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REZUMAT
TEZĂ DE DOCTORAT

MODALITĂȚI DE INTEGRARE
A ÎNVĂȚĂRII SOCIALE ȘI EMOȚIONALE
ÎN PRACTICILE EDUCATIVE ROMÂNEȘTI

COORDONATOR ȘTIINȚIFIC

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The motto of the thesis:
Behave with your students as you would like
to treat others your own children![1]

It is obvious that social and emotional learning issues have created a more global concern since social problems multiplying, since the complex challenges that individuals must face and insufficient tools and personal skills for responding to these problems. Various international authorities, such as UNESCO, UNICEF, OECD, WHO fired warning signs of social change and in terms of individuality, drew landmarks and made recommendations to solve or address these challenges effectively. Education systems remain the most convenient authority to intervene in problematic situations, just by their component of prevention, training and learning.

Social and emotional learning has emerged as a solution to life skills training, to cope with ourselves and with others, to make choices guided by an axiological referential, thus also contributing to the smooth functioning of the community as active citizens. Promoters of this type of education, who identified its benefits through scientifically validated studies, go so far as it considers a complementary component of academic learning, a true revolution in education. Social and emotional learning is valued as an organizing framework for all other preventive services in schools and other training programs with ethical, social or sanogenetic aims. Special appreciation and the evident impact in the formal and nonformal curriculum are supported by beneficial effects manifested in school and life success, in the improvement of mental health and prosocial behaviour, in an increased academic performance and inclusion.

These arguments have led us to outline the domain of social and emotional learning with its strengths at the international level and to identify entry points for implementation in the Romanian educational system. In doing so we built the complex theoretical edifice of social and emotional learning and then we tested an already known program in order to integrate in Romanian schools.

Chapter I of the thesis will achieve the necessary introduction in order to understand the specific domain of social and emotional learning, stating its "family tree" and the key identification data among the other cognitive theories and constructs. The readers will be capable

to understand all the challenges from the current social context to which social and emotional learning comes with solutions and answers regarding the increasing of the children wellbeing. Then they will get acquainted with the variety of concepts operating in the field, leaning more on the most important ones in detail. Afterwards, they will have the opportunity to discover the historical roots of social and emotional learning, either theoretical or pragmatic.

If we go deeper, in section 1.1 we find references of the major trends in contemporary education which lies in the interdependence relation with social and emotional learning, highlighting in a concise way the issues from which the thesis starts. It will be summarized in a personal manner the most important challenges regarding mental health and wellbeing of children, with examples from our country: the preventive component and the incidence of mental and behavioral disorders at childhood, the complex phenomena of violence in the educational system and the early leaving of school. In section 1.2 concerning the conceptual domain there are defined the concepts of social and emotional learning and competence extensively. To provide a more complete perspective, it will be briefly considered other correlative terms, proposing an alternative for use in Romania, namely the concept of social and emotional education. At the end of the chapter we provide a historical digression, appreciating as theoretical roots the Human Potential Movement and emotional intelligence and social learning theories. Further we will outline the most significant educational initiatives with practical connotation that contributed to the meanings of social and emotional learning as they are understood today.

In **Chapter II** we intend to capture eloquently the current state of the art in social and emotional learning at the theoretical and practical level, making a cognitive tour through many countries which have developed such initiatives. We start this mental journey with a brief exposure of the main paradigms of emotional intelligence, of multiple intelligences, social learning, relevant to the thesis problem. Then we detect the effectiveness and benefits of social and emotional learning presented in several meta-analysis conducted through extensive large groups of children of different ages. We will then identify the knowledge level in the U.S., where the first applications of emotional intelligence in school environment appeared, stating the need for this

type of education, and we will emphasize the great contribution of the CASEL Organization.

Taking into consideration that there is currently a systematic program in the UK education system, conducted as an extensive national initiative, we decided to focus our efforts on highlighting the curriculum framework and development in this area. We naturally oriented to identification of representative points of contact with social and emotional learning in various countries of Europe and those from other continents, sketching the relations with the so-called cross-curricular categories. In the final subsection we transferred various aspects that we have discovered in social and cultural context of Romania and that we appreciate that is of interest to social and emotional learning in this zone. Through this cognitive trip of initiation we decided to reflect in the consciousness of educators the reality of social and emotional learning for a more accurate understanding and for application of its principles in personal and professional experiences.

