In giving a unified perspective on the variables, and their relationships, that affect a student's degree of achievement in school subjects, this paper pointed out that degree of learning is a function of the ratio of the time the student actually spends on learning to the time the student needs, both being in turn a function of aptitude and other variables. [The Social Sciences Citation Index® (SSCI®) indicates that this paper has been cited over 180 times since 1966.]

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"This paper was a spin-off—a 'think piece' rather than a real research report—from a project on the measurement of foreign language aptitude. A more technical account was given elsewhere. I had noticed that different people could achieve the same level of success, but took different amounts of time. I therefore concluded that aptitude could be defined in terms of the amount of time needed to learn—low aptitude people requiring more time than those of high aptitude. But I needed other variables to explain all my results satisfactorily.

"Probably the article would never have been written had not E.J. Shoben, Jr., then editor of the Teachers College Record, encouraged me to present my ideas in a form that might generalize to many types of school learning. It seems to have received little attention until Benjamin Bloom used its ideas in formulating what he called 'mastery learning.' While my paper provided a basic theory, Bloom did much more than I to put my notions into research and development."