecz
Eszterházy Károly University

E-mail address of the first author:
ora_adri@msn.com

Lectors:

Éva Feketéné Szabó
College of Pető András

Tünde Rózsahegyi
University of Volverhampton

Veronika Schéder
University of Debrecen

Katalin Mező
University of Debrecen

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Bibliography of the subject of this recension:

Strzalkowski, Ralph (2013): *Never, never quit My Conductive Education*. Conductive Education. England: Press Birmingham.

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I would like to recommend this book for professionals who works with children with special education needs especially, to conductors and parents who have children with cerebral palsy. I hope both conductors and parents will find Ralph's story motivating and encouraging to continue their long and hard journey to make their children mobile and independent as much as possible.

The writer of the book Ralph Stralkowski who was born in 1979 in Warsaw, Poland with cerebral palsy. His parents became the pioneers of inclusive education in Poland. Ralph was a weekly boarder of The Pető Institute from 1986 to 1990. Later he got his postgraduate law degree in Poland then he went to a law scholarship to the University of Florida and now he has his own law practise in Florida. In 2011 he started to write his regular blog and this book is the collection of his 53 postings. In 2013 in Munich, Ralph was a Keynote Speaker of 8th World Conductive Education Congress.

Supplementary book was born because the writer highlights conductive education form a very unique perspective through his own experience. Nobody has done this before. The 59 postings which were selected into the book deals with two major topic. First, his memories

⁹ The editorial board does not take any responsibility for the English of the papers. Indeed, we made some slight changes but wanted to keep the style of the authors.

from childhood while he was a weekly boarder of the Pető Institute and then the present situation of Conductive Education in the United States.

The book begins with the author's introduction. In the introductory part Ralph talks about he never intended to write a book, but finally he agreed to bring his postings to a larger audience. As he says the value of this postings are "what he has already accomplished." Those who has not got such an irreversible condition like cerebral palsy cannot imagine how challenging life can be especially if you have to be in a wheelchair every day. This condition requires creativity and highly developed problem-solving skills from the patient, not to mention the daily hard work so as to maintain physical strength and well-being. These elements are necessary for living a good quality of life with CP. In the other part of the introduction the author talks about how difficult was for him to find the proper title. In my opinion he could finally come up with a very expressive title. The title express not just the writer's attitude itself, but also fits to his parents and conductors way of seeing things. He could not have found a better title for the book.

Let me continue my review with this never, never quit attitude from the parents 'side. He mentions several therapies including The Bobath, Japanese massage and many more because his parents never wanted him to lie idle. His mother even became certified in the Doman method just to make him better. He talks about the sacrifices of his parents made for him. His mother quitted her job and his dad took extra shifts in order to lets him have everything from normal education to the best rehabilitation methods. During the Communist government his parents fought against a whole system in which disability was seen as scarlet letter. "Nothing was really wheelchair-accessible and for years and years they would carry me up to stairs to class every day- at first unofficially under an agreement with the teachers to avoid problems. But I grew bigger and heavier and they got weaker and weaker. Their backs suffered, their health declined, but there was one goal for me to get an education."(Strzalkowski, 2013, p. 36). His gratitude to his parents and their endless love and believe in him belongs to one of the most touching episodes of the book.

This never, never quit attitude is true for conductors as well. Ralph describes The Pető Institute as a homely place where he was loved by the conductors. He shares a very vivid memory with a conductor nick named as "Crazy Marika" but not in a negative sense, because he enjoyed her company so much because of her good sense of humour. Yes, it is essential to fill the strict frame of the conductive complex program with jokes and other enjoyable activities. My conductor Csilla Bedy has a great sense of humour too. She can imitate me very well, so when I did something wrong she was my funny mirror and I had always roared with laughter, this pedagogical technique helped me to correct the position by myself. Conductors are very creative too. The writer also mentioned this characteristics of them. "They often modify routines and exercises because they know what works and what doesn't and they learn to adopt."(Strzalkowski, 2013, p.15). Csilla often modified the routines with adding some dancing, for example Zumba, or step-aerobic to it because, she knew that our group would enjoy it very much. In my opinion what makes The Pető Method special it really teaches step by step how to stand up to that person who was judged incapable of doing this. Furthermore, it gives a key for the motor-disabled persons how they can live a normal life in spite of their disability. As I experienced the key elements of success are the following: First, the tasks of conductive program can be easily convert and used in a real life situation. Second, you learn to adopt this "You can do it, do not give up!" behaviour from your conductor. This optimistic and supportive attitude helps me when my able-bodied peers try to discourage me.

Finally, cerebral palsy affects different areas of the brain therefore it makes very complicated to measure the progress and its validity by standardised tests. As a researcher I see one solution that could work in the future: long-term observation. I completely agree with Ralph if Conductive Education wants to prove that it is effective they should seek and show

their former students who became successful despite of their cerebral palsy. Here is one of the success stories of the Pető Method I hope you will find his story interesting because he is a truly remarkable individual as Andrew Sutton wrote it in the foreword of the book.