Ending the conceptual and historical trip of social and emotional learning, in **Chapter III** we will guide the lecturers to the applied-practical developments of this component of education. We will then disclose the results and suggestions of studies which have investigated the processuality of running Anglo-Saxon social and emotional learning programs. It was vital to set out the requirements related to the school management because in our opinion managers at various levels are key factors that might influence the optimal integration of social and emotional learning in education. Outlining a systemic perspective, we approach the usefulness of family and community involvement in children's education, presenting classical and modern ways of collaboration. We emphasize the guide characteristics of the paper, showing in a wider perspective the didactic approach to social and emotional learning, thus pointing out the aims, content, strategies and the specific evaluation. Then we expose some of the aims taxonomies, associated with the landmarks and values of social and emotional learning to which they relate. In terms of content and strategies, we detail the basic references thoroughly SEAL program, and also the methods "borrowed" from other social situations of personal development, used in this particular context of learning. From an evaluation point of view, we point out distinctively the two components of assessment: on one hand the skills of children, and on the other the school climate. To facilitate the documentation work of educators and

school counselors, we will deliver a range of psycho-pedagogical assessment tools available in other parts of the world.

Doctoral research, as a wider process, we divided into 2 distinct phases, the first aimed at pre-testing a program widely applied in Britain in order to observe key aspects of implementation, and phase two aims at validation of a more concise form of the program to capture the phenomenology of social and emotional skills development in children. We find it necessary to expose in Chapter IV the experience of piloting a UK program, creating after it a model specific to the national context and then we checked its validity in the sense of influencing the development of students' social and emotional skills. We believe that running a program of social and emotional learning for a longer period of time is a necessary step for educators and children, as this type of education working with sensitive content, with experiential strategies, with the requirements related not only to teaching, but which involves the whole school assembly, including family and community.

We felt that during program piloting observers were careful to many educational aspects: the teaching requirements and organization of the group of students, the attitudes and the created climate, the data regarding the knowledge of children's personality and the issues of implementing in the system and curriculum adaptation. One of the fundamental benefits of socio-emotional learning programs, which we have found experientially and it is not very clearly emphasized in the literature, represents the facilitation of a thorough knowledge of the student personality from the social context in a short period of time. It can be a starting point for any useful data base for the entire education system achieved by the persons working with children. Being quite rigorous during the observation research, we put together a series of beliefs that circulated in the program that can be a basis for curriculum development specific for social and emotional learning.

We will expose concisely all those considerations drawn from the experience of conducting a social and emotional learning program in order to provide starting points for further complex researches or for educators who want to experience such activities.

1. Social and emotional learning programs require a high level of quality of the educational process as it involves the children in the act of learning directly, motivating them through selected strategies, allowing them to create and organize their content, valorising them as complex personalities with all their character traits. Quality of education

must be judged from the point of view of programs efficiency for the purposes of information transfer to behavioral acts involving emotional life, so these changes may be evident in a short time in real life.

2. The teaching process carried out in such programs is very attractive and enjoyable for children; they participated with their entire being to practice social and emotional acquisitions because they can act roles and assume different responsibilities, not just the one of a good student from an academic point of view.

3. In conducting systematic and continuous social and emotional learning programs children manifest naturally with their whole personality, revealing their strengths and weak aspects and educators have a duty to celebrate first and improve or develop the other. Moreover counselors who could teach such subject may disclose this information about children to other teachers, either directly through the assistance and involvement in activities or by collection in different sheets or portfolios.

4. Conducting the proposed modules has positive effects on climate specific to the learning environment, releasing the tension from the critical incidents, defusing anxieties, allowing the establishment of an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect and sometimes sprinkled with moments of humor. This applies both to teachers who reframe their perceptions and judgments about children's reality and for students who report from another point of view, distanced from the act of learning. In addition, we believe that in this educational endeavor some aspects will be triggered and such as "snowball" or emotional contagion, they will affect the internal relations within the staff or family of origin.

5. In our opinion, the success of a social and emotional learning program is conditioned by the formation started at an early age and constant continuing in all stages of schooling, in a long-term effort to achieve effective and consistent results. This particular view will be confirmed by experimental study developed after observational research.

