

HABILITATION THESIS

MODERN PERSPECTIVES IN POSITIVE AND EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

In the first part of my habilitation thesis I have presented my scientific, professional and academic achievements, taking into consideration the main thematic directions. My scientific work has been focused on positive psychology and educational psychology.

The main thematic directions include studies on correlates and mediators of psychological wellbeing, school engagement, moral and self-reflexive emotions, the relationship between optimism, self-efficacy and subjective wellbeing, cheating behavior in academic settings, interpersonal stress, perceived social support and loneliness in early adolescence.

I have studied - and this is a first in Romanian specialist literature - concepts of positive psychology such as university students' psychological hardiness, sense of coherence, presence meaning in life, predictors and mediators of teachers' subjective wellbeing and relationships between moral emotions and religiosity in high-school students. Given that the study of emotions in the educational psychology field has focused chiefly on specific topics such as fear of inadequacy, fear of failure and fear of assessment, I decided to explore self-reflexive emotions - authentic (as opposed to hubristic) pride in relation to subjective wellbeing; shame, guilt and tendency to externalize in relation to cheating behavior in school; and moral emotions of forgiveness and gratitude in adolescence.

My studies on the sense of coherence, psychological hardiness, and ego-resilience were developed from the perspective of the salutogenetic model, investigating, in terms of factors protective against stress, the main aspects of maintaining psychological wellbeing.

The contribution of these studies consists of the empirical support they bring to topics little treated in the Romanian literature. Use was made of advanced data analysis, by means of the AMOS statistical package, including structural equation modeling and path analysis techniques whose superiority (compared to the linear regression and classical mediation techniques proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) has been highlighted by Iacobucci, Saldanha and Deng (2007).

In these studies I focused on the psychometric properties of the scales used in positive psychology, exploring their reliability and validity for secondary and high-school students, university students and teachers samples. The practical implication of the research for school psychologists' practice were discussed.

My book "*The Psychology of Education from Theory to Practice*" focused on how school practice can be improved by a better knowledge of educational psychology. It addressed new topics such as the development of metacognition in school, the benefits of self-regulated learning and incentives for this in school, homework and its role in the development of self-regulated learning, self-efficacy and academic performance, incentives for self-knowledge and socio-emotional skills and examples of good practice in the management of the phenomenon of bullying in school.

In "*Stress Management in Educational Settings*" I presented modern perspectives on resource buffers against stressors faced by both pupils and teachers. Thus, I analyzed the relationship between stress and optimism, psychological resilience, psychological hardiness, sense of coherence, self-esteem, self-efficacy and positive emotions. I also discussed the causes, phases and means of stress management, and the burnout issue in teaching – its causes, and protective factors.

"*Ethics in educational psychology*" is the first book on this topic in the Romanian literature. In it I analyze how standards prescribed in the professional code of ethics for psychologists need to be reflected in the work of school psychologists. We presented some relevant research conducted before the drafting of the first codes of ethics, highlighting the harmful effects that may occur, not only in research but also in practice, when no account is taken of values such as participant dignity and integrity, but only of the researcher's scientific interests.

In teaching I have introduced new courses at Master level, such as *Positive Psychology in schools*, *Ethics in Educational Psychology*, *Psychological aspects of mentorship and teaching career*, and *Socio-emotional competence stimulation in educational settings*. I would like to draw attention to the fact that *Positive Psychology in schools*, which I have been taught at the University of Bucharest since 2013, is the first course in this field.

I have received much positive feedback from course participants, who have commented that applying the knowledge of educational psychology and positive psychology that they had acquired enabled them to resolve problematic and challenging situations in their teaching.

In the second part of my habilitation thesis I have mentioned a career and professional development plan. Future research directions include exploring the impact of new forms of communication (Facebook, texting, Smartphone) on social relations; a cross-cultural study of the effect of social media on body self-image and the ideal of beauty in adolescence; teachers' hidden agendas and students' school engagement; and relationship between distorted metacognitive judgments, the calibration phenomenon and learning performance. A topic that I also intend to explore, which lies at the intersection of learning psychology and social cognition, is the relationship between anxiety in assessment situations in mathematics, stereotypic threat, and self-efficacy comparing students from humanities and science profiles. In the near future I intend to continue the pilot study, conducted on preschool children, on the relationship between metacognitive judgments such as feeling of knowing, coping strategies, and emotional awareness.

I want to share my professional experience of twenty years not only with Master level but also with doctoral students, while continuing to deepen my research into my established topics of interest in the field of positive and educational psychology.

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