6. Teachers are the key factor in running the social and emotional learning programs, so it would be constructive if they were mature and balanced in terms of personal / social development, and had profound life experiences and lessons to be learned from each of them. In the effort to integrate social and emotional learning in educational system it is therefore essential that all stakeholders to undergo personal

development modules and not just training modules related to teaching technology and content delivery.

7. The programs implementation is a complex process involving a sequence of phases and operations prior to the effective development: a necessary analysis, an effective promotion in order to persuade the stakeholders, the establishment of optimum working groups, creating all the resources to facilitate integration, designing the frameworks and evaluation references.

8. To have a higher probability of being integrated into the Romanian educational system, social and emotional learning should overlap on the Curriculum Area *Counseling* for several reasons: it can use the existing human resources with adequate training in this area, there are already allocated hours for this, there are elements of contents already established (even if they are focused on informational aspects), so they will require less financial means. At the same time counselors will actually acquire their teaching status, proving to be useful and involved in all aspects of the organizational life from the school.

9. The elements of social and emotional learning should be promoted and involved in curriculum from several areas and in the extra-curricular activities held at school, so that all human resource to know their benefits and use them as a way to challenge innovation in the organization.

10. The preventive perspective (we all know that it is better to prevent than to treat!) of the social and emotional learning has long-term effects on a whole range of sensitive issues, it reduces the incidence of pre-morbid situations decreasing the referee to psychological and psychiatric services, and easing the social integration.

11. Another interesting thing to note is the holistic, systemic approach about the child, but also about the school as a whole, produced by collaboration between staff, levels of decision, other elements of the educational process, while integrating all preventive interventions from school.

12. Social and emotional learning could be an opportunity for innovation in terms of teaching component, so we suggest differentiated ways of class organizing by separating into two working groups with alternative teaching and also facilitating teamwork of teachers through procedures of inter-assistance, inter-teaching and peer support, so that teaching will gain consistency and depth.

13. It is recommended that evaluation should not be done by marks or grades, but through personal development portfolios, through work products/achievements and through recording the learned behaviors (even as a personal journal) proved in other social contexts which the teacher has access to. Especially in the piloting stage, it is desirable an evaluation and continuous improvement of the program itself, highlighting the effects and benefits over the system.

14. Social and emotional learning programs targets the ethical issues related to privacy, the group relations safety and avoiding the situations of discrimination, so the teachers should be involved in training programs in order to address these specific issues.

15. Finally, the training of social and emotional skills is beneficial for students to meet employers' requirements in terms of required skills beyond the qualifications obtained through school, such as teamwork, innovation capacity, initiative, responsibility and flexibility in completing tasks.

The second stage of the research presented in **Chapter V** consisted in a pedagogic experiment of validation of the program "Playing Life" on a group of 27 children aged between 8 and 12. In essence, the experimental study aimed at the probability verification of influencing the children's social and emotional skill levels through the involvement in the program, identifying the differences in skill levels according to age and gender. The pre-test and post-test evaluation was performed using an actual instrument, appeared in October 2011, named SEARS (Social Emotional Assets and Resilience Scales).

The obtained results confirm the launched hypothesis, particularly in the level and growth rhythm of the abilities differentiated by age. The application of the intervention program will contribute to the children development of the social and emotional skills and their components/factors, namely self-regulation, social competence, empathy and responsibility. It also found that after the application of the intervention program the students will obtain raw scores and T scores with higher values, and then they will be placed in the higher classes in terms of social and emotional skills and their factors.

There are also significant differences by the age groups in terms of social and emotional skills; students aged between 10-12 will have a higher overall score of social and emotional skills and empathy than

those of 8-9 so this shows that it is possible to develop these skills through educational programs.

However, there are significant differences by the biological gender in terms of empathy, girls having the empathic competence more developed compared with boys.

We also found a differential effect of the intervention program on social and emotional skills, depending on the age group of children, as follows:

- In the *initial assessment* condition, children of 10-12 years old have more developed social and emotional skills than those of 8-9 years old;
- In the *final assessment* condition, there were no statistically significant differences between children of 8-9 years old and those 10-12 years old in terms of social and emotional skills (children's self-assessment);
- Both for children of 8-9 year old and those 10-12 years old the social and emotional skills are more developed after experimental intervention than before experimental intervention;
- Following the graphical representation of the results, it was found that although the initial socio-emotional skills were more developed in children of 10-12 years old compared to those of 8-9 years old, after the implementation of the intervention program the development level of socio-emotional skills increased reaching relatively to the same level for both age groups. It was observed that the program of socio-emotional skills development had a stronger effect on children of 8-9 than in those of 10-12.

However, there is a differential effect of the intervention program on social competence, depending on the age group of children, as follows:

- In both *initial evaluation* and the *final evaluation* condition there were no significant differences between the children of 8-9 years old and those of 10-12 years old in terms of social competence (teacher evaluation);
- Both for children of 8-9 and those of 10-12, there are statistically significant differences between the *initial* and the *final evaluation* in terms of social competence (teacher evaluation), social competence (teacher evaluation) being more developed after the experimental intervention than before the experimental intervention;

- Watching the graphical results, it was found that the program of socio-emotional skills development had a stronger effect on children of 8-9 years old than in those of 10-12 years old, in terms of their social competence.

Also, there is a differential effect of the intervention program on the responsibility, depending on the age group of children, as follows:

- In both *initial evaluation* and *final evaluation* condition there were no significant differences between the children of 8-9 and of 10-12 in terms of responsibility (teacher evaluation);
- For both children of 8-9 and those of 10-12, there were statistically significant differences between the *initial* and *final evaluation* at responsibility (teacher evaluation), the responsibility (teacher evaluation) being more developed after the experimental intervention than before the experimental intervention;
- Watching the graphical representation of the results, it was found that, although initially the responsibility was more developed in children of 10-12 years old compared to those of 8-9 years old (although the differences were not statistically significant), after the intervention program, the situation is opposite: the responsibility is more developed in children of 8-9 years old compared to those of 10-12 years old (although the differences are not statistically significant). It thus appears that the program of socio-emotional skills development had a stronger effect on 8-9 year olds than in those of 10-12 year olds regarding the development of responsibility.

Further we summarize the specific findings of educational context obtained from the experimental research:

- "Playing Life" Program is valid and leads to the development of children's social and emotional skills, regardless of their age or gender, of the global variable and for all its factors, for both children's self-assessments and teacher evaluations.
- It is likely that social and emotional skills to be rather influenced by the presence of a valid educational interventions as children grow in age.
- There are no gender differences in the level of children's socio-emotional abilities except empathy factor, so it is recommended the presence of learning opportunities for tolerance and

understanding/acceptance of otherness, equally for girls and for boys.

- The younger children are more permeable to acquire social and emotional skills, therefore the social and emotional learning programs should start at an early age and continue on long term. Further we advance the idea that as children grows these abilities are more stable and it is more difficult to influence them, especially when they are combined with vulnerable aspects.

Innovative perspective of the study is represented by the Romanian unique experience in the sense of proposing the social and emotional learning as a part of the formal curriculum and stimulating of the development of some non-formal educational structures focused on the emotional and social skills training. Another strength is organizing these programs from an early age (the early childhood and primary schooling cycle), being convinced that intervention will be more effective with younger children. More specifically, at the end of Chapter IV, we have proposed a procedural model which can be used by educational policy makers in integrating the social and emotional learning in Romanian schools. We also designed a model program in 8 modules which can be used both in the formal and the non-formal education system. Finally, there were made some specific recommendations for educational actors interested in developing social and emotional learning programs. The experimental research results confirm the possibility of developing social and emotional skills of children through educational programs and, more importantly, shows that the magnitude and intensity of development is more obvious since children are younger.

Summarizing both theoretical and applicative approach of the doctoral thesis, we would like a large number of professionals in sciences of education to become aware of the importance and benefits of social and emotional learning, or at least to remain open to the contact with this new pedagogical perspective. We tried to document as thoroughly as possible, to support interested educators and researchers simultaneously by developing two programs of social and emotional learning and making known all observations, data and findings obtained throughout the doctoral studies. We expressed the research experience in a pragmatic form inclusively the final considerations, in order to

prove useful in future applications and to reach where we aspire: to the child as a participatory authority in education. If we even popularize the concept of social and emotional learning in the educational environment, it will be strong and will show that our effort was not in vain. However, we will continue this mission of valuing the social and emotional learning in Romanian educational practices since we still adhere to the idea that it can be a real pedagogical revolution.